

FEMINICIDE

Theorizing Border Violence

Martha Idalia Chew Sánchez
St. Lawrence University

Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response. Edited by Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010. Pp. 200. \$50.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780816527120.

Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas. Edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. xxviii + 382. \$94.95 cloth. \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822346814.

Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera. Edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba with Georgina Guzman. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. Pp. x + 314. \$55.00 cloth. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780292723177.

Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries. By Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. Pp. xviii + 374. \$94.95 cloth. \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822350750.

Cities and Citizenship at the U.S.-Mexico Border: The Paso del Norte Metropolitan Region. Edited by Kathleen Staudt, César M. Fuentes, and Julia E. Monárrez Fragoso. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Pp. xxi + 250. \$95.00 cloth. \$31.00 paper. ISBN: 9780230100329.

Publication of four edited volumes that examine femicide in the Mexico-US border region adds immensely to our understanding of that phenomenon, particularly when they are read through the lens of Nicole M. Guidottie-Hernández's *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries*, which traces violence in the borderlands from the nineteenth century to the present and demonstrates how violence has shaped people's identities in the border area. These books tap many of the foremost authors on femicide, who bring to their analyses a wide array of disciplinary approaches and touch upon a host of related themes.

Guidottie-Hernández's work is informed by Chicano studies, borderland history, transnational feminism, and Latino studies. Guidottie-Hernández theorizes on the continuous mutation and situationality of national membership, rights, and birthrights. She explains some of the ways that exclusionary practices of membership, made manifest in policing racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects, have obscured the physical and psychological pain and trauma inflicted on such communities. She successfully demonstrates how competing understandings of

racial projects have worked in tandem to “produce proper subjects in the borderlands” (8).

Guidottie-Hernández traces physical and discursive violence to explain shifting notions of citizenship linked to the expansion of capitalism in the borderlands. In her reading, full citizens tend to maintain a “sense of bodily and physical integrity” (7). The moments and markers of differentiations in citizenship are inscribed through violence and denial of access to justice, land, resources, and control of the body, and through vigorous policing. For Guidottie-Hernández what is important about such notions of citizenship are the alliances that existed at various points in time between the Mexican and US nation-states in the persecution and terrorization of Yaquis, the collusion of the Mexican elite and some Papago Indians in the grand massacre of Apache and other nomadic Indians, and the elitist Mexican-American interpretation of racial dynamics in Texas.

Guidottie-Hernández makes a major theoretical contribution to border theory and Chicano studies in that she problematizes the concept of *mestizaje*, which essentializes and dehistoricizes Indian identity in the borderlands. Throughout her book, the author demonstrates how the *mestizaje* concept masks inequalities, disruptions, and heterogeneities within indigenous groups and indeed all racial groups in Mexico. She is also critical, and rightly so, of privileging the Aztec heritage, as most Chicano studies works tend to do. In particular, she interrogates the construction of Aztecs as a single indigenous group of common cultural, spiritual, and ethnic heritage for Chicanos and Mexicans, and the resulting lack of integration in the Chicano consciousness of the Apaches, Comanches, Havasupais, Hopi, Jemez, Kiowa Apaches, Lipans, Papagos, and Pimas, to mention some other groups. Guidottie-Hernández calls to mind the forgotten pain inflicted on the Yaquis and Apaches during Mexican- and US-sponsored terrorizing wars. Further, she exposes the historically unacknowledged periodic active alliances of some indigenous and Mexican groups with Anglo-American elites in such endeavors.

Building upon research on histories of violence and displacement of racialized and sexualized bodies during the colonization of the southwestern United States, Guidottie-Hernández studies the lynching of Josefa/Juanita, a woman who was accused of killing an Anglo miner who tried to rape her. She was born in California and had lived only in California but was denied fair legal process by an Anglo-American jury, which found her guilty of murder and sentenced her to be hanged that very day. The author analyzes the Anglocentric narrative of this lynching in newspapers and legal records and contrasts it with the lynching’s significance in Chicano consciousness. This lynching took place at the peak of the 1849 California gold rush, after the takeover of California by the United States. This is a case of disciplining racialized and gendered subjects in a time of economic change. Violence had been ritualized and normalized to impose new hierarchies in new colonial projects. English-language records of the event exhibit important omissions in Josefa/Juanita’s defense. Her lynching was objectified and sensationalized, yet her visibility was simultaneously denied. Josefa/Juanita’s first name is not even consistent in case documents, and her last name was apparently never worth recording.

