FRAMING THE BODY:

THE JUÁREZ FEMINICIDES IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN VISUAL CULTURE (1993 – 2013)

Anna Kingsley

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the School of Modern Languages, Literatures & Cultures at Royal Holloway, University of London

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Hispanic Studies

School of Modern Languages, Literatures & Cultures,

Royal Holloway, University of London

December 2017

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Anna Kingsley, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis presents a critical examination of selected visual responses to the Juárez feminicides within the media of art, cinematography, photography and documentary filmmaking, many of which have received limited academic attention. Central to the reading of these works is an exploration of the represented feminicide body that functions as a prominent and persistent motif throughout, whether framed in its absent or present form, alive or deceased, conceptual or mimetic. Amongst these responses, the body is visualised variously and is attached to varying agendas: it is reconstructed in order to shed light on the systems of power that both produce and erase it at the border; it is re-visioned as a site of resistance that counteracts the spectacles of violence that have dehumanised it; and it is re-embodied in order to evoke its absence and to remember it as a subject that has been lost. In this thesis, I propose that the body, in its various representations, functions as a privileged site of meaning. It is shown to be a vantage-point from which to contemplate the politics of precarious female existence at the U.S.-Mexico border whilst reclaiming visibility for the victims whose lives have been rendered invisible by violence and unheeding justice systems. My analyses will draw on the creative treatment of the body, engaging with its re-imagining, aestheticisation and portrayal. The body's function within these visual texts, I will argue, serves as a critical space for examining the intersecting social, political and economic forces which underpin anti-female terror in the contemporary Mexican context. Closely intertwined with the aesthetics of these visual responses are questions of a decisive ethical nature in relationship to exploitation, spectatorship, and the sensationalising of gender-violence which will be addressed accordingly. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field of study, and the divergent aesthetic practices discussed in this thesis, the analyses of the selected visual works will be supported by a multifocal theoretical framework, with an approximation to crucial scholarly discourses that link to notions of disposability, necropolitics, biopolitics, bare life, sexual violence, absence and grievability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors Professor Abigail Lee Six and Professor Ignacio Sánchez Prado. This thesis would not have been possible without their wisdom, encouragement and human kindness. I will be forever indebted to their commitment to see this project through to fruition. I would also like to thank other colleagues and friends in the School of Modern Languages, Literatures & Cultures for their support and generosity during the process, particularly Alba Chaparro, Marta Pérez-Carbonell and Dr Arantza Mayo. I am also grateful to Dr Sarah Wright for her advice during this final year, as well as Dr Miriam Haddu, whose undergraduate lectures first inspired my interest in Mexican visual culture. My time at Royal Holloway, University of London, has been incredibly rewarding thanks to my students in the Hispanic Department. Their intelligence and spirit always made teaching my courses a real pleasure.

Whilst conducting research in the U.S. and Mexico I met many academics, activists and cultural practitioners that have generously contributed to this thesis. I would like to thank Kathleen Staudt, Maria Socorro Tabuenca, Irasema Coronado, Tony Payan, Deborah Dorotinsky, Helena Lopez, Rían Lozano, David Wood, Oswaldo Zavala, Kerry Doyle, Véronica Corchado, Kirsten Nigro, César Fuentes and Mariana Berlanga. I am particularly grateful to Julia Monárrez Fragoso. During my time spent in Ciudad Juárez, she kindly guided me around the region. This first-hand experience opened my eyes to the dynamics of the U.S.-Mexico border, from its bustling urban areas to the remotest desert *lotes* where pink crosses still stand tall to commemorate victims of feminicide. I am also very fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet with and interview Judithe Hernández, César Saldívar, Enrique Arroyo and Carlos Carrera, whose visual responses to gender-violence in Ciudad Juárez, amongst others, are the focus of this study.

Mexico City was an important research base for this project. My thanks extend to those who assisted me at IMCINE, Cineteca, Museo de la Memoria y Tolerancia, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, UNAM and the Universidad Iberoamericana. I was blessed to meet some wonderful people during my visits to the capital who will most certainly remain friends for life. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Samuel, Miguel and Cecilia for their help and kind-heartedness. Special thanks go to my dear friend, Pablo, for being so accommodating, generous and fun.

Finally, closer to home, I would like to thank friends and family for their care and encouragement. Heartfelt thanks go to Hasreen and Bhumika for their unwavering friendship and moral support over the years. A special mention goes to Luke, Rich, Gladys, Clive, Steve, Jen, Ella, Sue and my Godmother, Fiona. I would also like to thank my friend, Fernando, for his sage advice and words of wisdom. I am indebted to my family: my mother, grandmother and aunt. They have always believed in me and supported me during the past years. To my father, whom I lost during this process – may we one day raise a glass of single malt again. Finally, I would like to acknowledge others that I have loved and lost along this journey, including cherished 'four-legged' companions. They are never far from my thoughts and I am grateful to them for having made my life richer and fuller.

This doctoral project would not have been possible without the funding of Royal Holloway, University of London, and Santander Travel Grants.

Contents

Introduction

> Ser mujer en Ciudad Juárez es más peligroso que en otros lugares del país. Allí la violencia deja su marca, desde hace años, sobre los cuerpos femeninos. Cuerpos desechables, cuerpos prescindibles en el aparato productivo, cuerpos borrables del imaginario social, cuerpos disponibles para los "más hombres" […] Allí, más que en cualquier otro lugar, se vuelve real el lema "cuerpo de mujer: peligro de muerte.[1]

> La misoginia jactanciosa y violenta ha sido el más perdurable de los regímenes feudales. La violencia aísla, deshumaniza, frena el desarrollo civilizatorio, le pone sitio militar a las libertades, mutila física y anímicamente, eleva el temor a las alturas de lo inexpugnable, es en síntesis la distopia perfecta.[2]

This doctoral thesis presents a critical examination of visual responses to the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez in the media of art, cinematography, photography and documentary filmmaking, many of which have received as yet only limited academic attention. Central to my analysis of these visual works is the representation of the female body, and its function as a prominent and persistent motif throughout, whether framed as present or absent, alive or deceased, conceptual or mimetic. Amongst these responses, the body is visualised variously and is attached to varying agendas: it is reconstructed in order to shed light on the systems of power that both produce and erase it at the border; it is re-visioned as a site of resistance that counteracts the spectacles of violence that have dehumanised it; and it is re-embodied in order to evoke its absence and to remember it as a subject that has been lost. In this thesis, I propose that the body, in its various representations, functions as a privileged site of meaning, a vantage-point from which to contemplate the politics of precarious female existence at the U.S.-Mexico border, and how such representations reclaim visibility for the victims whose lives have been rendered invisible by violence and unheeding justice systems. My analyses will draw on the creative treatment of the body, engaging with its re-imagining, aestheticisation and portrayal. The body's function within these visual texts, I will argue, serves as a critical space for examining the intersecting social, political and economic forces which underpin anti-female terror in the contemporary Mexican context.

[1] Rita Laura Segato, 'La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez: Territorio, soberanía y crímenes de segundo estado', *Debate Feminista* (2008), 78–102 (p. 78).
[2] Carlos Monsiváis, 'Review: Huesos en el desierto: Escuchar con los ojos a las muertas', *Debate Feminista*, 27 (2003), 327–333 (p. 327).

Moreover, this thesis will probe how visual responses are closely entwined with questions of a decisively ethical nature in relation to exploitation, spectatorship and sensationalising the 'pain of others,' to cite Susan Sontag's seminal publication.[3] This theme will be addressed in relation to the filmic texts, photography and installation art by Teresa Margolles, all of which may be considered contentious in their aestheticisation, display and deployment of the female body. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the field of study and the divergent aesthetic practices discussed in this thesis, the analyses of the works will be sustained by a multifocal theoretical framework, contextualising visual treatments of the feminicide body in key scholarly discourses, including those about disposability, biopolitics, necropolitics, bare life, sexual violence, absence and grievability.

Chapter contents

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first will be informative in nature, and will operate as a reference-point for the whole thesis, both contextually and theoretically. Part One will chart the history of gender-motivated crimes in Ciudad Juárez. It will outline the origins of the term 'feminicide', and describe when and how the murders at the border first came to public attention, who these victims were, and it will identify relevant statistics. It will then turn to a discussion of the complex arguments by researchers in the field about the factors underlying the precariousness of female existence at the border and the prolonged occurrence of the feminicides, which still continue today. Specific attention will be paid to: gender-power relations, the corruption driving a culture of impunity that impedes restorative justice, and the evident effects of neoliberalism, in the form of NAFTA and the global assembly line, in Ciudad Juárez – which have not only generated a context of insecurity for women, but have also fuelled a narrative that renders women's bodies disposable and exploitable subjects both inside and outside the workspace. Part Two will establish a relevant theoretical touchstone in relation to the body, which will provide an entry point into a reading of these visual responses. Since the productions that will be explored in each chapter place iconographic focus on the body, it is important to engage with the body's significance, its capacity to convey meaning and to speak back. Drawing on sociological and cultural studies, this part will elucidate how corporeality is, to paraphrase Michel Foucault, an inscriptive surface, which reflects not only the individual, but also the wider society in which it resides. I will observe, on the one hand, how the body is a space that can be shaped, disciplined and invested by power, and, on the other, how it can

[3] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

respond to and resist such practices. These and other reflections will inform my discussions throughout subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Two, I will embark on the analysis of visual texts with a study of a pastel-compilation, *The Juárez Series*, produced by Chicana artist, Judithe Hernández. Central to the series' iconography is the artistic re-imagining of the female body, which constitutes the sole protagonist in each composition. From the works I have chosen to examine within the series, a repetitive trope emerges, whereby the female form is depicted as ensnared, maimed and oppressed by the border fence. In this chapter, the focus of my analysis will probe the contentious relationship which is presented between the body and the spatialised geo-politics of the U.S.-Mexico border. It will demonstrate how female corporeality is displayed as marginalised and seemingly suspended between life and death. My analyses of Hernández's artwork will chiefly be situated in a reading of Giorgio Agamben's political theory of bare life. This frame of analysis will afford insight into how systems of sovereign power at the U.S.-Mexico border organise human life by means of inclusive exclusion. I will thereby draw a parallel between the female body as it is represented in these works, and Agamben's conception of the figure of *homo sacer*, an individual who may be killed with impunity, and who resides precariously in a 'state of exception,' evocative of the border context.[4]

Chapter Three will explore the art of Teresa Margolles, who has produced two installations that relate directly to the feminicides, *Cimbra Formwork* and *Lote Bravo*, both of which will be discussed at length. Margolles' creative methods are decidedly more provocative than Hernández's classical use of pastel and paper. She employs material remnants of human corpses, acquired from Mexico's morgues and evidence sourced from crime scenes to fashion minimalist and conceptual gallery installations that provoke reflection about the eradication of bodies by violence in Mexico. This chapter will engage with these two works and assess the artist's recourse to 'la vida del cadáver'. The discussion of Margolles' artwork will be informed by Achille Mbembe's recent philosophy of necropolitics, which, like Agambian thought, contemplates sovereign power over the body and its capacity to dictate whether an individual lives or dies. This is highly relevant to the artist's fusion of themes of death and the corpse in her productions. My readings of Margolles' installations will also draw on Judith Butler's contemporary theory of grievable life, in order to assess how Margolles' displacement of bodily fragments from the morgue to the public gallery space engineers temporary, makeshift sites of

[4] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics Series, 2nd edn (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998).

mourning. I will thus argue that this displacement serves to politicise the bodies of the feminicide victims, and forces an acknowledgement of the 'geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability', which, I contend, makes the once ungrievable life grievable.[5]

Chapters Four and Five will observe the framing of the female body within filmic narratives. Chapter Four will discuss the acclaimed short fiction film, *El otro sueño americano* (2004), directed by Enrique Arroyo. Over the course of ten minutes, the film depicts the traumatic experience of a young woman detained in a police car in Ciudad Juárez, where she is subjected to sexual violence and degrading language before being sold to an American sex-trafficker who is conducting illicit business out of the globalised border. From a detailed filmic analysis, I will argue that Arroyo's pseudo-simulation of a snuff film, serves, in terms both of aesthetics and of thematics, to raise crucial issues about the perception of women's bodies at the U.S.-Mexico border, and indeed their use as exploitable commodities. By engaging with feminist criticism of snuff and of the genre's archetypal amalgamation of gendered violence and pornographic scenes, this chapter will explore how the body's treatment in the short film encourages a broader discussion of female subordination, degradation and objectification.

Chapter Five will consider another dramatisation of the Juárez feminicides in the medium of cinematography. The feature film *El traspatio/Backyard* (2009), directed by Carlos Carrera, is perhaps the most popularised and certainly, I would argue, the most credible film to fictionalise this subject-matter to date. It traces the demise of a young southern Mexican girl who arrives at the northern border in search of work at one of the global assembly factories. Her newfound independence, however, is ultimately refuted by a young man whose romantic advances she rejects, and by a group of self-proclaimed macho men seeking to rape and kill. The film's narrative arc culminates in the scene of her rape and murder. As well as this storyline, *El traspatio* is composed of other tangential plots and characters which, together, evoke the sinister underbelly of life and insecurity in Ciudad Juárez. This chapter will undertake several lines of enquiry. It will focus on the female protagonist's downfall, and the external forces which bring about her eventual murder. It will also offer a critical analysis of how the neoliberalised border is portrayed, where profit seems to take precedence over female existence, thereby engendering a space devoid of moral values, where human life is expendable, both in the labour context of the global assembly line, but also in social life. Finally, the politics of screening rape will also be discussed in this chapter, and the subordinate

[5] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso Books, 2004), p. 29.

status of the female body will be assessed through a dissection of the scene, and via a theorisation of rape.

Chapter Six will turn to the medium of photography, to study the conceptual, studio-produced images by photographer César Saldívar, who has employed models along with black-and-white analogue photography to bring awareness to the Juárez feminicides. This chapter will take a more comparative approach, beginning with a discussion of the photojournalistic spectacles of brutalised bodies of feminicide victims which routinely feature in the pages of Mexico's national *nota roja* tabloids. Drawing on the critical scholarship of Linfield, Butler and Sontag, I will ponder the ethical tensions around the production and circulation of such images, which foster the unadulterated dehumanisation of violent death and potential desensitisation to their content. I will take this as a point of departure for examining Saldívar's staging and performing of nude bodies within the studio space. Focusing on Saldívar's representational nudes, this chapter will address how the nude body is converted into a site of resistance and a strategy of social action that seeks to denounce the degradation of female bodies. My reading of Saldívar's photographic corpus will further engage with the growing global trend of employing nudity as an act of protest, as has been explored in the recent scholarship of Barbara Sutton and Barbara Brownie.

Chapter Seven will complete the examination of visual responses, with a discussion of feminicide in the documentary mode. It will involve a close reading of the documentary film, *Bajo Juárez: La ciudad devorando a sus hijas* (2006), directed by Alejandro Sánchez and José Antonio Cordero. This film is a haunting story of loss and grief, which foregrounds the efforts of mothers and families who rally for justice for loved ones lost to feminicide in Juárez. For the most part, the film follows the personal story of Norma Andrade, a mother whose daughter, Lilia Alejandra, was murdered in Ciudad Juárez in 2001. This chapter will explore how the materially absent body of Norma's daughter is persistently recalled in the documentary frame, as a means of remembrance. I will scrutinise the manner in which absence is counteracted by the strategies of re-embodiment that take shape via Norma's memories of her daughter and via the documentary's visual recourse to family photographs and home video footage. By extension, I will also assess how collective demonstrations filmed in the narrative have sought publicly to render absent bodies present by appropriating city spaces, and by using the *siluetazo* – which suggests a striking historical parallel with the plight of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo.

In summary, the visual texts that will be critically analysed during these six chapters all recall and reconstruct the female body, employing it as a representational tool through which to highlight the complex reality of gender-crime in Ciudad Juárez, and the lack of justice afforded the victims and their families. By focusing on how the body is represented in these visual responses, this thesis aims to contribute a novel line of enquiry to the limited but growing scholarship on the ever-increasing visual narratives concerning the unabated cases of feminicide at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Chapter 1

Historical and theoretical contexts

Introduction

Before embarking on a critical examination of visual responses to the Juárez feminicides, in this first chapter I introduce the historical and theoretical contexts of these cultural productions, which inform my discussions throughout this thesis. The first part of this chapter is necessarily documentary in nature. It provides a broad overview of the history of feminicide at the U.S.-Mexico border, and outlines the problematics that researchers in the field consider the precursors to gender-crime in Ciudad Juárez, looking specifically at the social, political, juridical, and economic structures in Juárez that render the female body vulnerable. The second part makes the intellectual case for my focus on how the feminicide body is framed within visual narratives, and explains why I chose the body as an entry point into an analytical discussion of these texts. By engaging with theoretical approaches to corporeality, I elucidate how the body is considered to be a privileged site of meaning; by extension, I further explain how a critical reading of the representation of the body can bring spectators closer to understanding the context that has defined and erased these bodies; but I also show how the body can be a space of both resistance and memory.

Theorising femi(ni)cide

The term femicide, which essentially refers to the killing of women by men because of their gender, has evolved over time and been subjected to various theoretical revisions since it was first used publicly in the 1970s by feminist writer Diana E.H. Russell at the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels. While testifying against misogynist crimes at the tribunal, Russell urged her audience to recognise that 'a lot of homicide is in fact femicide', advocating the adoption of the term 'femicide' to draw attention to the 'sexual politics of murder.'[1] Given that legal terminology is inherently phallocentric, whereby crimes are categorised by male-dominated terms such as 'homicide' and 'manslaughter', it fails to recognise women as victims; as Attorney Hilda Morales notes: 'the law uses androcentric language, with man as its paradigm for humans, excluding and making invisible the existence

[1] Diana E. H. Russell, 'Defining Femicide', 2014, <http://www.dianarussell.com/defining-femicide-.html> [accessed 2 July 2016].

of women.'[2] The term femicide thus signified a lexical development which could be used to overcome the archaic legal doctrine, and render the female status visible.

It was not until Russell's co-edited publication, *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, that the term femicide was explicitly defined, in which co-editor, Jill Radford classified it as 'the misogynous killing of women by men.'[3] The publication also emphasised that, whilst femicide is the ultimate act of violence, which results in the death of a woman, it is however often preceded by other dehumanising, violent practices against the female body:

> Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of anti-female terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery […] physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, unnecessary gynaecological operations […] Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides.[4]

In a publication released a decade later, *Femicide in Global Perspective*, Russell modified the definition of femicide, redefining it as 'the killing of females by males because they are females.'[5] According to Russell, this revised version was intended to go beyond the assumption that all female murders are motivated by misogyny or hatred of women and aimed to expose 'all forms of sexist killing' to which women fall victim, including 'males [who are] motivated by a sense of entitlement to and/or superiority over females, by pleasure or sadistic desires toward them, and /or by an assumption of ownership of women.'[6] This expanded definition underscores an asymmetry of power relations between men and women, which will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter as a point to frame the Juárez feminicide narratives.

Since Russell introduced the term femicide, femicide discourse and theory has been re-shaped and popularised by the recent contributions of Latin American researchers, whose concerns are prompted by the growing pervasiveness of gender-motivated crimes in the Americas.[7]

---

[2] Hilda Morales Trujillo, 'Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala', in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 127–137 (p. 129).
[3] Jill Radford, 'Introduction', in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, ed. by Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., U.S., 1992), pp. 3–12 (p. 3).
[4] Jane Caputi and Diana E. H. Russell, 'Femicide: Sexist Terrorism against Women', in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, ed. by Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., U.S., 1992), pp. 13–21 (p. 15).
[5] Diana E. H. Russell, 'Defining Femicide and Related Concepts', in *Femicide in Global Perspective*, ed. by Diana E. H. Russell and Roberta A. Harmes (New York: Teachers' College Press, 2001), pp. 12–25 (p. 13).
[6] Ibid., p. 14.
[7] See *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

However, it remains a somewhat nebulous term that is constantly under construction, as it is adapted to events and circumstances affecting women in Latin America. The Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde was the first to shift the parameters of femicide as they had been established by Anglo-American feminists, to incorporate a more geographically-specific and political conceptualisation that is adapted to the specific Mexican context. Although Lagarde espouses the definition of femicide previously proposed by Russell, the cases of murders of females in Ciudad Juárez have given her cause to amend and politicise it. First, Lagarde made a significant orthographical amendment to the word femicide, replacing it with 'feminicide'. Although scholars seem to use these words interchangeably, Lagarde has outlined her reasoning for modifying the word:

> La traducción de femicide es femicidio. Sin embargo, traduje femicide como feminicidio y así la he difundido. En castellano femicidio es una voz homóloga a homicidio y sólo significa homicidio de mujeres. Por eso, para diferenciarlo, preferí la voz feminicidio y denominar así al conjunto de los derechos humanos de las mujeres que contienen los crímenes y las desapariciones de mujeres y que, estos fuesen identificados como crímenes de lesa humanidad.[8]

Her grounds for revising the term are rooted in the political, juridical and social context in Mexico that has placed female bodies at risk of violence. Not only does Lagarde define feminicide as the murder of a woman because of her gender: she also suggests that it is a crime on the part of the state, which she attributes to the country's culture of impunity that fails to safeguard the rights of its female populace or to prevent such crimes from happening. She remarks:

> El feminicidio conlleva la ruptura parcial del estado de derecho, ya que el Estado es incapaz de garantizar la vida de mujeres, de respetar sus derechos humanos, de actuar con legalidad y hacerla respetar, de procurar y administrar justicia, y prevenir y erradicar la violencia que lo ocasiona. El feminicidio es un crimen de Estado.[9]

Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano endorse Lagarde's implication of the state and her revision of the word femicide to feminicide, because of the specific context of heightened rates of gender-crime in Latin America: 'the level and extreme nature of violence against women requires a new concept such as feminicide […] to further a feminist analytics on gender-based

[8] Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, 'Antropología, feminismo y política: violencia feminicida y derechos humanos de las mujeres', in *Retos teóricos y nuevas prácticas*, ed. by Margaret Bullen and María Carmen Díez Mintegui (Donostia: ANKULEGI Antropologia Elkartea, 2008), pp. 209–239 (p. 216).
[9] Lagarde y de los Ríos, p. 235.

violence.'[10] They apply their own theoretical framework for the murders of women taking place in the Americas, which is premised on four key tenets. First, they recognise feminicide as a crime that is 'founded on gender power structures.'[11] Secondly, they classify gender-violence as both 'private and public,' implicating both the state and individuals as perpetrators.[12] Thirdly, they cite 'social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities' as factors that instigate and perpetuate violence against women.[13] Finally, like Lagarde, they judge feminicide to be a crime against humanity. For the sake of clarity, I will use the term 'feminicide' throughout this thesis. Although the theories drawn upon in each chapter are by no means exclusively feminist in nature, my analyses of the visual texts espouse the discursive ideologies of this recent Latin American scholarship, which emphasise 'how gender norms, inequities, and power relations increase women's vulnerabilities to violence.'[14] My analysis of the murders of females taking place in Ciudad Juárez takes as its point of departure the social, political, economic, and cultural factors implicated in the revisionist feminicide narratives.

Cases of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez

The first reported victim of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez is alleged to have been Alma Chavira Farel whose body was discovered on January 23rd, 1993, in Colonia Campestre Virreyes, a district located towards the north-eastern outskirts of downtown Juárez. Just thirteen years old at the time of her death, she had been strangled and subjected to horrific physical abuse, including both anal and vaginal rape.[15] Teresa Rodríguez, author of *The Daughters of Juárez*, notes that, whilst authorities consider her the first feminicide victim, this is not necessarily reliable, since 'record keeping was shoddy, at best.'[16] Although it is commonly assumed that feminicide began in 1993, Alice Driver also cautions against specifying what she calls 'an artificial start date', since this ignores the pre-existing deep-seated problems of violence against women which precipitated the increase of feminicide at the U.S.-Mexico border.[17] What is clear about 1993, however, is that it marked a moment when closer attention began to be paid to

[10] Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, 'Introduction: A Cartography of Feminicide in the Américas', in *Terrorizing Women*, ed. by Fregoso and Bejarano, pp. 1–42 (p. 6).
[11] Ibid., p. 5.
[12] Ibid., p. 5.
[13] Ibid., p. 5.
[14] Ibid., p. 4.
[15] Teresa Rodriguez, *The Daughters of Juárez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border* (New York; London: Simon & Schuster, 2007), p. 37.
[16] Ibid., p. 37.
[17] Alice Driver, *More or Less Dead: Feminicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), p. 5.

crimes against women, owing to the work of the late activist, Ester Chávez Cano, who began to compensate for the substandard collection of data by officials by documenting the number of murders taking place in Ciudad Juárez.[18]

(Un)reliable statistics

To find accurate or even credible statistics is an obstacle that researchers encounter when studying the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez. Figures released by newspapers and the national statistics provided by government agencies do not appear to correlate, as I will explain below. If state institutions are failing to provide accurate statistics about mortality rates, this raises a vital question about the value ascribed to life in Mexico today. Consequently, it has fallen upon NGOs, independent researchers and activists like Ester Chávez Cano to undertake the task of collating data. The researcher Julia Monárrez, whose extensive work on the murders has become an integral source of consultation in the field, has voiced her concern about the lack of accessible or dependable data which initially affected her own research: 'no hay el prurito ni la preocupación constante para solamente rescatar las estadísticas.'[19] Her first article about the murders, entitled 'La cultura del feminicidio en Ciudad Juárez 1993-1999', was the first of its kind to apply a methodological approach to the data she had managed to collate: she classified her findings according to the *modus operandi*, the socio-economic background of the victim and where the bodies were discovered. The following section will draw on this research, where, over the period 1993-1999, Monárrez revealed that a total of one hundred and sixty women were victims of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez. The study was however compromised not only by the questionable reliability of the statistics she had consulted, but also by the fact that feminicide is not a recognised crime in legal terms, and therefore all female murders fell under the umbrella term of homicide; as Monárrez notes, 'el asesinato de mujeres vuelve a clasificarse dentro de homicidios dolosos y homicidios culposos. No hay una desagregación por género'.[20]

Over a similar time-frame, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, another well-known researcher in the field, recognised numerical disparities emerging between the figures of newspaper journalists,

[18] Rubén Villalpando, 'Muere Esther Chávez, pionera en la lucha contra feminicidios en Juárez', *La Jornada*, 26 December 1996 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/12/26/estados/021n1est> [accessed 5 August 2016].
[19] Julia Monárrez, 'La cultura del feminicidio en Ciudad Juárez 1993-1999', *Frontera Norte*, xxiii, 12 (2000), 87–117.
[20] Ibid., pp. 87–117.

independent researchers and state institutions. She lists these incongruences, so as to highlight the uncertainty of figures relating to the feminicides:

> […] no one really knows the exact number of victims. Diana Washington Valdez in her 2002 *El Paso Times* exposé, "Death Stalks the Border" (nominated for a Pullitzer Prize), says her research shows 320 victims between 1993 and June of 2002; Casa Amiga shows 254 victims between 1993 and 2002; Mexico's attorney general's office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) calculates the number at 258 for the same time period […] Suly Ponce Prieto, the special prosecutor in the cases of the murdered women until 2001, reported 222 women killed between 1993 and 2000 […] while media reports in 2000 cited 300 to 500 victims in the first ten years of the crime wave.[21]

These numerical inconsistencies also feature as a subject of concern in Alice Driver's recent monograph, *More or Less Dead: Feminicide, Haunting and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico*. Driver observes that the conflicting nature of statistics about feminicides is, in part, due to the fact that 'efforts to systematise death counts in the city are not initiated by officials in Juárez.'[22] Because of this highly illogical practice, Driver also had to draw upon the records generated by researchers such as Julia Monárrez and María Soccorro Tabuenca, whose fieldwork has been conducted on location at the border. In addition, Driver makes use of the extensive work of a New Mexico University research librarian, Molly Molloy, who compiles and publishes death statistics relating to Ciudad Juárez on an online forum, *Frontera List*, which she established in 2009. According to an interview with *El Nuevo Sol*, Molloy's motivation for assembling this online archive was to provide a comprehensive record of the human cost of President Calderón's so-called 'war on drugs' (2008-2012) at the border; she states that 'most US coverage is pretty shallow and seems almost always based on the latest press releases from Mexican government entities.'[23] Molloy's meticulous extraction of information from local border newspapers, notably *El Diario de Ciudad Juárez* and *Norte de Ciudad Juárez*, has become a valuable resource for academics and journalists reporting on the state of affairs in the city; I make use of Molloy's work in my presentation of the latest feminicide statistics below. Molloy's interest lies chiefly in the homicide rate at the border as opposed to the feminicide rate; nevertheless, her correspondence with Driver offers some explanation of why crime statistics are so unreliable in this geographical context:

---

[21] Alicia Gaspar de Alba, 'Poor Brown Female: The Miller's Compensation for 'Free Trade', in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera (Chicana Matters)*, ed. by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. 63–93 (p. 70).
[22] Driver, p. 5.
[23] Virginia Isaad, 'University Librarian Keeps Tally of the Murders in Juárez, Mexico', *El Nuevo Sol*, 21 May 2012 <http://elnuevosol.net/2012/05/university-librarian-keeps-tally-of-the-murders-in-Juárez-mexico/> [accessed 7 August 2016].

> There 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 level 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 is really no way to verify these statistics.[24]

The non-prosecution of cases that Molloy refers to is indicative of the culture of impunity which, according to Lagarde, is a contributing factor to feminicide in Ciudad Juárez. Indeed, the non-prosecution of murders suggests that, in the eyes of Mexico's legal system, the bodies of both men and women are worthless, and hence expendable; this can only foster a climate of insecurity, as I elucidate below.

This is certainly the case with the ongoing history of the feminicides. Indeed, statistics reveal that feminicide in Ciudad Juárez remains a prevalent issue: according to Molloy's *Frontera List*, 1,232 cases of feminicide were reported over the period of 1993-2012. In an article published in *La Jornada*, journalists Villalpando and Castillo asserted that during the most acrimonious phase of the war on drugs in Juárez, the rate of feminicides doubled: 'en 2009 y 2010 se registraron en esa ciudad fronteriza 469 *feminicidios*, más del 50 por ciento de todos los cometidos en los anteriores 16 años.'[25] They therefore hinted that narco-trafficking and the increased military insurgency at that time were further determinants of gender-violence, as we see below. According to a report published by El Plan Estratégico de Juárez, during the years 2011-2013 another 380 cases were identified by *Proceso*.[26]

Although the volume of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez has declined in recent years, they have by no means disappeared. Moreover, feminicide has arguably reached pandemic proportions in Mexico as a whole, extending beyond the northern border to multiple locations across the country. According to data published by INEGI, the Mexican states with the highest rates of feminicide are Guerrero, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Durango, Colima, Nuevo León, Morelos, Zacatecas, Sinaloa, Baja California and Estado de México. Estado de México, commonly abbreviated to Edomex, is a case in point; since it has attracted increasing attention

[24] Driver, p. 14.
[25] Rubén Villalpando and Gustavo Castillo, 'Registra Juárez en 2010 la cifra más alta de feminicidios en 18 años', *La Jornada*, 2 January 2011 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/01/02/politica/006n1pol> [accessed 12 July 2016].
[26] Patricia Mayorga, 'Feminicidios en Juárez, con alta carga de "pornografía sádica": CIESAS', *Proceso*, 16 July 2015 <http://www.proceso.com.mx/410808/feminicidios-en-Juárez-con-alta-carga-de-pornografia-sadica-ciesas> [accessed 7 September 2016].

in journalistic and scholarly forums, it is worth discussing further here. Over the last decade, Juárez's infamous reputation for gender-motivated crimes has been usurped by disturbing figures emerging from the country's south-central state, some 2000 miles away from the northern border. Statistics released by the Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Feminicidio reported the disappearance of 1,258 young women in just one year (2011-2012). That same year, 448 females were confirmed to have been murdered. More recent figures covering a broader timeframe (2005-2015) have documented that at least 3,604 women have been victims of feminicide in the state. Ecatepec, one of Edomex's municipalities located on the outskirts of Mexico City is now widely acknowledged to be 'el municipio más mortífero para una mujer,' a title formerly associated with Juárez for almost two decades. The crimes unfolding in south-central Mexico have been labelled 'the silent epidemic.' History is uncannily repeating itself in Edomex: the narratives and circumstances surrounding these feminicide cases are decidedly reminiscent of those at the U.S.-Mexico border – the women affected are poor, young and insignificant in the eyes of their government.

Journalists Humberto Padgett and Eduardo Loza have written an investigative report, *Las Muertas del Estado: Feminicidios durante la administración mexiquense de Enrique Peña Nieto*, which extensively critiques the systematic failure of government institutions to acknowledge the Edomex feminicides. This insightful piece of journalism is the first publication of its kind to focus exclusively on gender violence in Estado de Mexico. Over seventeen chapters, Padgett and Loza amalgamate testimonies and statistics, alongside interviews with experts, to forge an understanding of the social phenomenon that is materialising in the country's most populated state. Central to their argument is that women of Edomex are victims not only of violent misogyny but also of institutional misogyny. Throughout their report, the authors cast a critical spotlight on the current Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto, and his administration, which they hold accountable for downplaying figures, and above all, for its unabashed disregard for female security and justice. For the most part, criticism is levelled at Peña Nieto himself. Troublingly, prior to his presidency, Peña Nieto served as the former Governor of Edomex for a six-year term (2005-2011), during which time violence against women increased dramatically. Under the governance of Peña Nieto, figures consulted by Padgett and Loza reveal that 522 feminicides were registered, all of which went

unpunished.[27] Additionally, during his term as Governor, over 4000 rapes were reported, none of which were investigated.[28]

What the authors find most disconcerting is that whilst running for President, his popularity was bolstered by the female electorate. He had a slick marketing strategy, which 'convirtió a Peña de un político en campaña en un atractivo *rockstar*.'[29] Throughout the PRI candidate's campaign he was photographed time and again with elated women who flocked to him and embraced him, eagerly awaiting selfies alongside him as they chanted, 'Peña, bombón, te quiero en mi colchón!'[30] These PR feats transformed the presidential hopeful into a veritable pop icon. By capitalising on his suave looks for political gain amongst female voters, he managed to deflect attention away from his systematic negligence towards the disappeared, raped and murdered female constituents of the state he had governed. Despite the weekly discovery of women's corpses which were dredged from canals in Ecatepec or found mutilated in public *lotes*, Peña Nieto, both as Governor and as President, has obscured the gravity of these cases, often by manipulating figures released to the public. As Padgett and Loza explain:

> En México el índice delictivo es una composición propagandística hecha a la medida de un proyecto político, invariablemente interesado en mostrar un escenario halagüeño a favor de los jefes de los procuradores estatales y del federal: los gobernadores y el Presidente de la República.[31]

Evidently, within this self-serving political arena, those entrusted with enforcing public security wilfully ignore crime rates in order to protect their own agendas, or to preserve Mexico's image. However, this anti-democratic strategy only serves to propagate a state of impunity, effectively granting a carte blanche for human rights abuses.

Peña Nieto's administration has therefore been subject to vehement public criticism for its dismissal of the escalating feminicides in Edomex. Paralleling the actions of the mothers of Juárez, families of the Edomex victims have taken to the streets of their municipalities, as well as Mexico City, to denounce these crimes against young, mostly poor, women. Importantly, their plight has mobilised NGOs which have applied pressure on the government to adopt emergency measures for tackling gender-motivated violence. In July 2015, the Sistema

[27] Humberto Padgett and Eduardo Loza, *Las muertas del estado: Feminicidios durante la administración mexiquense de Enrique Peña Nieto* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 2014), p. 98.
[28] Ibid., p. 98.
[29] Ibid., p. 13.
[30] Ibid., p. 59.
[31] Ibid., p. 405.

Nacional para Prevenir, Atender, Sancionar y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres (SNPASEVM) announced that an 'alerta de género' would be implemented in a total of eleven municipalities across Edomex.[32] However, this legislative development was a significantly delayed response to the urgent requests which had been made for five years by the Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Feminicidio and the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos.[33]

Under the terms of the gender alert, authorities are obliged to conduct a detailed investigation into the causes of violence against women, in collaboration with non-governmental institutions. Characterised as 'un mecanismo de protección de los derechos humanos de las mujeres,' the gender alert has three key objectives: to guarantee the security of women and girls, to bring an end to gender-motivated violence, and to eliminate inequalities brought about by public policy that may be considered in violation of human rights.[34] Although the guiding principles of this legislation suggested a more promising future for women in the Mexican municipalities where it was to be exercised, the decree has in practice fallen short of its expectations. From an interview with ONCF, featured in Padgett and Loza's study, the gender alert is now viewed unfavourably:

> La alerta de violencia de género es un mecanismo de simulación del gobierno mexicano sin transparencia y sin rendición de cuentas, ya que no ha tenido resultados en estos años y se ha utilizado como un novedoso procedimiento para proyectar una buena imagen de México a nivel internacional.[35]

Now that the alert has been implemented and its impact can be evaluated, the results prove unsatisfactory. The comments made by the ONCF reflect the inadequate outcome of its implementation. This is similarly evidenced in the unremitting feminicide figures published by NGOs. During its first year of operation in selected Edomex districts, the gender alert was dismissed by *La Jornada* as 'inútil.'[36] Contrary to its promise of reducing levels of gender violence, statistics demonstrate that these incidents have increased. Disturbingly, the article

[32] Veneranda Mendoza, 'Decreta Edomex alerta de género: Se tarda cinco años en solicitarla', *Proceso*, 9 July 2015 <http://www.proceso.com.mx/410116/decreta-edomex-alerta-de-genero-se-tarda-cinco-anos-en-solicitarla> [accessed 22 June 2017].
[33] Ibid.
[34] María de la Luz Estrada, *Conversatorio nacional: alerta de violencia de género y experiencias regionales para la prevención del feminicidio* (Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Feminicidio, 2017), pp. 1–10 <https://amnistia.org.mx/contenido/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Presentaci%C3%B3n-OCNF.pdf> [accessed 22 June 2017].
[35] Padgett and Loza, p. 98.
[36] Israel Dávila, 'Alerta de género en Edomex, inútil: ONG', *La Jornada*, 29 January 2016 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/01/29/estados/033n1est> [accessed 22 June 2017].

also stipulates that neither the police nor the Attorney General's Office are versed in the protocols attached to the gender alert, so its ineffectiveness is hardly surprising. In accordance with the ONCF's comment, the passing of this new act only seems to have brought about a further impasse. On the international political stage, this legislation may receive favourable attention, as it suggests that Mexico is making positive strides towards embracing democratic values which place emphasis on equal rights. Nationally, however, it seems to be a mere smokescreen that serves Mexican political interests to the detriment of gender-crime victims. Indeed, it has brought several advantages to the government. First, the decree represented a short-term fix to placate those dissenting against institutional ineptitude. Secondly, it provided a formidable PR opportunity, giving the failing PRI government a 'makeover' which could be reported by the world's media, in the hope of improving its laissez-faire reputation towards human rights abuses. Thirdly, the gender alert promises long-term political advantages – given the government's continued stronghold over judicial systems, their political interests will be maintained in the implementation of a law ostensibly directed at the greater security of the country's female populace.

Whilst feminicide figures in both Juárez and Edomex are deeply shocking, an especially troubling aspect of the crimes against these women is the sheer brutality of the acts committed against the physicality of the female body. The violence inflicted not only speaks of gratuitous sadism, it is also an exemplification of the exercise of absolute power over females, and expropriation of their agency, as the following section elaborates.

Feminicide: abuses against the body and gender power relations

Certain trends have been identified in the murders committed against women. First, there is a remarkable consistency in the injuries inflicted on victims' bodies and in the locations where they are found discarded. As Fregoso and Bejarano explain, 'approximately one third were killed under similar circumstances: they were often held in captivity, raped, sexually tortured, and mutilated and their bodies were discarded in remote, sparsely populated areas of the city.'[37] Secondly, it is apparent that the demographic most affected by these crimes is that of socio-economically marginalised women. In *Trama de una injusticia*, Monárrez notes that those most vulnerable to attack are women who work in foreign-owned assembly plants, known as *maquiladoras,* and those residing in the impoverished peripheries of the city:

[37] Fregoso and Bejarano, p. 6.

> […] cuando un cadáver de una 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.[38]

What these trends indicate is that being a poor woman at the U.S.-Mexico border constitutes a situation of heightened precariousness: in the words of the social anthropologist Rita Laura Segato, 'en Ciudad Juárez, más que en cualquier otro lugar se vuelve real el lema "cuerpo de mujer: peligro de muerte."'[39] Indeed, the female body becomes a locus of violence and extreme cruelty, a signifier of liminal value at the border. This repeated evidence of sexual violence against the victims' bodies has encouraged a broader analysis of the gender dynamics in the borderspace. Theories relating to power and gender thus tend to play a key role in the feminicide literature and in the visual narratives discussed in this thesis. This section shows how women's precarious position derives from the structures of their social environment and from their treatment within it.

The research of Rita Laura Segato is a suitable starting-point. Her ground-breaking essay 'La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez' goes some way to explaining why women are targets of male-perpetrated violence in this region. Her understanding of the feminicides may, to some degree, be regarded as a counterpoint to the work of other researchers referenced below. Whereas most scholars see these murder cases as the outcome of deep-rooted misogyny, Segato proposes a more novel line of thought, that the feminicides are part of a wider symbolic 'sistema de comunicación' amongst the 'órden mafioso' operating at the border, in which women's bodies are employed as semiotic signifiers.[40] For Segato, rapes, killings and public disposals of female bodies are acts that carry a number of connotations. She posits that feminicide is an expressive form of violence performed by men in order to prove their loyalty or to pledge their allegiance to what she terms 'cofradías mafiosas' in Juárez.[41] She writes:

> La víctima es el desecho del proceso, una pieza descartable, y de que condicionamientos y exigencias extremas para atravesar el umbral de la pertenencia al grupo de pares se encuentran por detrás de enigma Ciudad Juárez. Quienes dominan la escena son los otros hombres y no la víctima, cuyo papel es ser consumida para satisfacer la demanda del grupo de pares. Los interlocutores privilegiados en esta escena son los iguales, sean

[38] Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, *Trama de una injusticia: feminicidio sexual sistémico en Ciudad Juárez* (Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2013), p. 69.
[39] Rita Laura Segato, 'La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez: Territorio, soberanía y crímenes de segundo estado', *Debate Feminista* (2008), 78–102 (p. 79).
[40] Rita Laura Segato, *La guerra contra las mujeres* (Madrid: Traficantes De Sueños, 2016), p. 44.
[41] Ibid., p. 43.

> estos aliados o competidores: los miembros de la fratría mafiosa, para garantizar la pertenencia y celebrar su pacto; los antagonistas, para exhibir poder frente a los competidores en los negocios; las autoridades locales, las autoridades federales, los activistas, académicos y periodistas que osen inmiscuirse en el sagrado dominio; los parientes subalternos – padres, hermanos, amigos – de las víctimas. Estas exigencias y formas de exhibicionismo son características del régimen patriarcal en un orden mafioso.[42]

Segato thus suggests that female corporeality is exploited and used as a quasi-ritualistic offering: its sacrifice at the hands of male subjects is incentivised by the guarantee of power and the cohesion of fraternities. To be accepted as a member of fraternities, Segato adds, men must validate their masculinity, virility, aggressiveness and cruelty. These displays of masculinity are repeatedly – and, crucially, publicly – performed in Juárez precisely on the female body. Notions of masculine performance are addressed at considerable length by Segato. She draws a convincing connection between masculine domination of the female body and the concept of sovereign power. It is at this juncture in her essay, when her arguments are put in dialogue with contemporary political philosophies, that her study gains purchase.

Guided by the theories of Carl Schmitt, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben – who will also be central to later chapters of this thesis – Segato concludes that the rape and murder of women in Ciudad Juárez is synonymous with the pursuit of territorial control by groups associated with organised crime. These violent acts announce the omnipotent presence of what she categorises as the 'Segundo Estado.'[43] The fraternities reside in and rule over this parallel state that is constructed, conducting illicit business with impunity. Like other researchers cited in this chapter, Segato blames the inequalities brought about by neoliberalism for the growth of the Second State, and thus, indirectly, for the feminicides. At the opening of her article, she proclaims, 'allí se muestra la relación directa que existe entre capital y muerte, entre acumulación y concentración desreguladas y el sacrificio de mujeres pobres, morenas, metizas.'[44] Strikingly, she likens the dominion of these male factions at the border to various systems of geopolitical governance, notably, 'totalitarismo provincial,' 'feudalismo' and 'microfascismos regionales.'[45] Segato suggests that the female body is instrumental to such male-dominated regimes that vie for territory and sovereignty by any means. Indeed, as history attests, violating women's bodies has frequently been exercised as a tactic of war, genocide and colonisation. This tactic is heavily foregrounded in Segato's enquiry into the Juárez

[42] Ibid., p. 41.
[43] Ibid., p. 44.
[44] Ibid., p. 33.
[45] Ibid., p. 48.

murders. She posits that amidst violent conflict, the female body is a historical symbol of territory. Thus, to violate or to kill a woman is a deeply metaphorical act that evokes reminders of bygone conquests:

> El cuerpo de la mujer se anexe como parte del país conquistado. La sexualidad vertida sobre el mismo expresa el acto domesticador, apropiador, cuando insemina el territorio-cuerpo de la mujer. Por esto, la marca del control territorial de los señores de Ciudad Juárez puede ser inscrita en el cuerpo de sus mujeres como parte o extensión del dominio afirmado como propio.[46]

Segato thus considers that sexually-motivated crimes in Ciudad Juárez form part of the lexicon of power within the region. The exploited female body functions as a cypher, which, when decoded, heralds the power of a specific male group. For this reason, Segato is persuaded that the public discarding of women's bodies is a deliberate strategy intended to signify 'el trazo por excelencia de la soberanía […] su derrota psicológica y moral, y su transformación en audiencia receptora de la exhibición del poder de muerte discrecional del dominador.'[47] Whilst Segato's hypotheses differ in some ways from much of the literature on the border feminicides, she concurs that these are misogynistic crimes. In fact, her argument, which ultimately rests upon unequal gender power relations, echoes the works of other researchers, to whom I now turn.

Monárrez is perhaps the most vocal figure within the field, decrying what she labels a 'patriarchal hegemony' and a form of 'phallic terrorism', which has reduced women's bodies to 'sexually fetishized commodities.'[48] Monárrez draws on Scott Pincikowski's *Bodies in Pain*, which ascribes symbolic meaning to bodily suffering, to offer an unsettling, yet convincing, reading of the performance of violence acted out upon the female body by males; she thereby grants semiotic significance to such injuries:

> The blows and marks that are found on the corpses signify an entire system of pain that defines the sacrificed woman. The handcuffed hands cannot be brought together to plead for mercy; they no longer have an active role and cannot be used even to cover the eyes and face before atrocities and imminent death. The destroyed vagina evokes the action and scrutiny of male aggression and female defenselessness.[49]

Her rhetoric accentuates the inequality between genders: female passivity is subjected to aggressive male activity, which marks an ontological facet of patriarchal ideology. The term

[46] Ibid., p. 47.
[47] Ibid., p. 39.
[48] Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, 'The Victims of Ciudad Juárez Feminicide: Sexually Fetishized Commodities', in *Terrorizing Women*, ed. by Fregoso and Bejarano, pp. 59–69 (p. 59).
[49] Ibid., p. 60.

patriarchy refers, of course, 'to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways', whether it be economically, sexually or politically.[50] As such, patriarchy is essentially rooted in the gendered organisation of society. Monárrez suggests patriarchy as a way of analysing why women's bodies are stigmatised to such a degree, although, as the rest of this chapter explains, the issue remains a far more complex one. She deems the death of the women a physical manifestation of 'gendered oppression', a system of power that is organised by dehumanising violence, a system of power that 'keeps women subaltern'.[51] Monárrez is not the only one to see patriarchy as a determinant of feminicide. Indeed, for Lagarde, such treatment of women in Ciudad Juárez is constitutive of patriarchy: 'la violencia feminicida florece bajo la hegemonía de una cultura patriarcal que legitima el despotismo, el autoritarismo y el trato cruel, sexista – machista, misógino'.[52] A similar claim is made by the writer Sergio Gonzáez Rodríguez, who provides a useful contextualisation of these gender-crimes in his work *The Femicide Machine*: the 'machine' of his title is an allegory for the dystopia which Ciudad Juárez has become, a fertile ground that breeds misogyny: 'Ciudad Juárez's femicide machine is composed of hatred and misogynistic violence, *machismo*, power and patriarchal reaffirmations at the margins of the law'.[53]

Furthermore, patriarchal beliefs have in the past been used by the Mexican state to construct a discourse that blames women for their victimisation in Ciudad Juárez. Fregoso draws attention to the state's early response to the feminicides: responsibility for gender-crimes was shifted onto the victims themselves, who were criticised for having transgressed heteronormative gender roles; such rhetoric only committed 'further sacrilege against already violated bodies'.[54] When the murders first began to be recognised in the early 1990s, women were publically stereotyped as leading what was called a 'doble vida', that is, as Fregoso explains, 'engaging in respectable work by day and sex work by night – as though non-traditional sexual behaviour justified their killings'.[55] The Chihuahuan governor of the time, Francisco Barrios, played a role in popularising this narrative, speaking in a television interview of women's conduct in the city: 'las muchachas se mueven en ciertos lugares, frecuentan a cierto tipo de gente y entran

[50] Khamila Bhasin, *What is Patriarchy?* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2006), p. 3.
[51] Monárrez, p. 60.
[52] Lagarde de los Ríos, p. 233.
[53] Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 11.
[54] Rosa Linda Fregoso, 'Toward a Planetary Civil Society', in *Women and Migration in the U. S. –Mexico Borderlands: A reader*, ed. by Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 35–66 (p.37).
[55] Ibid., p. 37.

en una cierta confianza con malvivientes, con gente de bandas que luego se convierten en sus agresores.'[56] The assistant Attorney General, Jorge Lopez, likewise publicly dichotomised the lives of women in the city, and advised how 'good' women should behave: 'todos los buenos que estén en sus domicilios, que estén con sus familias y los malos que sean los que salgan a la calle'.[57] What they failed to recognise, however, was the government's role in re-shaping women's behaviour: it was precisely the government's initiative to increase foreign investment by expanding the *maquiladora* industry which was bringing women to the city, and thus extracting them from the typical domestic sphere prescribed by traditional patriarchal values. Fregoso notes that the state's typecasting of these women was characterised by a 'patriarchal nostalgia for an earlier era of male authority'.[58] The propagation of such a narrative, which questioned the morality of female citizenship at the border, was evidently to the detriment of women; Fregoso thus condemns it as a 'form of institutional violence', since, by blaming women's moral character, it 'naturalizes violence against women.'[59] The role of gender power relations and violence against the female body will be re-visited through the lens of snuff filmmaking in Chapter 4, which examines Enrique Arroyo's *cortometraje*, *El otro sueño americano*, and again in Chapter 5, which engages with the politics of rape through an analysis of Carlos Carrera's cinematographic response to the feminicides, *El traspatio*.

Given the treatment to which the female body is subjected, what are the conditions in Ciudad Juárez which produce and perpetuate the vulnerability of women at the border? The following sections of this chapter seek to provide some responses to this question. I assess the compelling narratives proposed by researchers, whose investigations establish links between impunity, violence and neoliberalism; many of these narratives are appropriated, to some degree, in the cinematographic, documentary and artistic responses that will be critically analysed in subsequent chapters.

The integrity of investigations and convictions

Over the course of more than two decades, justice for the crimes perpetrated against women in Ciudad Juárez has been minimal, to say the least. Despite the scale of feminicide cases reported at the border, William Paul Simmons asserts that only 'three convictions have been made.'[60]

[56] *Señorita Extraviada*, dir. by Lourdes Portillo (Xochitl Productions, Women Make Movie, 2001).
[57] Ibid.
[58] Fregoso, p. 38.
[59] Ibid.
[60] William Paul Simmons and Rebecca Coplan, 'Innovative Transnational Remedies for the Women of Ciudad Juárez', in *Terrorizing Women*, ed. by Fregoso and Bejarano, pp. 197–224.

According to Article 20 of the Mexican constitution, 'el proceso Peñal tendrá por objeto esclarecimiento de los hechos, proteger al inocente, procurar que el culpable no quede impune y que los daños causados por el delito se reparen.'[61] Simmons's statistic describes a widespread level of impunity which breaches this constitutional law, and suggests a breakdown of the judicial apparatus in Mexico. Police protocol and conduct during investigations have been widely criticised, particularly by mothers seeking justice for their daughters. This is widely reflected in the documentary cinema produced about the feminicides, in films such as *Bajo Juárez*, *On the Edge*, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Preguntas sin Respuestas*, which all interweave emotional testimonies by mothers and interviews with experts, researchers and NGOs, who bring to light the negligent conduct of the authorities when handling victims' cases. In 2003, criminal and forensic investigations handled by Mexican officials were publicly criticised by Amnesty International. In a damning report entitled *Intolerable Killings*, the NGO condemned the state's failure to exercise due diligence in the cases of gender-crimes at the U.S.-Mexico border:

> The failure of competent authorities to take action to investigate these crimes, whether through indifference, lack of will, negligence or inability, has been blatant over the last ten years. Amnesty International has documented unjustifiable delays in the initial investigations, the period when there is a greater chance of finding the women alive and identifying those responsible, and a failure to follow up evidence and witness statements which could be crucial. In other cases, the forensic examinations carried out have been inadequate, with contradictory and incorrect information being given to families about the identity of bodies, thereby causing further distress to them and disrupting their grieving process. Other irregularities include the falsification of evidence and even the alleged use of torture by officials from the Chihuahua State Judicial Police, in order to obtain information and confessions of guilt.[62]

Amnesty's report thus not only criticises the integrity of investigations, but also queries the dubious convictions made by police, which have been plagued by stories of coercion, torture and falsification. Indeed, when arrests have been made, evidence to corroborate the involvement of suspects in the murders of women has been contentious. For example, in 1995, Abdel Sharif, an Egyptian-born chemist, was the first individual to be sentenced to thirty years in prison for the murder of Elisabeth Castro García. Sharif was also alleged to have been the 'autor intelectual' behind a spate of other feminicides that took place in Lote Bravo whilst he

[61] Secretaría de Gobernación, 'Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos', 2014 <http://www.dof.gob.mx/constitucion/marzo_2014_constitucion.pdf> [accessed 29 July 2016].
[62] Amnesty International, 'Mexico: Intolerable Killings: Ten Years of Abductions and Murders in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua', *Amnesty International*, 10 August 2003 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR41/027/2003/en/> [accessed 29 July 2016].

was imprisoned: it was claimed that he orchestrated a gang known as the Rebeldes to murder young women by proxy, paying its members $1200 per murder.[63] The case, however, was fraught with flaws: as *La Jornada* reports, Sharif proclaimed that 'los peritajes forenses fueron alterados, ya que el cadáver que supuestamente correspondía a la víctima pertenecía a una persona que medía 12 centímetros más que Elizabeth Castro.'[64] Journalist Diana Washington Váldez likewise expresses scepticism about the handling of Sharif's case in her detailed history of the gender-crimes, *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women*, spanning the period of 1993-2005. Referring to comments made by Sharif's attorney, Max Salazar, Washington Váldez notes that 'in Sharif, authorities found the perfect scapegoat'; she attributes his arrest to the 'pressure the authorities were under to solve the murders.'[65] Sharif maintained his innocence until his death in 2006, and claimed that the police were responsible for letting the real culprits go unpunished: 'they lie, they even go to extremes to fabricate evidence like lying, manipulating, kidnapping people, beating up people.'[66]

Police conduct came under further scrutiny in relation to a separate set of arrests in 2001, when eight women's bodies were discovered in Campo Algodonero, commonly referred to as the 'cotton field murders'.[67] Two bus drivers, Víctor Javier García Uribe and Gustavo González Meza were detained for these crimes.[68] According to Washington Váldez, the police used coercive methods to force these men into confession: 'the suspects' defence lawyers said police wearing Halloween masks grabbed the two men at their homes and took them to a safe house, where they tortured them until they confessed to the murders.'[69] She goes on to stress that the case against these men lacked cogent evidence: 'officials had no physical evidence, no hairs, no fibres, blood or semen, linking the bus drivers to the victims.'[70] Incidentally, Meza later died in police custody 'under suspicious circumstances', and further suspicion to the credibility of the convictions was added when the defense lawyer, Sergio Dante Almaraz Mora, was later gunned down in 2004.[71]

---

[63] Diana Washington Váldez, *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women: The Truth About Mexico's Bloody Border Legacy* (Los Angeles: Peace at the Border, 2006), p. 43.
[64] Rubén Villalpando, 'Muere Esther Chávez, pionera en la lucha contra feminicidios en Juárez', *La Jornada*, 26 December 1996 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/12/26/estados/021n1est> [accessed 5 September 2016].
[65] Washington Váldez, p. 142.
[66] Rodríguez, p. 49.
[67] Washington Váldez, p. 63.
[68] Ibid., p. 151.
[69] Ibid., p. 151.
[70] Ibid., p. 153.
[71] Ibid., p. 153.