The Camp Grant Indian massacre of 1871 against the Pinal Apache has also been dismissed from the regional consciousness of the borderlands. Guidotti-Hernández's work is quite effective in analyzing the ways in which indigenous voices have been mediated throughout Anglo histories and how such narratives need to be understood as social and cultural exchanges within the context of male power. Guidotti-Hernández's theoretical contribution to the study of racial markings is important in this chapter because she shows how targets of racial markings have shifted in response to changing historical and political conditions. The author gives an account and analysis of the shifting terrain of the white imaginary during politically and economically unstable periods, such as the late 1800s in the newly conquered Southwest. Some descendants of Spaniards from the north of Mexico, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, and California invented origin traditions aimed at affirming their whiteness. The whiteness of such Mexicans was conditioned to conceal their communal forms of identification as well as to place them in opposition to indigenous groups, in particular to nomadic groups such as the Apaches. The racial groups that participated in the massacre allied themselves with the Anglos in the hope of sharing with them control of land and trading routes that the Apaches held. The promised rewards did not materialize and Anglos disenfranchised Mexicans and other indigenous groups to gain full control of the racialized economy of the Southwest. The exhibition of ritualized sexual violence and pain inflicted upon the bodies of Apache women and children was intended to obliterate their humanity and citizenship and ultimately to confirm the attackers' domination in the colonized land.

Guidotti-Hernández demonstrates how whiteness has changed its guises and facades while white privilege has remained intact. Despite the fact that in times of economic and social crisis there are social reconfigurations, these are only temporary; in the end whiteness is still the dominant ideology. She explores how Jovita González, a Tejana folklorist, anthropologist, and educator whose best-known work is *Caballero, a Historical Novel* (1939), played a significant role in reinforcing whiteness in the borderlands. Guidotti-Hernández provides a fundamental critique of the imperialist nostalgia prevalent in González's work, particularly the romanticizing of white Spanish descendants in Mexico before the takeover of Texas by the United States. González's desire to maintain the racial and class hierarchies that were in place during the early Spanish colonial years in the borderlands is coupled with her generic construction of indigenous people as universal savages or Aztec or both. González attempts to position herself as white by differentiating herself from indigenous people, and in particular Mexican Indians, whose tribal affiliations are never specified. González has been embraced as a feminist and a pioneer of feminist and Chicana studies, since she was the first Texan to earn a master's degree at the University of Texas at Austin. However, Guidotti-Hernández offers an illuminating point regarding how González's work colludes with rather than critiques US-Mexican racial dynamics and offers instead a middle-class, racist perspective that denies the citizenship of indigenous groups in Texas and completely ignores Afro-mestizos.

Guidotti-Hernández work is quite useful in understanding how the racialized exercise of power requires the constant threat of terror tactics in order to maintain

its grip. The invocation of this type of terror takes a number of forms, including the horror of war, rape, and lynching. The state-sponsored war against the Yaquis in the borderlands is another example of a spectacle of racialized domination and at the same time of racialized omission and erasure in both nations. Although the genocidal project of Yaqui extinction was promoted by venture capitalists on both sides of the border, it also was a project sponsored by both the United States and Mexico qua states. The book is thus important in understanding the ways in which national projects of capitalism and modernity are predicated on a lack of citizenship, the exercise of terrorism against racialized and sexualized subjects, and the impunity of the aggressors. A noteworthy contribution is her solid demonstration of the blatant impunity enjoyed by those who exert violence, and the official insistence on erasing such cruelties from the national consciousness. Guidotti-Hernández's afterword links the systematic public destruction of brown bodies in the nineteenth century to current cases of femicide and the extreme forms of violence that Mexican people have been experiencing for the last six years, and thus provides entry to the edited volumes under review.

Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas offers an insightful theoretical analysis of "femicide" with a focus on the particular socioeconomic dynamics at work, mainly in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, but also in Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Argentina. The primary theoretical lenses used in this collection are Marxism, Foucault's theories of social control, and Saskia Sassen's theories of globalization. The preface and eighteen chapters of the volume are a compilation of analyses by some of the most salient scholars in the field, including Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Cynthia Bejarano, Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, Deborah M. Weissman, and Alicia Schmidt Camacho, among others.