However, the cotton field murders also marked a landmark case in the history of the Juárez feminicides when, in 2009, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found the state of Mexico responsible for the deaths of three of the females, Claudia Ivette González, Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez, and Esmerelda Herrera Monreal.[72] The court found Mexico guilty on several counts of violating the women's human rights, notably the right to life, the right to humane treatment and the right to judicial protection; it was also found that the state had infringed multiple laws. The court identified a number of irregularities in the investigations into the murders of the three women, and held the state responsible for the following wrongdoings:

> (i) absence of information in the report on the discovery of the bodies; (ii) inadequate preservation of the crime scene; (iii) lack of rigor in gathering evidence and in the chain of custody; (iv) contradictions and deficiencies in the autopsies, and irregularities and (v) deficiencies in the identification of bodies, as well as in their improper return to the families.[73]

Having taken into consideration other feminicide cases that had been reported since 1993, the court blamed the state for 'ineffective responses' and 'indifferent attitudes' in the investigations of crimes against women.[74] The court concluded that the authorities' conduct only served to perpetuate a culture of violence against women:

> This judicial ineffectiveness when dealing with individual cases of violence against women encourages an environment of impunity that facilitates and promotes the repetition of acts of violence in general and sends a message that violence against women is tolerated and accepted as part of daily life.[75]

If, therefore, the state and its judicial systems are failing to protect the bodily integrity of women, their right to life and to justice, who exactly is being protected? Furthermore, who is profiting from this environment of impunity that permits female subjects to be exploited? This thesis by no means aims either to resolve these cases or to identify guilty parties; nevertheless, it is critical to ask why the female body is rendered so consistently vulnerable at the border, and why perpetrators are systematically evading prosecution. The next section establishes that the prevailing climate of impunity at the border, and indeed beyond, is the outcome of a web of complicity and corruption that has generated a law unto itself.

---

[72] Quiroga, Cecilia Medina, *Inter-American Court of Human Rights: Case of González et al. ('Cotton Field') v. Mexico; Judgment of November 16, 2009 (Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations, and Costs)* (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2010), p. 2.
[73] Ibid., p. 83.
[74] Ibid., p. 47.
[75] Ibid., p. 96.

A state of impunity fuelled by corruption

According to statistics published by the Center for Impunity and Justice Studies (CESIJ), a mere 4.46% of crimes reported across the whole of Mexico result in convictions.[76] Additionally, the report documented that only 7% of crimes are reported to authorities in any case, which the authors attributed to the mistrust of police.[77] Such figures reveal that Mexico is the worst country for impunity in the Americas.[78] As I suggested above, a legal system which systematically fails to conduct appropriate investigations or bring perpetrators to justice devalues human life; on the one hand, such a legal system disenfranchises its citizens, and on the other it galvanises a climate of impunity for culprits, which ultimately fosters a situation of precariousness. Indeed, Alicia Schmidt Camacho critiques this climate of impunity and lack of recourse to justice, which have, she argues, forsaken the feminicides in Juárez. She labels it a 'profound collective failure' that ceases to respect women as 'autonomous beings, to recognise their value as subjects, and thus to protect them'.[79] She asserts that impunity in Ciudad Juárez does not equate to an 'absence of law' but rather that impunity itself constitutes 'the rule of law' governing the border.[80] As a result, feminicide victims emerge as doubly oppressed subjects, oppressed on the one hand by the perpetrators who bring about their demise, and on the other by a state that suspends their constitutional rights to protection and to justice. Schmidt Camacho's criticism also raises unsettling questions about the state's motivation in tolerating such widespread impunity: she attributes the status quo to 'criminal mafias and political corruption' that successfully monopolise the social order.[81]

A similar perspective is adopted by other scholars in the field, who also attribute the largely unresolved status of the feminicides to Mexico's bleak history of corruption. Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ravelo Blancas offer some insightful reflections on the current state of impunity that has facilitated and perpetuated the physical exploitation of women's bodies; they connect the failure to resolve feminicide cases with the submission of government institutions to the demands of organised crime and of powerful figures in Mexican society: 'they have submitted to the will of more powerful groups that control them through corruption, threats, or

[76] James Bargent, 'Mexico Impunity Levels Reach 99%: Study', 2016 <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/mexico-impunity-levels-reach-99-study> [accessed 2 August 2016].
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Alicia Schmidt Camacho, 'Ciudadana X: Gender Violence and the Denationalization of Women's Rights in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico', in *Terrorizing Women*, ed. by Fregoso and Bejarano, pp. 275–289 (p. 280).
[80] Ibid., p. 280.
[81] Ibid., p. 280.

blackmail'.[82] They also implicate Mexico's police force in this web of state corruption concerning organised crime, which allows perpetrators not only to murder women on a whim, but above all, permits them to commit such crimes 'with the protection of the authorities.'[83] Despite the condemnations of Mexico in the reports by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and Amnesty International cited above, the acts of violence against women persist. Such a state of affairs leads Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ravelo Blancas to question what motives on the part of state organs can take precedence over the protection of the female subject: 'what interests inspire the Mexican government to neglect this fundamental aspect of the application of justice […] to the point of facing global shame for being one of the countries with the highest levels of human right's violations?'[84] Their answer is concise and uncompromising: it is, they assert, the result of 'a submissive relationship that the Mexican government maintains with criminal organizations'.[85]

Social insecurity: corruption, complicity and violence

Whilst a historical account of corruption and organised crime in Mexico is beyond the parameters of this thesis, it is important to consider their implications for the feminicides. After all, corruption has significant effects on the contemporary Mexican society where these women reside; because it compromises the legal and political systems that are conventionally intended to protect them, it has exacerbated a prevailing sense of social insecurity for women on the U.S.-Mexico border. In *Letras Libres*, Jorge Chabat exposes an overarching complicity between organised crime networks, especially narco-traffickers, and the federal state: 'hablar del narcotráfico es, en muchos sentidos, hablar del Estado. Es imposible entender esta actividad sin el papel que ha desempeñado en su surgimiento […] también es difícil entender su poder y alcance sin la protección del Estado'.[86] Chabat thus implies that an interdependence has emerged between the state and organised crime, based on lucrative profit, both 'beneficio personal e ilegítimo' and 'la economía del país'.[87] With the drug trafficking business being worth an estimated $64 billion per annum, Chabat underscores its economic significance for

[82] Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Patricia Ravelo Blancas, 'Obedience Without Compliance: The Role of the Government, Organized Crime, and NGOs in the System of Impunity That Murders the Women of Ciudad Juárez', in *Terrorizing Women*, ed. by Fregoso and Bejarano, pp. 182–196 (p. 182).
[83] Ibid., p. 183.
[84] Ibid., p. 185.
[85] Ibid., p. 185.
[86] Jorge Chabat, 'Narcotráfico y estado: El discreto encanto de la corrupción', *Letras Libres*, 30 September 2005 <http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/narcotrafico-y-estado-el-discreto-encanto-la-corrupcion> [accessed 2016].
[87] Ibid.

the country, labelling it 'un actor económico importante'.[88] He proceeds to clarify, however, that such a relationship comes at a severe cost for the security of citizens, because of organised criminals' use of violence, threats and bribery as mechanisms of control. The economic supremacy of organised crime manipulates and corrupts all systems of power at state and federal level, in particular the police force: 'se paga para no ser detenido […] se paga también por información sobre posibles operativos policiacos, para eludirlos, y también por información sobre "traidores."'[89] When authorities such as the police have been compromised, the protection of the populace suffers – as is demonstrated by the lack of justice for female victims of gender-crime at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Steve Hise's documentary, *On the Edge*, explores in turn the social, economic and political factors which contribute to feminicide in Juárez. Several interviewees emphasise the links between police corruption, narco-trafficking and the murder of women. For example, Alma Gomez, the co-founder of the grassroots organisation *Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas*, confirms that a situation of collusion is flourishing: 'there are a large number of crimes against women that are related to organized crime and connected to the police. They have bribed the police because they are involved in trafficking drugs, prostitution, car theft etc'.[90] The essayist Charles Bowden offers some further context as to why the police are complicit and readily accept bribes: 'in Mexico nobody gets paid enough to feed their family […] What do you think happens when you have a country that is poor and somebody shows up with dump truck full of money?'[91] Similarly, Bill Conroy, a correspondent for the *Narco News Bulletin*, explains the culpability of the Mexican police in conspiring either to commit or to conceal the feminicides:

> The Mexican police stop these girls and they disappear. Who is going to know? Police have all the power, so if you are a poor person, nothing is going to happen. And that is who is getting killed. You have three or maybe four hundred girls killed, and there's no evidence? It has to be law enforcement.[92]

The implication of law enforcement agents and narco-traffickers in the feminicides is also considered at length in Charles Bowden's publication *Murder City*, a quasi-apocalyptic account of Ciudad Juárez, in which law and order have been replaced with corruption and death.[93] At the time when the book was written, Juárez was awarded the infamous title "murder capital of

[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] *On the Edge: Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*, dir. by Steve Hise (Illegal Art, 2006) [documentary].
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Charles Bowden, *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields* (New York: Avalon Publishing Group, 2011), p. 17.

the world," a title that it retained for several years as a result of the war waged against the country's narcotics industry, when President Calderón's administration deployed 40,000 soldiers on the streets of the border city. It was a period that was characterised by insecurity for the entire city's citizens, especially women; in Bowden's words, 'it was when killing began to spiral to previously unimagined levels'.[94] His abrasive, forthright prose is by no means academic in style; nevertheless, the simplistic yet lyrical nature of his writing, resembling that of Cormac McCarthy, tells a frank, disturbing story of a city where anything is permissible, particularly the raping and killing of a woman:

> Imagine living in a place where you can kill anyone and nothing happens except that they fall dead. You will not be arrested […] You can take a woman and rape her for days and nothing will happen. If you choose, if in some way that woman displeases you, well you can kill her after raping her. Rest assured, nothing will happen to you because of your actions […] the police are corrupt, the government is corrupt, the army is corrupt, and the economy functions by paying third-world wages and charging first-world prices. The Mexican newspapers dance around the truth because, one, corrupt people who are rich and powerful dominate what can be printed and, two, any reporter honest enough to publish the truth dies.[95]

Bowden's chilling description evokes the image of a city descending into disarray, where politics and law do not work for the greater good of society, but operate autonomously, in the interest of personal or sexual gain, and for the protection of the powerful. Bowden's conversational style captures the noxious city that Ciudad Juárez has become, where the military, the police, the narco-traffickers, capitalism and women converge, where violence erupts, and where death lurks. He conveys the normalisation of violence that permeates the border, recounting throughout the book stories of multiple forced disappearances, executions and rapes. As Bowden puts it, 'violence is now woven into the very fabric of the community and has no single cause and no single motive and no on-off button.'[96] Moreover, he emphasises that such widespread brutality throughout the community has rendered women living on the border vulnerable. At intervals throughout the book, Bowden returns, almost obsessive-compulsively, to the story of one particular woman, named Miss Sinaloa.[97] Miss Sinaloa is a beauty queen who arrives in Juárez for a party, before being taken away by police where 'they

[94] Ibid., p. 25.
[95] Ibid., p. xiii.
[96] Ibid., p. 105.
[97] When employing Bowden as a point of reference within feminicide discourse, it is appropriate to issue certain caveats. Although Bowden's knowledge of Ciudad Juárez is irrefutable, the way in which his writings have, at times, tended to sexualise and sensationalise female victims, has been a subject of debate in the field. The limitations and problematics associated with his works are discussed by Driver (2015), Volk and Schlotterbeck (2010), and Schmidt Camacho (2004).

rape her for days' and dump her in the desert.[98] What befalls Miss Sinaloa is, Bowden writes, 'the normal course of business' in this border space, and constitutes evidence that police themselves participate in gender-crimes.[99] Further such evidence amasses, as he goes on to mention one rape after another, not just of poor young women, but even of female police officers – raped by the Mexican army that has now invaded the city, supposedly to tackle violence, but instead engaging in acts of sexual violence arbitrarily. Part way through the book, Bowden refers to a conversation with Ester Chávez Cano, who he dubs 'the gatekeeper on the city's savagery against women.'[100] Their conversation is enlightening, as Chávez Cano offers her account of why women are victimised: 'discrimination against women […] poverty […] ignorance […] culture […] lack of faith in the authorities […] social isolation […] maquiladoras.'[101] By the end of their meeting, Bowden recognises that 'the real history of the city is written on the bodies of women […] on bleeding flesh'.[102]

Taken together, what all this literature suggests is that women are victimised within a decaying society. It is a society where money can buy silence and protection, where organised crime, politics and the justice system collude at the expense of the people, and thereby obstruct justice. In Ciudad Juárez, where the feminicides have been committed, women's rights are suspended and their agency over their own bodies hovers in the balance. This will be discussed from a more a theoretical standpoint in Chapters Two and Three: I examine the artwork of Judithe Hernández and Teresa Margolles respectively, framing them in Agamben's philosophy of bare life and Mbembe's theory of necropolitics – both theories which explore how power is exercised over the body in society, and how it determines who lives and who dies. The following section will conclude the contextualisation of the feminicides by assessing the impact of neoliberalism at the border which has repeatedly been cited as one of the foundations of gender-crime, as profit takes precedence over women's bodies.

Feminicide and neoliberalism

This chapter has thus far described how research into feminicides has resulted in various frameworks to explain how and why the female body is subjected to violence, exploitation, and indeed murder in Ciudad Juárez. As argued above, the precarisation of women's existence at

[98] Ibid., p. 15.
[99] Ibid., p. 91.
[100] Ibid., p. 65.
[101] Ibid., p. 67.
[102] Ibid., p. 68.

the U.S.-Mexico border is driven by intersecting structural forces which cut across the Mexican political, juridical and cultural systems. This section will explore one final, yet central, narrative that has framed the topic of the feminicides in the borderland: the impact of neoliberal economic policies, in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the maquiladora industry in Ciudad Juárez. Literature relating to gender-crimes has comprehensively documented the emergence of this dialectical relationship between Mexico's free-trade economy at the border and feminicidal violence; indeed, this relationship is a central theme in Carrera's feature film *El traspatio*, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Before assessing the impact of NAFTA on female existence in Ciudad Juárez, it is first necessary to offer a brief account of the emergence of free trade under the rubric of neoliberalism, and to outline a history of its implementation in contemporary Mexico.

Tenets of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a politico-economic ideology, whose central tenet is free trade; it arose in post-World War II Europe, and was later adopted as a dominant model for economic policy by governments across the world, including in Latin America. It is a model that has attracted considerable criticism, particularly from left-wing intellectuals such as Naomi Klein, Noam Chomsky, and David Harvey, who regard neoliberalism as an ideological pretext for a profoundly capitalist project; this section offers an outline of their arguments. The ideological roots of neoliberalism lie in the ideas of the Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek, who proposed, as Klein writes, that 'any government involvement in the economy would lead society down "the road of serfdom" and had to be expunged'.[103] Hayek's perspective stemmed from the aftereffects of the Great Depression and World War II, which had prompted societies to demand a distinctly Keynesian 'hands-on form of government'.[104] This proactive style of government, apparent from the 1930s to the 1950s in Europe, the U.S., and also, in the form of developmentalism, Latin America (particularly Argentina and Chile), proved to be what Klein deems 'the bygone days of "decent" capitalism': governments sought to support their populations by social, labour, health and welfare provisions.[105] This however came at a cost to the corporate sector: as the economy grew, owners and shareholders were obliged to distribute some of their profits via corporation taxes and workers' salaries. That is not to say that the owners of these corporations were at a detrimental financial loss: Klein argues that society as

[103] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 53.
[104] Ibid., p. 54.
[105] Ibid., p. 54.

whole was prospering, even if 'a few could have been doing a lot better.'[106] With the dawn of neoliberalism, however, in the 1970s, it would be the multinational corporations – and, as Klein emphasises, 'the few' – whose interests would be safeguarded, as opposed to those of the wider proletariat. As this section shows, such a paradigm is evident in the case of NAFTA and female workers in Ciudad Juárez.

The economist Milton Friedman, a former student of Hayek, further propagated and promoted neoliberal ideas as a practical policy model, through his academic teachings at the Chicago School. Friedman advocated the liberalisation of the market, and reduction in the role of the state, as the best course to economic growth and freedom. He considered that this could be achieved through the implementation of three key strategies, namely 'deregulation, privatization and cutbacks.'[107] Within this rubric, Friedman stipulated further principles of neoliberalism, as Klein summarises:

> Taxes, when they must exist, should be low, and rich and poor should be taxed at the same flat rate. Corporations should be free to sell their products anywhere in the world, and governments should make no effort to protect local industries or local ownership. All prices, including the price of labor, should be determined by the market. There should be no minimum wage. For privatization, Friedman offered up health care, the post office, education, retirement pensions, even national parks.[108]

As Klein's synopsis suggests, the economy and profitability lie at the heart of neoliberal principles, which encourage the expansion of markets across national boundaries, through free trade and investment, conducted without government regulations or restrictions.

Indeed, as David Harvey notes in his definition of neoliberalism, 'state interventions must be kept to a bare minimum': the government is urged to adopt a *laissez-faire* strategy, so long as market interests are protected.[109] If not, neoliberal ideology stipulates that the state must intervene, 'by force if need be,' in order to preserve market-oriented policies, and, by extension, the elites and their global corporations which generate wealth.[110] The rhetoric of neoliberalism is seductive, suggesting, according to Harvey, that 'human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.'[111] However,

[106] Ibid., p. 56.
[107] Ibid., p. 57.
[108] Ibid., p. 57.
[109] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 2.
[110] Ibid., p. 2.
[111] Ibid., p. 2.

Harvey applies a critical lens to the precarious realities that neoliberalism has entailed for the wider body politic. In his wide-ranging book, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey traces neoliberal thinking from its theoretical beginnings through to its practical application, drawing on particular case studies where neoliberal policies have been implemented, in countries such as Chile (which marked the first neoliberal experiment in 1973), Mexico, Argentina, U.S., and Great Britain. He concludes that neoliberalism has emerged as a set of policies which do not so much generate economic wealth as redistribute it. He proposes that neoliberalism is not merely an economic model, but a 'political project' intended to 'restore the power of economic elites'.[112] This is achieved, he writes, by the process of 'accumulation by dispossession.'[113] That is to say that capital is accumulated by exploitative means, at the expense of wider society:

> By this I mean the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated of as 'primitive' or 'original' during the rise of capitalism. These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations […] conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights […] suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land […] and most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession. The state with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in both backing and promoting these processes.[114]

Harvey draws an unsettling parallel between the effects of neoliberalism on society with those of colonialism historically: similar strategies of imperialism, power, control afford economic prosperity to the few, by dispossessing others of rights to land, resources, wealth and welfare. Harvey shows that the above mechanisms of accumulation have a devastating human impact, as the 'social safety net' of citizens is dismantled, leaving individuals to assume personal responsibility for their success or failure.[115] Furthermore, because of structural adjustments to the economy and because of the state's reduction of social programmes, neoliberalism results in increased social dislocation; as Harvey puts it from his Marxist perspective: 'for those left or cast outside the market system – a vast reservoir of apparently disposable people bereft of social protections and supportive social structures – there is little to be expected from neoliberalization except poverty, hunger, disease, and despair'.[116] Moreover, a crucial element

[112] Ibid., p. 19.
[113] Ibid., p. 159.
[114] Ibid., p. 159.
[115] Ibid., p. 76.
[116] Ibid., p. 185.

in Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession is the manipulation of circumstances which, over time, have enabled neoliberal policies to be imposed in different countries. Harvey mentions the credit system as a case in point: financial crises and defaults on loans have provided ideal opportunities to impose neoliberal economic reforms. Indeed, this was a crucial factor in Mexico's economic restructuring.

Drawing on Harvey's interpretations, Klein similarly perceives neoliberalism as a model that advances through exploiting conditions of crisis. In *The Shock Doctrine*, she compares the rapid implementation of free market economic policies in the immediate aftermath of such diverse events as natural disasters (for example, Hurricane Katrina), coups d'état (she cites Pinochet's coup), terrorist attacks (notably 9/11), and financial crises (such as the Mexican Tequila Crisis): all were shock events, after which a neoliberal turn swiftly ensued. She sees these events as instances of what she terms 'disaster capitalism', moments when right-wing U.S. think-tanks following thinkers like Milton Friedman spot opportunities for neoliberal interventions.[117] Klein's arguments are amply illustrated by the case of Mexico's conversion to free trade.

Mexico: the neoliberal turn

Even before the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, Mexico had started to move towards free-trade reforms in the 1980s during the *sexenio* of President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988). Previous post-revolutionary administrations, since that of President Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s, had followed the economic model of Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI), a model which sought to limit foreign investment and to protect Mexico's domestic industries.[118] De la Madrid's first year as President was marked by a national debt crisis, precipitated by falling oil prices and the country's inability to meet foreign debt repayment obligations. Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda contend that Mexico's resultant 'position of vulnerability' provided the ideal pretext for the U.S. Treasury to 'rescue' the country's economy by repaying the loans, whilst applying clauses to the bailout which stipulated adjustments to the Mexican economy.[119] The U.S. Treasury, together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, imposed several conditions which obliged Mexico to move away from its previous protectionist policies towards a typical free-trade model, comprised of the usual privatisation measures, cutbacks in social programmes and the opening up of the economy to outside foreign

[117] Klein, p. 6.
[118] Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy* (London: Zed Books, 2012), p. 70.
[119] Ibid., p. 71.

investment – which of course all served the vested interests of the international corporate sector. Whilst this signalled a stark transition from the traditional economic model, it was a transition supported by de la Madrid, and by subsequent presidents, namely Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000); as Watt and Zepeda comment, this era of Mexican politics marked 'the rise of the technocrats amongst the political elite,' whose thinking was aligned with 'neoliberal capitalist economic values.'[120] The effects of Mexico's entry into a new neoliberal era are acknowledged to have impacted most on the working class and the poor. This is due to cutbacks in basic social provisions, such as food and living standards; it is also due to the deregulation of the economy and labour, and to the suppression of unionisation – all in the interests of increasing global competition and productivity in the market.[121]

Neoliberal reforms subsequently accelerated during the tenure of Salinas de Gortari, as Mexico readily opened its economy to foreign investment, beginning with the signing of the General Agreement of Tariff and Trade (GATT) in 1986, and culminating in the historic implementation of NAFTA on 1st January 1994. This trilateral accord between the U.S., Canada and Mexico eradicated all trade barriers between the three nations. It was ratified in law amidst grand promises of growth and prosperity. In President Bill Clinton's televised speech as he signed the act, he promised that the trade deal between the three countries would 'create an economic order in the world that will promote more growth, more equality, better preservation of the environment and a greater possibility of world peace.'[122] For Mexico, NAFTA epitomised the country's complete integration into neoliberal economics, its commitment to the obligations of the neoliberal model, and a growing dependency on the U.S. This was a watershed moment in Mexico's history, which shaped the social, cultural and economic landscape in the country that endures to this day. Now, some twenty years later, NAFTA's promises of equality and peace are hard to discern in Mexico as a whole. In *Drug War Mexico*, co-authors Watt and Zepeda hold NAFTA's economic mantra responsible for many of the issues which impact negatively on human existence in the country. They blame NAFTA for a whole range of issues: Mexico's widespread impoverishment; the increase of child labour; the exodus of farmers from arable land; the increase of importation; and the poor working

[120] Ibid., p. 75.
[121] Ibid., p. 77.
[122] Clinton, William J., *President Bill Clinton – Remarks on the Signing of NAFTA*, online video recording, YouTube, 24 March 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3ooMrgXido> [accessed 1 April 2016].

conditions in the factories of global corporations – all of which have exacerbated precarity. A central plank of Watt and Zepeda's argument is that neoliberalism has also fuelled the narcotics industry, and by extension the violence and corruption that is witnessed on a daily basis. They develop the idea that drug-trafficking in Mexico must be read within the 'wider economic environment.'[123] That is, the neoliberal economic model, with its cheap labour requirements, has had a severe impact on the living standards of the population, and has therefore 'had an exclusionary effect on the poor', who are forced to seek alternative measures to survive or to provide for families; such alternative measures are often found in criminal activity linked to narco-trafficking.[124] If Watt and Zepeda consider neoliberalism a precursor to increased criminality, the literature on feminicide has similarly made the argument that the increased levels of gender-violence in Ciudad Juárez are a direct corollary of the free-trade industry that dominates the border territory.

Females at the border: the global assembly line and NAFTA

Even before NAFTA was signed, the U.S.-Mexico border had been a frontline of national industrial activity since the introduction of the Border Industrialization Project (BIP) in 1965. The initiative was designed to compensate for the unemployment of *bracero* workers when an agreement known as the 'Bracero Program' came to an end in 1964. The Bracero Program, implemented in 1942, involved a contract between the U.S. and Mexico which permitted Mexican manual labourers (braceros) to cross into the U.S. so as, in Alejandro Lugo's words, 'to maintain American productivity,' particularly in the agricultural market at a time when American nationals were conscripted to fight in World War II.[125] A year after the programme ended, the BIP was drafted so as to create jobs for approximately 200,000 unemployed men.[126] The BIP permitted both national and U.S. companies to relocate their factories along the border, providing the incentive of duty-free tariffs, on condition that all products be exported.[127] This project thus heralded the emergence of the maquiladora industry, which would become emblematic of the free trade model in Mexico: whatever the sector – whether electronics, medical supplies or automobiles – materials are imported into Mexico, assembled in factories, and subsequently exported. Not only did this era set a precedent for the subsequent expansion

[123] Watt and Zepeda, p. 120.
[124] Ibid., p. 120.
[125] Alejandro Lugo, *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.–Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).
[126] Ibid.
[127] Leslie Sklair, 'The Maquilas in Mexico: A Global Perspective', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 11, i (1992), 91–107.

of the global assembly line under NAFTA: it also transformed both the social dynamics of the city and the gender dynamics of the labour force, with effects that persist today. Once the market was liberalised in the early 1990s, the employment opportunities in foreign-owned assembly plants at the border resulted in a migratory influx of citizens from interior regions of Mexico to Ciudad Juárez. Many migrated from poor rural provinces, displaced from the land which had been privatised under the neoliberal mandate. It was not only the male demographic that found work at the maquiladoras: according to Steven Volk and Marian Schlotterbeck, during this new period of industrialisation 'maquiladora managers turned to young women as their primary labor force'.[128] Women were favoured as workers due to assumptions about certain archetypal traits, especially being 'docile, undemanding, nimble-fingered, non-union and unmilitant'.[129] These sexist classifications were considered the requisite characteristics to maintain the low-wage regime and maximise both profit and competition. Researchers from different theoretical perspectives have argued that the feminisation of the proletariat, coupled with the exploitative low-wage maquiladora industry, correlates with heightened female vulnerability at the border.

In the first years that feminicide in Juárez was recognised, the killings of women were dubbed the 'maquiladora murders.'[130] In fact, according to the statistics gathered by Monárrez and Cervera Gómez, only 5% of the victims of murders committed between 1993-2010 were from the global assembly plants; nevertheless, the phrase 'maquiladora murders' prompted scholars to investigate the crucial relationship between women and NAFTA.[131] One of the first arguments made by feminicide scholars was that the increased presence of women in the labour force transgressed traditional patriarchal norms of the role of females in society, and therefore caused a male backlash. Volk and Schlotterbeck adopted this narrative, hypothesising that the new gendered workforce had 'generated a deep well of male resentment and female vulnerability'.[132] Similarly, María Socorro Tabuenca explored the newfound autonomy of women in urban space and the maquiladoras, suggesting that women's presence in the labour

[128] Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck, 'Gender, Order, and Femicide: Reading the Popular Culture of Murder in Ciudad Juárez', in *Making a Killing*, pp. 121–153 (p. 127).
[129] Ibid., p. 127.
[130] Elvia R. Arriola, 'Accountability for Murder in the Maquiladoras: Linking Corporate Indifference to Gender Violence at the U.S.–Mexico Border', in *Making a Killing*, pp. 25–61 (p. 25).
[131] Steven S. Volk, 'The Historiography of Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez: Critical and Revisionist Approaches', *Forum for Inter-American Research*, 8.2 (2015), 20–45 (p. 25).
[132] Volk and Schlotterbeck, p. 127.

force had defied the 'social construction of gender'.[133] Before the Mexican market was liberalised, Socorro Tabuenca observes that women were largely limited to the domestic sphere, confined to the role of mother or daughter; the transformation of economic policies to adopt the maquiladora model had shifted women's status to that of 'household provider'.[134]

However, Socorro Tabuenca warns against reducing violence against women to mere stereotypes or traditional binaries: to do so, she contends, does not capture the severity of anti-female terror in the borderspace. Rather, in order to analyse female vulnerability, Socorro Tabuenca proposes a more profound revisionism, extending beyond notions of patriarchal identity, to encompass a theorisation of class structures at the border, and to consider the manner in which government bodies have fuelled patriarchal discourse, as this chapter has already discussed. Indeed, although female labourers originally made up the majority of the maquiladora workforce, it is important to note that gender disparity had decreased by 2004: by then, according to Volk, hiring practices reflected 'an almost equal number of men and women […] in the assembling plants.'[135] Later discussions therefore have gone beyond scrutiny of the gender disparity of the workforce, to advance more cogent and progressive arguments. Some of the most engaging lines of argument have highlighted the perceived dialectic between free trade at the border and social insecurity, along with notions of female disposability and exploitation. Such tropes will be revisited in the exploration of visual texts throughout this thesis.

Elvia Arriola's article, 'Accountability for Murder in the Maquiladoras,' is a particularly striking contribution. For the most part, Arriola delivers a strong indictment of NAFTA and the maquiladora industry's 'systematic and structural disregard […] for the humanity of the laborer', which, she postulates, has 'provided a foundation for the emergence of more violent forms of social chaos and gender violence to erupt in Ciudad Juárez'.[136] In a crucial passage, she argues that Mexico's insertion into the global economy has given rise to precarious conditions for maquiladora workers, both inside and outside the factory. These precarious conditions are demonstrated by the lack of health, welfare and security measures afforded them:

[133] María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, 'Ghost Dance in Ciudad Juárez at the End/Beginning of the Millennium', in *Making a Killing*, pp. 95–119 (p. 97).
[134] Ibid., p. 97.
[135] Volk, 'Historiography of Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez', p. 25.
[136] Elvia R. Arriola, 'Accountability for Murder in the Maquiladoras: Linking Corporate Indifference to Gender Violence at the U.S. –Mexico Border', in *Making a Killing*, pp. 25–61 (p. 33).

> Multinational corporations come into Mexico, lease large plots of land, often run their factories twenty-four hours a day, pay no taxes, and do very little to ensure that the workers they employ will have a roof over their heads, beds to sleep in, and enough money to feed their families. Juárez, like many other border towns affected by NAFTA, may have factories and cheap jobs, but such employment has not enhanced peace and prosperity among the working class; instead, hostility against the poor working women.[137]

Arriola's account of the low welfare standards and marginalisation of the workforce employed at the maquiladoras underscores the effects of economic deregulation: the laxity of policies safeguarding workers' rights, combined with the competitive market comes at a cost to the proletariat, echoing to some extent David Harvey's theory of accumulation by dispossession. Throughout her article, Arriola contends that in the absence of labour regulations, female maquiladora workers have come to be regarded with 'fatal indifference'.[138] That is to say, under NAFTA the laxity of regulations, which privileges global corporations, has facilitated the 'systematic abuse' of maquiladora workers.[139] Such abuse takes place both inside and outside the global assembly line, in a variety of forms: 'abuse includes exposure to toxicity in the workplace, sexual harassment, and arbitrary disciplinary methods'.[140] She posits that gender violence and feminicide in this geographical context are, essentially, the extreme of a continuum of abuses that begin within the maquiladora space. For Arriola, even before a woman from the global assembly line is violated and murdered in Ciudad Juárez, her life has already been 'defined as insignificant: a fleck in the fabric of global production', because her life prior to death was supplanted by profit, her body regarded as a mere 'cog in the wheel of production'.[141]

Arriola's analysis corresponds to that of the feminist geographer Melissa Wright, a leading figure in the field of feminicide studies. In *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, Wright articulates a trenchant critique of the neoliberal model, whose low-wage labour regimes convert women's bodies into disposable subjects. Adopting an ethnographic approach, Wright studies the culture of labour-intensive maquiladoras and their subsequent impact on perceptions of a female labourer's subjectivity not only within the factory walls but also outside, in the milieu in which she resides. Wright draws on fieldwork conducted *in situ* at maquiladoras in Ciudad Juárez and southern China; she applies Marxist theories to generate

[137] Ibid., p. 27.
[138] Ibid., p. 33.
[139] Ibid., p. 28.
[140] Ibid., p. 28.
[141] Ibid., p. 55.

an empirical study of what her reviewer characterises as the 'entangled processes of capital formation and subject formation' in China and Mexico.[142] Her research is directed at the deconstruction of what she labels 'the myth of the disposable third world woman'.[143] According to this myth, the cumulative effects of the maquiladora model render females expendable both within the labour force and outside it; as Wright explains, the myth centres on the narrative of 'a young woman from the third world locale – who, through the passage of time, comes to personify the meaning of human disposability: someone who eventually evolves into a living state of worthlessness'.[144] This state of worthlessness is the outcome of the manual labour she is employed to carry out: over a short period of time, Wright observes, 'she loses the physical and mental faculties for which she was employed, until she is worth no more than the cost of her dismissal and substitute'.[145] The depressing result of all this is that the female labourer comes to signify a waste product of the global market. Wright emphasises that this myth, which, as her book reveals, is applied dogmatically in practice by transnational industries in both Mexico and China, renders the female's demise 'ineluctable'.[146] The myth propagates contradictory notions of a woman's value: on the one hand, she makes an important contribution to the economy as she repetitively assembles goods that translate, ultimately, into capital; on the other hand, this work producing goods entails stresses and strains, such that her own value decreases, until she is faced with dismissal or 'corporate death'.[147] Indeed, this is how the maquiladora industry survives, via the process of what Wright calls 'labor turnover'.[148] By this, she means the perpetual cycle of consumption of female workers, followed by their disposal once their optimal value has been extracted, a cycle which maintains the constant circulation of capital, a clear instance of what Chomsky might refer to as 'profit over people'. Indeed, this myth of the inherently disposable third world woman has become a paradigm for assembly-line managers to rationalise and justify their exploitation of the female workforce.

Wright's interviews with maquiladora workers elucidate the exploitative and often degrading treatment to which they are subjected in the factory: the women's bodies are surveyed, controlled and regulated, as is evident in the corporation's monitoring of their menstrual cycles

[142] Diana Ojeda, '*Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* by Melissa W. Wright', *Antipode*, iv, 40 (2008), 713–716 (p. 713).
[143] Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.
[144] Ibid., p. 2.
[145] Ibid., p. 2.
[146] Ibid., p. 2.
[147] Ibid., p. 74.
[148] Ibid., p. 27.

and sexual behaviour, and in the pregnancy tests which they are routinely obliged to take. Wright also alludes to the highly Foucauldian model of surveillance which is employed in this setting: assembly line managers are able survey the 'corporeal movements' of these women.[149] Managers watch over from behind 'upper-tier glass windows', monitoring 'wrists, fingers, backs, eyes, and other body parts' to ensure the optimum extraction of labour.[150] As Wright concludes, the female worker is not viewed as a 'human form' but rather as an assemblage of 'body parts'.[151]

The disposable status of the female labourer in the free market in Mexico is a matter of concern for Wright: expendability is not only manifest in the labour sector but is also translated into the treatment of female workers in the public domain. Her chapter 'The Dialectics of Still Life' highlights a direct, and highly pertinent, correlation between the politics of disposability around female maquiladora workers, and the repeated urban violence against women in the Mexican borderspace. As a central line of her argument shows, the myth of the third world woman overflows its immediate context of the global assembly-line, and 'interacts' with the wider social setting; this interaction, she remarks, often manifests itself 'in extremely cruel ways' on women's bodies.[152] Referring directly to the feminicides at the U.S.-Mexico border, she draws attention to 'the connections linking a discourse of third world disposability to the forces that treat women as if they were real instances of disposable humanity'.[153] From Wright's perspective, the turnover narrative and the murder narrative share the same trope of the disposable woman: both regard the female body as a site where value can be extracted for whatever purpose, whether capital accumulation or sexual gratification, before being discarded without significant consequences. Ultimately, she concludes, the feminicides are 'only symptoms of a wasting process that began before the violent snuffing out of their lives'.[154] Wright's analogy shows that NAFTA has both circulated and normalised a myth in Ciudad Juárez, that women's bodies are exploitable and, indeed, expendable, which exacerbates the vulnerability of their status within this social fabric. This correlation will be further explored in Chapter Five.

[149] Ibid., p. 17.
[150] Ibid., p. 17.
[151] Ibid., p. 17.
[152] Ibid., p. 72.
[153] Ibid., p. 72.
[154] Ibid., p. 77.

Theory: locating the body

As we will see, the visual texts studied in this thesis respond to the feminicide cases in Ciudad Juárez through framing the body in particular ways, which make visible lives rendered invisible by violence and the apathy of the judiciary. Although these productions may vary aesthetically, in both medium and genre, they share a common representational focus on the framing of the body, or more specifically the feminicide body, a body that has, is, or will be subjected to gender-violence. As the following six chapters will show, the body is invoked in the aesthetic domain to serve varying agendas: it is reconstructed in order to bring attention to the physical violations to which it is subjected, and to the structures of social, political and economic power that both produce and erase it at the border; it is employed as a space of resistance and dissent to subvert the contemporary spectacles of violence which dehumanise it; and it is re-embodied to counteract its absence and to remember it as a subject that has been lost. Through analysis of the framing of the body in these works and through engagement with the nature of its visualisation, the following chapters will shed critical light on how the feminicides have been portrayed in contemporary visual culture, and how these different representations variously employ the body as a conduit to explore politicised themes of disposability, grievability, female subordination, marginalisation, rape, loss, biopolitics, necropolitics and bare life.

The analyses of these visual responses are guided by the notion that the body constitutes a privileged site of meaning, an entity that not only reflects the personal but also the wider society in which it resides. As Hannah Westley puts it, 'the body is the threshold of subjectivity, the point of intersection between the private and the public, the personal and political'.[155] In order to justify this thesis's premise for analysing the visual responses to the feminicides through a focus on the body, it is here necessary to outline the theories about corporeality that have informed my understanding of the significance of the body and its ability to communicate and be read.

To some extent, a visual representation of the body is a logical departure point for any cultural response to feminicide in Ciudad Juárez: after all, it is the body that has been subjected to violence and the body that has been lost in these cases of gender-crime. If we contemplate the material, real feminicide body, it is a *corpus delicti*, the receptacle, the witness and the narrator of the violent acts that brought about its oppression and ultimate demise. As Monárrez explains, 'the physical body reveals the effects of violent power and reflects the tensions of

[155] Hannah Westley, *The Body as Medium and Metaphor* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008), p. 7.

civilisation'.[156] The body therefore emerges as a vessel of communication, and whilst the tangible surface of the body is marked with the legible wounds of physical violence, readings of corporeality, as this thesis will demonstrate, can go beyond that which is overtly visible or injurious, offering an insight into wider societal factors implicated in these violent manifestations. This is a perspective that resonates with contemporary discourses, particularly in the field of sociology, where the body and human embodiment has become a prominent analytical perspective from which to contemplate human life and our society. Contemporary reflections on the body have tended to move beyond biological or physiological reductionism, whereby the body had previously been understood in its most basic terms as a material structure or organism. In the 1980s particularly, mindfulness of the body shifted towards understanding it as 'a metaphor for society'.[157] This point is emphasised by the sociologist Anthony Synnott:

> The body social is many things: the prime symbol of the self, but also of the society; it is something that we have, yet also what we are; it is both subject and object at the same time; it is individual and personal, as unique as a fingerprint or odourplume, yet it is also common to all humanity […] The body is both an individual creation, physically and phenomenologically, and a cultural product; it is personal, and also state property.[158]

As Synnott underscores, the body is not only a symbol of selfhood, but also a socially-constructed entity, which is shaped and even determined by surrounding structures and culture. His argument here is informed by Foucault's thinking about the body as a significant site of power, control and manipulation in society. Indeed, as Nicholas Mirzoeff acknowledges, Foucault's works, which interrogate the relationship between the body and social structures, have made the body the topic of extensive focus in cultural studies and beyond.[159] In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, the body is central to the exploration of how society works: 'it is always the body that is at issue'.[160] From Foucault's social constructionist perspective, the body is 'docile'; it is malleable and compliant to its immediate surroundings, and is 'directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs'.[161] The body thus transpires as an impressionable site that can be 'invested with power relations and

[156] Monárrez Fragoso, 'The Victims of Ciudad Juárez Feminicide: Sexually Fetishized Commodities', in *Terrorizing Women*, pp. 59–69 (p. 59).
[157] Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, 'Introduction', in *The Body: A Reader*, ed. by Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004), pp. 1–46 (p. 11).
[158] Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 4.
[159] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Bodyscape Art, Modernity, and the Ideal Figure* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 8.
[160] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd edn (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995), p. 25.
[161] Ibid., p. 136.

domination'.[162] As Foucault describes, it is of 'economic use', but it is also a 'political instrument', which can be shaped accordingly.[163]

Such notions of power over the body are at the core of Foucault's later lectures about biopolitics, a theory of the management of bodies and human life by regimes of power or authority, which we will explore in Chapter Three. Indeed, biopolitics and later theories which build on it, namely Achille Mbembe's necropolitics and Giorgio Agamben's bare life, are deployed extensively in Chapters Two and Three, to analyse visual representations of the relationship between the body and power structures within society. Such theories provide an apt framework for addressing the vulnerability of embodied female experience at the border: as the visual texts depict, the female body's tenuous relationship to its social, political, economic and geographical contexts results in a lack of rights and lack of control over bodily agency. As Judith Butler reminds us:

> 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 the 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. The body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life.[164]

Like Foucault, Butler acknowledges that our bodies are never entirely our own, but are subject to the whim of others and of society. In this respect, the body is rendered vulnerable by economic and political forces and by individuals, which together expropriate its agency, leaving it precarious and open to violation – a point which this thesis will explore in relation to feminicide. This point particularly resonates with feminist enquiries into the gendered dimensions of corporeality. As this chapter has already highlighted, the act of feminicide is motivated, according to Russell, by unequal gender power relations, misogyny and the 'sense of entitlement,' 'superiority' and 'assumption of ownership' over the female body.[165] Chapters Four and Five will thus examine cinematic treatments of sexual assault, exploitation and rape, to show how gender power relations are inscribed on, and articulated through, the female body. As Ileana Rodríguez asserts, sexual crimes committed against the body of a woman are 'a social warning to everyone, an act of power, and discipline, a sign of masculine, brutal, natural, social

[162] Ibid., p. 25.
[163] Ibid., p. 26.
[164] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 26.
[165] Russell, 'Defining Femicide', p. 14.

and political power'.[166] In other words, women's bodies are constituted by the prescription of patriarchal norms based on male domination and female submission, according to which women are passive subjects. As these chapters will show, the female body is a site that is surveilled, policed, regulated and, ultimately, punished.

Women's bodies, in particular, have become the focus of emergent discourse since the 1960s, when the political movement of second-wave feminism took a distinctly 'corporeal turn,' to cite Alexandra Howson.[167] Feminist theory has sought to unravel and interrogate female embodiment or 'lived experience,' and also to understand the body as an 'object' of enquiry.[168] Much of the initial interest in the body sought to distinguish between gender and sex, an approach encapsulated by Simone de Beauvoir's maxim, 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.'[169] In short, while one is born a certain sex (our biological prescription), gender, as Butler explains, 'is the cultural meaning and form that that the body acquires.'[170] While discussion of the sex-gender dialectic lies beyond the limits of this thesis, other feminist arguments are helpful for analysing the framing of the body in visual responses to the feminicides. Critically, aspects of this thesis will be informed by feminist intellectuals' studies of the objectification and 'instrumentalisation' of the female body, especially the work of Andrea Dworkin, Catherine Mackinnon and Martha Nussbaum.[171] Their research has addressed how gender inequalities are manifested through corporeality, as in the examples of rape and pornography. These two topics will be addressed in Chapters Four and Five, which explore narratives that take the female body as an object whose autonomy is ostensibly removed; such treatment, to cite Mackinnon, 'fails to recognize women as free and equal persons […] dehumanizes women and encourages their victimization.'[172] In these two cinematographic responses, we will observe how female embodiment is portrayed solely through its experience of exploitation, be it in a sexual or labour context.

---

[166] Ileana Rodríguez, *Liberalism at its Limits: Crime and Terror in the Latin American Cultural Text* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), p. 170.
[167] Alexandra Howson, *Embodying Gender* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), p. 44.
[168] Ibid., p. 45.
[169] Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone De Beauvoir's Second Sex", *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 35–49 (p. 35).
[170] Ibid., p.35.
[171] Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Objectification', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24 (1995), 249–291 (p. 265).
[172] Laurie Shrage, 'Feminist Perspectives on Sex Markets', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/feminist-sex-markets/>.

The body is not only a socially, culturally and politically constituted site, as I have expounded: it can also be a space of resistance and memory. As Barbara Sutton reminds us, 'social forces, while extremely powerful, do not completely determine women's embodied existence and practices.'[173] Indeed, women's bodies can be vital agents of resistance, as explored in Chapters Six and Seven, in photography and documentary filmmaking respectively, where we observe, in Chris Shilling's words, 'the body reacting back and affecting discourses.'[174] These final two chapters look specifically at the nude body and collective embodied resistance in the form of social movements, showing how the body is framed as one of performance and dissent in equal measure. The nude female body, for instance, may connote a myriad of meanings. On the one hand, it may elicit sexual inferences, and certainly vulnerability in relation to the feminicides. On the other hand, as more recent work by Barbara Brownie, Barbara Sutton and Brett Lunceford has demonstrated, nude female corporeality, placed in a wider context of political dissent, may equally signify a 'revolutionary body.'[175] The disrobing of the body may, according to Sutton, 'disrupt dominant notions that depict women's bodies as passive, powerless, or as sexual objects for sale.'[176] Such an act can thus generate a counter-discourse and sense of empowerment. Likewise, the disruption of hegemonic discourses enacted via the body may be found in social movements, in this case, those of the mothers of feminicide victims. Resistance movements, as Sutton informs us, involve 'putting the material body in action to affect the course of society,' which she relates particularly to Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, and the refrain attached to their movement 'poner el cuerpo,' literally meaning, 'to put the body on the line.'[177] The mothers in Argentina 'fought with their own bodies which they offered as evidence of existence of their children.'[178] They thus used their own corporeality to signify bodies that had been lost, in much the same way as the mothers of the Juárez victims, as we will see. For Judith Butler, the collective assembly of bodies in public spaces for the purpose of political action signifies visibility and evokes the 'right to appear' for many who may have been deemed ineligible or discounted. As Butler writes:

---

[173] Barbara Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), p. 5.
[174] Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, 3rd edn (London: SAGE Publications, 2012), p. 84.
[175] Barbara Brownie, 'Naked Protest and the Revolutionary Body', *The Guardian*, 15 January 2014.
[176] Barbara Sutton, 'Memories of Bodies and Resistance at the World Social Forum', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8 (2013), 139–148 <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol8/iss3/10> [accessed 24 November 2016], p. 145.
[177] Barbara Sutton, 'Poner el Cuerpo: Women's Embodiment and Political Resistance in Argentina', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 49.3 (2008), 129–162 (p. 130).
[178] Ibid., p. 130.

> [A] 'right' to appear is tacitly supported by regulatory schemes that qualify only certain subjects as eligible to exercise that right […] For those considered 'ineligible' the struggle to form alliances is paramount, and it involves a plural and performative positioning of eligibility where it did not exist before.[179]

The body, as we will see, is converted into a 'protesting body' which emerges as an 'agent of social and political change.'[180]

Concluding remarks

As this first chapter has established, gender-based crime at the U.S.-Mexico border is a complex human rights issue. Despite new laws, reforms and initiatives driven by NGOs, justice for female citizens consistently faces severe obstacles in the form of state actors and institutions, which prevent the practical implementation of constructive changes. The extensive research conducted in the field makes it clear that there is no straightforward explanation for the murders in Ciudad Juárez. It is however clear that it is seldom helpful to focus on the question of *who* is perpetrating these crimes; after all, conspiratorial actions such as spurious convictions and flawed police enquiries obscure the identification of the actual perpetrators. It is therefore more constructive to assess *why* these gender-crimes happen. As this thesis elaborates, answering such a question involves analysing the systems and structures at the border – and indeed across Mexico as a whole – that cultivate a society predisposed to gender-motivated crime.

In the following chapters, which interrogate representations of the Juárez murders in visual culture, I situate feminicide at the intersection of two axes of violence: physical and symbolic. Whilst logic and semantics would suggest that these types of violence are fundamentally opposed, I show throughout the thesis that their relationship is interdependent and reciprocal. This point, as discussed above, is evident in Lagarde's theoretical tenets for explaining the term feminicide. Along one axis, the female body encounters tangible violence inflicted by male perpetrators; along the other axis, it is simultaneously subjected to the intangible violence generated by national and global structures which produce and nurture the conditions that render women's existence precarious and permit these crimes to continue with impunity. These

[179] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 50.
[180] Orna Sasson-Levy, 'Body, Gender, and Knowledge in Protest Movements: The Israeli Case', *Gender and Society*, 17 (2003), 379–403, p. 379.

interconnected systems of violence sustain each other to create a continuum of anti-female terror that targets the lived, bodily experiences of women.

As my enquiries will demonstrate, it is the female body, the object of this twofold violence, that is the protagonist of the visual works explored in this thesis. Though the body is disregarded at the U.S.-Mexico border, the representational mode affords it an antithetical space in which it can reclaim visibility. Cultural practitioners consistently appropriate female corporeality as a paradigm to serve the narrative purpose of each production, regardless of medium or genre. Through the representation of the body, spectators are granted an access point into what Jean Franco brands the 'cruel modernity' faced by feminicide victims in Juárez and into the subsequent plight of their families. By interpreting corporeality as a site of meaning upon which ideologies play out, my examination of the bodies portrayed in the following chapters enables a discursive analysis of the contemporary Mexican context, in which women find themselves interpellated.

Drawing these analyses together, I seek to map the potential problematics, limitations and ethical tensions that mark aesthetic representations of national, gendered trauma. Each chapter thus attends critically to how the body is employed, framed and mediated through various visual strategies and in various genres. Despite the generally well-intended stated goal of practitioners to alert the wider public to the horrors of feminicide, and its grammars, their contributions to this growing visual canon should not be assumed to be above reproach. Visual culture plays a pivotal role in shaping understandings of human rights violations against women in the public imaginary, since the frame becomes a conceptual space through which to filter ideas and (mis)conceptions. Therefore, in light of this pedagogical capacity to inform popular discourse, it is vital to subject these narratives to critique, and to study how these image-makers interpret, produce and convey the feminicides and their surrounding discourses. For this reason, it is important not to homogenise these representations; rather, they should each be taken on their own terms, taking into account ideological dimensions and stylistic elements which may inflect the meaning and production of these cultural expressions. Over the subsequent chapters, the body plays a multifarious role in this emergent visual landscape: it is re-imagined, re-embodied, retrieved, resurrected, re-victimised and re-commodified to serve what often transpire as conflicting representational narratives.

Consequently, I would argue that it is the role of academic praxes and responsible scholarship to cast a critical eye over this circulating imagery and assess how far it transforms, enhances

or skews the perception of these gender-motivated crimes in the public imaginary. Ultimately, the thesis argues that the female body should not simply be regarded as a victim or object of violence and suffering, but as a site of politics and resistance. So long as justice remains an abstract concept in Mexico, and so long as women continue to be targets of excessive violence, new scholarly approaches within the field prove to be as relevant and pressing as ever. This thesis intends to offer a new line of thought to the subject-matter, by taking the body as a source of inspiration.

Chapter 2

Biopolitics at the border: the body and bare life in Judithe Hernández's *The Juárez Series*

> I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered, so that it has never been forgotten. I know too that the powerful fear art, whatever its form, when it does this, and amongst the people such art sometimes runs like a rumour and a legend because it makes sense of what life's brutalities cannot, a sense that unites us, for it is inseparable from a justice at last. Art, when it functions like this, becomes a meeting-place of the invisible, the irreducible, the enduring, guts, and honour.[1]

Introduction

The above citation, from the critic John Berger's essay, 'Miners', offers a keen endorsement of art's capacity to intelligibly communicate human experience. He describes it as a discerning medium that casts an introspective lens over the social world and makes sense of it via representation. More importantly, Berger evokes the idea that art may afford justice and visibility to those who have suffered historically. In his concluding remarks, Berger asserts that art 'becomes a meeting-place of the invisible', and it is this observation in particular that resonates with the artistic narratives produced in response to gender crimes in Ciudad Juárez. As this and the following chapter will show, art, across its various genres, has served as a representational mode through which to give back a sense of visibility to bodies which have disappeared or been erased by the act of feminicide at the border. This chapter will critically engage with a corpus of artwork entitled *The Juárez Series*, by Chicana artist Judithe Hernández. Working with the medium of pastel on paper, Hernández boldly foregrounds the female figure in each composition of the series and develops a visual vocabulary that grapples with themes of citizen insecurity and marginalisation in Ciudad Juárez, so as to bring to light to its historic incidences of gender-based crime.

Central to my reading of Hernández's work is an examination of the dialectical relationship between the represented body and the borderspace portrayed within the *mise-en-scène* of selected tableaux. This particular frame of analysis opens up several lines of enquiry into the theoretical terrains of geopolitics, biopolitics and sovereignty, which are distinct yet imbricated areas of study that have been increasingly integrated within debates about the feminicides.

[1] John Berger, *Keeping a Rendezvous* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), p. 9.

First, the application of a geopolitical perspective affords a conceptualisation of the U.S.-Mexico border that looks beyond its topographical and reductive meaning as a territorial demarcation dividing two nation-states. The complexity of its history, and indeed its present-day reality, warrants a closer, more analytical inspection. As I contend in this chapter, the border location of Ciudad Juárez must be understood as an ever-shifting complex spatial configuration that plays host to a nexus of cultural, social, economic and political asymmetries. This urban geography is an integral trope in the pastel works in question: it does not simply feature as a backdrop, but rather comes to symbolise an antagonist that threatens, regulates, abandons and harms the female body that is present in each work. This leads me to the second point of interest in the chapter, which probes the interrelated notions of biopolitics and sovereignty that may also be inferred from the iconography of the narrative. More precisely, I will consider how embodied experience is portrayed as contingent on intersecting, overlapping and often competing expressions of power by local, national and global actors in the region.

My readings subscribe to notions of biopolitics and will be placed principally in dialogue with philosophical theories from selected volumes of Giorgio Agamben's twenty-year project, *Homo Sacer*, which will be employed as a heuristic framework. I propose that Hernández's visualisation of the body and the spatiality of the border on canvas evoke intriguing parallels with notions articulated by Agamben, namely bare life, spaces of exception, governance and the ontology of bodies in the political sphere. These notions will be critically analysed in light of empirical research, in order to reflect on the political reality of women's embodied experience within this border contact zone. By connecting Agambenian philosophy to the subject-matter of Hernández's pastel series, I seek to initiate an enquiry into the body's relationship with politics and power. This theme is woven through each chapter in this thesis, and is crucial to understanding gendered precariousness at the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as the potential for resistance. Before embarking on a detailed visual analysis of Hernández's artwork, it is first necessary to offer a brief overview of notable popular art about the feminicides, in order to shed light on the broader context of the artistic canon, and to draw attention to the representational strategies which are used to frame the body.

Contextualisation: art and the Juárez feminicides in global perspective

Over the past two decades, cases of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez have prompted what Benita Heiskanen calls 'a global activist-artistic movement'.[2] Divorced from the notion of art for art's sake, these artworks have been born of a sense of 'moral outrage', and employed as a mechanism to mobilise social consciousness.[3] These visual responses have served a range of agendas, from politicising and denouncing the systems which are to blame for violence against women, to commemorating the victims whose lives have been silenced by murder and systemic injustice. There have been many of these artistic initiatives, spanning a range of art forms, from paintings to installation pieces, performance art, craft, sculpture and mixed media. Much of the artwork produced has been exhibited transnationally, in galleries as part of collective projects, whilst other artists have transgressed the conventions of exhibition halls, and appropriated urban city spaces or plazas as a means of propagating anti-feminicide narratives to the wider public. Volk and Schlotterbeck claim that, in the absence of justice, visual culture has served as 'a site where victims are mourned', and that these narratives have 'filled the vacuum left by state officials who continue to either shun their responsibilities or to conceal the guilty'.[4] This is not to say that art, or other visual representations by cultural practitioners, is beyond criticism or is void of ethical implications – which, indeed, are the concerns of this thesis. Nonetheless, what can be said about art in particular, as I will now discuss, is that it has brought the subject of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez into the global cultural imaginary; in doing so, it counters the 'silencing of the murders from official public memory', and encourages both dialogue and reflection.[5] Although it is not possible to offer a comprehensive typology within which to locate all the artistic contributions, I would argue that certain visual paradigms have emerged: some art commemorates, especially by portraiture; some art focuses on bodily absence through more conceptual methods; and some art is more politically-charged, exploring the broader factors which underpin the crimes. Hernández's pastel-compilation falls into the last category, which will also be explored in this chapter, before turning to the experimental, unorthodox installations of the Sinaloan artist Teresa Margolles in Chapter Three.

[2] Benita Heiskanen, 'Ni Una Más, Not One More: Activist-Artistic Response to the Juárez Femicides', *JOMEC*, 3 (2013), 1–21 (p. 1).
[3] Ibid., p. 4.
[4] Volk and Schlotterbeck, pp. 121–153 (p. 122).
[5] Heiskanen, p. 3.

Commemorative portraiture

Figure 1. *400 Women*, Tamsyn Challenger.

The creations of artists Diane Kahlo and Brian Maguire, along with Tamsyn Challenger's international exhibition *400 Women*, have all imparted similar aesthetic responses to the feminicides, employing the medium of portraiture. Their works have sought to commemorate, by individualising the victims; by contrast, works explored later in this section collectivise them. *400 Women*, for instance, was a large-scale, collaborative art project coordinated by a British artist, Tamsyn Challenger, and involved the commissioning of over two hundred other artists from around the world. The project was inspired by Challenger's trip to Mexico in 2006, when she was making a feature for BBC Radio 4's *Women's Hour*. It was here that she met Consuelo Valenzuela, whose daughter Julieta disappeared in Ciudad Juárez in 2001, when she was just 17 years old. After speaking with Valenzuela, Challenger was given postcards featuring Julieta's portrait. Challenger was preoccupied by Julieta's image: 'the face looking up at me was such a poverty of an image. It had been reproduced from a snapshot and the face was blurred […] And I think I just wanted to bring her face back.'[6] When she returned to the UK, Challenger searched for more images of girls and women who had disappeared or been killed in the region; this gave her an incentive for the project *400 Women*.[7] She rallied a large collective of artists, making each one responsible for producing a portrait of one of the victims. With each portrait measuring approximately 14x10 inches, the dimensions and imagery have been likened to the style of traditional Mexican retablo paintings, which, as Aishih Wehbe-

[6] Tamsyn Challenger, *400 Women*, 2010 <http://www.tamsynchallenger.com/400-women/> [accessed 9 October 2016].
[7] The exhibition *400 Women* took place in the basement of Shoreditch Town Hall in November 2010. It was later shown again at the Edinburgh Art Festival (2011), and then at Sugar City in Amsterdam (2012). Several world-renowned artists contributed to the exhibition, including Tracey Emin, Maggi Hambling and Dame Paula Rego.

Herrera writes, 'symbolizes an act of remembrance and the tribute paid to the victims'.[8] Whilst Wehbe-Herrera does not expand on this observation, it is important to note the devotional underpinnings of retablo art, a practice traditionally reserved for the depiction of religious icons and saints; as Charles Lovell and Elizabeth Zarur explain, 'these paintings were used primarily by the Mexican people as objects of veneration in their homes or placed at pilgrimage sites as votive offerings'.[9] Challenger's stylistic choice of a retablo format for all the portraits therefore serves not only to foster the commemorative properties of the style, but also to re-embody, honour and immortalise the victims, within the traditions of the genre. Indeed, as Challenger describes the premise of the exhibition: 'each artist represents each woman, painting her into being'.[10] This theme of re-embodiment as a vehicle of remembrance has also surfaced in other cultural productions.

Figure 2. *Wall of Memories: The Disappeared Señoritas of Ciudad Juárez*, Diane Kahlo.

Figure 3. *Esmeralda Juárez Alarcón*, Brian Maguire.

[8] Aishih Wehbe-Herrera, '"A New Landscape of the Possible": *400 Women*, Politics of Representation and Human Rights', *FIAR*, ii, 8 (2015), 120–138 (p. 126).
[9] Charles Muir Lovell and Elizabeth Zarur, 'Foreword', in *Art and Faith in Mexico: The Nineteenth-Century Retablo Tradition*, ed. by Elizabeth Zarur and Charles Muir Lovell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), pp. 7–9 (p. 7).
[10] Ilinca Cantacuzino, '400 Women', 2011, <http://4http://www.londongrip.com/LondonGrip/Art%3A_Ilinca_Cantacuzino%3A_400_Women_Mexico.html> [accessed 9 October 2016].

The American artist Diane Kahlo, for instance, adopts a similar aesthetic approach to Challenger's project. Kahlo's exhibition, entitled *Wall of Memories: The Disappeared Señoritas of Ciudad Juárez*, hosts a display of one hundred and fifty small-scale framed painted portraits, in uniform style, which feature the face and upper body of feminicide victims.[11] Having opened in 2011, the exhibition continues to tour across U.S. states. Like Challenger, Kahlo was motivated to undertake her project because of her desire to re-member the women as they were before, as opposed to the way in which their bodies had been found, often dehumanised, and at times beyond recognition. Speaking with the *Lexington Herald Leader*, Kahlo explained the objectives of her artwork: 'I painted them as a mother would because I'm trying to create a memory. I wanted them to be remembered as they were.'[12] This objective is visually translated in the portraiture of the women, whose identities are reprised and appear lifelike, vivid and enshrined by a decorative use of gold leaf paint for the background, evoking the style of early venerative Christian art. Her work, like Challenger's exhibition, is imbued with religious undertones; the posthumous portraits not only resurrect the bodies of those who have suffered, but also convey a sense of worth to previously marginalised subjects. Indeed, portraiture as a genre is invested in the revivification of absent bodies and their histories, as Kamilla Elliot poignantly explains:

> Portraiture not only makes the absent present but also makes their *absence* present. Portraits defy death by projecting live images of the dead; they serve as perceptual, tangible, collective memories retaining the dead in the social realm; they are material compensations for the loss of bodies. They are simultaneously revivers of memory and intimations of resurrection.[13]

The 'material compensation' for the lost subject which, according to Elliot, portraiture affords, appears to be a central feature of the Irish painter Brian Maguire's contribution to the artistic movement about the feminicides. Like Kahlo and Challenger, his portraiture displays an urge to give back agency to the murdered women, for the sake of their mothers in particular, as well as for the wider public. Maguire's artwork is the product of four years spent *in situ* in Ciudad Juárez, where he visited victims' families and taught their children; this journey, his interactions with the families and his paintings became the subject of the documentary *Blood*

[11] *Wall of Memories: The Disappeared Señoritas of Ciudad Juárez* was exhibited at the University of Kentucky's Tuska Center for Contemporary Art in October 2011.
[12] Linda B. Blackford, 'Artist Immortalizes "Disposable" Slain Women of Ciudad Juárez', *Lexington Herald*, 9 October 2011 <http://www.kentucky.com/entertainment/visual-arts/article44130144.html> [accessed 9 October 2016].
[13] Kamilla Elliott, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764–1835* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 249.

Rising (2014), co-produced by Maguire and Mark McLoughlin. Using photographs given to him by the mothers, Maguire has painted expressionist portraits of their daughters on canvas. As he has explained, from the outset of the project his intention was not to draw upon stories of their deaths, but rather to focus on their life before their demise; he states, 'there was a conscious decision not to tell the story of the killing in images, but try to locate the materiality and story of the girl who was once living'.[14] His portraits consist of meaningful reconstructions of the absent women, depicted with his idiosyncratic style of bold acrylic brushstrokes and overlapping tonalities, giving depth and texture to the centralised female subject. Moreover, they are acts of empathy for the loved ones left behind, to whom he gifts one of the two portraits that he paints. Countering the injustice suffered by these young women, Maguire's use of portraiture exploits the nature of the genre which, in Richard Brilliant's words, 'challenges the transiency or irrelevancy of human existence'.[15] Indeed, Maguire recovers and then embodies the memory of these women, who would otherwise have remained obscured by the failing Mexican justice system. Echoing the sentiment of John Berger cited above about the humanitarian properties of art, Maguire emphasises the medium's capacity 'to make the invisible visible'.[16] Whilst Maguire, Kahlo and Challenger resort to naturalistic portraits to engage with and resubjectivise the feminicide victims in didactic, commemorative ways, other artists have deployed metonyms to foreground the absent presence of the body.[17]

[14] Brian Maguire, 'Discussion of Juárez feminicide portraits. Personal Interview.' 2013.
[15] Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), p. 14.
[16] Melissa Castellanos, 'Irish Painter Brian Maguire Pays Tribute to "Invisible" Victims of Juárez, Mexico Murders', *Latin Post*, 1 April 2015 <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/45290/20150401/feminicido-Juárez-mexico-irish-painter-brian-maguire-mexican-city-Juárez-blood-rising-brian-mcguire.htm> [accessed 9 October 2016].
[17] A compelling reading of Brian Maguire's paintings features in Nuala Finnegan's forthcoming monograph, *Cultural Representations of Feminicidio at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, which promises to be a significant addition of knowledge to the field. Due to be published in August 2018, her work will critically appraise how creative responses to the murders, by an array of practitioners from different countries, construct, frame and shape an evolving public consciousness of gender-motivated crime at the border. Examining literary, theatrical and visual narratives, Finnegan's analysis will be of particular interest to those studying how victims are remembered, mourned and ultimately immortalised in the cultural sphere. See Nuala Finnegan, *Cultural Representations of Feminicidio at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

Evoking the absent body in art

Figure 4. *Zapatos Rojos*, Elina Chauvet.

Figure 5. *Desconocida Unknown Ukjent*, Lise Bjørne Linnert.

As noted above, whilst some artistic responses have used portraiture to frame the body of feminicide victims, other important productions have adopted a more conceptually-oriented method, to evoke female corporeal absence. *Zapatos Rojos* (2011-), for instance, is an ongoing travelling public art installation that began in 2009, designed by the Mexican artist Elina Chauvet. Her installation features over two hundred and fifty pairs of red shoes donated by the citizens of Ciudad Juárez, which have been displayed in locations worldwide, including Mexico, Argentina, Spain, Italy and the UK.[18] She positions the shoes among busy city streets and urban buildings, obliging passers-by to interact with the installation, observing, walking around, or side-stepping the shoes as they encounter them on their daily flânerie. Chauvet gives public space a new purpose, to impart a distinctly political message about the acts of violence that have rendered these women invisible; accordingly, as Francesca Guerisoli suggests, this urban cityscape becomes a site for a 'silent march of absent women'.[19] Much like a

[18] María Paula Zacharías, '"Artivismo": Cientos de zapatos rojos dan la vuelta al mundo contra el femicidio', *La Nacion*, 16 August 2016.
[19] Francesca Guerisoli, 'From Art Project to Movement: How Art Can Contribute to Social Change', 2013 <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/probing-the-boundaries/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/guerisolirrpaper.pdf> [accessed October 2016].

demonstration, or even a modern-day flash mob, these shoes in their multitudes spontaneously appear, converge and perform for bystanders, evoking the dead by inference and thereby bringing them back again into contact with the literal space of the living. Shoes have proved to be a rhetorical device in cultural productions relating to the feminicides, and indeed in the broader field of remembrance of atrocities, employed metonymically to invoke presence via an ostensible absence. It is a visual motif that has been appropriated in the documentaries *Bajo Juárez* and *Señorita Extraviada*, in which periodic close-up shots are shown of women's footwear, abandoned in desert lotes or on display in shop windows. These shoes are invariably polysemous, inviting multiple interpretations – discarded and sullied shoes suggest ideas of untimely death and women that never returned home, whilst images of new shoes in shop windows convey the feminisation of the borderspace, coupled with a foreboding sense of future demise and a repetition of history. Indeed, shoes can be compelling referential metonyms, suggestive of the bodies which once occupied these shoes and walked these streets, but which no longer exist. They are metonyms for death and corporeal absence which have long been engrained in the public imaginary, owing particularly to the canon of Holocaust imagery. The shoes which the Nazis confiscated from men, women and children have emerged as lasting reminders of their final whereabouts in concentration camps before their merciless killing. Gallery spaces and memorial sites have reclaimed these shoes and imaginatively reemployed them, much like Chauvet in *Zapatos Rojos*: when they are collectively assembled, they speak of the magnitude of human rights abuses. At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., a stockpile of worn shoes is exhibited, taken from prisoners at the Nazi camp in Majdanek, Poland. Above the shoe-covered floor, there is an extract from a poem entitled *I Saw a Mountain*, by Jewish poet Moses Schulstein: 'we are shoes, we are the last witnesses […] and because we are only made of fabric and leather and not of blood and flesh, each one of us avoided the hellfire'.[20] This poetic excerpt affirms how the imagery of shoes, abstracted from their daily function, can operate semiotically as potent signifiers of historical human trauma and politics entwined with individual or collective demise. As Mieke Bal writes, 'shoes, especially in large quantities, carry what has been called […] the bond between art and politics, a "holocaust effect"'.[21] Although shoes are resonant of the Holocaust in particular,

[20] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Victims' Shoes – Media' <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-kits/united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum-press-kit/confiscated-shoes> [accessed 9 October 2016].
[21] Mieke Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 17.

Zapatos Rojos shows that they have further become a universal symbol for absence, or as Bal writes, an 'index of presence past'.[22]

This notion of 'presence past' is also conveyed in another notable visual response in the anti-feminicide cultural canon, Lise Bjørne Linnert's global community-based embroidery project, *Desconocida Unknown Ukjent* (2006-). Like *Zapatos Rojos*, this is an ongoing, travelling project which has been exhibited internationally, throughout Europe, the U.S. and Mexico, forging global awareness of the gender-crime at the northern Mexican border. It is a profoundly collaborative artistic undertaking, which encourages and indeed depends on direct public participation. The viewer and participant is asked to embroider two white cotton labels, one containing the name of a feminicide victim, the other simply with the word "unknown" in the participant's language, to connote both the murdered women that have been identified and those that have not.[23] To date the installation is comprised of 7900 nametags, stitched by 4800 members of the public from across the world.[24] The embroidered labels are uniformly pinned to an expansive temporary wall, erected in the gallery space, which evokes the physical U.S.-Mexico border infrastructure. At a glance, the installation and the attached nametags bear a distinct visual resemblance to international wall memorials dedicated to soldiers or atrocity victims, such as the Srebrenica-Potočari genocide memorial in Bosnia, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., the LAPD Memorial to Fallen Officers in California, and indeed the pertinently titled 9/11 memorial, *Reflecting Absence*. Like these sites of memory that punctuate the cultural landscape, Bjørne Linnert's wall installation of inscribed names foregrounds the marked absence of bodies. Presence is engineered by the physical stitching of the nametags, as Linnert stipulates:

> To stitch the murdered woman's name on a small piece of cloth is a physical act, time consuming, repetitious; an intimate experience. It is an act of care, in remembrance and of protest. The embroiderer brings back an identity to each name through the trace of handwriting, stitches, and colors. The protest is brought forward through the format of workshops; historically, sewing-circles have played an important role in feminism and the fight for equal rights.[25]

As Linnert suggests, the interplay between the participant and the act of stitching is a process which encourages reflection on the body that is no longer present, and in this physical

[22] Ibid., p. 17.
[23] Heiskanen, p. 9.
[24] Lise Bjørne Linnert, *Desconocida Unknown Ukjent (2006 - ongoing)*, 2008 <http://www.lisebjorne.com/art_projects/desconocida-unknown-ukjent/> [accessed 9 October 2016].
[25] Ibid.

engagement, its existence is temporarily reactivated. Stitching a name is a significant performance. Names are, of course, important and are to some extent taken for granted because of their habitual use. But, in fact, on closer reflection, they are inherently symbolic and referential: they are not just an abstract configuration of letters, but carry further meanings. Ascribed at our birth, names convey identity, they individualise us, they differentiate us from others, they validate our place in society and express our existence. Above all, names stand for a tangible, physical presence; they are metonyms for our bodies, bodies that *are* and bodies that *were*, and, as such, they testify to our lived history. Because of the cultural universality of names, those participating in Linnert's project or viewing the installation may relate to, and thus engage with, the absent presence of the feminicide victims to whom the nametags are dedicated. If viewers' engagement with Linnert and Chauvet's works evokes the absent body, other artists have given physical shape to corporeality in their works, employing it as a vehicle for more politically-charged explorations of feminicide and precarious female existence at the border. I now turn to one instance of this, the work of Judithe Hernández.

Judithe Hernández: art, agenda and *The Juárez Series*

> Oppression and violence against women is a human issue. It speaks to a critical failure in the ethical structure of society to protect the most vulnerable. Artists are in a unique position to frame issues, like in Ciudad Juárez, in such a way that they will be discussed and, hopefully, renew the resolve of those who will fight for change.[26]

Hernández labels herself a political artist whereby the subject-matter of her artwork chiefly consists of the social and political issues that affect women, Mexican immigrants and Chicano communities.[27] She attributes her fusion of art and political issues to her early career in the 1970s, when she was the only female member of the East L.A. Chicano muralist collective, Los Four.[28] As a young woman of Mexican descent coming of age in 1960s and 1970s America, Hernández witnessed a pivotal moment in Chicano history, which was marked both by social upheaval and by empowerment for the demographic resulting from the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and then the Chicano Muralist Movement, where she featured as a key artist.[29]

[26] Email to the author, 13 May 2012.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Los Four comprised Carlos Almaraz, Gilbert "Magu" Sanchez Lujan, Roberto de la Rocha and Frank Romero. See Guisela Latorre, *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).
[29] It was a period characterised by a general sense of activism, strikes and anti-establishment movements that stretched across the West and Latin America. This was a turning-point in history which saw a politically-engaged generation unite against oppressive governments and demand social inclusivity regardless of gender, sexuality or race, as evidenced by the African-American Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968), the student protests in Mexico and France (1968), anti-war demonstrations

Mirroring the strategies of post-revolutionary Mexican muralism of Los Tres Grandes, Hernández and Los Four, like other artist collectives, appropriated the urban landscape around them, using the walls of public buildings, homes and underpasses to visualise their Mexican American cultural identity and to propagate the socio-political ideologies of the Chicano Movement within the public imaginary. Hernández collaborated on several murals across California, including *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* (1975), *El Teatro de la Vida* (1975), *Homenaje a las Mujeres de Aztlán* (1977), *Recuerdos de Ayer*, *Sueños de Mañana* (1982), many of which sought to centralise the female subject, and to pay tribute to women's contributions to agriculture, family, Mexican history and their active involvement in the Chicano Movement.

Whilst Hernández's medium has changed over time from fresco painting to graffiti-based art and then to smaller-scale studio-produced pastel works, her consciousness of the wider political issues affecting Mexican women remains constant. This is demonstrated by *The Juárez Series*, which she began in 2008 in direct response to the gender-crimes that she learnt were transpiring in her ancestral homeland. To date, the series is comprised of sixteen pastel compositions, all featuring a solitary female protagonist. Themes of bodily violence, oppression and marginalisation are encoded by a repetitive system of metaphors and symbols, including barbed wire, surgical sutures, cages and distinctive red hands. Her creative commitment to the issue of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez and the substantial quantity of artwork she has produced in recent years, in comparison to other artists, enables a broader critical analysis of the politicised messages she conveys via the framing of the female body. Hernández has vowed that she will continue to supplement this series with new works as long as the feminicides continue unpunished, or in her own words, 'until the deaths of these young women become a priority for the Mexican authorities'. *The Juárez Series* has twice been featured at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago: on the first occasion it formed part of a collective exhibition entitled *Rastros y Crónicas: Women of Juárez* (2009), and a couple of years later it was the basis for Hernández's own show *La Vida Sobre Papel* (2011). My analysis will focus on a selection of compositions from this series, notably *The Border* (2008), *Juárez: Ciudad de la Muerte* (2008), *Ni Una Más* (2007) and *The Weight of Silence* (2010). I will explore how the body is framed

against the Vietnam war (1963–1973), the Cordobazo uprising in Argentina (1969) and the establishment of the Gay Rights Movement and Feminism.

in relation to the borderspace, and how allusions to its marginality speak of the social, political and economic abandonment of female subjects at the frontier.

Theory: locating the U.S.-Mexico border

At first glance, the pastel works that comprise *The Juárez Series* display two repetitive visual tropes: the female body and the razor-wire fence. Invariably, the body is shown to be physically ensnared, trapped or wounded by the fence's omnipresence in the frame. The fence's representation operates as an unambiguous symbol of the geographically delineated border between the U.S. and Mexico, and a contextual reminder of where these gender-crimes are taking place. The allusion to the oppression of the female figure at the centre, however, is suggestive of the profound impact of spatiality upon subjectivity, corporeality and life itself, and thus warrants closer inspection. To apprehend the dialectical relationship which is represented between the female body, the border and its wider connection to the context of the feminicides, it is necessary to address certain crucial, timeless questions: What is a border? And, more importantly, what does it mean to reside at the U.S.-Mexico border? The epigraph to Nicholas Vaughan-Williams' publication *Border Politics* is a useful starting point for contemplating the historical, composite nature of a border zone, which will inform my visual analyses and discussions in this chapter:

> Borders are ubiquitous in political life. Indeed borders are perhaps even constitutive of political life. Borders are inherent to logics of inside and outside, practices of inclusion and exclusion, and questions about identity and difference. Of course, there are many different types of borders that can be identified: divisions along ethnic, national or racial lines; class-based forms of stratification; regional and geographical differences; religious, cultural, and generational boundaries; and so on. None of these borders is in any sense given but (re)produced through modes of affirmation and contestation and is, above all, lived. In other words borders are not natural, neutral nor static but historically contingent, politically charged, dynamic phenomena that first and foremost involve people and their everyday lives.[30]

These arguments demonstrate the need for a mode of investigation that politicises borders not simply as geographical demarcations dividing the topographies of two nation-states, but as sites of conceptual divisions and binaries. For Vaughan-Williams, borders are socially constructed phenomena: they evolve, they are inherently political, socially divisive, and, above all, they have impacts on those that reside at them. Drawing on Foucauldian and Agambenian theories, Vaughan-Williams contends that borders should be conceptualised not only in terms of

[30] Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 1.

geopolitics, but also in biopolitical terms, in order to emphasise the manner in which human bodies are regulated at these peripheries: 'borders are […] machines of sovereign power that are inseparable from the bodies they performatively produce and sort into different categories'.[31] I will apply this compelling line of thought to Hernández's framing of the female body's interpellation in the borderspace at a later stage in this chapter. Whilst Vaughan-Williams' scholarship addresses borders largely in abstraction, an emergent corpus of research has mapped and theorised the specific, concrete cartography of the contemporary U.S.-Mexico border; such research has examined how the border impacts, structures and organises the lives of its residents, or *fronterizos*. As such, as we will observe in Hernández's collection, the bisecting line of the border heightens the insecurity of the female subjects living along it.

Since the annexation of Mexican territory to the United States in 1848 and the subsequent imposition of a dividing border, Mexican border cities occupying this interstitial space have acquired a rather notorious reputation within the public imaginary, equated with 'vice and lawlessness', as Tabuenca Córdoba writes.[32] This permissive reputation developed further in the 1920s Prohibition Era in the United States, when the sale and consumption of alcohol became a state offence. Given this legally-enforced abstinence, neighbouring Mexican border metropolises became favoured locations for Americans to indulge in their forbidden pleasures. As a result, as Oscar Martínez notes, the Mexican frontier represented a hub of 'sin and degradation', and Ciudad Juárez in particular was branded as an 'immoral' place and a 'Mecca for criminals and degenerates from both sides of the border'.[33] This characterisation of Ciudad Juárez has barely changed in the intervening time. It remains, in Martínez's words, 'a deeply troubled region', which has acquired further ill-famed connotations as a site of illicit trade, illegal immigration and, of course, feminicide.[34] Contemporary visions of Ciudad Juárez as a 'topographic metaphor' for lawlessness have been encouraged by the media and by cinematic representations that play upon these widely-held perceptions.[35] Indeed, Juárez and other locations along the border have featured both as the backdrop and central setting for a range of films from both the Mexican and American filmic canon, including *Aventurera* (1950), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *Traffic* (2000), *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), *Babel* (2006),

[31] Ibid., p. 39.
[32] María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, 'Representations of Femicide in Border Cinema', in *Gender Violence at the U.S.–Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response*, ed. by Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010), pp. 78–102 (p. 83).
[33] Oscar J. Martínez, *U.S.–Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2nd edn (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), p. 151.
[34] Oscar J. Martínez, *Troublesome Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), p. 3.
[35] Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Corona, p. 3.

Sleep Dealer (2008), *La Misma Luna* (2007), *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *Sicario* (2015), *Desierto* (2015) and *Las Elegidas* (2015). Most of these films grapple with sinister themes of murder, kidnapping, corruption, sex-trafficking, prostitution, drug-trafficking and illegal border crossings.

The U.S.-Mexico border, however, cannot simply be reduced to the sum of the perceptions about such issues; in fact, the picture is more complex. A full understanding of the border requires mapping geopolitical and cultural contexts, as scholars in the emergent field of border studies have shown. It should be noted that this frontier is the single most 'traversed national boundary in the world', a transitory zone, where human activities and lives criss-cross, mingle and intersect, playing host to approximately '250 million' legal crossings per annum.[36] It also attracts vast numbers of migrants from other parts of Mexico and Latin America as a whole, who converge on this 1,972-mile contact zone in a bid to cross illegally into the U.S. The border therefore symbolises a gateway, a final destination before embarking on a pursuit of the "American Dream". Nonetheless, as Debra Castillo and María Tabuenca Córdoba remind us, this geopolitical space is paradoxical. Whilst it may represent a path to a better life, it is also a site where 'Mexican nationals' dreams are dashed and broken', where crossing the border illegally is a death-defying act obstructed by fortified fences, walls, exposure to natural elements and a stringent border patrol.[37] As a result of this migratory presence at the border, it has become, as Elena Dell'agnese writes, a 'place of encounter and paradigm for intercultural exchange and transcultural crossing and mixing'.[38] Given the pluralism of cultures manifest at the border, the cultural critic Néstor García Canclini has labelled it a 'hybridised' space, the outcome of globalisation and the maquiladora industry at the frontier.[39] Indeed, as Chapter One showed, the industrialisation of the border region under the neoliberal mandate has shaped both labour relations and social relations in the border cities, in particular those in Ciudad Juárez.

It is, in part, the politico-economic differences between Mexico and its U.S. neighbour that become apparent in the borderspace, which has led Robert Alvárez to regard the border as a 'contextual paradox', where the First World meets the Third.[40] According to David Lorey, the

[36] David J. Danelo, 'Prologue', in id., *The Border: Exploring the U.S.–Mexican Divide* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2014).
[37] Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, *Border Women: Writing from La Frontera* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 2002), p. 4.
[38] Elena Dell'agnese, 'The U.S.–Mexico Border in American Movies: A Political Geography Perspective', *Geopolitics*, ii, 10 (2005), 204–221 (pp. 215).
[39] Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
[40] Robert R. Alvárez, 'The Mexican–U.S. Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, i, 24 (1995), 447–470 (pp. 451).

U.S.-Mexico border is the only locale in the world where a developed superpower meets and overlaps with a developing state.[41] Alvárez elaborates on this point; his account of the border as paradoxical highlights the inequalities manifest in the border region:

> No other border in the world exhibits the inequality of power, economics, and the human condition as does this one. The complexity and problems inherent in such a paradox go beyond everyday nation-state negotiations. This paradox reaches into the most local of contexts and affects the everyday life of border folk. The massive exchange of commodities, both human and material, dramatically affects life and behavior, as does the continuous shifting and reconfiguration of people, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, and economic hierarchy and subordination.[42]

This interstitial zone, therefore, is where inequalities and asymmetries are encountered between the two nation-states and their respective political and economic systems. More importantly, Alvárez is mindful of the social inequalities enforced by the border, which adversely affect and impact on the social fabric and human interaction within this space. Kathleen Staudt, Mark Lusk and Eva Moya draw attention to the 'systematic social and economic injustice' that this region experiences, which gives rise to 'poverty […] institutional racism, gender violence, and structural violence'.[43] They argue that the U.S.-Mexico border is a site where citizens find themselves marginalised by the effects of 'governmental neglect and social isolation', as the needs of global corporations are ranked above the social and human rights of local people (see Chapter One). It is this 'social isolation' prevalent at the border, what Driver categorises as a 'geography of exclusion', that features as a dominant visual theme within Hernández's responses to the feminicides, and is accentuated in perhaps her most recognised pastel work, *The Border* (2008).[44]

[41] David E. Lorey, *The U.S.–Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century: A History of Economic and Social Transformation* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999), p. 1.
[42] Alvárez, p. 451.
[43] Mark Lusk, Kathleen Staudt, and Eva Moya, *Social Justice in the U.S.–Mexico Border Region* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2014), p. 3.
[44] Driver, p. 33.

***The Border* (2008)**

Figure 6. *The Border*, Judithe Hernández.

Central to the composition's foreground is a female subject depicted from the shoulders upwards, with distinctly racialised indigenous features – dark hair and dark skin. Her deep-set eyes are cavernous voids and a line of horizontal stitches suture her face and the contours of her upper lip, almost fashioning the violent hallmark of a "Glasgow smile." From these stitches blood coagulates down her mouth, chin and chest, drawing the viewer's gaze downwards to the repressive three-strand barbed-wire fence that garrottes the subject. In the backdrop, rough vertical pastel strokes create a dramatic, fiery, almost Dantesque scene, as the female descends into the depths of an inferno. The minimal spatial depth between the background and foreground in the frame creates an accentuated sense of confinement between two perilous forces, and evokes the peripheral nature of the subject's location. This composition, like Hernández's other works, is largely metaphoric or even abstract. The artist urges the viewer to look beyond the literal, and to make associations that tap new and deeper levels of meaning. The iconography of this work thus suggests multiple interpretations relating to space and female insecurity.

It is the hollowed eyes that first draw the viewer's attention, but the unsettling outward glare compels the viewer's gaze towards the sutures that silence the victim, then towards the blood, before arriving at the bisecting lines of wire. The bloodied wounds sustained by the female within the frame, in conjuncture with the razor-wire fence, indubitably evoke the words of prominent Chicana feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa, in her seminal *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, in which she refers to the border as 'una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the

first and bleeds'.[45] This visceral metaphor, comparing the border to a bodily trauma in the form of a lesion, is used by Hernández to gesture towards the literal manifestations of violence and abuse against women's bodies within this topography.[46] Whilst Anzaldúa's writings mostly explore the hybrid cultural identities of those who, like Anzaldúa herself, straddle the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, her periodic commentary on the precarity and marginalisation of female embodied experience at the border may be applied to a reading of Hernández's work, whose preoccupation with this geography and the female subject mirrors the sensibilities present throughout Anzaldúa's creative writing. The visualisation of the female body snared in the fence like an unsuspecting animal resonates with Anzaldúa's cautionary message about this locale. She describes it as a place of bodily vulnerability as she warns her readership: 'do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot […] ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger'.[47] She cites the female body as the main target of violation and exploitation, dating back to Mexico's colonisation by the Spaniards, then to the imposition of the border in 1848, followed by what she calls the introduction of the 'U.S. colonizing companies' that settled at the northern frontier.[48] 'The Mexican woman is especially at risk,' she writes; women are susceptible to forms of victimisation such as rape, maltreatment and being sold into prostitution.[49] She largely attributes this precariousness to the spatial organisation of the border, which is constructed as a place of otherness. In her polymorphous narrative that meanders between autobiographical accounts, poetry and pre-Columbian mythology, whilst switching between Spanish, English and U.S.-Mexican dialects, she characterises the border as an in-between space, a divisive 'third country', both in geographical and political terms.[50] It is a place that represents not only a topographical divide, but one that generates in itself juxtapositional boundaries of belonging and exclusion, us vs. them. For

[45] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), p. 3.
[46] I should mention the intertextual connection between Anzaldúa's description of the border and that of fellow Chicano poet, Luis Alberto Urrea. In his early 1990s work *By the Lake of Sleeping Children*, Urrea offers a similarly metaphorical interpretation of this boundary: 'I had a barbed-wire fence neatly bisecting my heart' (Luis Alberto Urrea, *By the Lake of Sleeping Children*, New York: Doubleday, 1996, p. 4). Both Anzaldua's and Urrea's deeply personal perceptions appear to be in direct dialogue with the visual idiosyncrasies Hernández ascribes to the borderlands. Barbed wire is in fact a fecund motif in Chicano/a literary and artistic productions; María Herrera-Sobek offers an excellent appraisal of its iconographic status and polyvalent meaning in contemporary Chicano aesthetics (see María Herrera-Sobek, 'Barbed Wire, Iconography and Aesthetic Activism: The Borderlands, Mexican Immigration, and Chicana/o Art', in *International Perspectives on Chicana/o Studies: This World is My Place*, ed. by Catherine Leen and Niamh Thornton, New York: Routledge, 2014, pp. 150–167).
[47] Ibid., p. 3.
[48] Ibid., p. 10.
[49] Ibid., p. 12.
[50] Ibid., p. 3.

Anzaldúa, as for Alvárez, the borderlands are a 'place of contradictions'.[51] Those who inhabit this 'vague and undetermined place' are deemed non-heteronormative: 'the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead.'[52]

Anzaldúa's conception of the border as a place of human alterity and liminality is echoed in Hernández's depiction of the female subject as interpellated in the borderspace. As we can discern from *The Border*, female corporeality is visually placed against the wire, at the very periphery of this territory. This marginal location appears to oppress and silence the female, and render her physically vulnerable, to the point that it is uncertain whether she is alive or dead. The hues and tonality of her upper body still reflect colour, although her face emerges ashen. This ambiguity of the framed female body, occupying the divide between life and death, is a leitmotif throughout *The Juárez Series* which brings to mind a state that Driver associates with women's embodied experience at the border: the state of being 'more or less dead'.[53] This phrase is taken from Bolaño's posthumous novel, *2666*, in the chapter entitled 'La parte de los crímenes', which revolves around an epidemic of feminicides taking place in the fictional town of Santa Teresa. Driver asks what it means to be 'more or less dead', linking such a state to Agamben's theory of bare life, a theory that relates to an order of power that strips subjects of legal protection or political agency. Driver, like other researchers in the field, has equated this condition of bare life with the female precariousness in Ciudad Juárez that is a precondition of feminicide.[54] Accordingly, my readings of Hernández's other compositions discussed in the sections below will be informed by Agambenian political philosophy and the interrelated field of biopolitics.

Biopolitics, bare life and the figure of homo sacer

Before analysing Hernández's framing of the body in terms of female bare life at the U.S.-Mexico border, it is necessary to outline the core theoretical principles of *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben's seminal first publication, including the central notion of biopolitics. The text has become a touchstone for examining, mainly from a juridical angle, the functioning of

[51] Ibid., 'Preface'.
[52] Ibid., p. 3.
[53] Driver, p. 60.
[54] See Julia E. Fragoso Monárrez, 'Losses of Humanity in Times of War: The Actions of Alternative Subjects of Justice', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, i, 3 (2014); Steven S. Volk, 'The Historiography of Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez: Critical and Revisionist Approaches', *Forum for Inter-American Research*, ii, 8 (2015), 20–45; Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

modern political systems, especially their organisation of human life within society. Indeed, Agamben's philosophies are deeply embedded in the theoretical field of biopolitics. Chapter Three will explore this notion further, alongside Achille Mbembe's recent concept of necropolitics; the two concepts are, in Rosi Braidotti's words, 'two sides of the same coin'.[55] Both biopolitics and necropolitics offer instructive lenses for contemplating physical and symbolic violence against women in Juárez. They are particularly useful for analysing the framing of the body, given their concern with the subjugation of bodies to life and death. By extension, they emphasise the discursive structures and politics through which women's bodies are controlled, marked and, ultimately, killed. The concepts thus advance discussions about disposable life, which are integral to this thesis, and to emergent feminicide scholarship as a whole.

As the etymology suggests, biopolitics signifies the emergence of human life at the centre of political consideration, and revolves around the idea of the populace being subject to regulation and management by various mechanisms of power. Michel Foucault is attributed with bringing the term into the sphere of critical thinking. For Foucault, biopolitics encapsulates the transformation and rearticulation of power in modern society. He detected a shift from the seventeenth century onwards in the way power was exercised and experienced, whereby traditional, centralised and habitually violent sovereign power gave way to a 'new mechanism of power'.[56] That is, the archaic, omnipotent power of the sovereign, which centred on the right to impose death and deprivation of rights, began to be displaced by more disciplinary measures involving 'numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations'.[57] The rationale for this shift in governance lay both in economic and historical developments (namely the rise of capitalism and the concomitant need to optimise labour productivity), and in the increase in knowledge about disease, medicine, birth and death rates, and so on. Whereas previously sovereignty had rested on excluding, depriving or appropriating life via a 'right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself', biopolitics lends itself to the reproduction of life, rather than its destruction.[58] For Foucault, the transition to biopolitical regimes heralded a new era that sought to fully harness the capacity of the populace, whilst making inroads to advance and manage life. Such a practice of power worked to 'incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a

[55] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 9.
[56] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 89.
[57] Ibid., p. 140.
[58] Ibid., p. 136.

power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impending them, making them submit, or destroying them'.[59] As his well-known dictum neatly puts it, the prerogative of biopolitics is 'to make live and let die'.[60]

While Agamben draws on Foucault's notion of biopolitics, he challenges Foucault's interpretations and proposes alternative perspectives. Whereas Foucault considers biopolitics to coincide with the advent of modernity, Agamben traces its genealogy much further back in history, to the age of antiquity. Moreover, whilst Foucault sees sovereign power and biopolitics as connected but distinguishable, for Agamben they are indissociable. As he contends early in his text, 'the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of the state'.[61] This 'original activity' involves the integration of certain citizens into the community and political sphere, whilst other lives are excluded and thus relegated to the status of bare life – the core topic of his thesis. There is, however, an implicit commonality that links the two authors' biopolitical paradigms: exclusion. As this section explains, in Agamben's somewhat cynical analysis, political life and sovereignty rest on the paradoxical model of 'inclusive exclusion', ensuring that some citizens are outlawed from the polis. Foucault, however, regards modern biopolitical regimes more favourably, stressing their potential to optimise life. Nevertheless, Foucault's analysis of power also stresses its function of excluding or 'letting die' certain groups of the population.

At the centre of Agamben's philosophy, are, in Anthony Downey's words, the 'lives lived on the margins of social, political, juridical and biological representation'.[62] As I will show, this concern is essential for comprehending the feminicides: marginalisation of women at the border has engendered a space where their murder may be permitted with impunity. *Sovereign Power and Bare Life* is a broad theoretical study which delves deep into the historical past, drawing on ancient Roman statutes and Greek philosophy, in order to elucidate the nature of modern political power over embodied human existence. Three key concepts lie at the heart of Agamben's theories: homo sacer, bare life and the state of exception. Agamben starts by analysing the protagonist of his work, the homo sacer (or in its translated form, "sacred man"), a term derived from Roman law which refers to an individual who has been cast out from

[59] Ibid., p. 136.
[60] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures At The Collège De France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 241.
[61] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics Series, 2nd edn (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[62] Anthony Downey, 'Zones of Indistinction: Giorgio Agamben's "Bare Life" and the Politics of Aesthetics', *Third Text*, ii, 23 (2009), 109–125 (p. 109).

society, a figure whose life is considered 'devoid of value' and 'a person that is simply set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law'.[63] Exclusion of an individual is decided and exercised by the sovereign or the political body, and such exclusion suspends the homo sacer's legal rights; in other words, according to Downey, the homo sacer is 'deprived of national civil rights and international human rights'.[64] At this point, the homo sacer emerges as a target of violence, whereby the law permits this figure to be killed by others with impunity: as Agamben explains, 'this violence – the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit – is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege'.[65] The homo sacer thus emerges as 'an obscure figure' that constantly occupies the divide between life and death, inclusion and exclusion, since this subject is 'included in the juridical order […] solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)'.[66] As a result, the homo sacer is abandoned and reduced to the status of bare life. This condition equates, as Ewa Ziarek surmises, to a body that is 'stripped from political significance and exposed to murderous violence […] both the counterpart of the sovereign decision on the state of exception and the target of sovereign violence'.[67] To be relegated to a status of bare life therefore, ultimately signifies expendability and endangerment, to paraphrase Ziarek.[68] Whilst the homo sacer occupies a status of bare life, it resides in what Agamben designates 'a state of exception'.[69] The state of exception is essentially an exclusionary political model enforced by the sovereign power: as Agamben explains, it is the 'sovereign […] who decides on the state of exception.'[70] Central to this state is the complete suspension of law, which, as Diane Enns comments, 'marks the end and the ruin of every ethics of dignity and conformity to the norm'.[71]

Theoretical notions of homo sacer, bare life and the state of exception resonate strongly with contemporary cases of feminicide at the U.S.-Mexico border, including women's treatment pre- and post-mortem, as well as the culture of impunity. I now relate these concepts to the pastel work, *Juárez: Ciudad de la Muerte* (2009) from Hernández's series. I critically assess

[63] Agamben, p. 82.
[64] Downey, p. 112.
[65] Agamben, p. 82.
[66] Ibid., p. 8.
[67] E. P. Ziarek, 'Bare Life on Strike: Notes on the Biopolitics of Race and Gender', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, i, 107 (2008), 89–105 (p. 90).
[68] Ziarek, p. 90.
[69] Agamben, p. 11.
[70] Ibid., p. 11.
[71] Diane Enns, 'Bare Life and the Occupied Body', *Theory and Event*, iii, 7 (2004) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/tae.2004.0019> [accessed 14 October 2016], p. 27.

the relevance of Agambenian thought to the discussion of contemporary female political subjectivity in the borderspace, showing how such theoretical notions are both echoed and reproduced in Hernandez's iconography of the body. However, while a cursory glance at the scholarship on the gender-crimes would suggest that Agamben's philosophy is an increasing source of inspiration in the field, certain caveats are necessary concerning both its appropriation and application. First, the application of Agamben's ideas to the Juárez context seldom ventures beyond a consultation of his most famous work, *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Second, feminicide studies rarely problematise Agamben's perspectives, challenge the transposition of Western-centric thought onto a postcolonial setting or place his writings in dialogue with more contextually relevant research or theorists. To compensate for these emerging blind-spots, I will employ Agamben's philosophy heuristically and in dialogue with factual and contextual studies about socio-political abandonment, citizenship and the idea of denationalisation in the Juárez region.

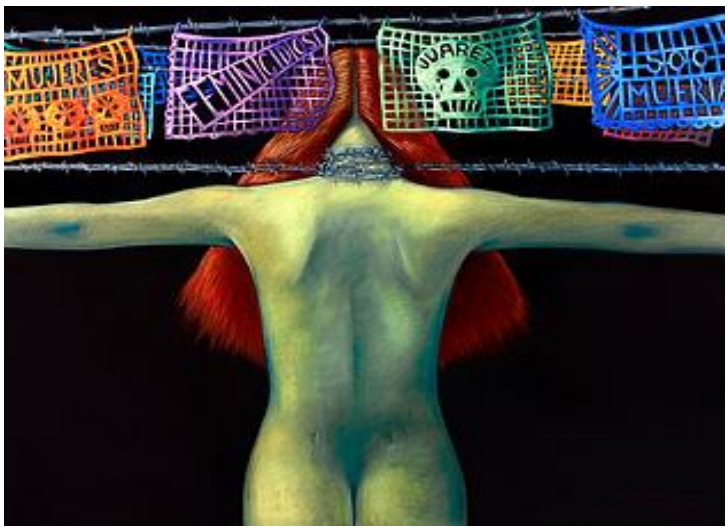

Figure 7. *Juárez: Ciudad de la Muerte*, Judithe Hernández.

Juárez: Ciudad de la Muerte (2009)

Agamben's theory provides a suitable vantage-point from which to contemplate Hernández's composition, *Juárez: Ciudad de la Muerte*, which may be seen as the quintessential visual incarnation of the homo sacer figure. The body on display in this work is unclothed - a fitting metaphor for a subject stripped of her rights, exposed to death and reduced to a status of bare life. Positioned centrally and symmetrically on the canvas, the foregrounded body assumes a Christ-like stance, with arms outstretched to create the dimensions of a religious cross, like the

commemorative crosses erected for feminicide victims throughout Juárez. However, whilst religious analogies may certainly be extrapolated from this composition, the outstretched arms of the solitary subject tap into a wider visual economy of images of 'corporeal vulnerability', to borrow from Butler, and representations of bare life from other cultures. Its iconography bears a marked resemblance to Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (1814), Nick Ut's Pullitzer Prize-winning photograph, *The Napalm Girl* (1972), taken during the Vietnam War, and most strikingly, the emblematic image of a tortured detainee at Abu Ghraib prison in April 2004, commonly known as *The Hooded Man*.[72] Indeed, unlike traditional artistic depictions of Christ's crucifixion, the spectator is not presented with a frontal view of human suffering, but rather with the back of the subject. This is an interesting aesthetic decision for two reasons. First, Hernández avoids eroticising the female body; in fact, only two indications within the frame suggest the gender of the central figure: the long red hair and the *papel picado* draped at intervals across the wire, with slogans that read "500 muertas," "mujeres," "feminicidios," and "Juárez", all of which serve as contextual reminders for the spectators. Secondly, with no face of pain to observe, the viewer is obliged to contemplate who the subject is, whether she is alive or deceased, and if the latter, how she succumbed to this fate. Certain aesthetic details imply that she may be in the final stages of death or rigor mortis, for example the discoloured, sallow skin tone and the rigidity of the body; but, overall, her condition remains largely indistinct. The ambiguity of her condition evokes Downey's depiction of bare life:

> Lives lived on the margins of social, political, cultural, economic and geographical borders are lives half lived. Denied access to legal, economic and political redress, these lives exist in a limbo-like state […] the refugee, the political prisoner, the disappeared, the victim of torture, the dispossessed – all have been excluded, to different degrees, from the fraternity of the social sphere, appeal to the safety net of the nation-state and recourse to international law. They have been outlawed, so to speak, placed beyond recourse to the law and yet still in a precarious relationship to the law itself.[73]

Downey's words help us understand the 'limbo-like state' of Hernández's protagonist, whilst prompting us to ask what other borders have marginalised her, not solely in geographic terms. With the subject represented in an indistinct state between life and death, included within the

[72] This arresting photograph, along with others featuring dehumanising, sexualised torture practices, was shot inside the prison by U.S. army personnel. The victim, Abdou Hussain Saad Felah, stands on a small cardboard box, with his arms extended, threatened with electrocution from wires attached to his body and dressed in a hooded costume, reminiscent of the distinctive regalia worn by the white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan. Although the image gestures towards notions of martyrdom, much as in *Juárez: Ciudad de la Muerte*, the framed body symbolises the violation of basic human rights. Whilst the subject of *The Hooded Man* is a male prisoner (although that fact is not visible in the picture), his reduction to a homo sacer figure, a body stripped of rights and exempt from the law, is comparable to the status of Hernández's female protagonist.

[73] Downey, p. 109.

borders of society, yet simultaneously relegated to its outermost margins, the image visually allegorises Agambenian notions of socio-political abandonment and the space of exception. The border's relationship to the body within the composition functions as a metaphor which resonates beyond its geopolitical reality, additionally alluding to the other margins within society which stratify the lives of its female dwellers, and convert some of them into homines sacri.

In turn, the framing of the body here suggests that cases of gender-crime in Ciudad Juárez may be aligned with the wider problematic of bare life, one of Agamben's terms that has been crucial to the field of feminicide studies. As I have previously explained, scholarship in the field has applied his philosophy to precarious female existence at the U.S.-Mexico border, where women have become killable subjects as a result of their marginalised status. Driver employs the theory of bare life to explain the interminable 'erosion of basic human rights' in relation to both the victims of feminicide and their respective families that are faced with political and juridical systems that afford little protection, almost non-existent justice and few rights.[74] Bare life has also contributed to Volk's discussions of the feminicides; fittingly he replaces the term homo sacer with the more contextually, gender relevant 'femina sacer'.[75] His recent history of the gender-crimes acknowledges the applicability of Agamben's philosophy to the vulnerability of women residing in Ciudad Juárez, albeit briefly, as he suggests that Juárez is characteristic of a state of exception and that 'the poor women […] have become vulnerable inhabitants in denationalized spaces, deprived of full citizenship rights, and reduced to the barest elements of existence within their far-flung slum dwellings'.[76] Here, Volk refers chiefly to the socio-economic disenfranchisement felt by women in the impoverished zones by the border, an outcome of neoliberal regimes and non-statist interventions. Stephen Eisenhammer also draws on the notion of bare life as he argues that the conversion of the borderspace into an export processing zone has rendered women 'disenfranchised'; in such a place, life is 'cheap,' or in other words, 'devoid of value', to reiterate Agamben.[77] Interestingly, Eisenhammer draws a comparison with the Nazi concentration camps and the border's neoliberalised economy in which he perceives the female maquiladora workers as the homines sacri, or 'the present-day slaves', who enter a dehumanising labour context of 'Arbeit Macht

[74] Driver, p. 61.
[75] Volk, p. 26.
[76] Ibid., p. 26.
[77] Stephen Eisenhammer, 'Bare Life in Ciudad Juárez: Violence in a Space of Exclusion', *Latin American Perspectives*, ii, 41 (2013), 99–109 (p. 101).

Frei', which he suggests resonates with Agamben's theoretical framework.[78] This echoes González Rodríguez's arresting analogy between the 'abject architecture' of the Nazi gas chambers and Juárez's assembly plants, which he brands the 'femicide machine's […] exceptional "camp"'.[79]

The border context: problematising Agamben, sovereignty and biopolitics

As the discussion above indicates, Agambenian theories have been prominent in feminicide analysis. The condition of bare life occupied by the homo sacer acts as a warning of the dehumanising apparatus that operates as a sinister adjunct to what are described as modern democracies. In the case of the gender-crimes, Agamben's theories offer a compelling philosophical model for addressing the social abandonment, violence and impunity faced by female subjects in the contemporary border context. Nevertheless, despite its relevance, Agamben's historical biopolitical paradigm is not without its limitations. Applying his theories to a diagnosis of the current political scene for women at the Mexican border must therefore be done critically.

First, it is necessary to emphasise that Agamben is a European thinker whose perspectives are grounded in traditional Western history, its political systems and Christian theology. The superimposition of a Eurocentric historical framework onto a postcolonial setting raises certain difficult questions. Indeed, despite his profound genealogy of Western antiquity, Agamben omits colonialism, which is a key instance of sovereign power and its inherent violence. This omission suggests a certain reductive quality to the text, at least its metaphysical and metageographical position: only a handful of spatio-temporal contexts are referenced, most commonly, the Nazi camp. Moreover, as Ziarek identifies, his abridgement of political ontology equally elides 'the way bare life is implicated in the gendered, sexist, [colonial] and racist configurations of biopolitics'.[80] This elision proves particularly limiting when scrutinising anti-female and often racialised iterations of violence committed with impunity. The elision thus reinforces the androcentrism through which power has evolved, disregarding women as viable political subjects. Indeed, Ziarek emphasises that even at the start of the 1900s, 'racialized and gendered subjectivities still occupied liminal positions in Western

[78] Ibid., p. 102.
[79] González Rodríguez, p. 31.
[80] Ziarek, p. 93.

democracies, and as such were associated in the political imaginary with the inclusive exclusion of bare life'.[81]

Moreover, when researchers in the field align Agambenian logic with matters of gender violence, they also tend to skate over the variations and transformations in modern sovereignty and biopolitical regimes. For the most part, throughout Agamben's nine-volume project, he never reformulates his model of sovereignty, which he theorises as a unilateral, centralised form of governance over the populace. Only in the penultimate volume, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, does Agamben acknowledge the possible morphology of sovereignty. Although the text was released in 2015, the two theses it contains had actually been delivered as seminar papers at Princeton University in October 2001, just a month after 9/11.[82] The terror attacks evidently shape the contours of Agamben's argument, which seeks to establish a theoretical model for social unrest in the polis. *Stasis* is a brief but characteristically dense instalment, which addresses the absence of theorising on the subject of civil war; as his opening passage states: '[t]here exists, today, both a "polemology", a theory of war, and an "irenology", a theory of peace, but there is no "stasiology", no theory of civil war'.[83] In order to fill this lacuna, he once again returns to ancient Greek history in search of answers. Drawing on Nicole Loraux's *La Cité Divisée*, he traces the political history of civil strife in the Athenian polis. As in the first volume of the series, Agamben continues to analyse the biopolitics intrinsic to power, this time in relation to internal conflict. Agamben understands civil war (*stasis* in ancient Greek) as another archetypal threshold which represents 'the tensional currents of politicisation and depoliticisation, the family and the city […] disjoined and yet intimately bound together'.[84] Stasis materialises in a 'zone of indifference between the unpolitical space of the family and the political space of the city', and its outcome marks a shift, politicising or repoliticising some and thus depoliticising others, who may then be excluded.[85] Borrowing Thomas Hobbes' ideas, Agamben suggests that there are 'two faces […] of a single political paradigm' within the polis: on the one side there is the 'necessity of civil war' and on the other the 'necessity of exclusion.'[86] Ultimately, stasis is perceived as an occurrence that restores the previously destabilised balance of power, leading to reconciliation and new forms of solidarity.

[81] Ibid., p. 98.
[82] Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 7.
[83] Ibid., p. 8.
[84] Ibid., p. 20.
[85] Ibid., p. 16.
[86] Ibid., p. 10.

These ideas are partially applicable to contemporary Mexico. *Stasis* marks an advancement in Agamben's paradigms of political power, and suggests that the authority of the sovereign can be disrupted by internal, non-political actors who seize it. Nonetheless, his conception of sovereignty lacks nuance and remains a centralised, unified system. By confining his discernment of sovereignty to these parameters is somewhat limiting, and thus serves to 'reproduce totalitarian notions of modern politics', as Martijn Oosterbaan and Wil Pansters remark.[87] Indeed, as Chapter One showed, power in Mexico is not a linear concept. Behind the public façade whereby the federal government poses as the executive branch of authority, diverse informally-connected, non-political actors vie for claims to control and power. In light of this composite structure, Finn Stepputat suggests the term 'formations of sovereignty' to describe how 'political landscapes […] are formed through multiple, coexisting, overlapping, and sometimes competing claims to sovereignty over people, resources, and/or territories'.[88] Pansters similarly posits the notion of 'multiple sovereignties' as a means of conveying the 'plural, ambiguous […] and fragmented' structures operating at national and local levels in Mexico.[89]

The traditional, unitary notion of sovereignty is critiqued and adapted in Gareth Williams' text, *The Mexican Exception*. Williams similarly considers that Agamben's theories of sovereignty lack historical specificity. He thus finds the Foucauldian discourse of biopolitical regimes of governance useful for theorising the present-day state apparatus in Mexico. Whilst the right to take life remains central to sovereignty in the country, Williams contends that 'top-down sovereignty is now supplemented by the infiltration and proliferation throughout society of a multiplicity of immanent power and force relations'.[90] Unlike Agamben's juridico-political philosophy, Williams privileges the more expansive tenets of biopolitics found in Foucault's writings in *Society Must be Defended*. Unlike Agamben, Foucault emphasises the impact of capitalism on the decentralisation of state power. As Williams recognises, biopolitics is a mechanism of national management, the outcome of the blending of 'political and economic domination'.[91] It entails the outsourcing, distribution and reproduction of power across

[87] Martijn Oosterbaan and Wil G. Pansters, 'Introduction: Sovereignty and Social Contestation: Between Violence and Alternative Sociocultural Orders', *Conflict and Society*, 1, i (2015), 125–128 (pp. 125).
[88] Finn Stepputat, 'Formations of Sovereignty at the Frontier of the Modern State', *Conflict and Society*, 1, i (2015), 129–143 (pp. 129).
[89] Wil G. Pansters, '"We Had to Pay to Live!" Competing Sovereignties in Violent Mexico', *Conflict and Society*, 1, i (2015), 144–164 (p. 145).
[90] Gareth Williams, *The Mexican Exception* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 8.
[91] Ibid., p. 7.

different sectors and institutions of society, not solely the state, in order to control and monitor the population, often labelled by Foucault 'micro-powers'.[92] This terminology is particularly helpful for describing the diffusion of power in Mexico, and especially for understanding the organising principles of the U.S.-Mexico border context. Here, as Fregoso puts it, a 'complex web of power relations […] multiple forces and orders of power' materialise, govern and shape the lives of citizens.[93] The frontier is an intersectional space in which neoliberal regimes supplant state involvement, hyper-nationalised military projects guard checkpoints to preclude the unwanted migrants into the U.S., and illicit business thrives, creating its own violent, excessive laws. These 'micro-powers' have their own governing agendas and subjugate bodies to the systemic embeddedness of racialised, gendered, classist and patriarchal ideologies. The following section returns to Hernández's artwork and addresses two final tableaux, *Ni Una Más* and *Weight of Silence*. The thematics of these pieces encourage a discussion about the grammars of power operating in the region and the embodied effects of their mechanisms of control. Once again, the body on canvas is (re)imagined, interrogating how power relations, in Foucault's words, 'have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs'.[94] Questions of citizenship are connected to the rise of neoliberalism in the region, as capitalist mandates impact on women's marginalisation, subjectivity and agency.