An important contribution of this collection is the editors' problematization of the term *femicide* and conception of the term *femicide*, which unlike *femicide* denotes gender-based violence. That is, femicide is not just the murder of women and girls because they are females, but rather the murder of women "that is both public and private, implicating both the state (directly or indirectly) and individual perpetrators (private or state actors); it thus encompasses systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence" (5). Femicide is a "systematic violence rooted in social, political, economic and cultural inequalities" (9).¹ This reframing provides the chapter authors with theoretical tools that make their study of violence against women and the enforcement of women's rights quite transformative. Collectively the contributors provide a thorough political, economic, and social contextualization of femicide in Latin America, focusing in particular on how femicide has been used not only as a tool of patriarchal control but also to maintain racial, economic, colonial, sexual, and even ideological hierarchies. The outrageous violence toward women's bodies cannot be explained merely as personal attacks. Rather, analyses must incorporate systemic and structural forces. For instance, in Ciudad Juárez, over 80 percent of the femicides

1. The term *femicide* has been employed throughout the remainder of this review essay to reflect the author's concurrence with this comprehensive approach, though the other works under review use the term *femicide*.

occur against women who live in the areas with the least physical infrastructure, lowest employment, and weakest social and community links.

In Latin America, neoliberal agendas that created extreme social and economic inequalities, as well as dirty wars and civil wars and now the war against drugs, have utilized feminicide as a common practice for which there is impunity. Feminicide not only involves a crime, but also the ways in which states have acted with negligence and even collusion, often simply blocking access to justice. In some instances the state initiated feminicide projects, the most emblematic of which was the Guatemalan military regime's targeting of indigenous women in the late 1970s and 1980s. During the military dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil, most of the women killed were those who challenged the political goals and doctrine of the military governments then in power: members of trade unions, teachers, and indigenous women.

The effects of terrorism against women do not necessarily end when the wars, counterinsurgency campaigns, or military dictatorships are officially over. There are many long-term effects of such terror that manifest during times of peace, in public and private spaces, and in both community and interpersonal relations. The chapter by Hilda Morales Trujillo is particularly useful in understanding legacies of state violence and impunity in Guatemala, one of which is the proliferation of arbitrary repression and violence against other vulnerable groups. This type of violence has a systemic logic because government officials are often implicated in organized crime.

The editors of *Terrorizing Women* give substantial credit to the women who have survived human rights atrocities in Latin America. There are no direct survivors of feminicide, but the families of feminicide victims, particularly the women in those families, have endured enormous pain. Despite facing indignities in their claims for justice, these women are the ones who have insisted most on the creation of democratic and just models of violence prevention and alternative approaches to human security. They have persistently demanded the delivery of justice and avoidance of denial and erasure of the crimes in the national consciousness. As indicated in their testimonies (related in this and other books covered in this review), the families of victims of feminicide are also victims themselves of state terrorism, and yet they are key actors in the democratic movements that are taking place in Latin America. This volume also includes deep description and analysis of the role certain NGOs play in strengthening the inclusion of women in the national agenda, for example by creating "observatories" (citizen watchdog groups) to improve accountability, working on strategies for regional, national, and international coalitions, and generally empowering communities in their claims for justice.

The first part of *Terrorizing Women* offers a feminist analysis of structural patterns of feminicide and provides cogent arguments about the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and the rise of feminicidal violence. The authors explore specific points where global capital mobilizes and inhabits discourses of race, gender and class. In the case of Mexico, neoliberal policies have been applied dogmatically, in favor of national, transnational, and financial institutions at the cost of increased social, economic, and political marginalization in both rural and

urban areas, as well as increased severity in human rights violations. A prime example is the tight control, exploitation, and oppression of women's bodies in the labor-intensive production process of the maquiladoras. The book also probes the role of public policies in reproducing a spatial apartheid in urban spaces in Ciudad Juárez, and the resulting rise in the levels of violence against women in their workplaces, communities, and interpersonal relations. From a human rights perspective, femicide in Ciudad Juárez is one of the most striking episodes in history in which women are stripped of their historical identities, their citizenship, and their value.

Terrorizing Women shows how femicide has been shaped by the changing configurations of global capitalism, which works like a worldwide assembly line and is highly eclectic. Global capitalism requires racialized and gendered labor that is the basis of informal economies, subcontracts, and sweatshops, as well as the dearth of social public safety nets, union labor, and day care centers. However, global capitalism and patriarchy are not monolithic, and the boundaries of exclusion and privilege have varied historically. The promises of modernization and equality under late capitalism have been translated into more social, gender, and racial inequalities.

Among the contributors, Monárrez Fragoso provides analysis of the concrete ways in which the bodies of the victims are sexualized and fetishized commodities that testify to the specific pain the body endured. "The pain is part of the social construction of gender, but it is also part of the social construction of capital. And it exposes the sufferer to the vulnerability of those who observed the suffering," she writes (59). Monárrez Fragoso analyzes the production, construction, and exploitation of women's bodies from a Marxist perspective, as an appendage of capital; from Foucault's perspective, as a disciplinary mechanism; and from a feminist perspective, emphasizing the way gender relations have worked to normalize the transformation of women's bodies into a sexual fetish that is part of the display of power in the geography of Ciudad Juárez.

Weissman makes a compelling argument for understanding feminicides within a political-economic context in order to avoid a facile and distorted portrayal of Mexicans as murderous people without morals "governed by corrupt forces and better kept on the other side of the border" (223). In many cases femicide has been analyzed as a cultural expression, losing sight of the complexity of the phenomenon. In Ciudad Juárez a great number of people live in permanent penury without any possibility of obtaining in the short or even medium term a substantial remedy to their exclusion from the social contract. Social disruption happens in a context where structural factors such as insecurity, stressful conditions, lack of community kinship, absence of social support, and uprootedness prevail. In Mexico, the structural adjustment policies of the late 1980s made possible the privatization of state-sector systems such as health care, pensions, education, transportation, and other social programs. Although there are some differences, structural violence also has set the tone of lawlessness in other Latin American countries that have followed neoliberal reforms.

According to Weissman, explanations about the phenomenon of femicide that are based only on a backlash against feminist advances tend to be totalizing

and contribute little to an understanding of sources of gender violence. Neither women nor men have had meaningful power acquisition via the maquiladora industry, and in most cases every member of the family has to work in order to make ends meet. The transition of some migrant women from providing food from family crops to performing wage labor in the maquiladora has not been a constructive one; on the contrary, entire communities have been disrupted by this change. The state is understandably being condemned for its failure to prevent and investigate violence and deliver justice, but, as Weissman notes, the new global economy forces the nation-state to relinquish its function as a protector of its citizens. The nation-state has been reduced to its minimum expression as a necessary condition of economic liberation and globalization of the economy. Everything in the state is underfunded. "Demanding that the state act while ignoring challenges to economic policies masks how poverty and crime are generated," the author writes (236). Weissman also makes a very important point regarding demands for justice: advocates use international human rights laws to hold accountable not only nation-states but multinational corporations and other influential actors in the global economy that violate rights.

The last part of the book grapples with the contradictions of female citizenship practices in the twenty years of unprecedented feminicides, torture, sexual abuse, and disappearances that women in Ciudad Juárez have been experiencing. Alicia Schmidt Camacho estimates that the level of state-sponsored gender terror against women and advocates of women in Ciudad Juárez has reached wartime levels. One of the peculiarities of the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez is that they are happening a few meters from the United States. The border space has been critical to Mexico's integration to the US economy, partly because it has been made "denationalized" space. Certain cross border activities occur only there, and more important, the Mexican side of the border has been made almost lawless in order to facilitate the functioning of maquiladoras, tourism, contraband, and a US police presence. The border has created illegal and legal interdependence that has limited the Mexican state's capacity to guarantee the rights of its citizens.

Schmidt Camacho is critical of the facile representation of feminicide as a regressive cultural manifestation of masculinity. Instead, she invites us to incorporate in our analysis the "rational expression of the contradictions arising from the gendered codes of neoliberal governance and development" (278). The tragedy of feminicide lies not only in the phenomenon itself but also in the fact that women's rights have been increasingly denied in the delivery of justice, as has been described in the rich testimonies of family members Eva Arce, Julia Huamañahui, Rosa Franco, and Norma Ledezma Ortega that are part of this collection. The state has invariably and implicitly justified violent tactics as a form of social control, particularly in poor areas. Migrant women are constantly subjected to gender terror, not only by law-enforcement officers and armed criminal groups, but also in their workplaces and domestic spaces. Schmidt Camacho develops a critique of the state-centered nature of human rights discourse and calls for a theoretical framework that is post-national in order to transform women's citizenship rights.

Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera is another new edited col-

lection, comprising twelve chapters that would have been more effective if many of them did not repeat contextual information about the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez. The volume is nonetheless useful in describing the state's response (or lack of it) to feminicides, the role of racialized and sexualized subjects in the global economy, and the specific situation of the border that creates myriad loopholes through which to carry out crimes. Many chapters also make reference to the novel *Desert Blood*, written by the editor, to substantiate points in their analysis, and at times the text is too self-referential. Since the volume is critical of embedded classism and racism in the treatment of the families of feminicide victims, perhaps it would have been more meaningful to give additional context for the two included testimonies by mothers of victims of feminicide and compare them to contributor Melissa W. Wright's critique of what she calls "mother-activism." The collection does a good job in uncovering indifference of the major transnational firms that employ most of the victims of feminicide and discussing the social responsibility corporations have toward employees. Elvia R. Arriola, author of the first chapter, calls for all people, and in particular women, to carry out research and make art to raise awareness about feminicides, but more important, to create global alliances to change the working and living conditions of women who are exposed to gender terror.

Alicia Gaspar de Alba brings into her analysis Chicana theory regarding cultural constructions of gender in Mexico in order to explain the cultural reasons why women in Mexico are being made victims of feminicide. She also provides a thorough explanation of infrastructure policies that have helped make feminicide happen in Ciudad Juárez. "Read within the context of the *Tres Marias* Syndrome, the patriarchal social discourse of Chicano/Mexicano culture, which constructs women's gender and sexuality according to three biblical archetypes—virgins, mothers and whores—the *maqui-loca* clearly fall into the third category" (81).

The chapter about popular culture and feminicide by Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck tends to "other" at multiple levels the artistic works and artifacts that it analyzes, which include a song, a photograph, and a novel. The authors offer cultural and almost biological explanations for why feminicides occur and why the efforts to combat sexual crimes have failed. Their critique of the song "Las Mujeres de Juárez" as an inconceivable patriarchal fantasy proved wrong. The lyrics include a call to form self-defense groups, and ten years after the song was written self-defense groups have grown in many parts of Mexico, but particularly in Michoacán and Guerrero, due to the state's alliance with organized crime and the lack of protection to entire communities from extortion, abduction, and other forms of violence.

The lyrics of the song, like most *corridos* and *corridos-canciones* of Los Tigres del Norte, have resonance not only in the border area but throughout the country. Volk and Schlotterbeck's treatment of celebrated photographer Julián Cardona's work is also not persuasive. Cardona's photography has focused on the economic and social impact of globalization in Ciudad Juárez, but the authors do not fully explore the intention and situation of the single picture they select for analysis, particularly because it is part of a series on child labor in the maquiladoras and cannot easily be understood on its own. Ironically, by interpreting the

girl in the photograph as a virgin the authors sexualize her in that their analysis is a function of her sexuality or asexuality. Volk and Schlotterbeck's critique of Carlos Fuentes's 1995 novel *La frontera de cristal* lacks basic engagement with the characters, the plots, and Fuentes's own critique. The misogynistic gaze of some characters is one of the tools Fuentes uses to build his critique of patriarchy, but Fuentes's views do not necessarily correspond with the values, viewpoints, and positions of his characters.

Kathleen Staudt and Irasema Coronado provide a political science framework to stress the difficulties in sustaining regional NGOs in the border area, mainly due to the harassment NGOs experience and lack of interest from both Mexico and the United States. The authors provide a detailed list of strategies for change: introducing into school curricula materials against domestic and sexual violence, legalization of currently illicit drugs in the United States and Mexico, anti-corruption measures, and civil lawsuits, among others. Complementing the Staudt and Coronado chapter, Clara E. Rojas describes the collusion and co-optation of some NGOs composed of privileged women who perpetuate practices that are racist and classist toward families of victims of feminicides. At times Rojas's work seems to lose sight of the main goals of anti-femicide activism. Rojas's explanations regarding which NGOs, academics, and activists are legitimate at times are undertheorized.

Monárrez Fragoso uses cultural studies theories as a framework to analyze the ways groups in power handle the affairs of the victims of femicide and their families, in particular the construction of such vulnerable groups from a classist perspective. These families are portrayed as lacking logical reasoning and being a collective nuisance that has hurt the image of Ciudad Juárez and consequently sabotaged prospects for drawing more transnational capital into the city. The families are "othered" symbolically and nonsymbolically through social and legal institutions that exacerbate their pain and grief. Their lengthy battles for justice are especially challenging because activism requires symbolic capital and financial stability that most of the families lack.