***Ni Una Más* (2009)**

Figure 8. *Ni Una Más,* Judithe Hernández.

[92] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 222.
[93] Rosa Linda Fregoso, '"We Want Them Alive!": The Politics and Culture Of Human Rights', *Social Identities*, 12.2 (2006), 109–138 (p. 110).
[94] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 25.

Ni Una Más is another example of the artist's preoccupation with the dialectic between women's embodied experience and the hostile, delimiting border-zone. Its formal elements resemble the works analysed above in terms of arrangement, style and subject-matter. Structurally, the composition is divided into three zones of recession that guide the viewer from the foreground, through the middle-ground and to the background. Again, emphasis is placed on the illustration of a female's upper torso, whose dimensions occupy the majority of the space within the frame. The colour scheme is noticeably chiaroscuro, whereby the achromatic tonality of the subject's skin is juxtaposed with a heavily saturated black backdrop. The white hues that dominate the female's body serve to dramatise its disfigurement. Her shoulders appear torn away from her torso, leaving behind large bloodied lesions. She seems to have stigmata: blood lines the contours of her closed, blackened eyelids, falling like tears onto her chest. Despite the subject's spectral appearance, the implied motion of fresh streaming blood hints that she is either still alive or has just passed away, in keeping with the ambiguity of the compositions in the series analysed above, and evoking the category of bare life. Her moribund state is inferred both explicitly and implicitly. From a cursory glance at visual motifs found in Hernández's previous works, the repeated imagery of the border fence may immediately be recognised as a foreboding signifier.[95] Its strutted wire structure divides the frame, penetrating the subject's upper body in the process and acting as an immobilising agent. Positioned directly above, the viewer's gaze is averted to an obscure congregation of miscellaneous coloured fragments, whose angular edges and assorted sizes resemble pieces of a puzzle or discarded

[95] Thomas Nail's *Theory of the Border*, which offers a further critical reading of limology, sees borders as ever-shifting processes of 'social division', as opposed to static geographical phenomena that separate territories from one another. For Nail, borders are contingent upon societies, which he perceives to be constantly shifting according to a range of variables. As such, he applies the theory of 'kinopolitics' to his reading of borders to reflect how 'societies are always in motion: directing people and objects; reproducing their social conditions (periodicity); and striving to expand their territorial, political, juridical and economic power through diverse forms of expulsion'. According to this logic, borders are therefore 'made and remade' throughout history. He takes the U.S.–Mexico frontier as a case study to discuss the various types of manmade structures erected over time to separate peoples and their lands, from the staking of fences and the construction of walls, through to the installation of cells and national checkpoints. Nail includes an interesting genealogy of the widespread use of barbed-wire fences to limit human or animal movement. While these stark, steel fences are nowadays universally recognised as paradigmatic structures that immediately connote division and hostility, when it was patented in the late 1800s, the design was devised to facilitate the easy passing of gunfire but equally able to 'capture bodies and animals in its barbs'. He proceeds to label it an 'antiflesh type of border', one that is invested in biopolitical regimes, often ominously dividing nationals from non-nationals. For this reason, it has become a particularly violent symbol that is evocative of 'political violence, nationalism, and oppression'. In this series, Hernández capitalises on this recognised relationship between barbed-wire fences and oppression. Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

debris. On closer inspection, some bear the faint etching of words and numbers, which act as necessary contextual markers for the viewer: '1000 muertas', 'maquiladoras', 'Juárez', '500', 'asesinatos de mujeres', 'muertas'.

The body to some extent acts as a palimpsest in this piece, both visually and figuratively. The shadows cast by the subject's detached limbs conjure an optical illusion. The viewer may wonder if the canvas has been re-used, as it seemingly bears signs of a previously illustrated body that has been imperfectly erased to make room for another one. This multi-layered effect is almost textual, and appears to recount the story of a female subject, once embodied, now disembodied – inviting reflection on the circumstances that precipitated her fate. This motif of disembodiment may be understood as a polyvalent symbol that connotes more than just the act of divesting the body of its corporeal existence. To be disembodied has multiple inferences: immobility, detachment, immateriality, violence, dehumanisation, disempowerment, depoliticisation and, ultimately, a lack of agency. Within the frame, the female body is not only disembodied, but also dispossessed, engulfed in darkness, dissociated from society, and unaided in her evident time of suffering. As with Hernández's previous works, the ensemble of visual features foregrounds women's interpellation in the borderlands, and prompts reflection on the category of citizenship – including both ideas about national belonging and constitutional rights – which at this point in time seems to be denied to her.

Questions of citizenship have been widely addressed in feminicide discourse in the past decade. Schmidt Camacho's study 'Ciudadana X,' briefly discussed in Chapter One, offers a convincing correlation between what she terms women's 'denationalised citizenship' at the border and their subsequent subaltern status, which exacerbates their exposure to gender-crime.[96] She starts by determining what it means to be a citizen and the basic constitutional rights traditionally granted. Drawing on the work of Linda Bosniak, she defines citizenship as 'the subject's capacity to exert political agency as a recognized member of a political community, with entitlements to protections and services'.[97] Schmidt Camacho, however, surmises that under neoliberal reforms Mexico's structural adjustment to accommodate deregulated, global markets in its northern territory has significantly reduced the role of the nation-state and its duty towards its citizens. Indeed, globalisation, as the author affirms, has

[96] Alicia Schmidt Camacho, 'Ciudadana X: Gender Violence and the Denationalization of Women's Rights in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico', in *Terrorizing Women*, ed. by Fregoso and Bejarano, pp. 275–289 (p. 280).
[97] Ibid., p. 276.

'encouraged a disarticulation of citizenship rights from membership to a single national community'.[98] As the locale has been effectively sacrificed to macroeconomic objectives, Ciudad Juárez may be regarded as a largely deterritorialised space, where national sovereignty is ceded to alternative systems of governance. Subsequently, as Schmidt Camacho argues, citizenship is emptied of the assurances that had been constitutionally pledged to local people, rendering those residing in the region denationalised 'non-citizens'.[99] According to her study, among the most troubling aspects of this denationalised geography is its divisive and discriminatory nature. She describes it as a contentious setting in which sociality is atomised and national belonging is supplanted by an overarching sense of otherness, segregated according to ethnicity, class and gender. Globalisation, she asserts, has polarised the space into two distinct demographic categories: the enfranchised, 'post-national elites' on the one side, and disenfranchised 'marginalised people' on the other.[100] The subjectivity of the latter is deemed less important than their labour value, and 'their lack of access to rights' leaves them open to exploitation, be it physical, economic or sexual, with very little repercussion.[101] Borrowing the words of Jean Franco, Carmacho Schmidt terms the marginalised in Ciudad Juárez 'disposable non-citizens.'[102] In this border setting, she argues that 'disposable non-citizens' form a feminised and racialised category, exemplified by the brutal murders of young, poor Mexican women who are afforded minimal rights, protection, agency or justice.

Building on the analysis of Wright's *Disposable Women* (see Chapter One), Schmidt Camacho holds the presence of global markets in Juárez primarily accountable for the devaluing representation of poor Mexican women as both subordinate and superfluous. Her critique rests on the argument that the enlisting of female labour within the border maquiladoras has promoted a cultural narrative that, in this geography, women's bodies, whether or not they are assembly-line employees, can be appropriated, consumed and discarded once their value has been extracted. These global economies, she remarks, 'convert subaltern women into commodities', and thereby 'interrupt women's purchase on the most basic right to personal security'.[103] The denial of the most rudimentary of rights to women in this neoliberal landscape

[98] Ibid., p. 289.
[99] Ibid., p. 276.
[100] Ibid., p. 276.
[101] Ibid., p. 276.
[102] Ibid., p. 276.
[103] Ibid., p. 279.

not only underscores the negation of these working women as political subjects (reinforcing patriarchal beliefs), but also reduces the female body to the sum of its uses.

The word 'use' is afforded extensive critical coverage in Agamben's final instalment of the *Homo Sacer* series. Entitled *The Use of Bodies*, this closing text reminds us of the perennial question underlying his entire project: what constitutes a qualified or political life? To do so, Agamben revisits Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and takes the figure of the slave as a starting-point for his enquiry into the imbricated fields of ontology and politics. What began with the body of the homo sacer thus concludes with that of the slave: both find themselves subject to the whim of others whose powers confine their existence to zones of indeterminacy, caught in a chasm between the *zoe* and the *bios*. As mentioned above, the 'sacred man' and his separation from the unity of the polis form the very foundation of sovereignty, and facilitate the functionality of both power and the rule of law. Here, the slave, who is similarly consigned to an existence of inclusive exclusion, is used as an instrument, so that the lives of others may prosper as qualified life. Agamben can thus use the figure of the slave to formulate and dissect ideas about 'use'. Leland de la Durantaye summarises Agamben's thinking on this topic as follows:

> What is yours, and how do you use it? Your body, for instance, is yours, as is the life you lead with it; but in what way, to what degree, subject to what restrictions? And above all, how conditioned or curtailed by which notions of what life is, what it is for, what obligations it carries, and what tasks it may be assigned? [104]

Moving his analysis away from the subjugation of the body to the laws of sovereign power, Agamben emphasises the body's internalisation of power, which is manifest in the relationship between master and slave. Unlike the homo sacer, whose existence may not be redeemed from that of bare life, and whose emancipation from the state of exception is impossible, the slave is capable of discovering a 'form-of-life'.[105] Nevertheless, the slave's existence and subjectivation are premised purely on the practical use of the body for the sake of others. At this juncture, another Agambenian dichotomy surfaces, whereby the slave finds definition in his use of his body only when he is being used by another. As such, Agamben clarifies that the slave is entrenched in a 'zone of indetermination between subject and object […] and between active and passive'.[106]

---

[104] Leland de la Durantaye, 'To Be and to Do', *Boston Review*, 26 January 2016 <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/de-la-durantaye-agamben> [accessed 11 August 2017].
[105] Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 210.
[106] Ibid., p. 28.

Dualities like those posited by Agamben above are an evident trope in *Ni Una Más*, woven into the subtext of the visual narrative. Through a series of metaphors, Hernández brings to light the dialectic between embodied experience and the powers at play in this geography. Although the female is presented as a subject on the canvas, she is simultaneously a passive object, regulated and dismembered by the interiorised wire fence, which assumes a parasitic character that offers only an impending sense of doom. Not only is the materiality of her body divested, but so too is her bodily agency, as her limbs are torn from her torso, rendering her merely a sum of her parts. As geographer Felicity Callard recognises, bodily fragmentation forms part of Karl Marx's critique of capitalism and the political economy. Indeed, she highlights the Marxist associations between corporeality and capitalist incentives:

> It is precisely through the figure of the fragmented body […] that Marx was able to narrate with such horror and vigour the arrival of the capital-labour relation. For it is only when the manufacturing worker had his body torn and reconfigured so that it became 'an appendage' […] of the workshop, that the division of labour, through the branding of the body in this way could be seen as a characteristically capitalist one.[107]

From this Marxist perspective, the depicted female's disjointed arms seem to signal towards their instrumentalisation in the assembly plants. The grey colouration of her skin furthers this analogy, as she acquires the dehumanised traits of an automaton, reflecting the industrialisation of the space she inhabits. Under the profit-driven regimes of the neoliberalised border, the labouring female body materialises as an 'embodied site of exploitation and accumulation', to reference Wright. Here the female subject is not recognised in her human entirety, but is disaggregated as an 'array of body parts […] of unattached limbs', primed for labour.[108] This serves to underscore the dehumanising paradigm of neoliberal globalisation, which, as Sutton notes, 'is built on a disembodied approach to the social world', whereby profits and material goods are ranked above the materiality of the real human being.[109]

As such, *Ni Una Más* makes it clear that the deterritorialised border cartography generated by the powers and demands of neoliberal governance engenders a space of ethical contestation for female embodied experience. Again, the motif of the border as a paradoxical site is reproduced, and its paradoxes are experienced and internalised by female corporeality. Whilst it promises economic independence to poorer female demographics, this comes at a cost to their bodily

[107] Felicity J. Callard, 'The Body in Theory', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16.4 (1998), 387–400 (p. 394).
[108] Wright, *Disposable Women*, p. 46.
[109] Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, p. 38.

agency, subjectivity and even their basic rights as citizens. The body, much like the border region itself, occupies a tenuous position, its value contingent on the capitalist flow of goods and an ethos of accumulation and dispossession. The 'disinvestment in the public sphere', especially the state's retreat from social welfare programmes for the sake of global capitalist initiatives, has, according to Fregoso, cultivated a 'state of exception' in the country, which she now, paraphrasing Agamben, deems to be 'the norm'.[110] As the tableau's imagery emphasises, the female body politic at the border has come to be conflated with a body whose subjectivity is defined by use, and the propagation of this narrative, along with the lack of citizenship rights, has produced a fertile territory for anti-female terror and the ultimate expropriation of female bodily agency in the form of feminicide.

Concluding remarks

As this chapter has shown, the U.S.-Mexico border may be understood as a paradoxical space. It is a topography that plays host to multiple dualities, divisions, disparities and diasporas. These constitutive properties are reproduced and given meaning in Hernández's *The Juárez Series*. Since Hernández is a Chicana, her aesthetics are marked by sensibilities to gender, race and territory. The annexation of female subjects to the outermost edges of the archetypal razor-wire fence echoes Anzaldua's preoccupations with disempowerment, bodily agency and colonial avarice. However, these exiled, wounded protagonists are not condemned to an eternal death on canvas, but rather seem to inhabit an ambivalent status in this region, hovering between the living and the dead. Nevertheless, this interstitial illustration of corporeality also evokes the potential for resistance. As viewers, we observe a body that, despite being dismembered, wounded and imprisoned, may perhaps still be alive, and seeks assistance to return to the animated subject that she once was. The urgency to re-member or re-assemble the body on canvas calls to mind Anzaldua's words with which she beseeches us 'to piece together the corpse and give it life, to demand that the "exiled body and exiled emotions be re-membered"'.[111]

Although the paradigm of biopolitics proves useful for analysing the bodies illustrated in this artistic corpus, a significant problematic surfaces. If biopolitics, according to Foucault, is an affirmative management regime that is based upon fostering life as opposed to disregarding it, how does it explain the brutal deaths of both men and women that have occurred so frequently

[110] Fregoso, '"We Want Them Alive"', p. 133.
[111] Antonia Castañeda, *Gender on the Borderlands* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), p. 111.

in this border setting? This question will be attended to theoretically in the following chapter, in which Achille Mbembe's postcolonial theory of necropolitics will be aligned with the installation art of Teresa Margolles. Her installation pieces mark a departure from Hernández's expressionist imagery towards the medium of conceptual gallery exhibits. Although the body is conspicuously absent from the installations, its presence is repeatedly indexed metonymically through the inclusion of aesthetically unorthodox resources, often in the form of bodily remnants forensically extracted from the corpse.

Chapter Three

The necropolitical body and the aesthetics of violence in the work of Teresa Margolles

> What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?[1]

Introduction

This chapter turns to consider another artistic response to the Juárez feminicides in the form of installation art by Teresa Margolles. Contrary to the vivid illustrations of the female body studied in the Hernandez's previous pastel works, corporeality in Margolles' installations is reduced to nothing but an inferred spectral trace of its former material being. Working directly with bodily remains collected from the country's morgues and evidence sourced from crime scenes, Margolles places a spotlight on the systems of power and institutional negligence that render the bodies of both women (and men) disposable in contemporary Mexico. This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first will begin by outlining Margolles' aesthetic trajectory: I will explore the various methods she and her artist collective, SEMEFO, have used in past exhibitions to invoke the body and then dwell on the ethical implications both of appropriating and transmogrifying the corpse for the gallery space. Following this contextualisation of her work, the second part of this chapter will engage in a critical analysis of two selected installations entitled *Cimbra Formwork* and *Lote Bravo* that Margolles has produced concerning the gender-crimes at the U.S.-Mexico border. Framed by discourses of necropolitics, grievable life and abjection, this chapter draws on the theoretical insights of Mbembe, Butler and Kristeva in order to interrogate Margolles' framing of corporeality in the context of the border feminicides.

Teresa Margolles and SEMEFO: from the carcass to the corpse

Having received a diploma in forensic science, Margolles became acquainted with the interior space of the morgue, observing the corpses that routinely arrived. This in-between space where the dead are brought before burial or cremation became a site of artistic inspiration for Margolles and her artist collective, SEMEFO, which she established in the 1990s. Fittingly, the name SEMEFO is an acronym for the official state institution in Mexico where corpses are

[1] A. Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, i, 15 (2003), 11–40 (p. 12).

taken pending post-mortems and identification. The artist collective's appropriation of the morgue as an alternative atelier from which to produce art also coincided with a period of national instability and as a result, according to Gallo, 'a pile of corpses' ensued.[2] Gallo labels the 1990s 'one of the most turbulent periods in Mexican history', as it was characterised by a series of events and reforms that altered the social, economic and political landscape of the country, namely the implementation of NAFTA, the Zapatista uprising, the devaluation of the Mexican peso and the political assassination of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio.[3] It was a decade that the then-President Salinas de Gortari promised would, with the signing of NAFTA, improve the lives of Mexicans, reduce poverty and migration, and above all mark the beginning of 'la gran época'.[4] However, as Chapter One showed, NAFTA has delivered very little growth, and has intensified inequality in the population. A corollary of this decade's economic changes was an increase in violence; as Pansters notes, 'the economic downturns and the onset of neoliberal reforms […] created the conditions for a surge in urban crime and violence'.[5] Pansters observes that during the decade, Mexico witnessed an escalation of drug-related violence, ethnic violence, electoral violence, urban violence, domestic violence and gender violence.[6] It is this contemporary Mexican context, steeped in violence and social injustice that has formed the basis of SEMEFO's work and continues to inform Margolles' solo projects, as I will discuss throughout this chapter.

Before creatively engaging with vestiges of the human corpse, SEMEFO's first exhibition, entitled *Lavatio Corporis* (1994), hosted at the Museo de Arte Carillo Gil in Mexico City, brought lifeless horse carcasses to the gallery setting, which were contorted into macabre, submissive, carousel figures and harnessed to metal frames. There are visual parallels between this assemblage of work and British artist Damien Hirst's use of animal carcasses, often preserved in formaldehyde in perspex tanks.[7] *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), *Away from the Flock* (1994), *The Cell* (2000), *In Nomine Patris* (2004) are all works that centralise the figure of a dead animal and gesture towards the theme of mortality, which is similarly explored by SEMEFO and Margolles, as I will show. Although

[2] Ruben Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990's* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 119.
[3] Ibid., p. 1.
[4] Linaloe R. Flores, 'TLCAN, 20 años: Las promesas al olvido', *Investigaciones*, 1 January 2014.
[5] Wil G. Pansters, 'Zones of State-Making: Violence, Coercion, and Hegemony in Twentieth Century Mexico', in *Violence, Coercion, and State-making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur*, ed. by Wil G. Pansters (California: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 3–42 (p. 12).
[6] Ibid., p. 12.
[7] Richard Cork, *Breaking Down the Barriers: Art in the 1990s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 30.

SEMEFO and Hirst were producing these installations during the same era in their respective homelands, SEMEFO veered away from the scientific aesthetic manifest in Hirst's collection. Unlike Hirst, SEMEFO opted not to encase the carcasses in specimen containers, but left them exposed and unguarded in the gallery. This afforded the spectator a dual-sensory experience of death, via both sight and smell, which became a common representational method in their later works, as discussed below.[8] Not only was *Lavatio Corporis* intended to demonstrate, as Caballero writes, 'the make-up of living beings and changes that they undergo in dying', it is also understood to be an avant-garde interpretation of José Clemente Orozco's painting series, *Los Teules IV*.[9] His painting features the image of a writhing fallen horse amongst what appears to be the carnage of a battlefield which, according to Caballero, is redolent of the horrors encountered in the Spanish Conquest in Mexico and the demise of the indigenous population. Fusco stresses the importance of reading SEMEFO's allusion to Orozco's art as a 'Mexican national allegory' that historicises today's violent deaths in those of the past.[10] Whilst Orozco painted death, however, SEMEFO made the themes of his work more literal, bringing actual dead horses into the space of the gallery. For Banwell, this primary composition was a 'historical marker' for Margolles' later artistic works, which continue to deal thematically with violence, but in relation to its modern-day manifestations across the nation state.[11] These later explorations of violence signal SEMEFO and Margolles' departure from the employment of animal carcasses, to the more ethically challenging application of the human corpse to installations which I will discuss below.

Exhibiting *la vida del cadáver* in the works of SEMEFO

The corpse and violence in the contemporary Mexican context are the central subjects of SEMEFO's installations and remain the inspiration for Margolles' later solo works, including those related to the Juárez feminicides. As opposed to exhibiting the dead body in its entirety or in a state of decomposition, Margolles' artist collective focused on the excavation of remnants and residues extracted from the corpse whilst in the morgue, before applying them to installations via various artistic stratagems. The body in these works is always inferred, but never present. Instead it is represented 'indexically', 'synecdochically' and '*in absentia*', to

[8] Julia Banwell, *Teresa Margolles and the Aesthetics of Death* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015)
[9] Germán Rubiano Caballero, *Art of Latin America: 1981–2000* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank), p. 24.
[10] Coco Fusco, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 62.
[11] Banwell, p. 116.

cite Gallo.[12] The collection of artworks produced by SEMEFO and Margolles is considered to be principally concerned with *la vida del cadáver*. This oxymoronic expression alludes to what Rebecca Scott Bray calls 'the transitional biography of the dead body'.[13] By 'biography', the author is referring to the existence of the body both pre-mortem and post-mortem. With death, she writes, the body transitions to a new state that remains 'contingent upon the social, political and economic context of life pre-death'.[14] In essence, the history of a body continues post-mortem, its treatment remaining subject to its original living status, as critic and curator Cuauhtémoc Medina explains:

> Death is not egalitarian. Social taxonomies are re-inscribed not only in the causes of death but also in the fate of our remains, the quality of our funerary rites and monuments, and the amount of public attention to our disappearance.[15]

The installations produced by SEMEFO and Margolles demonstrate a preoccupation with the fate of bodies, especially those that have succumbed to a violent death and those that remain unclaimed in the mortuary. Indeed, as Banwell suggests, all of the bodies employed in these artworks not only demonstrate their subjection to violence, but 'once belonged to individuals who were economically disadvantaged in life'.[16] Using bodily fluids, flesh, fat or water used to wash corpses in the morgue, Margolles and her artist collective extricate essences of corporeality, which they reconfigure into installations that confront the viewer with the effects of violence and marginalisation in Mexico. This point is evidenced by an assortment of works produced throughout the last two decades. *Dermis/Derm* (1995), for instance, was an installation produced by SEMEFO, comprised of sheets imprinted with the bloodied silhouettes of two anonymous bodies found side by side in the Mexico City morgue.[17] The crisp white linen is juxtaposed with the fading red and brown stains of coagulated blood to create a haunting 'indexical representation' of corpses.[18] Although the bodies are perceivably absent, their outlines act as referents of their presence, whilst the blood testifies to violence or trauma sustained. *Fluidos* (1996) is another SEMEFO production that reduces the corpse to a sum of its secretions. With 240 litres of water used to wash corpses sourced from the morgue, the artist

[12] Gallo, p. 119.
[13] Rebecca Scott Bray, 'En Piel Ajena: The Work of Teresa Margolles', *Law Text Culture*, i, 11 (2007), 13–50 (p. 15).
[14] Ibid., p. 15.
[15] Cuauhtémoc Medina, 'SEMEFO: The Morgue', in *The Mexico City Reader*, ed. by Ruben Gallo (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 309–326 (p. 309).
[16] Banwell, p. 88.
[17] Gallo, p. 122.
[18] Ibid., p. 122.

collective filled a large glass container and illuminated it with white lights.[19] As in *Dermis/Derm*, corpses in this installation, though ostensibly absent, are inferred; material traces left behind post-mortem instead become metonyms that stand in for the body. The materiality of the corpse that is thus invoked features as a continued trope and point of interest in Margolles' later solo intermedial works, produced after she disbanded with SEMEFO. Her installations remain firmly in dialogue with the morgue and the wider context of violence occurring in the country. Recent works, as I will show, have critiqued the loss of life resulting from widespread drug violence, and of crucial importance to this chapter, the feminicides, as we will see in Part II.

Margolles: solo works and bodies of violence

As a solo artist, Margolles has received national and global notoriety. She has exhibited her work across the Americas and has also established a firm reputation in European countries, notably Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Italy and the United Kingdom. Margolles' appropriation of bodily vestiges from the dead has remained a constant focus since her collaborative work with SEMEFO. Corporeality, precarious mortality and violence continue to inspire her minimalist yet evocative installations. However, her efforts at truncating the distance between the spectator and the corpse via creative and often transgressive methods have intensified. *En el aire* (2001) and *Vaporización/Vaporisation* (2002) for instance, are two innovative and multi-sensory pieces. Both installations incorporate recycled water from the morgue, which had previously been used to cleanse corpses. Margolles proceeded to generate mist and bubbles from this water, which she then released into the gallery space amongst the spectators. In these interactive works, Margolles resurrected the residues of the dead and liberated them amongst the living through imperceptible yet literal means. An osmotic and unifying process occurred, in which the spectator absorbed the extracted essence of the deceased. The interplay, or even communion, between the spectator and the bodies of the dead is vital, and functions both physically and cognitively. The dispersal of mist and bubbles into the gallery space places the spectator's own corporeality in dialogue with that of the deceased whose traces lace the air. The essence of the corpse touches their skin and their clothes, and they embody them simply by inhaling. Given the amorphous nature of these elements, the corpse is imperceptible yet materially present, and enters the gallery setting ethereally. However, its haunting presence is momentary, and its fleeting arrival and exit remind the

[19] María Campiglia, 'Teresa Margolles: Reiterating Violence', *Barcelona Investigación Arte Creación*, i, 2 (2014), 100–125 (p. 108).

spectator of the precariousness of embodied existence. What appear at first to be sensorial, engaging installations in fact are revealed as visceral encounters with bodies that have succumbed to violent death: as Caroll writes, 'the scattering of literal humanity – to recycle meaning – the allegorical – as its epistemologically violent particulate matter'.[20] In this case, the spectator is urged to contemplate the formless bodies, their biographies and how they died in Mexico. This interaction between the dead body and the living body is crucial to the contemplation of the bodies of feminicide victims in Margolles' installations, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

While the interactive exhibits mentioned above acquire necrological residues from the mortuary space, Margolles' sourcing of primary materials in later works has departed from the boundaries of the Mexico City morgue, and taken her to places further afield in Mexico, to the country's urban streets and, in particular, to the U.S.-Mexico border. In recent years, this locale, as we saw in Chapter One, has become a site of national trauma. It is a space characterised by the endemic loss of bodies to murder, victims both of Calderón's Drug War and of the murders of women. These two topical subjects have provided a stimulus for Margolles' more recent corpus of work within the last ten years. One of her best known works is perhaps *¿de qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?* (2009) which featured at the 53rd Venice Biennale. This was a particularly visceral installation both in terms of vision and other senses. For the exhibition, Margolles collected earth and blood from scenes of violent crime in northern Mexico associated with narco violence. She transferred what she had collected to cloths, which she relocated to the Mexican pavilion in Venice, at the Palazzo Rota Ivancich.[21] The cloths were then repurposed, saturated with water and used to mop both the floors and windows of the exhibition hall on a daily basis. The regular process of washing the floors with traces left from sites of murder transforms the gallery space into a crime-scene in itself, and thus alludes both to the re-opening of wounds and to the quotidian nature of violence affecting Mexico. For Banwell, the exhibition 'holds up a mirror to challenge those in power to justify their failure to heal the wounds in society'.[22] As in the artist's previous works, the body is once again physically absent yet materially bound up in the viscosity of liquids and sourced materials; as Ramos states, Margolles denies the spectators 'a single, stable subject or figure'.[23] Instead, Ramos contends,

[20] Amy S. Carroll, 'Muerte Sin Fin, Teresa Margolles' Gendered States of Exception', *The Drama Review*, ii, 54 (2010), 103–125 (p. 115).
[21] Iván A. Ramos, 'The Viscosity of Grief: Teresa Margolles at the Scene of the Crime', *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, iii, 25 (2015), 298–314 (p. 298).
[22] Banwell, p. 5.
[23] Ramos, p. 300.

the artist offers an 'alternative mode of communing with and conceptualizing our relationship to the dead'.[24] Mónica Salazar brings to our attention the media reaction to this installation, citing some of the headlines that surfaced, namely, 'gut wrenching,' 'a temple of blood' and 'disgusting'.[25] These disapproving reactions suggest an ethical quandary for the spectator who has been confronted with, surrounded by, and stepped on the physical traces of bodies murdered in Mexico. These ethical tensions, which are prevalent in most of Margolles' aesthetics, will now be addressed in further detail with a closer reflection on the notion of the abject which permeates her work. Before approaching the ethical problematic, the following section will be prefaced by a necessary mapping of the corpse in the broader field of popular culture.

Dead body politics: corpse theory, abjection and ethical tensions

Across the wider fields of media and popular visual culture, death is a ubiquitous spectacle and images of the 'real and simulated corpse' are commonplace.[26] Jacque Lynn Foltyn goes as far as to say that the corpse has become 'pop culture's new star,' endowing it with a pseudo-celebrity status.[27] Literary critic, Mark Seltzer echoes these sentiments and emphasises the entertainment value of what he labels 'wound culture'.[28] His coinage of this term lends itself to how spectators are fascinated and drawn to sites of violence and crime in order to witness 'opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock trauma and the wound'.[29] There is certainly ample evidence for this claim in the widespread predilection for literary, theatrical and cinematographic representations of crime, death and the corpse. Long-running television productions such as *CSI*, *Body of Proof*, *Bones* and the UK series *Silent Witness*, are all testament to our popular obsession with viewing the cadaver, whether in situ at a crime scene or in the parameters of the morgue, scrutinised by forensic pathologists. This subject matter is approached by Ruth Penfold Mounce in her article 'Corpses, Popular Culture and Forensic Science', where she details the pervasion of corpse spectacles in the twenty-first century, particularly in the medium of forensic science television programmes: 'viewing the dead within the fictional context of the undead and forensics has made the corpse,

[24] Ibid., p. 299.
[25] Mónica Salazar, 'Redefining the Mexican Tradition of Death: Teresa Margolles and the Embodiment of Absence', *Proceedings of the Art of Death and Dying Symposium*, 1 (2012), 92–98 (p. 92).
[26] Jacque Lynn Foltyn, 'Dead Famous and Dead Sexy: Popular Culture, Forensics, and the Rise of the Corpse', *Mortality*, 13, ii (2008), 153–173 (p. 153).
[27] Ibid., p.153.
[28] Mark Seltzer, 'Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere', *October Magazine*, 80 (1997), 3–26 (p. 3).
[29] Ibid., p. 3.

particularly the open and violated corpse, into an acceptable entertainment commodity'.[30] Critically, however, she is quick to emphasise that these programmes do not expose the real corpse, but are masterful re-creations of the 'undead', enhanced by technically advanced special effects, which in turn immediately distance consumers from reality and from direct exposure with the abject. Because the purpose of these crime series is spectacle and entertainment, they aim only for verisimilitude, with the result that the spectator bears second-hand witness to a corpse that is an imaginary construction.

Subsequently, if we are so familiar with the corpse, why has Margolles' work been branded 'disgusting'? An answer perhaps lies in Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, a theory about our embodied reactions to threat and death. As opposed to dramatised recreation of on-screen corpses, Margolles' installation obliges the viewers to interact with real body matter or crime scene evidence, and in doing so, contemplate their own mortality. Throughout the past two decades, Margolles' collaborative works with SEMEFO and her solo artistic ventures have powerfully evoked the concept of abjection. The abject disturbs the deepest foundations of our fears as human beings, and of our subjective and objective systems of meaning. In *The Powers of Horror,* Kristeva details the principles of the abject: it is a human response to a threatened collapse of meaning in our lives, in which 'ego [is] threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death.'[31] Abjection, in essence, generates 'a state of crisis […] the borders between the self and other break down in the confrontation with the abject'.[32] Such a primordial reaction may be induced by the corpse, as well as by blood, bodily fluids, excrement and decay. It is certainly true that Margolles' works do not exhibit the human corpse in a defamatory state of decomposition, but it is indisputably inferred metaphysically. In Margolles' exhibits, spectators are thrust amongst remnants of the corpse, obliged to share their living space with that of the imperceptible dead. For Kristeva, the corpse is that which 'I permanently thrust aside in order to live', and the fluids or excrement associated with bodily functions are 'what life withstands'.[33] Therefore, when positioned in direct contact with these elements, Kristeva asserts, 'I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive from that border.'[34] It is precisely this

[30] Ruth Penfold Mounce, 'Corpses, Popular Culture and Forensic Science', *Mortality*, 21 (2016), 19–35.
[31] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 71.
[32] Ibid., p. 3.
[33] Ibid., p. 3.
[34] Ibid., p. 3.

situation that spectators encounter in the gallery space, where a physical intersection between the living and the dead is created, prompting a largely philosophical reflection on one's own fragile existence.

Banwell's recent monograph, *Teresa Margolles and The Aesthetic of Violence*, is the first comprehensive and theoretically informed account of Margolles' work across the decades. Her commentary is insightful and necessarily ethically contemplative. For Banwell, there is one overarching question regarding the artist's aesthetic use of the corpse: whose permission does Margolles have to employ and manipulate the dead body for the purposes of art? This is a contentious question, as the manner in which Margolles has acquired bodies and body parts may be considered controversial. In 2000, for instance, she produced the installation *Lengua*, featured at Bellas Artes in Mexico City, which displayed the decaying tongue of a young male heroin addict. In exchange for the deceased's body part, Margolles funded the funeral on behalf of his impoverished family.[35] Similarly, in 1999, Margolles collaborated with SEMEFO to conceive a piece entitled *Entierro*: they encased in a small but robust concrete block the remains of a dead foetus, which was donated by the mother because she was unable to finance a conventional funeral. It is important to acknowledge that these compositions depend on trading bodies for money, and the artist's work thus rests on the concept of exchange value.[36] One might therefore ask what this says about the socio-economics of the body in Mexico. If *Lengua* and *Entierro* were enabled by the agreement of socially marginalised families, is Margolles not simply profiteering from their poverty? Is this another case of accumulation by dispossession? Is the artworld capitalising on the melancholic cycle of disposability in this globalised era? Is Margolles therefore complicit in the economy of death in her homeland? To some degree, the use of corpses of people belonging to the disenfranchised social strata parallels the commodification of disposable bodies at the global assembly line, discussed in Chapters One and Two. That is to say, in the case of art, the disposable body is returned to the market once it is disposed of, to be acquired again for the benefit of artists who use it to meet the consumer demand of the international artworld.

There is no straightforward answer to these questions. However, despite these problematic ethical issues, Margolles' internationally exhibited installations have sparked a much needed conversation about human rights abuses in contemporary Mexico. Moreover, most of her later

[35] Ibid., p. 93.
[36] Ibid., p. 101.

solo work (particularly that relating to the feminicides) is neither overtly gratuitous nor exploitative, as her aesthetics favour an implicit evocation of bodily vestiges, as opposed to an explicit, candid display of a corpse. Thus, when visitors enter the gallery space and interact with her installations, there is very little to suggest that what they are observing, smelling or feeling contains the actual physical remains of a person or people who have suffered a violent death in Mexico. For the spectator, therefore, her artwork is more about *believing* what they are *informed* they are seeing, than seeing for themselves. As such, these installations channel the same need for belief as historic religious relics. In fact, as I will discuss in relation to her feminicide exhibits, Margolles' aesthetics are resonant of the communion which Christian reliquaries forge between the living and the dead.

Margolles' ethics have been defended by curator Cuauhtémoc Medina, who redirects the blame towards the Mexican state, criticising the laxity of legal systems that have made her acquisition of corpse matter and her artwork possible:

> Su práctica artística debe su existencia a la relajación de los servicios policiales mexicanos. Sus obras exponen con enorme franqueza la situación de ese aparato, al tiempo que son resultado de la complicidad de la artista con ese mismo sistema. El hecho de que a lo largo de los años las instituciones estatales mexicanas hayan promovido activamente el arte de Margolles es muestra de su talento para habitar una laguna legal y política. Sería posible poner en cuestión sus métodos sin denunciar al mismo tiempo las peculiares normas tanto de la morgue como del sistema cultural. En este sentido su obra es menos una transgresión que un reflejo del estado deteriorado de la ley. Si su arte ocupa un espacio de tolerancia, es gracias a la complicidad e ineficiencia institucional.[37]

Medina's argument resonates with the arguments earlier in this thesis which emphasised the ineptitude of authorities and institutions, and their resultant negligence regarding the feminicide cases. This is now evidenced in Margolles' appropriation of bodies: since institutions are complicit, it exposes underlying currents of institutional corruption. Of course, as Banwell asserts, even though the artist's work has been 'carried out legitimately' in morgues and crime scenes, this does not 'efface its ethical implications' that remain manifest in her work.[38] Nevertheless, what Margolles' work does successfully highlight is the underlying apathy of institutions towards the dead. This, by extension, calls to mind the notion of necropolitics with which Margolles' work is imbued.

[37] Cuauhtémoc Medina, 'Zonas de tolerancia: Teresa Margolles, Semefo y más allá', *Revista Parachute*, 104 (2003), 31–52 (p. 31).
[38] Banwell, p. 82.

Necropolitical theory and feminicide

Medina, in his description of the Venice Biennale installation *¿de qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?*, comments: 'Margolles interrupts the art space by bringing in these materials that are really charged, which traces the relationship between death and power. It is about necropolitics, and the eruption of necropolitics in the art sphere'.[39] His remarks firmly situate Margolles' aesthetics in direct dialogue with the political technology of control that is based upon 'the subjugation of life to the power of death'.[40] Necropolitics is a compelling frame of analysis for contemplating Margolles' feminicide-based exhibits, which translate the horrors of gender violence into visually austere displays that weave together necrological by-products. Before examining these works, this section first outlines the key tenets underpinning necropolitics and assesses its conceptual relevance to the cases of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez.

Necropolitics is a neologism first proposed by the postcolonial philosopher Achille Mbembe, who characterises it as 'the ultimate expression of sovereignty […] the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die. To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power'.[41] He presents necropolitics as a fitting alternative to Foucault's notion of biopolitics, discussed in the previous chapter. His rationale is that biopolitics, a regime based on optimising life, proves analytically inadequate for explaining modern forms of war, political violence and subjugation. He criticises schools of political philosophy that have 'privileged normative theories of democracy', as Foucault does; indeed, the shortcomings of biopolitics are magnified when applied to contemporary (post-)colonial contexts where 'death worlds' have become the norm.[42] In such locales, sovereignty operates under the logic of exercising 'the mass destruction of persons and […] vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead'.[43] As opposed to the biopolitical premise, 'make live and let die', the

[39] 'Organized Crime and How to Represent It: Teresa Margolles', *Violence Through the Arts in Latin America: A Dictionary*, 2016 <https://latinamericandictionary.wordpress.com/2014/02/04/o/> [accessed 17 June 2017].
[40] Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', trans. by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, 15 (2003), 11–40 (p. 11).
[41] Ibid., p. 12.
[42] Ibid., 13.
[43] Ibid., p. 40.

aphorism best suited to necropolitics might be 'let live and make die', as Marina Gržinić and Šefik Tatlić propose.[44]

Mbembe proposes the notion of necropolitics partly because of his concern about sovereignties that exert their power for the sake of the 'generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations'.[45] Examples of where necropolitics is particularly evident, according to Mbembe, include the Kosovo war, the colonial occupation of Palestine, apartheid in South Africa and the figure of the suicide bomber. Although these instances all reflect disparate agendas, where varying modalities of violence and death are witnessed, they are connected by the division of people into those that may live and those that must die. Ultimately, then, necropolitics is based on the categorisation of bodies, whereby some are marked as expendable or killable and others are granted liveable lives.

Scholars examining the Juárez feminicides have found the theory of necropolitics helpful for explaining anti-female terror in the borderspace. Wright, for instance, whose article 'Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide' has become a vital point of reference in the field, deploys a necropolitical lens for interrogating gender violence. She perceives the act of feminicide as 'a tool for securing the state', and the death of women to be a form of 'urban cleansing'.[46] For Wright, women have been entered into a necropolitical system as a result of what she calls the 'public woman discourse'.[47] In the early 1990s, when the crimes against women in Juárez began to be recognised, political figures refused to acknowledge that feminicide was linked to wider social or economic issues. Instead, Governor of Chihuahua, Francisco Barrios, publicly propagated a narrative that blamed women for their own fate because they were leaving the house at night and being sexually promiscuous. In doing so, he conflated the '*obrera* (worker) with *ramera* (whore)'.[48] Consequently, he created a justification for necropolitics, implying that feminicide was a 'logical outcome of dangerous female sexuality'.[49] Wright thus suggests that this discourse has engrained the idea that 'the deaths of public women represent a kind of public cleansing, as the removal of troublesome women

[44] Marina Gržinić and Šefik Tatlić, *Necropolitics, Racialization, and Global Capitalism: Historicization of Biopolitics and Forensics of Politics, Art, and Life* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 22.
[45] Mbembe, p. 14.
[46] Melissa W. Wright, 'Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico–U.S. Border', *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, iii, 36 (2011), 707–731 (p. 708).
[47] Ibid., p. 713.
[48] Ibid., p. 713.
[49] Ibid., p. 715.

restores the moral and political balance of society'.[50] Ileana Rodríguez proposes a similar line of thought, arguing that feminicide is a corollary of the 'necropolitics of globalization'.[51] She regards women's lack of rights and lack of legal protection at the border as precursors to gender crime, as necropolitics results from a combination of the 'politics of the state and the politics of the maquila labor'.[52] Fregoso likewise understands feminicide as the result of an emerging 'necropolitical order' that is engulfing the border region.[53] She deems this order to be the result of intersecting 'forces and processes, including militarization, denationalization, neoliberalism and ingovernability' that operate simultaneously in Ciudad Juárez, systematically disempowering women and delegitimising their human rights.[54]

Theory: dead body politics

Sociological studies of the body and embodiment are chiefly axed towards an appraisal of the animate, living body. As this thesis has established thus far, an interrogation of corporeality and its materiality can facilitate meaningful analyses of systems of power that enframe us, as well as the space, society and culture in which we reside. However, enquiries into the dead body or the significance of the corpse post-mortem are far less ubiquitous. Whilst Butler memorably claims that 'bodies matter,' I would contend that *dead* bodies matter too. This lacuna however is in the process of being gradually filled by an emergent scholarship called dead body politics. Discourses in this field extend discussions of the corpse beyond thematics of loss and mourning to foreground it as a vector of 'political, cultural and emotional power'.[55] An authoritative voice in this discipline is Katherine Verdery, whose publication *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* proves a noteworthy reference point for recognising the discursivity of the body in its posthumous state. Although the deceased that she researches hail from post-socialist Eastern Europe, her politicisation of corpses is germane to this study of feminicide bodies comprising Margolles' installations. She brings into stark relief that corpses represent more than neutral, inanimate entities eternally consigned to the grave and history. According to Verdery, they acquire a 'posthumous political life' and can confer unto us a window into spatio-temporal contexts of the past and inform present politics.[56] Of particular interest to her

[50] Ibid., p. 713.
[51] Ileana Rodriguez, *Liberalism at its Limits: Crime and Terror in the Latin American Cultural Text* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), p. 202.
[52] Ibid., p. 202.
[53] Fregoso, '"We Want Them Alive"', p. 111.
[54] Ibid., p. 112.
[55] Jay D. Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), p. 3.
[56] Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 127.

study are the exhumation, relocation and reburial of human remains. She recognises that displacing corpses or 'restoring them to honor, expelling them, or simply drawing attention to them, their exit from one grave and descent into another marks a change in social visibilities and values,' which resonates with Margolles' transferral of human remains into the exhibition hall as a means of politicising those that would otherwise be forgotten.[57]

The politics of posthumous bodies similarly informs the work of historian, Ewa Domanska. According to her analyses of the Argentinian *desaparecidos*, the dead body is a 'space of conflict between different interests of power, knowledge and the sacred'.[58] For Domanska the corpse serves many purposes for the living world, she identifies it to be a 'witness from beyond the grave,' 'an alternative form of testimony' and an 'object of mourning'.[59] By assuming these multiple roles she deems the body to be more politicised post-mortem than pre-mortem, specifically in the context of post-Dirty War Argentina, she writes, 'death itself turns out to be more of a political fact than an individual experience'.[60] Domanska's observations draw distinct parallels with the situation of feminicide in Juárez, whereby those murdered lacked rights or state consideration whilst alive, but in death, they have been brought into the political sphere, particularly thanks to the families, NGOs and activists calling upon the State to grant them justice.

The capacity of the corpse to communicate in some form or another echoes the sentiments of Finn Stepputat. His publication *Governing the dead: Sovereignty and the politics of dead bodies* is a compelling read and particularly resonates with the both the thematic and theoretics of this chapter: human remains, sovereignty and necropolitics. He begins by urging his readers to deviate from conventional interpretations of the corpse as a figure that only serves the purpose of mourning once departed. Instead he urges the importance of engaging with dead bodies on a political level and to recognise them as critical sites of meaning upon which sovereignty (whether it be *de facto* or *de jure*) is 'claimed and performed'.[61] The death of person, Stepputat writes is a 'performance of sovereignty,' not only in the centralised, territorial etymology of the term, but also for 'sub-, trans- and supra-national entities that seek to claim

[57] Ibid., p. 19.
[58] Ewa Domanska, 'Toward the Archaeontology of the Dead Body', *Rethinking History*, 9, iv (2005), 389–413 (p. 403).
[59] Ibid., p. 403.
[60] Ibid., p. 403.
[61] Finn Stepputat, *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 11.

or produce autonomous domains of power'.[62] Central to his interest is what he calls the 'management of dead bodies,' in other words, how death came about and how the body is dealt with from its passage from life through to death and thereafter.[63] Reading the dead body through this lens enables us to unravel the functionality of power in a country, social hierarchies, and the value placed on life and death. He emphasises sovereignty's intrinsic relationship to corporeality and theoretically contemplates the differing technologies of power through which bodies are governed pre- and post-mortem. Mapping the concepts of biopolitics and necropolitcs (Foucault, Agamben and Mbembe respectively), much like this thesis has also carried out, Stepputat surmises that these two forms of demographic management work side-by-side and are indistinguishable in modern-day sovereignty, specifically in the Americas. Borrowing ideas from the work of Claudio Lomnitz, he posits that 'dead bodies have an important role to play in the enchantment of politics and the sacralisation of authority'.[64]

As this section has established, even posthumously, the body is a site of power and knowledge that performs almost pedagogically for the living to make sense of both the past and present. As the Latin phrase written above the forensic laboratory in the U.S. television series, *Body of Proof*, aptly attests, '*hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitae*,' which translates as 'this is the place where death delights to help the living'. With these theories of dead body politics in mind, alongside an understanding of necropolitics the following section will move to a reading of Margolles's two feminicide installations. Particular attention will be afforded to the way in which the artist frames or infers the 'material destruction of human bodies,' to reiterate Mbembe.[65] Furthermore, the thematics of necropolitics find resonance with Butlerian notions of 'the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability.'[66] As such, I will then situate Margolles work in relation to discourses of grievable and non-grievable life.

[62] Ibid., p. 4.
[63] Ibid., p. 19.
[64] Ibid., p. 20.
[65] Mbembe, p. 14.
[66] Butler, p. 29.

The absent bodies of feminicide: *Cimbra Formwork* (2006)

Figure 9. *Cimbra Formwork*, Teresa Margolles.

In 2006, Margolles contributed the installation *Cimbra Formwork* to the *Frontera 450+* exhibition at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston. This period marked a temporary shift in focus for the artist. Although remaining committed to the social injustices facing her homeland, she narrowed her attention from the precarisation of the national body politic to that of the site-specific, female body politic in Ciudad Juárez. *Cimbra Formwork* joined an assemblage of multi-generic artworks by sixteen other artists hosted within the Houston exhibition space, all of which were dedicated to the gender crimes at the border.[67] Structurally, *Cimbra Formwork* comprised a rectangular wooden slatted frame, with a narrow central aperture. As the spectator approaches the long, unassuming structure, arbitrary smatterings of cement on the exterior invite them to investigate its provenance, which seems to be from within. Closer inspection reveals that a total of 546 articles of clothing acquired from the families of feminicide victims line the length and breadth of the interior, made rigid by coatings of cement. The non-didactic visual asceticism of the installation, coupled with its incongruous primary materials, encourages the viewers themselves to contemplate its message. Although *Cimbra Formwork* is a much less multi-sensory experience than Margolles' previous installations, it is no less demanding in terms of viewer engagement or agency. On the contrary, this wooden structure at the heart of the gallery setting conjures the illusion of a coffin awaiting mourners to pay their final respects in a chapel of rest, beckoning the viewer to interact with

[67] Handwerker, Margo, 'Frontera 450+', *Art Lies: A Contemporary Art Quarterly*, 53 (2017) <http://www.art-lies.org/article.php?id=1448&issue=53&s=1> [accessed 13 July 2017].

the installation accordingly. Whilst outwardly funereal in appearance, the contents of this makeshift casket gesture towards a more sinister meaning. The abandoned, sullied clothing buried beneath the cement evokes imagery usually associated with remains exhumed from mass graves, altering the viewer's participatory role from mourner to crime-scene witness or investigator. In keeping with the artist's aesthetic trajectory, *Cimbra Formwork* condenses politically-charged themes of death and corporeal absence into conceptual offerings that rely on a reading of symbolism and metonyms.

The repurposing of feminicide victims' clothes within this artwork perhaps holds the greatest signifying value. By force of habit, every day we automatically dress ourselves. For the majority, clothes are, first and foremost, customary, functional and vanity items that conceal our modesty, protect us from the natural elements and satisfy our aesthetic desires. Moreover, what we wear both defines and differentiates us from one another, as Judy Attfield notes, 'they negotiate the inner self with the outer world'.[68] For this reason, clothing may be viewed as a primary signifier of gender, class, religion, culture and, most importantly, human embodiment. Clothes mould to the body's contours like a second skin, a social skin that navigates public space. By virtue of their daily use and attachment to the body, clothes tell a unique story that can recall bygone eras, past fashions, physical changes and memorable events, and, above all, can testify to the materiality and the history of the wearer. In Margolles' installation, *Cimbra Formwork*, then, what meaning is encoded by disembodied, discarded clothing?

As historic images from post-genocide countries attest, clothes can be deeply symbolic of the magnitude of civilian deaths, emphasising the necropolitical regimes of power in operation. In locations across the world where violence has resulted in widespread loss of life, memorial sites now mark these violent epochs with mounds of clothes stripped from victims. At sites such as Nyamata Church in Rwanda, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia or Auschwitz in Poland, clothes of the deceased and unnamed remain bundled together, confined to the spatio-temporal context in which they were last seen alive. Just as shoes are closely associated with atrocities, as mentioned in the previous chapter, clothes too have become universal metaphors of absent, suffering bodies. Margolles capitalises on clothing's status as a universal signifier of loss to evoke the absent bodies of females murdered in Ciudad Juárez. However, she is not alone in her artistic endeavours of repurposing of victims' apparel: increasing numbers of artists have deployed this creative strategy to comment on violent conflicts and

[68] Judy Attfield, *Wild Things* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 128.

national traumas that have resulted in extensive loss of human life. Colombian artist, Doris Salcedo is a prime example of this case in point. Her minimalist, austere installations that grapple with 'the human aftermath of violence' in her homeland evoke convincing parallels with Margolles' own aesthetic signature.[69] Garments of clothing and cement are similarly the primary resources for select pieces within her repertoire, namely *Sin Títulos* (1992) and *Casa Viuda* (1992). In these two exhibits, Salcedo encases clothes, shoes and even household furniture in coatings of cement with the intention of evoking 'human life in anonymous homes whose biographies are absent,' as Gastón Alzate asserts.[70] The assemblage of clothes, organised with military precision, await the return of the body to reanimate them and restore their purpose. The cement overlay, however, implies that these items are suspended in time and the possibility of these clothes being reunited with their wearer is unlikely, as Louise Crewe pertinently reminds us, 'bodies come and go; the clothes which have received these bodies survive'.[71]

The survival of clothes is a line of thought that merits deliberation with respect to *Cimbra Formwork*. As we have established clothing proves to be greatly polysemic, engendering multiple meanings. According to Nina Felshin, its use as a referent of the body means that clothes 'act as a surrogate' to infer the presence of the wearer, imbuing them with anthropomorphic qualities.[72] This semiotic relationship calls to mind religious reliquary and its respective memorialising of human remains or materials historically salvaged mostly of saints or other religious figureheads. In the case of *Cimbra Formwork*, its religiosity is immediately inferred upon observing the coffin-like structure in the gallery. The clothes within, imbued with the once physical essence of women lost to feminicide, magnifies its relic-like significance. Conventionally, relics, as Christine Quigley writes, are items or human remnants 'worthy of worship' and 'function as symbols of faith'. Religious relics, she posits, 'have been sworn on, prayed over, and carried in funeral processions'.[73] If relics are reserved for the veneration of the holy, we might ask why Margolles forges this parallel. The answer perhaps resides in the counteracting of the 'desacralizing of life' in Mexico, to cite Fusco.[74] In her text, *The Bodies*

[69] Denise Birkhofer, 'Trace Memories: Clothing as Metaphor in the Work of Doris Salcedo', *Anamesa*, i, 6 (2008), 48–66 (p. 50).
[70] Gastón Alzate and Marcia Olander, 'Absence and Pain in the Work of Doris Salcedo and Rosemberg Sandoval', *South Central Review*, iii, 30 (2013), 5–20 (p. 8).
[71] Louise Crewe, *The Geographies of Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 125.
[72] Nina Felshin, 'Clothing as Subject', *Art Journal*, i, 54 (1995), 20–29 (p. 20).
[73] Christine Quigley, *The Corpse* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 259.
[74] Fusco, p. 75.

That Were Not Ours: And Other Writings, Fusco engages with Margolles' early artistic interventions whilst still a member of SEMEFO and draws a pertinent analogy between their work and reliquary. Detailing traditions from Catholicism, Christianity and the Middle Ages, Fusco notes that relics symbolise the 'triumph of spirit over matter of the saintliness of martyrs' and that the use of corpse relics signify the ability of a Christian's flesh to survive 'torture, destruction, and even death'.[75] The allegories attached to these traditions, she suggests 'linger behind these contemporary artworks that thrust the unclaimed bodies into spotlight in an effort to thwart the efforts to efface them, and with them the unspeakable violence that brought an end to each one's life'.[76] Fusco's remarks on SEMEFOs previous installations may certainly be transposed to Margolles' work in question, *Cimbra Formwork*. Margolles appears to engineer a pseudo-religious ceremony, so that the feminicide victims whose rights to justice, a funeral or burial have been deprived may be afforded one in a setting divorced from the borderlands in which they were subjected to gender-crime. It transmits a defiant message that whilst women's bodies may be physically erased, they will continue to be remembered.

Moreover, it is a dissenting installation that offers an indictment of the U.S.-Mexico border's necropolitical landscape. The monochromatic cement that binds the coiled and entwined clothes evokes connotations of a slurried trench; a space where violence eradicated bodies and clothes remained the last trace of their existence, echoing Mbembian notions of the subjugation of bodies to death. Ratliff suggests that the use of clothing sourced from victims, women and families constitutes a direct reference to the deliberate incineration of crime-scene evidence taken from feminicide victims in 1999.[77] Furthermore, she connects the work with social injustices and women's existence within a space where death has more significance than life, suggesting that the aesthetics of the installation triggers a visual reminder of the landfills, *lotes* and ditches where the women were disposed of after death.[78] Certainly the liminality of these corporeal traces which are relegated to an unadorned wooden structure evokes the socio-political and ultimately precarious status of the bodies that these garments index.

[75] Ibid., p. 74.
[76] Ibid., p. 74.
[77] Jamie Ratliff, 'A War on Women: Teresa Margolles' Ciudad Juárez', *n.paradoxa*, 35 (2015), 56–65 (p. 63).
[78] Ibid., p. 63.

Lote Bravo (2005): bodies worth grieving?

Figure 10. *Lote Bravo* (2005), Teresa Margolles.