In sharp contrast, Wright's work develops a critique of "mother-activism," a term she coins to describe public organizing undertaken by the mothers of femicide victims. Wright argues that such activism takes a conservative form because most of the mothers' testimonies express the "idea of a human rather than a political connection." Referencing the "testimonies and tears, to which the audience almost always visibly responds in kind, its anger palpable and tears flowing," Wright argues that "the emotional experience reinforces the mother-activists' assertions that their motivations lie not in the political realm but in their experience as mothers" (230). Wright claims that this account quite often reduces the mothers' activism to a performance designed to make audiences "support the movement with human and material resources" that "arise from the networks of social activism that link local and global organization with access to donor bases (usually in the "First World/Global North")" (231). In this claim Wright's gaze and position tend to be individualistic, paternalistic, and colonial. Antifemicide movements are not alive thanks to the donations from the "First World/Global North"; more often it is due to the courageous daily work of the victims' families.

Any insinuation that the mothers seek to profit is not supported by the testimonies included in part 3 of this book, or for that matter more broadly available. Eva Arce and Paula Flores say rather that they would like to commemorate their daughters, and they ask for justice and better forensic investigation, among other changes that seem likely to benefit the entire border community, not just themselves.

Wright anticipates that mother-activists will likely retreat to their communities once they resolve their individual cases, but this conclusion asserts a classist and simplistic separation between public women and mother-activists that obscures the complexity of life, particularly in very community-oriented societies. Many mothers of victims of feminicide are migrants who have worked outside the home for long periods. Their position regarding their political knowledge and activism comes from acute awareness of the conditions in which they live. Wright's proposition shows that antifeminicide efforts are far from homogenous and reflect pronounced, even irreconcilable, differences. Missing in this analysis are linkages connecting female oppression to other visible social antagonisms such as class exploitation, colonial expansion, and national as well as racial domination. Wright's depiction of the mothers as "radical-conservatives" fails to see that the trauma of feminicide induces a reevaluation of their roles in their communities, families, and the economy. In opposition to capitalism, which historically has worked to dismantle entire communities of racialized, colonized, and sexualized subjects for the sake of productivity, the mothers envision a division of labor that does not necessarily militate against a greater unity, and they are invested in the social production of their communities.

Wright's analysis can be contrasted to the chapter by Patricia Ravelo Blancas in a third edited volume under review here, *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response*. Ravelo Blancas analyzes testimony from families of the victims of feminicides to understand their subjectivities, intersubjectivities, and sense of morality. "The violence these subjects experience in their daily life has paradoxically changed their worldview by stimulating feelings of strength and dignity as well as of resistance and willingness to fight for justice," the author finds (38). Families' and notably mothers' initial impetus is hard to sustain in the face of state terror and the indignities they experience during their activism. Mothers have demanded justice, as well as respect for their pain and the memory of their daughters. They have repeatedly asserted that their demands were not for monetary compensation.

Paula Flores, the mother of feminicide victim Sagrario Flores and contributor to *Making a Killing*, adds to the understanding of the phenomenon of gender violence in significant ways. It was the mothers and the families of the victims, not feminist activists, who initiated the movement with few material resources. Rather than profiting, family members often lose their jobs and become stigmatized, sometimes through mischaracterization by local or foreign scholars, who often treat them in paternalistic, colonizing, classist, and racist ways and who are not really in communion with them.

Candice Skrapec offers a concise and thorough understanding of feminicides from a forensic point of view in her essay in *Making a Killing*. Invited by the state judicial police to assist them by overseeing an internship and providing general

forensic support, in her visits Skrapeč saw that there was only one van and one crime lab van to serve the 1.5 million people in Ciudad Juárez. There were no provisions for analyzing DNA evidence in situ. The police needed to train personnel “in the area of identification, processing and storage of evidence for purposes of subsequent prosecution of criminal suspects, because without that you cannot make the case,” Skrapeč asserts (245). In her review of the files from 1999 to 2002, she saw that many of the bodies had not been identified. More importantly, there has been little infrastructural change. Serial killers, including those whose killing included sexual violation, have killed women in Ciudad Juárez and then moved to the United States, as was the case of the “railway killer” Rafael Reséndez-Ramírez. Very few perpetrators have been incarcerated for even one case, and many arrests and prosecutions have not followed a proper process. Others have been scapegoats incarcerated for years awaiting trial. Since there is not much evidence, the system relies on confessions, and these are almost always coerced. The fact that Ciudad Juárez is a hotbed for drug trafficking makes its situation worse because homicides, prostitution, and other crimes are part of drug trafficking. The one positive element of Skrapeč’s report is that autopsies do not report careful excisions, removal, or preservation of organs that would give credence to rumors of organ trafficking.

The two prevalent scenarios of sexual crimes are those committed in groups and those by individual offenders. Globally, collective crimes are comparatively rare because they increase the risk of the perpetrators being identified, but in Ciudad Juárez the groups of men who are committing feminicides enjoy camaraderie, so no one among them has denounced the crimes. Neither the state nor society has responded in effective ways. It is possible that some members of the groups also kill individually when they are not with the group. According to Skrapeč, all of them may be defined as serial killers because they take time to select their victims—feminicides are not random. In Ciudad Juárez the profile of the victims is young girls who live on the west side of the city. Since the murders of women have gone unprosecuted the killings have increased over time. In the cases of drug-related crimes, the people who are killed have such worth that revenge is normally expected. That is not the case for women, who are so systematically devalued that no revenge or justice is expected.

Jane Caputi, in her afterword to *Making a Killing*, brings Chicana/o theory and feminist theory to analysis of “gynocides,” the destruction of women’s “traditions, spirituality, morale, memory and sense of self and culture.” She goes on to explain that “the aim of gynocide is to destroy women as a spiritual, political, and cultural forces and to obliterate women’s group identity, with a shared history, responsibility, consciousness and sense of value and purpose” (280). In order to understand the cultural context of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, Caputi brings to bear various Aztec rituals of human sacrifice and part of the mythology of the dismembering of the goddess Coyolxauhqui. The author offers substantial analysis of the ways patriarchy works to control women. However, in her analysis Caputi “others” Mexican men as if they possess innate criminal tendencies. Her approach is evocative of the Zoot Suit Riots, in which the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department issued a report alleging that the Mexican American’s desire to spill blood and be

violent was a biological characteristic that had a direct link to the Aztecs. As in the book by Guidotti-Hernández, the indigenous groups related to Mexico have been homogenized, simplified, and linked to the Aztecs. This overlooks the fact that indigenous groups from the borderlands are very different from those in central and southern Mexico, and that Ciudad Juárez is now home to migrants from many different parts of Mexico, with different genealogies and cosmovisions.

Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response, a collection edited by Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona, is a much-needed contribution to the study of femicide in Ciudad Juárez because it is centered on the representation of femicide in newspapers, novels, and films. Each chapter has a very useful introduction by the editors that links it into a cohesive volume. Even so, the first chapter does not quite fit with the rest, mainly because its focus is on violence in relation to transvestite/transgender sex workers in Tijuana rather than femicide in El Paso/Ciudad Juárez. The methods and theoretical frameworks do not cover media representation as this chapter is based instead on formal interviews and surveys carried out by Emilio Velázquez as part of a study designed by several authors. The analysis takes a top-down approach that at times feels disconnected from the participants, place, and circumstances. Although the authors state that “the results of both qualitative and quantitative elements of this study effectively indicate that violence in all its different modalities is deeply rooted in this population, both as part of their work lives as well as outside” (32), it is difficult to assess the survey data absent information on the number of participants, the period of time in which it was carried out and by whom, and additional contextual and methodological matters. An important finding is the role of the police in routinely exerting violence against sexual minorities.

Coeditor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba’s cultural analysis of the representation of femicide in television is groundbreaking. He argues that the patterns of representation of violence in the main local television channels are commodification of violence, violence as an instrument of manipulation in the ideological and political struggles between interest groups, and reproduction of a violent culture. “Values represented in the abundance of violent images . . . induce a paralysis of any political project intended to fight terror,” he reports (65). The media do not address the structural causes of violence and femicide in particular. Instead they participate in propagating terror and oppression for the sake of security. According to Domínguez-Ruvalcaba the representation of violence in the main television station in Ciudad Juárez, Channel 56, repels political ideas aimed at recovering and constructing community. Most of the Spanish-language programs aired in the United States that cover the phenomenon of femicide in Mexico magnify and stigmatize subjects and do not make connections to the structural factors that are propagating such violence. In this way, femicides are othered and the victims stigmatized even further.

Corona’s research on the representation of femicides in newspapers provides insights into the patterns of sensationalistic details published to capture readership and explains the economic and political limitations on newspapers’ ability to carry out research and publish investigative reporting. This chapter could have been more complete if the author had integrated information on terrorism aimed

at journalists and more recently at newspapers' headquarters. In general, Corona points to a "crisis of truth" (his phrase) regarding the investigation of femicide. Newspapers compensate for and cover up big information gaps. The information they report is fragmentary and unclear, a phenomenon that some journalists have termed "obscurantism."