As we have observed in *Cimbra Formwork*, the bodies of feminicide victims were inferred metonymically by the creative use of clothing entombed within cement. In another display committed to the case of the Juárez feminicides, entitled *Lote Bravo* (2005), it is crime-scene evidence that forms the basis of the installation. For this piece, Margolles assumed the role of flâneur or perhaps forensic pilgrim, travelling the length of the northern Mexican border to source sand and earth from scenes where women had been found murdered. Afterwards the artist fashioned them into 500 compact, concrete blocks.[79] A smaller-scale version of this artistic undertaking was exhibited at the Peter Kilchmann Gallery, Zurich. In this gallery setting, fifty hand-made blocks, all of equal proportions and dimensions, were placed uniformly in the exhibition hall. As the blocks visually resembled headstones, the gallery space was thus transformed into a pseudo-cemetery: the spacing and placement of the blocks invites the spectator to walk around and between them, and to observe them, as one might in an actual cemetery setting. Such minimal use of space is crucial to Margolles' artistic vision, as the immediate emptiness of the exhibition hall instantaneously steers the viewer's sight to that which is present, luring the viewer towards the headstones and encouraging interaction with the installation. Indeed, they urge physical engagement, beckoning the viewer to approach them. However, while the blocks may resemble headstones, closer inspection reveals that they lack any typical epitaph or inscription. In the absence of an epitaph, the headstones thus emerge as emblems of human anonymity. This namelessness evokes the effects of necropolitics on the

[79] Ibid., p. 58.

existence of women and their bodies: as Mbembe reminds us, bodies affected by necropolitics are reduced to 'lifeless bodies […] simple relics of an unburied pain, empty, meaningless corporealities, strange deposits plunged into cruel stupor'.[80] Nevertheless, despite being rendered anonymous, the body's metonymic conversion into a headstone encourages a sense of mourning.

It is here that Butler's notions of corporeal vulnerability and grievable life are pertinent to the analysis of the installation. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Butler responds to the increased vulnerability of life in the wake of the events of 9/11, focusing specifically on the distribution of corporeal vulnerability, to critique how some populations fall victim to arbitrary violence, whilst others do not, as we can observe in relation to the gender-crimes at the border. Butler's interpretations raise pertinent, timely questions about the value of life in today's world, and prove particularly applicable to Margolles' treatment of the body in her installations, and by extension, to the artistic responses to the feminicide in Ciudad Juárez. Building on her evaluation of vulnerable populations, Butler also extends her analyses to explore how death, and therefore grief, is not egalitarian: whilst some losses may be nationally or even globally recognised, others are not. As Butler puts it:

> Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as livable life and a grievable death?[81]

For Butler, some lives can be mourned, whilst others cannot. Those whose lives are precarious and affected by violence, she writes, 'are already negated' and due to this negation, they cannot be mourned because they are 'already lost or, rather, never "were."'[82] Drawing on Agamben's theory of bare life, which bears parallels to necropolitics, she insists that those 'living in a state of suspension, between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark. There will be no act of grieving'.[83] Moreover, referring to the context of the war waged on Iraq by the United States, Butler notes that those who were casualties of war in Iraq had no obituaries. In the absence of an obituary she contends that 'there would have been no life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving.'[84] These remarks present an interesting resonance with Margolles'

[80] Mbembe, p. 33.
[81] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. xiv.
[82] Ibid., p. 33.
[83] Ibid., p. 36.
[84] Ibid., p. 34.

installation in which there is no acknowledgement of individual victims via inscribed messages on the headstones. The installation lends itself to the collective loss of gendered lives. Nevertheless, the opportunities for mourning these victims are increased within the gallery setting and with the engagement of spectators who reflect upon the headstones. Does Margolles' installation not efface the once ungrievable nature of the bodies? Whilst they may not be afforded an obituary, they are at least rendered visible and shown to be real, as opposed 'interminably spectral' or 'unreal,' even if it is only a trace of material corporeality that is encountered in the headstones.[85] In doing so, Margolles forges a counter-discourse that rejects the marginalisation of necropolitics and bare life which mark bodies as disposable.

Concluding remarks

Margolles' contributing artistic response to the feminicides and her respective framing of the body sheds light on the necropolitical existence of women within the borderspace. Although ethically contentious, in her minimalist works we encounter the possibility of grieving previously ungrievable lives via her displacement of otherwise anonymous bodies into the public setting of the gallery. While the corpse is never presented in its entirety it is recurrently conjured via various representational methods, often displaced by a metonym. The next chapter will address a new visual medium: cinematography. The cinematic text to first be interrogated is titled *El otro sueño americano*. It marks a departure from the largely metaphorical narratives discussed in the previous two chapters and moves towards the didactic, mimetic representation of the female body, which as I elucidate emerges as a site of sexual exploitation in the border geography.

[85] Ibid., p. 34.

Chapter 4

The exploited body: snuff, violence and spectatorship in Enrique Arroyo's *El otro sueño americano* (2004)

> The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement […] It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.[1]

Introduction

This chapter and the next engage critically with cinematographic responses to feminicide in Ciudad Juárez. Departing from the creative re-imagining and re-composition of the body in Hernández and Margolles' artworks, this chapter will explore how the body and its subjection to various forms of exploitative gender-violence are framed on the small screen, in Enrique Arroyo's internationally recognised short film *El otro sueño americano*. Although the film's title alludes to the culturally romanticised 'American Dream', the film itself displays the very antithesis. Instead it depicts the dystopian story of a young female migrant's traumatic experience in the passenger seat of a police patrol vehicle in the desert peripheries of Ciudad Juárez. Driven into the desert, Sandra, the female protagonist, endures a harrowing ordeal, assaulted both physically and verbally by a Mexican policeman named Genaro. Handcuffed to the seat, Sandra is forced to listen to the macabre fate to which she will succumb, before being quite literally sold to a *gringo*, Timoteo, whose business is sex- and organ-trafficking from the border region. Although this ten-minute production, directed and scripted by Arroyo, is a fictional film, its diegesis, single-sequence shot cinematography, low-quality pixelation and static camera angle combine to deliver an unsettling sense of realism, containing many of the aesthetic and thematic features of an amateur snuff movie. Since snuff is a genre which historically involves a female victim subjected to extreme sex, violence and ultimately death, Arroyo's film constitutes a critical perspective on the physical exploitation of the female body in the borderspace. This chapter will begin with a brief contextualisation of Arroyo's creative thought-process and the film's reception both nationally and internationally. Thereafter, I will proceed to identify the central tenets of the snuff genre, and observe to what extent they are

[1] James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New Jersey: First Transaction Printing, 2012), p. 363.

present in the script and cinematography in *El otro sueño americano*. Engaging with a corpus of feminist scholarship, this chapter will probe how Arroyo's appropriation of the cinematic elements of snuff, and its close affiliations with pornography and horror, serve to politicise the subordination and commodification of female corporeality at the U.S.-Mexico frontier. Moreover, it will explore the ethical tensions involved in reconstructing scenes of female suffering and sexual exploitation, whilst also critiquing the film's potential impact on its viewers.

El otro sueño americano: production and reception

El otro sueño americano was, according to the director, inspired by his 'outrage and pathos'.[2] When the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez first came to his attention, he began to organise an archive containing articles about the murders from daily newspapers and magazines. Arroyo's research before writing the film script extended beyond journalistic excerpts, as he also managed to acquire a sample of forensic reports relating to some of the historic feminicide cases at the border, as he recounts in *Diariomonitor*:

> Cuando empezó a darse a conocer información de las mujeres que aparecían muertas en Ciudad Juárez, comencé a recortar de los periódicos y revistas estas notas para organizar un archivo. Era material muy fuerte, y no tenía muy claro qué es lo haría. Luego, hace como tres años, la novia de un amigo, que estudiaba periodismo y vivía en Ciudad Juárez, se hizo amigo del médico forense de ahí, y tuvo acceso a los reportes de las muertes de muchas de esas mujeres. Ella comenzó a escribir un libro al respecto y vino a ver a Elena Poniatowska para que le ayudara. Yo la encontré en una conferencia, y me prestó los reportes forenses por una noche para leerlos. Fue una verdadera pesadilla enterarme de todo lo que les sucedió.[3]

Given the information that he had acquired from reading these forensic investigations, he felt 'compelled to bring awareness to the brutality of these immoral crimes' which, he contends, 'eradicate the humanity of the victim'.[4] Indeed, this eradication of humanity is certainly translated as a central motif into the filmic narrative, where, as this chapter will show, the bodily agency of the female protagonist is expropriated by the two on-screen male characters, who engage in sexually abusive acts and hate speech. In order to draw attention to what was transpiring in Juárez, Arroyo drew inspiration from an investigation that had circulated at the time, which put forward eight hypotheses about the causes of the feminicides: drug- and people-trafficking, prostitution, organ-trafficking, sexual crimes, satanic cults, crimes of

[2] Interview with director, 2013.
[3] *Diariomonitor*, IMCINE, archive.
[4] Interview with director, 2013.

passion and snuff filmmaking.[5] These hypotheses, according to Arroyo, formed the basis of his idea for the film: he assimilates each hypothesis into the body of the ten-minute frame either via its mise-en-scène, dialogue or action. Indeed, the hypothesis that women were being killed for the purposes of the snuff film industry became the director's representational mode to portray the victimisation of the young female protagonist.

Released in 2004, Arroyo's *cortometraje* was applauded within the film festival circuit, particularly by foreign audiences. Its achievements can be measured by the awards that it has attained at international festivals, including: the Grand Prix at Clermont-Ferrand, best short fiction film at Festival International del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano de La Habana, the Mikeldi de Oro at the Festival Internacional de Cine Documental y Cortometraje de Bilbao, Grand Prix at the Uppsala International Short Film Festival in Sweden, and Golden Danzante award at Huesca, Spain. According to Arroyo, *El otro sueño americano* has received 'the most recognition in the history of Mexican short films', which, given its distressing subject matter, he deems 'a dubious honour'.[6] More importantly, however, Arroyo recalls how the film was shown to some of the mothers of feminicide victims in Juárez: 'Some cried. One mother was very angry, not because the film had offended her, but because she wished I had made it earlier, as a warning to their daughters and to the women of Juárez.'[7] Despite the mothers' endorsement, Arroyo's short film should not be exempt from critique. There are disturbing implications in the treatment of the female protagonist, the choice of camera angle, and, above all, the self-conscious staging of a pseudo-snuff narrative, which will be discussed below. The next section of this chapter contextualises the film in the history of snuff filmmaking, and identifies the key thematic and aesthetic elements of a snuff production. This will mark a logical departure point from which to observe how *El otro sueño americano* draws on the genre cinematographically, and the implications of these choices for the framing of the female body.

Snuff filmmaking: visual and thematic prescriptions

Snuff essentially refers to a 'filmed killing of a human being, containing a strong element of erotic sadism'.[8] The latter element features clearly in *El otro sueño americano*. Snuff films first emerged in the public imaginary in the 1970s, when rumours circulated in the U.S. that they

[5] Ibid.
[6] Interview with director, 2013.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Mark Astley, 'Snuff 2.0: Real Death Goes HD Ready', in *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, ed. by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker and Thomas Watson (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), pp. 153–170 (p. 156).

were being made in Mexico and Argentina before being imported onto the U.S.'s underground movie market.[9] This furore was precipitated by the release of Michael and Roberta Findlay's aptly named film, *Snuff* (1976), which purported to contain an actual onscreen murder; its public advertisement alluded to women being the paradigmatic victims by featuring the image of a mutilated woman beneath the denigrating tagline: 'Snuff […] the film that could only be made in South America… where life is CHEAP'.[10] Ultimately, however, snuff films remain more of a cultural myth, or, to cite Dolores Tierney, an 'urban legend'.[11] Tierney suggests that snuff filmmaking 'inhabits the tenebrous interstitial and illegal space between the real and the imaginary', because although many might know what the genre entails, nobody has necessarily seen a snuff movie, or at least nobody would readily admit to it.[12] Instead, it is fictional narratives that have propagated the genre's presence in the cultural imaginary. Multinational films, mostly belonging to the horror or thriller genre, such as *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Hardcore* (1979), *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980), *Videodrome* (1983), *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* (1992), *8mm* (1999), *Tesis* (1996), *The Brave* (1997), *The Great American Snuff Film* (2003), *Vacancy* (2007), and *A Serbian Film* (2010) have all capitalised on the snuff genre, appropriating it as a mode of visual production or incorporating it at the centre of a dramatic plotline.[13]

---

[9] Neil Jackson, 'Introduction: Shot, Cut, and Slaughtered', in *Snuff*, ed. by Jackson et al., pp. 1–20 (p. 6).
[10] Eithne Johnson and Eric Schaffer, 'Pornography and Sexual Representation', *Journal of Film and Video*, 45 (1993), 40-59 (p. 44).
[11] Dolores Tierney, 'The Appeal of the Real in Snuff: Alejandro Amenábar's *Tesis* (*Thesis*)', *Spectator*, 22 (2002), 45-55 (p. 46).
[12] Ibid., p. 46.
[13] In particular, *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* (commonly known by its English translation of *Man Bites Dog*) and *A Serbian Film* engineer plots where the spectator is drawn into the underground world of snuff film-making, showing the processes whereby such films are made. Directed by the Belgian trio, Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel and Benoît Poelvoorde (who also plays the central character), *C'est arrivé près de chez vous* is constructed as a mockumentary with elements of dark humour. A sense of realism is created as a film crew trails the protagonist Ben and captures on tape the multiple, gratuitous murders he commits. Women are not the sole victims within this narrative, as Ben's ruthless, psychotic and impetuous nature to kill means that over the course of his escapades we bear witness to murders of men and women, young and old, without discrimination. One scene, however, is typical of the snuff genre: a woman is seen to be gang-raped on a table and later eviscerated by Ben and his fellow filmmakers. In a similar vein, although arguably more graphically shocking, *A Serbian Film* revolves around the spectator being made complicit in the making of a snuff film. It is a filmic narrative that contains recurrent scenes of pornography and brutal violence, along with rape, incest and paedophilia, mostly acted out against female victims. An alternative perspective on snuff is found in films such as *Tesis* and *8mm*, which both rely on the scenario where taped video footage of a snuff film is found showing a lone female being tortured and murdered; this is then investigated, justice sought for her and morality is seemingly restored. Spectatorially, we engage with the taped materials by proxy, through the experience and reaction of the central protagonists who watch them: a series of edited crosscuts and reverse angle shots oscillate between the film being played on a television and the recoiling of the onlooking characters. Unlike *A Serbian Film*, where the viewer is obliged to discover their own, subjective moral compass through exposure to extreme

Although fictional narratives are based on visual simulations of snuff aesthetics, they have extended our understanding of the representational strategies employed and the formal characteristics of the genre. First and foremost, a central trope of snuff is the body, which, according to Mark Astley, is filmed 'in distress', 'affected by violent events', 'fetishized' and 'ruined', solely for the purposes of 'perverse entertainment'.[14] Neil Jackson asserts that snuff is not only grounded in the act of killing, but combines 'explicit images of mutilation and defilement with hardcore sex', and he describes how women are the prime victims of these films, subjected to 'sexualised murder'.[15] It is the combination of violent sex and murder inflicted on the female body in the snuff frame that has galvanised a fervent anti-snuff, anti-porn opposition, which contends that this genre epitomises the ultimate 'cinematic expression of violent misogyny'.[16] I will explore this contention in relation to Arroyo's film below. In terms of its staging, Tierney suggests that the snuff genre gravitates towards a mise en scène comprised of 'no frills, no POV shots […] just one room, […] an impersonal setting, […] one camera, […] silent, […] grainy, […] bad editing'.[17] Similarly, David Ray Carter identifies four visual and narrative components: 'a lack of credits, a lone female victim, a setting of a single room, and anonymous attackers'.[18] Like Jackson, Ray Carter analyses snuff films in gendered terms: the solitary female features as a locus of victimisation, as I will now discuss in relation to Arroyo's film, *El otro sueño americano*.

Simulating snuff: *El otro sueño americano*

It is possible to discern all these features of snuff in *El otro sueño americano*; indeed, Arroyo's assimilation of visual and narrative snuff prescriptions conflates the margins of fictional and amateur snuff to deliver a convincing situation of on-screen female victimisation. The short film begins abruptly, the screen flickering with black-and-white horizontal lines and scratchy non-diegetic sounds, suggestive of an antiquated VHS home-movie tape. A jump-cut ensues to reveal a solitary, young, dark-skinned female in the passenger seat of a moving car. The persistent drone of the vehicle's engine, coupled with the grainy, low-quality pixelation of the image, evokes what can only be described as a private, candid video, not intended for

onscreen sex and violence, *Tesis* and *8mm* might be considered more spectatorially contrived cinematic narratives that impress their own moral codes and oblige the viewer to espouse them.

[14] Astley, p. 156.

[15] Jackson, p. 2.

[16] Ibid., p. 4.

[17] Tierney, p. 46.

[18] David Ray Carter, 'It's Only a Movie? Reality as Transgression in Exploitation Cinema', in *From the Arthouse to the Grindhouse: Highbrow and Lowbrow Transgression in Cinema's First Century*, ed. by John Cline and Robert Weiner (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), pp. 297–316 (p. 302).

commercial consumption. Furthermore, the camera apparatus itself remains static, angled in the direction of the seated female subject, capturing her every move, emotion and reaction. The tailoring of the image to resemble that of uncovered amateur footage, together with the stationary positioning of the lens, clearly allude to the generic features of snuff aesthetics. The poor image quality reinforces the apparently unedited and unprofessional nature of the video, and prompts the viewer to immediately question the origin of the footage. Indeed, Arroyo's intention was to produce a film that would genuinely appear aged and damaged; he accomplished this effect by the simple method of downloading filmed digital footage onto a VHS analogue format tape, which he then manually crushed in order to partially spoil the reel.[19]

Another fundamental element of snuff filmmaking that Arroyo espouses is the single-sequence shot; this feature generates a sense of realism, as Tierney explains:

> Out of reverence for the ontological "wholeness" of the real's unfolding in space/time, one of the essential aesthetic prescriptions of snuff is that it be shot in one, long continuous take. […] The ontological imperative for the single take in snuff film is to convince of its reality, that the violence is not a special effect.[20]

In rejecting montage, Arroyo was also inspired by the twentieth-century Russian director, Andrei Tarkovsky, whose cinematic methodology he appropriated.[21] Tarkovsky opposed the basic principles of Soviet Montage Theory, which prescribed editing as the *sine qua non* of filmmaking. As director and early pioneer of that movement, Sergei Eisentein had professed in his essay, *The Cinematographic Principle of the Ideogram*, that 'cinematography is, first and foremost, montage'.[22] By contrast, Tarkovsky's style was characterised principally by his extensive use of lengthy single-sequence shots, as seen in *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1975) and *Stalker* (1979). This stylistic choice represented Tarkovsky's endeavour to bring the spectator closer to real time, and as Robert Bird states, 'to create a concrete spatial and narrative matrix within which the stochastic flow of time could interfere at once randomly and meaningfully'.[23] For the purpose of *El otro sueño americano,* Arroyo stated that he wanted to produce a single-sequence shot, not only to correspond with the conventions of the snuff genre, but also as a form of filmic experimentalism to gauge, in his words, 'how long a single frame could hold without losing the spectator's interest'.[24] Thus, for Arroyo, the structuring of the mise-en-scène

[19] Interview with director, 2013.
[20] Tierney, p. 46.
[21] Interview with director, 2013.
[22] Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2014), p. 28.
[23] Robert Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, London, 2008), p. 171.
[24] Interview with director, 2013.

was crucial: everything inside the frame counts and has to tell the story in order to retain the audience's gaze. Arroyo also adheres to the French film theoretician Andre Bazin's predilection for the long take. For Bazin, the long take represents a superior mode of filmmaking, in contrast to the customary use of montage, chiefly because of its fixed relationship with reality: time and space unfold realistically within the frame for the spectator. In his study *What is Cinema?* Bazin argues that the montage used by the Soviet Montage movement and German Expressionism, in effect, serves to 'impose its interpretation of an event on the spectator',[25] whereas the uninterrupted long take has the capacity to relocate the spectator precisely within the scene that is taking place before the camera. As an advocate of realism, Bazin emphasises the need for 'spatial unity' which, if disrupted or deconstructed, 'would change it from something real into something imaginary'.[26] In *El otro sueño americano,* the spectator's gaze is forcefully drawn into the mêlée of the action as a result of his or her occupation of the all-seeing, all-witnessing "third eye" embodied by the surveillance camera. Thus, the single-sequence shot enlists the spectator's participation in the frame, and obliges him or her to observe the vicious victimisation of the female character; in doing so, it encourages reflection and independent interpretation.

Besides conforming to the typical cinematographic elements of snuff filmmaking, such as the solitary camera, low image definition, single sequence shot, *El otro sueño americano* simultaneously remains somewhat, though not entirely, faithful to the thematics of the genre, which amalgamates, as Jackson notes 'porn and horror tropes'.[27] Within the first minute of the short film, the audience is made aware of a male character who seems to be driving the vehicle, a character who will shortly become a dominant force in the narrative, both verbally and physically. His engagement with the on-screen female known as Sandra is initiated by a conversation between the two, which generates an instant sense of foreboding. When Sandra asks, "¿Adónde vamos?" the response is not an answer, but rather a derisive comment about supposedly being a prostitute. Having made no attempt to negate this statement, Sandra remains silent, nervously twisting a loose strand of hair. The male antagonist, who, we learn only in the latter stages of the film, is called Genaro, proceeds to demonstrate his disdain towards Sandra, by mocking the 'American Dream' he believes she wants to pursue across the border. As the narrative swiftly unfolds, the scenario becomes clearer, and the audience is made aware that

[25] André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume I* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 26.
[26] Ibid, p. 50.
[27] Jackson, p. 4.

Sandra has in actual fact been arrested for the possession of cocaine and is currently travelling in a police car or *patrulla*.

The dialogue and action of the short film turn to matters of negotiation and sex, commencing with the policeman's corrupt proposal of "¿Cómo nos vamos a arreglar?", followed by Sandra's retort: "¿Le hago un servicio, si me da mis cosas y me deja ir?" From now on, the pornographic dimensions of the snuff genre dominate the film. After Sandra obligingly partakes in Genaro's offer to snort cocaine, she engages in the act of fellatio on his instructions, as part of an anonymous arm enters the frame and forces her head downwards into his off-screen crotch. Because of the static camera angle, the performance of oral sex is not filmed in explicit detail with the aid of POV shots or close-ups; nevertheless, the vigorous physical movements are reflected in the adjacent passenger seat window, and Genaro provides a running commentary of the sexual act as he groans, "No, si sí sabes hacer tu trabajo, putita. Despacio, despacio, así, despacio. Así despacio. ¡Ay, la putísima madre!"

Genaro's orgasm coincides with the audible metaphor of a train hurtling overhead as they pass through a dimly-lit tunnel, and the traversing of this tunnel marks a pivotal moment in the film's narrative, propelling Arroyo's simulated snuff mode into the genre's more infamous sadistic realms of sexual sadism. The prior passing of an assemblage of pink crosses, iconographic reminders of the Juárez feminicides, gives semiotic forewarning of the fate awaiting Sandra and seemingly correlates male libidinal satisfaction with female death. This digression is marked by Sandra's spitting Genaro's ejaculated semen out of the window, which instantly enrages him. Punishment is initially enacted with masculine physical force, as Genaro aggressively wrenches Sandra's hair and thrusts her against the passenger window, injuring her in the process. With the split second contemplation of a fight or flight tactic, Sandra retaliates by thrashing her arms against Genaro and hollering "¡Te voy a denunciar, cabrón!" Physical violence then ensues and the assertion of male dominance and female submission is visualised by a powerful punch to Sandra's face which knocks her unconscious. The ultimate coup de grâce for Genaro's masculinity then arises when Sandra attempts to escape his control, an effort which is immediately thwarted as Genaro returns her to her seat, physically assaults her again and then handcuffs her to the handrail in the car, stringing her up. Reduced to a controlled, punished object, Sandra is labelled 'una pinche puta a la que nadie va a extrañar,' underscoring the expendable nature of her existence at the border – a key precondition of the Juárez feminicides, as this thesis has shown. Hereafter, Sandra is tortured, not physically but psychologically, via a vitriolic monologue that overwhelms the dialogue. Genaro describes in

lurid details the almost inconceivably horrific physical and sexual abuses Sandra's body will be forced to endure before being killed:

> No sabes con quién te metiste, pinche vieja. Vas a sufrir. Primero te van a violar entre muchos. Hasta que te sangre la […]. Estos vatos están bien pinches locos. Y les encantan las perritas jóvenes así como tú. Yo los he visto a los cabrones. Te apagan cigarros en las verijas. Y ya cuando se hartan de ti te matan a patadas como un perro. Muerta te siguen cogiendo. Y esto te lo ganaste tú por pasarte de verga conmigo. Y yo portándome buena onda contigo… La madre… A una le metieron un tubo por el culo, hasta que le perforaron los pulmones. No más se iban turnando los cabrones. Todavía estaba viva cuando empezaron. Hay días en que todavía escucho sus gritos.

Genaro's recital of the sadistic practices the protagonist's body will endure gestures towards what will happen off-screen, and foretells the shocking final stages of Sandra's life. This graphic description thus marks a departure from the explicit visual content expected of a snuff film, as it displaces scenes of further violence, sex and death to outside the frame.

Instead, the short film suggests that the killing of Sandra will occur elsewhere in this desert location. The closing three minutes of Arroyo's ten-minute production reveal what is intimated to be Sandra's final destination. The patrol car grinds to a halt in an isolated plot of wasteland, indicative of the paradigmatic shots of the peripheries of Juárez in feminicide documentaries and *El traspatio*, as we will see in the next chapter. Another male figure immediately opens the passenger door and proceeds to physically assault the handcuffed and defenceless Sandra. He inspects her and simulates a scene that may take place at a livestock auction, as he objectifies her body, gropes her breasts and speaks about her in the third person, reinforcing her current dehumanised state and devalued existence. During the exchange between this *gringo*, Timoteo, and the police officer, Genaro, it becomes clear that Timoteo operates a business in human-, sex- and organ-trafficking out of the globalised border, an industry that is evidently safeguarded and even endorsed by the Mexican police. As such, he is able to conduct his business with immunity from the law and in collusion with its enforcers, as evidenced by Genaro's literal sale of Sandra. Contorted against the seat, with her arm strapped up to the handrail, and her face turned away from the camera lens, Sandra's body resembles not that of a woman but a carcass, suspended from an abattoir hook. Much like meat, Sandra's body will also become a product of consumption that is purchased and consumed for momentary sexual gratification and to sate sadistic desires; as Timoteo remarks, "llegaron unos locos de Tejas. Unos güeros grandotes. Con billetes. No solo quieren coger, dicen, quieren descarnar. Pinches locos." His image, illuminated by the outdoor sunlight, contrasts with the now obscured interior of the vehicle, which draws the viewers' gaze to an almost anachronistic sepia image of John

Lennon printed on his T-shirt. This iconic headshot of the musician, taken by the Scottish photographer Ian McMillan for the 1969 *Abbey Road* album, pierces the screen, in an act of irony. Lennon's pacifist persuasions and desires for a utopian, equal world, as evoked by the lyrics of *Imagine*, stand in stark contrast to the dystopian inequality at the U.S.-Mexico border, where female bodies are traded.

The final moments of the short film prove revelatory for the spectator. As Genaro drives away into the desert, leaving Sandra's fate in the hands of Timoteo, he turns to switch off the surveillance camera, reverting the screen back to the original horizontal flickering lines with which the narrative had opened. This re-emphasises the film's guise of unedited, found footage. When the end credits roll, a brief message inscribed with pink lettering appears, informing the audience that, whilst what have they have just watched is a fictional representation with fictitious characters, the scenario resembles the current reality at the border, where women have been victimised and subjected to impunity for over ten years. The message then concludes with statistics of female murders in Ciudad Juárez recorded by the PGR and by Amnesty International. This concluding revelation gestures towards the underlying socio-political subtext of the film where the horrors portrayed onscreen are revealed to be an allegory for the real horrors affecting women in Ciudad Juárez. With this in mind therefore, it is crucial to analyse the broader effects of representing the female in a pseudo-snuff production, and observe how its generic affiliations with pornography serve to politicise the denigration of the female body. I will address this line of thought by exploring how the framed subordination and objectification of the body critically projects wider fears about feminicide at the U.S.-Mexico border, and how Sandra's victimised body operates rhetorically to address broader social concerns about gender-violence.

Framing the female body in snuff: a feminist perspective

Figures 11 and 12: *El otro sueño americano*

As *El otro sueño americano* is consciously staged as a pseudo-snuff production, it is the female body that becomes the visual onscreen focal point. As already mentioned, the narrative content of a snuff film is straightforward and perturbing: the videoed murder of a female victim. Death is of course the final climatic ingredient, however, it is precipitated by the female being subjected to other degrading acts of sex and violence, combining, as Jackson puts it, 'conventions from realist horror films and pornography'.[28] Given the centralisation of the female figure and her subjugation to such horrors, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas urges us to engage with snuff narratives first and foremost through a perspective of 'gender politics'.[29] Snuff, with its close affiliation to pornography, has certainly faced trenchant feminist opprobrium; as Pamela Donovan explains, snuff films epitomise the 'totalizing quality of male control of women and the trivialization of their lives and their flesh'.[30] This is echoed in the writings of feminist intellectual Catherine Mackinnon, who regards snuff films as the definitive expropriation of female bodily agency, to the point of complete corporeal dehumanisation:

> Snuff films, in which actual murder is the ultimate sexual act, the reduction to the thing form of a human being and the silence of women literal and complete. Such material combines the graphic sexually-explicit […] activities like hurting, degrading, humiliating, that is, actively subordinating, treating unequally, as less than human, on the basis of sex.[31]

Mackinnon's critique of snuff forms part of her wider anti-pornography project. Her extensive publications about pornography elucidate her staunch conviction that it creates an 'institution of gender inequality'. She notes that a visible paradigm is constructed within pornography that dictates male supremacy over the subordinated female figure. Such a paradigm therefore reinforces women's ontological status as objects of male desire and domination. For Mackinnon, women in pornography are constructed 'as things for sexual use', for the purposes of phallic arousal and satisfaction.[32] She surmises that the use and possession of women in pornography narratives contributes to their 'social definition as inferior'.[33] Mackinnon further argues that pornography commoditises female corporeality: 'it sells women to men as and for

[28] Jackson, p. 2.
[29] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, *Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2014), p. 58.
[30] Pamela Donovan, *No Way of Knowing: Crime, Urban Legends and the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 37.
[31] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words*, 5th edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 23.
[32] MacKinnon, 'Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: "Pleasure under Patriarchy"', *Ethics*, ii, 99 (1989), 314–346 (p. 327).
[33] Ibid, p. 327.

sex. It is a technologically sophisticated traffic in women.'[34] Central to her preoccupation is the 'cruelty,' 'dehumanization' and 'objectification' of women depicted in pornography, which, in turn, 'actualize the distinctive power of men over women'.[35] Mackinnon is not alone in her critique of pornography's socially detrimental effects. Fellow feminist Andrea Dworkin similarly considers it a genre that exalts 'male power' and argues that 'the degradation of the female is the means of achieving this power'.[36] Similarly, Susan Brownmiller suggests that pornography is 'a male invention designed to dehumanize women, to reduce the female to an object of sexual access'.[37] In *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality*, co-written by Mackinnon and Dworkin, the authors offer a noteworthy theorisation of pornography and classify it as follows:

> The graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words that also includes one or more of the following: (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display; or (vi) women's body parts – including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, or buttocks – are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts; or (vii) women are presented as whores by nature; or (viii) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or (ix) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injure, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes those conditions sexual.[38]

Mackinnon and Dworkin's definition firmly underscores the relationship between pornography and gendered violence. Moreover, there are correlations between their comments and Arroyo's framing of the female body through pornographic imagery, in keeping with snuff prescriptions. The politics of the female body and its consequential treatment in this narrative provokes a broader contemplation of its historical context. By representing female embodiment within the U.S.-Mexico borderspace purely through its physical exploitation, Arroyo raises concern about women's precariousness and projects the fears of anti-female terror which are attached to feminicide discourse. Arroyo's short film thus emulates the subordination and objectification of female corporeality encountered in pornographic materials which was explained above.

---

[34] MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 195.
[35] Ibid., p. 127.
[36] Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 25.
[37] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2000), p. 394.
[38] Catharine A. MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988), p. 36.

When the tape begins to roll, an immediate medium shot focuses in on Sandra, from the waist upwards, seated in the police patrol vehicle. The camera far enough away from her body for it to be viewed objectively in relation to the mise en scène and the passing scenery seen via the passenger window which offers vital clues about the narrative's geographical context. Upon our introduction to Sandra, she comes across as an outwardly confident, vocal young woman, whose body is her own. However, as the scene unfolds and once the narrative shifts towards sex, followed by gender-violence, her initial bodily integrity and autonomy, is gradually yet visibly eroded before the camera lens. The gender inequalities embedded in pornography and, by extension, snuff, are swiftly brought into the frame, both through visual and narrative effects. Genaro immediately assumes the role of the active male character, as he leads the conversation, dominates the dialogue, controls Sandra's actions and converts her into a victim. Sandra, on the other hand is represented as a passive body as she acquiesces to Genaro's sexual impulses, showing her breasts and fellating him on command, and thereby conforming to the genre's norm of female "servility". In doing so, it juxtaposes the imbalance between the male pleasure which Genaro derives from the sexual acts, and the female pain that Sandra sustains from her attacks; this is reinforced aurally by the contrasting diegetic sound of his moans and her screams. Moreover, the hierarchical nature of these inequalities is accentuated by Sandra's positioning within the frame which is permanently one of inferiority and submission. The marginally off-kilter, high angle of the camera lens looks down upon the character, more markedly so after her attack, when she is seen slumped down in the seat and physically cuffed to the vehicle's inside handrail – a visual connotation of her restriction and powerlessness. This inferiority is marked not only by visual representation, but also the spoken narrative and action. Having engaged in dialogue at the start of the film, by the end she is rendered speechless, her voice is reduced to mere sobs and cries, in contrast to the vociferous, Genaro. The last words uttered by Sandra in the film come in the form of a helpless, childlike plea, "Quiero ver a mi mamá." This reaction is provoked by the extreme array of sexual violence that Genaro tells her she will be forced to endure, namely cigarettes being burned on her genitalia, being raped by multiple men and her orifices being violated by implements until fatal bodily harm is incurred. Just as Sandra's physical assault makes her submission to the point of dehumanisation visibly manifest, she is also linguistically rendered other, denied equality or subjectivity. Throughout the full length of the film, she is repeatedly made inferior as she is referred to using profanities such as 'una pinche puta,' 'una pendeja' and 'una culera', and addressed by derogatory animal similes and epithets, such as 'puerca' and 'perrita'. She leaves the vehicle a subordinated, inanimate, mute object awaiting yet more trauma and inevitably death.

Sandra's objectification may be aligned with feminist writings about sexual objectification, which is clearly evident in pornographic materials that reduce women in particular to the sum of their sexual organs or body parts that may sexually arouse consumers. This theory has also been applied to the perceived treatment of women in wider society, chiefly in the media and advertising. To put it simply, objectification refers to an individual being rendered a thing or object; as Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts state, it is 'a framework for understanding the experiential consequences of being female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body'.[39] Phyllis B. Frank's definition proves particularly insightful and comprehensive, equating the process of being objectified with the reduction of rights and deprivation of human qualities:

> A definition of objectification might be: portrayals of women in ways and contexts which suggest that women are objects to be looked at, ogled, even touched, or used, anonymous things or commodities perhaps to be purchased, perhaps taken – and once tired of, even discarded, often to be replaced by a newer, younger edition; certainly not treated as full human beings with equal rights or needs.[40]

Like pornography, contemporary feminist writing on sexual objectification is an expansive terrain, but for my purposes in this chapter it is worth briefly referencing some of the theoretical insights provided by central figures in the field, namely Mackinnon, Dworkin and Nussbaum. Their reflections are rooted in eighteenth-century ethics: as Evangelia Papadaki affirms, 'feminists' views on sexuality and objectification have their foundations in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant'.[41] Kant's views on the morality of sex, the problematics of sexual impulse and how it precipitates objectification are certainly reflected in modern-day theory. Central to Kantian thought about objectification is the humanity and dignity of a person. For Kant, when sex takes place outside a monogamous marriage, objectification ensues. More specifically, Kant's concern was, like the feminist perspectives explored below, that when the sexual impulse causes the objectification of a desired person, it in turn demotes their humanity, rendering them merely an object or instrument of enjoyment, only needed to sate sexual appetite. As Papadaki puts it, this 'constitutes the loss of an individual's humanity; she no longer has a dignity, an absolute value, but only a relative or instrumental value'.[42] As the

[39] Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, 'Objectification Theory', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, ii, 21 (1997), 173–206 (p. 173).
[40] Phyllis B. Frank, *Objectification of Women* (2012), <http://nomas.org/objectification-of-women/> [accessed 12 December 2016].
[41] Evangelia Papadaki, 'Sexual Objectification: From Kant to Contemporary Feminism', *Contemporary Political Theory*, iii, 6 (2007), 330–348 (p. 330).
[42] Ibid., p. 340.

extract below elucidates, for Kant, sexual impulse is the primary, if not the only, way in which an individual is converted into an object to be indulged:

> Amongst our inclinations there is one which is directed towards other human beings. They themselves, and not their work and services, are its objects of enjoyment. It is true that man has no inclination to enjoy the flesh of another – except, perhaps, in the vengeance of war, and then it is hardly a desire – but nonetheless there does exist an inclination which we may call an appetite for enjoying another human being. We refer to sexual impulse. Man can, of course, use another human being as an instrument for his service; he can use his hands, his feet, and even all his powers; he can use him for his own purposes with the other's consent. But there is no way in which a human being can be made an object of indulgence for another except through sexual impulse. This is in the nature of a sense, which we can call the sixth sense; it is an appetite for another human being […] Taken by itself it is a degradation of human nature; for as soon as a person becomes an Object of appetite for another, all motives of a moral relationship cease to function, because as an Object of appetite for another person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by every one.[43]

Such Kantian thought can be found echoed in Martha Nussbaum's pivotal article *Objectification*, in particular her views on the instrumentality of another. She deems objectification, however, to be more of a multi-layered concept, revealing multiple variations attached to the term. Unlike Kant, and even Mackinnon and Dworkin, Nussbaum does not concur that objectification is entirely negative, it can, as she elaborates in the article be both good and bad, however she stresses that objectification is always contingent upon the context in which it transpires and is 'morally problematic.'[44] For Nussbaum, objectification is comprised of seven distinct ideas as to how a human being may be treated as a thing or object, she lists: as an instrument, as lacking in autonomy, as lacking in agency, as interchangeable, as violable, as able to be bought and sold, as lacking in subjectivity.[45] Nussbaum reveals that what is at issue is how one treats another person, essentially she writes, 'one is treating as an object what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being.'[46] Mackinnon's reaction to the sexual objectification of women is more zealous than Nussbaum whose line of enquiry is more neutral and multi-dimensional. Be it in pornography, or within the social fabric of daily life, Mackinnon argues that 'all women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water'.[47] She establishes a trialectic between objectification and the commoditisation of women's bodies that concretises hierarchical gender relations. Mackinnon surmises that, 'like the value of a

[43] Immanuel Kant, cited in Papadaki, p. 331.
[44] Martha C. Nussbaum, 'Objectification', *Philosophy andPublic Affairs*, iv, 24 (1995), 249–291 (p. 289).
[45] Ibid., p. 257.
[46] Ibid., p. 257.
[47] Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 149.

commodity, women's sexual desirability is fetishized' and in turn makes 'supremacist sexuality a material reality of women's live'.[48] If a woman is deemed to be sexually objectified, it implies, according to Sandra Lee Bartky that 'a woman's body, body parts or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her'.[49] This is by no means a novel understanding of the objectified status of the female body. The objectification of women's bodies is pervasive in marketing, advertising, cinematography, fashion, amongst other fields.

Although Nussbaum may advocate that not all sexual objectification is detrimental or harmful to the objectified, within Arroyo's screenplay, objectification is highly contentious. In this case, objectification appears as a justification for the sexual exploitation of the onscreen female protagonists Moreover, her identity is noticeably reduced to anatomical parts such as 'las chichis,'(breasts) 'el culo,' (arse) and 'la verija' (vagina) which Genaro forcefully implies will be groped and violated. The film thus alludes to the female body as an expendable entity that serves no purpose, with the exception of being apposite for sexual gratification and abuse.

Violating the voyeur: spectatorship, ethical encounters and memory

Spectatorship occupies a tenuous yet imperative position in *El otro sueño americano* and invites reflection on the politics of looking at suffering, particularly the suffering of a female subject. The central problematic to be explored is the spectator's agency or role within the film's narrative. Is the spectator a witness to events or complicit in the victimisation of the on-screen female? Is such imagery the object of a traditional voyeuristic gaze, or could the spectator's visual experience be deemed an ethical encounter? To some extent, the spectator embodies all of these functions and thus spectatorship is by nature heterogeneous. As film theorist Michele Aaron proposes, 'spectatorship has always been bound up with […] the spectator's activity or passivity, manipulation or resistance, distance or implication'.[50] To regard spectatorship as a site of tension is by no means a novel concept: the underlying complexity of spectatorship has been the subject of an extensive discussion in the broader field of cinematic enquiry, particularly since its advent in academia during the 1970s. Mobilised by the importation of ideologies from separate disciplines, such as phenomenology, semiotics, gender studies and psychoanalysis, screen-spectator relations have been dissected and probed through various analytical lenses.

[48] Ibid., p. 152.
[49] Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 35.
[50] Michele Aaron, *Spectatorship* (London: Wallflower, 2007), p. 1.

The director, Arroyo, consciously places the viewer in the frame as the all-seeing eye, making him or her almost complicit with the female's on-screen victimisation. Like Hitchcock or the contemporary Austrian director Michael Haneke, Arroyo employs a voyeuristic framework to implicate the spectators, obliging them to question their presence in the film's narrative. In film theory, such participation from the audience would be classified as a feat of voyeurism, but I am reluctant to categorise the spectatorial experience of watching *El otro sueño americano* within the parameters of conventional voyeurism, given its illicit connotations and relationship with subject/object desire. As opposed to the sexual gratification reaped from the ontological pleasures of voyeurism, I would contend that the amateur-style filming, and employment of the single sequence shot, which adheres to the indexicality of Bazinian *ciné vérité*, approximates the spectator with reality and ethically challenges the traditional meaning of the voyeuristic gaze. Although I acknowledge the widespread arguments in film theory which, following Mulvey, deem voyeurism a gendered vehicle of sexual perversion, in the case of *El otro sueño americano*, I would support the more contemporary vision of Mark Ledbetter, who has expanded this field of studies to encompass the definition of voyeurism as that of a 'necessary ethical encounter'.[51] Ledbetter's philosophical article, 'Do Not Look at Y/Our Own Peril', has been regarded as an 'impassioned defense of the contested category of voyeurism'.[52] The article attempts to shift common assumptions away from the sexualised voyeuristic gaze and direct contemplative thought towards the ethical and moral benefits of looking, or what he calls 'the ethical integrity of voyeurism'.[53] Drawing upon ideas proposed by Scarry, Sontag, Levinas, Baudrillard and Artaud, Ledbetter engages especially with the notion of observing images of suffering, which is particularly applicable to the disturbing content exposed by *El otro sueño americano*. To elaborate upon his conception of voyeurism, Ledbetter states:

> We are voyeurs by nature, and voyeurism is necessary to ethical encounter. Certainly to look, in private or public, has the potential of violation. But to look and see empathetically is in turn to be violated, to be vulnerable, and violation, if not indictment? culpability? empathy?, is at the heart of the ethical moment. Engaged looking, vulnerable seeing, like Baudrillard's notion of seduction, has the possibility of "putting things in play." So I like the definition of voyeurism that says "to lie in wait." Sure it has its own interesting connotations towards the "shady side," but I would like

[51] Mark Ledbetter, 'Do Not Look At Y/Our Own Peril', in *Ethics and Images of Pain* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012), pp. 3–14 (p. 3).
[52] Ibid., p. 3.
[53] Ibid., p. 4.

> us to think that each of us is lying in wait to do a good thing, that each of us is waiting to see what to do, which requires us to look whether invited or not.[54]

His conversational style writing is somewhat uncharacteristic of academia, and exudes a certain optimism or perhaps even naivety about the inherent virtuousness of humankind, as if this quality is lying in wait to do a good deed. On reflection, however, his optimism is as bountiful as Mulvey's feminist scepticism in her pioneering essay 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema', in which she recurrently returns to psychoanalytic thought to establish that 'woman as representation signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat'.[55] With Ledbetter's theory, the voyeur becomes the seer; he or she frames the ethical moment, gives perspective, values implications and then chooses to act or not act, as he or she has been brought into the frame not to objectify but rather to question. This theoretical evaluation alludes to Levinas' philosophy, and the notion of the face-to-face encounter through which a figurative communion manifests itself between the spectator and subject.

Ledbetter's writings equally correlate with the concept of surveillance, a prevailing feature of Arroyo's film. From a closer inspection of the cinematography, we may glean that the spectator's vision is not aligned with the perpetrator, but with the surveillance lens. Thus, if we recognise the primary ontological parameters of surveillance, as a mode of security, invested in the ideological monitoring of society, identifying disreputable activity and quelling it, then the spectator may be interpreted as the invisible Panopticon guard surveying the situation from a pseudo-Foucauldian watchtower, observing 'docile bodies, bodies in space, the distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchal organisation, of disposition of centres and channels of power'.[56] In a contemporary society where technology and surveillance are so weighted around power relations, discipline and punishment and the visibility of truth, the camera lens thus figures as an access point for the spectator to witness gender violence, establishing morality in an otherwise immoral cinematic space.

Ledbetter's argument also aligns with the conclusions of Dean Lockwood, whose article 'All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of "Torture Porn"' expounds upon the morally transformative possibilities of viewing cinematic suffering for the on-looking audience. Whilst horror and its

---

[54] Ibid., p. 4.
[55] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 833–844.
[56] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 136.

respective subsets are believed to bask in the delight of gratuitous violence or 'troubling amorality', Lockwood proposes a respectable counter-argument, on the basis of affect theory. Drawing on the work Gabrielle Murray, who has written at length about representations of bodily pain in modern horror films, Lockwood writes: 'what the cinema mostly does, and one of the main reasons we continue to engage with its content, is that it *affects* us – it makes us feel'.[57] If, then, the 'moral pollution' projected in horror, is understood through theories of affect, such a genre may in fact have 'a transformative and liberating potential'.[58] He establishes that within the genre, the concept of morality does not exist; rather, it is the spectator who actively fills this vacuum with a moral framework when watching the terrifying unfolding of the plot. The eliciting of these emotions, which Lockwood identifies as 'the affect of horror', challenges the moral compass of the audience and 'causes panic amongst the established guardians of morality'.[59] This argument is further developed by Aaron, for whom amoral cinema is 'an essential ingredient to ethical cinema' and spectatorial agency 'a marker of socio-political responsibility'.[60]

Concluding remarks

By means of conclusion, *El otro sueño americano* proves to be a challenging and somewhat incendiary filmic portrayal of the feminicides which is accentuated by its visual and thematic similarities to the horror sub-genre, snuff. Although precariously close to exploitation, I would argue that this short-film is allegorical, and acts as a vehicle of communication to expose the social decay of its respective context. Whilst *El otro sueño americano* alludes to the brutal rape that awaits Sandra, the next filmic text to be interrogated in Chapter Five goes beyond such inferences. In *El traspatio*, as I will now discuss, the film brings to the screen the harrowing rape of the central female protagonist prior to her murder.

[57] Dean Lockwood, 'All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of "Torture Porn"', *Popular Communication*, i, 7 (2009), 40–48 (p. 41).
[58] Ibid., p. 40.
[59] Ibid., p. 42.
[60] Aaron, p. 88.

Chapter 5

The ne(cro)liberal body: labour and rape in Carlos Carrera's *El traspatio/ Backyard* (2009)

> Neoliberalism's industries of disposability relentlessly enforce unchecked notions of the private that both dissolve social bonds and deter conditions of agency from the civilian landscape of responsibility and ethical considerations. Absorbed into privatized orbits of consumption, commodification, and display, inhabitants of neoliberal societies are entertained by the toxic pleasures of spectacles of violence which cannot be divorced from the parasitic presence of the corporate state, the concentration of power and money in the upper 1 percent of the population, the ongoing militarization of all aspects of society, and the relentless, aggressive depoliticization of the citizenry.[1]

Introduction

As we have observed in Chapter Four, the plight of the feminicide victims has not escaped the cinematic imagination. Filmic responses, whether in fiction or documentary form, have become a crucial medium through which to recall and re-present these women's stories to a global audience. Fictionalised adaptations of the murders, in particular, began to be produced and circulated towards the latter end of the 1990s, with a succession of feature films and television series produced over the space of almost two decades, portraying the crimes from multiple perspectives and via a variety of genres. This chapter will examine another cinematic narrative from the canon, the bilingually-titled feature film, *El traspatio/Backyard* (2009), directed by Carlos Carrera. To date, this film, I would contend, is the most credible in addressing the feminicides on-screen, a viewpoint that is also shared by *La Jornada*'s Luis Tovar who posits: 'hasta ahora es la propuesta fílmica más honesta y claridosa – en *largo* de ficción – que se hace en torno al tema de las asesinadas de Juárez'.[2] The film follows the parallel storylines of two female protagonists arriving in Ciudad Juárez for the first time. Blanca Bravo (Ana de la Reguera) is a police detective enlisted to investigate the murder and disappearance of women, while Juana (Ázur Zagada) is a young Cintalapan who migrates to the border in search of work at one of the foreign-owned maquiladoras. Although a fictional dramatisation, the film is pseudohistorical and appears to be based upon cases, evidences, characters and truths that have emerged since the gender-crimes were purported to have begun in the border region (see

[1] Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux, *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015), p. 53.
[2] Luis Tovar, 'Los huevos y la canasta', *La Jornada*, 22 March 2009. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/03/22/sem-tovar.html> [accessed 5 December 2015].

Chapter One). The film brings to the fore the intersecting forces of the neoliberal economy, politics and social culture, which coalesce in this geography, and which consequently imperil the female body, making her vulnerable to sexually-motivated attacks and murder. This chapter will examine the on-screen representation of the demise of the female body, specifically that of the protagonist, Juana. After her arrival in the borderspace, she undergoes a marked physical and psychological transformation that culminates in her death. Close attention will be paid to how the film presents the maquiladora industry and the profit-driven economy which undermines human rights, devalues life and propagates a narrative of female disposability within the social fabric of the border. The filmic narrative will be largely analysed through the theoretical arguments of Brad Evans, Henry Giroux and Sayak Valencia Triana with respect to neoliberalism, violence and the politics of disposability. The final sections of this chapter will focus on the film's denouement: the screening of Juana's gang-rape and death. With a series of progressively violent sequences preceding her brutal assault and ultimate demise, I will question Carrera's cinematic representation of rape, its significance within the film, as well as the manner in which Juana's body is abused by her assailants, instigated both by a misogynistic sense of entitlement and by male revenge to compensate for romantic rejection. Drawing on scholarship related to rape in cinema, I will dissect the scene sequence, to consider the implications of watching sexual crimes on-screen, and to suggest that Juana's body functions as a metonym for the broader, exploited female body politic in contemporary Ciudad Juárez.

The Juárez feminicides on the silver screen

There is a series of fictional cinematic responses that have been based on or use as a principal thematic component the murder of women in Ciudad Juárez. Some of these have achieved more commercial success and notoriety than others. Most, however, have attracted weighty criticism from academics and film journalists. For example, Socorro Tabuenca reviews how the reality of feminicide is reconstructed in the films *16 en la lista* (1998), *Pasión y muerte en Ciudad Juárez* (2002) and *Espejo retrovisor* (2002), all of which can be categorised as thrillers, which is to say that they generate suspense for the audience watching the protagonists fall victim to danger.[3] These three films are some of the first dramatisations and have not been internationally popularised, whereas others produced later feature more distinguished actors from the Mexican and Hollywood star systems. *16 en la lista* and *Pasión de la muerte en Ciudad Juárez* rely upon the mythology of the crimes, as opposed to researched facts: women are cast as prostitutes or

[3] As this thesis is being written, another Mexican film about the Juárez feminicides is scheduled to be released, *De las muertas* (2016), directed by José Luis Gutiérrez.

lacking in moral scruples, men are portrayed as psychopathic serial killers, while the police detectives are lauded as dedicated to their profession. Socorro Tabuenca considers that these representations and their narratives preserve 'patriarchal ideology' and reinforce the 'hegemonic ideology that normalizes violence against women'.[4] With scenes of gratuitous violence combined with lacklustre, uninformed scripts, these two productions exploit the crimes, rendering the female body an eroticised spectacle of violence and entertainment. However, *Espejo retrovisor* is more objective in its interpretation, taking into greater consideration the wider societal factors behind feminicide and questioning the legitimacy of the legal system. This greater objectivity is brought about by an introductory radio broadcast during the opening scene, by the presence of a narrator who provides more accurate details about the consequences of being young and poor in Juárez, and by the avoidance of clichéd female stereotypes. By subverting the usual typecasts of the media and authorities, the film, as Socorro Tabuenca concludes 'begins to question the reigning structures of power and supports the prevention of violence against women'.[5]

Several later in 2006, *The Virgin of Juárez,* directed by Kevin James Dobson, and *Bordertown*, directed by Gregory Nava, were released. Both films are structurally similar: an investigative female reporter from the U.S. travels to Ciudad Juárez to uncover the truth behind the crimes against women. *The Virgin of Juárez*, starring Minnie Driver, is by no means a credible piece of cinema in terms of narrative or plot; its hybridisation of supernatural and thriller genres to reconstruct the murders of women deflects the gravity of the situation, so as to trivialise and sensationalise feminicide. The actress Minnie Driver assumes the role of the principal character, Karina, a Los Angeles based journalist who meets a rare survivor of feminicide, Mariela, an assembly-line worker. Whilst convalescing, Mariela experiences visions of the Virgin Mary and is afflicted by stigmata, which attracts a religious following that will ultimately help to bring an end to the feminicides. The polarisation of realism and religious supernaturalism detracts from the seriousness of the issue at hand, to the point of trivialisation, relying on archaic beliefs that religion can resolve violations of human rights. Nava's *Bordertown* displays a more sophisticated approach to the feminicides. It also boasts a well-known celebrity cast, with actors such as Michael Sheen, Antonio Banderas and Jennifer Lopez

[4] María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, 'Representations of Feminicide in Border Cinema', in *Gender Violence at the U.S.–Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response*, ed. by Hector Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010), pp. 79–101 (p. 99).
[5] Ibid., p. 99.

playing central roles. Unlike previous adaptations, *Bordertown* reflects more on the complexity of the context of female victimisation. Nava's film was overtly more critical of NAFTA and the maquiladora industry, exposing its negligence towards the well-being of its female workers. The film follows the journey of a Chicago reporter, Lauren, to the Mexican frontier, where she establishes contact with a maquiladora worker, Eva, who has survived a brutal sexually-motivated attack and was left for dead. With the help of a local newspaper owner, Lauren retraces Eva's steps to discover the identity of her attackers. It is important to note that despite enlisting Hollywood stars, neither *The Virgin of Juárez* nor *Bordertown* received major recognition, and neither film was shown in movie theatres, with both going straight to DVD release.

El traspatio/Backyard and background context

One feature film, however, that has evaded criticism is *El traspatio/Backyard*, directed by Carlos Carrera, and submitted by Mexico for the category of Best Foreign Language Film to the Academy Awards (2010). Through the eyes of the police detective, Blanca, and the maquiladora worker, Juana, the audience acquires a vision of the sordid underbelly of Ciudad Juárez, in which corruption and capital impede any form of restorative justice for the victims of feminicide. Impunity from the law enables powerful male characters, such as the businessman Mickey Santos, to use the transient borderspace as a literal hunting ground for young, underage girls whom he is permitted to rape and murder, however and whenever, without legal consequences. The film's narrative encompasses the intersecting storylines of multiple characters, both male and female, from various socio-economic demographics. The lives of Blanca and Juana eventually cross under tragic circumstances in the final stages of the film, after Juana is gang-raped, asphyxiated and disposed of in the desert peripheries, dubbed the U.S.'s "backyard".

The rights to the film were acquired by Paramount Pictures in Mexico and it was produced by Indigo Films in association with Argos Comunicación, el Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, and Coppel e Inbursa. *El traspatio*'s script was penned by dramatist, writer and director Sabina Berman, who conducted on-site research before writing the screenplay, engaging directly with the citizens of Juárez, maquiladora workers and human rights activists campaigning for justice. Berman is a Mexican of Jewish heritage, who has enjoyed commercial success in the fields of literature, theatre, journalism and film. Having been awarded the Premio Nacional de Dramaturgía en México four times, and being the two-time winner of the Premio

Nacional de Periodismo, she is considered a prominent female writer in her homeland. Prior to *El traspatio*, Berman's previous film and theatre works, such as *Entre Pancho Villa y una mujer desnuda* (1996) and *Feliz nuevo siglo Doktor Freud*, tackled socio-cultural issues in Mexico, from patriarchy and gender, to violence and power. The critique of such issues was generally achieved through humour and satire, so the seriousness of *El traspatio* marks a departure from Berman's favoured genre, but it remains highly politically engaged. Joining forces with Berman, Oscar-nominated Carlos Carrera, took the helm as director. Like Berman, Carrera has also demonstrated an interest in controversial social issues. His 2002 directorial undertaking, *El crimen del Padre Amaro* (2002), confronted the hypocrisy and corruption embedded in the Catholic Church in Mexico, which sparked controversy amongst religious groups when it was released.[6] Despite a call for it to be banned by the government, the film went on to secure its place as the top grossing Mexican film of all time at the national box office, and was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards (2003).[7] In an interview with *Proceso*, Carrera explained his motivations behind being part of *El traspatio's* production: 'más que realizar una película sobre las muertas de Juárez, me interesaba ver qué sucede en el país para que se pueda dar un fenómeno de esta naturaleza, y en el guión de Sabina encontré la explicación'.[8]

Carrera and Berman worked closely together to combine their visions for the film, with the objective of producing a narrative that was political, informative and that would exact empathy from its viewing audience. From the media coverage and interviews carried out with the production team and cast, it is clear that this was not just a film for film's sake, but also a message about gender violence in Mexico, and keeping the memory of the victims alive in public consciousness. This sentiment is expounded by Carrera, in an article printed by the newspaper, *Record*:

> Lleva un mensaje implícito de acabar con el machismo y el desprecio hacia la vida de las mujeres […] lo que quiero mostrar es que un problema tan atroz como lo son los feminicidios que suceden allá, y en el resto de la República, no pueden ni

[6] Juan Jesús Aznarez, '"El crimen del padre Amaro" se convierte en la película más taquillera de México', *Espectaculos*, 16 September 2002.
[7] *El crimen del Padre Amaro* now features as the second highest grossing film after Gaz Alazraki's 2013 production, *Nosotros los Nobles*.
[8] Columba Vértiz de la Fuente, '*Traspatio* de Carrera/Berman, filme incómodo', *Proceso*, 15 February 2009, p. 67.

> deben quedarse en el olvido. Debe invitar a la reflexión y a la participación de la ciudadanía en conjunto.[9]

The notion of awakening society to the actualities of feminicide in Juárez is also echoed by Berman, who stipulates that the film 'no pretende ser una denuncia o dar soluciones'.[10] Indeed, in an interview with *La Jornada*, Berman explained that she wished to elicit empathetic reactions from the audience, stipulating 'quise hacer emocionante lo real, que el espectador sienta, sienta, sienta'.[11] *El traspatio/Backyard* serves as a reminder of the apathetic responses of the Mexican Government to the ongoing phenomenon of feminicide, and instructs its audience to wake up and react to these human rights violations. One way the film engages the emotions of its viewers is by humanising the victims of the on-screen crimes, individualising the characters and giving them a backstory, which enables the spectators to relate to the young women:

> Lo que tiene esta película es que a las víctimas tienen rostro, porque se habla mucho del problema, pero no sabemos quiénes son y el rostro de la víctima queda perdido en la página ocho de cualquier periódico. Creo que este es un punto a nuestro favor y despertará el interés de la gente por seguir atenta a lo que sucede.[12]

Unlike previous cinematic responses to the feminicides, which were filmed in the more secure parameters of the U.S., *El traspatio* was filmed on location in Ciudad Juárez to capture and translate cinematographically an authentic image of the city, its populace and space. Martin Boege, who rose to success through his work on Francisco Vargas's film, *El violín* (2005), was responsible for the photography and managed to engineer a documentary-style vision of Ciudad Juárez, drawing parallels with the imagery featured in previously released documentaries such as Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) and *Bajo Juárez* (2006), directed by Alejandra Sánchez and José Antonio Cordero. Carrera was doggedly determined to remain faithful to Ciudad Juárez and its topography through filming on location, in spite of death threats to the cast and crew during the film's making. In an interview with *Excelsior*, Carrera spoke of his determination to shoot on-location:

> Es importante contar esta historia en Juárez. Rodarla en otro lugar sería traicionar la ciudad. No me considero un hombre osado, pues siento una gran responsabilidad por documentar este lugar tan importante para el país. Es una realidad que se debe registrar.

[9] Adrián Ruiz, 'Asegura Carlos Carrera que *Backyard* quiere acabar con el machismo', *Record*, 19 February 2009, p. 58.
[10] Jorge Caballero, '*El traspatio*, postal de las hipótesis sobre los *feminicidios* en Juárez', *La Jornada*, 20 February 2009, p. 89.
[11] Ibid., p. 89.
[12] Mary Carmen Santana, 'Otra óptica del crimen', *Milenio*, 19 February 2009, p. 9.

> […] Es preocupante lo que está pasando en México debido a la complicidad, la impunidad y el desinterés de las autoridades.[13]

Regardless of the dangers presented by the city, which at the time was a prime target for President Calderón's so-called War on Drugs, the citizens of Juárez proved a vital source of information for Carrera and his crew.[14] Having been first-hand witnesses to narco-conflict and feminicide, the Juárense residents directed Carrera to notorious locations where bodies had been discovered; as the lead actress Ana Reguera comments, 'toda la gente que ha vivido estos acontecimientos nos comenta en dónde nos tenemos que ubicar y cómo'.[15] The resultant sense of authenticity enabled Carrera to strike the fine balance he wanted for the film. As he explains in *El Universal*, 'no quise ser amarillista ni caer en una estética que resaltara lo sórdido. No quería retratarlo como el infierno, como han hecho en otras películas que ni filmaron ahí.'[16] Perhaps the most sensationalised or titillating aspect of *El traspatio* was in fact in its advertising and marketing campaigns, with billboard posters boasting the tagline: 'Un lugar donde tus miedos se hacen realidad'.

El traspatio was generally well-received by reviewers. *Reforma*'s film critic, Guadalupe Loeza, directly commands her readership to view the film: 'vayan a verla, acompañe a estas mujeres y a sus familias en su dolor, pero sobre todo, acompáñelas, con su indignación y su interés'.[17] Likewise, José Felipe Coria concludes his review in *El Financiero* with the following comment: 'un filme con la suficiente capacidad de observar Ciudad Juárez como genuino traspatio en el que solo habita el horror, la podredumbre social, la injusticia, el dolor, la depredación humana, quedándose tan solo el aire, literalmente, como único rasgo digno de elogio ("el cielo es de un azul cobalto")'.[18]

El traspatio/Backyard: historical truths

Based on true events that took place in the mid-1990s, the film meticulously blends fact and fiction, both in terms of aesthetics and narrative. Aside from the cinematography which shows Ciudad Juárez through a documentary lens, several characters in the screenplay are inspired by real individuals involved in the cases of the murdered women. Most importantly, the character of Sara, the public accountant who has established a women's refuge for those who have

[13] Luis F. Castañeda, 'Le ponen rostro a la muerte', *Excelsior*, 8 March 2009, p. 8.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] *El Universal*, Cineteca archive.
[17] *Reforma*, Cineteca archive.
[18] *El Financiero*, Cineteca archive.

suffered from violence and rape, is based on the activist, Ester Chávez Cano. Chávez Cano, as noted in Chapter One, became a fervent campaigner for justice in Ciudad Juárez and was the first individual to methodically compile a list of the murder victims, including information about the circumstances of their death and the officers in charge of the investigation. In 1999, Chávez Cano founded the women's crisis centre, Casa Amiga, a non-profit organisation which supplied medical and legal support to women afflicted by gender violence.

Other characters in the screenplay that appear to be inspired by historical figures from the era include the Governor of Chihuahua, who represents the PAN-affiliated politician Francisco Barrio Terrazas. His tenure as state Governor (1992-1998) was marked by an increase in feminicide cases, which he infamously stated were caused by the women themselves because they were dressing provocatively and walking through unlit areas of the city at night. Additionally, the chief suspects originally accused of murdering women in Juárez, Abdel El Sharif and a local gang, known as Los Rebeldes, are likewise adapted, represented in the film as El Sultán and Los Cheros respectively. *El traspatio's* engagement with factual evidence means that the narrative, although fictional, acquires a greater sense of legitimacy; indeed, it complements the documentary imagery to engender a gritty representation of the crimes.

Visualising the border: a contextualisation of the opening scene

El traspatio's opening scene sequence, lasting approximately five minutes, proves to be the most revealing of the film, visually and contextually, by foregrounding the unmistakable sense of desolation and destitution that imbues the lives of those residing in the border topography of Ciudad Juárez. With a pseudo-documentary objective, the camera becomes a flâneur, its lens capturing authentic everyday scenes of the region, from the geographical terrain to the socio-cultural spaces of the city streets.[19] For the spectator, everything inside the cinematic frame is significant, from the imagery to the accompanying dialogue, both contributing genuine historical insight into the fabric of Juárez, and urging the audience themselves to assume the role of detective in order to piece together possible factors that have facilitated the gender crimes. The initial introductory shot lingers on a detailed close-up of barbed wire, from which long brunette strands of suggestively female hair are entangled, promptly evoking perceptions

[19] By pseudo-documentary, I mean that, while the narrative is fictional, some of the cinematography portrays the border city and its peripheries factually with panoramic shots; this portrayal parallels that of the documentaries about the feminicides, such as *Bajo Juárez* (see Chapter Seven). Del Jacobs defines pseudo-documentary as 'a unique cinematic form combining elements of fiction and nonfiction film'. (Del Jacobs, *Interrogating the Image: Movies and the World of Film and Television*, Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2009, p. 188).

of feminine danger, with quasi-Holocaustal implications. Much like Hernández's artwork explored in Chapter Two, the visual iconography of the border wire suggests parallels with the imagery of Nazi concentration camps, an image which is universally recognised and which speaks immediately of death and despair, central themes in *El traspatio*. These perceptions of death are further reinforced by consecutive images of oppressive, rusted metal spikes and ramshackle boundary fences bearing warning signs and Texas-state number plates. As a tracking shot then follows mounted police scouring the Juarense scrublands, the camera pans along the ground, bringing into view discarded broken bottles and a solitary white plimsoll that appears amidst the sand. These images culminate in the discovery of a semi-buried, ossified female corpse, formally identified by the police detective, Blanca. Observing the body at the crime scene, attended also by her colleague, Fierro, an on-site journalist and several press photographers, she recounts the injuries sustained, including a fractured femur, a torn-away nipple, as well as signs of strangulation. From a uniform found near the deceased, Blanca establishes that the female was formerly an employee at a foreign-owned factory based in Juárez; it is this connection with the maquiladora industry, a defining symbol of Mexico's neoliberal economy, that becomes the fulcrum of Carrera's film. As the camera draws away from the crime scene, the lens widens to show a expansive view of the desert margins of the city, incorporating Lomas de Poleo, the notorious site where actual feminicide victims were once encountered, which offers further visual context about the impoverished setting of the murders. When re-joining Blanca and Fierro in the police car on their journey downtown, the dialogue turns to the undetermined number of women murdered in Juárez, and the conflicting statistics recorded by both the police and the media. When speaking of the deaths, Fierro makes a facetious remark, "Eighty-three murders in the past three years, that's got to be a world record, right?" This is the film's first hint of doubt about the integrity of the judicial system and the value of female life in Mexico. At this point, attention is drawn to the passing vista of the U.S. bordertown, El Paso, with its iconic modernised skyline of high-rise buildings, banks and hotels. A cross-cut then contrasts this architectural prosperity just over the border with the underdeveloped mass of *colonias* occupying the Mexican borderspace, evoking Anzaldúa's reflections on the border as a site where the First and Third world meet. The film's title is then superimposed on this scene. The theme of economic privation in Juárez is further emphasised in a consecutive set of shots that depict its citizens, of all ages, aimlessly loitering around neglected, derelict neighbourhoods, walking the streets and begging. Against the backdrop of these images, a pertinent and politically-engaged song, *Politik Kills* by Manu Chao, can be heard. Chao is an artist affiliated with anti-globalisation movements, and his lyrics often

contain left-wing ideas, blaming hegemonic regimes and free-trade agreements for social inequality in the world. The short verses and repetitive chorus stress the underhanded nature of political governance that leads to the demise of its peoples:

> Politik use drugs, politik use bombs, politik needs torpedoes, politik needs blood, that's why my friend is an evidence, politik is violence […] politik need force, politik need cries, politik need ignorance, politik need lies.[20]

El traspatio's opening sequence is brought to a close by the omniscient voice of radio disc jockey, Peralta, played by actor, Joaquín Cosío, who provides a candid social commentary at intervals throughout the duration of the film. His live transmissions to the region recount a true portrayal of Juárez and its actualities that the municipal officials and government try to conceal for the sake of the economy and tourism. By contrast, Peralta's discourse pays homage to the female victims, and, as Namaste writes, 'his charged social commentary does not solve the murders […] but it does give voice to silenced public reaction'.[21] Peralta's entrance into the film's narrative is marked by his morning broadcast which characterises the city of Ciudad Juárez as a heterotopic, suffering space that continues to live up to its reputation as a location of vice for its North American neighbours:

> Good morning Juárez. Border city, crossover city. Backyard with two gates. From the U.S., trucks roll in loaded with used clothing, used jalopies for sale, expired medicines, and rich kids looking to lose their virginity to our top-notch sex workers. And from the rest of Mexico, the poorest of the poor roll in looking for minimum wage in the factories and just maybe, God willing, if the Border Patrol looks the other way, they'll hop the border as wetbacks. There you have it, Juárez. Crossroads of chaos, border city. Wounded city, crowned with the blood of murdered girls.[22]

Peralta's discerning reportage, which is narrated alongside footage of the city, contextualises this border landscape for the uninformed spectator. As the city is unveiled as a space fraught with disparities and extreme perils for its female citizens, these introductory scenes create an atmosphere of tension and foreboding, which only intensifies as the film progresses. After the broadcast, the camera cuts away from the underprivileged setting of downtown Juárez to the Chihuahua Governor's opulent ministerial office. Returning to matters of the border economy, the viewer is made privy to a three-way conversation between the Governor and a pair of disgruntled maquiladora bosses. One of their employees is reported to be the latest feminicide victim in the region, and they are concerned about the adverse effects it may have on business,

[20] Manu Chao, 'Politik Kills', *La Radiolina* (Because Music, 2007) [on CD].
[21] Nina Namaste, 'Not Just A Ciudad Juárez Problem: Extreme Capitalism, Masculinity, and Impunity in Sabina Berman's Backyard', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, iv, 22 (2012), 485–498 (p. 493).
[22] *El traspatio/Backyard*, dir. by Carlos Carrera (Scanbox Entertainment, 2010) [on DVD].

should their company be named in the press. Despite the evident loss of life, not a shred of empathy is heard during this exchange; on the contrary, the murder is rather dubbed a 'negative detail' that may hinder their broader marketing agenda. With discussions firmly rooted in the protection of corporate interests, the acquiescing Governor concludes by assuring them that he will instruct the press not to draw any associations between their maquiladora and the spate of female murders, as a means of damage limitation for their global brand. This dialectic relationship between Juárez's burgeoning industry and the value of human life is a trope that pervades the film's narrative. The neoliberal economy is used as a central axis around which the plotline and character development pivot. In *El traspatio*, neoliberalism does not simply represent an economic model that has been implemented: it is a silent antagonist whose dominion shapes the very social fabric of this border setting. Throughout the course of the film, its effects are portrayed as extending far and wide, perverting political and judicial operations, disrupting social relations and spawning a climate predisposed to extreme gender violence. In sum, it is insinuated that neoliberalism is the catalyst for young Juana's eventual downfall. On this basis, the following sections will address the film's depiction of neoliberalism, its mode of operating, its implied ramifications, and above all, its impact on Juana's character arc and ultimate demise.

The borderspace and female independence: mapping Juana's character arc

Our introduction to the female protagonist, Juana, occurs immediately after scenes of collective prayer and mourning that take place in the desert, where a group of women, accompanied by a priest, have gathered to place a cross in memory of another feminicide victim. Such scenes, preceding Juana's arrival in Ciudad Juárez, allude to the danger facing women in the city, and hauntingly forecast the tragic fate that will befall Juana herself. This melancholic footage is juxtaposed with the young character, full of anticipation, stepping off a bus, carrying only a couple of boxes bound with string. Her dark-skinned, youthful features resemble the faces of the hundreds of missing Mexican women pinned to the walls of Blanca's office, again hinting at her likelihood of an untimely death in this locale. It is, however, the promise of economic betterment, symbolised by the free market, that provides the impetus for Juana's re-location to the northern border from her rural Chiapan hometown in southern Mexico. Her cousin Márgara, with whom she will stay, has also recently moved away from the family home to this industrial hub, lured by the border's employment prospects in the flourishing maquiladora industry. Upon arrival at her cousin's home, a deliberate visual contrast is forged between the two female characters: Juana is presented in plain, outdated clothing, with a juvenile plaited hairstyle,

whilst Márgara is decidedly more en vogue, with styled hair and fashionable, vibrant clothing. The camera's consciously staged comparison between Juana and Márgara achieves two objectives: first, it illustrates that although both girls share the same humble origins, Márgara's modern border life has clearly altered her outward physical identity; secondly, it sets in motion the beginning of Juana's journey and newfound modern life at the U.S.-Mexico border, a life that we, the viewers, will follow closely as it is rapidly transformed.

Juana's arrival in Juárez and her physical transformation are instantaneous. This change is initiated by her cousin, who asserts, "I'll take out the Indian, you'll see," as she proceeds to re-style Juana's hair to resemble the Mexican-American singer, Selena, featured in the spread of a magazine laid out on the dining table. Dubbed the 'Tejano Madonna' because of her choice of costumes, Selena was one of Latin America's most adored vocal artists, and the epitome of a young, confident woman in a globalised society.[23] Here, the film's diegesis signals Juana's departure from her traditional agrarian roots, where she had previously looked after her father and tended to the land, and her subsequent entry into the world of individual self-interest, redolent of this neoliberalised space and its mantra of liberal individualism.

The awareness of Juana's newly liberated status, facilitated by this globalised environment, is quickly realised when she acquires a job at a maquiladora, working alongside her cousin and surrounded by a female-dominated labour force. Like Márgara, these women are all represented as freethinking; they run their own domestic spheres and earn a living. Whilst Juana undergoes a compulsory medical examination, the maquiladora's on-site doctor educates her about the lifestyle changes that women enjoy when residing in Ciudad Juárez, particularly their engagement in sexual activity, before he administers a prescription of contraceptive pills. Although Juana is still a virgin, the doctor's parting words prove a prophecy of things to come, as he proclaims: "Girls change here. They're liberated. They make their own money and decisions, especially with no parents around." And this prophecy swiftly becomes Juana's reality: the audience observes a noticeable character arc emerging, as she responds to her change of setting in the story. With a greater level of self-confidence, she evolves into a modern woman, like all those around her: she enjoys drinking with friends, dancing to *ranchero* music with whomever she chooses, attending self-defence classes and engaging in physical relations with men. Although she begins courting the naïve, lovestruck Oaxacan, Cutberto, when she

[23] Re-styling Juana in the image of Selena is an interesting aesthetic choice, which was perhaps deliberate, in order to foreshadow Juana's fate: Selena was shot dead at the age of 24 by her fan club manager, in March 1995.

first relocates to the border, Juana eventually rejects him, favouring her newfound autonomy over a committed relationship. She defiantly tells him, "I work nine hours Monday through Friday, so I can do what I want on Saturday […] I'm my own boss. I want to meet people. Not get tied down […] I can do whatever I want. And like they say on TV, my body is my body." These last words, "my body is my body", prove to be the most ironic statement uttered in the film. The truth of the matter is that Juárez's capital-driven setting might proffer independence, but it does not value human life. As the film unfolds, the female body is revealed to be a commodity that is exploited both economically and sexually, in equal measure, with fatal consequences. What emerges from the dystopian underside of this global economy operating in Ciudad Juárez is an unbridled narrative of disposability that penetrates the very foundations of the social fabric.

Ne(cr)oliberalism: the production of disposable bodies and violence

As this thesis has established, Mexico's transition to neoliberal economics represents a focal point of debate within feminicide discourse. It is the predominant explanatory framework for contemporary anti-female terror in Ciudad Juárez. Chapter One provided a detailed review of scholarship related to NAFTA and the broader theoretical study of neoliberal principles. Led by commentators such as Wright, Klein, Chomsky and Harvey, critiques of neoliberalism in the Third World have proved trenchant. As previously established, neoliberalism is a profoundly capitalist project that demands low taxation, privatisation and deregulation, whilst limiting government intervention and suppressing welfare initiatives. Hence idioms (see Chapter One) such as 'profit over people' and 'accumulation by dispossession' have come to encapsulate the sentiment of these free market principles, which are favourable to business and the wealthy few, but indifferent to the wider public, particularly the poorer echelons of society. Such understandings of the tenets of neoliberalism have been translated into *El traspatio*'s diegesis. The interests of the global market are regularly shown to be privileged over the wellbeing and security of Juarense citizens. This observation is perhaps best supported by a scene featuring a face-to-face meeting of the Chihuahua Governor, a Japanese businessman and a U.S. senator. Due to the alarming rate of feminicides being reported at the border, Ciudad Juárez's reputation hangs in the balance. Aiming to swiftly defuse such negative publicity, the Governor proposes better transport services for assembly-plant workers and increasing the police presence on the ground. He asks for financial contributions from multinational corporations, as well as the U.S. government, to guarantee the implementation of these proposals. As leverage, he offers to open the city up for greater international economic

programmes and suggests a grandiose campaign to equate the "betterment of life in Juárez with the name brands of maquiladoras". This incentive, however, is simply not enough. The senator, in response, clearly stipulates that the operation of the maquiladora industry is based purely on sourcing the cheapest labour in the world and maximising profit margins. Reeling off the costs of female workers in different countries, the senator cautions that the maquiladora industry will relocate to China or Bangladesh, "unless women in Juárez cost less, not more". This meeting proves to be an enlightening scene for the audience, as it clarifies that, as Namaste puts it, 'women's value in the global economy is purely an economic one; their worth is calculated in dollars, cents, costs and profits, and thus, their worth as human beings is not even considered'.[24] Above all, this exchange brings the narrative of disposability into sharper view. It underscores clearly that the female labourer's worth in this geography is solely contingent on exploitation, accumulation and corporate profitability. Moreover, it exposes the neoliberal economic model in Ciudad Juárez to be ethically bankrupt, as capital gain precludes basic welfare rights.

Evans and Giroux propose intriguing parallels between neoliberalism and the production of disposable bodies in the contemporary age, which are relevant to the analysis of *El traspatio*. Although their publication *Disposable Futures* does not refer specifically to free market economics at the U.S.-Mexico border, it delivers an incisive commentary on what they call 'predatory formations' of neoliberalism.[25] For the authors, neoliberalism represents much more than a straightforward 'system of economic organisation'.[26] It is a new mode of governance that disrupts centralised politics, launches an affront on human rights and stakes a claim to all aspects of the social state. They perceive market-driven regimes to be divisive, characterised by disinvestment, dispossession and the consignment of citizens to 'zones of hardship', echoing Agamben's biopolitical concept of states of exception (see Chapter Two).[27] Central to their study is the development of a new conceptual apparatus within which to frame discussions about the changing socio-political landscape, where a 'politics of disposability' prevails.[28] That is to say, a politics where the imperatives of capital accumulation come at a cost to society, leading to 'social abandonment' and 'human destruction' for those marginalised.[29] Moreover, this politics of disposability produces what the authors label a 'culture of violence', where the human body itself becomes the waste product of a 'social fabric disordered by market-driven

[24] Namaste, p. 492.
[25] Evans and Giroux, p. 84.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., p. 52.
[28] Ibid., p. 45.
[29] Ibid., p. 1.

imperatives […] and removed from any sense of civic or ethical considerations'.[30] The authors posit that under these neoliberal regimes which divide citizens, 'violence and fear […] become the motivational forces of societies'.[31]

These critical thoughts resonate with the dramatisation of life at the border in Carrera's feature film, in which the politics of disposability is a key thematic trope. As previously noted, the film's dialogue between the Chihuahua Governor and foreign investors foregrounds the devaluation of the Mexican female worker in the eyes of the neoliberal economy. On the global assembly line, her worth is solely understood within the parameters of economics, profit margins and capital accumulation. As *El traspatio's* plotline develops, the disposable third world woman narrative appears to be assimilated within the wider social, political and legal structures of society, much to the detriment of female border citizens. Via a series of subplots, the film takes strides towards exploring these corollaries, which are shown to generate a context of heightened insecurity for women. Mexican politics, for instance, is represented at the whim of the free market. In the film, it is international corporations that determine the border's social policy and the extent of political involvement. Although the Governor, for example, proposes new social provisions for maquiladora workers, his interventions are rebuffed due to their costly nature. Hence, the city's peripheries, where murdered women are being discovered, remain underdeveloped and unsafe. This is visually reinforced throughout the mise en scène; with the aid of tracking and establishing shots, the camera navigates the city to reveal make-shift roads, scarce street lighting, disconnected transport systems and isolated *colonias*. These underprivileged sites reflect the discerning words of Evans and Giroux, whom claim that 'zones of hardship constitute the hallmark and intensification of the neoliberal politics of disposability, which is relentless in material and symbolic violence'.[32] Indeed, this notion is upheld in *El traspatio*, where such areas of disinvestment and dispossession constitute the hub of sexual violence and the chosen dumping ground of feminicide victims.

In addition to the political disinvestment faced by women in Ciudad Juárez, *El traspatio* reveals that the city's law enforcement has also forsaken them. The escalating number of feminicides are met with indifference by the police. The image of hundreds of *pesquisas* featured in the film is not only testament to legal ineptitude, but also to the disposable nature of women, whose lives have little importance in the city. Blanca Bravo is the only detective that attempts to make

[30] Ibid., p. 45.
[31] Ibid., p. 55.
[32] Ibid., p. 52.

inroads into the murder cases, albeit to no avail. Other officers in the taskforce show complete disinterest in solving the crimes, due to their own vested interests that lie on the side of criminality, not the law. The Comandante, for instance, accepts bribes from El Paso businessman, Mickey Santos, whom crosses the border in search of women, and young school girls, to rape and kill. Within the film's narrative structure, Ciudad Juárez is a place of deep-seated corruption fuelled by individual self-interest, echoing neoliberal values. Suffice to say, impunity prevails, and in turn, the narrative of women as disposable subjects gains further momentum.

From the opening scene sequence to the film's closing shots, women's bodies are framed as waste products of the free market and of sexual violence. Representations of disposability shift between symbolic inferences to more literal portrayals. A discernible cinematographic motif employed by Carrera to emphasise disposability at the border is the equation of female bodies with waste. An example that best illustrates this semiotic association is the scene in which two young boys discover multiple bodies whilst innocently playing in the city's desert periphery. A tracking shot follows the children as they climb mounds of rubble in an isolated *lote*. As they reach the top and gaze ahead, the camera gradually pans out, slow enough for the audience to observe the scenery, before switching to an overhead angle. The spectacle that comes into view below is one of abject horror. Female bodies lay strewn across the wastelands, as far as the spectator's eyes can see. The majority are naked and mutilated, left to decompose amongst other refuse that is scattered around them. This alarming image that visually equates women's bodies with discarded waste dovetails ideas proposed by feminist geographer, Melissa Wright. As previously discussed in Chapter One, Wright draws a parallel between the discourses of waste with female labourers in the third world locale, more specifically in Mexico and China; she refers to them as 'waste-in-the-making' and the 'personification of human disposability'.[33] Situated in the context of global capitalism, Wright regards the female maquiladora worker as a commodity who is first exploited, and subsequently, discarded. For Wright, what is most preoccupying, however, is that the disposable status the female labourer has come to embody, also endures beyond the factory walls, in the public sphere. What is more, the narrative of female disposability is linked to a culture of violence that both legitimises and normalises the exploitation of women.

[33] Wright, *Disposable Women*, p. 2.

As these sections have established, a politics of disposability proves to be a useful frame of analysis when reflecting on female existence at the U.S.-Mexico border, as featured in *El traspatio*. Although neoliberalism is by no means the sole factor contributing to feminicide in the film, its impact on wider socio-political structures is palpable. The filmic narrative appears to suggest that despite the personal and economic freedom that neoliberalism may promise, in the borderspace this may come at a deadly cost. Suffice to say, *ne(cr)oliberalism* is arguably a more apposite term to employ in relation to the chain of events unfolding on-screen. This is certainly applicable to the story of the young protagonist, Juana, whose death I will now turn to address within the frames of rape theory.

Juana's demise: rape and feminicide

Following Juana's rejection of Cutberto, he is befriended by a group of self-proclaimed "macho men". Unlike Cutberto who is, at heart, a man of moral principles, these men are quite the antithesis. They pass the time drinking, smoking, gambling and leering over women on the city streets. Their treatment of female family members in domestic sphere is equally reprehensible. They coerce Cutberto to take action with Juana and "reclaim the masculinity" which she had publicly disgraced. Under the influence of these men, Cutberto's character noticeably changes. His physical identity is decidedly more masculine having grown a moustache and he has also taken up smoking. When Juana agrees to meet Cutberto at a bar to talk about their relationship, she too recognises his changed demeanour. After Cutberto spikes Juana's drink, they are both driven to a disused building. When Juana awakes, disoriented, she is lying on a stained mattress on a concrete floor. The room is dark and squalid, with dank walls and only a few rays of light manage to pass through the cracks in the shuttered windows. This oppressive setting is where Juana's physical and psychological turmoil begins, as Cutberto asks: "Can I make love to you? Let me make love to you and I will let you go. By the Virgin, I swear I'll let you go. I just want to make love to you." Reluctantly, Juana turns her body towards Cutberto who is arched over and, although clearly fearful, allows his advances. This initial assault, however, is given no further representation in the narrative.

Following the assault, Cutberto re-joins the men, whom ask him if he will share her. When he refuses they push him aside and storm the room. When the film re-joins this storyline a few scenes later, Juana and the men, including Cutberto, are in a van, driving through the desert terrain that has become such an emblem of the Juárez feminicides. The diegetic sound of the roaring engine is interspersed with audible female screams and jeering men. The use of the

dolly shot forges an uninterrupted, real-time experience for the spectator, who, having closely followed Juana's newfound life at the border, is now about to witness her death. In the van, a series of quick cross-cuts shift the focus of the camera lens between Juana's brutal rape and Cutberto's distress at being forced to watch her traumatic ordeal, unable to protect her. The female body in this scene is depicted as a contorted and fragmented object of assault. Juana's clothes are torn from her body to reveal brief images of her breasts and pubis before being held into position whilst the men violently rape her. Her continual shrieks are piercing and deeply unsettling. With a gun pressed to his head, Cutberto is then coerced into asphyxiating Juana with a plastic bag. Although Cutberto, who is in an evident state of shock, cannot bear to watch Juana dying, the audience witnesses the final seconds of her life; her bloodied face and mouth agape can be seen through the plastic bag. When she is dead, they throw her and Cutberto out of the moving vehicle. Juana's lifeless, semi-naked body lands on the ground with a thud, brutally evoking the literal disposability of her life.

The topic of rape has been subjected to extensive theoretical analysis by feminists. It is an act that has been inflicted on the female body for as long as humankind has existed. As Susan Brownmiller reminds us, 'man's structural capacity to rape and woman's corresponding structural vulnerability are as basic to the physiology of both sexes as the primal act of sex itself'.[34] According to feminist schools of thought, rape constitutes the ultimate manifestation of patriarchal authority and unbalanced power relations, expressed in the form of bodily violence and domination. Within critical theory, rape has been variously described. Ann Cahill, for instance, deems it a 'crime that epitomizes women's oppressed status';[35] Catherine MacKinnon proposes that rape 'is not an isolated event or moral transgression or individual interchange gone wrong but an act of terrorism and torture within a systematic context of group subjection, like lynching'.[36] This notion of terrorism against the female body is consistent with Caputi and Russell's definition of rape, as 'a direct expression of sexual politics, an act of conformity to masculinist sexual norms […] and a form of terrorism that serves to preserve the gender status quo'.[37] Although rape is, first and foremost, a crime committed against the individual, it is indubitably linked to the political; to quote Russell, 'rape may be seen as the

[34] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2000), p. 7.
[35] Ann J. Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 2.
[36] Catharine A. MacKinnon, 'Rape: On Coercion and Consent', in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, 7th edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 42–58 (p. 42).
[37] Caputi and Russell, p. 15.

supreme political act of men against women'.[38] When a rape is committed against a female subject, it represents both a physical assertion and a perpetuation of masculine supremacy.

El traspatio's rape scene is haunted by echoes of Juana's defiant proclamation to Cutberto, "my body is my body". For Segato, in the case of rape, 'the victim's control of her body space is expropriated'.[39] Indeed, the scene in *El traspatio* reveals Juana's loss of control over her own body as she is brutally reduced to an object, purely exploited by men for a momentary sadistic thrill. Segato also draws a parallel between cannibalism and rape: she suggests that the female subject is, in effect, consumed by her aggressors, and her autonomy is entirely removed, to the point at which her the body exists merely as 'part of the dominator's project'.[40] Jean Franco's *Cruel Modernity* details a history of human cruelty in Latin America, carried out principally towards women, children and minority groups. Her cultural criticism draws on visual representations, literature and testimonies, to detail acts of torture, rape and massacre carried out by governments, militia, rebels and narco-traffickers in Guatemala, Peru, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Drawing on philosophical theory and social science, Franco's study considers what happens when political agendas, violence and neoliberalism collide, giving birth to what Arendt would term the 'banality of evil' that elicits the worst from humankind. One of Franco's chapters, entitled 'Raping the Dead', contextualises the human rights violations carried out against woman by the militia during the Guatemalan Civil War, which resulted in a genocide of the indigenous Mayan population. Franco details cases of savage rape and feminicide during this period of tumult: 'Rape followed by execution performs expulsion from the human by first reducing subjects to a state of abjection when the "I" no longer is sovereign and then disposing of them as so much rubbish.'[41] This analysis can be applied to the visualisation of the treatment of Juana's body when gang-raped: her body is subjected to the whims of others, who exploit her corporeality and efface her subjectivity.

Viewing rape on-screen

Jonathan Kaplan's *The Accused* (1988), for which Jodie Foster won the Academy Award, was one of the first mainstream Hollywood productions to feature graphic rape. Since then,

[38] Diana E. H. Russell, *The Politics of Rape: The Victim's Perspective* (Bloomington: iUniverse.com, 2003), p. 231.
[39] Rita Laura Segato, 'Territory, Sovereignty, and Crimes of the Second State: The Writing on the Body of Murdered Women', in *Terrorizing Women*, pp. 70–92 (p. 74).
[40] Ibid., p. 74.
[41] Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 77.

numerous cinematic representations of rape have followed, in both arthouse and mainstream films. Some on-screen simulations of sexual abuse are visually more explicit and are given longer scene sequences than others. Gaspar de Noé's *Irreversible* (2002), for example, features an uninterrupted nine-minute sequence depicting the rape of a woman in an underpass in Paris. The French film *Baise Moi* (2000), directed by Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, was originally banned in France for its uncensored and unsimulated scenes of rape and real sex. Other films that integrate such violent sexual acts into the visual narrative are *Straw Dogs* (1971), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), to cite but a handful of examples. Given the ethical issues surrounding the spectatorship of rape, when a rape scene features in a film, the critic should ask the following questions: Is this scene necessary? Does it purposefully contribute to the narrative and the development of the storyline?

In the case of *El traspatio,* I would argue that the rape scene is a justifiable component within the filmic narrative, albeit somewhat gratuitous, for two reasons. First, Juana's rape marks the conclusion of her degradation and demise in Ciudad Juárez. For a viewer who has watched Juana's on-screen transformation from an inexperienced young girl into an independent, self-assured woman, this scene brings her storyline to a close. Secondly, central to this scene is a serious message about the extreme, unjustifiable exploitation happening against the female body on the U.S.-Mexico. Naturally, as with any visualisation of extreme sexual violence in film, questions are asked about whether or not the imagery is pornographic and/or conducive to sexual gratification.

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey establishes the basis for a feminist/psychoanalytical approach to the moving image. Analysing the role of the female body in Hollywood films, Mulvey uncovers a 'number of possible pleasures' that the cinema conveys to the spectator.[42] Among these is scopophilia, concerning 'circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure'.[43] This is far from an innocent pleasure, for, as Mulvey argues, 'in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female'.[44] As I have examined in Chapter Four in relation to the filmic text *El otro sueño americano,* Mulvey proposes the notion of 'the male gaze' responding and relating to the female on-screen body, which 'projects its phantasy on to the female figure'.[45]

[42] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 806.
[43] Ibid., p. 806.
[44] Ibid., p. 809.
[45] Ibid., p. 808.

As a result, 'in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*'.[46] Since Mulvey's seminal article was published, it has been the subject of much debate and criticism. Even Mulvey herself has revised her clear-cut distinction between the male gaze and the passive female object in a later publication, 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. It could be argued that in some ways the sexual imbalance proposed by Mulvey has been confronted, if not by society itself, then at least by Debord's *The Spectacle*: a 'feminine' form of scopophilia is now clearly a market segment, as the genre of woman-friendly pornography evidences, which suggests that it is not only men who can extract visual pleasure from images.

However, Mulvey's notions of scopophilia and the male gaze are still relevant to question a particularly gendered type of images, images in which sexual imbalance persists: images of rape. Just as women are still the most frequent victims, while men continue to be the most frequent perpetrators of this crime in real life, so is male-on-female rape the most frequently depicted on the screen. Whether simulated rape features in mainstream films, or whether in pornography of borderline legality passing through online websites, such images raise not only legal questions, but also questions about how viewers interact with the images, and the possibility and ethics of extracting visual pleasure from them. In the case of Juana's rape in *El traspatio/Backyard*, I would argue that this difficult scene is inscribed in a logic of gendered violence and murder, which is clearly linked to Mexico's broader "sexual imbalance", but which is also coherent within the logic of contemporary necro- and neoliberalism in the region, with all the oppression and exploitation that they have engendered.

The key point to explore when analysing this scene is, of course, the camera angle: from whose perspective do we see and witness the sexual assault? *El traspatio/Backyard* is strikingly objective in its panning of the lens. Rather than portraying Juana's violation through the eyes of the perpetrators, the camera in fact shifts back and forth between Cutberto's reaction and the assault taking place. Its momentary focus on Juana's body means that no pleasure is necessarily elicited by the screening of her subjugation. As Jerrold Levinson writes, 'both moral realism and pornography contain depictions of degradation and abuse, but pornography endorses the abuse, whereas moral realism makes no such endorsement'.[47] In the case of Juana's rape, I

[46] Ibid., p. 809.
[47] Jerrold Levinson, *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 299.

would suggest that the scene is not a pornographic spectacle, but is rather an instance of moral realism.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the film delivers a poignant message about the disposable status the female has come to embody in the borderspace. Whilst neoliberalism may be conducive to economic freedom, its failure to protect the security of female citizens means that freedom comes at a deadly cost. Placing profit over people, the neoliberal landscape of the U.S.-Mexico border, in effect, produces ne(cr)oliberal bodies, whose sufferings serve the interests of capital, shared by the elite few. As Carrera's film shows, female maquiladora workers are afforded little in the way of rights or justice, given the corrupt law enforcement system that privileges wealth and status over the protection of human life. Women's corporeality in the borderspace is not defended, but rather, in MacKinnon's words, it is 'a thing to be stolen, sold, bought, bartered or exchanged by others'.[48] However, both *El otro sueño americano* and *El traspatio* resort to pathology to account for the women's murders, placing blame on evil men, as opposed to the culture that harvests this misogyny and the structures that enable these crimes to take place. The outcome of these narratives therefore is that women's lives remain constrained to a framing that either blames them for their own victimisation or considers them to be unfortunate victims of predatory men. Whilst these two cinematographic responses have re-constructed the female body only to de-construct it again via on-screen violence, the following chapter moves towards the medium of art photography which foregrounds the potential of employing the body as a site of resistance and to re-claim agency.

[48] MacKinnon, p. 43.

Chapter 6

The suffering body: from the abject to the conceptual in César Saldívar's photographic series

> To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more – and more. Images transfix. Images anaesthetize. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs […] But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real.[1]

Introduction

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the body has been assigned multiple representations in the visual responses to the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez. As we have seen, the body has been artistically re-imagined by Judithe Hernández (Chapter Two), resurrected in Margolles's installations (Chapter Three), and fictionalised in filmic narratives in Carlos Carrera's *El traspatio* and Enrique Arroyo's *El otro sueño americano* (Chapters Four and Five). The body's aesthetic treatment, its characterisation and role in the public imaginary have forged discussions about the multifarious perils that women face in this urban geography of the borderzone, stemming from necropolitical power structures and neoliberal regimes. Photography is yet another visual medium which has contributed to social consciousness of these gender-based crimes. Press, documentary and art photography have all recorded, recalled and re-presented the body via the camera lens, and herein lies the focus of this chapter. Taking a comparative approach, this chapter will, first, engage with the image culture of brutalised bodies routinely featured in the Mexican press, and will highlight the ethical consequences of repetitively framing corporeality in its abject, violated state. These analyses will be largely supported by the theoretical discourses of Susan Sontag and Judith Butler, who raise critical questions about human desensitisation to images of violence and the concomitant risk of re-victimising the suffering bodies. This will then provide a logical departure point for an examination of art photography by César Saldívar, as a counter-discourse to these images of violence. In contrast to the on-location shots taken of mutilated cadavers which are later circulated in the media, Saldívar's works are produced in the studio, where he stages female death at the border using nudity and black and white analogue photography to engineer

[1] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 20.

conceptual images. Through a reading of selected photographs, this chapter will observe how the body is transformed from a site of suffering to one of resistance. Drawing on the scholarship of Barbara Brownie and Barbara Sutton, I will argue that nude bodies have become a growing trend to denounce and contest systems of power.

Society of the spectacle and images of suffering

To quote the prescient words of French critic Guy Debord, we reside in a 'society of the spectacle'.[2] Ours is a visual era of epic proportions, a world in which everything is captured via the camera lens, instantly circulated into our avaricious daily spectatorial trajectories to sate our consumerist appetites. As Debord explains, 'all that once was directly lived has become mere representation'.[3] That is to say, image saturation has altered the way human experience unfolds. More importantly, Debord defines the spectacle not only as images to gaze upon, but rather 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images', which ultimately influences our perception of life and the human condition as it actually exists.[4] His pivotal 1967 text was perhaps a prophecy of times to come, as its relevance to today's culture seems uncanny. Echoing the sentiments of Karl Marx, Debord's writings evoke his disillusionment with capitalist society and the manner in which the spectacle has stultified the intellectual capacity of citizens; he views spectacle as 'a constant opium war waged to make it impossible to distinguish goods from commodities or true satisfaction from a survival that increases according to its own knowledge'.[5] He goes on to further stress his argument about the passivity and simplification of people who are dominated by the spectacle and who can no longer distinguish between truth and falsehood: 'the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real things and effective motivations of hypnotic behaviour'.[6]

Of course, this society of the spectacle that Debord diagnosed over half a century ago has been fuelled significantly by technological advancements, particularly in relation to the field of photography. Photography has been the subject of scrutiny since its inception in 1839. Art-conscious Baudelaire dismissed it as 'a trivial image on a metallic plate'.[7] But nowadays, to take a photograph is one of the most routine practices of life, or in Sontag's words, 'today

[2] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 1992).
[3] Ibid., p. 5.
[4] Ibid., p. 5.
[5] Ibid., p. 13.
[6] Ibid., p. 13.
[7] Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 14.

everything exists to end in a photograph'.[8] Today, photography is a ubiquitous medium that has infiltrated every facet of social experience, every public and private domain. The camera apparatus no longer represents a technology of the elite, but a portable device for the masses, who are able to document their surroundings at any decisive moment in time. Nowadays, there is an incessant, insatiable desire to record daily happenings and justify our own material presence through the camera lens. As Walter Benjamin observed in 1936, in his essay about the coming age of mechanical reproduction, 'the need to bring things spatially and humanly "nearer" is almost an obsession today, as is the tendency to negate the unique ephemeral quality of a given event by reproducing it photographically. There is an ever-growing compulsion to reproduce the object photographically, in a close up.'[9] Although this is an age of digital narcissism, made possible by the democratisation of the camera and social media, photography as a medium, with all its sub-genres, stretches far beyond the parameters of the self. Its capacity to testify, to document and to chronicle spaces, places, historical events and peoples is profound. The photographic lens is in many ways an ethnographic, anthropological, documentary and creative tool that gives insight into a world we may not be able to see. Many social-documentary works by photographic icons such as Sebastião Salgado, Dorothea Lange, Eugene Atget, Graciela Iturbide and Henri Cartier Bresson have delivered images of the unfolding reality of humankind and the topographies that it inhabits.

Amongst the most mass-produced, most widely disseminated and most extensively consumed images worldwide are those that feature the themes of violence, death and bodily suffering; as Sontag writes, 'being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience'.[10] These moments are eternalised by the frontline lens of photojournalism or documentary photography, and many of these images have been elevated to an iconic status within the global cultural imaginary; as Arthur and Joan Kleinman remark, the destitution of humankind is 'a master subject of our mediatized times'.[11] Some of the most canonical images rooted in public consciousness have been serialised and repetitively reused in popular culture, such as Robert Capa's *Muerte de un miliciano* (1936), Nick Ut's *Accidental Napalm Attack* (1972) and Kevin Carter's *Struggling Girl in Sudan* (1993). Although such images are appropriated as a means of engaging public morality, the commercial success of

[8] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 24.
[9] Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1988).
[10] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 16.
[11] Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, 'The Appeal of Experience; the Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times', *Daedalus*, 125 (1996), 1–23 (p. 1).

suffering in the digital world is hard to ignore. The body of the 'other' in the frame has become a site to be looked at and a form of currency in the media, an idea that the Kleinmans elaborate in their article, *The Appeal of Experience*, where they categorise these photographs as 'infotainment' in which anonymous victims find themselves 'taken up into processes of global marketing and business competition'.[12] Within the burgeoning globalised context, the Kleinmans consider the transaction of these images from one country to another to be disconcerting, as it commodifies suffering; furthermore, as they state, 'through this cultural representation of suffering, experience is being remade, thinned out, and distorted'.[13] The question that therefore arises is how this affects the spectator's experience, if suffering has become a commodity? How does the viewer perceive or read the victim in the photograph? The theoretical terrain concerning the visual reading of the pain of others is complex, and will be explored in the next two sections, which will address the images of the feminicide body disseminated repeatedly in the Mexican press.

The body and the Mexican *nota roja*

In the context of Mexico, episodes of civilian suffering in social crises, conflict and resistance have likewise been documented photographically throughout history, with the earliest photographs originating from the battles of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Since then, photography has testified to other violent events which have marked Mexico's past and present, from the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre through to the Ayotzinapa forced disappearances in 2014. Nonetheless, the daily mediatisation of violent imagery, particularly in the past decade, has been prolific, and unquestionably intensified by the recent War on Drugs. Bodies hanging from bridges, decapitated heads exhibited in streets and mutilated women forsaken in *lotes* are all purposely exposed for the public to witness. This is no longer just about representing murder, but about enacting a sordid spectacularisation of the abject body, which is posed and performed theatrically to spread fear, to deliver warnings and to articulate power. These disfigured cadavers, which are regularly dehumanised beyond recognition are then propagated in the media, often reserved for the front pages of sensationalist *nota roja*[14] notably *El Gráfico*, *PM*

[12] Ibid., p. 1.
[13] Ibid., p. 2.
[14] Jesse Lerner's study *The Shock of Modernity: Crime Photography in Post-Revolutionary Mexico City* retraces history to locate the juncture at which photographing abject scenes of violence originated in the country. Lerner establishes that the shooting of such material was spearheaded by the forefathers of photojournalism in the country, the Cassasola brothers, whose careers spanned from the latter stages of the Porfiriato rule through to the 1930s Golden Age. Although the initial post-revolutionary era was characterised by a revived sense of nationhood and idealistic visions of a socio-cultural renaissance,

de Ciudad Juárez and *El Peso de Chihuahua*, and kitsch publications such as *Alarma* (which is now no longer in print) and *Alerta*, as well as the infamous online *narco*-blogs. Observing the savagery carried out on bodies in Mexico is now easier and more accessible than ever.

It is worth briefly noting that there is a historical relationship between Mexico, photography and death, as exemplified by the practice of taking pictures of the dead, or the post-mortem photography popularised in the nineteenth century in Mexico, as well as the U.S. and particularly Victorian England. Cadavers were often decorated, posed and then photographed as part of the ceremony of an individual's passing. Salvador Olguin reflects on this custom in the essay, 'Beyond Horror'.[15] Although he addresses the contemporary images of dehumanised corpses featured in Mexican press photography, his writings take as a starting point Mexico's traditional employment of the dead in photography, so as to historicise the changing nature of Mexico's photographic imaginary from past to present. Olguin specifically examines Alejandro Palacio's post-mortem collection in San Luis Potosí, to describe the way that photos of the deceased functioned as a form of *memento mori* and how the bodies are 'reincorporated into the community' as a means of commemoration as opposed to morbidity which we might think today.[16] Nevertheless, the recent and repetitive images of corpses in Mexico have transgressed the traditional underlying objectives of remembrance: the contemporary imagery of dead bodies documents what Jean Franco terms the 'cruel modernity' of contemporary Mexico. Indeed, as Rossana Reguillo comments in the article, 'Condensaciones y Desplazamientos: las políticas del miedo en los cuerpos contemporáneos', bodies have become vessels of communication, particularly for warring cartels:

> Se trata de "cuerpos" desmembrados, cuyo valor "informativo" es el de ser portadores de algún mensaje cifrado. La "persona" desaparece y se desliza hacia la lógica de la anomalía, excedente de sentido, cuerpo anónimo que opera como mensaje y apuesta, como ratificación de una política del miedo que se instala quedamente.[17]

encapsulated by the murals of *Los Tres Grandes* which were officially commissioned, this new modern period also elicited an underbelly of crime, particularly in the capital. The extensive photographic archive amassed from the period boasts a plurality of images that depict political assassinations, crime scenes, post-mortems and prison exposés. Henceforth, out of this period, this visual journalistic sub-genre referred to as *nota roja* was born.

[15] Olguin Salvador, 'Beyond Horror: Taking Pictures of the Dead in Mexico', *Revista Sans Soleil: Estudios de La Imagen*, 4 (2012), 182–95.

[16] Ibid., p. 192.

[17] Reguillo, Rossana, 'Condensaciones y desplazamientos: Las políticas del miedo en los cuerpos contemporáneos', *Hemispheric Institute*, 4 (2007) <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/journal/4.2/eng/en42_pf_reguillo.html> [accessed 19 April 2016].

Dismembered bodies are the semantics of this macabre rhetoric and are vital to the hyper-violent and hyper-visible performance of the 'narco-machine'.[18] Reguillo posits that narcos exercise their power via five interchangeably employed categories of violence: structural, historic, disciplining, diffuse and expressive.[19] She deems expressive violence to be an explanatory term that best encapsulates the messages delivered by the public display of brutalised bodies. For Reguillo expressive violence may be understood as 'the exhibition of total and unquestionable power, using the most brutal and at the same time most sophisticated forms of violence against a body that has already been stripped of its humanity'.[20] Although these bodies are part and parcel of scaremongering tactics amongst cartels and criminals, the fact of the matter is that violence is a commercially lucrative subject: as Sontag asserts, 'if it bleeds, it leads'.[21] Indeed, the depredation of the body is an iconography of the times, as Sergio González Rodríguez notes in his latest study *El hombre sin cabeza*:

> En los últimos años hemos visto cómo la iconofilia propia de la modernidad se ha convertido en algo más: en una depredación visual y virtual que complementa la depredación física, objetual de las personas. De esta última surgió la otra, que ahora se ha convertido en un velo o corteza intangible y tenaz que envuelve el planeta en un tejido infinitesimal, ubicuo, simultáneo. No sólo hay un deseo engolosinado en torno del disfrute de la imagen violenta como se ha propuesto, sino una avidez destructiva que devora la imagen del otro y de quien mira también.[22]

Thus, as González Rodríguez establishes, suffering bodies in Mexico constitute spectacles of curious, Sadeian enjoyment, or even entertainment. Ángel Iglesias Ortíz, who has written at length about the commodification of this graphic material in Mexico, suggests that whilst this photography may generate understanding about the country's issues, the perpetual framing and circulation of images delivers a message of 'normalization'.[23] What concerns Iglesias Ortíz about the reproduction of this material is that it 'may imply the promotion of certain ideology reinforcing dominant narratives'.[24] This is a crucial observation that requires expansion in

[18] Reguillo, Rossana, 'The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence', *Hemispheric Institute*, 8 (2011) <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-82/reguillo> [accessed 23 March 2016].
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 16.
[22] Sergio González Rodríguez, *El hombre sin cabeza* (Spain: Anagrama, 2009), p. 65.
[23] Ángel Iglesias Ortíz, 'Spectatorship and Visual Evidence of Violence in Mexico: When the Right to Information Becomes Exploitation', *Revista de Estudios Para El Desarrollo Social de La Comunicación*, 8 (2013), 231–46 (p. 234).
[24] Ibid., p. 236.

regards to the depiction of the feminicide body in photojournalism; it also stimulates questions about the photographic medium and the ethical reactions that it may or may not engender.

Looking at images of suffering: a theoretical perspective

To look at the suffering of others is often a fleeting experience for the spectator, albeit a common one. This genre of photography is an enterprise in itself, funded, according to Sontag by a spectatorship whose 'appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked'.[25] In this sense, we are all voyeurs, in the very simplest sense of the word, whether we want to be or not. There is no real choice given to us when images flash before our eyes or appear on our screens every day. As a result, over time we grow accustomed to what we have previously seen, although an aroused sense of curiosity may still remain. The familiarisation to images of suffering is central to Sontag's explorations of photography, and she has supplied some of the most salient and critical enquiries into the medium. In light of the ever-growing inventory of images of human despair, atrocity has become more familiar, and this process has, Sontag suggests, made 'the horrible seem more ordinary – making it appear familiar, remote ("it's only a photograph"), inevitable'.[26] If, as Sontag suggests, 'shock can become familiar' then the habitual viewing of shocking images indubitably affects the responses, reactions and sensibility of spectators. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag writes of the novelty of shock, relating it to her own personal experience of viewing imagery from Dachau and Bergen Belsen for the first time. Despite being moved by the horror of the concentration camps, she was equally gripped by a sense of numbness, or, as she recalls, 'part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead'.[27] To be a virgin spectator, that is, to encounter images of such content for the first time, may elicit an emotionally-engaged response. However, with the omnipresence of images, Sontag considers that our reception to what we look at has changed: 'a saturation point may have been reached […] photography has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it'.[28] Throughout her work, she stresses that apathetic responses are spawned not by the act of seeing, but by the act of seeing over and over again. Vicariously witnessing the recurrent trauma of others from a privileged vantage point constitutes an obstacle to compassion and empathy. Indeed, Sontag argues that 'wherever people feel safe […] they will be indifferent'.[29] When the permeation of

[25] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 36.
[26] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 21.
[27] Ibid., p. 20.
[28] Ibid., p. 21.
[29] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 89.

these spectacles becomes so pervasive due to the globalised scale of this imagery, our capacity to react is challenged: 'compassion, stretched to its limits, is going numb'.[30]

The waning capacity to empathise with photographs of suffering people is a subject addressed by a range of recent scholars, namely Butler, Linfield, Hesford and Sontag.[31] Debord warned us years ago that the accumulation of images would be 'the efficient motor for trancelike behaviour'.[32] This idea has been re-claimed and re-formulated as compassion fatigue. Endorsing Sontag's arguments, Susan Moeller's *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* holds American news outlets accountable for dulling our interest in matters of human crisis. Like Sontag, Moeller is convinced that images of suffering have been sensationalised by the media and therefore, have hit a ceiling in their capacity to induce empathy from the viewers. She defines compassion fatigue as follows:

> Compassion fatigue is the unacknowledged cause of much of the failure of international reporting today. It is at the base of many of the complaints about the public's short attention span, the media's peripatetic journalism, the public's boredom with international news, the media's preoccupation with crisis coverage […] Compassion fatigue abets Americans' self-interest […] Compassion fatigue reinforces, simplistic, formulaic coverage. If images of starving babies worked in the past to capture attention for a complex crisis of war, refugees and famine, then starving babies will headline the next difficult crisis.[33]

Counter-arguments have surfaced since the term compassion fatigue was popularised. David Campbell and Susie Linfield are two of the most vocal critics of this categorisation. Not surprisingly, neither favours Sontag's works or reflections, which ultimately lie at the root of the notion of compassion fatigue. Campbell denounces it as a 'myth';[34] Linfield dismisses it as a 'truism' and 'cliché'.[35] Both critics question and critique the consistency of Sontag's arguments in *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Campbell, in particular, flags some of the incongruities between these two texts, which were written thirty years apart.

---

[30] Ibid., p. 96.
[31] It is worth noting the emerging tendency to homogenise spectatorship, which fails to acknowledge that viewing is, above all, an immediately subjective experience, and that the spectrum of reactions to images will be broad. Nevertheless, it is a convincing argument that there has been a paradigmatic shift in the ability to empathise when faced with a photographic surplus of suffering in the world.
[32] Debord, p. 7.
[33] Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 2.
[34] David Campbell, 'The Myth of Compassion Fatigue', (2012), 1-29 <https://www.david-campbell.org/wp-content/documents/DC_Myth_of_Compassion_Fatigue_Feb_2012.pdf> [accessed 13 April 2016] (pp. 1).
[35] Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 45.

Indeed, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag recants some, but not all, of her previous assertions about how photographs of atrocity reduce sympathy: 'I wrote, photographs shrivel sympathy. Is this true? […] I'm not so sure now. What is the evidence that photographs have a diminishing impact, that our culture of spectatorship neutralises the moral force of photographs of atrocities?'[36] Whilst she remains adamant that the way in which images are reproduced and projected has habituated us to atrocity, Campbell identifies Sontag's most fundamental retraction as her admission that 'harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock'.[37] Linfield similarly takes an aversion to Sontag's correlation between atrocity photography and desensitisation:

> The desensitization argument is exactly wrong. For most of history most people have known little, and cared less about the suffering of those who are unknown or alien […] And it is the camera – the still camera, the film camera, the video camera, and now the digital camera – that has done so much to globalize our consciences; it is the camera that brought us the twentieth century's bad news. Today it is, quite simply, impossible to say "I don't know": photographs have robbed us the alibi of ignorance. We know of suffering in far-flung parts of the world in ways that our forebears never could, and the images we see – in some places, under some conditions – demand not just our interest but our response.[38]

Although Linfield's argument is logical and should be credited, like Sontag, she tends to homogenise the spectatorial experience, when in actual fact viewers' responses to photographs are dependent on a spectrum of factors that are as personal as they are political. What is refreshing about Sontag's understanding of photography and atrocity is that it is ultimately (and unashamedly) based on her own, subjective opinion. She does not seek to impose her view, subject it to academic substantiation or convert people to her way of thinking; but she does deliver a valid, thought-provoking analysis as to why images may not be so impressionable in today's society.

The feminicide body in press photography: an enduring victim

The habituation to images of suffering can be convincingly applied to the Mexican context, where there is a distinct market for morbid photography. Even if it is a niche demographic which wants to observe these photographs, their widespread public distribution means that the genre is based on a process of supply and demand. Whilst the photography of bodies subjected to heinous crimes may be commonplace, the more important question is what the visual rhetoric

[36] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 94.
[37] Campbell, p. 10.
[38] Linfield, p. 46.

of these images conveys about the bodies. How might the visual composition affect the viewer's understanding of the human condition? This is a problematic that requires unpacking in regards to the framing of the feminicide body. As such, I have selected two photographs for analysis, published by different online Mexican news forums, *Proceso* and *El Gráfico*. The images chosen represent two prime examples of the generic visualisation of the female body in the media.[39]

The stylistic composition of the two photographs is similar: they both centralise a lifeless female body, abandoned in a desolate terrain. Both women are partially clothed and neither face is visible. Their partial nudity is somewhat sexualised, one female has her legs suggestively splayed to reveal a vague glimpse of her genitalia; the other is exposed from her upper torso, with the remnants of a bra covering her chest. These women are framed simply as victims of sexual exploitation and disposal; there are no other referential or contextual markers. If the female is both representationally and referentially projected as a victim, it might be supposed that this photography only contributes to the reproduction of violent ideologies. All images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic. But images of the repulsive can allure, to quote Sontag. Furthermore, the question of exploitation is raised as a cause for concern by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, in her *Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography*, where she actively encourages the spectator to reflect on the motives of the photograph:

> We must ask, in other words, whether the documentary act does not involve a double act of subjugation: first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it re-presents.[40]

Solomon-Godeau's interrogation of the image resonates with Sontag's claims that 'photographs objectify: they turn an event or person into something that can be possessed'.[41] To photograph is, to a large degree, to appropriate the thing photographed – the subject of the

[39] I am opposed to the re-circulation of feminicide imagery. On this basis, I have made a conscious decision not to reproduce the photographs in this thesis. For reference see: Rosalia Vergara, "En México, cada año, 14 mil mujeres son violadas: Amnistía Internacional", *Proceso*, 2013 <https://www.proceso.com.mx/333074/en-mexico-cada-ano-14-mil-mujeres-son-violadas-amnistia-internacional> [Accessed 6 September 2017] and Astrid Sánchez, "Hallan sin vida a una mujer con huellas de ataque sexual, estrangulamiento y lapidación", *El Gráfico*, 2015 <http://www.elgrafico.mx/la-roja/06-12-2015/violan-y-desfiguran-jovencita-en-ecatepec> [Accessed 6 September 2017].

[40] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 176.

[41] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 72.

image is captured and contained. The objectification of the abandoned female body within the limitations of the photographic frame may serve not only to re-victimise, but also to re-commodify: the subject enters, post-mortem, an alternative globalised assembly line, that of the press photography industry, before being exported both locally and internationally for the all-seeing eye of the spectator, eternally pinned to the location of her demise and left anonymous, labelled impersonally as victim. Such uninterrupted images serve to normalise the disposability of life. These victims, existing within a neoliberal hegemony that excludes and marginalises the disenfranchised to the peripheries of society, are reduced, in Agambenian terms, to a literal status of bare life.

Perhaps the most significant connection between the two previous photographs is the anonymity and dehumanisation of the female body. At this juncture, my analysis draws on Butler's cogitations on the precariousness of life, and the grievability or non-grievability of the life of specific demographics. As Butler writes:

> 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. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost, or, rather, never "were". Violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leave a mark that is no mark. There will be no act of grieving.[42]

The centre-stage of these photographs is occupied by anonymous individuals who lack any identity either pre- or post-mortem. In other words, since they merely constitute camera fodder, minimal grieving is permitted: there is no desired face-to-face encounter, which, as Emmanuel Levinas stipulates, would stimulate an encounter of political or ethical dimensions.

Somewhat disappointingly, the pioneers of photography criticism, Sontag, Berger, Barthes and Linfield fail to devise feasible or even possible counter-measures to represent the "unrepresentable". Sontag concludes *On Photography* with a suggestion that a rationing of images may re-endow the shock value that they formerly possessed and calls for 'an ecology not only of real things but of images as well'.[43] Written in 1971, however, this book could not predict the transformations in communications technology that would have a still greater defining impact on the limitless ability to take photographs and distribute them via digital means. Realising the inadequacy of her proposal for an ecology of images, Sontag had to

[42] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 33.
[43] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 94.

readdress this issue thirty years later in her 2003 publication, in which she admitted that 'there isn't going to be an ecology of images' and that 'no Committee of Guardians is going to ration horror, to keep fresh its ability to shock'.[44] Even the visual critic Linfield, whose aversion to Sontag's writings is evident in her recent study *Cruel Radiance*, confesses to remain 'haunted' and 'angered' by a question of a similar nature posed by the photographer Gilles Peress as to how to make the unseen seen.[45] If indeed we as a society have reached our full capacity to view and then empathise with graphic images of human suffering, and if, as Sontag conjectures, 'our capacity to respond to our experiences with emotional freshness and ethical pertinence is [being] sapped by the relentless diffusion of vulgar and appalling images', then the removal of the abject from the frame may invite greater reflection. [46]

Other feminicide photography

Whereas the body is conflated with victim in photojournalism, documentary and art photography have sought to assign it alternative roles in the cultural imaginary. Amongst the photographers to have addressed the feminicides, a distinguishable visual dichotomy of visible versus invisible bodies has materialised. Maya Goded, for instance, a female photographer whose works favour the depiction of marginalised, female communities, has taken to framing the desolate Juarense topography as a signifier of loss and absence, wherein, as Alice Driver comments, 'Goded plays with shadow and light, hinting at absence but never showing bodies'.[47] Photojournalist and documentary photographer Francisco Mata Rosas has likewise used geographical spaces which are emblematic of the U.S.-Mexico border to play with notions of privation and death. By contrast, the Mexican photographer Yamina del Real has produced a similar corpus of images to that of César Saldívar. Like Saldívar, del Real's visual trajectory is also invested in explorations of the female nude. She uses the camera as a reflexive device with which to visualise her own nudity as a means of drawing attention to the paradoxes embodied by female corporeality. Speaking about her employment of the female body, del Real commented: 'el cuerpo femenino es uno de los lugares donde convergen los sinsentidos de las relaciones sociales de dominación y poder […] es lo que se apuesta, y nadie gana. Lo que se teme y oprime. Lo que se desea y niega. Lo que se desconoce, pero se lo describe'.[48] Her 2011

[44] Ibid., p. 97.
[45] Linfield, p. 258.
[46] Ibid., p. 97.
[47] Driver, *More or Less Dead,* p. 147.
[48] Claudia Palacios, 'El cuerpo deshabitado, El cuerpo jaula. Yamina del Real en el Museo Archivo de la Fotografia', *Artes e Historia Mexico,* 2011 <http://www.arts-history.mx/semanario/?id_nota=15062011165341> [accessed 29 April 2016].

exhibition, *El cuerpo deshabitado o en busca del cuerpo perdido*, presented at the Museo Archivo de la Fotografía in Mexico City, included a series dedicated to the cases of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez.

Turning towards the conceptual: the photography of César Saldívar

This section now turns to address two selected photographs from César Saldívar's photographic series *Perder el Norte*, titled *Transiciones, Juárez III* (2006) and *Círculos, Juárez III* (2006). Both images were later exhibited in Mexico City's Palacio de Minería in 2010. This corpus of material was produced in direct response to the Juárez feminicides and sought to spotlight these crimes via conceptual methods of representation, as opposed to the graphic imagery encountered in press photography. In an interview with *El Universal*, Saldívar spoke of his motivations behind the aesthetics of the project:

> […] las mujeres de Juárez se han convertido en una especie de marca mediática en la que siempre se representa el lado más violento, grotesco, visceral, yo no quiero representarlas así, estoy seguro de que lo sútil puede ser muy poderoso.[49]

In his studio, through the control of natural light, staging of models and traditional use of an analogue camera, Saldívar conceptualises an alternative vision of these gender-crimes in each frame that he makes. Although visually estranged from the unadulterated ground-zero photographs taken of the dead victims discarded and left in an undignified state, Saldívar's works are no less politically charged. Themes of death, bodily violence and precariousness are central to his collection and bestow a representational value. Reminiscent of the traditional aesthetics of the twentieth-century masters of Mexican photography, such as Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Edward Weston and Mariana Yampolsky, Saldívar engages directly with natural light, creating a profound sense of texture that generates a composition with depth, dimensions and expression. His employment of *desnudos* has become a signature of his camerawork, as Saldívar himself acknowledges: 'el desnudo se ha convertido en uno de los colores de mi paleta, y así lo instrumento al servicio de otros discursos'.[50] Nudity is a theme of critical importance in this final section. Discussions of the nude female body in Saldívar's photography will be framed within the wider discourses of performance politics and nude protests. Although Saldívar's photographically framed body performs in the private studio domain and not in the

[49] Alex Cruz, 'Homenaje fotográfico a las «Muertas de Juárez»', *La Voz de Galicia* <http://www.lavozdegalicia.es/ocioycultura/2010/03/09/00031268117807180457738.htm> [accessed 29 April 2016].
[50] Anasella Acosta, 'Sin culpa: César Saldívar', *Cuartoscuro*, 2009 <http://cuartoscuro.com.mx/2009/07/sin-culpa-cesar-Saldívar/> [accessed 21 April 2016].

open public space, female nudity as form of counterhegemonic resistance is a key trope within his imagery. Regarding the female body as a tool of dissent opens up a new line of enquiry that counteracts its objectified, passive condition observed in press photography.[51]

The nude body as resistance

Nude protests represent an increasing global trend that is shaping the current landscape of resistance movements. A cursory glance at the last few years attests to its growing appeal as a worldwide strategy of social action used to campaign against animal cruelty, war, loss of farming lands, feminicide and even Brexit, amongst other examples. One rationale behind this tendency to disrobe in public is the idea that 'nudity renders everyone equal'.[52] The body is one commonality shared by all humans, and according to this logic, should we all remove our clothes, the nude form would demonstrate that each one of us is remarkably similar. Amidst these displays of activism therefore, nudity materialises as an equalising agent, regardless of gender, race or class.

Nude female protest, in particular, is becoming increasingly instrumental in the contemporary age as a defiant act of resistance against oppressive patriarchal systems and against gender violence. In June 2017, for example, the Argentinian group Fuerza Artística de Choque Comunicativo staged a nude performance outside the Presidential palace, La Casa Rosada, in Buenos Aires, to denounce a continuum of anti-female terror in the country. This was not a typical protest, in its most traditional sense, rather a staged display of nude women, like the models found in Saldívar's photographic series. Outside the State building, members of this

[51] It is worthwhile to issue certain caveats here. I am aware that studio-based art photography and public protest are two different mediums of expression. One takes place in private, the other in the public space in front of an audience of passing onlookers. The target audience, forum, reception, appreciation and context naturally diverge in the case of photography and public protest. Whilst photography will be viewed in the gallery setting, protest takes place in the political space of the streets. I am equally mindful of the fact that the act of disrobing in public as a performance of dissent is, in itself, just as powerful as the act of being nude in public. Moreover, nude protests have a collective dimension, whereby the gathering of multiple bodies is an impetus behind these demonstrations. And finally, whereas nudity in art photography is a conventional, appreciated genre of the discipline, nudity in public is not the norm and in some geographical contexts, it is illegal and considered a shameful act. In this sense, nude protests are often axed towards breaking historic taboos. Having said this, one distinctive commonality shared between Saldívar's photography and nude protest is the performative nature of the body and its capacity to resist.

[52] Barbara Brownie, 'Naked Protest and the Revolutionary Body', *The Guardian*, 15 January 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/costume-and-culture/2014/jan/15/naked-protest-revolutionary-body> [accessed 14 October 2017].

movement congregated and proceeded to slowly remove every item of clothing they were wearing, including their socks and shoes. Over a tannoy, a female orator recites the following:

> Nombremos a todas: asesinadas, desaparecidas, abandonadas, golpeadas, discriminadas, expulsadas. Nombremos a todas: trabajadoras, desempleadas, enfermas, sanas, locas, no hay cuerdas. Nombremos a todas: vivas y muertas. Dí mi nombre, el tuyo. Nombremos a todas y exigiremos siempre.[53]

Subsequently the orator calls upon those present to take their positions below a large banner that reads: 'Feminicidio es Genocidio'. The women pile themselves on top of one another in a disorderly fashion and assume distorted positions to create a sea of flesh that is visually reminiscent of corpses seen discarded amidst historical mass atrocity. As the nude women remain motionless, details of the way in which feminicide is committed (strangled, burnt, stabbed, kidnapped and left without food or water) and the length of time it takes for women to die from their injuries are read aloud. This is a meticulously theatricalised performance in which the female body is employed as a tool to denounce the violence to which women are subjected throughout Argentina and beyond. Death is re-enacted by the living and, more importantly, the nude body is mobilised to subvert patriarchal discourses of objectification and passivity associated with the female form.

The performance politics associated with such protests has piqued scholarly enquiry. A growing corpus of research has sought to theoretically address the strategic deployment of the unclothed body as a politicised site of dissent. Barbara Sutton's article 'Memories of Bodies and Resistance at the World Social Forum' provides insights about nudity as a tool of action and its potential for rallying solidarity. The author recounts her experience of witnessing a young woman's nude protest amongst crowds at the forum's annual meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2003. Though Sutton's text is remarkably descriptive and subjective in nature, with vivid personal memories from the day, her theoretical reflections on nudity and its relationship to politics are no less compromised. Sutton opens the article by describing what she observed amidst the throngs of people congregating at the World Social Forum. The forum itself, considered the world's 'largest gathering of civil society' is something of a global assembly point, with a deep-rooted counter-hegemonic charter of political principles.[54] It is designed as

---

[53] '#Feminicidioesgenocidio: La impactante acción feminista en Argentina contra la violencia machista', *El Huffington Post*, 1 June 2017 <http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2017/06/01/feminicidioesgenocidio-la-impactante-accion-feminista-en-argen_a_22121232/> [accessed 31 October 2017].

[54] World Social Forum, 'World Social Forum 2016', 2016 <https://fsm2016.org/en/sinformer/a-propos-du-forum-social-mondial/> [accessed 12 November 2016].

a space of free and open thinking fostering democratic initiatives in opposition to neoliberal and imperialist global systems. Most of the forum comprises organised, participatory activities such as political workshops, conferences and artistic performances which engage directly with themes of human rights, solidarity, global economics and democracy. Sutton remarks that the forum is a 'bodily experience', a space where bodies unite to march, protest, resist, debate and organise.[55] For Sutton, then, the unclothed female body whose public nudity is intellectually scrutinised represented an extension of this bodily experience; as Sutton puts it, it is 'a body performing resistance'.[56] Many facets of this woman's performance pique Sutton's curiosity. She first interprets the woman's exposed form as the opposite of the scantily-clad bodies of beauty queens or supermodels so frequently seen and commodified in western mass media: 'her nakedness was not about flaunting sexuality or selling anything'.[57] For Sutton, the woman's nudity is not aligned with clichéd prescriptions of beauty but rather 'stood proud as a way to convey a different type of message […] that "under our skins we are all equal, we are all humans"'.[58] Moreover, this embodied performance, Sutton proposes, served a dual purpose. Most importantly, it acted as a condemnation of the society in which we reside, especially global neoliberal policies and war. Beyond this statement, however, Sutton understands the woman's disrobing action as a means of subverting mainstream visual images of nude women, instead accentuating the unclothed body's 'expressive possibilities and asserting its right to take space, to speak, and to be heard'.[59]

Although Sutton focuses mainly on the powerful singularity of the woman's nudity, she reveals that she was equally absorbed by the disrobing of others in the public space of the concert in a show of solidarity, and the forceful deployment of the city's police force that ensued. It is the police intervention that carries Sutton's text into more theoretical territory, as she proceeds to question the impact of nudity. She asks directly: 'why did a naked protest seem so threatening and destabilizing? […] What fears did these out of control rebellious bodies stir?'[60] Much like Sutton's contemporaries, as I will elaborate, she ponders the notion of being nude in order to unravel the significance of the woman's unclothed status at the forum. Her first assertion is that

[55] Barbara Sutton, 'Memories of Bodies and Resistance at the World Social Forum', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, iii, 8 (2013), 139–148 (p. 139).
[56] Ibid., p. 139.
[55] Ibid., p. 140.
[58] Ibid., p. 140.
[59] Ibid., p. 141.
[60] Ibid., p. 141.

the unclothed body 'is filled with multiple, context-bound, historically-specific meanings'.[61] Occupying a state of undress can elicit disparate ideas: it can be pleasurable or humiliating, empowering or disempowering, natural or unnatural, legal or illegal, deliberate or forced. Furthermore, connotations of nudity are contingent on the society in which we reside and are closely 'intertwined with ideologies of racism, classism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, and other systems of oppression', to cite Sutton.[62] When viewed through the prism of resistance movements, the body, whether it is dressed or undressed, represents 'the tool of protest *par excellence*'.[63] As I will discuss in the following chapter with respect to documentary, the body is central to resistance, it requires protester's to be physically present or, as it is termed in Spanish, 'poner el cuerpo'. With respect to women's nude protests, Sutton surmises that it is a tactic for women to 'reclaim a position as an active subject' and to reconstruct nudity 'away from objectification'.[64]

Giving definition to one's own body is central to the beliefs of the controversial Ukrainian group, FEMEN. The tactic most associated with this feminist group is the exposure of their bare breasts which are often scrawled with polemic, political messages. FEMEN's topless protests, Barbara Brownie writes, call attention to female 'bodily suffering' and 'objectification'.[65] Although a self-declared feminist group that wish to reclaim ownership over their bodies, they have been subject to criticism from fellow feminists for their recourse to nude strategies. Inna Schevchenko, one of the figureheads of FEMEN, has responded to these disparaging comments with a convincing argument that reflects the group's manifesto, she asserts, 'I'm going to give definition to what my body is. My body is sexual when I decide it to be sexual; my body should be political when I decide it to be political'.[66] This idea of reclaiming bodily ownership and agency is resonant with Saldívar's photographs, as I will now elucidate.

[61] Ibid., p. 141.
[62] Ibid., p. 142.
[63] Ibid., p. 142.
[64] Ibid., p. 145.
[65] Barbara Brownie, *Acts of Undressing* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 75.
[66] Rahila Gupta, 'The Politics of Nudity as Feminist Protest – From Ukraine To Tunisia', *Open Democracy*, 21 July 2017 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rahila-gupta/politics-nudity-feminist-protest> [accessed 25 October 2017].

Figure 11. *Círculos, Juárez III*, César Saldívar.

Círculos, Juárez III: the nude Rosita Adelita

Saldívar's photograph, *Círculos, Juárez III* proves an interesting visual response to the Juárez feminicides. In contrast to the theme of precariousness that is threaded through the artistic and filmic narratives examined in the previous chapters, this photograph foregrounds the possibility of strength and resistance. In this black and white image, a female nude is positioned centrally and symmetrically. Her body is depicted from the thighs upwards and occupies both the length and breadth of the frame. With her head tilted, she raises her arm, pointing her elbow out to the side and watches her bicep flex. Light and shadows are the only co-participatory elements within composition. Darkness partially eclipses one side of her body which obscures her breast and pubic area, whilst the bright light draws the viewer's attention to the subject's strength shown by her arm gesture. This image marks a paradigmatic shift from the press photography previously discussed. Here, the female nude is an active subject who takes control of her body. Furthermore, the conventionally masculine, muscle-flexing position subverts gender expectations and destabilises traditional portrayals of passive femininity which, in turn, elide both her objectification and sexualisation.

The photograph recalls images of female empowerment from the wider iconography of popular culture, in particular the celebrated feminist icon, Rosie the Riveter. J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It' poster, designed during World War Two, has made Rosie the Riveter an enduring symbol of women's power and solidarity. The poster was produced for Westinghouse Electric Corporation in the U.S. to encourage women to join the war effort and assist the company with

aviation manufacturing. Rosie is depicted wearing her classic red bandanna, rolling up the sleeves of her blue overalls and flexing her muscles. She is considered the paragon of a woman for feminists. Not only is she able to carry out a man's job well, but she is equally a woman of beauty. Since the 1940s, this image has enjoyed transculturation appropriation and the figure of Rosie has been re-imagined as other women of different races and creeds. In January 2017, for instance, following the Women's Marches, Rosie featured on the front cover of *The New Yorker* as a woman of colour. In May 2014, American singer Beyoncé famously donned a Rosie costume and assumed her classic pose, which quickly became an Instagram sensation. Furthermore, Mexican artist, Robert Valdez produced a Mexican Rosie for his acrylic work Rosita Adelita. Valdez's tableau displaces traditional American Rosie with that of La Adelita, a female *soldadera* from the twentieth century Mexican Revolution.

Círculos, Juárez III borrows from this lasting visual legacy of Rosie the Riveter. It taps into the theme of female power that the image has come to signify throughout each of its cultural re-inventions. The nude body in Saldívar's photograph 'functions rhetorically', to cite Brett Lunceford.[67] It makes a statement that the female body is capable of defying its generic, gendered prescriptions, resisting hierarchies and above all, acquiring agency via the act of nudity and performance. Performance opens up critical conversations about the prediscursive nature of gender ascribed to the body, posited in Butlerian theory. Her theoretical explorations of performativity prove apposite to the discussion of this image. Central to Butler's understanding of gender is that 'it is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency'.[68] Rather gender represents a tenuous identity that is constructed over time and 'instituted through a stylized repetition of acts'.[69] The body, in turn, is a stylised site, where the identity of gender is inscribed via 'bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds' that generate the impression of 'an abiding gendered self'.[70] Butler's remarks underscore that gender and the body are therefore socially constructed and 'how one does gender' is contingent upon society, context and their respective principles. Gender construction is not just the case for women, but for men as well. Kathleen Staudt situates the notion of gender performance in dialogue with the modalities of gender violence in Ciudad Juárez. She asserts that by thinking of how gender

[67] Brett Lunceford, *Naked Politics: Nudity, Political Action, and the Rhetoric of the Body* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 5.
[68] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 30, 4 (1988), 519–531 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893> [accessed 28 October 2017].
[69] Ibid., p. 519.
[70] Ibid., p. 519.

is performed provides a lens through which to observe male violence towards women. Violence, she writes, is 'embedded in language and behavior; it is learned'.[71] To consider gender and the practicing of gender as performances that are subject to regulations, codes, systems and norms, then the possibility of re-regulating gender offers some hope of change. According to Staudt, violence against women is a normalised behaviour based upon dichotomous tenets that construct men as active and women as passive. As such, she commends the work of anti-violence activists that seek to preclude 'the normalization of violence' by recalibrating it as 'abnormal and no longer […] legitimate'.[72] The subversion of gender ideologies captured through the camera lens in Saldívar's work therefore proves both progressive and productive.

Transiciones, Juárez III

Figure 12. *Transiciones, Juárez III*, César Saldívar.

Transiciones, Juárez III is another example of Saldívar's use of the female nude as a vehicle of resistance against male violence and patriarchal oppression. Central to the composition is the nude human form. The gender of the subject is not immediately decipherable due to the tilted camera angle and the carefully positioned foliage that obscures the genitalia. Only when our gaze is averted upwards from the lower quadrant of the frame are we able to fathom that the subject is a woman. The body is not photographed in its entirety, but is presented in a fragmented form. Both the lower limbs and forearms extend out beyond the photographic

[71] Kathleen Staudt, *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 18.
[72] Ibid., p. 19.

frame. The female nude assumes a Christ-like stance, with her head tilted upwards and her arms outstretched, tapping into traditional religious connotations of suffering and sacrifice. Natural light is channelled upwards to map the body's topography, capturing its contours and crevices that cast subtle shadows over the skin. In the foreground, what appears to be an onion is placed upon the pubis of the subject and its silhouetted shoots disconcertingly claw towards the female's skin. The co-presence of the body and the onion, two discontinuous visual elements, prompt reflection. Although the nude form is larger in dimension than the foregrounded spherical onion, its scale is accentuated by the manipulation of light and shadow. The use of chiaroscuro bathes the body in a divine light and draws the onion into the darkness which endows it a malevolent aura, and, by extension, sinister connotations. Its abstract presence gestures toward a wider symbolic value.

At first glance, the sprouted onion is suggestive of the phallus. Its outline and placement over the female's genital area alludes to the sexually-motivated nature of crimes in Ciudad Juárez and the violable woman. Its dominant structure imposes itself over the female's nude torso, piercing up from her loins to her abdomen to evoke the motion of forced penetration which renders the subject submissive. On a deeper connotative level, however, the onion may elicit further metaphorical associations and resist these phallic denotations. Sociological studies, for instance, employ the onion as an analogy for the multi-layered nature of life, society and identity. Marie Connolly and Louise Harms, for instance, compare the layers of an onion to the facets of human experience, they write, 'human experience reflects layering: layer upon layer, building up around us and influencing our lives, sometimes in complex and repetitive ways'. Employing an onion as a metaphor emphasises the search for truth and understanding by peeling back layers to make sense of the outer and inner selves, or the public and private selves that we all hold. In the case of Saldívar's image, the onion may infer the need to look beyond the superficialities of gender or may point towards the unpeeling of central issues to get to the core of the ongoing incidences of feminicide in Juárez. The title of the composition, *Transiciones,* may also give significance to the image's symbolism and respective meaning. The word 'transition' conveys evolution, metamorphosis and to be in the midst of change. In our contemporary age, it is a word that is commonly associated with gender and sex; those 'transitioning' are choosing to change their gender-identity or the sex they were assigned at birth. Alternatively, transition can imply death, not necessarily in a morbid sense, but rather a regenerative one. The transition from life to death, followed by a period of decomposition is a

dynamic cycle that can give life to the biosphere, hence the integration of the onion to demonstrate rebirth.

Concluding remarks

As this chapter has observed, visual responses to gender violence within the medium of photography vary considerably, according to genre and agenda. That said, the body still remains a consistent trope. Adopting a comparative methodology, this chapter first sought to consider images of bodily suffering encountered in Mexican press photography. It contemplated whether spectacles of anonymous death run the risk of re-victimising the body, commodifying it and reproducing violent ideologies. Subsequently, the focus of the chapter then shifted to the creative visions of feminicide captured in Cesar Saldivar's studio-based art photography. Using nude models, his black and white images transform the body into a site of resistance and action to denounce anti-female terror. Chapter Seven will continue to engage with theories of the body as a tool of dissent when examining Alejandra Sánchez and José Antonio Cordero's documentary *Bajo Juárez.*

Chapter 7

The absent body in the documentary *Bajo Juárez: La ciudad devorando a sus hijas* (2006)

> Documentary film operates in literal compliance with the writ of *habeas corpus*. "You should have the body" – without it the legal process comes to a standstill. "You should have the body" – without it documentary tradition lacks its primary referent, the real social actor(s) of whose historical engagement it speaks. Documentary film raises in acute form the persistent question of what to do with people, how to represent them, or, how to represent the human body as a cinematic signifier in a manner commensurate with its status in the ensemble of social relations.[1]

Introduction

If, as Bill Nichols suggests, documentary film is principally concerned with the representation of the human body, then how might those who have died or disappeared be represented? How might a body that is physically absent become a "primary referent" or "social actor" within the documentary frame? These are pertinent questions in relation to the documentaries about the Juárez feminicides, given that the subjects, who are central to the narrative of these productions, are often those who are no longer present. From a close reading of the documentary text, *Bajo Juárez: La ciudad devorando a sus hijas* (2006), this final chapter will analyse the representational methods of making the materially absent female body visible. Directed by Alejandra Sánchez and José Antonio Cordero, *Bajo Juárez* has been applauded for its balanced interweaving of personal testimonies by victims' families, archival footage and interviews with maquiladora workers, journalists and ex-police officials. Not only does *Bajo Juárez* provide a factual account of feminicide to expose the scale of the corruption which has impeded official justice for the grieving mothers; it also, and most importantly, seeks to remember individual victims of such crimes. This chapter will consider how the absent female body is repeatedly recalled and re-embodied via visual, narrative and memory strategies. Informed by the theories of Barthes, Freud and Hirsch, amongst others, my arguments will explore the interconnected themes of loss, memory, mourning and collective resistance that combine to make present the body that is physically *in absentia.*

[1] Bill Nichols, 'History, Myth, and Narrative in Documentary', *Film Quarterly*, 41 (1987), 9–20 (p. 9).

The Juárez feminicides: a documentary perspective

Much like the mediums of art, photography and cinematography discussed in previous chapters, the documentary genre has been a popular means of chronicling, denouncing and remembering the Juárez feminicides. A number of productions have been released since the late 1990s, notably *Señorita Extraviada* (2001), *Preguntas sin Respuestas* (2005), *Bajo Juárez* (2006), *On the Edge* (2006), *La Carta* (2010) and *Blood Rising* (2013), to name but a few of the most prominent and discussed films in the documentary canon. Although the aesthetics and narratives may vary, these productions all share common objectives – to remember the victims and to heighten public consciousness of the crimes committed against women at the border.

Ursula Biemann's *Performing the Border* (1999) was the first to shed light on the issue and to highlight the status of women living and working along the northern frontier, from Tijuana down to Ciudad Juárez. The thematic structure resembles the analytical and theoretical approach of a dissertation, and indeed, Biemann labels her film a 'video essay' and divides the narrative into four parts: The Plant, The Settlement, Sex Work and The Killings.[2] Unlike later documentaries, *Performing the Border* does not exclusively address the feminicides or dwell on the victim's stories; instead its purpose lies in critical evaluation of the complex space of the border and its impact on female corporeality. In an article written by Biemann herself, she reflects on the underlying interests of her video essay:

> I will focus, therefore, on the circulation of female bodies in the transnational zone and on the regulation of gender relations in representation, in the public sphere, the entertainment and sex industry, and in the reproductive politics of the maquila.[3]

Much of Biemann's documentary is shaped by a somewhat intellectual questioning of the nature of borders, whether geographical, economic, social or personal. From the outset, this demarcation line that separates the U.S. and Mexico is deemed to be a 'highly constructive' space that gets 'reconstituted and reproduced through the crossing of people'.[4] For this reason, Biemann considers the border a contradictory place for citizens to live in; their lives are placed

[2] Demos explains why Biemann classifies her work as a 'video essay', as it 'implies a category that joins images and writing, but also, more complexly, presents images as a form of writing and writing as a mode of images' (T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013], p. 209).
[3] Ursula Biemann, 'Performing the Border: On Gender, Transnational Bodies, and Technology', in *Globalization on the Line: Culture, Capital and Citizenship at U.S. Borders*, ed. by Claudia Sadowski-Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, 2002), pp. 99–118.
[4] *Performing the Border*, dir. by Ursula Biemann (Women Make Movies, 1999).

in a constant state of transformation, and she suggests that such transience makes for a 'highly performative' setting:[5]

> Life on the border teaches you to cope with contradictions, to shift out of habitual formations on a daily basis, to operate in a pluralistic mode because flexibility is a matter of survival when you are among the extras on the set of corporate culture.[6]

It is the relationship between corporate culture and women's bodies that is probed throughout the documentary. Amidst scenes filmed in the maquiladora plants, the narrator speaks of women's struggles in the arena of global capitalism. Their repetitive work is observed by the camera, in a quasi-Foucauldian strategy of surveillance that gestures at the regulation of the female body in the context of labour. As Biemann explains, 'in the corporate language, any activity and any person can be thought of in terms of disassembly and re-assembly. The body of the female worker gets technologized and fragmented in post-human terminology.'[7] As Fregoso suggests, the conversion of women's bodies into robotic subjects and their commodification is a leitmotif that is maintained throughout and visually reaffirmed:

> The film focuses 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. Links between the exploitation and alienation of laboring bodies in various sites within global capitalism.[8]

A few years later, in 2001, one of the most famous feminicide documentaries, *Señorita Extraviada*, was released. Directed by Lourdes Portillo, this was the first documentary to place emphasis on the individual and collective grief of the mothers whose daughters had either disappeared or been murdered in Ciudad Juárez. At the time of its release, it was the first documentary to bring the issue of gender-violence in Mexico to the international stage, and achieved many commendations on the film festival circuit, including Special Jury Prize at Sundance and an Ariel award for Best Mexican Documentary.[9] Whilst Portillo's body of work is extensive and multi-generic, her trajectory has gravitated over time towards crimes against humanity in Latin America and has situated women at the centre of these narratives. Before *Señorita Extraviada*, Portillo produced the Oscar-nominated film, *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (1985). Like *Señorita Extraviada*, this 1985 documentary addresses themes of murder,

---

[5] Ibid.
[6] Biemann, *Performing the Border*.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Rosa Linda Fregoso, *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[9] Lourdes Portillo, 'The Films and Videos of Lourdes Portillo', 2016, <http://www.lourdesportillo.com/about/about_bio.php?category=awards> [accessed 1 November 2016].

disappearance, maternal grief and social activism. Its subject matter is the estimated 30,000 *desaparecidos* who were forcibly disappeared and killed in Argentina during the period of imposed terror known as the Dirty War.[10] Between 1976 and 1983, under military rule, thousands of citizens, from all strata of society, were apprehended and never seen again, as a means of expelling left-wing dissidence. Portillo's documentary focused on the relentless protesting of mothers who stood united in search of the truth about the whereabouts of their missing children. The film provided a platform for the mothers to voice their losses and thereby empowered them; as Fregoso writes, *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* was a way to 'redefinir y reapropriarse la maternidad como un modelo de resistencia que unifique a las mujeres de distintos sectores sociales frente a su lucha contra la represión del nacionalismo patriarcal'.[11]

Señorita Extraviada is characterised by family testimonies and performative imagery that often functions allegorically as a subtext, beckoning the spectator to think beyond what they view. It is a documentary production that counters the dehumanisation of women, amalgamating visually pleasing aesthetics with politics and realism. Portillo has spoken openly of her conviction about the benefits of aesthetic intervention in social issues, stating that 'el arte del cine puede ser utilizado al servicio de las desprotegidas'.[12] In Fregoso's critical retrospective of Portillo's work, she describes how *Señorita Extraviada* is driven by 'una poética política y una ética destinada a la transformación del terror',[13] which she considers promotes mechanisms of compassion and understanding for feminicide victims and survivors alike. Speaking in general about Portillo's productions, Fregoso notes, 'sus documentales son narrados en tono lírico, personal e íntimo, de una voz lírica-subjetiva que sugiere, y no como la narración del documental clásico que resulta distante y autoritaria'.[14] A notion of ethereality infuses the scenes to create a prevailing sense of absence and foreboding. From the outset of the documentary, Portillo, who acts as the narrator, explains: 'I came to Juárez to track down ghosts and to listen to the mystery that surrounds them.'[15] Indeed, the film's opening shots dichotomise the presence and absence of the female body in the borderspace, oscillating between faded

[10] Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War'*, 3rd edn (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press Books, 1997), p. 158.
[11] Rosa Linda Fregoso, 'Una retrospectiva crítica de la obra cinematográfica de Lourdes Portillo', *Comunicación y Medios*, 24 (2012), 148–70.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Lourdes Portillo, *Señorita Extraviada* (Xochitl Productions, Women Make Movie, 2001).

spectres of women in the desert and images of young women going about their daily life in the urban space of the city. Fregoso also remarks on the ethereality of the film:

> *Señorita Extraviada* is part of a new politics of the body taking shape around poetic, ethereal representations that animate an alternative sense of presence or what Hetherington calls a *praesentia*, the manifestation of "an absence" within the "material presence of social life".[16]

Other scholars have made similar assessments: Driver notes that because the documentary mingles the genres of melodrama, documentary and mystery it could be categorised as a 'melodocumysterio';[17] Jill Sandell comments that Portillo 'breathes life into a space of death and protests the silence that surrounds the crimes'.[18]

Bajo Juárez: context and plot

Although parallels may be drawn between Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* and Sánchez and Cordero's *Bajo Juárez*, the latter appears less invested in the performativity of aesthetics, and more interested in conveying maternal loss and exposing truths plainly, with little editing. *Bajo Juárez* foregrounds the individual story of Norma Andrade, a mother whose daughter was murdered in Ciudad Juárez. The film traces Norma's personal journey over the span of several years, from her immediate grief when she first learnt the news of her daughter's untimely death, through to her fervent engagement in social activism and her pursuit of justice against the state for the unresolved gender-crimes in the border region. Lilia Alejandra García Andrade was only seventeen years old when she was kidnapped en route home, following a shift at a local assembly plant. A week after her disappearance, her body was discovered in an empty lote in the vicinity of the Plaza Juárez Mall. The autopsy results revealed signs of sexual assault, torture and strangulation as the cause of her death. To this day, like countless other gender-crimes, her murder remains unresolved and those accountable have gone unpunished.

Bajo Juárez offers a vital counter-narrative to the apathetic discourse propagated by the state about the Juárez feminicides. As the documentary reveals, during President Vicente Fox's administration, government officials (including the President himself) and figures from the

[16] Rosa Linda Fregoso, 'Transforming Terror: Documentary Poetics in Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* (2001)', in *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, ed. by Alexandra Juhasz and Alisa Lebow (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 233–51.
[17] Alice Laurel Driver, *Cultural Production and Ephemeral Art: Feminicide and the Geography of Memory in Ciudad Juãrez, 1998–2008* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2011) <http://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=hisp_etds> [accessed 17 May 2016].
[18] Jillian Sandell, 'The Proximity of the Here and the Urgency of the Now: Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada*', in *Political Documentary Cinema in Latin America*, ed. by Antonio Traverso and Kristi M. Wilson (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 180–93.

judiciary publicly declared that the murders of women had been largely resolved in Ciudad Juárez, unashamedly denying the true extent of the issue. Speaking to *La Jornada*, one of the co-directors, Cordero, commented on a specific scene in which Norma Andrade confronts President Vicente Fox. Fox's indisputable attempt to avoid denouncing the crisis in Juárez underpinned, in Cordero's words, 'un total desinterés gubernamental en los asesinatos de las mujeres, si no es que un desprecio total'.[19] This documentary space, however, created a forum for a competing discourse to be publicly aired, in which not only mothers but academics and journalists too could present their findings and dispel established myths about the female victims.

Filmed over the course of six years, *Bajo Juárez* was based on an earlier short documentary, *Ni Una Más* (2001), produced by Sánchez alone. In an interview in the *Excelsior*, the directors of *Bajo Juárez* explained that they had based the investigative part of the documentary on books previously published by Diana Washington Valdez and Sergio Gónzalez Rodríguez, both of whom are interviewed at length in the film. Indeed, the film's structure is modelled on that of their publications, *Cosecha de Mujeres* and *Huesos en el Desierto*, which methodically establish the connections between organised crime, maquiladoras, the powerful and the government – all factors, according to these writers, that contribute to feminicide in Ciudad Juárez.[20]

The opening shots of the documentary feature the desolate yet transient space of the border, capturing its emblematic desert landscapes and its constant flow of traffic. Much like the cinematic texts, *El traspatio* and *El otro sueño americano*, and the artwork of Judithe Hernández examined in previous chapters, the geographical setting of the borderspace is a persistent visual motif throughout *Bajo Juárez*. As the viewer is introduced to Ciudad Juárez, a *norteño*-style song accompanies the passing images. The lyrics of the song romanticise the prospect of living at the border and the fulfilment that it brings to its residents:

> On the border another life awaits me. I'm going north to get some love. In Ciudad Juárez I'll find my destiny. In Juárez everything will be better. The night will not stop shining. Life there is for dancing and enjoyment because people in Juárez never stop loving.[21]

[19] *La Jornada*, 3 December 2006, p. 10.
[20] *Excelsior*, 3 October 2008, p. 15.
[21] *Bajo Juárez: La ciudad devorando a sus hijas*, dir. by José Antonio Cordero and Alejandra Sánchez (FOPROCINE/IMCINE, 2006).

This love letter to Juárez, however, is abruptly interrupted by a radio bulletin which announces that a young girl who was murdered in the region has been identified as Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, whose story will be narrated throughout the documentary. This broadcast is played to a bus full of passengers, consisting mostly of women. As the transmission divulges more information about the deceased's occupation as a maquiladora employee, and issues fresh reports of women kidnapped *en route* home from work, the camera pans along the female commuters, hinting at their possible fate while living in Ciudad Juárez. This is further reinforced by the lingering shot of a "missing" poster attached to a lamppost, which details the disappearance of another Mexican female, Betsy Reyes Hernández, who has yet to be found. This ephemeral image of the missing young woman sets a visual precedent for the rest of the documentary, where female spectres of the murdered and disappeared return to haunt the frame via a variety of representational strategies employed by the documentary filmmakers. This chapter will now analyse how these strategies recall the absent female body and to what effect. I will begin with an examination of the frequent use of family photographs and home footage.

The body: family photographs and home video footage

To return briefly to Nichols's words cited above, he questions how the documentary mode can represent its necessary primary referent when that referent is in fact materially absent. This remark is particularly relevant to the analysis of *Bajo Juárez*, where the primary referent, Lilia Alejandra, is absent due to her untimely death by feminicide. Nichols proceeds to reflect upon this quandary in relation to Ana Carigan and Bernard Stone's *Roses in December* (1982), a documentary that brings to the screen the life of Jean Donovan, who was attacked, violated and murdered, along with three nuns, whilst carrying out missionary work during the civil war in El Salvador. For Nichols, the documentary's visual objective was 'to restore meaning to a life that has been lost', an objective that he surmises is by no means exclusive to *Roses*; indeed, *Bajo Juárez* appears to share this same purpose.[22] He asks the poignant question, 'by means of what conceptual framework can we imbue the body – its appearance – its actions – with significance?'[23] Nichols identifies an answer in the documentary's 'weave of materials that stand in for a person who is dead'.[24] By "materials", he refers to the matrix of home videos, archival footage, iconography and differing narrative strategies deployed within the frame that rematerialise the body and life of Jean Donovan, who would otherwise remain *in absentia*. His

[22] Nichols, p. 9.
[23] Ibid., p. 10.
[24] Ibid., p. 10.

observations therefore find resonance in *Bajo Juárez*, where Cordero and Sánchez incorporate similar modes of production to bring back the body of Lilia Alejandra.

Photographs and home video footage prove vital to her representation and are employed episodically throughout *Bajo Juárez*. These private, family archives represent, in Annette Kuhn's words, 'repositories of memory' both for those grieving and for the documentary's public spectatorship.[25] The imagery featured of Lilia Alejandra García Andrade stands in as a compensatory mechanism for her material absence, and is used in an attempt to revivify her as a subject, as opposed to merely that of a lost, anonymous victim. Her photographs are bathed in a nostalgic light that transports the viewer back to her childhood and adolescence, to a time of innocence, happiness and wholeness. Footage of her past plays out on-screen, much like memories do in our minds, recollecting specific moments, focusing our gaze and making it linger on the body that is no longer with us, that we can no longer see or touch. Lilia Alejandra is first presented to the viewer by a family photograph taken of her during her *quinceañera* celebration. Wearing a floor length white dress and tiara, an attractive, young woman entering into adulthood is evoked. Video recordings and snapshots of Lilia Alejandra's *quinceañera* are frequently returned to as a means of instilling memory. The images are employed chronologically, and guide the viewer through this pivotal rite of passage for the young girl, from the church ceremony through to her celebration with friends and family. Several snippets from the day are played out in slow motion, a visual technique that not only romanticises the subject and surroundings, but also urges the viewer to contemplate her life prior to her murder. The music and lyrics that accompany these scenes are as significant as the events depicted, with each line of a song paralleling the story that is unfolding on-screen. The first scene sequence of Lilia Alejandra dressed and ready for her birthday celebrations is complemented with the lyrics: 'I dressed in white. And on the way to church I leave sadness behind. I am fifteen today. My heart is beating. My five senses are throbbing. With all my friends around me, I start to live today'[26]. The picture of youth conjured here is then juxtaposed with that of her later death, as we learn that only two years after this home video was taken, Lilia Alejandra was killed. Across a series of frames, her body and white dress fade and transmute into an image of a pink cross being erected in a barren desert plain, then into a body bag being removed from a police investigation site and finally into missing posters of other young women. Much of the film oscillates between similar dichotomous images of life and death, past and present,

[25] A. Kuhn, 'Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performances of Memory in and with Visual Media', *Memory Studies*, iv, 3 (2010), 298–313 (p. 303).
[26] *Bajo Juárez*.

in order to convey Lilia Alejandra's bodily absence from the frame and the collective loss of women owing to feminicides in the region.

Family photographs prove both effective and affective in the documentary mode, when telling the story of someone who is no longer alive, particularly someone who has suffered an untimely death. Not only do they individualise a person's history, but they simultaneously make the spectator identify with the subject on a more emotionally invested plane. In the case of *Bajo Juárez*, photographs which were once contained in the family album now constitute politically charged statements that seek to affirm Lilia Alejandra's past existence and humanise her to the audience. Whilst photography may be connected to death, as explored in Chapter 6, the medium also shares a close relationship with presence and memory: as Barthes writes, 'every photograph is a certificate of presence';[27] in the words of John Berger, 'the most popular use of the photograph is as a memento of the absent'.[28] The photographic image is a testament to subjectivity and a documentation of the physical, corporeal being that is captured at a given time before the camera lens. In *Camera Lucida*, whilst contemplating the ontology of photography and its distinction from other visual arts, Barthes arrives at the conclusion that every image produced by a camera brings 'the return of the dead'. Barthes' reflections, like those of Sontag, are born out of a subjective desire and curiosity to understand photographs, drawing on personal experiences and dismissing the use of any theoretical references to substantiate assertions. The mission Barthes sets himself in *Camera Lucida* is to identify the essence of photography, which he fails to do until the latter part of his publication. In Part II, Barthes' appreciation of photography becomes all the more romanticised and sentimental, prompted by an image found of his late mother. In the wake of his mother's death, Barthes finds himself sifting through old photographs in what he describes as a futile attempt at 'finding her'.[29] Nonetheless, he recalls himself on one occasion, alone at his mother's apartment, viewing pictures in search of 'the truth of the face I had loved'; when he finally comes across it, this marks a turning point in Barthes' perspective on photography. The photograph is of his mother, aged five, standing with her older brother amongst the palms in their parents' Winter Garden. Whilst this significant photograph is not reproduced in his book, he recounts in meticulous detail its mise-en-scène, his mother's gestures, features and gaze. This image that roused Barthes' emotions so much leads him to ponder the existence of that which is

[27] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard, 12th edn (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982), p. 87.
[28] John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph*, ed. by Geoff Dyer (New York, NY: Aperture, 2013).
[29] Barthes, p. 63.

photographed: 'in Photography, I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past.'[30] His realisation that photography attests to the presence of the 'that-has-been' leads him to state:

> The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze; light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.[31]

Barthes thus finds materiality in the Winter Garden image, alluding to Sontag's assertion that a photograph is 'a material vestige of its subject'.[32] Although his mother's body is "impalpable", he evokes a sense of heightened attachment to her via what he calls an "umbilical cord" that generates reciprocity between himself and the photographed maternal subject. His use of the metaphor 'umbilical cord' is curious and evokes the continued familial link between the two. This idea is evident in *Bajo Juárez*, where photographs and slow-motion videos of Lilia Alejandra smiling and cheerful amidst her celebrations are alternated with images of her solitary mother in a quiet domestic setting, recalling memories of her lost daughter. These interchanging frames serve a dual purpose: first, they emphasise the de-animation of the household in the wake of Lilia Alejandra's death, as the silent room speaks of her absence, and secondly, they reinforce the importance of photographs to the continuation of family unity even after a subject has passed.

As Marianne Hirsch argues, photographs are 'the family's instrument of self-knowledge and representation – the means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated, by which the family's story would henceforth be told'.[33] Indeed, Hirsch sheds light on family photographs as performances of memory. Their ideas rest on the indexicality of the photographic medium and its capacity to reendow materiality, and by extension, presence, to the subject in front of the lens; as Hirsch writes in her seminal text, *Family Frames*:

> It is precisely the indexical nature of the photo, its status as relic, or trace, or fetish – its "direct" connection with the material presence of the photographed person – that at

[30] Ibid., p. 76.
[31] Ibid., p. 80.
[32] Sontag, p. 120.
[33] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 6.

> once intensifies its status as harbinger of death and, at the same time and concomitantly, its capacity to signify life.[34]

The photographic image thus emerges both as a *memento mori* of that which is dead, and as an existential affirmation that testifies to the presence of an individual who stood directly before the camera lens. Kuhn draws similar conclusions about the significance of familial photographic archives: 'while family photographs and family albums can function prosthetically as substitutes for remembering, they are also used by their compilers and owners as prompts for performances of memory in private, interactive, collective and sometimes even public, contexts'.[35] Indeed, the family album in *Bajo Juárez* fulfils many of these functions. In the first instance, it is returned to nostalgically and privately by Norma as she endeavours to remember her daughter amidst the stages of her grief throughout the documentary. It is then applied as a visual mechanism to rally public consciousness, to put a face to the crimes of feminicide and to humanise the victims. Finally, the family photograph is appropriated as a means of collective resistance amongst the wider community of mothers whose daughters have been victims of gender-crime: they cling to their loved ones' images as they march through the streets of Juárez and Mexico City in search of restorative justice that they have never been afforded.

These women's photographs, particularly the image of Lilia Alejandra, are omnipresent spectacles which move fluidly between scenes, spaces and temporalities, taking the viewer back and forth through the history of the crimes. Their ephemeral presence which haunts the documentary frame like ghosts evokes Derrida's theory of spectrality: 'a specter is both visible and invisible, both phenomenal and nonphenomenal: a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance'.[36] For Derrida, spectres constitute the 'ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead'.[37] Like the deceased women in *Bajo Juárez*, spectres are thus an absent presence in society. The spectre, Derrida writes, returns to the spatio-temporality of the present 'in the name of justice'.[38] Those who are considered spectres are 'victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations'.[39] His writings help us interpret the photographs of women, many of which are

[34] Ibid., p.19.
[35] Annette Kuhn, 'Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performances of Memory in and with Visual Media', *Memory Studies*, iv, 3 (2010), 298–313 (p. 303).
[36] Akira Mizuta Lippit, 'Reflections on Spectral Life', *Discourse*, 30 (2008), 242–254 (p. 242).
[37] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. xviii.
[38] Ibid., p. xviii.
[39] Ibid., p. xviii.

emblazoned on posters, simply with the word "Justicia" written above, and clutched by mothers as they demand recompense for lives lost. These women signify those that are 'of the visible but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood'.[40] And whilst photographic images constitute a repetitive structural component, they are deployed intertextually amongst other visual and narrative devices which also seek to retrieve or represent the absent body. As we will observe in the next section, this is often achieved by an iconography where symbols figure as metonyms for female corporeality.

The body and iconography

Whilst the female body in *Bajo Juárez* is physically recalled by family photographs, its physical absence becomes manifest iconographically. Perhaps the most recognisable icons of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez are the large crucifixes placed commemoratively across the city, often where women's bodies have been discovered. As is evident in *Bajo Juárez*, most of the crosses are painted pink or white, and are lovingly decorated by family members, who adorn them with the name of their lost loved one. These feminised Christological symbols in the desert landscape are makeshift monuments that function as instant semiotic reminders of female death and bodily absence. As their religious connotations suggest, the crosses allude to suffering and sacrifice, in this instance of young women, whose lives were taken from them in order to fulfil 'pure sexual sadism', to quote Oscar Máynez, a former forensics expert in Chihuahua who is interviewed several times in the documentary.[41] Pineda-Madrid suggests that the crosses stand for 'female humanity' and seek to 'reclaim territory' for victims and survivors alike in Juárez.[42] Driver has also addressed this reclamation of public space and territory at the border, compellingly discussing the distribution of crosses, graffiti and missing posters across the urban landscape of the city and its immediate desert peripheries. For Driver, this appropriation of space as a means of commemorating the loss and disappearance of women has converted Juárez's geography into a 'memoryscape' interspersed with 'ecotestimonios'.[43] She coins this portmanteau term from an amalgamation of two sources: *cine testimonio* and ecofeminism.[44] These two branches of cinematography and feminism respectively serve differing agendas. *Cine testimonio*, a form of cinema initiated by Mexican documentary-maker Eduardo Maldonado, is concerned with lending a cinematic platform to subaltern voices, to those that,

[40] Lippit, p. 251.
[41] *Bajo Juárez*.
[42] Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Cuidad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), p. 115.
[43] Driver, p. 103.
[44] Ibid, p. 103.

according to Driver, 'lack access to the means of mass communication, in order to make their point of view public'.[45] Ecofeminism is a lesser known sub-movement in the field of feminist studies that is focused on the 'connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women'.[46] Driver's turns to ecofeminism because of its substantive critique of economic formations, such as the maquiladora industry, that exploit and subordinate the environment and women in equal measure. In short, Driver's combination of these two terms into a portmanteau, 'ecotestimonios', serves as public reminder of the personal losses of exploited women and generates 'a message for those who have died and for those that might witness such memorials in the distant future'.[47] Indeed, these ecotestimonios, in the form of crosses and missing posters, function in the documentary as an aide-mémoire to the spectator that the geography of Juárez is not only a 'memoryscape', in Driver's words, but also a 'deathscape' that has become a gravesite of women's bodies, where mothers congregate in acts of solidarity to mourn their loved ones. I will now analyse the process of mourning and motherhood, in particular examining how Norma's spoken memories of her daughter bestow a further sense of identity to her absent body.

Motherhood and mourning the body

As this chapter has established so far, the absent body of Lilia Alejandra, like those of other female victims, is, for the most part, called to the documentary frame via a combination of representational methods, namely personal family photographs, home video footage taken in bygone years and via the use of iconography, chiefly the pink crosses that have become emblems of the Juárez feminicides in the public imaginary. Nonetheless, oral testimonies by mothers and their collective activism further contribute to recalling and re-embodying their lost daughters. Interestingly, unlike other documentaries in the canon, such as *Señorita Extraviada* or *Preguntas sin Respuestas*, there is no voiceover in the documentary. Instead, *Bajo Juárez* incorporates testimonies and interviews, mostly with female interlocutors. The maternal voice occupies a prominent role in the film, particularly the voice of Lilia Alejandra's mother, Norma Andrade. It is via Norma's personal account of losing her daughter that the spectator is made aware of the trauma of feminicide, which extends to the personal injustices that many families have faced at the hands of the corrupt Mexican judicial system. To an extent, the documentary serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, it provides a forum for subaltern voices and journalists

[45] Ibid., p. 104.
[46] Ibid., p. 105.
[47] Ibid., p. 106.

to propose their version of events, which contradicts the official state rhetoric; and, on the other hand, it acts as a cathartic space where mothers may work through the stages of mourning their loved ones. The process of mourning becomes particularly apparent in the case of Norma Andrade. As the documentary is filmed chronologically, the viewer first encounters Norma in the immediate aftermath of Lilia Alejandra's murder. The initial interview is conducted in the desert, where a commemorative cross has just been placed in remembrance. The camera turns to Norma and Lilia Alejandra's sister sitting in the foreground; they proceed to recall emotionally the turmoil they felt on first realising that Lilia Alejandra was missing. As her sister speaks of the moment they heard on the television that a girl matching Lilia Alejandra's description had just been found dead, the lens focuses on her mother's grief-stricken reactions. Her gaze attempts to evade the camera, as she looks away, unable to engage properly with what is happening.

This reaction may be analysed through Freudian theory. In one of his seminal publications, *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud deems mourning a natural, regular human instinctive reaction 'to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on'.[48] The act of mourning has been scrutinised time and again by psychoanalysts. While it is by no means my intention to psychoanalyse Norma's grief, her emotional process of mourning her daughter, which takes place before the camera lens, does contribute to reendowing subjectivity to this 'lost object', to cite Freud.[49] For Freud, two responses surface when confronted with the loss of a loved object: mourning and melancholia. Although both principally manifest themselves in similar ways, they each have different conclusions. Mourning is considered a normal reaction to such events and a process that can be worked through, whereas melancholia can become a 'morbid pathological disposition'.[50] Initial responses to the loss of a loved one, according to Freud, demonstrate an 'intense turning away from reality […] the object being clung to through the medium of hallucinatory wish psychosis'.[51] With time, he observes, this irrationality dissipates, although the 'existence of the lost object is continued in the mind'.[52] With mourning, it is through the process of hypercathexis that eventually the individual may detach himself or herself from the lost object and become 'free and uninhibited again'.[53] Conversely, melancholia

[48] Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p. 203.
[49] Ibid., p. 203.
[50] Ibid., p. 203.
[51] Ibid., p. 204.
[52] Ibid., p. 204.
[53] Ibid., p. 205.

is a perpetual state, and, whereas mourning is a conscious process, melancholia constitutes an unconscious reaction to loss, which then leads to feelings of worthlessness or self-reproach.[54]

To link Freud's analyses to *Bajo Juárez*, it would appear that Norma exhibits a state of mourning within the documentary. Interestingly, it was shot over the period of a few years, and filming began immediately after her daughter's death. This spacing of time therefore allows the audience to distinguish clearly between her stages of mourning. As noted above, when we are first introduced to Norma, the pain she is suffering from Lilia Alejandra's murder is noticeably acute, and, as Freud posits, in the aftermath of loss she is unable to engage with reality, deliberately turning away from the lens and crying. But throughout the documentary, Norma is given a forum within which to work through this grief and contemplate her maternal loss. Mourning proves central to the narrative of the documentary: as Norma attempts to cling to the memory of her lost daughter, she recounts some of her fondest and proudest memories of Lilia Alejandra, piecing together a picture of who she was for the audience, and thereby returning a sense of identity and agency to the absent body. Most of Norma's interviews take place in her own home, a space that reinforces the notion of family and motherhood. In her domestic space, where Lilia Alejandra was raised, Norma presents to the camera photographs from family albums and diplomas that Lilia Alejandra had been awarded. Like any proud mother, she forges an image of Lilia Alejandra as an ambitious, intelligent young woman who studied and worked hard; she is eager to share with the audience the person that her daughter was. She remembers her creative aptitudes, particularly her capacity for singing and poetry, before reciting one of her poems from memory:

> Mexico, I believe in you like the apex of an oath. You smell of tragedy, my land. But you laugh too much. Perhaps because you know laughter is a cover up for silent pain. I know the sky from your sky. I know pain through your tears that are learning to cry in me. Mexico, I believe in you because you write your name with an X. That is both cross and Calvary. Because the proud eagle on your emblem enjoys the tossing of coins, with life and sometimes with death.[55]

The narrative of the poem written by Lilia Alejandra is ironic: she almost foretells her fate when she characterises her native country as a place of tragedy, pain and tears. Norma's recital of it, however, is a poignant reminder of the manner in which she clutches onto any memory of her daughter that she can. Lilia Alejandra's words, which she herself should be reciting, are brought back through the body and voice of her mother, which makes Lilia Alejandra's absence

[54] Ibid., p. 206.
[55] *Bajo Juárez*.

all the more intense. Her absence is exacerbated when, as Norma delivers the poem, the screen fades and digresses from the domestic setting back to the arid, open desert where another pink cross is being hammered into the ground, surrounded by a group of men and women who congregate to watch and recite the names of those who have been murdered. The close of the poem emphasises the idea that whilst Lilia Alejandra's words may live on, her physical body will never return. We observe, however, Norma's personal journey through this grief: from an initial sense of solitude where she is interviewed alone, we see her go back to work, look after her grandchildren, and, finally assume a pivotal role in anti-feminicide activism. Many scenes in the documentary focus on the collectivity of women in the public domain and their collaborative campaigning for justice. My arguments below will further probe the notion of collectivity in the documentary, and discuss how the assembly *en masse* of subjects re-embodies, by proxy, the absent women. I will take into account the similarities between the women's movement in Juárez and other resistance movements, especially las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, from whom they culturally appropriated the *siluetazo*, an iconic production of absent presence fostered originally for the disappeared of Argentina.

Poner el cuerpo*: bodies of resistance and *siluetazos

Latin America's history of collective resistance against state and military injustices is prolific. Women, in particular, have become increasingly prominent social actors in grassroots movements. Many of these movements have been established by mothers whose children have been forcibly disappeared and/or been murdered in some of the worst incidents of human rights abuses. Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Argentina), the Co-Madres (El Salvador) and the Damas de Blanco (Cuba) are just a few examples of Latin American groups assembled and spearheaded by mothers in search of answers and justice for their lost children, like the mothers of Ciudad Juárez. Their activism, rallying cries and public marches all bear outward visual, narrative and organisational similarities. Particular parallels may be drawn between the mothers of feminicide victims featured in *Bajo Juárez* and Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, evidenced by their resistance strategies and appropriation of public space, along with their iconic use of the *siluetazo*, which has similarly been adopted by the mothers in Juárez, as I will now examine.

In *Bajo Juárez,* collective acts, especially maternal collectivism, are drawn upon at various occasions during the documentary. One of the first instances of this collective action takes place in Campo Algodonero, a notorious site in the history of the feminicide cases, where eight

women's bodies were unearthed, exhibiting signs of the extreme sexual violence (see Chapter One). The camera pans along the mothers who hold hands and congregate around multiple pink crosses, in an act of evident solidarity and shared grief. Hung around their necks are printed posters of the mothers' lost daughters, inscribed with the red capitalised word "Justicia", a word that underpins their personal mission and public campaign and one that is later repeatedly chanted during demonstrations in the nation's capital. Further poignant scenes of women, men and children assembled *en masse* feature at a later point in the documentary, chronicling the V-Day march that took place in 2004. This was a pivotal event in the history of activism against feminicide, and one that was widely publicised owing to the celebrity endorsement it received from figures such as Jane Fonda, Eve Ensler and Lilia Aragón. Crowds of people are filmed marching in Ciudad Juárez reciting "Ni Una Más", a slogan that has become associated with the Juárez feminicides in the public imaginary. While marching, they grasp life-size cut-outs of human silhouettes painted pink, which, as with the crosses, is a mark of femininity. Moving from an eye-level shot of the streets of Juárez saturated with a sea of pink, the camera then turns to a low-angle focus to track the quantity of marching legs and shoes. The image conjures an immediate sense of bodily absence, each silhouette ostensibly occupying the space of a murdered or absent woman. The *siluetazo* has historically emphasised a potent sense of loss, as demonstrated by Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo. Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone's *El Siluetazo* is a detailed compilation of texts concerning the production, deployment and politicisation of the silhouette in the context of Argentina's disappeared, but its analytical content equally resonates with the context of activism in Juárez, and the authors likewise acknowledge the universalisation of this emblem: 'la silueta se universaliza y reactualiza en otros crímenes, injusticias o ausencias'.[56] The silhouette, for the authors, is the ultimate manifestation of 'la presencia de la ausencia', and a referent to a body that is no longer alive or which has been lost.[57] Commonly known as the "*siluetazo*", the idea to create silhouettes of those who had been forcibly disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship arose from three national artists, Guillermo Kexel, Julio Flores and Rodolfo Aguerreberry in 1983. As the artists themselves explain in a chapter of the volume, the intention was to create 30,000 images of 'figuras humanas a tamaño natural'.[58] Central to their project were several key objectives: to reclaim presence for those who had disappeared, to mobilise a lasting symbol to represent the

[56] *El Siluetazo/The Silhouette*, ed. by Ana Longoni and Gustavo Bruzzone (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora S.A., 2008), p. 23.
[57] Ibid., p. 7.
[58] Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel, 'Propuesta presentada a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo en septiembre de 1983', in *El Siluetazo*, pp. 63–67 (p. 63).

loss of life during the political dictatorship, to produce 'un hecho gráfico' on a grand scale that would garner media attention, and to rally together the Argentine population.[59] Their intention was for the absent body to be re-embodied by the proxy of those living and present; as the artists stipulate, 'cada manifestante se presente con una imagen "duplica" su presencia, agregando al reclamo verbal y de su presencia física, la presencia de un "ausente"'.[60] This project was consequently adopted by Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo as a visual memory and vehicle of dissent against the country's crippling human rights abuses.[61] While many of the thousands of silhouettes were drawn onto walls, or onto the street pavements like crime-scene drawings, the mothers of Juárez have taken to brandishing the female silhouettes during demonstrations. But in both geographical contexts, the purpose and visual outcome is similar: returning corporeal presence to what would otherwise remain absent as a result of violence.

Whilst the *siluetazo* is unquestionably a fitting 'huella de los cuerpos ausentados' that restores a sense of visibility to those lost to feminicide, the physical congregation of protesting bodies and their appropriation of public space in the name of justice may equally be perceived as a performance of the absent, and should therefore be afforded analysis.[62] Mirroring the approach taken by las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, who would protest outside Argentina's central government headquarters in Buenos Aires, the Juárez mothers are similarly captured on camera as they bring the traumas of feminicide in the north to the central political stage of Mexico's capital. With the aid of a cross-cut, the documentary switches from recordings of provincial activism to a mass collective assembly in Mexico City. Once again, the mothers are joined by legions of marchers, brandishing photographs, silhouettes and banners that read: 'Aquí estamos. Los familiares de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez. ¡Reclamamos justicia! ¡No a la impunidad!' Such scenes of collectivity formed in the interest of human rights evoke 'poner el cuerpo', a Latin American-derived term that is most commonly associated with resistance in Argentina, as Sutton explains:

> In Argentina, the bodily dimension of political resistance is evoked through a common expression in some activist circles: *poner el cuerpo*. Literally this phrase means "to put the body" […] Poner el cuerpo overlaps somewhat with "to put the body on the line" and "to give the body," but it transcends both notions. With respect to political agency, poner el cuerpo means not just to talk, think, or desire but to really be present and involved; to put the whole (embodied) being into action, to be committed to a social cause […] Poner el cuerpo is part of the vocabulary of resistance in Argentina, and

[59] Ibid., p. 63.
[60] Ibid., p. 64.
[61] Ibid., p. 64.
[62] Longoni and Bruzzone, p. 32.

> implies the importance of material bodies in the transformation of social relations and history.[63]

As the author suggests, the body's role within collective resistance movements must not be overlooked: it is a vital agent of political action and social change. Bodily presence lies at the core of the phrase *poner el cuerpo*. And that presence is noticeably translated in the protests filmed for the documentary. Much like the function of the silhouettes that revivify the deceased, the bodies of the protesters become tangible vehicles of memory and proxies for those who are physically absent, as they lend their own bodies to the missing or murdered, so that they might be metaphorically seen and heard. As the mothers clutch laminated images of beloved daughters close to their chests, the camera's focus repeatedly oscillates between the material and the missing, and, more importantly, evokes the communion between the two, the undying maternal bond between their bodies and those of their daughters. Drawing on the work of sociologist Saskia Sassen, Fregoso refers to such mobilisation of grassroots collectivities as a 'production of presence – a process for staging visibility by those without power […] a choreographed cultural politics of visibility'.[64] Indeed, the purpose of these demonstrations is not only to pursue action and change against human rights abuses; it is also deeply concerned with making visible victims who have been rendered invisible by government-endorsed impunity. As we can glean from the documentary, resistance here serves a dual purpose: to seek justice and to remember.

What is most intriguing about this collective performance of memory is the space in which it takes place – the public streets of the capital. The documentary is seemingly mindful of the cityscape, ensuring that the camera lens maps the avenues, buildings and monuments for the audience to see. The shots alternate between the mothers' march and images of the city's most iconic locations. Their march begins at the monument known as El Ángel de la Independencia, situated on the capital's major thoroughfare, Avenida Reforma, and culminates outside the President's official residence, Los Pinos. Steeped in ideological meaning, these sites are key signifiers of Mexico's official past and recent political history. On the one hand, they represent the country's revolution, with its initial commitment to nationhood and the promise of democratic values; on the other, in a bitter twist of irony, they are reminders of the emphatic failure of contemporary political administrations to tend to the basic human rights of their

[63] Barbara Sutton, 'Poner el Cuerpo: Women's Embodiment and Political Resistance in Argentina', *Latin American Politics and Society*, iii, 49 (2007), 129–162 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30130813> [accessed 3 October 2016] (p. 130).
[64] Rosa Linda Fregoso, '"We Want Them Alive!"', p. 115.

citizens, especially the disenfranchised female demographic. This city space is ultimately one that is historically founded on patriarchal ideas and order. However, as we can observe from *Bajo Juárez*, this space of masculinist authority is transgressed by an overarching female presence, converting the public streets into feminised spaces. This appropriation of the city by women delivers a defiant, counterhegemonic message that seeks to reassert female subjectivity, not as a passive construction but as one that is active and that extends beyond the private, domestic realm. Joseph Scarpaci and Lessie Frazier categorise this process as the 'gendering of landscapes'.[65] They interpret the seizure of public spaces by women's social movements as a direct disruption of classic gender roles (passive vs. active) and spatial dichotomies (public vs. private) in order to 'discredit authoritarian rule', in the hope of 'reclaiming a space for civil society'.[66] Referring to women's demonstrations in the Southern Cone, the authors deem their occupation of cityscapes to be a 'source of empowerment' that converts third world females into 'agents of change and creators of feminist theory rather than victims of oppression'.[67] As evidenced in *Bajo Juárez*, the women lay claim to the capital's streets, repurposing them as a forum where they ask for answers, seek justice and speak on behalf of their lost ones who are no longer there and cannot testify. This spectacle of collective bodies signals a united resistance against the invisibilisation of those whose lives have been erased by physical violence and the symbolic violence wrought by government indifference.

Concluding remarks

This final chapter has asked how the frames of representation in the documentary *Bajo Juárez* counteract Lilia Alejandra's bodily absence and recapture the essence of a life once lived. As discussed, a range of strategies are employed to achieve this objective, ensuring that her presence repeatedly haunts the mise-en-scène. This is achieved, in the first instance, via family video footage, endless photographic reminders, pink memorial crosses, archetypal *siluetazos*, and biographical narrations by her mother, Norma. In addition to these basic representational, iconographic mechanisms, Lilia Alejandra, along with other victims of feminicide, is recalled, and given a sense of re-embodiment by means of the collective protests seen taking place in Ciudad Juárez and then in the country's capital, Mexico City. A predominantly female crowd is seen 'putting their bodies on the line', to paraphrase Sutton, opposing impunity, corruption

[65] Joseph L. Scarpaci and Lessie Jo Frazier, 'State Terror: Ideology, Protest and the Gendering of Landscapes', *Progress in Human Geography*, i, 17 (1993), 1-21 <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913259301700101> (p. 1)
[66] Ibid., p. 16.
[67] Ibid., p. 17.

and anti-female terror. As the women act in concert, this example of embodied protest resists the erasure of their loved ones and, by extension, animates the dead.

Conclusion

In the introduction, this thesis proposed a critical reading of various visual responses to the ongoing gender crimes at the U.S.-Mexico border. Some of the primary materials examined in this project have never been subject to scholarly enquiry or scrutiny. This lacuna in the field of feminicide studies has allowed me to explore uncharted territory, opening up fresh discussions through new visual stimuli. As elaborated in Chapter One, my interest has centred on the framing of the female body in each of the visual narratives examined. Regardless of the medium, the female body proves a vital recurring trope common to each artistic response. As I have shown throughout the chapters, the represented body forms an entry-point into the contemporary border context. Sociological theory foregrounds the body's innate capacity to emit signs and be read accordingly. Visual responses to feminicide have tapped into the body's discursivity, deploying it as a site upon which they have inscribed meaning and constructed ideas that bridge the personal and the political, and that reflect the ideological systems and structures behind the systematic anti-female terror in Ciudad Juárez.

Chapters Two and Three approached artistic representations of the gender crimes from the Chicana and Mexican artworld respectively. Judithe Hernández's pastel series places a spotlight on the relationship between the female body and the spatial dynamics of the border location. Employing a metaphorical visual language, Hernández's solitary female protagonist is often illustrated as imperilled by border wire and hostile fences. The multiple meanings that can be elicited from her imagery suggest a theoretical consideration of the mechanisms of power that govern the region, prompting an interrogation of the imbricated concepts of geopolitics, sovereignty and biopolitics. These theoretical fields are vital to understanding the stratification of life at the U.S.-Mexico border, especially the management of gendered bodies in the border topography. In Chapter Three, biopolitical discourses were exchanged for an exploration of postcolonial necropolitical philosophy, which was employed to analyse the ethically problematic installation art of Teresa Margolles. Her transposition of necrological by-products sourced directly from morgues and crime-scenes in northern Mexico into the gallery setting creates a makeshift site of mourning. Margolles' feminicide exhibits, *Cimbra Formwork* and *Lote Bravo*, seek to revive, perhaps even resurrect, the anonymous female body and afford her funeral rites that she was deprived of in her homeland.

Chapters Four and Five moved from artistic responses to cinematographic productions. Arroyo's *cortometraje*, *El otro sueño americano*, is a deeply troubling filmic narrative on many levels – visually, aurally, linguistically, thematically and ethically. Borrowing techniques from snuff, horror and pornographic subgenres, the young female's on-screen victimisation via a surveillance camera proves an unsettling, emotional visual experience. Nevertheless, Arroyo's framing of female corporeality arguably alludes to filmic stereotypes that detract from the reality of the situation for women in Juárez. Chapter Five marked a departure from the analysis of a short film to that of a financially endorsed feature film, *El traspatio*, boasting a cast of eminent actors from the Mexican star system. Its portrayal of feminicides is more cognisant of the factors contributing to these crimes. As opposed to previously released films that revolved around the clichéd pursuit of a psychopathic serial killer, *El traspatio* offers a nuanced narrative arc that integrates themes of corruption, neoliberalism and gender power relations that contribute to the eventual downfall of the female protagonist, Juana. Nevertheless, whilst the plotline may be historically factual, the representation of female characters assumes remains trapped in a classic filmic paradigm in which women are divided into hackneyed binaries: good vs. bad and feminine vs. androgynous.

Chapter Six addressed responses to feminicide derived from another visual medium: photography. This chapter was structured as a comparative approach between two photographic genres: press and art photography. Press photography, particularly the *nota roja* press, objectifies the dead, often brutalised body, in order to convey the state of its dehumanisation. However, in an era in which images of death and violence are so profuse, the risk of desensitising viewers to the suffering of others becomes increasingly apparent and disconcerting. César Saldívar's studio-based art photography responding to the feminicides is produced as a direct countermeasure to this violent image saturation. He counteracts dehumanisation with humanisation as a means of resisting spectacularised displays of what Reguillo terms 'expressive violence'.[1] Employing the nude female body in a series of desexualised images, Saldívar foregrounds its agency and capacity to resist oppressive structures that render it submissive, passive and merely a sum of its parts. For this reason, I drew a parallel between his staging of the nudy body and the performance politics associated with the burgeoning trend of nude protests.

[1] Reguillo, The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence.

In Chapter Seven, a documentary response to the Juárez gender-crimes was investigated. *Bajo Juárez* underscored an urgency to remember and re-member the victims of feminicide. The documentary focuses on the story of Norma Andrade whose daughter, Lilia Alejandra was found murdered. It is a haunting portrayal of loss, injustice and mourning for the absent body. Absence is a key motif that is visually engineered and narratively explored. It is shown to function in paradoxical terms whereby via the recognition of absence, the presence of Lilia Alejandra, albeit ephemeral and spectral, is restored.

Twenty-five years have now passed since the Juárez feminicides first entered the public consciousness. It took the compassion and dedication of a local woman, Ester Chávez Cano, and the Grupo 8 de Marzo that she founded and operated from her home to draw attention to gender crimes at the U.S.-Mexico border. It is her efforts, amongst others, that laid the groundwork for these cases to be made public – work that was the statutory responsibility of the police, Chihuahua state officials, judicial systems and the national Mexican government. Since then, Ciudad Juárez has been emblematic of feminicide. Despite troubling statistics elsewhere in Mexico and across the Americas, the border remains synonymous with female death and sexual violence, as a sort of prototype. This enduring association in the public imaginary is due to several factors: the concerted campaigns by mothers, human rights activists and NGOs; investigative journalism; and, finally, the global 'marketing' of the phenomenon. I use the word 'marketing' somewhat gingerly; however, I would contend that Juárez feminicides have been advertised, promoted and sold globally, which has, at times, veered towards the realms of exploitation rather than altruism. Amongst the vast array of visual and literary productions profit has been made from the real suffering of others whose access to justice is minimal and whose lives have little value both pre- and post-mortem. That is not to say that I intend to cast aspersions on the compassion or perspectives of cultural producers. However, it is important to flag the underside of this cultural phenomenon which has rendered gender-crime at the U.S.-Mexico border a lucrative trope in visual and literary culture. Moreover, there is somewhat of a paradox that emerges whereby previously invisible female victims have now acquired visibility in popular culture, yet the perpetrators continue to live in the shadows, and justice still constitutes an intangible concept for families. Whereas the victims have been brought into public consciousness the factors contributing to their deaths still remain relatively underdiscussed. The tendency to blame malevolent men and frame them as frenzied serial killers, as opposed to scrutinising exogenous factors that enable or produce men that commit feminicide, remains cemented in the rhetoric.

As such, there is still a need to disrupt this hyperbolic rhetoric, fuelled stories disseminated by transnational media outlets and some cultural responses that capitalise on the mystery of serial female murder in the region. Such responses seem to titillate their audiences with speculative accounts of psychopathic men preying on young brown-skinned women. This genre of reportage or representation is hopelessly counterproductive and far removed from the fundamental issues at stake. The circulation of salacious headlines – such as 'Who is Killing the Women of Juárez?'; 'Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez'; and 'Hundreds of Women Disappear in Ciudad Juárez Every Year' – only serves to fuel a sense of moral panic, while also isolating Ciudad Juárez as a place of otherworldly monstrosity where violent men play out fantasies, as if lifted from a crime fiction novel. As UN Women's insightful report 'Latin American Model Protocol', about the investigation of gender-related killings, stipulates, pathology is repeatedly ascribed to these women's murders to somehow justify the actions of aggressors who are clearly 'crazy, out of control, or jealous'.[2] However, using pathology to diagnose individuals as evil or even to unashamedly blame victims is merely a tactic that avoids confronting the complex underlying factors in gender-based crime. As Montserrat Sagot and Ana Carcedo Cabañas insist, feminicide is 'the result of a structural system of oppression […] the most extreme form of sexual terrorism, caused primarily by a sense of ownership and control of women'.[3]

Although Juárez's moniker as the feminicide capital may prevail, other states across the country, such as Estado de México, have now superseded the rate of gender-violence at the U.S.-Mexico border. In fact, cases of feminicide in the Americas and beyond are very much a contemporary issue. Over the past couple of years, the killings of Lucía Pérez and Mara Fernanda Castilla in Argentina and Mexico respectively, have been catalysts for mass protests against gender-violence. Feminicide remains very much part of both the modern-day lexicon and social landscape across various geographical contexts. So long as the 'female body remains a battleground', to paraphrase artist, Barbara Kruger, investigations such as those carried out in this thesis, sadly prove to be as relevant as ever.

---

[2] Camilo Bernal Sarmiento et al., *Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-Related Killings of Women (Femicide/Feminicide)* (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women], 2014), p. 37 <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20americas/documentos/publicaciones/latinamericanprotocolforinvestigationoffemicide.pdf?la=en&vs=1721> [accessed 7 September 2017].

[3] Montserrat Sagot and Carcedo Cabañas, 'When Violence Against Women Kills: Femicide in Costa Rica, 1990–99', in *Terrorizing Women*, ed. by Fregoso and Bejarano, pp. 138–156 (p. 142).

References

Artistic works

Arroyo, Enrique, dir, *El otro sueño americano* (Mexico: CONACULTA/IMCINE, 2004) [on DVD]

Biemann, Ursula, dir, *Performing the Border* (Women Make Movies, 1999) [on DVD]

Carrera, Carlos, dir, *El Traspatio/Backyard* (Scanbox Entertainment, 2010) [on DVD]

Challenger, Tamsyn, *400 Women*, 2010 <http://www.tamsynchallenger.com/400-women/> [accessed 9 October 2016]

Hise, Steve, dir, *On the Edge: Femicide in Ciudad Juárez* (Illegal Art, 2006) [on DVD]

Linnert, Lise Bjørne, *Desconocida Unknown Ukjent (2006 - Ongoing)*, 2008 <http://www.lisebjorne.com/art_projects/desconocida-unknown-ukjent/> [accessed 9 October 2016]

Manu Chao, 'Politik Kills', *La Radiolina* (Because Music, 2007) [on CD]

Margolles, Teresa, *Liverpool Biennial 2006*, 2006 <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/teresa-margolles-liverpool-biennial-2006> [accessed 18 July 2014]

Margolles, Teresa, *Teresa Margolles: 127 Cuerpos* (Germany: Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, 2007)

Portillo, Lourdes, dir, *Señorita Extraviada* (Xochitl Productions, Women Make Movie, 2001) [on DVD]

Sánchez, Alejandra, and José Antonio Cordero, dir, *Bajo Juárez: La ciudad devorando a sus hijas* (Mexico: FOPROCINE/IMCINE, 2006) [on DVD]

Station Museum of Contemporary Art, *Frontera 450+*, 2006 <http://stationmuseum.com/?page_id=2655> [accessed 20 November 2016]

Bibliography

Aaron, Michele, *Spectatorship* (London: Wallflower, 2007)

Acosta, Anasella, 'Sin culpa: César Saldívar', 2009 <http://cuartoscuro.com.mx/2009/07/sin-culpa-cesar-saldivar/> [accessed 29 April 2016]

Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics Series, 2nd edn (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998)

Agamben, Giorgio, *Stasis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

Agamben, Giorgio, *The Use of Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016)

Alvarez, Robert R., 'The Mexican-U.S. Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), 447-470 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.002311>

Alzate, Gastón, and Marcia Olander, 'Absence and Pain in the Work of Doris Salcedo and Rosemberg Sandoval', *South Central Review*, 30 (2013), 5-20 <https://doi.org/10.1353/scr.2013.0025>

Amnesty International, 'Mexico: Intolerable Killings, Ten Years of Abductions, and Murders in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua', *Amnesty International*, 10 August 2003 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR41/027/2003/en/> [accessed 29 July 2016]

Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987)

Aronson, Jay D., *Who Owns the Dead?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)

Arriola, Elvia R., 'Accountability for Murder in the Maquiladoras: Linking Corporate Indifference to Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border', in *Making A Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, And La Frontera*, ed. by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. 25-61

Astley, Mark, 'Snuff 2.0: Real Death Goes HD Ready', in *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*, ed. by Neil Jackson, Shaun Kimber, Johnny Walker and Thomas Watson (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), pp. 153-170

Attfield, Judy, *Wild Things* (Oxford: Berg, 2005)

Aznarez, Juan Jesús, '"El crimen del padre amaro" se convierte en la película más taquillera de México', *El País*, 16 September 2002 <http://elpais.com/diario/2002/09/16/espectaculos/1032127201_850215.html> [accessed 29 August 2016]

Bal, Mieke, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)

Banwell, Julia, *Teresa Margolles' Aesthetic of Death* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2009)

Banwell, Julia, *Teresa Margolles and the Aesthetics of Death* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015)

Bargent, James, 'Mexico Impunity Levels Reach 99%: Study', 2016 <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/mexico-impunity-levels-reach-99-study> [accessed 2 August 2016]

Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982)

Bartky, Sandra Lee, *Femininity and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 2011)

Bazin, André, *What Is Cinema? Volume I* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004)

Bejarano, Cynthia, and Rosa-Linda Fregoso, eds, *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010)

Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1988)

Berger, John, *Keeping a Rendezvous* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991)

Berger, John, *Understanding a Photograph* (New York, NY: Aperture, 2013)

Bernal Sarmiento, Camilo, Miguel Lorente Acosta, Françoise Roth and Margarita Zambrano, *Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-Related Killings of Women (Femicide/Feminicide)* (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women [UN Women], 2014), p. 37 <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20americas/documentos/publicaciones/latinamericanprotocolforinvestigationoffemicide.pdf?la=en&vs=1721> [accessed 7 September 2017]

Bhasin, Khamila, *What Is Patriarchy?* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2006)

Biemann, Ursula, 'Performing the Border: On Gender, Transnational Bodies, and Technology', in *Globalization on the Line: Culture, Capital and Citizenship at U.S. Borders*, ed. by Claudia Sadowski-Smith (New York: Springer, 2016), pp. 99-118

Bird, Robert, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008)

Birkhofer, Denise, ‘Trace Memories: Clothing as Metaphor in the Work of Doris Salcedo’, *Anamesa*, 6 (2008), 48-66

Blackford, Linda B., ‘Artist Immortalizes “Disposable” Slain Women of Ciudad Juárez’, 2011 <http://www.kentucky.com/entertainment/visual-arts/article44130144.html> [accessed 9 October 2016]

Bolaño, Roberto, *2666* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2006)

Bowden, Charles, *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy’s New Killing Fields* (New York: Avalon Publishing Group, 2011)

Braidotti, Rosi, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013)

Brilliant, Richard, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991)

Brownie, Barbara, ‘Naked Protest and the Revolutionary Body’, *The Guardian*, 15 January 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/costume-and-culture/2014/jan/15/naked-protest-revolutionary-body> [accessed 24 November 2016]

Brownie, Barbara, *Acts of Undressing* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016)

Brownmiller, Susan, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2000)

Bruzzone, Gustavo, and Ana Longoni, *El Siluetazo/ The Silhouette* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora S.A., 2008)

Butler, Judith, ‘Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s Second Sex’, *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 35-49 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930225>

Butler, Judith, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, 30, 4 (1988), 519-531 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893> [accessed 28 October 2017]

Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso Books, 2004)

Butler, Judith, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso Books, 2010)

Butler, Judith, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015)

Caballero, Germàn Rubiano, *Art of Latin America, 1981-2000* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank, 2001)

Cahill, Ann J., *Rethinking Rape* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001)

Callard, Felicity J., 'The Body in Theory', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16, 4 (1998), 387-400 <https://doi.org/10.1068/d160387>

Campbell, David, 'The Myth of Compassion Fatigue', 2012 <https://www.david-campbell.org/wp-content/documents/DC_Myth_of_Compassion_Fatigue_Feb_2012.pdf> [accessed 29 April 2016]

Campiglia, María, 'Teresa Margolles: Reiterating Violence', *Barcelona Investigación Arte Creación*, 2 (2014), 100-125 <https://doi.org/10.4471/brac.2014.04>

Cantacuzino, Ilinca, '400 Women', 2011 <http://4http://www.londongrip.com/LondonGrip/Art%3A_Ilinca_Cantacuzino%3A_400_Women_Mexico.html> [accessed 9 October 2016]

Carroll, Amy S., 'Muerte Sin Fin, Teresa Margolles's Gendered States of Exception', *The Drama Review*, 54 (2010), 103-125

Carter, David Ray, 'It's Only a Movie? Reality as Transgression in Exploitation Cinema', in *From the Arthouse to the Grindhouse: Highbrow and Lowbrow Transgression in Cinema's First Century*, ed. by John Cline and Robert Weiner (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), pp. 297-316

Castañeda, Antonia, *Gender on the Borderlands* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007)

Castellanos, Melissa, 'Irish Painter Brian Maguire Pays Tribute to "Invisible" Victims of Juárez, Mexico Murders', *Latin Post*, 1 April 2015 <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/45290/20150401/feminicido-Juárez-mexico-irish-painter-brian-maguire-mexican-city-Juárez-blood-rising-brian-mcguire.htm> [accessed 9 October 2016]

Castillo, Gustavo, and Rubén Villalpando, 'Registra Juárez en 2010 la cifra más alta de *feminicidios* en 18 años', *La Jornada*, 2 January 2011 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2011/01/02/politica/006n1pol> [accessed 12 July 2016]

Cazeaux, Clive, *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000)

Clinton, William J., *President Bill Clinton – Remarks on the Signing of NAFTA*, online video recording, YouTube, 24 March 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3ooMrgXido> [accessed 1 April 2016]

Cork, Richard, *Breaking Down the Barriers: Art in the 1990s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003)

Corona, Ignacio, and Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010)

Crewe, Louise, *The Geographies of Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017)

Cruz, Alex, 'Homenaje fotográfico a las muertas de Juárez' <http://www.lavozdegalicia.es/ocioycultura/2010/03/09/00031268117807180457738.htm> [accessed 29 April 2016]

Chabat, Jorge, 'Narcotráfico y Estado: El discreto encanto de la corrupción', *Letras Libres*, 30 September 2005 <http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/narcotrafico-y-estado-el-discreto-encanto-la-corrupcion>

Chomsky, Noam, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and the New Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998)

Danelo, David J., *The Border: Exploring the U.S.-Mexican Divide* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2014)

Dávila, Israel, 'Alerta de género en Edomex, inútil: ONG', *La Jornada*, 29 January 2016 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/01/29/estados/033n1est> [accessed 22 June 2017]

Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London: Rebel Press, 1992)

Dell'agnese, Elena, 'The U.S.-Mexico Border in American Movies: A Political Geography Perspective', *Geopolitics*, 10 (2005), 204-221 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040590946548>

Demos, T. J., *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013)

Derrida, Jacques, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012)

Desmond, Kathleen K., *Ideas About Art* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)

Domanska, Ewa, ‘Toward the Archaeontology of the Dead Body’, *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 389-413 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642520500307602>

Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, Héctor, and Patricia Ravelo Blancas, ‘Obedience Without Compliance: The Role of the Government, Organized Crime, and NGOs in the System of Impunity that Murders the Women of Ciudad Juárez’, in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Cynthia Bejarano and Rosa-Linda Fregoso (United States: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 182-196

Donovan, Pamela, *No Way of Knowing: Crime, Urban Legends and the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2004)

Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002)

Downey, Anthony, ‘Zones of Indistinction: Giorgio Agamben’s “Bare Life” and the Politics of Aesthetics’, *Third Text*, 23 (2009), 109-125 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820902840581>

Driver, Alice, *Cultural Production and Ephemeral Art: Feminicide and the Geography of Memory in Ciudad Juárez, 1998-2008* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2011)

Driver, Alice, *More or Less Dead: Feminicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2015)

de la Durantaye, Leland, ‘To Be and to Do: The Life’s Work of Giorgio Agamben’, *Boston Review*, 26 January 2016 <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/de-la-durantaye-agamben> [accessed 11 August 2017]

Dworkin, Andrea, and Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women’s Equality* (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988)

Dworkin, Andrea, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991)

Eisenhammer, Stephen, ‘Bare Life in Ciudad Juárez: Violence in a Space of Exclusion’, *Latin American Perspectives*, 41 (2013), 99-109 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x13509786>

Eisenstein, Sergei, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2014)

El Huffington Post, ‘#Feminicidioesgenocidio: La impactante acción feminista en Argentina contra la violencia machista’, *El Huffington Post*, 1 June 2017

<http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2017/06/01/feminicidioesgenocidio-la-impactante-accion-feminista-en-argen_a_22121232/> [accessed 31 October 2017]

Elliot, Gregory, and Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (New York: Verso Books, 2009)

Elliott, Kamilla, *Portraiture and British Gothic Fiction: The Rise of Picture Identification, 1764-1835* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012)

Enns, Diane, 'Bare Life and the Occupied Body', *Theory and Event*, 7 (2004) <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2004.0019>

Felshin, Nina, 'Clothing as Subject', *Art Journal*, 54 (1995), 20-29 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.1995.10791672>

Finnegan, Nuala, *Cultural Representations of Feminicidio at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018)

Flores, Linaloe R., 'TCLAN, 20 años: las promesas al olvido', *Sin Embargo*, 1 January 2014 <http://www.sinembargo.mx/01-01-2014/858398> [accessed 27 August 2016]

Foltyn, Jacque Lynn, 'Dead Famous and Dead Sexy: Popular Culture, Forensics, and the Rise of the Corpse', *Mortality*, 13 (2008), 153-173 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270801954468>

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995)

Foucault, Michel, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003)

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986)

Franco, Jean, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013)

Frank, Phyllis B., 'Objectification of Women', *National Organization for Men Against Sexism*, 2012 <http://nomas.org/objectification-of-women/> [accessed 12 December 2016]

Fregoso, Rosa Linda, *Mexicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)

Fregoso, Rosa Linda, '"We Want Them Alive!": The Politics and Culture of Human Rights', *Social Identities*, 12 (2006), 109-138 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630600583296>

Fregoso, Rosa Linda, ‘Toward a Planetary Civil Society’, in *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader*, ed. by Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 35-66

Fregoso, Rosa Linda, ‘Una retrospectiva crítica de la obra cinematográfica de Lourdes Portillo’, *Comunicación y Medios*, 24 (2012), 148-170

Fregoso, Rosa Linda, ‘Transforming Terror: Documentary Poetics in Lourdes Portillo’s *Señorita Extraviada*’, in *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*, ed. by Alexandra Juhasz and Alisa Lebow (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 233-251

Freud, Sigmund, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005)

Fusco, Coco, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings* (London: Routledge, 2001)

Gallo, Rubén, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

García Canclini, Néstor, *Hybrid Cultures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)

Gaspar de Alba, Alicia, ‘Poor Brown Female: The Miller’s Compensation For “Free” Trade’, in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*, ed. by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. 63-93

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

Giroux, Henry A., and Brad Evans, *Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015)

Goldstein, Natalie, *Globalization and Free Trade* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2007)

Gómez-Quiñones, Juan, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990)

Gorner, Klaus, and Udo Kittelmann, *Teresa Margolles: Muerte sin fin [anlässlich der Ausstellung Teresa Margolles - Muerte sin fin, 24. April - 15. August 2004, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main]* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004)

Greco, Monica and Mariam Fraser, eds, *The Body: A Reader* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004

Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, 3rd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994)

Guerisoli, Francesca, 'From Art Project to Movement: How Art Can Contribute to Social Change', 2013 <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/probing-the-boundaries/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/guerisolirrpaper.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2016]

Gupta, Rahila, 'The Politics of Nudity as Feminist Protest: From Ukraine to Tunisia', *Open Democracy*, 21 July 2017 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rahila-gupta/politics-nudity-feminist-protest> [accessed 25 October 2017]

Haddu, Miriam, *Violence, Conflict and Discourse in Mexican Cinema* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming)

Hallam, Elizabeth, *The Anatomy Museum: Death and the Body Displayed* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016)

Handwerker, Margo, 'Frontera 450+', *Art Lies: A Contemporary Art Quarterly*, 53 (2017) <http://www.art-lies.org/article.php?id=1448&issue=53&s=1> [accessed 13 July 2017]

Harmes, Roberta, and Diana E. H. Russell, eds, *Femicide in Global Perspective* (New York: Teachers' College Press, 2001)

Harvey, David, *Spaces of Neoliberalization: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 2005)

Harvey, David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Heiskanen, Benita, 'Ni Una Más, Not One More: Activist-Artistic Response to the Juárez Femicides', *JOMEC*, 3 (2013), 1-21

Heller-Nicholas, Alexandra, *Found Footage Horror Films: Fear and the Appearance of Reality* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2014)

Hersh, Seymour M., 'Torture at Abu Ghraib, American Soldiers Brutalized Iraqis: How Far Up Does the Responsibility Go?', *New Yorker*, 10 May 2004 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/05/10/torture-at-abu-ghraib> [accessed 14 November 2016]

Hirsch, Marianne, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997)

Hobbs, Robert, ‘Andres Serrano: The Body Politic’ in *Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993*, ed. by Robert Hobbs, Wendy Steiner and Marcia Tucker (University of Philadelphia: Institute Contemporary Art, 1994) pp. 17-43

Howson, Alexandra, *Embodying Gender* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005)

Isaad, Virginia, ‘University Librarian Keeps Tally of the Murders in Juárez, Mexico’, *El Nuevo Sol*, 21 May 2012 <http://elnuevosol.net/2012/05/university-librarian-keeps-tally-of-the-murders-in-Juárez-mexico/> [accessed 7 August 2016]

Jacobs, Del, *Interrogating the Image: Movies and the World of Film and Television* (Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2009)

Jessel, Ella, ‘Organized Crime and How to Represent It: Teresa Margolles’, *Violence Through the Arts in Latin America: A Dictionary*, 2016 <https://latinamericandictionary.wordpress.com/2014/02/04/o/> [accessed 17 June 2017]

Kexel, Guillermo, Julio Flores and Rodolfo Aguerreberry, ‘Propuesta presentada a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo en septiembre de 1983’, in *El Siluetazo/ The Silhouette*, ed. by Gustavo Bruzzone and Ana Longoni (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora S.A., 2008), pp. 63-67

Klein, Naomi, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2008)

Kleinman, Joan, and Arthur Kleinman, ‘The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in our Times’, *Daedalus*, 125 (1996), 1-23 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20027351>

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 19th edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

Kuhn, Annette, ‘Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performances of Memory in and with Visual Media’, *Memory Studies*, 3 (2010), 298-313 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698010370034>

Lagarde y de los Ríos, Marcela, ‘Antropología, feminismo y política: Violencia feminicida y derechos humanos de las mujeres’, in *Retos teóricos y nuevas prácticas*, ed. by Margaret Bullen and María Carmen Díez Mintegui (Donostia: ANKULEGI Antropologia Elkartea, 2008), pp. 209-239

Latorre, Guisela, *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009)

Ledbetter, Mark, ‘Do Not Look At Y/Our Own Peril: Voyeurism as Ethical Necessity, or To See as a Child Again’, in *Ethics and Images of Pain*, ed. by Asbjørn Grønstad and Henrik Gustafsson (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012), pp. 3-14

Levinson, Jerrold, *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Linfield, Susie, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

Lippit, Akira Mizuta, ‘Reflections on Spectral Life’, *Discourse*, 30 (2008), 242-254 <https://doi.org/10.2307/41389800>

Lockwood, Dean, ‘All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of “Torture Porn”’, *Popular Communication*, 7 (2009), 40-48 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405700802587232>

Lorey, David E., *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century: A History of Economic and Social Transformation* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999)

Lugo, Alejandro, *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009)

Lunceford, Brett, *Naked Politics: Nudity, Political Action, and the Rhetoric of the Body* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012)

de la Luz Estrada, Maria, *Conversatorio nacional: alerta de violencia de género y experiencias regionales para la prevención del feminicidio* (Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Feminicidio, 2017) <https://amnistia.org.mx/contenido/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Presentaci%C3%B3n-OCNF.pdf> [accessed 22 June 2017]

MacKinnon, Catharine A., *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989)

MacKinnon, Catharine A., ‘Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: Pleasure Under Patriarchy’, *Ethics*, 99 (1989), 314-346 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2381437>

MacKinnon, Catharine A., *Only Words*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996)

Martínez, Oscar J., *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2nd edn (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996)

Martínez, Oscar J., *Troublesome Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006)

Mayorga, Patricia, ‘Feminicidios en Juárez, con alta carga de “pornografía sádica”: CIESAS’, *Proceso*, 16 July 2015 <http://www.proceso.com.mx/410808/feminicidios-en-Juárez-con-alta-carga-de-pornografia-sadica-ciesas> [accessed 7 September 2016]

Mbembe, Achille, ‘Necropolitics’, *Public Culture*, 15 (2003), 11-40 <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>

Medina, Cuauhtémoc, ‘SEMEFO: The Morgue’, in *The Mexico City Reader*, ed. by Rubén Gallo (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 309-326

Medina, Cuauhtémoc, ‘Zonas de tolerancia: Teresa Margolles, Semefo y más allá’, *Revista Parachute*, 104 (2003), 31-52

Mendoza, Veneranda, ‘Decreta Edomex alerta de género; se tarda cinco años en solicitarla’, *Proceso*, 9 July 2015 <http://www.proceso.com.mx/410116/decreta-edomex-alerta-de-genero-se-tarda-cinco-anos-en-solicitarla> [accessed 22 June 2017]

Mirzoeff, Nicholas, *Bodyscape Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Moeller, Susan D., *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999)

Monárrez Fragoso, Julia E., ‘The Victims of Ciudad Juárez Feminicide: Sexually Fetishized Commodities’, in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Cynthia Bejarano and Rosa-Linda Fregoso (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 59-69

Monárrez Fragoso, Julia E., *Trama de una injusticia: Feminicidio sexual sistémico en Ciudad Juárez* (Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2013)

Monárrez Fragoso, Julia E., ‘Losses of Humanity in Times of War: The Actions of Alternative Subjects of Justice’, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 3 (2014) <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.eo>

Monárrez Fragoso, Julia E., ‘La cultura del feminicidio en Ciudad Juárez, 1993-1999’, *Frontera Norte*, 12 (2000), 87-117

Monsiváis, Carlos, ‘Huesos en el desierto: Escuchar con los ojos a las muertas’, *Debate Feminista*, 27 (2003), 327-333

Morales Trujillo, Hilda, ‘Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala’, in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Cynthia Bejarano and Rosa-Linda Fregoso (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 127-137

Moraña, Mabel, and Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, eds, *Heridas abiertas: Biopolítica y representación en América Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2014)

Moya, Eva, Kathleen Staudt, and Mark Lusk, *Social Justice in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region* (Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2014)

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 833-844

Nail, Thomas, *Theory of the Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Nichols, Bill, 'History, Myth and Narrative in Documentary', *Film Quarterly*, 41 (1987), 9-20 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1212324>

Noriega, Chon A., and Tere Romo, 'Points of Convergence: The Iconography of the Chicano Poster', in *Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California*, ed. by Chon A. Noriega (Santa Barbara, CA: University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001), pp. 91-115

Noriega, Chon A., ed, *Just Another Poster? Chicano Graphic Arts in California* (Santa Barbara, CA: University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001)

Nussbaum, Martha C., 'Objectification', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24 (1995), 249-291 <https://doi.org/10.2307/2961930>

Ojeda, Diana, 'Review: *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* by Melissa W. ', *Antipode*, 40 (2008), 713-716 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2008.00631.x>

Oosterbaan, Martijn, and Wil G. Pansters, 'Introduction: Sovereignty and Social Contestation – Between Violence and Alternative Sociocultural Orders', *Conflict and Society*, 1 (2015), 125-128 <https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2015.010110>

Ortiz, Ángel Iglesias, 'Spectatorship and Visual Evidence of Violence in Mexico: When the Right to Information Becomes Exploitation', *Revista de Estudios para el Desarrollo Social de la Comunicación*, 8 (2013), 231-246 <https://doi.org/10.15213/redes.n8.p231>

Padgett, Humberto, and Eduardo Loza, *Las muertas del Estado: Feminicidios durante la administración mexiquense de Enrique Peña Nieto* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 2014)

Palacios, Claudia, 'El cuerpo deshabitado, el cuerpo jaula: Yamina del Real en el Museo Archivo de La Fotografía', 2011 <http://www.arts-history.mx/semanario/?id_nota=15062011165341> [accessed 29 April 2016]

Pansters, Wil G., '"We Had to Pay to Live!" Competing Sovereignties in Violent Mexico', *Conflict and Society*, 1 (2015), 144-164 <https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2015.010112>

Pansters, Wil G., ed, *Violence, Coercion, and State-making in Twentieth-Century Mexico: The Other Half of the Centaur* (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 2012)

Papadaki, Evangelia, 'Sexual Objectification: From Kant to Contemporary Feminism', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6 (2007), 330-348 <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300282>

Paz, Octavio, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1985)

Penfold Mounce, Ruth, 'Corpses, Popular Culture and Forensic Science: Public Obsession with Death', *Mortality*, 21 (2016), 19-35

Pile, Steve, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space, and Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 1996)

Pineda-Madrid, Nancy, *Suffering and Salvation in Cuidad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011)

Pinedo, Isabel Cristina, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997)

Pitarch, Pau, and Isabel Clúa Ginés, *¡Pasen y vean! Estudios corporales* (Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 2008)

Portillo, Lourdes, 'The Films and Videos of Lourdes Portillo', 2016 <http://www.lourdesportillo.com/about/about_bio.php?category=awards> [accessed 1 November 2016]

Quigley, Christine, *The Corpse* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005)

Quiroga, Cecilia Medina, *Inter-American Court of Human Rights: Case of González et al. ('Cotton Field') v. Mexico; Judgment of November 16, 2009 (Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations, and Costs)* (Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2010)

<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_205_ing.pdf> [accessed 23 September 2016]

Ramos, Iván A., 'The Viscosity of Grief: Teresa Margolles at the Scene of the Crime', *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 25 (2015), 298-314 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770x.2015.1124668>

Ratliff, Jamie, 'A War on Women: Teresa Margolles' Ciudad Juárez', *n.paradoxa*, 35 (2015), 56-65

Reguillo, Rossana, 'Condensaciones y desplazamientos: Las políticas del miedo en los cuerpos contemporáneos', *Hemispheric Institute*, 4 (2007) <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/journal/4.2/eng/en42_pf_reguillo.html> [accessed 25 April 2016]

Reguillo, Rossana, 'The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence', *Hemispheric Institute*, 8 (2011) <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-82/reguillo> [accessed 23 March 2016]

Roberts, Tomi-Ann, and Barbara L. Fredrickson, 'Objectification Theory', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21 (1997), 173-206 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x>

Rodríguez, Ileana, *Liberalism at its Limits: Crime and Terror in the Latin American Cultural Text* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014)

Rodríguez, Marc Simon, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2014)

Rodríguez, Sergio González, *Huesos en el desierto*, 3rd edn (Barcelona: Anagrama, Editorial S.A., 2002)

Rodríguez, Sergio González, *El hombre sin cabeza* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2009)

Rodríguez, Sergio González, *The Femicide Machine* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012)

Rodríguez, Teresa, *The Daughters of Juárez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007)

Russell, Diana E. H., *The Politics of Rape: The Victim's Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2003)

Russell, Diana E. H., 'Defining Femicide', 2014 <http://www.dianarussell.com/defining-femicide-.html> [accessed 2 September 2016]

Russell, Diana E. H., and Jill Radford, eds, *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (London: Open University Press, 1992)

Sagot, Montserrat, and Carcedo Cabañas, 'When Violence Against Women Kills: Femicide in Costa Rica, 1990–99', in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Cynthia Bejarano and Rosa-Linda Fregoso (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 138-156

Salazar, Mónica, 'Redefining the Mexican Tradition of Death: Teresa Margolles and the Embodiment of Absence', *Proceedings of the Art of Death and Dying Symposium*, 1 (2012), 92-98

Salvador, Olguin, 'Beyond Horror: Taking Pictures of the Dead in Mexico', *Revista Sans Soleil: Estudios de la Imagen*, 4 (2012), 182-195

Sandell, Jillian, 'The Proximity of the Here and the Urgency of the Now: Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada*', in *Political Documentary Cinema in Latin America*, ed. by Kristi M. Wilson and Antonio Traverso (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 180-193

Sasson-Levy, Orna, 'Body, Gender, and Knowledge in Protest Movements: The Israeli Case', *Gender and Society*, 17 (2003), 379-403

Scarpaci Joseph L., and Lessie Jo Frazier, "State Terror: Ideology, Protest and the Gendering of Landscapes", *Progress in Human Geography*, 17.1 (1993), 1-21

Scarry, Elaine, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)

Scott Bray, Rebecca, 'En Piel Ajena: The Work of Teresa Margolles', *Law Text Culture*, 11 (2007), 13-50

Schmidt Camacho, Alicia, 'Ciudadana X: Gender Violence and the Denationalization of Women's Rights in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico', in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Cynthia Bejarano and Rosa-Linda Fregoso (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 275-289

Secretaría de Gobernación, 'Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos', 2014 <http://www.dof.gob.mx/constitucion/marzo_2014_constitucion.pdf> [accessed 29 July 2016]

Segato, Rita Laura, 'La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez: Territorio, soberanía y crímenes de segundo estado', *Debate Feminista*, 2008, 78-102

Segato, Rita Laura, *La guerra contra las mujeres* (Madrid: Traficantes De Sueños, 2016)

Seltzer, Mark, 'Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere', *October Magazine*, 80 (1997), 3-26 <https://doi.org/10.2307/778805>

Shilling, Chris, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2012)

Simmons, Paul and Rebecca Coplan, 'Innovative Transnational Remedies for the Women of Ciudad Juárez', in *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas*, ed. by Cynthia Bejarano and Rosa-Linda Fregoso (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 197-224

Sklair, Leslie, 'The Maquilas in Mexico: A Global Perspective', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 11 (1992), 91-107 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3338601>

Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979)

Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004)

Stanbury, Sarah, Nadia Medina, and Katie Conboy, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, 7th edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)

Staudt, Kathleen, *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

Stepputat, Finn, 'Formations of Sovereignty at the Frontier of the Modern State', *Conflict and Society*, 1 (2015), 129-143 <https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2015.010111>

Stepputat, Finn, *Governing the Dead: Sovereignty and the Politics of Dead Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Sutton, Barbara, 'Poner El Cuerpo: Women's Embodiment and Political Resistance in Argentina', *Latin American Politics and Society*, 49 (2008), 129-162 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2007.tb00385.x>

Sutton, Barbara, *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010)

Sutton, Barbara, 'Memories of Bodies and Resistance at the World Social Forum', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8 (2013), 139-148

Synnott, Anthony, *The Body Social* (London: Routledge, 2002)

Tabuenca Córdoba, Maria Socorro, 'Ghost Dance in Ciudad Juárez at the End/Beginning of the Millennium', in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*, ed. by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. 95-119

Tabuenca Córdoba, Maria Socorro, 'Representations of Femicide in Border Cinema', in *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response*, ed. by Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010), pp. 79-102

Tabuenca Córdoba, María Socorro, and Debra A. Castillo, eds, *Border Women: Writing From La Frontera* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

Tatlić, Šefik, and Marina Gržinić, *Necropolitics, Racialization, and Global Capitalism: Historicization of Biopolitics and Forensics of Politics, Art, and Life* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014)

Taylor, Diana, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War'* (London: Duke University Press Books, 1997)

Tierney, Dolores, 'The Appeal of the Real in Snuff: Alejandro Amenábar's "Tesis" ("Thesis")', *Spectator*, 22 (2002), 45-55

Tovar, Luis, 'Los huevos y la canasta', *La Jornada*, 22 March 2009 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/03/22/sem-tovar.html> [accessed 23 March 2016]

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Victims' Shoes – Media' <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-kits/united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum-press-kit/confiscated-shoes> [accessed 9 October 2016]

Valdez, Diana Washington, *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women* (Los Angeles: Peace at the Border, 2006)

Vaughan-Williams, Nick, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)

Verdery, Katherine, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)

Villalpando, Rubén, 'Muere Esther Chávez, pionera en la lucha contra feminicidios en Juárez', *La Jornada*, 26 December 1996

<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/12/26/estados/021n1est> [accessed 5 September 2016]

Villalpondo, Ruben, and Miroslava Breach, 'Murió el egipcio, preso por feminicidios en Juárez', *La Jornada*, 2 June 2006 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/06/02/index.php?section=sociedad&article=043n2soc> [accessed 29 July 2016]

Volk, Steven S, and Marian E. Schlotterbeck, 'Gender, Order and Femicide: Reading the Popular Culture of Murder in Ciudad Juárez', in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*, ed. by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. 121-153

Volk, Steven S., 'The Historiography of Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez: Critical and Revisionist Approaches', *Forum for Inter-American Research*, 8 (2015), 20-45

Wehbe-Herrera, Aishih, '"A New Landscape of the Possible": *400 Women*, Politics of Representation and Human Rights', *Forum for Inter-American Research*, 8 (2015), 120-138

Westley, Hannah, *The Body as Medium and Metaphor* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2008)

Williams, Gareth, *The Mexican Exception* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

World Social Forum, 'World Social Forum 2016', <https://fsm2016.org/en/sinformer/a-propos-du-forum-social-mondial/> [accessed 12 November 2016]

Wright, Melissa W., 'Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. Border', *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 36 (2011), 707-731

Wright, Melissa W., *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006)

Zacharías, María Paula, '"Artivismo": Cientos de zapatos rojos dan la vuelta al mundo contra el femicidio', *La Nacion*, 16 August 2016 <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1928429-artivismo-cientos-de-zapatos-rojos-dan-la-vuelta-al-mundo-contra-el-femicidio> [accessed 9 November 2016]

Zarur, Elizabeth and Charles Lovell, eds, *Art and Faith in Mexico: The Nineteenth-Century Retablo Tradition* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001)

Zepeda, Roberto, and Peter Watt, *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy* (London: Zed Books, 2012)

Ziarek, Ewa P., 'Bare Life on Strike: Notes on the Biopolitics of Race and Gender', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107 (2008), 89-105 <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2007-057>

Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence* (London: Profile Books, 2008)