Miguel López-Lozano adds to the volume a very thorough analysis of the way sexual violence has affected literary imagination. López-Lozano provides an overview of the most important literary work in this genre and focuses on three novels: *La frontière* by Patrick Bard, *Tierra marchita* by Carmen Galán Benítez, and *Desert Blood* by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. López-Lozano concludes that the three novels are well written and their contributions are enormous, but he is not without criticism. These works "perpetuate the deeply ingrained stereotype of the border as a zone of terror in which justice, dignity, and humanity fail to flourish," López-Lozano writes. "Nonetheless, they help us to understand various forms of explicit and implicit violence that constrain the lives of hundreds of thousands of women, men, and children who live and work along the US-Mexican border" (148).

Cities and Citizenship at the U.S.-Mexico Border: The Paso del Norte Metropolitan Region is a fine interdisciplinary effort that analyzes the international border with Ciudad Juárez as a global manufacturing urban space. The collection has a social science perspective and the editors have done an excellent job in providing historical context on the region. Most of the work uses Saskia Sassen's globalization theory. Monárrez Frago, whose work in *Terrorizing Women* and *Making a Killing* was reviewed earlier in this essay, returns here to analyze the way civil society in Ciudad Juárez has experienced atrocities under the discourse of war, and how the city has become a modern necropolis of sexual and other kind of terrorism. Within the context of the global and liberal economy, the corpses in Ciudad Juárez, particularly those in common graves, seem like natural residue, and those in power have not cared enough about the killings to bring justice and prevent more crimes. Femicides become more complex in an urban space when the number of people addicted to drugs is increasing, as is the case on the Mexico-US border, though the area is less a destination than a transshipment route; 99 percent of the cocaine that is delivered to the United States goes through Mexico.² Globalization offers many advantages to organized crime networks, and people in Ciudad Juárez are victims not only of local violence but of shifts in the global economy. Monárrez Frago builds a pertinent critique of the ways that states have used questions of sovereignty to avoid binational initiatives that address violence against women, simultaneously becoming absent in the implementation of national agendas to create a safer life for *fronterizos*. The negligence of the Mexican state is such that in 2009 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights declared Mexico guilty of negligence and impunity.

The anthropological work of Guillermina Gina Núñez and Georg M. Klamminger in *Cities and Citizenship at the U.S.-Mexico Border* about the *colonias* on the

2. Matthew S. Jenner, "International Drug Trafficking: A Global Problem with a Domestic Solution," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 18, no. 2 (2011): 901–927.

US side of the border is similarly pertinent to the understanding of border dynamics and calls for rehumanization of the people who live in these settlements.³ Colonias are the result of the demand for labor and the lack of infrastructure to provide affordable housing for the workers in factories that demanded such labor, yet their inhabitants are quite stigmatized and marginalized. The authors provide analysis of the ways inhabitants of the colonias have actively embraced vertical and horizontal processes of civic engagement.

There are very important dialogues across the five volumes reviewed here and some authors pop up in more than one of them. One major vacuum in the four volumes that deal directly with femicide in the border area is that, with the exception of López-Lozano, these scholars do not engage with the academic writings, community work, and legal analysis done by Dr. Alfredo Limas Hernández, Sonia Torres, and Karla Micheel Salas. Professor of the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez and coordinator of the observatory of social violence and gender of the same university, Dr. Limas Hernández is based in Ciudad Juárez. He has done extensive work on a daily basis with the families of the disappeared and victims of femicide and has written innovative academic work on femicide. Most of these volumes cite the Cotton Field case as a legal precedent concerning violence in a nonwar context and an example of the possibilities that can be created in international law. For the first time the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled against the Mexican government in 2009 for its failure to investigate the murder and protect the lives of women. The case is emblematic and therefore most people who theorize about femicide have used it in their work, yet in a troubling omission none of the four volumes here that directly address femicide in Ciudad Juárez discuss the context for this case. The omission is all the more glaring because some authors submitted *amicus curiae* testimony before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for the case. At times, this silence regarding the efforts of those who work so closely with their border communities to make such important legal triumphs possible, against all odds, seems as if it were a form of appropriation that hints at the colonial hierarchies lingering within academia.

3. In Spanish, *colonia* means a community or neighborhood. However, the term has been appropriated by the state of Texas to refer to a Mexican-American residential area along the Texas-Mexico border. Most colonias lack some of the most basic living infrastructure such as potable water and sewer systems, electricity, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing.