

Violence, Cultural Production, and Resilience as Resistance: Community Organizing and  
Cultural Activism in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

by

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¿Será posible el Sur? Mercedes Sosa (1984)

¿Será posible el Sur?  
 será posible tanta bala perdida  
 al corazón del pueblo,  
 tanta madre metida en la palabra loca  
 y toda la memoria en una cárcel

¿Será posible el Sur?  
 será posible tanto invierno  
 caído sobre el último rostro de mi hermano,  
 tanto salario escaso riendo con descaro  
 y en el plato vacío el verdugo esperando

Mi territorio que una vez gira  
 en la oscuridad de esa pregunta,  
 de esa pregunta:  
 ¿Será posible el sur? ¿Será posible?  
 si se viese al espejo ¿se reconocería?

*Ciudad Juárez is a resilient city. It's a city that is shaped every day by injustice and by inequality. It is a city made up of migrants who struggle every day to survive despite the heat, despite the cold. That's why it is resilient. A friend once told me: the women of Juárez are the barbarians of the north, you are made of the stone and the salt of the desert. You are unbreakable and strong, in spite of all that has happened to you. You are like fortresses made of desert rock. And I said: maybe that's true, because the extreme climate has shaped us. Living here, the heat suffocates us, but we keep walking. The cold chills us to our bones, but we keep walking. We are [the people] of Ciudad Juárez. And I believe that our bodies can endure anything. We have seen bodies fall, we have thrown ourselves on the ground during shoot-outs, we have been kicked out of City Hall during protests, we have nearly been arrested, we have been discredited by the media. We have been accused of profiting off the pain of others. We have endured many things and yet we continue to resist because our city needs it to move forward ... We are the voice of resistance, the voice of subversion. (Carmen, personal interview, July 2016)*

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*“In life, one must do three things: write a book, plant a tree, and have a child.” (Muhammad)*

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## **DEDICATION**

For Mama, Bobby, Bonnie, Osita, Emma, and lxs guerrerxs de Ciudad Juárez.

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## I. CONTEXTUALIZING CIUDAD JUÁREZ: EXTREME VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY CULTURAL PRODUCTION

*“They tried to bury us; they didn’t know we were seeds.”*  
(Mexican Proverb)

From 2008 to 2013, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico was militarized which resulted in the city earning the title of “the murder capital of the world” in the international journalism community. During this time, civil society was redefined by the powers of impunity, violence, the maquila, and the narcoeconomy. In the context of Juárez, political corruption, the export manufacturing sector, and *narcotraficantes* have created a perfect storm that has normalized the exploitation of people and the presence of ubiquitous violence. Sayak Valencia uses Achille Mbembe’s notion of necropolitics as a point of departure in her scholarship (*Capitalismo Gore*, 2010) that explores the intersection of need, power, death, and capitalism, suggesting that violence serves a triple role in the Mexican reality: it is an effective market tool, serves as an alternative means of survival, and is a mechanism of perverse masculine assertiveness. She describes the current period of capitalism in Mexico as that of “gore,” a reality that is marked by blood, corpses, torture, and violence, a reality in which victims are held captive by the reproduction of capital. Cities along the NAFTA corridor operate under the system of gore capitalism, that is to say the dark side of global economy that exists outside the realm of traditional capitalism and neoliberalism.

This violence rules the city and has come to profoundly and negatively impact civil society,<sup>1</sup> including its dwellers, institutions, and all aspects of human life that operate in the

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<sup>1</sup> “Civil society” refers to non-political and voluntary social organizations that seek to strengthen democracy and foster community and trust, which act as civilizing forces and balance the democratic process. Without a developed and effective civil society, democracy cannot function as it relies on these relationships of trust among community members, creating a symbiosis



interest of members of the community that are State responsibilities. Domínguez Ruvalcaba and Ravelo Blancas (2011) assert that the concept of citizenship has gone through an emptying process (“una ciudad en proceso de vaciamiento de la ciudadanía” (p.16)) caused by neoliberal processes and the country’s narcoeconomy. The culture of fear that rules Juárez stems from the extreme violence that in itself is a form of power that is impossible to overthrow, and to which all are subject, even the ruling class. This creates a form of impotent citizenship, and in this violent context, human beings are rendered powerless against it (Ruvalcaba and Ravelo Blancas, 2011).

Notwithstanding, during the years of military occupation (and in the post-militarization period), crime and violence have inspired works of community collective action, and other forms of individual agency that have come to challenge the *culture of fear* and sought ways to alter the daily geographic space of the city. As I seek to explore in this dissertation, cultural activism, community organizing, and works of cultural production serve as mechanisms of resilience in the community. In particular, my study centers on four community initiatives: 656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma’Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta, which I will explore in-depth in Chapter Four. The context of Juárez has created the conditions for a particular cultural reality in which activists seek out ways to claim subjectivity and demonstrate resistance as they assume social

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between representative government and community relations. There are many different definitions of civil society that are widely used. For example, Putnam (1993), Carothers (1999), and Peruzzotti (2007) suggest the notion that a strong civil society affects citizen engagement in community, and ultimately affects government and creates responsive states. Muller and Seligson (1994), Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995), Blair (1997), Gibson (2001), Newton (2001), Jordan (2011) consider civil society’s responsibility to be that of strengthening democracy, while (Risse 2000), Ward (2005) consider the defense of human rights to be it responsibility

responsibilities that have been abandoned by the neoliberal State. Thus, my study will consider and reveal the concept of “resilience as resistance,” a form of civic engagement in this post-conflict space through which small, everyday acts of rebuilding community and civil society are achieved through harnessing personal trauma with the goal of creating change, and these acts hold significant symbolic power and serve as forms of resistance. In this sense, the purpose of this research is twofold: it explores individuals’ resilience and agency that led them to become activists/organizers despite a violent context, and it connects these experiences to collective forms of cultural production that serve to rebuild civil society in Ciudad Juárez in the post-militarization period.

The term “resilience” carries different determinants and meanings, particularly that of enduring, rebuilding, and recovering. The American Psychological Association (2014) defines resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress,” and there is a significant body of literature that addresses different contexts and concepts of resilience (business/economic resilience, ecological resilience, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Resilience is often a framework used along with social network analysis to address questions of disaster risk reduction that inform policy and practice; social structures are identified and ties to social actors/stakeholders and their relationships to networks are examined (Taylor et. al, 2014). When speaking of resilience as it relates to community and civil society, this psychological corpus of work explores resilience as a post-natural disaster or public health

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<sup>2</sup> Barbee, Daniel. 2007. "Disaster Response and Recovery: Strategies and Tactics for Resilience." *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 4(1), Article 11.  
Coutu, Diane. 2002. "How Resilience Works." *Harvard Business Review*. May Issue.  
Gunderson, Lance. 2000. "Ecological Resilience—In Theory and Application." *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 31(2000): 425-439.

emergency phenomenological response; this is to say how community responds to, manages, and moves past a (most often) one-time catastrophic event. Additionally, many international relations scholars consider resilience to be a reaction to contemporary neoliberal governmentality, as Foucault suggests in his 1979 lecture at the Collège de France, “German post-war liberalism and the liberalism of the Chicago School.” Civil society is depoliticized and is rendered apolitical and powerless under neoliberal governance, and “beneath resilience lurks a dehumanising political agenda and the continuity of the state’s dominance” (Duffield, 2012: Walker and Cooper, 2011, as cited in Bourbeau and Ryan, 2017, p. 222); Evans and Reid (2013) go as far as to suggest that resilient subjects are “subjects that have accepted the imperative not to resist ... [and cannot] conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility...the real tragedy for us is the way the doctrine [of resilience] forces us to become active participants in our own de-politicisation” (Evans and Reid, 2013, p. 85).

Resistance, on the other hand, is considered to be an organized contestation to power—acts that are political in nature—and there is no intersection between the two concepts, as they are considered to be mutually exclusive. In consulting the extensive scholarship regarding resilience in a multitude of contexts, I encountered little research that considers resilience to be a form of resistance. However, a compelling approach by Bourbeau and Ryan (“Resilience, resistance, infrapolitics and enmeshment,” 2017) relates to my research as it utilizes the case of the Palestinian national liberation movement to reconsider the history of resilience and resistance as two binary and opposite concepts. They contend that approaching the two processes as static concepts rather than adaptive interrelated processes diminishes the strength of the possible relationship between them: “Resistance and resilience can assist and support one another. In broader terms, adopting a more inclusive approach allows us to appeal to both resilience and

resistance as tools for understanding certain features of world politics ...[which] allows our analytical framework to give much greater credit to populations/communities/individuals who cope during chronic adversity or protracted conflict” (Bourbeau and Ryan, 2017, p. 227).

Bourbeau and Ryan explore the discursive relationship between resilience and resistance through infrapolitics and the lens of Scott’s theory of veiled acts of insubordination and resistance discussed in this dissertation. Bourbeau and Ryan’s theory establishes a relationship of coexistence that is mutually beneficial between the processes of resistance and resilience: “resilience, rather than a mere annoying noise in the years of resistance, becomes a crucial vector for explaining why some resistance movements manage to persevere despite heavy hurdles and setbacks...resilience demands extraordinary acts of willpower, dedication, resourcefulness and creativity—all traits that can be deployed in furtherance of strategies of resistance (Bourbeau and Ryan, 2017, p. 228-9). Bourbeau and Ryan’s framework considers “resilience [to be] complementary and relational to overt resistance” (p. 10), and while a useful tool to analyze civil society and is context-dependent, I argue it falls short in considering the true change-making potential of resilience itself. They contend that resilience is a type of byproduct or reaction that succeeds an overtly public and political contestation; within the context of the Palestinian national liberation movement and the geopolitical space of West Bank, Palestinians exemplify resilience through sustaining the ever-changing occupation of territories by Israeli forces that has endured during the 70 year-long struggle,<sup>3</sup> and by adapting, persevering, and remaining hopeful for resolution.

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<sup>3</sup> Bourbeau and Ryan assert “The continuation of a Palestine liberation movement for that period illustrates how resilience is necessary to sustain resistance through its ebbs and flows over decades” (p. 230).

The case of Ciudad Juárez, however, is unique and nuanced, as it requires a resilience of a different kind: within the context of this dissertation, the resilience I refer to is the Juarese community's response to long-term sustained trauma and extreme guerrilla warfare-type narcoviolence, State-sponsored violence, and gendered violence that is not tied to a larger geopolitical project (violence that is the byproduct of a larger project that will benefit civil society long-term, violence that one might consider to be justifiable or as a means to an end). The violent conflict that affects Juárez is executed by a small subset of the community, is not tied to a collective identity, and does not benefit the community at large, as is the case of the Palestine national liberation movement. The resilience specific to Ciudad Juárez is exemplified by the actions of the post-conflict community of Juárez and its refusal to adapt to the trauma experienced during the period of military occupation at the hands of the State. It further embodies the individual and collective determination to recover fair and just citizenship practices, a sense of community, humanity, and space within the context of failed Mexican civil society.

The militarization of Juárez created the conditions for the destruction of civil society and the welfare state; the city experienced what Naomi Klein (*The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 2007) positioned as the disaster capitalism complex, “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events, combined with the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities” (Klein, 2007, p. 6). Klein explores different cases of disaster capitalism on a global scale, employing a multitude of examples of how marginalized populations are exploited during times of crisis, often under the guise of aid and development. Militarization as a way to solve the social crisis of a war between thriving drug cartels vying for territory and smuggling routes to the US quickly devolved into extreme State-sponsored violence

and corruption, exacerbated by the poverty created by neoliberalism and a State that had failed its citizens. During this time, normal functioning of civil society halted; the conditions of the drug war made it too dangerous to spend time outside and all unnecessary movement from place to place throughout the city stopped.<sup>4</sup> According to Plan Estratégico, a private organization in Ciudad Juárez dedicated to the research and analysis of civil society from a quality-of-life perspective, between the years of 2008-2010, the city experienced 7,764 documented homicides (it is widely accepted that not all homicides are reported (Plan Estratégico, 2016)), and extortion, record-high disappearances of women and cases of femicide (the serial killing of women; 401 cases of femicide in 2010 alone (Plan Estatégico, 2016)), and impunity increased across the city. After the destruction sustained during the years of “alta violencia” (2008-2013) as that period is referred to in Juárez, community members involved in organizing and cultural activism apprehensively expanded or restarted their projects.<sup>5</sup> Enduring the militarization of the city and the violence that continues to surge, community organizers and activists show that their work counters the city’s narrative of violence and oppression through their initiatives, and moreover, is grounded in resilience and the desire to rebuild civil society. The work of Juarese activists and organizers, while it seeks to improve human life in their communities by assuming State

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<sup>4</sup> This was mentioned in all interviews when asked how the city’s everyday functioning changed during the years of high violence. One study participant cited “There are generations of people who have been practically imprisoned in their homes, or school or work, children and young people that go from home to school and from school to home; from home to work, from work to home (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016). Another participant reflected “There were several years when we did not leave our homes: from home to work, from work to home, it was a situation where you were afraid to walk through public spaces” (Gabriela, personal interview, July 2016).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that some community members did stop community projects because they considered the danger to be too great.

responsibilities as their own, opens a political space through which to understand the different dimensions of the complex case that is Ciudad Juárez as a whole.

To examine these experiences and works of collective action, I explore factors that contribute to how resilience develops at the community level, such as how crime/violence is spoken of, silenced, and discussed in the community, how trauma is overcome and serves as inspiration for civic engagement, and how cultural production is a way in which actors assert agency and create a voice. I use individual participant testimonies I collected during my trips to Ciudad Juárez from organizers, activists, artists, and cultural producers to explore the discourse of violence and how crime impacts space and social relationships. This chorus of organized voices not only reveal the inner workings of the period of militarization but resist the complicated context of Ciudad Juárez, and their resilience to create systemic change in the face of violence, corruption, impunity, and trauma is itself a form of resistance.

This research is significant because resilience has the power to be an organizing and civilizing force in both conflict and post-conflict spaces, and it warrants exploration. I am pursuing an interdisciplinary dissertation that lies at the crossroads of the humanities and social sciences as I believe it is important to evaluate a complex social context such as Juárez by considering a myriad of approaches, nuances, and dimensions. I was inspired to begin this project after completing a thesis for my Masters in Spanish, which included working with *2666* by Roberto Bolaño (2004) and the story of Santa Teresa, a fictional space that represents Ciudad Juárez. The novel spans periods of history marked by violence (WWII, post-war years) and ends in the geographic space of Santa Teresa, one of today's most extreme spaces where the proliferation of violence was created by the effects of globalization and the neoliberal model. The novel spans diverse human groups that represent the global social polarity between elite and

poor. Bolano's novel presents a context of everyday existence in which uneven development generated by global modernity translates into particular pathological scenarios. *2666* contains the major horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the novel considers itself to explore "the secrets of the world." Violent scenarios in the forms of femicide and other forms of violence are narrated with a deep sense of apathy and emotional distance, reflecting the similar apathy of the state as represented in the novel. Sections of the novel, particularly Part Four, read like crime scene reports in which no affective narrative voice emerges and positions the reader as witness. Calling to mind the work of Judith Butler (*Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 2006), the victims and murdered women in Santa Teresa are not mourned, and this fact calls into question the notion of the connected global community and what type of human is counted as human, who is intrinsically dehumanized, whose lives can be counted as lives, and who deserves mourning.

As I worked with Bolaño's *2666* at great length, I became interested in the reality of life on the ground of Juárez. Ciudad Juárez is seen as a space that exemplifies the calamities of unregulated transnational capital, neoliberal development, and the violence of poverty and extreme and perverse forms of masculinity. It has achieved international infamy for its violence, narcocrime, and impunity, and I wondered about community members who sought to rewrite this narrative as presented in Bolano's *2666*. As my research into the particular reality of Juárez continued, I considered the role of the community organizer or activist that challenges this context, and I eventually began my Master of Science studies in the School of Human Ecology's department of Civil Society and Community Research to facilitate this on-the-ground research.

Being a student of both the humanities and social sciences, I bridge the two disciplines in this dissertation while I rely on individual testimony and allow participants' words to tell their



own stories. Highly editing the authentic experiences captured in this study's interviews seemed like an injustice. For this reason, I have included a number of lengthy interview passages in this dissertation rather than synthesizing an experience down to one sentence. While I will discuss the context of the interviews, their contribution to my study, and my role in selecting those passages included in my dissertation, I simultaneously ask the reader to hear the pain, struggle, passion, and power in the words of those working on the ground in Juárez to shift the city's narrative. Names have been changed to protect the identity of those interviewed.

### *1.1 CONTEXTUAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO CIUDAD JUÁREZ: CRIME, RESISTANCE, AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION*

*“We left the airport in El Paso and were making a few stops before heading to the border. I didn't know what direction we were driving in so I asked where Juárez was. She responded ‘See in the distance where the lights of Texas stop and it looks like a black abyss? Like the earth ends? That is Juárez.’”<sup>6</sup>*

Crime and violence and how they are discussed in different community settings have powerful effects on social organization and civic engagement. In this introductory chapter, I explore theories that relate to the context of Ciudad Juárez: how the exhaustive discussion of crime has contributed to the city's culture of fear and has impacted active citizenship, how because of its violent context, everyday works of resistance are most effective in the community, and how small works of cultural production are serving as mechanisms for resilience and change in Juárez. Additionally, this chapter serves as space in which I explore the sociopolitical and

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<sup>6</sup> An excerpt from my fieldnotes of my first glimpse of Ciudad Juárez in January 2016.

economic context and challenges of Ciudad Juárez that have led to its current reality, and I describe this study's research methodologies.

### *1.1.a. Talk of Crime*

Teresa P. R. Caldeira's analysis of crime, violence, and social organization in São Paulo (*City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*, 2000) reveals a complex relationship between responses to violence and concepts of citizenship and is a useful lens through which to consider the multifaceted problematics of Juárez. Gail Mason (*The Spectacle of Violence: Homophobia, Gender, and Knowledge*, 2001) explores themes related to Caldeira's scholarship; Mason examines how violence is not only a physically destructive force that demands subjugation, but how it also simultaneously serves as a constitutive and formative discourse, an instrument of control, and is an ideological force that falls upon specific bodies in society. Caldeira identifies the notion of "talk of crime" as a mechanism of social organization structured around fear that is perpetuated by social stereotypes and by constant reflection/rumination. Specifically, "talk of crime" (constant, everyday references to crime and its impacts) reorganizes communities according to social class; the wealthy are contained behind walls in protected communities, while members of lower socioeconomic classes—the vulnerable and marginalized populations of urban spaces—are considered dangerous and are both the perpetrators and victims of violent crime. Many view lower class sectors of the city (such as favelas and cortiços in the case of São Paulo) to be infested with violent crime and those who inhabit such spaces to be potential criminals devoid of conscience and humanity. Caldeira explores the effects "talk of crime" has on perceptions of violence and urban organization/segregation:

The talk of crime—that is, everyday conversations, commentaries, discussions, narratives, and jokes that have crime and fear as their subject—is contagious. Once one case is described, many others are likely to follow. ... [They] seem compelled to keep

talking about crime, as if the endless analysis of cases could help them cope with their perplexing experiences or the arbitrary and unusual nature of violence. The repetition of histories, however, only serves to reinforce people's feelings of danger, insecurity, and turmoil. Thus the talk of crime feeds a circle in which fear is both dealt with and reproduces, and violence is both counteracted and magnified. (p. 19)

Narratives of crime reinforce polarities between good and evil and reorder the world along prejudicial and unjust lines, creating stereotypes, separation, and inequality. Violence is class-specific in Caldeira's analysis of urban social organization and segregation; it is true that all social groups are victims of crime, however, working class communities are most often victims of violent crime (Caldeira, 2000). Caldeira suggests that "inasmuch as the categorical order articulated in the talk of crime is the dominant order of an extremely unequal society, it does not incorporate the experiences of dominated people; rather, it criminalizes and discriminates against them. ...[The] talk of crime is productive, but it helps produce segregation (social and spatial), abuses by the institutions of order, contestation of citizens' rights, and especially, violence itself" (Caldeira, 2000, p. 39). The talk of crime thus redraws social space and serves as a mechanism of social control that categorically organizes civil society along SES (socioeconomic) lines.

Talk of crime is important when considering the context of community organizing and cultural activism in Ciudad Juárez because cultural initiatives that I consider in this study engage communities that many perceive as lawless, dangerous, and the ground zero for violence and crime. Similar to São Paulo's context, there is a marked lack of economic and social mobility in Juárez due to industrial restructuring through the maquila model and damaging neoliberal reforms, and impunity is a common practice. This commonly held view of the social and cultural context of fear and the erosion of civil life in Ciudad Juárez allows us to situate cultural production within the geographic limits of the city. Considering this real threat of violence and rather than self-segregation and cloistering, community organizers and activists are mobilizing

and engaging marginalized *colonias* (neighborhoods) in which violence is rampant; these disenfranchised communities on the social and economic periphery are the lawless protagonists in Caldeira's concept of the talk of crime. Through their work, organizers show that these communities, arguably the most vulnerable and those that have experienced the most extreme effects of neoliberalism, are resistant and resilient in the face of their challenging contexts. In Chapter Two I will consider the way community organizers and cultural producers defy and respond to "the talk of crime."

### *1.1.b. Resistance, Resilience, and Cultural Production*

When considering cultural production and cultural activism, it is necessary to acknowledge that different forms of civic engagement must shift and assume different identities according to context. Specific forms of resistance must adapt to align with sociopolitical and geographic contexts in order to be most effective. It is important to consider these nuanced identities of resistance because examining forms of resistance through a Westernized lens (and in a Westernized context in which forms of resistance are largely public and publicized due to the US Constitution's First Amendment) would be unjust and short-sighted. As such, James C. Scott (*Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, 1985) argues that in many cases of oppressive political systems, subtle forms of resistance against hegemonic rule are more effective than large-scale actions, and dramatic public acts of confrontation or defiance often do not accomplish what small, everyday acts of resistance accomplish through subtlety. He suggests that large, organized acts of collective action are often met with equally powerful pushbacks. Scott posits:

Where everyday resistance most strikingly departs from other forms of resistance is in its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals. Where institutionalized politics is

formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate de facto gains. ... Open insubordination in almost any context will provoke a more rapid and ferocious response than an insubordination that may be as pervasive but never ventures to contest the formal definitions of hierarchy and power. For most subordinate classes, which, as a matter of sheer history, have had little prospect of improving their status, this form of resistance has been the only option. (p. 32-33)

Scott's scholarship centers on forms of lower-caste peasant resistance against the oppressive political model of indentured servitude in India. In Scott's ethnography, he demonstrates the effectiveness of subtle yet calculated forms of discontent within the context of labor; peasants perform work carelessly, half-heartedly, and inefficiently as means of symbolic noncompliance and retaliation against a master. In the case of Ciudad Juárez, this "symbolic noncompliance" (Scott, 1985) can be seen in the various manifestations of community organizing and cultural activism that seek to change the violent and corrupt narrative of the city, such as community libraries, art initiatives, graffiti workshops, literacy projects, and poetry/rap workshops, among others. Four cultural initiatives that exemplify Scott's scholarship will be explored in-depth in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Another theory that informs my work is that of geographies of resistance. Steve Pile (1997) approaches the concepts of power and resistance from a geographical perspective; if resistance were to be mapped, only overt acts in place in physical spaces would be captured, leaving out all covert or unidentifiable acts (meaning acts that are not obviously categorizable as "resistance"). In this sense, "when geographies of resistance are examined then new questions arise not only about the ways in which resistance is to be understood and about the geographical expressions of identifiable acts of resistance, but also about the ways in which geography makes possible or impossible certain forms of resistance" (Pile, 1997, p.2). It is widely known that socioeconomic realities, political conditions/policies, and State-sponsored violent oppression can

prevent the manifestation of mappable, visible forms of resistance (marches, protests, boycotts, explosions). Hence, it is under these circumstances that resistance becomes veiled. More importantly, Pile uses the phrase “Resistance to power, resistance for power” (Pile, 1997, p. 24) to describe its double meaning; the goal of resistance is to speak against an agent of oppression as well as to gain momentum and support for an alternative agenda or cause. This double meaning particularly relates to the context of activism and organizing in Juárez in a specifically nuanced way: community resilience is a calculated reaction to the oppressive powers of violence and corruption, and resilience as empowerment is a way in which community is engaging to shift the discourse of violence and create alternative discourses.

As we understand from Scott’s scholarship, resistance can assume multiple forms, particularly forms of action that are subtly noncompliant in nature. This means that quietly protesting the status quo through calculated actions or works of activism is resisting the hegemon (that can be political, social, economic in nature, for example). Other forms of resistance are less subvert and more obvious in nature, such as demonstrations, marches, protests, and the occupation of public spaces. While these manifestations of resistance represent symbolic acts and do serve a purpose of publicizing a cause, movement, or agenda, they are not organic acts that are connected to the day-to-day functioning of the city. After large-scale acts, there is a marked lack of political follow-through and consistency, and before long, these symbolic acts are often quickly forgotten. Given the dangerous sociopolitical context of Juárez, it can be observed that most acts of enduring resistance are more covert and subtle.

In Ciudad Juárez, many forms of organized resistance are art-based or literary-based creative initiatives, therefore the notion of resilience through cultural activism dialogues with Bourdieu’s idea of cultural production and capital creation (*The Field of Cultural Production:*

*Essays on Art and Literature*, 1993). Among the many motives for which art is produced, art can be used as a form of resistance, resilience, and medium for navigating or healing trauma in specific sociopolitical contexts. In this sense, art is not simply art; for art to be understood, it must be socially situated within the context of its production and reception and how it relates to concepts of class, gender, and power. Bourdieu theorizes that literature and art are both forms of cultural production, as well as speech acts and political actions. The autonomy of the field of cultural production operates within a larger system of fields but remains subordinate to the field of power (a composite of the field of the economy and the field of politics). An individual navigates this field of power through possessing different forms of capital specific to the subordinate fields—not solely economic capital—but social, symbolic, educational, political, and cultural, among many other examples. He suggests that social agents and their work are inseparable from the structure of which they are a part, and their position within this structure of power relations can change (Bourdieu, 1993). Those that possess the greatest amount of capital relative to their field are thereby dominant and are able to structure that field in order to reinforce their dominance over others. All fields are subordinate to the field of power.

In the context of Ciudad Juárez, there is a significant shortage of different forms of capital due to a lack of investment in civil society. For many, a corrupt political system and neoliberal capitalism have eliminated the possibility of social mobility through a lack of infrastructure, thereby eliminating one's opportunity to obtain more social, economic, and cultural capital. In this context, cultural activism and community initiatives seek to create/supplement different forms of capital (social, cultural, symbolic) where the State has failed to. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to consider these different forms of cultural activism and community organizing through the lens of cultural production and the distinct

forms of cultural capital they create as they seek to shift the narrative of violence that has come to define the reality of Ciudad Juárez.

## *1.2 CONTEXT FOR CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ*

It is undeniable that neoliberalism has restructured the Mexican state over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), David Harvey asserts that although increased dependence on foreign investments and capital spurred the development of the Mexican economy (particularly in the 1950s and 1960s), the benefits of growth were not fairly distributed and “a significant monopoly state sector emerged in transport, energy, and public utilities” (Harvey, 2005, p. 98). As such, this new economic model led to the creation of a society in which the state dismantled its social responsibility and represented transnational capitalist interests rather than its citizens. Before Mexico transitioned to a neoliberal state during the Salinas de Gortari administration (1988-1994), and its neoliberal identity was fortified under the presidency of Vicente Fox (PAN), it was a corporatist state controlled by the PRI whose economy was based on the economic model of import substitution industrialization (replacing foreign imports with domestic goods to decrease foreign dependency). During the political tenure of the PRI from 1929-2000, the BIP (Border Industrialization Program) of 1965 emerged as a project that intended to modernize the Mexican economy through the maquiladora industry. The border zone between Mexico and the United States received large sums of foreign investment capital to achieve this result.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, violence in Ciudad Juárez related to drug trafficking began to rise, a period that coincided with mass migration to the city as the export manufacturing industry surged. By the late 1980s and after the Washington Consensus was imposed, Mexico had received vast amounts of aid from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as



both institutions, as well as the G7, functioned as “centres of raw power mobilized by particular powers or collections of power seeking particular [exploitative] advantage” (Harvey, p. 94), demanding aid contingencies from struggling governments. The government began to deregulate the economy and encouraged private investment in state enterprises. It was during this time that the inexplicable and horrific phenomenon of *las muertas de Juárez* (the dead women of Juárez) emerged and the city’s reputation as the femicide capital of the world was established and fortified. The vast majority of the victims of these murders are poor, migrant, mestiza women who migrated to the *fronterizo* (border) zone in search of labor opportunities in the export manufacturing industry. The city’s lack the infrastructure and security necessary to receive and protect this marginalized population of women, and lack of police initiative established a state of lawlessness that was driven by impunity. Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso,<sup>7</sup> a professor and social science researcher at el Colegio de la Frontera Norte, cites that while many seek to establish a date for when the femicide epidemic began (some theorize 1991, others 1993), this exercise of chronologically mapping the femicide crisis overshadows and draws attention away from the fact that women have been and are still systematically denied protection and rights under the law (Driver, 2015). According to Monárrez Fragoso (2003), “Between January 1, 1993, and November 15, 2012, 1,481 feminicides involving women and girls were registered. Of those, 217 were categorized as intimate feminicides (those related to domestic violence or interfamily violence) and the lower level of impunity in these cases relate to the demands for justice made by families of victims, women’s organizations, and feminists. Of those, 233 were systematic sexual feminicides (the so-called sex crimes), and 706 cases corresponded to organized crime” (Monárrez Fragoso, documentary film interview, 2003). The alternative informal economies of

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<sup>7</sup> Monárrez Fragoso was thesis adviser and mentor to Elena, this study’s community gatekeeper.

drug and arms trafficking, extortion, and money laundering created a perfect storm for explosive violence that has profoundly impacted civil society in Ciudad Juárez and in particular, Juarenses women.

The passage of NAFTA and the surge of investment in the maquiladora industry coincided with the shift to neoliberal capitalism. The new logic of global capitalism created an axiological system with focus on the value of the individual against the collective. This neoliberal shift changed the Mexican socio-economic landscape in a variety of ways. First, the country experienced a need to increase efficiency, productivity, and to modernize areas of production that represented antiquated models of exploitation (especially in rural areas and State-owned industries) that ultimately increased urban culture and mass immigration to the US-Mexico border. Additionally, a profound emphasis on consumerism aided in structuring a collective personality of impulsivity, leading to the exacerbation and multiplication of competition driven by the new axiological system. This new system focused supremely on the individual consumer/entrepreneur while the country experienced a steep decline in social spending.

Nkahnsah-Amankra, Agbanu, and Miller (2013) discuss neoliberalism's effects on US communities in "Disparities in Health, Poverty, Incarceration, and Social Justice among Racial Groups in the US: a Critical Review of Evidence of Close Links with Neoliberalism." Although the article centers on US communities of color, this framework similarly reflects the neoliberalism of the Mexican State. The authors argue that neoliberalism has increased racial disparities in poverty, health, and incarceration in the US and that this economic policy negatively impacts those of lower SES (socioeconomic status). They define US-style neoliberalism as a political and economic regime whose policies reflect market principles,

privileges individualism and choice, competition, and limits state interventions. Because of this focus on the individual and limited state interventions, there is evidence of disparate health care, poverty, and criminal justice outcome disparities that are tied to this political and economic structure. Research has shown that neoliberalism has led to increasing disparities in access to healthcare, poverty, and an increase in mass incarceration of disadvantaged minority populations.<sup>8</sup> Advantaged populations are protected by the neoliberal structure and therefore experience less disease, poverty, and negative interactions with the criminal justice system. Also, advantaged populations have the ability to manipulate public policy to their advantage to maintain their privileged status at the expense of those with less privilege. This shift to the neoliberal framework represents a major change “whereby responsibility for poor people’s health is no longer understood as the obligation of professional experts working within the welfare state, but, rather, as the responsibility of the poor themselves, who must govern their own access to health care through their expertise as consumers” (Nkahnshah-Amankra, Agbanu, & Miller, 2013, p. 219). A more visible violence of poverty emerged as an effect of Mexico’s shift to neoliberalism as evidenced by the decrease in social spending and flourishing narcoeconomy. With less state investment in the social sector (in the form of education, accessible healthcare, state aid, etc.), many have had to resort to alternative ways to make a living by entering into the narcoeconomy.

The insertion of the drug trade in an already corrupt state has contributed to the culture of violence in Mexico and the destruction of civil society. In Mexican neoliberal society, there is a

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<sup>8</sup> As discussed in the two following works: Mooney, G. “Neoliberalism is Bad for Our Health.” *International Journal of Health Services*. Volume: 42 Issue: 3, page(s): 383-401. 2012. Mooney, G. 2012. *The Health of Nations: Towards a New Political Economy*. London: Zed Books.

direct relationship between drugs and the production/circulation of capital. Poorly paying jobs and lack of necessary social services and investment in the body politic has created the condition of poverty from which violence is created, emerges and surges, and has translated to increased participation in the drug economy which serves as a transnational business and market tool. Cultural and community activism serve as means of challenging the city's narrative of fear by confronting the banality of violence and by trying to rebuild civil society that has been destroyed by corruption, exploitation, and violence, stemming from two policies: the Mérida Initiative (Plan Mérida) and Joint Operation Chihuahua (Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua), otherwise known as the militarization/military occupation of Ciudad Juárez. As I will show, a discussion of these two policies is fundamental to understanding how the community in Juárez devolved into a state of rampant violence and what organizers and activists consider to be the community's "rock bottom."

The Mérida Initiative, announced on October 22, 2007 and enacted on June 30, 2008, is an initiative that came from the US' need to protect its borders in the post-9/11 era. This international agreement was created through partnerships between the United States, Mexico (under the Calderón administration), and Central America with the goal of decreasing drug trafficking, reducing the power of transnational organized crime networks, and surveilling potential regional terrorist networks that posed a threat to the Western hemisphere (Arteaga Botello, 2009). The Mérida Initiative established increased military operations and utilized technological surveillance mechanisms within Mexico and Central American countries with the end-goal being increasing security in the region. With US security concerns in mind, in October 2007, President Bush encouraged Congress to approve a 1.4 billion dollar annual aid package that would disperse funds to Mexico and Central America for three consecutive years (500

million USD allocated yearly for Mexico, 50 million USD allocated yearly for Central America). Instead of providing mass sums of aid that countries would spend where they deemed necessary, the funds dispersed by the Mérida Initiative sought to professionalize police and military forces, strengthen the national judicial system, increase intelligence measures and security databases, and improve border security technologies that would prevent illegal substances from entering the United States. In this sense, the US' control extended into Latin America as its security agenda dictated where international aid was to be spent.

In the Cold War period, the United States delocalized its borders (meaning a country's control exceeds its geographic borders and spreads into that of other countries', not only through surveillance practices but also through legislative practices). The US' political and military interventions in Latin America were positioned as precautionary foreign diplomacy measures fighting communism, as US foreign involvement took advantage and rode the wave of Central American rebellion/guerrilla movements that destabilized much of the region. In the same way within the post-9/11 context, US borders were again delocalized; the United States intervened in foreign countries as means of preventing possible terror attacks that would affect the US population. The Mérida Initiative was an important moment for the United States and Mexico as both nations acknowledged the interdependency that exists between them due to a shared international border. The futures of both countries rely on one another; Mexico's violent drug war is driven by the US' demand for drugs. Both countries hoped that through improved military training and security interventions, the supply of drugs entering into the US would be significantly minimized. However, it is clear this vision never came to fruition as a basic supply-and-demand model dictated that a larger supply of drugs was needed, which fueled violence between cartels (it must be noted than more than 100 documents between the US and Mexican

State Departments were published by WikiLeaks in late 2010 and titles revealed insights such as “The Army is Comfortable Letting the Cartels Fight Each Other”). Violence between warring cartels (in the context of Ciudad Juárez, the Sinaloa (Federación) cartel and the Juárez cartel (and its armed wing known as La Línea) were vying for territory) increased during the Calderón presidency and the increased security came at a price, as civil liberties were infringed upon and civil rights were violated.

Mexican civil society has experienced military human rights abuses since the Mérida Initiative was enacted. Miguel Agustín of the Pro-Juárez Human Rights Center (2011) reflected on the Mérida Initiative’s focus on security initiatives and its marked lack of concern for human rights: "The Mérida Initiative is characterized by a lack of a human rights perspective, a human security approach that mistakes the security of states for the security of human beings...It is time for the international community to stop supporting short-sighted policies such as this one." Agustín, 2011). Similarly, Witness for Peace, a non-profit organization in Washington DC, interviewed social justice movement leaders and members of the Mexican academy about the effects of the Mérida Initiative on Mexican civil society. Espacio Civil, a collective of 52 civil society organizations in the state of Oaxaca, offered insights regarding the possible nation-wide effects of the Mérida Initiative: “[In 2007] the army committed severe human rights violations in their supposed counter-drug operations. We are concerned that the funding from the U.S. government will ultimately make this situation worse” (Witness for Peace, 2008). The funds allocated to Mexico increased security both at the international border with the United States and domestically. Arteaga Botello reflects on the increased security measures and their impacts on Mexican civil society:

The expansion of special surveillance technologies tends to reduce the continuation of, rather than to end, violent acts, drug trafficking, and money laundering. The installation of such surveillance technologies is a new machinery of government that could not only be used in the spaces considered in danger or at risk, but which could also be extended to monitor the population in general. ... Traditionally, physical borders were enough to control, but with the Mérida Initiative, borders have acquired another dimension altogether when supported by coordinated electronic surveillance databases. (Arteaga Botello 2009, p. 108)

The militarization of Juárez, formally known as Joint Operation Chihuahua, was another development that complicated the violent context of Ciudad Juárez. Increased surveillance in Mexico led to increased social control of civil society, however, income inequality, political corruption and instability, and the drug trade led to rapidly increasing violence in Ciudad Juárez. The Washington Office on Latin America reported that at the end of 2009, over 6,500 assassinations had been recorded in the 2009 calendar year in relation to drug trafficking (Meyer et al., 2010), and over 15,000 murders had been documented between December 2006 and December 2009. Between 2008 and 2009, more than 35% of the country's homicides had been committed in the state of Chihuahua, specifically in Ciudad Juárez, the state's largest city.

When elected in 2006, President Calderón publicly declared war on drugs in Mexico; the launching of Joint Operation Chihuahua (Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua) in April 2008 in response to Chihuahua's staggering homicide rates caused by the competition between the Juárez and Sinaloa cartels was another step in his mission to end drug-related violence. More than 8,000 soldiers and police were dispatched to the state of Chihuahua with the mission to increase regional security as warring cartels fought for market control and regional drug transport routes. However, it was reported that "Despite the massive presence of security forces, extortions, robbery, and assassinations significantly increased as did reports of human rights violations, with women being a particularly vulnerable target for abuse" (Meyer et al., 2010). The increased security presence was intended to mitigate the issue of violence in the city and give the

impression that government action was being taken, however, Joint Operation Chihuahua created some unforeseen negative effects within the Juarenses populace. Staudt and Méndez (2015)

suggest:

Simultaneously and paradoxically, it produced a sense of fear in people as a palpable surveillance apparatus went into action utilizing round-the-clock checkpoints around the city, patrols of heavily armed and masked soldiers and federal police agents, and searches without judicial warrants of all homes in entire neighborhoods to purportedly locate (and sometimes confiscate) weapons that Mexican law prohibits. (p. 75-6)

These intimidation tactics by members of the military and local and federal police instilled fear in the community, as did the increase in human rights violations. Human rights abuses went largely unreported during the period of militarization (as they continue to be today) due to public perception of police inefficacy, corruption, impunity, and the commonly held belief of the existing complicit relationship between police and the drug cartels. The paradoxical increasing levels of crime (in spite of the increased security presence) also intimidated the community. Reported homicides increased during the period of militarization in Ciudad Juárez; 469 homicides were registered in the year before militarization (2007), while 1,608 homicides were documented in 2008 and 3,249 homicides were documented in 2009 (Quintana Silveyre, 2012).

January 13, 2010 marked a shift in Joint Operation Chihuahua. Calderón's administration restructured the national security program; under the new title Coordinated Operation Chihuahua, Calderón shifted control of the security operation to Mexico's Federal Police. 2,000 additional federal officers were dispatched to Ciudad Juárez to assume all police responsibilities and security roles in the city, while the military was responsible for intelligence measures, security checkpoints, and monitoring rural regions of the state of Chihuahua (Meyer et al., 2010). While this policy shift clearly defines the roles of the military and federal police in Chihuahua



and specifically in Ciudad Juárez, the government lacked accountability measures for actions of its national security forces and failed civil society.

Similarly, activists who reject this sanitized version of reality through the creation of community initiatives (to confront issues the government continues to ignore) also experience violent pushback for the visibilization of crime in Juárez. *On Dangerous Ground*, a 2016 report published by Global Witness, cites that between 2010 and 2015, Mexico accounted for 33 of the 573 documented murders of activists in Latin America, numbers that do not include the 2014 mass killings of 43 student activists from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher's College in Iguala, Mexico and the recent murders of Isidro Baldenegro<sup>9</sup> and Miriam Rodriguez Martinez.<sup>10</sup>

The years of high violence (2008-2013) demanded a reorganization of civil society and a new form of citizenship was born. Space was not easily navigated and years passed in which members of the community remained cloistered in their homes outside of working hours, and rights of citizenship were infringed upon and democracy became disjunctive in two ways; as Caldeira (2000) suggests, “first because the increase of violence itself erodes citizens' rights, and second because it offers a field in which reactions to violence become not only violent and disrespectful of rights, but also help destroy public space, desegregate social groups, and destabilize the rule of law” (p. 52). During this period, larger protests eventually were organized against violence, femicide, and the city's lack of infrastructure (as they continue to be today) and were met with violent pushback from the military and failed to achieve lasting results.

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<sup>9</sup> Isidro Baldenegro was killed January 15, 2017 in Coloradas de la Virgen in the southern part of Chihuahua. He was a leader of the Tarahumara people and an environmental activist that organized against illegal logging. His father, Julio Baldenegro, was assassinated in 1986 for protesting illegal logging.

<sup>10</sup> Miriam Rodriguez Martinez was killed May 12, 2017. She lived in San Fernando and founded a group of 600 families that together were searching for disappeared family members.

Therefore, many small works of organized resistance would together serve as symbols of resilience in the face of the extreme violence in the city going forward.

Because my research spans both the fields of the social sciences and the humanities, it is important to discuss the methodologies that inform the structure of the four case studies conducted for my MS thesis and doctoral dissertation, including the research questions I seek to answer and the methods I use to approach them. Case study is the method of inquiry that I chose to employ for my research given that the concept of resilience as resistance is a specific phenomenon that manifests within a bounded system (a phenomenon that is specific to a certain time and place). Case study differs from ethnography, the method of qualitative inquiry often associated with cultural studies scholarship, as ethnography requires the researcher to be fully embedded in a community for extensive periods of time to become fully immersed in a community's day-to-day life and to interpret the "shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group" (Harris, 1968 as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 90). These patterns of everyday life, social behaviors or organization, or beliefs reveal the innerworkings of a specific tightly-knit cultural group from which theories can be built and fleshed out.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, given the time constraints of my study and that it would be conducted in a series of shorter trips over the course of two years, as well as the fact that I was researching four distinct works of collective action carried out by unaffiliated activists/organizers, case study was the logical method of inquiry for my research. I approached my fieldwork knowing that to fully understand the bounded system of Ciudad Juárez and how the participants were situated within it, I must first understand its complex sociopolitical and socioeconomic context.

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<sup>11</sup> The comparative cultural anthropological studies of Boas, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Mead were trailblazing examples of the effectiveness of imbedding oneself in a community to fully understand a cultural phenomenon.

Secondly, when in the field, I collected and examined many distinct forms of data and information to achieve a complete and nuanced view of the reality of Juárez. As Creswell contends, “the hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case. In order to accomplish this, the researcher collects many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, to observations, to documents, to audiovisual materials” (p. 97).

As I indicated, the purpose of this research is to explore individual agency that led to cultural activism/community organizing despite living in a violent context, and it connects these experiences to collective forms of cultural production that serve to rebuild civil society in Ciudad Juárez in the post-militarization period. My research combines a cultural studies analysis of case studies conducted during multiple field work trip to Juárez over the course of two years, as well as materials produced by activists and organizers in the community. I formulated the interview protocol to delve into organizer and activists’ personal formations and experience with civic engagement and whether they view activism and organizing as a viable tool through which to shift the culture of violence in Juárez, among other points of relevance and interest.

Before conducting fieldwork interviews, I hypothesized that organized works of collective action were done so as active forms of resistance against impunity, the maquiladora system, and violence and femicide. Participant interviews were conducted and guided by sets of questions that were divided into sections that sought information about (1) the participant’s personal background, (2) background of community work, and (3) involvement with and perceptions of cultural activism in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>12</sup> Upon completing fieldwork interviews, data

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<sup>12</sup> Please refer to the Appendix for interview questions.

points emerged from interview transcripts that revealed a common theme of resilience; the community forms of collective action in the years during and after the period of high violence were forms of organized, calculated resilience. This resilience in the form of organizing initiatives and civic engagement despite the extreme violent context was determined to serve as subtle pushbacks and forms of resistance themselves against the social, political, and economic reality of Juárez.

In the post-data collection process, I transcribed and thematically grouped 25 in-depth interviews, which is a relatively large sample for a qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013). After thematically analyzing participant interviews, specific themes emerged that allowed me to create an organization/structure for this project that combines and reinforces the theories used in this dissertation (Caldeira (2000), Scott (1985), Pile (1997), and Bourdieu (1993)); these themes will be explored in more profundity in later chapters. Through these interviews, participants reflected internally on personal experiences with violence and reflected externally on its effects on the organization and functioning of the Juarenses community on a larger scale. Participants' narratives revealed how works of small-scale activism and community organizing and cultural production serve as forms of power and resilience, and I eventually focused my analysis of works of cultural production on four case studies that exemplified this finding that will be analyzed in Chapter Four: 656 Cómics Collective, a comic collective that addresses social justice through the medium of comics; ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, a community organization and art space that hosts mosaic workshops for families of victims of femicide as a medium for healing and empowerment; Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana, a community library that hosts reading workshops for community youth to foster empowerment through literacy; and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta, a community library situated in one of the

neighborhoods most affected by narcocrime during the years of high violence, and whose primary mission is to board buses and conduct public, participatory readings with members of the community to encourage literacy as an empowering force in Ciudad Juárez. I chose to focus on these four community initiatives because they have the mission of helping marginalized populations (economically disadvantaged children from marginalized areas of the city in the case of 656 Cómics and the two community libraries, and mothers of victims of femicide in the case of La Promesa) navigate trauma and find empowerment through art and literacy. Interviews were conducted with community members involved with cultural activism/community organizing but not associated with these organizations to enrich the study's context and to achieve a more informed and holistic view of organizing in Ciudad Juárez. Data analysis yielded 25 general codes of interest that represented issues that negatively affected the community and positively generated, informed, or influenced social organization in the forms of community organizing or cultural activism.

In preparing for the interview process with study participants and before leaving for the field (and after my initial site visit in January 2016), I identified specific examples of community organizing and cultural activism in Juárez around which I would focus my analysis. During the course of my fieldwork, I expanded the number of study informants due to the snowballing process achieved through my community gatekeeper, Elena. I stayed with Elena during my first trip to Juárez in January 2016 during which I established working relationships with community members with whom I maintained contact until I returned to the field in June 2016. While staying with Elena during the course of my summer fieldwork, it became clear that there were many important perspectives that deserved inclusion in my study than I had not initially considered, and therefore I expanded the scope of my interview sampling to include a larger

purposeful sampling of community members not associated with the two initiatives but actively involved in community organizing or cultural activism to enrich the context of this study. It is important to note that Elena's work is informed by a feminist, gendered perspective and as such, she has served as a community organizer for many years regarding women's rights and the issue of gender-based violence. Elena is now a project manager at the DIF government initiative (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia) and is a former cultural program manager at a local cultural institute, and as such, her work in the community is exceptionally valuable and visible.

Oral informed consent was obtained before conducting interviews with participants (as written consent could not be guaranteed given the unknown literacy competency of potential interview participants), and interviews were conducted at Oficina del Instituto Chihuahuense de la Cultura Representación Juárez in the Centro Cultural Paso del Norte or other locations of convenience for participants such as cafés, restaurants, personal studios, and a clandestine location with one participant due to death threats received. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and three hours and interviews were captured through audio recording; three participants' interviews were split into multiple sessions due to additional time needed and those multi-part interviews are not reflected in the total number of interviews captured for this study (25 individuals were interviewed for this study).

It is profoundly important to reflect on my identity as a researcher from the United States and how my positionality as a community outsider was an issue of concern before beginning fieldwork. There is increasing scholarship in the field of social science that considers qualitative researcher positionality—both the perspectives of community insider and community outsider—and the risks and benefits associated with both identities. Angrosino (“Recontextualizing Observation: Ethnography, pedagogy, and the prospects for a progressive political agenda,”

2005) underscores postmodernism's emphasis on researchers' personal narratives and identities, as these factors can impact interpretations of data and findings. It has been argued that community outsiders are able to carry out observations, conduct field work, and collect and analyze data objectively and without emotionally subjective involvement that may skew results. That said, given the lack of a shared, common identity with study subjects, community outsiders can potentially approach research with personal biases and preconceived perspectives that would impact data findings. Similarly, outsiders lack an established network of potential participants from which to draw on in the data collection process, which in turn would negatively affect the study's outcome due to its limited scope. Conversely, insider researchers (also referred to as researchers with "complete membership roles") are accepted members of the group they are studying and are able to gain entry, access participants, and gather data/testimonies that enrich the study's findings, given previously established levels of trust, confidence, and mutually shared identities that outsider researchers do not possess.<sup>13</sup> However, being a community insider is not without its potential issues; Corbin Dwyer and Buckle ("The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research," 2009), drawing from the work of Adler and Adler (*Membership roles in field research*, 1987), contend that while data collection is easier for insider researchers, data analysis has the potential to be complicated due to the "ultimate existential dual role" (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 73). They assert that a researcher with insider status can sometimes "[struggle] with role conflict if they find themselves caught between 'loyalty tugs' and 'behavioral claims.' ... [This] dual role can also result in role confusion when the researcher responds to the participants or analyzes the data from a perspective other than that of researcher" (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, 58). Ultimately, it is imperative to acknowledge

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<sup>13</sup> The idea "it takes one to know one" exemplifies this.

that while both researcher positionalities—and their associated advantages and challenges—can influence qualitative research collection, “the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

Given the political tension, the exploitative nature of the relationship between the United States and Mexico (I argue exploitative in every respect), and the associated collective trauma the community had sustained, I could not anticipate how I would be received by interview participants and how their reception of me would affect data collection (how much respondents would be willing to share with me or the potential for negative interactions given my background, for example). Going into my fieldwork, I was concerned I would be viewed as a naïve American woman, a sheltered, ivory tower white academic who came to Ciudad Juárez to hear about *las muertas de Juárez* and the narcoviolence, as so many others had before me. It became clear during the course of the interview process that this is a tired trope community members are all too familiar with; foreign community outsiders (journalists, academics, filmmakers, activists, aid workers, etc.) traveled to Juárez during the period of high violence to document and interview community insiders about the extreme forms of violence the city was experiencing. These community outsiders sought to document the city’s infamous violence and not the subjective experiences of those who navigated the violence every day. Once the levels of violence had started to decline, interview respondents asserted that the presence of community outsiders diminished greatly, creating a feeling of exploitation in community members. Given these negative past experiences, I could not foresee the outcomes of the interactions I would have with members of the community that had witnessed and survived unimaginable personal losses



and trauma, and whether we would be able to find a common ground so that participants could trust me with their stories. I knew cultural barriers had the potential to complicate and profoundly impact my research. Therefore, I arrived in Ciudad Juárez with no agenda and great humility; I traveled there with the intention to learn from community members, listen to personal stories and histories, and to document the work of activists and organizers. I wanted my interactions to guide my research, and although I arrived on site with a hypothesis, I consciously allowed my connections with community members drive the study—I allowed myself and my research to be taken in a direction by the stories of those I interviewed—and I was not too proud to say my hypothesis was wrong.

The crux of Corbin Dwyer and Buckle’s research lies in the notion of the “space between,” a researcher positionality that bridges the binary divide between insider and outsider status. They apply Aoki’s work (*Imagaries of “East and West”: Slippery Curricular Signifiers in Education*, 1996) and other scholarship to their own experiences as researchers, suggesting that the opposite positionalities can be “brought together to conjoin with a hyphen. This hyphen can be viewed not as a path but as a dwelling place for people. This hyphen acts as a third space, a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction” (p. 60). Buckle’s research centers on parental loss of a child; overall, her lack of experience as a bereaved parent did not inhibit her ability to connect with study participants, yet two grieving fathers did question her ability to understand and appreciate the depth of their loss. While Buckle had not personally navigated the death of a child, the blend of her professional knowledge on parental bereavement and the idea that grief is central to the human condition, she found herself occupying a “space between;” she could not fully understand the trauma her study participants had endured, yet “there certainly was content and experiences shared by participants

in [my] research that [I] could relate to at a deep, personal level. As a human being faced with mortality, can one ever truly be an outsider when researching death, dying, loss, and grieving?” (p. 61). Given that my research is conducted in a geopolitical space known for its documented brutality toward women, I found myself—a community outsider—yes—but also a person who identifies as female—in a “space between.” I recognize that my privilege and positionality dictate that I will never know or fully understand the true reality of occupying a female body in Ciudad Juárez. Yet, because the nature of my research focuses on individual agency, resilience, and community involvement (instead of the infamous violence of Ciudad Juárez), my interactions, shared experiences, and interviews with participants resulted in deeply meaningful relationships, conversations, moments of shared vulnerability, and finding a common ground, such as sharing our own experiences of trauma and assault, and how the vulnerability of women—in its many forms and in many geographic spaces—sadly knows no bounds. I formed distinct relationships with every interview respondent; interviews with participants ranged from peer-to-peer interactions to didactic teacher-to-student interactions to maternal mother-daughter interactions.

It is important to mention that I did not solely spend time with study participants within the context of a recorded interview session: I was invited to share meals and celebrate birthdays; I visited studios, office spaces, and worksites; I toured community projects, community feminist spaces, and graffiti sites around the city memorializing victims of femicide; I attended and participated in a Christmas gift/book distribution/literacy workshop event for the families of Lexmark maquiladora employees who were striking for better wages; I attended book lectures and art and museum expositions; I accompanied a group of feminist human rights defenders to a femicide arraignment and trial at El Cereso Prison; I traveled to Lomas de Poleo and Anapra,

the areas of Juárez with the highest occurrences of femicide, among many other impactful experiences during my trips to Juárez. Every interview was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol (refer to the Appendix) and the rhythms of my conversations with study participants ebbed and flowed; we (the study participant and myself) were able to transcend potentially polarizing positionalities and cultural differences, and I assessed the interpersonal connection I had with each participant and deferred to their emotional availability and followed their lead in which direction the conversation would take.

The very nature of qualitative research demands that researchers consider life in a different context or through a different lens. Participants are not represented by anonymous numbers on a graph or percentages, but rather their willingness to be vulnerable is what drives the study outcomes. Corbyn Dwyer and Buckle reflect that

[the] process of qualitative research is very different from that of quantitative research. As qualitative researchers we are not separate from the study, with limited contact with our participants. Instead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant 'researcher' role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact lies the space between. The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain rue outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords. (p. 61)

In the preface to the tenth anniversary edition of *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (original date of publication was 1993), Ruth Behar contends that the greatest lesson Esperanza taught her was the power of the human narrative and the stories that tell of the strength of the human condition. Behar writes, "We cannot live without stories. Our need for stories of our lives is so huge, so intense, so fundamental, that we would lose our humanity if we stopped trying to tell stories of who we think we are. And even more important, if we stopped

wanting to listen to each other's stories. Ten years ago I believed that if every woman could tell her life story and be heard, we could change the world. I still believe it. I still believe it now" (p. xix). The conversations captured during my fieldwork in Juárez—a space that many consider to be devoid of humanity entirely—tell a different story, a story of resilience in the face of trauma and of a collective steadfast resolve to create change. Because of my professional formation as a researcher in both the humanities and the social sciences, I approached the data collection process for this study knowing that I wanted to structure the findings in a specific way. I wanted to rely on participant voices to present the data authentically through their own first-person narratives/vignettes that would allow the reader to hear their journeys of individual and collective agency, struggle, trauma, and triumph that were captured. I argue that this way of presenting findings effectively bridges a sort of ethnographic narrative and short stories while emphasizing the subject's voice. It honors individual subjectivity and emotion; the reader is allowed glimpses into the lives of those interviewed and is able to personally connect with participants' emotions.

My dissertation is organized into three chapters after this introductory chapter: Chapter II explores how crime and violence in Ciudad Juárez are determinants in how space is remapped, navigated, and occupied; Chapter III examines issue areas of activism in Juárez, forms of activism/the role of the activist and insurgent citizenship, and the challenges faced by those engaged in works of civic engagement in the community; Chapter IV serves as an analysis of the four cases studies conducted for this dissertation (656 Cómics, La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta) and connects how individual resilience and agency and cultural production are necessary to rebuild civil society in Ciudad Juárez; and a Conclusion in which I synthesize this study's findings, how they are applicable in different

contexts and spaces, how this research contributes to the larger body of community resilience/cultural studies scholarship, and how this research will impact the direction of my future research.

## II. CIUDAD JUÁREZ: VIOLENCE AND THE REMAPPING OF SPACE

*“It’s a city that journalists have named the most risky and dangerous in the world, and yes, it is fraught with danger, but there is a silent strength that is very much alive, a strength that demands that we take back what is ours”* (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016).

There is extensive scholarship surrounding the debate of the politics of community space and what the term “community” constitutes in specific contexts. In the introduction to *Place and the Politics of Identity* (1993) Michael Keith and Steve Pile explore Frederic Jameson’s aesthetic of cognitive mapping (1991) as an approach to the concept of spatial organization as it applies to community life. Calling for a shift toward a new radical political culture whose fundamental objective is to explore the “world space of multinational capital” (Jameson, 1991, p. 54), Keith and Pile assert that Jameson’s concept is intended to “allow people to become aware of their own position in the world, and to give people the resources to resist and make their own history. It is the logic of capital itself which produces an uneven development of space” (p. 3). They contend that these spaces require mapping “so that they can be used by oppositional cultures and new social movement against the interest of capital as sites of resistance” (p. 3); this is to say that the notion of space cannot be approached in a vacuum, as identity, politics, capital (and its uneven distribution), history, and culture affect how space is constructed and how space itself has the ability to construct. Keith and Pile employ the work of Jameson, Soja (1989), hooks (1991), Kukin (1992), and Bhabha (1992) among others to formulate the argument that “all spatialities

are political because they are the (covert) medium and (disguised) expression of asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 38), asserting that there exists a constant tension between hegemonic power structures, their construction of place, power, and identity (Keith & Pile, 1993, p. 38) and those in conflict that pushback against them.

Keith and Pile’s work problematizes the notions of both community and identity, as both are often blindly associated with a specific space and are considered products of a specific geographical positioning (instead of considering the intersection of the aforementioned elements that contribute to culture and identity). Echoing Keith and Pile’s thesis, Gillian Rose (“Performing Inoperative Community: the space and resistance of some community art projects” , 1997) argues that the supposedly unifying concepts of community and identity in fact are constructed by a hegemonic power, a power that controls space and groups’ access to it, and creates distinctions between community members and those that are considered to be community outsiders, creating rifts and inequalities within a group. In this sense, “community” is a myth, and its connotation of cohesion and unification is false, as Iris Marion Young (1990) asserts: “Community represents an ideal of shared public life, of mutual recognition and identification [...] the ideal of community also suppresses difference among subjects and groups. The impulse to community often coincides with a desire to preserve identity and in practice excludes others who threaten that identity” (Young, 1990, p. 12). This notion of the purity of community—the idea that community is one unified, homogenous entity or force—cannot exist unless every member is afforded the same opportunities are of equal sociopolitical and socioeconomic standing. In the case of Juárez, this is an impossibility given the government’s oppressive control of public space, considering that crime and violence determine patterns of everyday life, and considering the uneven distribution of unregulated capital created by neoliberalism. There has

emerged in Ciudad Juárez a collective resistance to this lack of community and basic human rights, and how violence and the discourse of violence have rearranged the city's social landscaping.

It deserves mention that the term "community" is often employed interchangeably with the term "resilience" by a ruling power when describing groups of people and spaces that have sustained trauma or conflict, as both terms are infused with feelings of collective identity and social cohesion. This vision of community (and resilience) fails to represent a space's authentic sociocultural and sociopolitical heterogeneous fabric, as the unified and highly edited version of reality effectively negates differences among community members. Instead, those that hold power suppress the community's true narrative and instead script a false narrative of what they would like "community" to signify/represent and what the space's collective identity is.

In the context of Ciudad Juárez, there exist different perspectives within the Juarese community concerning the community's identity, its narrative of violence and the pervasive culture of fear, the possibility of its reconfiguration, and the community's future. Many in the community have accepted the reality and identity of Juárez—that of a lawless, infamously violent space subjugated by the power of neoliberalism, narcoviolence, and impunity—and do not believe in the possibility of long-term change. Community organizers and activists, however, are pushing back against the status quo culture of violence and international identity that Ciudad Juárez has come to be associated with and are seeking to normalize a new narrative of resilience in the face of sustained trauma and violence (narcoviolence, the violence of poverty, and femicide). The perspective of Ciudad Juárez from those in political power, however, is that of a Juárez that is a unified community in which violence is waning; Pope Francis' February 17, 2016 visit was seen as welcoming a new era free of violence and exploitation to Juárez (Pope Francis

pleaded for “no more death; no more exploitation!”<sup>14</sup> praying for peace and an end to violence in the community). As the local and national government seeks to write a new narrative for Juárez, crime, violence, and their impacts on public space and community, as well as neoliberalism’s violence of poverty, are fiercely denied by the government and these issues are censored in the media, and journalists addressing such themes are silenced.

Community space, the way in which civil society utilizes it, and civil society’s access to it often experiences a paradigm shift when a governing body undergoes a transformation, such as when a political regime is overturned or instated, or when power changes hands. In particular, the strategies of neoliberalism and globalization that have been introduced by many political projects in Latin America—most often accompanied by increased community violence and systematic oppression—limit the uses of public space for gathering purposes, laws are created to aggressively attempt to limit civic participation, and necessary infrastructure to maintain community space is eliminated. Pinochet’s post-Allende Chile is dramatic case of militarization, neoliberalism, and its damaging effects on civil society that deserves mention when considering the contemporary context of Ciudad Juárez under military occupation from 2008-2013. The violent model of policide that Steve J. Stern defines in *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (2004) explores the direct relationship between the Pinochet regime’s neoliberal economic and social restructuring project and the ubiquitous violence employed by the military junta: “Policide meant building a regime of systematic violence and fear so that the old ways of understanding, organizing, and practicing politics could be annihilated and replaced by technocratic and authoritarian governance. ...[P]olicide served as the precondition for building the new order and implied a ‘war’ to destroy old ways” (p. 31). Stern contends that for many

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<sup>14</sup> “One Year After Pope Francis’ Visit to Juárez.” February 10, 2017. El Paso Times.



Chileans of high socioeconomic levels, military intervention was seen as a salvation for a nation in turmoil that yearned for a new modernizing economic model, vast social relandscaping, a new moral order, and changes in individual and collective will that led to the acceptance of neoliberal development.

Similar to the years of military occupation in Ciudad Juárez, under the Pinochet regime, violence was utilized against the Chilean people as a mechanism of community control; the massive social, economic, and political rewriting of neoliberalism was contingent upon the population's acceptance of it. As Stern posits in *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988* (2006), in the years following the fall of Allende, the junta promoted a vision of salvation for the country through the neoliberal economic modernization campaign: "it enriched the memory as salvation with the idea of emerging normalcy and institutionalization. By this logic, the junta not only saved Chile from immediate disaster in 1973. It also built a package of deep reforms that would modernize Chile and build a bright future ... [through] the economic boom of the late 1970's, and the transition to a new Constitution and new political-institutional order in 1980-81" (p. 167-8). Significant modernization of state apparatuses—so as to better control the masses—can be identified in the Chilean case; as Stern suggests, "The negative coercive powers and fear propaganda of a police state, the positive powers of economic recovery, media saturation, and ceremonial patronage—these added up to enormous advantage in the contest to define the faces of Chilean reality" (p. 352). Additionally, a profound emphasis on consumerism aided in structuring a collective personality of impulsivity. This led to the exacerbation and multiplication of competition driven by the new axiological system. This new system focused supremely on the individual consumer/entrepreneur while the country experienced a steep decline in social spending. The

masses were suffering economically under suffocating violent military rule while Chile's economy was flourishing; this disconnect created an environment of social tension that was dampened down through the use of violence.

The Chile case, its shift to neoliberalism, and the extreme military-sponsored and narcoviolence that accompanied the new economic project strongly reminds us of Ciudad Juárez and the havoc wreaked upon it by neoliberalism, free trade, and globalization. As discussed in Chapter One, the maquiladora sector's development coincided with the emergence of neoliberal capitalism and intensified globalization in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The negative consequences of the neoliberal model were accelerated by international economic free trade agreements as the State dismantled the regulation of capital accumulation and sought out a workforce that could circumvent the gains made by organized labor in the "overdeveloped" First World. To create capital gains in the hope of competing in the global market (similar to the Chile case and as is the current reality in other democratic countries), the Mexican government abandoned its role as a welfare state as it systematically eliminated investment in infrastructure and social services.

The passage of NAFTA on January 1, 1994 marked a new era for Mexico's economy and social macrogeography; as Saskia Sassen suggests in *Globalization and its Discontents* (2002), "global cities" sprouted seemingly overnight in mass numbers along the NAFTA corridor after its passage, and these new centers of transnational commerce served as sites of disenfranchised and disempowered actors and were defined by specific class assignments and inequalities. The Mexican government positioned NAFTA as beneficial to the country, however the country itself was arguably not prepared for the free trade model. Given the median low income and high levels of poverty, many Mexicans are not able to equally participate economically as consumers, and Mexico lacked the same economic agency afforded to the United States and Canada as

members of NAFTA. Mass labor migrations<sup>15</sup> and a lack of infrastructure along the US-Mexico border eliminated the right to humane living conditions and NAFTA itself eliminated the right to a living wage; this desperate context (both socially and economically desperate) created the ideal conditions in which violence thrived, specifically the violence of poverty and gendered violence that targeted marginalized members of the community.

William I. Robinson examines globalization's myriad effects on actors in the globalized reality ("Globalization: 9 theses of our epoch," 1996) and suggests that the globalization of capitalism and transnationalization of social, political, and cultural processes are developments that manifest in the contemporary space, and he offers a holistic snapshot of important actors and dialogues that contribute to the discourse of the global rich versus the global poor. He asserts there exists a type of economic "world war" (p. 13) that is incubated by new technologies, a cheap labor force (often comprised mostly of women), and transnational capital that occurs in economically and socially marginalized contexts. This new "world war" he describes that was sparked by capitalist globalization has hastened the internationalism of capital and technologies, the international division of labor (as effectively demonstrated by the Global North versus Global South model/paradigm), and the clear decline in the importance of the nation-state. Economic globalization acts as the material basis for the transnationalization of political processes and network-systems, civil societies, and global integration of social life. In this way, global capitalism is tearing down all non-market structures that previously limited the accumulation and domination of capital.

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<sup>15</sup> In *Boom, Bust, Exodus: The Rust Belt, the Maquilas, and the Tale of Two Cities* (2015), Chad Broughten posits that between 1995 and 2000, more than 425,000 veracruzanos migrated to Reynosa, Tamaulipas in search of labor opportunities, and by 2005, 2 out of 3 Mexicans lived in a depopulated region.

Mexico is in a particularly unique position with its close geographic positioning and shared border with the United States. While it can be argued that globalization creates a certain comparative advantage in developing countries, it also has far-reaching negative social effects. Jonathan Friedman discusses globalization and the restructuring of its violent effects in “Globalization, Dis-integration, Re-organization: The Transformations of Violence” from *Globalization, the State, and Violence* (2003). Friedman posits that globalization demands that the national state relinquishes its welfare responsibilities, and through cultural fragmentation and the formation of cultural, social, and economic transnational networks that exceed territorial constraints, new micro-classes are formed (p. 17). These new micro-classes that Friedman identifies consist of marginalized populations that lie at the social periphery and are excluded from social integration. In the case of Ciudad Juárez, social relation/roles and the rights of civil society have been restructured and redefined by extreme violence brought on by neoliberalism.

### *2.1 TALK OF CRIME AND ITS EXCLUSIONARY IMPACT ON PUBLIC SPACE*

As I indicated in the previous chapter, crime controls patterns of everyday life in Juárez; it determines how members of social groups navigate public spaces and it organizes social environments. As Caldeira suggests, talk of crime, its impacts on space, its reinforcement of polarities regarding good and evil, and the threat of violence reorganize communities according to social class; the wealthy live in protected communities to escape violence, while vulnerable and marginalized communities are considered to be the perpetrators of violent crime and are left unprotected. Respondents reflected on the many manifestations of crime, its effects on community and social relationships, its presence in the media, and its position as a catalyst for community initiatives. Silvia, a professor of Spanish literature and curator of a collection of

children's books at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, reflected on her experience living in Juárez after moving to the border city in 1998. She cites the shift in the organization of the city due to the increase in violence, which she has seen firsthand:

The city, if you go around downtown, it is destroyed because investors tore down the part they wanted to gentrify, they want to build an upper-class neighborhood where native Juarenses or migrants used to live. ... This city is constantly shifting. To the eastern part of the city, in the last 10-15 years, enclosed subdivisions have been built where the middle to upper class seek refuge from the violence. On the other hand, you can see on the margins of the city, in the outer areas, the terribly impoverished areas, where people can't escape their reality, and have to live with the constant risk of violence. Those are the areas where victims of femicide have disappeared, and where gangs hire youth to become assassins. Assassinations in Ciudad Juárez are a deep-seeded problem, especially from 2007-2012. (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016).

Caldeira's notion of the talk of crime as a form of control of social space is evident here as Silvia recalled how the city has changed over the last 15 years. Neighborhoods have been reorganized and restructured according to the prevailing threat of violence. Disappearances and violence are concentrated in marginalized communities, and where cartels find young men or children with low socioeconomic backgrounds who will serve as *sicarios* (hired assassins). These vulnerable communities are believed to be the breeding ground for violence in Ciudad Juárez.

Carl Schmitt's exploration of Locke's Eurocentric notion of the relationship between power and land appropriation in *Nomos of the Earth in the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (2006) exemplifies this shift in space and how violence has redrawn the city. Schmitt suggests that *nomos* is now translated as "law," "regulation," or "norm", but he indicates its original intended meaning conveyed political order through spatial organization. *Nomos* is derived from *nemein* (meaning "to divide" or "to pasture") (Brown, 2014, p. 45); Schmitt cites "Thus, *nomos* is the immediate form in which the political and social order of a people becomes spatially visible...every *nomos* consists of what is within its own bounds" (pg. 46, 48). In this way, as Wendy Brown (*Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 2014) suggests, "There is first enclosure and

then the sovereign. Or, put the other way around, it is through the walling off of space from the common that sovereignty is born” (p. 45). The physical separation of the economically advantaged from marginalized low socioeconomic populations in Ciudad Juárez creates a type of higher social order; citizens that can afford protection from the violence seek refuge in cloistered, walled-off communities while those citizens that cannot afford such protections are left vulnerable to violence. Brown’s analysis of Schmitt’s concept of *nomos* as a type of fenced-off divide between two disparate spaces in conflict is reminiscent of a modern-day, urban adaptation of Sarmiento’s notion of *civilización y barbarie*; the divide between these spaces “is where civilization ends, but it is also where the brutishness of the civilized is therefore permitted, where violence may be freely and legitimately exercised” (p. 46). This binary manifests literally and symbolically in Juárez in socioeconomic and political terms. Given the mass migrations of disenfranchised actors to the NAFTA corridor in search of employment in the exploitative maquiladora sector and without the necessary systems in place to receive them, access to basic human rights are denied. I contend that in the case of Ciudad Juárez, those that are considered “civilized” are those that hold power—both socioeconomic and political—and can afford basic human rights, and those that cannot are considered to be “barbaric” and are abandoned by the state. To obtain this power, pervasive and random violence is used as a mechanism of control that to create the politics and culture of fear that rules the city.

Another way in which the concept of space has shifted is that space as a public good was not prioritized before the militarization period in Ciudad Juárez, and its status as a priority continued to diminish as violence increased. Caldeira cites that talk of crime redefines the uses of public space, who can access certain spaces, and who has rights to space. Study participants reflected on how citizens’ rights to public spaces declined as they were reappropriated by the

government in the years leading up to and during the period of *alta violencia*. Jacobo, the founder of the city's el Bazar del Monu,<sup>16</sup> spoke of the city's main plaza, la Plaza de Benito Juárez and its evolution as a public space over the course of the pre- and post-militarization period. During my last visit to Juárez in January 2017, the art museum hosted an exposition called *MONUmentografía: exposición de archivo y obra*. This exposition documented the space of the Plaza de Benito Juárez and the history of the Bazar del Monu, and I attended this event with a member of 656 Cómics, who had painted murals for the installation. Additionally, the organizers of Bazar del Monu that were interviewed for this study published a book that coincided with the museum exhibit that sourced photographs of la Plaza de Benito Juárez from members of the community. This collective project's intention was to demonstrate the importance and history of la Plaza de Benito Juárez as a space central to the life and identity of Ciudad Juárez that had been reenvisioned after years of violence. El Bazar del Monu began in 1998 as an informal weekly event held in la Plaza de Benito Juárez in which community members could meet for informal workshops, dance classes, and musical performances. By 2000, it had evolved into a weekly market where community members sold antiques, records, and artisan goods.

Jacobo reflected on the notion of constantly challenging how the threat of violence infringed on one's right to public space in the city:

Well, I'll tell you about how it all happened, but when we talk about it now, after so many years, and talking about the recovery of public spaces and the period during and after the violence, we talk about the recuperation of public spaces, but those of us that are here and are involved, and really Estela, my partner, and I realized that it isn't just a recovery of space but rather is a constant fight to maintain space exactly as it is. We can't

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<sup>16</sup> El Bazar del Monu is an unregulated cultural bazar that is held every Sunday in the city's main plaza. Pablo started the bazar May 10, 1998 and it evolved over the years according to the context of the city.

say “we’ve succeeded in taking back space;” the space that we’ve recovered isn’t necessarily going to be that way forever. If you want to maintain space, you have to be constantly fighting for it, it’s an ongoing fight, because there are other people, other forces, that also want it for their own interests. So, during the time when the violence began, and after as it was increasing, we had a goal; we wanted there to be a cultural bazar where all artists and artistic expressions could be represented. (Jacobo, personal interview, June 2016)

Jacobo and other participants reflected that the right to occupy and utilize space in Juárez has been altered due to prevailing violence; members of certain social classes are allowed to seek refuge behind safely walled areas of the city, while those of a lower socioeconomic class are denied rights to these spaces and instead occupy marginalized and dangerous *colonias*.

Occupying public space was a right that was easily sacrificed during the years of high violence and militarization, and in the case of la Plaza de Benito Juárez, citizens’ right to space was challenged in the years before. Jacobo reflected on the changes made to the city’s main open-air public space, and how the public was displaced from the Plaza because of a remodeling project that aimed at



*Jacobo replanting trees in la Plaza de Benito Juárez. May 2014.*

increasing safety and visibility, but instead led to its destruction and loss of beauty:

In 2006, the mayor at the time, Héctor Murguía, his nickname was “Teto,” he decided he was going to remodel the park. So they had us leave the park with the promise that we would return after the park was remodeled, which wasn’t true, because when the park was finished, they didn’t let anyone enter the space. Then, the park lost all its beauty because they took out all the trees, or at least a lot of them. They removed 170 trees because they blocked the view of the Monument statue. They cut down 170 trees in a city that is in the middle of the desert. They left nothing but a concrete slab with the explicit intention that they don’t want people to go to the park, they don’t want people to conspire. They see going to the park as going to conspire; you’re going to chat and speak badly about the government, so we are going to create a slab of concrete where no one



can spend free time because it is exposed and too cold or too hot in this city. So, the park once again is empty. (Jacobo, personal interview, June 2016)

Jacobo's reflection on the government's remodeling of the space with the intention of making it less appealing for community members to gather is another example of neoliberalism's deleterious social effects and the experience of reconciling the relationship between increasing modernity and underdevelopment in the physical space of Juárez. Similarly, the government's efforts to make the space less desirable for the public also served as a mechanism of control over public gatherings and eliminated the right to occupy community space. The plaza's remodeling project was intended to increase safety in the central urban space but instead symbolically reinforced the city's narrative of violence and its culture of fear, the barren plaza serving as permanent and enduring reminder.

Jacobo also expressed the challenges of exercising this right to occupy public space during the years of high violence as the plaza was the site of daily gun battles between the military and warring drug cartels. He explained that because of the 2006 remodeling project that prevented citizens from entering the plaza and later it being the site of intense violence, vendors moved el Bazar del Monu to an alleyway directly off the plaza. The Bazar has been held every Sunday, including during the years of military occupation and high violence, as "people know that the Monument is alive again, it's a meeting place, as it always has been...the Monument Bazar has gotten to see that the people in the community are coming to visit and spend time in the park" (Jacobo, personal



*Vendors at el Bazar del Monu. 2016.*

interview, June 2016). In our interview, Jacobo spoke of the similarities between El Bazar del Monu and El Chopo, the bazar in Mexico City that Carlos Monsiváis named “the temple of Mexican counterculture” and José Agustín called DF’s “Rock



Capital.” Jacobo asserted that the initial intention of El Bazar del Monu was to create a similar space in Juárez to El Chopo, to create a space in which Juarenses with different perspectives and interests could come together weekly and sell goods. He reflected that the project came to serve a different purpose:

A friend who started with us, he sold art and music, movies, especially blues, which he brought from Mexico City. One day while he was at the bazaar, he asked me: what difference do you see between El Chopo and Bazar del Monu? I say: well, many more people visit El Chopo, our space is smaller, EL Chopo is on a street but you can’t walk because there so many people that attend, you can find very rare albums to buy at El Chopo. I tell him: there is a lot more variety at there. He tells me: no, no, no, there is a very important distinction between the Bazar del Monu and El Chopo, there is one thing that differentiates one from the other, he tells me: coexistence. El Chopo is nothing more than buying and selling, people do not live together. Here we have a profound brotherhood, we are all friends, everyone participates. Because there [at El Chopo], at the end of the day, ‘well, cool, let's eat, let's go for some beers.’ Here after a Sunday we all go to my house, we go to the Monument and we have a few beers, in the summer we have a barbecue. Coexistence continues after our bazaar. We are a group of friends that meets every Sunday there [at the plaza], that is something El Chopo does not have. There you are going to sell or buy and it's over at the end of the day. (Jacobo, personal interview, July 2016)

Another study participant who is deeply involved in the organization of el Bazar del Monu and other cultural activism projects in the community, Alma, also reflected on the overall project and intention behind the weekly gathering of vendors. She cited that while the bazar is a cultural event, it is symbolically significant in that members of civil society are pushing back against the local government's appropriation of public spaces and are reconceptualizing how space is used in the city through the project's example of sustained continuity. She also asserted that the period of *alta violencia* generated civic engagement and eventually led to the mobilization of community members:



*Community members reflect on the future of Juárez at el Bazar del Monu. May 2014.*

the project's purpose is cultural, it's a place where artisan goods are sold, there is music, people sell handicrafts, art, books, etc. This is a pretext because the ultimate goal of the project is to create a common meeting space and create a dialogue of coexistence. In Juárez we lack such spaces, we lack places that promote coexistence, so in this space, art and cultural activities are generating this coexistence. And I believe that violence, unlike how it was before, has inspired many artists and many positive things have happened and continue to happen because of the violence. That is, the violence activated many of us to get involved instead of keeping us locked up inside, and the violence has generated many community ties and projects and super creative ideas, so yes, we are rebuilding and it is essential that we do so. ... So I think the Bazaar project has bred...it has created many positive things that have managed to spread throughout the community, and in a way, much of what makes the Bazar del Monu an interesting space is its continuity. That is something very important, its continuity, for example I have friends who don't come for months and then come back and say: I know that the bazaar will always be there. I can leave the city for a year, or I don't attend for months, and I know I can always go to the city center and go to the bazaar on Sunday. It is a project that has generated confidence and the possibility of obtaining resources to do other projects in the community with a similar goal of the bazaar. Because the Bazar del Monu is much greater than just the people who come and sell or the people who come and buy. (Alma, personal interview, July 2016)

El Bazar del Monu is a specific case of sustained continuity in the community that serves as an example of the importance of retaking public spaces despite crime continuing to impact the community's access to space in Juárez. Participants cited the negative effects of crime on public spaces, specifically public spaces in which youth could spend time, feel secure in their neighborhoods, create community, and socialize. One participant reflected on her community, Colonia Virreyes,<sup>17</sup> and the disappearance of public space—particularly spaces intended for children—that occurred during the years of high violence:

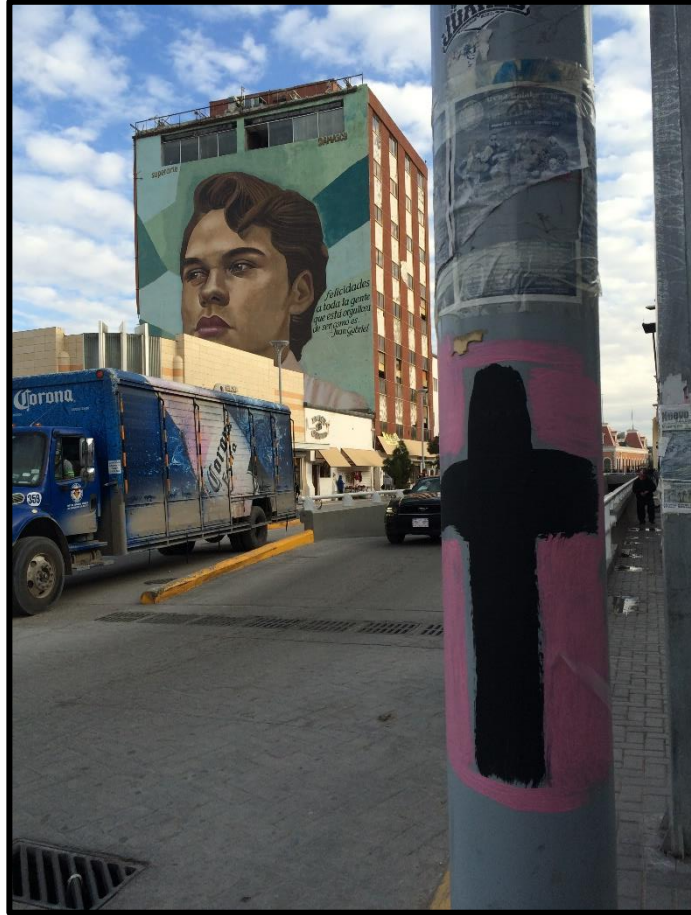
communities began to lose public space. Ciudad Juárez, you've seen it, is a geographic space, is a geopolitical space where no (...), where public space has never mattered to politicians or to private industry or to businesses or to factories and this has added to the extreme climate of Ciudad Juárez: the summers are unbearable, the winters are unbearable, there is no infrastructure, there are no parks, there is no fresh air, nowhere to feel like you have any quality of life, the city is in the middle of the desert, and that has a lot to do with the lack of urban infrastructure or the little infrastructure with which people can move around the city. And when (...) we already had these problems, but when there is intense violence in a place like this, the most vulnerable spaces, not only vulnerable, but violated spaces, are the public spaces that were intended for children and youth. (Elena, personal interview, July 2016)

As previously discussed, investments in public goods such as infrastructure and public spaces steeply declined with neoliberal reforms to Mexico's economy. The city was not able to accommodate the large surge in population during the 1990s after the passage of NAFTA, and the standard of living swiftly diminished. This can be seen especially in marginalized communities that lie on the periphery of the city, and with the violence reaching its apogee from 2008-2010, violence related to narcotrafficking overtook communal neighborhood spaces in vulnerable areas of Juárez. Because of pervasive violence, patterns of daily living, community interaction, and social relationship-building were effectively eliminated.

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<sup>17</sup> A particularly violent and marginalized neighborhood in southeastern Juárez.

A unique way in which violence and resilience has overtaken public space is through the use of crosses as symbols of both resistance to gender-based murder and of remembrance in the physical place where a death has taken place. Specific to Ciudad Juárez are the black crosses painted on a pink background that symbolize a victim of femicide. Memory-making and honoring the dead is achieved through the symbolic acts of painting a cross or constructing



*Femicide cross on Avenida Juárez.  
First fieldwork trip. January 2016.*

a cross where a family member was a victim of violent crime. The practice of painting these crosses in both public spaces and at the sites of both feminicides and abductions remind us of *stolpersteine* (pl.; “stumbling stones”), a post-World War II transitional justice practice started by artist Gunter Demnig in which small memorial brass plaques inscribed with Jewish Holocaust victims’ information are installed on the ground at the site of their last known dwelling or place of work. Commemorating victims of Nazism’s human rights abuses through *stolpersteine* has become an international form of symbolic reparation; *stolpersteine* can be found throughout

Europe, and in 2017, the first *stolperstein* outside Europe was laid in Argentina to memorialize sites of refuge for the Jewish diaspora community having escaped Nazi persecution.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to *stolpersteine*, through the use of the emblematic crosses specific to Ciudad Juárez, the Juarese community is making violence visible that would instead go unnoticed or be forgotten. While the community utilizes these physical symbols as remembrance and subtle forms of resistance against femicide, they do serve as a powerful counternarrative and enduring reminder of the violent context of the city. Elena, a former cultural program manager at a local cultural institute and present program manager at a government agency, grew up in a context of violence in multiple forms. She started the second of our three interviews reflecting on her own experiences with violence and the prevailing visual reminders of death and its intersection with everyday life in Juárez. She recalled a time she walked through her neighborhood and came upon

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to mention Angelika von Wahl's scholarship on transitional justice ("How Sexuality Changes Agency: Gay Men, Jews, and Transitional Justice," 2011) as it relates to victim representation; von Wahl problematizes the intersection of gender, sexual identity, and symbolic and material reparations in the cases of human rights abuses. She asserts that State reparations of any kind are rare in the wake of human rights violations, and she underscores the importance of critically examining the identities of those that are deemed worthy of justice:

Some states have publicly apologized, paid compensations, or returned lost property, while other states quite literally 'got away with murder'. In a time of continued human rights abuse and attendant global restitution claims, it becomes increasingly important to ask what factors lead governments to grant reparations, and to examine what kind of specific reparations are made and to whom. Why do some categories of victims seem more likely to gain necessary legal and/or organizational resources and receive at least some kind of reparation? Why do other groups fail? And, what role does gender, sexuality, and sexual identity play in the process of transitional justice? (von Wahl, 2011, p. 192).

The 2001 femicides at Campo Algodonero, the subsequent 2009 Inter-American Court of Human Rights case known as *González et al. v. Mexico*, reparations, and victim memorialization will be discussed in Chapter III.

a small playground—a space intended for children’s imaginative play—and found it marked by death in the form of a small memorial cross erected for a neighborhood youth:

In Mexico, there is a certain symbolism surrounding death, where people die, we put crosses to honor their memory, and their families place flowers or the community places a cross there because we believe that these places are culturally sacred. So, regarding the image of the cross, one day I was walking in my neighborhood, and something that I always loved when I was a child was the slide, you know what a slide is? Where children climb up and let themselves slide down from above, sometimes pushing each other down. So, there next to the slide, a few days before, young child had been killed, a very young neighbor, so there was a cross and on top they had put lime to absorb the blood so it wouldn’t be seen. I then started to notice the absence of children in that place. I thought, how are children going to want to play in this park when there are so many crosses that remind them of death? (Elena, personal interview, July 2016)

This tradition of constructing or painting crosses where a victim’s body was found serves as an enduring reminder of death and violence and they permeate daily life and public space in the city due to their ubiquitous presence. Whether it be a cross constructed by a victim’s family or a cross painted by a feminist activist group,



*Crosses in Lomas de Poleo, Ciudad Juárez.*

these representations of death in public spaces are symbols of the risk that exists living in Juárez. These symbols of violence and death do affect one’s ability to occupy public space without fear, while all serving as forms of resistance against the ubiquitous violence that all Juarenses recognize and understand.

Study participants also reflected on the loss of the right to public space and the challenge of navigating the city during the years of high violence, and the culture of fear that permeated the

community. Silvia spoke of the elimination of the civic right to space and that for many members of the community, life was lived indoors during the period of *alta violencia*:

It's very difficult for someone to go out freely at any time of the day in this city, you are living it [Anna], you are suffering through it now. There are generations of people who have been practically imprisoned in their homes, or school or work, children and young people that go from home to school and from school to home; from home to work, from work to home. And unless they live in one of these enclosed housing areas similar to where we are now, children cannot go out on the street because they run the risk of suffering some sort of violence. (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016)

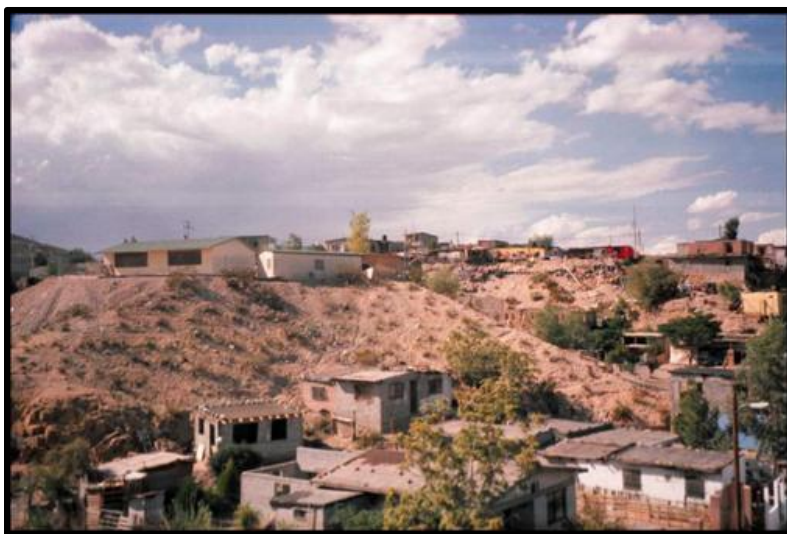
Similarly, Gabriela, a program manager, feminicide researcher, and human rights defender at a non-profit organization, cited her experiences during 2008-2010 of only traveling between home and work, fearing public transportation and public spaces, and the marked lack of infrastructure that complicated—and still complicates—life for citizens of the border city:

There were several years when we did not leave our homes: from home to work, from work to home, it was a situation where you were afraid to walk through public spaces, and not only were you were afraid, we were totally denied it by how the city is built. If you want to ride a bicycle here, you can do it, but you are risking your life because there is no urban infrastructure so you can do it safely. I consider that to be another type of violence—the deficiencies that exist in terms of development and infrastructure here. (Gabriela, personal interview, June 2016)

It is important to note that she distinguishes between two kinds of violence in her reflection: the violence of crime and the violence of poverty and underdevelopment of community infrastructure. Monárrez Fragoso and Cervera cite a direct correlation between marginalized areas of the city and higher occurrences of violence. This is evident in Lomas de Poleo, an area in the western region of Juárez with one of the highest concentrations of feminicide and drug-



related violence: “After many bodies were discovered in Lomas de Poleo, politicians started investing money in paving some of the [main] roads and providing electricity and water to citizens” (Driver, 2015, p. 35). This investment was



*Lomas de Poleo, Ciudad Juárez.*

limited, however, as the community still lacks

basic urban infrastructure such as hospitals, clinics, schools, public transit systems, drainage systems, and paved roads.<sup>19</sup>

The fear Gabriela reflects on is similar to that of another study participant, Guadalupe, the co-founder of a non-profit organization that focuses on the eradication of femicide. Founded in 2001 by Guadalupe, Susana, and the families and friends of victims of gender-based murder, the organization’s mission is to promote social justice in the state of Chihuahua and to find and prosecute perpetrators of femicide. The organization was established after the death of Lucy, a young woman who was kidnapped and tortured over five days, and eventually murdered.<sup>20</sup> By drawing both national and international attention to the issue of femicide, the organization seeks to promote legislative change within Mexico and serves the Juarese community by seeking legal and social justice for victims, promotes critical consciousness, and

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<sup>19</sup>In the study *Encuesta de Percepción Ciudadanía 2015*, citizens were asked to rate public goods on a scale from 1-10 (10 being “best”). It was found that public spaces and green spaces were rated 5.78, public transit 5.43, and street maintenance/paved roads 5.50.

<sup>20</sup> Guadalupe was Lucy’s teacher.

works internationally to disseminate information about the reality of women living in the state of Chihuahua. She recalls that during the years of high violence, fear served a specific function in daily life, that of a survival mechanism: “I understood at a certain point that fear is natural, and that I had to feel it, because it was something that protected me, being afraid made me more alert and take care of myself, but it was terrible to leave the house and have someone follow you” (Guadalupe, personal interview, July 2016). Public space in Juárez was converted into a site of danger and crime of which anyone could be a victim; Ruvalcaba and Ravelos Blancos (2011) compare the streets of Juárez to the vast, empty desert that surrounds it. They assert that “the street, despite its active traffic, is just as unsafe as the desert is. The desert and the street are the same. The city, which entails order and social control, a site of citizen participation and recreation, has been annihilated; what remains, then, is an area like the desert that is desolate and dangerous” (p. 29). They suggest that the city has, through violence, been transformed into a desolate and dangerous place, and is marked by citizens’ fear. The community’s heightened sense of fear—legitimate in nature due to the current social climate of the city at the time—was promulgated and perpetuated through the media’s sensationalized coverage of violence.

## *2.2 YELLOW JOURNALISM, VIOLENCE, AND THE DISCOURSE OF VIOLENCE*

There exists a double dimension surrounding violence and how it serves as a mechanism of power. Gail Mason explores how the discourse of violence and the ways in which it controls bodies in *The Spectacle of Violence: Homophobia, gender, and knowledge* (2002). Mason situates her analysis of the relationship between violence and power within the larger feminist and poststructuralist theoretical context of how violence affects the bodies of marginalized bodies, specifically women and homosexuals. Foucauldian theory suggests that violence is not a

form of power while feminist theory asserts that violent acts serve as expressions of power (patriarchal power specifically when the subjugated being is female) (Mason 2002, p. 119). Mason does not outrightly align herself with either theoretical paradigm but does identify “the nexus between violence and power is an instrumental one: [that] violence as an instrument of power. That is, of the capacity of violence to shape the ways that we see, and thereby come to know, certain things” (p. 120). Mason’s central thesis is that violence and the discourse of violence together inform the subjugation of its victims, that violence “dominates, not only by inflicting physical harm and injury, but also by engendering feelings of shame, worthlessness or guilt. Women’s concerns and fears about violence can restrict everyday life, limiting pleasures and freedoms. In some instances, this can lead to a repressed sense of personal options and possibilities. It is not just the actual experience of violence that does this. The knowledge that one may be targeted for particular forms of violence also generates a series of self-regulator strategies designed to minimize this perceived risk” (p. 121-2). I consider Mason’s assertion to be true when considering the context of Ciudad Juárez, the role of violence in the media, and how highly publicized violence has the ability to shift public perception and creates a culture of fear and anxiety in the community and serves as a passive mechanism of control.

Through interviews I determined there to exist strong relationships between crime and its constant presence in everyday life, its coverage (or lack of) in the media, and reference made to two distinct periods in Juárez: “before the violence” and “after the violence.” Participants reflected that as crime and violence rose in the city during the years of high violence, coverage of these acts by the media shifted. First, participants were asked how the media portrays the violence and crime of Ciudad Juárez (Caldeira’s talk of crime in a more formal, publicized sense), and all interview participants responded that violence is represented in one of two ways:

it is either highly publicized and sensationalized or is silenced; ultimately, the media unfairly and negatively represents the city's image and determines a biased correlation between violent crime and socioeconomic status. For those study participants that suggested that crime, criminality, and violence are perpetuated by *periodismo amarillista* (yellow journalism) that serves as a constant and visible reminder of the city's violence and generates fear, they simultaneously asserted that the roots of violence are not deeply explored by the media or government, such as impunity, minimal infrastructure, neoliberal economic reforms, and other aforementioned contributing factors. Instead, specific newspapers in Ciudad Juárez, such as *El PM*, are dedicated to reporting and printing photographs of the city's violence crimes such as homicides, feminicides, assassinations, and the dismemberment of bodies that are publicly displayed to send symbolic messages between warring cartels, which some interview participants cited as the cause of emotional disconnect regarding violence (as a consumable). A previously mentioned study conducted by Plan Estratégico cited that nearly one-quarter of Juareneses believe crimes are never prosecuted (and it is widely accepted that crime statistics are significantly lower than the reality the community experiences); Domínguez Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona (2010) assert victims of violence in Juárez are "doubly victimized by criminals and the system of impunity on the one hand and by available systems of representation on the other, the victims become a morbid source of image production as the material evidence of psychological and physical violence" (p. 9). This contributes to the culture of fear in the community, the fear that one could be a victim of violent crime at any moment, in any space. By erasing the true roots of crime in the city and publicizing graphic violent acts instead, journalists are drawing attention away from the sociopolitical and socioeconomic issues that affect the community at large.

In an interview, Marcos, the editor-at-large of *El PM*, reflected on the news media and its role in disseminating violence and violent images to the public. He made the distinction between *El Diario de Juárez* (the other major newspaper in Juárez) and *El PM* and the purposes both newspapers serve in the community, citing “*El PM* is aimed at ..., it's a police-type tabloid, as well as ...it's similar to the *National Inquirer*. It is aimed at lower-middle class people [laborers, housekeepers, the elderly, bus or taxi drivers, etc.], and *El Diario de Juárez* is a publication intended more for professionals, for audiences that would read the *Dallas Morning* or the *New York Times* or the *Los Angeles Times*...” (Marcos, personal interview, November 2017). The most notable difference between the two Juarese newspapers is the sensationalistic coverage of community violence by *El PM*, a type of content that according to Marcos, is of interest to Juarenses of a low socioeconomic standing in particular. Considering *El PM*'s readership consists of Juarenses that live in lower-middle class *colonias* where many of works of community engagement and organizing most often take place, heightened publication of such works would seem intuitive (*El Diario de Juárez* does include some stories concerning on community projects and culture, while *El PM* does not focus attention on works of collective action). However, Marcos posited that the publication of extreme violence is more attractive than stories of community organizing or community interventions to a population that does not particularly enjoy reading as a past time. Therefore, the content published by *El PM*—stories containing graphic and lurid details of community, interfamilial, sexual, and romantic partner violence as well as narcocrime—serves as a guilty pleasure for mass consumption, a type of

second-hand voyeurism that the community can easily consume on a daily basis (*El PM*'s daily readership is 40,000; daily readership for *El Diario de Juárez* is 50,000). While I will explore the problematic effects of consuming violence



*Front pages of El PM newspaper in Ciudad Juárez.*

through media, Marcos suggested that the content published by the tabloid may be sensationalistic and may glorify violence, but ultimately it is fostering and encouraging community literacy: “I think you can reach a sector of people who do not like to read, so I try to take advantage of the position I have to make reading attractive to people who otherwise would not read...we try to make reading as a whole more attractive [by publishing what interests our readership]” (Marcos, personal interview, November 2017). When questioned as to why the newspaper prints mostly stories about community violence and whether the theme of violence itself is intriguing to community members of a low socioeconomic background, Marcos reflected that

[El PM] is a product that is bought more for pleasure than for interest. For example, it's like when you are deciding what to buy at the store; you like salmon but you also like hot dogs, so you say: I'm going to buy hot dogs because I like them, not so much because they're good for me or my health... they satisfy your hunger while you really enjoy what you are eating. You buy [El PM] because you like it. ... You have to see it as both, as a source of entertainment and information. ... People are informed and at the same time they are being informed in a way they enjoy. Otherwise, maybe they wouldn't buy a newspaper at all. *El PM* tries to check those two boxes: you inform people well, but you inform them in a morbid way, which they find compelling and attractive. (Marcos, personal interview, November 2017)

The themes of murder, corruption, extortion, drug trafficking, impunity, and narcocrime that are glorified by *EL PM* echo the hypermasculine, violent tropes of *narcocorridos* that many consume with similar gusto. Those that *narcocorridos* pay homage to are seen as a type of “social bandit” (Staudt, 2008, p. 89) who lives outside the limits of the law; Los Tigres del Norte refer to this impunity and unprosecuted feminicides in “Las Mujeres de Juárez,” “The bones in the desert demonstrate the stark truth of the untouchable impunity, that the dead women of Juárez are a national shame” (Staudt, 2008, p. 89). Respondents in my study indicated that perpetual talk of crime and the community’s exposure to violence as a good that is to be consumed on a mass scale creates the conditions in which social critique of violence fails to exist, and the lines between fiction for entertainment and investigative journalism become blurred.

The type of journalism being practiced by *El PM* seemingly blends genres in which violence is presented and consumed. There is a significant body of scholarship that explores how violent tropes in media affect readership or viewers; the UNESCO global study on media violence (1999) distinguishes types of violence that manifest in the media and categorizes them according to mode and problematizes their potential effects on the public. The study examines three primary forms of media content—*purely investigative content* (news journalism), *message-oriented content* (advertising, campaigns), and *entertainment content* (films, shows) (Groebel, 1999, p. 7)—and identifies the intersections of these forms of media with two specific classifications by which one can examine and interpret them, the classifications of *problematic* or *non-problematic*. UNESCO determined media that falls under the classification of *problematic* to include published examples of voyeurism, censorship, dehumanizing propaganda,

and rewarded violence, while non-problematic forms of media include classical journalism, anti-violence campaigns, and story thrills (Groebel, 1999, p. 7).

The aforementioned problematic themes in media have shown to have specific physiological effects in the human body; Social Learning Approach theory (Bandura) suggests that observed patterns of violence can be imitated or reproduced in everyday life (Groebel, 1999, p. 8). Similarly, Script Theory (Huesmann and Eron) goes a step further and suggests that those who view violence and problematic tropes in media come to develop a type of sustained complex in which the “[one overestimates] the probability of violence in real life (e.g., through its frequency on the TV-screen), [developing] a belief-system where violence is a normal and adequate part of modern society” (Groebel, 1999, p. 8). Two specific sub-theories of Script Theory, the frustration-aggression-hypothesis (Berkowitz) and its counterpart, catharsis-theory (later known as inhibition theory) (Feshbach), suggest that aggression will either be heightened and acted out, or will diminish with exposure to violence (visual exposure to violence serves as a sort of catharsis). While many studies conducted explore the effects violence has on children specifically as they lack the capacity to differentiate between fiction and reality and act on their feelings of aggression without inhibition, common conclusions have been reached surrounding the effects social and cultural environments have adult viewers of violence. Cultures in which violence is glorified have been shown to have higher levels of tolerance regarding episodes of violence in everyday life; Donnerstein, Malamuth, and Linz (1997) investigated the effect of this “long-term exposition” in consumers of violence through the media. It was found that “Men in particular get used to frequent bloody scenes, their empathy towards aggression victims is reduced” (Groebel, 1999, p. 8). Similarly, Gerbner and Groebel’s analysis of the impact of media violence on anxiety as explored in several longitudinal studies prove “that the frequent depiction



of the world as threatening and dangerous leads to more fearsome and cautious attitudes towards the actual environment. As soon as people are already afraid or lack contrary experiences they develop an anxious world view and have difficulties in distinguishing between reality-and-fiction” (Groebel, 1999, p. 9).

Considering *El PM*'s extensive readership—for many Juarenses the media outlet serves as their only source of news—its content is problematic in that it blends investigative journalism and entertainment through the presentation of violence as a consumable that is made to be attractive to readers. Readers of *El PM* are consuming a form of journalism that is not nuanced and that seemingly rewards violence through its detailed, published accounts of violent acts. Perpetrators of violence achieve a sort of infamy as the newspaper's stories focus on the “how” rather than the “what” of violent crimes in Juárez, publishing crimes in the community using detailed and shockingly graphic descriptions that through their consumption of that what is considered to be horrific, many readers experience a type of anti-abjection/*jouissance*.

Julia Kristeva explores this notion of encountering pleasure through the pain of others through her framework of abjection (*Powers of Horror*, 1941). She cites that abjection is the manifestation of a human reaction in the face of horror; abjection is caused by a disruption in a system or order, when norms are challenged or rules or borders are disrespected (Kristeva, 1941, p. 4). Kristeva suggests that “Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. ... Abjection ...is...a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor that sells you up, a friend who stabs you” (p. 4). Through daily consumption of violence and violent images (through media outlets such as *El PM*, *La Polaka* (the online equivalent to *El PM*), etc),

Juarenses experience a type of anti-abjection, emotional numbness, or even a type of pleasure when paying for their daily dose of violence published by *El PM*. Marcos, editor-at-large of *El PM*, reflected on the community's state of emotional numbness after being exposed daily to lurid accounts of community violence:

Yes, that is true [that the community is emotionally numb after being exposed to so much violence]. There is an abundance of gruesome stories when reading these publications, after 4 years of violence in which every day there were 15 people dead, 20 dead, and now homicides are put on the front page, and for people this is not news, they have become used to this, violence has become normalized and no longer is shocking. I, for example, say that I work for a newspaper that tries to highlight those types of stories, we have to try to find another way of telling them that is attractive to readers, not so much what happened, but *how* it happened. *What* happened? They killed a neighbor. And right now [in Juárez] it is not so much the *what* but the *how*. *How* was he murdered? He was beaten to death with a hammer because he was a cheater. There may be a story that three people were executed on the street, and there is another story that tells how parents punished their daughter by putting out cigarettes on her back, and the story of the young girl is more attractive, even though three people were murdered publicly in the street, people take notice of the story about the girl, because the other type of violence is normalized [and banal and is less detailed]. (Marcos, personal interview, November 2017)

In our interview, it was evident that Marcos has experience defending *EL PM* and its controversial content. He sought to positively frame the graphic episodes of violence that the media outlet covers in a way that encouraged community literacy, bringing a product to the masses that is accessible and enjoyed. Emilio, a community literacy promotor, former graphic layout designer at *El Diario de Juárez* and *El Diario de El Paso* (its subsidiary), and the writer for *El PM*'s sports section viewed the newspaper and its sensationalistic, violent content that is intended for consumption by Juarenses of low socioeconomic status in a different light. He suggested:

Regarding the question of whether publishing violence is dangerous or not, I believe that yes, it is dangerous because of two things: one, because it is a distractor, I think that people are easily distracted by violence, and they forget important or fundamental issues that affect their community. They decide instead to talk about the rapist, the dead man, the person hit by a car, the person whose body was burned, they talk about what *El PM*

publishes. For those of us who live on the border, we have become insensitive to these kinds of stories. It has become so common to see [violence] daily, in print, in the house, because it's a newspaper that enters the home and the children can see it, the elderly, everyone, and they see these graphic, explicit photos of violence ..., and there are studies that show that if you constantly view these types of images, you lose your emotional sensitivity to them. (Emilio, personal interview, December 2017)

As indicated in interview responses, it is widely known that *EL PM*'s readership consists mostly of members of marginalized communities where the published violence itself is occurring. This heightened visibility of published acts of violence, corruption, murder, and extortion have become woven into the fabric of everyday life in Juarez, establishing a set of normalized expectations of crime being associated with specific social groups; i.e. powerful politicians of high socioeconomic status (corruption) and low socioeconomic status Juarenses that occupy marginalized spaces in the city (drug-related violence that is extreme in nature). In *Information Inequality: The Deepening Social Crisis in America* (1996), Schiller explores different forms of mass cultural industry, their effects on public perceptions of specific social groups and associated personal freedoms, and how these forms of cultural production navigate the cultural field in which they are situated. First, Schiller posits that historically the questioning of oppressive sociopolitical and socioeconomic systems has been tied to individual weaknesses instead of placing blame on larger, systemic issues. Communication industries are most often private corporations that are financed by a moneyed social group that aligns with a political and social agenda. Therefore, media outlets “exhibit a marked preference for detailing the flaws, imperfections, and antisocial behavior of human beings. ... Crime, delinquency, broken families, political and economic corruption—whatever the social ailment—are explained [by the media] by pointing to *individual* weakness and inadequacy. Such a diagnosis conveniently removes malfunctioning institutions from scrutiny and discussion” (Schiller, 1996, p. xiv).

Because the root of community violence is multifaceted in nature and is situated within deeply flawed sociopolitical and economic systems, violence published by the media reinforces this class-specific categorization of different types of violence. Monárrez Fragoso (2013) explores the boundaries of live and death in Juárez and the process of dehumanization and subsequent industrialization of death that occurs. She suggests that victims of femicide and organized crime are men and women who live in the marginalized urban areas with the high indicators of poverty (Monárrez Fragoso, 2013, p. 144); she cites that after death, these victims are “presented to the community, by both the criminals and those who control the investigative and judicial processes, as transgressors of both their genders and social orders” (p. 144). Culpability often unfairly falls on victims of violent crime, whether they were intended targets of a crime or were collateral deaths, of which there have been many during and after the years of militarization. This class-specific culpability for community violence was most notable in 2009 when General Jorge Juárez Loera (who assumed an important leadership role in Joint Operation Chihuahua) publicly instructed members of the press to report on homicides in the following way: “Instead of saying one more death [in your articles], say there one less delinquent” (Siscar, 2011).

A particular event that exemplifies class-specific violence marked many interviews conducted for this study, and it is evident that it serves as a painful stain on the fabric of the city’s identity. The massacre at Villas de Salvárcar on January 30, 2010 remains the most highly

publicized example of normalized violence being unfairly attributed to a specific social group. Villas de Salvárcar is a socioeconomically marginalized neighborhood



*Community memorial erected in memory of the victims of the Villas de Salvárcar massacre. 2018.*

on the southeastern side of Juárez that is situated near a maquiladora industrial

park, and it is the site of the early 2010 massacre of fifteen young community members. Teenage students and residents of the *colonia* were attending a birthday celebration when three groups of armed men descended on the party, opened fire, and slowly left the scene. By new year's eve day, the mass killing would make national and international news, and when pressured to make a statement about the massacre, then-President Calderón inaccurately attributed the murders to gang-related narcoviolence. Families and acquaintances of those killed openly responded to the president's pronouncement of misinformation; through local news outlets, Juarenses came to know the victims for their true identities—young and engaged students, athletes, and members of socioeconomically struggling families without ties to organized crime who died without cause. Due to public uproar that followed his reaction to the killings, President Calderón visited Juárez and was expected to introduce social programs aimed to address and decrease the violence that was plaguing the city. Instead, the polemic social welfare program *Todos Somos Juárez*:

*Reconstruyamos la Ciudad*<sup>21</sup> was rolled out in February 2010, without the government seeking any feedback, insights, or input regarding its structure or content from on-the-ground organizations in the city who had been battling community issues firsthand. The government's poorly veiled effort to assuage the massacre at Villas (as it is known to Juarenses) and its lack of follow-through in investigating the fifteen homicides angered Juarenses. The massacre of Villas de Salvárcar has become

an emblematic symbol and representation of the horrifying levels of violence and the ineptitude and dereliction of duty of local, state, and federal authorities. It evinced the high price the community and its members were paying for a war that purportedly targeted cartels but in reality had taken the lives of thousands in the city who had died unarmed, young, and poor, but also whose deaths almost always remained in absolute impunity. These deaths at best were recognized by Mexico's president as 'collateral damage' in a war that people did not want and had not asked for. (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p. 60-1)

Interview responses indicated that in the wake of the Villas de Salvárcar massacre, Juarenses attempted to navigate and reconcile the events of January 30 and the government's alarming response to them. The biased and brazenly erroneous response to the massacre of

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<sup>21</sup> *Todos Somos Juárez* was a short-term initiative that sought to address crime, advance development projects, and improve social benefits. A series of 160 "pledges," a veritable to-do list that centered on lowering crime and violence rates, was created with both local government and community input, and 15 public forums were held to inform the drafting of the pledges. Pledges had benchmark that was to be met in the first 100 days, and most pledges had a conclusion date of December 2010. The organization Justice in Mexico covered the *Todos Somos Juárez* and explained a number of the proposed pledges: For example, the 100 day benchmark for Pledge#1 (decrease the response times of emergency and law enforcement personnel) is implementing a GPS system in 760 vehicles. The benchmark for Pledge #11 (strengthen security in customs), includes adding more security cameras, canine units, and mobile X-ray machines to facilitate customs inspections. Though some pledges are more specific than other, the majority make use of specific numbers. Pledge #38 aims to hold nine courses to train 350 total people in mental health or crisis issues by December, with four courses training 140 people completed by its 100-day benchmark. Larger infrastructure projects to provide employment and improve the environment are also an important part of *Todos Somos Juárez*. These include building or renovating public spaces, local parks, paving projects, and sports facilities. Some of the pledges relating to education or culture are increasing available scholarships, upgrading computer equipment in twelve libraries, and remodeling a local iconic movie theater."

community youth served as a watershed moment in working-class Juárez, leaving many to wonder who—if anyone—could be safe from extreme, senseless violence if not youth. In *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), Naomi Klein suggests that national crises can be exploited by governments and transnational corporations that use such events to push through economic agendas or policies. She cites that during times of community trauma and upheaval (such as the Chilean coup d'état and the Iraq War), citizens can experience a type of paralysis that manifests as inaction. This economic “shock therapy” leads to small wealthy sectors of the population benefitting from these newly instated economic policies, while the rest of the community must continue to navigate poor infrastructure and failing and underfunded social programming. Reflecting on the media’s sensationalistic agenda, one study participant cited that while the violence continues to receive media attention and is sensationalized through both print and online journalism, the multitude of factors contributing to extreme violence are not discussed and that the community is seemingly shocked into submission by the city’s violent context. She states that the media focuses its attention on sensationalizing and publicizing the shocking numbers of homicides in the city instead of exploring the roots of the issue that affect the community (the violence of poverty, lack of infrastructure, lack of employment opportunities, lack of opportunities to earn a living wage, etc.):

Imagine a violent context where we sometimes had up to 40 or 50 people killed in a single day, and all you were seeing in the media were the killings, and in that sense, the media was covering the murders without taking into account the whole reality of the community... yes it is important to speak of the dead, excuse me, not of the dead, of the murdered; yes it’s important to talk about the murdered women, but it is also important to talk about the [city’s] circumstance as a whole, that is (...), these murders were also causing many people to lose their jobs, so the first thing we are going to ask in this context is ‘what we are going to eat ?,’ not if they are going to kill us or not, because if they kill us, it’s hardly ever a random act because the state has its enemies and has already chosen their fate. However, ‘what are we going to eat?’ is the first question people in these communities ask, and this violent context shows us that children are worried about the same things, and that the image that the media portrays is completely

wrong. We should be asking marginalized communities if they are really worried about the reality portrayed in the media or if they're worried about other things, not that the first isn't important, but they are different concerns. (Elena, personal interview, July 2016)

Calderia posits that talk of crime in communities has the ability to perpetuate violence; Elena suggested that drawing attention to the city's violent context is important because the reality of Juárez should be known. However, she cited that there exists a profound disconnect on the part of the government between the root causes of violence—which is the bigger issue at hand—and the violence itself. She reflected that talk of crime in the media is widespread, but that the media fails to reflect on the true sources of violence. As previously discussed, the State's costly military interventions served as a perceived short-term solution for narcoviolence, however it ignored the community's longstanding problems that created the conditions in which that violence thrived. Through the media's publicized talk of crime, Ciudad Juárez assumed a violent identity on an international scale that unfairly ignored a multitude of factors that contributed to the creation of its violent narrative. The media diverts readers' attention away from socioeconomic issues that are present in the community every day, and this creates feelings of frustration, despair, and discouragement in community members. Common concerns regarding access to food, education, healthcare, and employment are minimized and erased by the constant coverage of the city's extreme violence and narcocrime. The international face of Juárez is that of a city crippled by crime brought about by the drug war, when in fact, there are multitudinous factors that contribute to the sociopolitical and socioeconomic context of the community that are neglected by the media. The findings of this study show that the violence of poverty is explored and addressed through works of cultural production that serve as forms of resistance instead.

Similarly, Margarita, a former project manager at a private thinktank that researches community perceptions of civil society and political institutions and currently serves as the



services channeling manager at a local women's institute, reflected on the current context of Juárez and how in recent years the homicide rate has started to decline. She noted that while it is true that the city is experiencing less violent crime relative to the years of *alta violencia*, the conditions still exist that create such violence:

The numbers of first degree homicides have dropped, but that's just the number of *first degree* homicides, we had up to 60 homicides in a weekend, the homicide rate has diminished considerably, but that doesn't mean that the change is that statistically significant, or that the conditions causing this extreme violence have changed. The poverty continues, the disappearances of women continue, impunity continues, no one speaks of the corruption, and I realize I am here working for Plan Estratégico, and we only research the municipal government, but the amount of money lost, the amount of corruption within the government, that continues. That is, the fundamental structural issues, those continue, those have not changed, and it seems that we are going back to the same point where all the extreme violence started, and it's worrisome because that means that if another change in governing power enters office and declares another war against the narcotraffickers, all of the conditions are still there for that to happen again. It's not guaranteed that there will not be another rebellion against the State and another period of extreme violence. (Margarita, personal interview, June 2016)

Margarita's background as a non-partisan thinktank researcher positions her in a way that she maintains a pulse on community perceptions of the sociopolitical reality in the community while also being engaged in cultural activism. Her perspective on the sensationalized violence in the media, as well as the conditions in which violence flourished, was similarly expressed by many participants in this study.

In relation to this publicized violence in the community, I found in the data collection process that there was a marked period that participants referred to in terms of violence—an evident before-and-after—in reference to the period of *alta violencia* in recent history. Interview participants asserted that initially during the period of high violence, there was an increase in foreign investment (due to international attention the crisis drew) in social initiatives and projects

through agencies such as USAID,<sup>22</sup> and that Plan Mérida and NAFTA also drew increased capital to the community (although not used for social initiatives). Luis, a research assistant at UACJ and a former member of Movimiento Pacto por la Cultura (a movement of artists and activists founded in 2004 that cited cultural rights as basic human rights), offered insights regarding this recent moment in history and the influx of foreign capital that was aimed at social projects. He reflected on the United States' heightened presence in Juárez through USAID interventions and cited this program as a type of social and cultural cooptation:

USAID has its political arm that served...to help with the transition after the Mérida Initiative [was passed], to see through the specific political changes and structural changes that took place. ... Another arm [of USAID] is that of social intervention, in which the American Consulate through USAID comes up with a strategy or carries out a strategy with community collectives, with key people, to develop a policy of community interventions through culture. This cooptation, as I refer to it, eventually revealed a series of contradictions in the community...what I refer to as "workshopitis." Everyone was doing workshops without considering continuity, that's why it's "workshopitis." Why? Because [USAID] gave you money to do a workshop with children in a specific colonia, so you went through with your intervention, and then three months later they gave you money for a painting intervention, they didn't pay you or they paid you as an artist very little, and then the money dried up and it was as if nothing happened, and the children were the ones who suffered. (Luis, personal interview, June 2016)

Luis suggested that, in theory, the influx of foreign aid during the period of militarization was beneficial to the community; it allowed organizers and activists to launch interventions and initiatives in marginalized *colonias* that served as ground zero for the violence during the military occupation. However, this increase in foreign monies intended for social spending lacked continuity or follow-through: funding was not dispersed with long-term goals in mind of

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<sup>22</sup> United States Agency of International Development. In March 2017, it was announced that Mexico will receive \$25 million in US funds through Plan Mérida to combat recent spikes in violence in cities such as Ciudad Juárez.

addressing the socioeconomic or sociopolitical issues that created the conditions for the violence itself.

Margarita also cited that after the period of high violence and when the homicide rate in the city started to decrease, international attention and foreign funding slowly waned. Investments in social programs diminished and when the talk of crime on the international level faded, funding for community programming and interventions similarly was withdrawn. With less foreign investment in social initiatives and with the same roots of violence not being addressed or improved, Margarita suggested that violence is thriving once again in the community:

I think we're regressing back to where we were when the violence started because I see young people in the same conditions, for example, simply to talk about a community population, the conditions of young people are very similar to how they were before. A lot of young people are still unemployed, and the same number of students that are being accepted into the university is the same number as five years ago, that's to say that those who can afford to study are the same kinds of students with the same backgrounds, and the vast majority of young people here will never have the opportunity. This tells us something serious because young people are not able to access the university, they stop after middle school or high school, and we know that someone who has a middle school or high school education here in Juárez works in the maquiladora industry. Where else can they work? Or they end up getting married, having children, and repeating the same cycle that their parents lived. (Margarita, personal interview, June 2016)

Similarly, Roberto, a member of 656 Cómics who washes cars at maquiladoras for a living and has lived in the community for 38 years, echoed Margarita's perspective on the current context of violence in Juárez. He asserted that violence is again returning to levels seen during the period of *alta violencia* because the causes of violence are ignored:

I believe that nothing is ... I think the city is returning to the years ... it was a very rough time for Ciudad Juárez a few years ago, and now it's a bit different, but there is still violence. For example, feminicides are happening again, feminicides have always happened here, but now we are seeing numbers like we saw in the past. (Roberto, personal interview, June 2016)

Although the community has confronted many of the same issues that other cities and communities in Mexico and Latin America face, the sociopolitical factors and the city's geopolitical space (close proximity to the United States and the transnational economic presence of late industrial capitalism) created a perfect storm in which violence thrived that is specific to the context of Ciudad Juárez.

### *2.3 THE SILENCED TALK OF CRIME AND MEDIA CENSORSHIP*

Another finding that emerged is that crime and violence as published by the media have effectively gone through a silencing process. Representations of crime and criminality are softened or are systematically eliminated in print journalism. Participants cited that the media's coverage of violence has been sanitized in the government's attempt to shift the city's public image, although the circumstances that create violence still exist, and it was evident that the silenced talk of crime is itself creating a dialogue in the community, a dialogue of mistrust and frustration that serves as a catalyst for community interventions (that will be explored in a later chapter).

The media coverage of the city's context has shifted since the years of high violence when attention was drawn to Juárez on an international scale. The militarization phase of the drug war marked a period when the drug-related violence reached its apogee, and local organizations and activists worked to publicize the state of terror in the city. The effects of the city's staggering narcocrime were highly publicized, and local government was eager to shift the city's reputation. Some participants cited that local media outlets' coverage of narcoviolence quickly declined, and this image that the government continues to censure is that of "infinite violence, and the story of how the formal economy, state and non-state institutions, and

transnational capital failed to contain it. ... This process of concealing the violence itself is one of the ways the government and its allies maintain total impunity” (Domínguez Ruvalcaba & Ravelo Blancas, 2010, p. 24). The government seeks to project an unrealistic view of Juárez in the media as being a changed city<sup>23</sup>, while the conditions that are at the root of community violence continue to exist, crimes are not prosecuted, and impunity is law.

In one comparative study, respondents indicated they had little to no confidence in the country’s judicial system, while half of respondents were of the opinion that corruption impedes Mexico from functioning as an effective democracy (Klesner, 2001, p. 127). Similarly, in a study conducted in Mexico City, it was found that only 17 percent of victims of crime reported their experiences to police, citing that it was “pointless” or a “waste of time” to involve the judicial system; another study’s findings indicate that 73 percent of people surveyed reported that police systematically failed to investigate crimes and were guilty of colluding with and protecting cartels. Of the respondents who had reported crimes to police, 45 percent indicated that nothing had been done to investigate their case (Staudt, 2008, p. 119). Interview respondents for this study echoed these opinions that collusion with cartels and impunity prevent law enforcement from being effective peacekeepers and guardians of the community. Marcos reflected on his experience as the editor-in-chief of *El PM* and the lengths the government (both state and federal) will go to protect itself from negative public opinion regarding violence, crime, and

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<sup>23</sup> As reported by the El Paso Times on January 3, 2018, Juárez experienced 773 homicides in 2017, including 87 in December alone according to the daily tally recorded by television Channel 44-XHIJ. In 2016, there were 543 murders in Juárez (58 in December 2016 alone) according to the Juárez Security and Justice Board. The organization reported roughly 300 murders in 2015, 336 homicides in 2007, the year before the drug war erupted, and more than 3,000 killings in 2010. Following the publication of the article in the El Paso Times, it was reported on January 6, 2018 that at least 25 homicides had occurred between January 4 and January 5 in Juárez, including twelve homicides in the course of two hours.

impunity in Juárez. He described the reality of being a journalist in a city where information is highly censored and the frustration one feels knowing that facts are not reaching the public:

Often information is obstructed or blocked by the government, the government wants to make up figures, they want to tell you what makes them look best, especially now, the current governor, he is fighting with all media outlets... [regarding] what happened in the past, that there was a lot of insecurity, and right now there is a lot of insecurity again, especially in the highlands of Chihuahua, entire communities have been burned, narcos arrive and burn all the houses, there have been massacres that have left up to eight or 10 dead, police officers murdered. Here in Ciudad Juárez, just last month narcos killed four police officers. ...The governor was asked what he thought about the violence, what was the tactic the government was going to use to counteract this; and he said that the media has invented everything, that media didn't see anything, that the public didn't witness it, that the media was trying to use these events to heighten the newspaper's publicity. So, those are the main problems that one faces as a journalist, the cynicism of those who are at the forefront, how they say that nothing happens when they kill people every day and there are families that are left without the head of the family. And you go and ask the governor, and he cynically tells you no, that everything is being invented by the media, that everything is false. Fake news, as Trump says. (Marcos, personal interview, November 2017)

Another interview respondent, Guadalupe, similarly discussed her interaction with the Juarenses media and its highly edited version of the true context of the community. Given her organization's international reputation, she is frequently sought out by journalists who are documenting femicide. She spoke of the shift in reporting true events to a softer, published version of the woes of Juárez that were similarly discussed by other participants. She described a common sense of distrust in the media due to the silencing of talk of crime (not representing the true violent context of the city):

In fact, the media has had a very important role in the development of this public image of Juárez and wasn't allowed to show what was really going on ... I believe that within the media, there are people who are paid by the government to keep quiet, or to write what the government wants them to, and they agree to depict a clean image, one of economic prosperity, that businesses should come to invest here, that nothing bad is happening here, and that all murders that occurred here have been prosecuted. But fortunately, in recent years, this has changed a lot, our society has matured, and now we

no longer believe anything that the media publishes. (Guadalupe, personal interview, July 2016)

Guadalupe asserted that the community now is much more discerning of the media and how it reports life in Juárez; she suggested that the community is aware of the legitimate conditions of the community that the media does not report on, and that these community issues serve as catalysts for organized initiatives. Alejandra, a program manager at a local women's institute and former community organizer in the colonia Plutarco Elías Calles,<sup>24</sup> similarly reflected on this idea that Guadalupe spoke of—of Juárez's double identity; she asserted that the media presents a side of positive change while the conditions for violence in the city remain and thrive:

Well, the media portrays Juárez as, I would say, like two twin cities; On the one hand, the media portrays a reality of Juárez that has changed ... that we have received support, the city is safer, there aren't kidnappings anymore, there is no crime, that is one image of the city; But the other image of the city, the real one, the Juárez that exists in the *colonias*, that hasn't changed at all. I can tell you that just like in the years when I worked with kids in the dangerous areas of the city, when drugs were being moved through the neighborhoods, when there was crime, it's still happening just as it was and has not changed, all the government wanted was that the media portray a clean image. It's like when you clean your house and don't dust under the furniture, you just clean the surface and it looks clean. That is what we survived during the violence, it was a process of social cleansing, and many young people were killed just because they were young, just because they were migrants, because they were poor. So, what the media did was say that everything was fine in order to clean up the city's image, but really, the lack of political and social development tells us a different story. The city is not well, it will continue to decline if we continue with the same corrupt practices, if we as citizens continue to allow the authorities (...), if we as responsible citizens we do not do our job, migrants will continue to move here and the city will not give them the infrastructure and resources they need, the warm reception they deserve, and if we do not respect their human rights, the context of Juárez will continue as such or get worse. (Alejandra, personal interview, June 2016)

Similarly, Fernando, one of the founders of 656 Cómics, spoke of the mixed representation of violence in the media: "I think the media has their gig, and their job is to sell tragedy. It's difficult to say because the media does show many things but hides other things that

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<sup>24</sup> A marginalized and dangerous neighborhood in the city.

are even worse, but I think they play a very important role because what they publish is face of Juárez that the world sees” (Fernando, personal interview, June 2016). Roberto from 656 Cómics also reflected that talk of crime is in fact being silenced and that an alternative, sanitized reality is being projected by the media. This downplays the severity of the city’s violence and the government is encouraging the publication of this highly edited version of the social context: “The local media does talk a little bit about how Juárez really is, but they still continue to cover up the violence, for example. The violence isn’t reported on, they go with the official State government version that claims that violence is decreasing, which is not true” (Roberto, personal interview, June 2016). A sterilized version of reality—effectively the silencing of the talk of crime—is what is most often published by media in the city at the government’s willing in the post-militarization period. Freedom of the press has been systematically eliminated in Juárez, and its silence is powerful.

Human rights abuses, impunity,<sup>25</sup> and corruption increased in Ciudad Juárez during the shift to militarization and the violence, while it has waned from time to time, has found a stronghold in the border city. Therefore, journalists that challenge the corruption and violence of Juárez risk their lives in doing so. It is important to note that while the government seeks a censored published version of the social reality in Juárez, journalists that do report factual information do so at their own peril; at least 38 journalists have been murdered in Mexico since 1992 (The Committee to Protect Journalists Database). Many journalists instead often practice self-censorship to avoid violent pushback from the cartels and government. In a 2009 interview

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<sup>25</sup> In a 2016 study completed by Plan Estratégico de Juárez, A.C., a private organization dedicated to the research and analysis of civil society from a quality-of-life perspective, 24.6% of citizens responded that crimes are never prosecuted in Juárez, while 61.5% responded that crimes are only occasionally prosecuted.



with the Committee to Protect Journalists, the editor-in-chief of *El Norte de Ciudad Juárez*, Alfredo Quijano was cited saying “We have learned the lesson: to survive, we publish the minimum. We don’t investigate. Even at that, most of what we know stays in the reporter’s notebook. Being a probing reporter these days is too dangerous. Yes, you can do journalism. You can investigate. Then you can publish. But then you have to leave the country quickly” (O’Connor, 2009).

In April 2017, the newspaper *El Norte de Ciudad Juárez* permanently ceased printed publication after 27 years in circulation due to an unprecedented wave of violence against journalists (three were murdered in April 2017 alone). The most recent and well-known victim was reporter Miroslava Breach, who was in her car with her daughter when she was shot eight times outside of her home on March 23, 2017, and a note reading “for being a tattletale” was left on her body. The owner of Norte, Oscar A. Cantú Murguía, printed this on the front page of the newspaper’s last edition on April 2:

On this day, esteemed reader, I address you to report that I have made the decision to close this newspaper due to the fact that, among other things, there are neither the guarantees nor the security to exercise critical, counterbalance journalism. ... For me, a free press is a pillar of democracy. If I can no longer do the type of journalism that I want to do ... I cannot accept it anymore. Enough. (Cantú Murguía, 2017)

In a June 2017 interview with *TIME Magazine*, Cantú cited his reasoning for closing the paper after 27 years of service (whose readership had reached 35,000 daily readers) being that he could no longer guarantee the protection of those journalists in his charge whose mission was to practice critical journalism: “We have 99.95% impunity in Mexico. I realized if we keep doing what we are doing we are not going to get results. ...I closed in protest.”

Ultimately, crime and violence were found to impact community interaction and social organization. The discussion of crime has contributed to the community's culture of fear and has led to social reorganization that falls along socioeconomic lines, and space as a public good has been lost and is in the process of being recuperated. Sensationalistic journalism tactics have also perpetuated Juárez's culture of violence and fear by drawing community attention away from the causes of community violence, such as poor infrastructure, an exploitative labor market, and failing social programming. Alternatively, as described by some participants involved in community organizing or activism on a local level, the media's coverage of violence has gone through a silencing process as demanded by the government, softening the city's violent image. All these various dimensions surrounding the community's exhaustive talk of crime are fostering dialogues among engaged citizens that serve as catalysts for community initiatives that will be explored going forward. In the next chapter, I will focus on activists, activism, and the challenges they face through their repressive representation and erasure by the media. The findings of this study will demonstrate (in Chapter Four) that the violence of poverty is being addressed through works of community organizing, cultural activism, and cultural production that serve as forms of resilience and resistance.

### III. CONTEXTUALIZING ACTIVISM: THE INTERSECTION OF FEMINICIDE AND ANTI-MILITARIZATION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.” (Bishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, 1984)*

*“The women of Juárez are not just Juárez's dead. They are the world's dead, for they were killed simply because they were women. Let us all cry out: 'not one more woman assassinated, raped or even insulted!'” (Esther Chávez Cano, 2008)*

*Everything changed, life took a total turn and we had to learn many things along the way, we stumbled over many stones because we had to forge our own path. We had to knock on doors that did not open, we had to fight with corrupt authorities who tried to break us with false stories and lies, we were attacked many times from all sides. All the days of my life have been plagued by anxiety, fear, persecution, threats, terrible things. But, now that I see it from a distance, I am able to say I am thankful for everything that has happened to me, because without it, I would not be as strong as I am to keep fighting. I think it all had to happen that way to make me stronger and worthier to continue onward. All that accumulated courage resulted in many good things, many positive moments, because despite the fact that things have not changed much, we have tried our best. There have been many positive experiences and I think that above all, we had to open the way forward and we had to exhaust our options to make way for these new activists who are now fighting for these same rights, and who are now looking for a possible future through different means.  
(Guadalupe, personal interview, July 2016)*

Social justice activism in Latin America in response to unprecedented increasing levels of community violence and gendered violence has become an issue of international attention in recent years. Human rights abuses have marred the social and political history of Mexico (during the late 1960s and 1970s; the government’s response to indigenous uprisings in Chiapas and

elsewhere in the 1990s) and drew attention from foreign agencies and international governments. The election of Vicente Fox in 2000 marked the end to a seventy-year political tenure; the new administration developed a discourse of human rights transparency and an active commitment to eradicate human rights abuses that had long been tolerated by previous administrations. However, human rights abuses have persisted, but in particular the episodes of femicide specific to Ciudad Juárez have garnered more critical international attention from both foreign and domestic actors than any other violations to date.

The fieldwork case studies that were conducted for this dissertation concern works of civic engagement that seek to address both community violence and femicide (as they are inherently interrelated and cannot be analyzed independently from one another). Chapters One and Two of this study illustrate how public acts (and media's publication of these acts) of brutality and violence in Juárez during and after the militarization have come to redefine space, community relationships, and have created a pervasive culture of fear; the forms of brutality and violence discussed in the previous chapters were that of narcoviolence and the violence of poverty (that inherently contribute to one another). That said, gender-based violence in Ciudad Juárez has reached epidemic proportions, a species of violence that can be classified as a predatory type of violence that concurrently manifests alongside narcoviolence (a type of extreme, public cruelty that most often eclipses femicide in print media as discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation), and from which women or people that identify as women<sup>26</sup> cannot escape. I consider it profoundly necessary to differentiate between the two phenomena, as both forms of violence are driven by very different—yet intersecting—forces and both are sources of

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<sup>26</sup> By “women” I refer to cis, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and intersex/gender fluid women.

inspiration for community civic engagement. In this chapter, I will first explore the culture of machismo and normalized gender-based violence in Ciudad Juárez that has led to the city's infamous reputation as "the femicide capital of the world" within the international community. In particular, I will focus on the female activists I collaborated with in this study and will utilize their stories and experiences to then address and problematize large-scale activism, the role of the activist and activism's representation in the media, and how women in the community are using personal trauma as inspiration for community work.

It can be argued that women as victims of violence, exploitation, and oppression is an enduring trope central to the history of Latin America and every other geopolitical space. The violent use and sexual exploitation of the female body as an instrument for political leverage emerged as a common practice in colonial control, in coup d'états, and continues to thrive within a contemporary context rooted in globalization. Jean Franco discusses the victimization of the female body in Latin America in *Cruel Modernity* (2013) and traces its roots from the colonial period through today; the systematic rape of indigenous women by the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores served as symbolic acts of violence, misogyny, machismo, and the conquest of the female body, representing the total subjugation of a culture and the dramatic end of an empire. Franco effectively demonstrates how the violent physical conquest of women has manifested time and again throughout history as a violent trope in the cases of civil war, political upheaval, and social unrest. Ileana Rodríguez (*Liberalism at Its Limits: Crime and Terror in the Latin American Cultural Text*, 2009), referring to recent regional violence, argues that "sexual crimes are a social warning to everyone, an act of power, and discipline, a sign of masculine, brutal, natural, social and political power, and an invasion of the public space—when not a

complete takeover” (Rodríguez 2009, p. 170).<sup>27</sup> In any context, the acts of assault and rape serves as performances of perverse masculinity, and they are utilized as calculated tools to terrorize and incite fear in a physically weaker victim. Rape is an act of torture (as defined by the UN Human Rights Committee, Franco 2013) and psychological and emotional homicide; after surviving the brutality of sexual violence, many victims experience enduring effects from their trauma.

The genesis of femicide in Ciudad Juárez cannot be traced to a single occurrence or case, and activism organized in protest has gradually increased over time. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Juarese femicide scholar, Julia Monárrez Fragoso, asserts that assigning a contrived date to the first case of documented femicide is an arbitrary exercise in futility, as Driver, in an analysis of Monárrez Fragoso’s work asserts that it “ignores the deep roots of the problem of violence against women and the lack of institutional rights afforded to them to them, which has led to the escalation of femicide in Juárez. Perhaps hundreds of impoverished young women, perhaps thousands, have been victims of femicide since the early 1990s<sup>28</sup>” (Driver 2015, p. 5). There has been much discussion concerning terminology employed to describe the systematic murder of women in the global community. Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano utilize the term “femicide” in the title of their book, *Terrorizing Women: Femicide*

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<sup>27</sup> In the April 5, 2019 New York Times article “Someone is Always Trying to Kill You,” journalist Sonia Nazario reports on femicides in Choloma, Honduras, asserting that “It’s about machismo — the culture of which goes back to colonial times, when conquering Spaniards came without wives and treated the indigenous like slaves. Today, in a world ruled by gangs and narco groups, it’s about engendering maximum terror in your enemies, and you do that by showing how macabre you can be in the way you torture or kill.”

<sup>28</sup> In *Sistema de Información Geográfica de la Violencia en el municipio de Juárez, Chihuahua: Geo-referenciación y su comportamiento espacial en el contexto urbano y rural* (SIGVIDA) (2010), data gathered by Cevera and Monárrez Fragoso demonstrates that “Femicide victims begin to accumulate in greater numbers in the age group from 15 to 19 years old” (p. 9).

*in the Américas* (2010), and they necessarily differentiate between the concepts of *femicide* (the murder of women) and *feminicide* (the murder of women because of their gender and perceived inherent inferiority)<sup>29</sup>. They argue that gender-based murder is both “public and private, implicating both the state (directly or indirectly) and individual perpetrators (private or state actors) ...[feminicide] encompasses systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence...[a] systemic violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities” (p. 5). They assert that this complex and multifaceted form of violence confirms and perpetuates the non-citizen status of the poor migrant mestiza—a figure to which scholar Melissa W. Wright (2006) attributes the name “the disposable Third World woman”—a woman that by relocating to the NAFTA corridor to work in a maquiladora<sup>30</sup> effectively disrupts the gendered division of

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<sup>29</sup> In an interview with Alice Driver, Cynthia Bejarano discusses the misuse of the two terms in certain contexts or works of cultural production. She contended “Everyone has a different interpretation of what the term means. I think the most important thing is to think about the term as it has evolved. People who haven’t been immersed in the discourse of *femicide* or *feminicide* haven’t understood the evolution of the term and how scholars and academicians or activists have come to use the term. Unless you’re fully immersed in the issue, perhaps these individuals [who fail to see the murder of women as a physical manifestation of gender inequality, and therefore choose to use the term *femicide*] are coming at it from the periphery of either the movement or their involvement” (Driver, 76). Therefore, in the context of this dissertation, I choose to utilize the term “feminicide.”

<sup>30</sup> Melissa W. Wright (*Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, 2006) explores the figure of a marginalized woman situated in the Global South whose body is created and subjugated by the power of capitalism. This woman is “mythic” in the sense that she defies the limits of the human experience and her value is created through a specific economic discourse as a cog in the wheel of the capitalist machine. Wright explores how transnational capitalism seeks to extract value from an inherently unvalued body and how capitalism’s global expansion mandates the exploitation of women of the Global South. Jonathon Friedman (“Globalization, Dis-integration, Re-organization: The Transformations of Violence”) discusses the emergence of new micro-classes through the practices of globalization and neoliberalism, and Wright echoes this when discussing the role of the maquila worker and discipline’s function as a mechanism of social control. A form of factory discipline that Wright explores is her concept of the “factory family unit” with masculine “manager” fathers and the micro-class of docile bodies comprised by female factory line “daughters.” As Wright’s analysis suggests, women operate within the maquila model of patriarchal control regardless of the factory; the average duration at a maquila is two years, due to repeated corporeal movements, the certain part of the body of a female

labor and economic earning power in her relationship, but in doing so suffers the structural violence of a globalized economy.

Acts of violence, brutality, and perverse masculinity against Juarese women are most often committed in anonymity, with impunity, and signal the rule of law of the shadow state (Bejarano and Fregoso, 2010, p. 32). Franco asserts that the death of lower-class mestiza women not only confirms masculine domination and reaffirms unequal class assignments, but it also publicizes the lawless nature of Juárez and total impunity of the unknown perpetrators to the community (Franco, 2013, p. 222). Similarly, Monárrez Fragoso (2003) elaborates on this definition and the Mexican State's inaction, arguing that femicide "compromises a progression of violent acts that range from emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse through battery, torture, rape, prostitution, sexual assault, child abuse, female infanticide, genital mutilation, and domestic violence, as well as all policies that lead to the deaths of women, tolerated by the state" (p. 157).

When considering the State's complicity concerning the complicated context of Ciudad Juárez and the disproportionate numbers of femicide cases that occur there, Franco cites the scholarship of Laura Rita Segato ("Territory, Sovereignty, and Crimes of the Second State", 2010; "La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez: Territorio, soberanía y crímenes de Segundo Estado, 2008), who argues that the Juárez murders are "expressions of a zeitgeist we have not acknowledged" (Franco, 2013, p. 221): "The humble deaths of Juárez...awaken us and leads us to a more lucid reading of the changes that the world is experiencing in our time, as it becomes every moment more inhospitable and terrifying"

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maquiladora worker begin to physically deteriorate. She will then seek employment at another factory and the cycle perpetuates until her whole body—her only perceived market commodity—is rendered unusable and devoid of value.

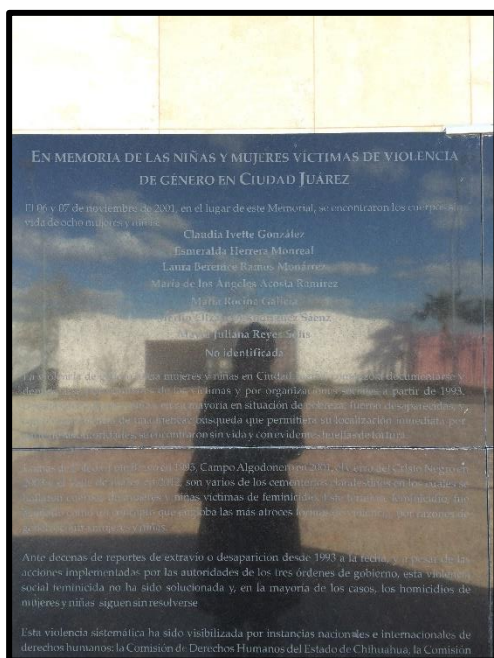
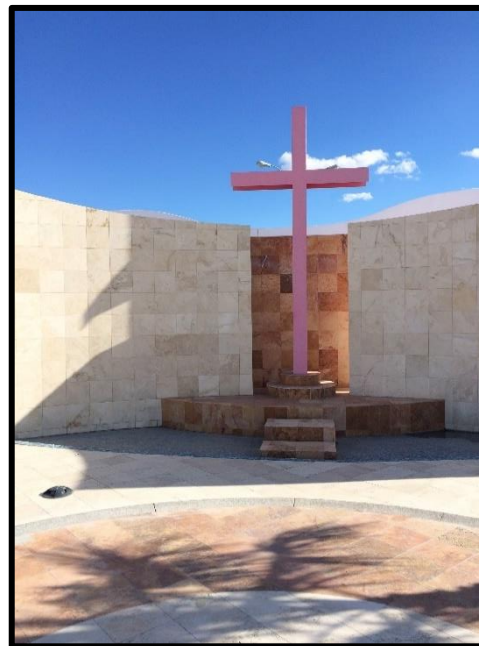


(Segato, 2010, p. 88). Segato echoes the musings central to Bolaño's *2666* in that uneven development generated by global modernity has created social polarities in which new species of perverse and extreme violence proliferate all aspects of life and are carried out without consequence. She draws a correlation between death and the unregulated accumulation of neoliberal capital, its concentration that falls along class lines, and the sacrifice of the poor mestiza migrant woman whose downfall occurs at the intersection "where the monetary and symbolic economies, the control of resources and the power of death are articulated" (p.79), whose death reaffirms masculine subjectivity and requires repeated confirmation (Segato, 2008). Franco suggests that femicide serves an act of social sovereignty executed upon seemingly anonymous bodies (given the sheer numbers of feminicides, victims' identities blend together), that it is expressive and performative in nature, and that ends in the "psychological and moral" decimation of the victim. In sum, femicide is a performative exhibition of gender power that requires an audience (p. 222). Concerning this global human rights issue of gender-based violence, UN Women and the United Nations Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean cite that by 2015, "16 countries in Latin America had modified their laws to include a specific type of crime referring to the murder of women under the name of femicide or femicide, or as an aggravating circumstance of homicide" (July 2015)<sup>31</sup>. Specifically, the case of Campo Algodonero<sup>32</sup> in Ciudad Juárez, an abandoned cotton field located at the intersection

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<sup>31</sup> It is clear that femicide affects other communities in the region and globally; however, the frequency of episodes of femicide in Juárez is undeniably disproportionate when considered within a larger context. Between 2007 and 2015, femicide legislation was enacted in the following countries: Costa Rica (2007); Guatemala (2008); Chile (2010); El Salvador (2010); Mexico (2012); Nicaragua (2012); Bolivia (2013); Honduras (2013); Panama (2013); Peru (2013); Dominican Republic (2014); Ecuador (2014); Brazil (2015); Colombia (2015). Venezuela (2007) and Argentina (2012) adopted femicide legislation under the designation "aggravated homicide."

of Avenida Ejército Nacional and Avenida Paseo de la Victoria on the eastern edge of the city where the bodies of eight murdered women and girls were discovered in 2001, drew international attention to the social and cultural plague of pandemic proportions concerning gender-based violence in the Juarenses community. After years of denial, inefficacy, and negligence by the Mexican State, activists and families of three of the victims (Claudia Ivette González, Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez, and Esmeralda Herrera Monreal) of the Campo Algodonero feminicides presented the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (case is known as *González et al. v. Mexico*). The historical significance of the case cannot be understated, as it marked the first time in which victims' identities were used on a national scale to successfully promote legislative systemic change (victims often remain anonymous after death in the press). In December 2009, the Court ruled in favor of the victims, and the Mexican State was required to comply with a set of stipulations that would honor the victims and sought to prevent future feminicides in the community. This legal and symbolic victory ushered in a new wave of activism in Juárez that will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.



*Memorial monument for victims of femicide. Campo Algodonero. First fieldwork trip. January 2016.*

### ***3.1 FEMINICIDE & THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF GENDERED NORMS OF BEHAVIOR: IS VIOLENT MACHISMO AN EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL CULTURE?***

Cultural norms and patterns of violence against women deserve exploration when considering the case of Ciudad Juárez and the scores of documented episodes of femicide. The Pan

American Health Organization<sup>33</sup> 2013 report *Prevention of Gender-based Violence in Ciudad Juárez: Results and Lessons Learned* cites Estela Serret's "Discriminación de género: las inconsecuencias de la democracia" (2008) as a point of departure from which interpersonal patterns of violence and their implications are evaluated from a gendered perspective: "Gender norms have been cultivated that establish a hierarchical and stratified social order, where what is male is the parameter of explanation and the measure of things and what is female is subordinated: the social roles of women, the ways in which they are imagined and represented, have not included viewing them in these societies. No wonder the terms that designate men as a group is also used to designate humans as a group. For all societies, man is the protagonist, he is the maker of culture" (PAHO, 2013, p. 3). PAHO's research dissects interrelationship inequalities and assesses that not only is the unequal status in women in relationships (familial, intimate, work, etc.) a human rights issue but also a public health issue, as negative impacts on quality of life (such as emotional, physical, psychological violence or trauma, for example) are impactful determinants in health outcomes (PAHO, 2013).

The intersection of widely accepted unequal binary gender roles in male-female relationships and a machista culture of misogyny seemingly legitimizes the use of violence against intimate female partners and can be argued to be the root cause of the domestic violence and femicide epidemics in Ciudad Juárez. From a historical perspective, misogyny as an enduring cultural trope and practice in Mexico can be traced to 15<sup>th</sup> century documentation of Cortés' interpreter, La Malinche, as she betrayed her people and culture to further promote the project of the Spanish conquest. Octavio Paz considers the conquest, colonialism, violence, and gender roles in "The Sons of La Malinche" in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), portraying la

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<sup>33</sup> A regional office of the World Health Organization

Malinche as a traitor of culture and country as he explores the etymology of the expression *la chingada*. Paz asserts that the popular saying is imbued with historical significance, aggression, physical pain, and sexual violation: “The *chingón* is the *macho*, the male; he rips open *la chingada*, the female, who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world...in a relationship determined by the cynical power of the first and the impotence of the second” (p. 77). He argues that men in Mexico are *hijos de la chingada* and are born with an inherited subconscious bitterness toward women, including himself in the collective with his statement: “We are alone. Solitude...the source of anxiety, begins on the day *we* are deprived of maternal protection...these feelings are common to all men” (p. 80; emphasis added). His reflection on contemporary misogyny rooted in history depicts anguished men negotiating for and justifying the abuse of women, men that are born into a position of forever being haunted by the betrayal and abandonment by *la Malinche*, against whom they harbor subconscious resentment, demand submission, and seek revenge.

Roger Bartra’s *The Cage of Melancholy* (1992) similarly considers the historical significance of the identity of *La Malinche* and her enduring impact on contemporary gender constructions, positioning the infamous indigenous traitor figure against her mythical and venerable counterpart and symbol of *mexicanidad*, the Catholic figure of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* (Staudt, 2008, p. 36). He explores the identities of both mythical women and suggests that the archetypical Mexican woman is a heterogenous blend of both identities in opposition, “*la Chingalupe*.”

The cult of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* is seen as a deep expression of man’s guilt, whereby he begs for forgiveness from the woman he himself has betrayed and abandoned; love for the virgin runs parallel with worship of the mother, now institutionalized but practiced only under certain circumstances and on special occasions. But Mexican men know that woman (his mother, lover, wife) has been raped by the *macho* conquistador, and he suspects that she has enjoyed and even desired the rape. For this reason, he exerts a sort

of vengeful domination over his wife and expects total self-sacrifice from her. Thus, arises a typical sado-masochistic relationship. (Bartra, 1992, p. 150)

Bartra reflects on the possible damaging effects national mythmaking—carried out by intellectual elites and perpetuated by civil society—can have on the conception of what is considered to be national identity or quality that a culture embodies and practices. In Kathleen Staudt's 2008 analysis of Bartra's work in *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez*, she asserts that national myths often serve as subconscious justifications for patterns of behavior. She contends that the commonplace experience of physical and sexual violence directed at women in Mexico in some part can be attributed to these over-generalizing myths that serve as the basis of a collective cultural identity that “not only portray men as brutes but women as masochists” (p. 37). Specifically, women that are victims of femicide are often unjustly criminalized and labeled as hypersexual and/or sex workers, thus deserving a violent death that resulted from their chosen profession that pushes back against normalized gender role; as Driver contends, “To participate in sex work as a woman is seemingly, according to public discourse, equally as offensive as or more offensive than the rape or murder of a woman” (p. 8). Similarly, Monárrez Fragoso (2009) explores the sexual politics of unequal gender dynamics and violence and its discourse as tools of patriarchal control through a Foucauldian lens in *Trama de una injusticia*, asserting that opposing gender binaries are to blame for femicide, particularly women who are considered to have failed in their submissive role in relationships: “The subject/body, in a binary, structure that crosses society and is not neutral, for Foucault, is always an opponent to someone. This is why there are two groups, two categories of individuals: men and women. In this dichotomy, the victims of sexual systemic femicide are always analyzed and evaluated in relation to their behavior and to what degree it has moved away from the objectification of the feminine ideal or in how they did not fulfill the assigned

gender role” (p. 206). It is true that patterns of interpersonal gender-based violence and the epidemic of femicide cannot be wholly attributed to cultural myths that inform national identity that ultimately determine behavior. However, I argue that there is power in cross-generational misogyny and/or patterns of abuse as a learned behavior that reinforce unequal gender roles and normalized violence against women.

These discussions of gender roles rooted in cultural history and the seemingly justified unequal binaries in heteronormative relationships were represented and unpacked in Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* (2004). I would be remiss not to mention “The Part about the Crimes” as a contemporary thematic departure from the works of Paz and Bartra that problematizes the species of normalized gender-based murder specific to Ciudad Juárez by effectively bridging fiction and reality (a literary work that also drew international attention to the issue of femicide). Sol Peláez (“Counting Violence: Roberto Bolaño and *2666*,” 2014) examines the narrative’s socio-literary project of exposing—through the critical narration of different species of violence—that horror and violence are shared globally in many dissimilar contexts, and that readers must examine their role in violence by consuming it for entertainment.<sup>34</sup> She asserts that *2666* “challenges language (and its users) with the ethical dilemma of accounting for violence... [and] explores how the enjoyment of language and the reification that language entails pervade the telling and reading of violence, questioning the position of a morally alert critic, [thus locating] language at the intersection of responsibility and complicity, leaving no possible external position from violence and language” (p. 30). Bolaño uses the Juarese femicides as the ultimate example of social and moral decay that is specific to our contemporary context.

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<sup>34</sup> This theme of the consumption of violence, however in the context of the media, was discussed in Chapter Two.

The five-part novel ties back to one common geographic space where the disastrous intersection of unregulated transnational capital, neoliberal development, and economic violence meet, a city described in the novel as “equal parts lost cemetery and a garbage dump” (Bolaño 2004, p. 362): the Mexican border town of Santa Teresa, the spectral presence of Ciudad Juárez. The narrator characterizes the citizens of Santa Teresa as “more or less dead:” they inhabit a space between life and death because of their socioeconomic positioning and the violence of poverty they must endure, they are systematically denied protection and rights of citizenship by the State, and they are among the thousands of unidentified victims of uninvestigated crimes that seemingly blend together due to similar profiles (of both the victims and the crimes) (Driver, 2015, p. 66). Bolaño frankly considers the identity of the Juarese femicide victim and the crimes committed against her body, rather than justifying culturally normalized, socially violent behavior (as do Paz and Batra) and arguing for her seemingly complicit role in her own death as simply existing as a woman (or young girl in some cases).

Given the nature of the novel—a fictional, chronotopic narrative that incorporates both real events and real spaces—the reader vacillates between reality and fantasy, curiosity and disbelief. Arguably the most impactful section of the novel, Bolaño chronicles 108 authentic femicide episodes taken from Juárez that took place between 1993-1997 (the majority of the victims are maquiladora workers or are daughters of factory workers) in Part Four and presents the State’s tangible apathy and inefficacy surrounding the epidemic of violence against women. While the narrator of *2666* lacks affective involvement and evokes sensations of disquieting frankness and emotional distance when describing the violent accounts (which read like crime scene reports or forensic case filings), Bolaño’s literary project offers an unconventional yet powerful tribute to victims that has not been seen before:



That same month of November 1994, the partially charred body of Silvana Pérez Arjona was found in a vacant lot. She was fifteen and thin, dark-skinned, five foot three. Her black hair fell below her shoulders, although when she was found half her hair was scorched off. The body was discovered by some women from Colonia Las Flores who had hung their washing on the edge of the lot, and it was they who called the Red Cross. When the ambulance arrived, the older man, the ambulance driver, asked the women and onlookers milling around the body if anyone knew the dead woman. Some filed by, gazed at her face, and shook their heads. No one knew her. ...According to the medical examiner, the girl had been raped. Two direct stab wounds to the heart were the cause of death. The killer had tried to burn the body to erase his tracks, but apparently he was a fuckup or else someone had sold him water for gasoline or he'd lost his nerve. The next day it was learned that the dead girl was Silvana Pérez Arjona, a machine operator at the maquiladora in the General Sepúlveda industrial park, not far from where the body had been found. (p. 425-6)

Laura Barberán Reinares ruminates on this disquieting aesthetic technique Bolaño employs in "Globalized Philomels: State, Patriarchy, Transnational Capital, and the Femicides on the US-Mexican Border in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*" (2010), asserting that the lack of personal narrative detail of victims creates a specific effect in Bolaño's reader: "Unlike the majority of literary works representing complex subjects of rape, torture, and murder, here the author offers a new way of seeing these abducted women...whom we encounter only as anonymous mutilated bodies once they have already been kidnapped, raped, and killed" (p. 56). The narrative voice imbues the text with a type of emotional paralysis through the use of disengaged language that evokes feelings of complicity and guilt in Bolaño's audience, effectively problematizing the notion of reading for entertainment given the horrific nature of the novel's content. He offers scant outlines of the victims' lives and does not elaborate on many personal details that would offer the reader an emotional attachment to their identities. Instead, the sheer number of murdered women chronicled in the novel—defined by both their anonymity and the perverse forms of violence that their bodies sustained in death—demands that the reader sit with both their abjection and disgust at the true events Bolaño exposes, as well as their own unease and guilt having consumed the reported deaths of real women as a form of entertainment.

Peruvian-Mexican novelist Mario Bellatin reflected on the sociocultural and political importance of *2666* in an October 2012 interview.<sup>35</sup> He spoke of the real-life application of Bolaño's novel, and how it has shed light on the epidemic of femicide, serves as a tribute to otherwise forgotten and anonymized femicide victims, and well as decriminalizes victims who are often misrepresented in the media: "I feel like this is the only tribute that the victims have received, the dead women of Juárez, especially in the section of *2666* where he gives a body and a name to these anonymous dead. Anonymity is something frightening, something that goes beyond death. The [dead] are always statistics and numbers...[The] government has recently tried to criminalize all victims,<sup>36</sup> to say that aside from being killed, they were criminals, which is their [the government's] ultimate strategy, as if it is okay that they died because they were engaged in some form of illegal activity" (Bellatin, 2012). The last case described in "The Part About the Crimes" effectively represents the unfair criminalization of victims and their justified deaths; "The victim, according to medical examiners, had been dead for a long time. ...She was naked, but a pair of good-quality leather high heels were found in [a] bag, which led police to think she might be a whore. Some white thong panties were also found. [The case was] closed after three days of halfhearted investigations" (Bolaño, 2004, 632-3).

The theme of femicide in works of cultural production and the ethics regarding its seemingly increasing commercialization emerged in interview responses collected for this study. "Femicide victims and their families have been marked by a pervasive public discourse about female sexuality, a discourse that has reappeared in many works of cultural production" A

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<sup>35</sup> Personal interview with Alice Driver, October 4, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> An example of this unjust criminalization of non-femicide victims was discussed in Chapter Two in the case of the teenage male victims of Villas de Salvárcar massacre on January 30, 2010.

number of participants in this study reflected that 2666 (as well as Hollywood films such as *Borderland*,<sup>37</sup> *The Virgin of Juárez*,<sup>38</sup> and *Sicario*<sup>39</sup>) drew international attention to the epidemics of both gender-based violence and narcoviolence that the city continues to endure, and yet it is difficult for the community to see *las muertas de Juárez* and rampant violence utilized as tropes for mass cultural consumption and monetary gain. The 2005 Associated Press article<sup>40</sup> “Many films, no justice in unsolved murders of Juárez women” explored Juarese public opinion regarding films that centered around the Juárez feminicides; families of victims of femicide were interviewed for the article and opinions ranged from anger to hope when considering the films’ overall projects:

“Anyone thinks they can film a movie or make a song or a soap opera about our daughters,” said Rosaura Montanez, whose 19-year-old daughter was kidnapped after leaving a friend’s home, raped and killed in 1995. “It seems our daughters died so these people would have material for their songs and movies. It’s just not fair.” But not all the victims’ relatives are critical of the attention. Paula Flores, whose 17-year-old daughter was killed in 1998, has always talked to anyone who wants to hear about her plight in hopes that the attention will force authorities to act. “I’m for [the films] if they are done with respect toward our daughters and they can help us with our demand for justice,” she said. “What I want is for the whole world to know that we live in impunity, in a city without law.” (Olga R. Rodriguez)<sup>41</sup>

I argue it is important to consider the ethics of representation and aesthetics when utilizing graphic violence in cultural production. When considering the context of Juárez as a site of impunity and continued suffering, perhaps a balance can be negotiated between

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<sup>37</sup> 2006; starring Jennifer Lopez, Martin Sheen, and Antonio Banderas

<sup>38</sup> 2006; starring Minnie Driver

<sup>39</sup> 2015; starring Emily Blunt, Benicio del Toro, and Josh Brolin

<sup>40</sup> The article was published after filming began for *Bordertown* in New Mexico.

<sup>41</sup> The article also cites then-Ciudad Juarez Mayor Héctor Murguía Lardizábal’s opinion (2004-2007, 2010-2013) that films would likely fail to accurately represent life in the borderland city and would further tarnish the city’s image: “Some people like to focus on yellow journalism, but it’s not right that they only talk about this tragedy and not show the real face of Juárez” (Gonzalez).

descriptions of gratuitous violence and death and the lives and experiences the victims lived (Driver 2015, p. 73). Without such a balance that emphasizes the humanity of the Other (Driver, 2015, p. 73)—the “framing of images” as Judith Butler describes in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004)— certain human lives are rendered unworthy of grief or abjection, and through “providing no image, no name, no narrative, ...there never was a life, and there was never a death” (p. 146). Works of cultural production that synthesize femicide victims down to simply anonymous bodies and the graphic descriptions of the violence they suffered leads to what Butler describes as “the derealization of loss.” By using the image of a death without framing its life removes its humanity, becoming a disembodied *thing* to consume. Butler explains that this “derealization of loss—the insensitivity to human suffering and death—becomes the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished. This derealization takes place neither inside nor outside the image, but through the very framing by which the image is contained” (p. 148).

Interview responses for this study revealed that Bolaño’s work, as well as other works of cultural production that center around the feminicides and narcoviolence in Ciudad Juárez are seen as exploitative and one dimensional. It was argued that victims’ deaths and suffering have been utilized for personal and professional gain and fail to accurately represent the multidimensional reality of life in the city. Alice Driver (2015) argues that “Femicide victims and their families have been [unfairly] marked by a pervasive public discourse about female sexuality, a discourse that has reappeared in many works of cultural

production”<sup>42</sup> (p. 8), and interview respondents contended that for many readers, Bolaño’s novel is their only exposure to life in the borderland. In the epilogue to *2666*,<sup>43</sup> Ignacio Echevarría (Bolaño’s friend and former literary executor) cites notes from Bolaño’s literary project that reveals the world devolving into madness and being pulled into a black hole, a metaphor that Bolaño refers to throughout the text. Echevarría refers to Santa Teresa—the spectral presence of Ciudad Juárez in the novel—as ground zero, a space of convergence for the many horrors Bolaño presents in *2666*:

En una de sus abundantes notas relativas a *2666* Bolaño señala la existencia en la obra de un “centro oculto” que se escondería debajo de lo que cabe considerar, por así decirlo, su “centro físico.” Hay razones para pensar que ese centro físico sería la ciudad de Santa Teresa, fiel trasunto de Ciudad Juárez, en la frontera de México con los Estados Unidos. Allí convergen, al cabo, las cinco partes de la novela; allí tienen lugar los crímenes que configuran su impresionante telón de fondo (y de los que, en un pasaje de la novela, dice un personaje que “en ellos se esconde el secreto del mundo”). (Echevarría, 2004, pg. 1123)

Study participant Silvia, a literature professor and community organizer who co-founded la Biblioteca Independiente la Ma’Juana, argued that while *2666* is a seminal example of literary innovation in many respects, Bolaño’s own lack of authentic on-the-ground in the physical geographic space of Juárez limited his ability to represent Juárez’s complicated and multidimensional reality for his audience, calling into question the ethics of representation in cultural production: “I have read Bolaño, I think he has many interesting things to say [in *2666*], but it seems to me that people who read Bolaño think they know Ciudad Juárez, and the problem

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<sup>42</sup> Other examples of works of literary cultural production with less international reach than *2666* are *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (Charles Bowden, 1998), *Huesos en el desierto* (Sergio González Rodríguez, 2002), and *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (Alicia Gaspar de Alba, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Echevarría refers to the title of Bolaño’s novel in its prologue: “Y está luego el título. Esa cifra enigmática, 2666—una fecha, en realidad—que actúa como punto de fuga en el que se ordenan las diferentes partes de la novela. Sin este punto de fuga, la perspectiva del conjunto quedaría coja, irresuelta, suspendida en la nada” (1123).

is that Bolaño never came to Ciudad Juárez, and what he describes resembles or is similar to what we experience here, because he used documented cases, because he was lent material to work off of and that's fine, he did an extraordinary job, but if someone really wants to write about Juárez, he has to *come* to Juárez" (Silvia, personal interview, June 2016, emphasis added). For community outsiders, the infamous reputation of Juárez precedes itself; the international journalism community has constructed and perpetuated an unjustly biased violent and narco-driven identity for which the city is now known. Similarly, interpretations of Ciudad Juárez in works of cultural production do not fully represent the city's context; feminicides and cartel violence manifest as exhausted tropes that fail to frame and therefore dehumanize real victims of violence. Study participants reinforced Silvia's assertion that to truly know Juárez, its nuances, and its idiosyncrasies, one must experience the geopolitical space first-hand; only then can city's publicized infamous identity dissolve away, revealing acts of community engagement and active civic participation that attempt to reclaim the community's identity and construct new ideological narratives of nonviolence and equality.

### *3.2 "WE MUST START IT WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG, ONLY THEN DO WE HAVE A CHANCE FOR CHANGE:" ERRADICATING MACHISMO THROUGH IDEOLOGICAL & CULTURAL RESTRUCTURING*

The epidemic of femicide has continued to intensify in Juárez (as well as the State's apathy concerning the gravity of the situation); this has opened up a discussion drawing on many different voices across the sociopolitical and cultural landscape as how to end culturally normalized/accepted behaviors of gender-based violence. Anthropologist, author of *Los*

*cautiverios de las mujeres: madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas* (1990),<sup>44</sup> and Mexican Federal Deputy Marcela Lagarde<sup>45</sup> publicly condemned normalized gender-based violence and the criminalization of femicide victims. She petitioned her colleagues to confront the patriarchal institutions, the unjust gendered structures in place, and the patterns of everyday behavior that reinforce gender biases and inequalities in her March 2014 Senate address, arguing that

“It is time to say it, we must not only change women, we also need men to change substantially, change our culture by eliminating this alienating gender discrimination.” She highlighted the positive social and political contributions of feminist ideology: “The great contribution of feminism to modernity is the political criticism of structural patriarchy, the androcentrism, the inequality that it generates, the structural discrimination against androcentrism, the inequality that they generate, the discrimination that in turn causes violence, the accumulation of injustices that generate oppressive patriarchal societies like ours. ...[F]eminism has always proposed alternatives to this world of women's exclusion, of men's supremacism, of various oppressions, of gender discrimination” (Lagarde, 2014).

Study participant Alejandra reinforced Lagarde's agenda and reflected in our interview on the different manifestations of deep-seeded machismo and the structural violence against women in Juárez on a smaller, everyday scale. A community organizer, feminist singer-songwriter, and member of a punk rock metal band, Alejandra's lyrics address problematic social themes that affect Juarese women and the community at-large. She elaborated on the need for creating alternative discourses that break the cycle of normalized gender-based violence and that do not reinforce gender inequalities:

The issue of violence against women is something that is present in the community environment, that nobody speaks of, but everyone knows it happens. Machismo, sexism,

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<sup>44</sup> Study participant, Silvia, reflected that “*The captives of women* speaks to us of how the patriarchal system frames us in a series of limitations, of discriminations, of restraints, of lack of recognition, of lack of opportunities, and we as women have to break free from those captives to find freedom, but a freedom linked to the ethics of pleasure” (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Lagarde was the first to introduce the term “femicide” to audiences in Latin America.

homophobia, racism are very common in everyday language here, they are discourses that are reproduced in practice, and in schools, I saw this working in schools here, and I realized that if this violence is taught in schools, then what can we expect from a child in school if their environment—both structural and familiar—is violent? (Alejandra, personal interview, July 2016)

Alejandra asserted that gender inequality is ingrained in everyday life and everyday experiences in the community concerning machismo, interfamilial, and gender-based violence. Children are exposed to gender inequality in both the private and public spheres at a young age, which contributes to the perpetuation of gendered violence and bias. This study considers four community initiatives<sup>46</sup> that seek to carry out this mission of shifting the community's violent identity through the creation of non-violent discourses and works of cultural production that will be later explored and evaluated in Chapter Four.

Similarly, other respondents confirmed Alejandra's assessment of the Juarenses reality, adding that the normative culture of machismo, interpersonal violence, and misogyny are compounded by the violence of poverty, which intensifies violence against women. When asked to consider why high numbers of feminicides are more particular to Ciudad Juárez than other areas of Mexico, Gabriela, a feminicide expert and human rights defender at a local non-profit organization, posited that there is an intersection of complex and multidimensional factors at play, including Wright's assertion of the disrupted dynamic of gender-based earning power:

Obviously there is a context and background of machismo in this place, in this city. There are several factors and we have to consider them together to fully understand the complexity of Juárez, the fact that we are a border city is a very important factor that should not be overlooked. There is a precariousness to life here and employment insecurity despite the fact that the city has received great financial investments in the form of industrial development, with the whole maquiladora network, the integration of these factories, of these transnational companies that have settled here, and all that started decades ago, since the sixties. The installation of the maquiladora industry here did not invest in the community, there has been no respect for labor rights, nor has it seen the

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<sup>46</sup> 656 Cómics Collective, La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente La Ma'Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta.



need to improve the economic and social conditions of the workers, who are mostly women, and it endangers the lives of those who participate in it, the lack of access to decent wages means that what you earn will never get you out of poverty. You have the industrial business side of life here, on the one hand, which is very strong, but I can tell you that there has been no investment in urban development, in improving the conditions of communities, there are things that would seem so simple to provide such as drinking water, electricity in the community, and many people are living in situations of intense poverty that runs through the community and social life here in Juárez. Due to the very situation of being a border city, there is finally the issue of migration and especially of women who come to join the maquiladora industry, many of these women who come from the south and come here to the city and start earning money, that allows them to finally experience empowerment, but we really need to analyze *what is meant when we say empowerment ?*, because they are ultimately in a situation of exploitation, they are still suffering unequal power dynamics with their romantic partners. There are people who say that the fact that women have jobs and men do not, has been one of the main causes of murders of women. . . . Men feel devalued, they see their masculinity minimized, and I do believe that there is some of that at play, but it is not the only reason, there are many other factors and we cannot focus only on that part. The root cause lies in the socioeconomic situation and cultural expectations that we have constructed of what a woman should be. (Gabriela, personal interview, August 2016).

Interview respondents highlighted the complicated intersection of interrelated factors—narcocrime, poverty, machismo, migration to the NAFTA corridor, among others—that have led to Ciudad Juárez’s infamous identity as a geopolitical space in which women are victimized and targeted simply for existing as women (or presenting as women). A June 2004 presentation *Informe de gestión (noviembre 2003-abril 2004)* included commentary and insightful analysis by special federal investigator María Guadalupe Morfín Otero (“Discurso de la Comisionada para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez,” 2004) regarding high levels of gender-based murder in Ciudad Juárez that echoed the responses of study participants. Morfín’s address cited Federal Deputy Marcela Lagarde’s February 14, 2004 commentary that publicly identified the complicity of the Mexican State, calling femicide a “crime of the State.” Morfín Otero denounced local and federal governments’ hand in the community’s femicide crisis, and criticized their lack of actionable steps taken to confront gender-based violence:

The city is a difficult space to govern. Federal agents abdicated power to organized crime decades ago. Here, crime flourished with total impunity for twenty years, fueled by the most powerful cartel in the country; the cartel's ease of operation was aided by public servants, who had in their hands the power to eradicate the source of the violence; corporations, federal and local governments were corrupted; all of these factors are inseparable components of the situation that has led to violence against women, specifically against poor women. (Morfín Otero, 2004, p. 2)

During the second phase of data collection for this study (fieldwork in Summer 2016), I witnessed and documented a State meeting that reinforced the findings of this study and respondents' opinions concerning how femicide has been handled by the government at both the local and federal levels. I attended a Ciudad Juárez Police Academy roundtable meeting regarding a proposed protocol that would dictate how police would process and report episodes of violence against women in Juárez (the title of the meeting was “La Construcción del Protocolo de Actuación Policial para la Defensa y Protección de las Mujeres Víctimas de Violencia de Género”) on June 10, 2016. Below is a firsthand account taken from my fieldnotes regarding the meeting, observations concerning the space and those in attendance, and the proposed protocol:

Sitting in the back of a conference room in the corner. There are probably 30-40 people in the room—police officers (both men and women), civilians, professionals. Nine female officers and five male officers occupy seats at tables on an elevated stage that face the audience. The others in attendance sit in two rows of horseshoe-shaped tables that face forward. Two male police officers are wearing full bulletproof body armor; all are armed with AK-47s, but none of the female officers wear body armor. The other women in attendance are from local community organizations centering on women's issues. Those that have participated in the development of this protocol: public servants (police officers), members of the academy, and social organizations. I was given a nametag and asked to register in a book. Upon entering the Academy, I noted the size of the space; the Police Academy has a large open central space where cadets were doing wrestling and self-defense drills in matching sweat suits. There were only two female cadets in the class of ~40-50 cadets. Saw a weight room to the left as we walked toward the meeting room at the back of the building. ... The majority of people at the roundtable are women, but strangely men are conducting the meeting. There is a noticeable weighty tension in the room. The female police officers are all looking at their hands, phones, or are looking skeptical. Javier, the man wearing a pink tie (appropriate for the occasion?) and is presenting the protocol, said “We would like to fly a helicopter around with two psychologists to help victims, but we don't have the money. The most important thing is

to put the protocol into action and not just put it on the shelf like what normally happens.” I wonder if the women in this room believe in this public effort or if this is just to placate public concern. Javier says, “This is an educational experience for police who are uneducated on issues of gender. Why is Mexico still using a system that doesn’t work? 20 detenidos, 100 policías. 20 detenidos, 500 policías. What we need are sufficient numbers of police that are well-trained. We don’t need more police.” Javier just asked the police officers in attendance if they could recall and comment on any of the protocol’s content and none were able—he had failed to send the protocol to them before the meeting. The room has a closed-in feeling; the floors and walls are covered in grey carpeting. The lights are fluorescent and the space lacks air circulation. Women are fanning themselves. ...A discussion has opened up about how to use justified force in defense of female victims. Javier and Alexis (a representative from a community organization) are asking for attendees to help create a conceptual framework/glossary for the protocol. They need help constructing definitions for *aggressor*, *victim*, how to *define a crime as an example of gender-based violence*. ... Javier mentioned a hypothetical situation: “si veo una muñeca enfrente de una tienda, inclinada, golpeada, etc. ¿Eso es violencia de género? No sé porque no soy experto de género.” I wonder why he is heading up this roundtable...why are two men presenting this when there are actual experts on gender in the audience that are women (or identify as women). Javier interrupted a woman who was speaking and said “Are you done? I thought you were done.” He is notably agitated and aggressive. One of the points of the protocol is to avoid categorizing what police officers are seeing at crime scenes, the need to avoid using juridical terms re: crimes. That is not a police officer’s responsibility; police officers are experts in public security, not the law. The real problem is police and their value judgments they place on crimes. Police officers are not writing crime reports because they are judging what they see unfairly in favor of the men at the crime scenes and not protecting women. And it’s costing the community many lives. The deadline for the protocol is June 15. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, June 10, 2016)

### *3.3 THE PRESSURE TO CONFRONT FEMINICIDE: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ENGAGEMENT*

It has been mentioned that The Mexican State’s tolerance of gender-based violence and femicide has been a long-enduring human rights issue around which the local and international communities have organized in recent years. When confronting a government’s human rights violations, there are two ways in which foreign, developed democracies or actors can exert pressure and influence to inform change. Alejandro Anaya Muñoz explains in “Explaining high levels of transnational pressure over Mexico: the case of the disappearances and killings of

women in Ciudad Juárez” (2011) that material pressure can be applied to an offending government by retracting trade, investments or international aid, which negatively impacts domestic and foreign economic relations and seeks to create economic pressure to manifest change (Anaya Muñoz, 2011, p. 341). Alternatively, ideational pressure is the process of public systematic shaming of a government within the context of the larger international political community in an attempt to lead the offending regime to take action. Certain mechanisms within the UN, the Organization of American States (OAS), Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch have utilized ideational pressure in explicitly and publicly condemning the gap between theory and practice concerning human rights violations and femicide in Juárez. It would seem intuitive that material pressure from developed democracies would be the fastest and more effective path to address human rights violations. That said, the United States has not employed the tactic of material pressure with Mexico; certain state and federal legislators have been fiercely critical of the plague of femicide and Mexico’s corrupt judicial system and infamous impunity. However, the source of the US’ (as well as Europe’s) ideational pressure stems from congressional or legislative actors and not the executive branch (Anaya Muñoz 2011, p. 342). Therefore, it could be argued that given the economic codependence between US and Mexico (while aware of femicide in Juárez, the US government continues to engage in NAFTA and imports goods produced or assembled in Mexico to sell in the US market, while maquiladoras create jobs for/exploit certain marginalized social groups—comprised largely of poor women—on the border), the US government has taken a more complicit position concerning the gender-based crimes in Juárez than an actively critical stance.

Cases of human rights abuses that gain effective transnational pressure and around which other networks will collaborate require certain elements to garner international support. First,

networks operate to their fullest capacity when they are “dense” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 28); their density is dependent on the number of civil society networks<sup>47</sup> involved and their access and ability to disseminate legitimate information collected on the ground (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 28). Local NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), IOs (intergovernmental organizations), community organizers, and academic activists seek to transnationalize justice to shore up international support. Through the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the involvement of transnational advocacy networks (TANS) (such as research and advocacy groups, branches of local government, churches, media, unions, social organizations, foundations, Western government agencies, among others), issues of accountability concerning femicide and exploitation in the maquiladora sector along the NAFTA corridor have been raised. In *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (1998), Keck and Sikkink argue that issue-based “transnational value-based advocacy networks are particularly useful where one state is relatively immune to direct local pressure and linked activists elsewhere have better access to their own governments or to international organizations. Linking local activists with media and activists abroad can then create a characteristic ‘boomerang’ effect, which curves around local state indifference and repression to put foreign pressure on policy elites” (p. 200). These groups and networks employ a typology of tactics—information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 16)—to communicate, share information, and largely have the ability to inform policy change and exert influence. TANS that advocate for women and women’s rights rapidly grew in strength and numbers once violence against women was accepted as an instinctive, transcultural and

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<sup>47</sup> Keck and Sikkink define a “network” as being comprised of actors in civil society, intergovernmental organizations and governmental actors.

international human rights issue. The framing of gender-based violence and insecurity as human rights issues were achieved through what Charles Tilly refers to as the “adjacency principle;” given that the normative value of human rights has been established and recognized on an international scale, women’s rights therefore serve as a corollary of human rights and are in similar need of protection.

Secondly, scholars contend that successful transnational pressure campaigns shore up international support by local NGOs identifying, documenting, and sharing personal stories of vulnerable or innocent individuals that depict experiences of suffering, bodily harm, and violations that clearly violate norms of behavior (Anaya Muñoz, 2011, p. 344). The murders of women in Ciudad Juárez has become an international human rights issue due to the severe nature of the gender-based crimes (the bodies of femicide victims often display evidence of sexual assault, battery, mutilation, and torture), the overwhelming number of episodes of femicide, and the density of the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso borderland networks. As such, social movement organizations—organizations with shared ideologies “which seek to abate the oppressive conditions that affect the general population and women in particular” (Ramírez Vázquez & Díaz-Cepeda, 2018, p. 2)—emerged in Juárez, such as La Red Mesa de Mujeres, Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa, Voces sin Eco, Casa Amiga Centro de Crisis, Justicia para Nuestra Hijas, Alto a la Impunidad: Ni una Muerte Más, and Mujeres de Negro (among others). These organizations, along with community activists, organizers, and key actors—including victims’ families and close relatives—have drawn attention to the well-documented cases of human rights violations against Juarese women that continue to occur due to government corruption and impunity. Additionally, the European Union and key members of the Mexican Congress advocated for the involvement of a UN Special Rapporteur to examine the Juárez case of

documented brutal killings (sometimes utilizing the term ‘slayings’ in reports (Anaya Muñoz, 2011, p. 346)) and disappearances of women. It has been determined that femicide victims are largely “Women, especially young women living in poverty and marginalisation, are explicitly considered as particularly vulnerable in the face of prevailing social, cultural and economic structures” (Anaya Muñoz, 2011, p. 346). As mentioned in previous chapters, perverse violence manifests in many forms in Ciudad Juárez—femicide, narcoviolence, and the violence of poverty. Victims of femicide are doubly victimized given their gender and their socioeconomic status. Not coincidentally, documented episodes of femicide reached record levels in 2010, as well as human rights abuses, two years into

the militarization of Juárez. Local NGOs and nonprofits asserted that heightened military surveillance in the community led to increased military-led impunity and brutality. Since gender-based murder reached its apogee in 2010, study participant and femicide researcher, Gabriela, has maintained a month-by-month

Mes	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Enero	16	16	12	2	5	3	1
Febrero	9	35	10	2	4	5	1
Marzo	28	19	15	3	6	10	2
Abril	15	15	18	1	2	0	5
Mayo	17	15	6	3	2	2	1
Junio	29	18	9	4	2	2	9
Julio	25	13	2	2	2	2	
Agosto	41	17	3	5	4	3	
Sept.	44	15	8	sin datos	2	2	
Oct.	48	8	21	1	6	6	
Nov.	16	7	0	sin datos	2	4	
Dic.	16	11	0	1	?	1	
	204	191	99	93	45	46	20

*La Red Mesa de Mujeres, Running Femicide Data, Second fieldwork trip, July 2016*

record of femicide cases in the community for the non-profit she works with. In her testimony, she revealed the correlation between the military occupation and increased frequency of human rights abuses and femicide:

Well, it was a little over two years after the militarization. But 2010 was when the number of soldiers, troops, federal police, state police, who were based here in Ciudad Juárez was at its peak. One of the things that we are always situating and insisting on is that the levels of violence increased very much in line with the city’s militarization. It is blatantly evident, there is even a video, a documentary about the murders made by a young woman who was also here during the militarization. It shows a graph where you

see the increase in violence, and then another line shows the increase in numbers of the military forces and the federal police here, and they go hand in hand, they run completely parallel. There were many human rights violations committed by the military, many participated in criminal activity or who knew were aware of the details of certain feminicides. That is something in our very recent past, but it is something that the authorities refuse to talk about and do not acknowledge. (Gabriela, personal interview, August 2016)

It must be mentioned that the Mexican government has taken certain public, symbolic measures to appease families of victims and the international human rights community. Calderón's presidency was marked by watershed pieces of legislation in favor of women's rights, but with little measurable long-term data to support their efficacy. *La Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*<sup>48</sup> was approved on December 15, 2006 by the Mexican Senate and signed into action in 2007. It was the first legislative step taken to put integrated systems into place that were designed to protect women from violence. However, after further femicide legislation was passed by the Mexican government in 2012 to assuage international attention concerning rampant episodes of gender-based murder, national rates of femicide continue to climb. Data published by Mexico's National System of Public Security (Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública; SNSP) revealed January 2018 to have the third-highest number of recorded feminicides in the country's history—64 in total (Olmos, 2018).

While the State has taken these steps to address documented human rights abuses against women in Juárez, it deserves mention that within the context of human rights abuses, the narcoviolence that led to the militarization of Juárez and of which many innocent citizens were

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<sup>48</sup> This defined femicide as “the most extreme form of violence against women, which has been expressed as violence of class, ethnicity, ideology, and politics. Culminating in death, this violence has been accompanied by impunity and the absence of justice. ... Through these cruel acts, the assassins strengthen the unequal gender relations that distinguish the sexes by emphasizing otherness, difference, and inequality” (Carmona López, Gómez Caballero & Castro Rodríguez, 2010, p. 158).



victims, is not considered a human rights issue by the State or the international community. For a case to be considered a human rights issue and around which a transnational pressure campaign can be organized, victims must be considered members of a vulnerable group. In the case of Juárez's unpredictable and rampant narcoviolence, every member of the community as a whole—both those entrenched in gangs and participate in narcoviolence and those that do not—is considered to be a potential victim. As such, it is impossible to determine patterns of victimization of drug-related random brutality, as “activists considered that it is much harder to generate international pressure in a situation in which [certain] victims are perceived as radical and violent ‘trouble makers’ or are suspected criminals than in which a situation in which the victims are poor and marginalised women and girls” (Anaya Muñoz, 2011, p. 346). This widespread randomized brutality of narcoviolence and culture of fear it has created in Ciudad Juárez as discussed in Chapters One and Two is the other type of violence around which community actors organize.

### *3.4 LARGE-SCALE ACTIVISM'S WINS, LOSSES, AND (MIS)REPRESENTATION / ERASURE IN THE MEDIA*

The aforementioned sociopolitical, cultural, and economic factors, along with personal lived experiences of gender-based violence and femicide, serve as points of departure from which activists seek to address and confront the accepted violently sexist cultural norms of perverse masculinity and homophobia, pervasive violence against women, rampant impunity, and the established, accepted, and often glorified culture of violence. Local anti-femicide/gender-based civil society organizations were founded in response to the genocide of young girls and women in Ciudad Juárez, have mobilized community members, and have established an advocacy

presence in the community and the state of Chihuahua. These organizations—both NGOs and IOs (intergovernmental organizations)—have denounced violence against women both nationally and internationally by litigating cases at the local, national, and international levels, raising awareness through locally visible protests and campaigns, and by promoting human rights and gender perspectives in relation to state legislation and public policy.

Femicide activism and organizing in Ciudad Juárez has ebbed and flowed since it began in mid-1990s and has a number of specific, identifiable stages. Starting in 1993, cases of gender-based murder of Juarese women started to appear in the media, and from there, activism against femicide would eventually become large-scale and public. After many government commissions failed to end the femicide plague, works of collective action—led by feminists and victims’ families seeking justice—reached a crescendo by 2004, as evidenced by publicized large-scale street protests. The 2008 militarization of Juárez ignited another wave of activism that intersected with femicide organizing; community members organized public anti-militarization events and protests against the city’s military occupation by federal police and the increase in violence in the community.<sup>49</sup> Finally, preparations for the December 2009 Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) case of the 2001 Campo Algodonero murders marked a second wave of activism; this wave peaked again between 2010-2012 after the Court’s ruling. The IACHR ruled in favor of the victims of femicide, marking the first international

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<sup>49</sup> “In 2008, the murder rate increased from 25.5 murdered men per 100,000 inhabitants to 215 and from 2.8 to 16 murdered women per 100,000 inhabitants (INEGI 1994-2008). An average of 8.3 murders per day occurred during the climax of the violence in 2011. As a result, since 2008 Ciudad Juárez has been called ‘the national tomb of the dead’ (Turati, 2009, 11). It wasn’t known at that point that the violence would continue to get worse; according to Monárrez Fragoso (2013, 214) 6000 people were murdered in only two years of the Joint Operation Chihuahua (*Operación Conjunta Chihuahua*). In addition to the number people killed, between 2007 and 2011 hundreds of thousands of people emigrated from the city.” (Ramírez Vázquez & Díaz-Cepeda 2018, p. 9-10)

victory against gender-based violence in Mexico. The watershed ruling included specific stipulations the Mexican State would need to comply with:

The IACHR ensured that the Mexican State: effectively carried out the criminal procedure of the case at national level; investigated and sanctioned officials accused of irregularities; investigated and sanctioned those responsible for harassment against relatives of the victims; publicized the verdict under the national and local press; acknowledged their international responsibility for the case in a public act; built a monument in memory of the female victims of homicides due because of the number of gender-related crimes in Ciudad Juárez; standardized all protocols and manuals for the investigation of crimes related to disappearances, educated citizens about sexual violence and homicides of women; adapted programs to deal with the cases of disappearances of women; created a website that included information about the missing women since 1993 in Chihuahua; created a database on disappearances and homicides of women; trained officials in the importance of equal rights for both sexes; carried out an education program for the population of Chihuahua to overcome violence against women; provided free medical, psychological, or psychiatric care in public institutions to the relatives of the victims and paid compensation for material and immaterial damages, and reimbursed costs and expenses of the trial. (Ramírez Vázquez & Díaz-Cepeda 2018, 3)

In the ten years since the IACHR ruling, the Mexican State has failed to comply with most of the provisions dictated by the international Court's judgment, specifically the requirements to prevent recurrence of gender-based violence against women or those who present as women in the community.

The most recent example of public, large-scale activism against gendered violence is the “Violet Spring (Primavera Violeta)” in Ciudad Juárez (2016). The movement grew quickly as all women—politically involved or not—could identify with the movement's central tenet: women have a right to a life devoid of violence<sup>50</sup>. The National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information Technology reported that 67.7 percent of women in Chihuahua have been victims of

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<sup>50</sup> It must be mentioned that there are many different types of violence that one can suffer, such as sexual, gendered, community, interpersonal, work, among many more.

some form of violence (familial, intimate, work-related, etc.)

(Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010).

Moreover, Abril Mulato's 2016 *El*

*País* article, "El Gráfico Sobre La

Edad a La Que Empieza El Acoso

En México," revealed shocking

findings derived from Twitter data

analyzed by UNAM physics

professor, Adrián Santuario. On

April 23, 2016, #miprimeracoso

trended on Twitter with 183,000 tweets

using the hashtag; after determining an algorithm to capture authentic responses and cleaning the

data, Santuario utilized a sample of 78,000 tweets (93% women, 7% men) (Mulato, 2016) that

identified the age at which they experienced their first sexual assault. In the weeks that followed,

Santuario's analysis revealed that in Mexico, the majority of first-time assault victims (59%) are

young girls between the ages of six and ten.

Social organizations in Ciudad Juárez previously mentioned in this dissertation were considered to be safe feminist spaces in which women exercise their rights to organize and their right to a life free of violence. However, this assumption was refuted by the April 24, 2016 public protest in Ciudad Juárez, an international movement called the National Mobilization



**El Gráfico Sobre La Edad a La Que Empieza El Acoso En México, 2016, Adrián Santuario**

Against Male Violence in Mexico. Both a visible on-the-ground and social network-oriented<sup>51</sup> day of action, women of all backgrounds and orientations rallied for a life free of violence, and Juarese women activists at the local and national level emerged to reveal and denounce internal sexual harassment and gendered violence within the organizations of which they were a part (Ramírez Vázquez & Díaz-Cepeda).<sup>52</sup> This unexpected revelation effectively proved that no woman is safe from sexual violence, even those that inhabit or navigate spaces that publicly and ideologically support women's liberation. This public outcry called into question the legitimacy of certain social organizations, specifically male constituents' gender privilege, their dedication to deconstructing the cultural norm of machismo and eradication of normalized sexual violence, and their promotion of gender equality

In the wake of public acts of organized civic engagement, the Mexican State has a habit of taking symbolic measures to ease community concern regarding femicide and narcoviolence, and it can be argued that if not for the small pockets of collective action driven by steadfast and judicious community activists and organizers, Ciudad Juárez may never know a different future. In study interviews, two noteworthy examples of State-sponsored transparent

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<sup>51</sup> The hashtags #24A, #Wewantourselvesalive (#vivasnosqueremos), and #Myfirstsexualharassment (#miprimeracoso) appeared in online social network spaces to show solidarity with the Violet Spring movement in Ciudad Juárez.

<sup>52</sup> In Ramírez Vázquez & Díaz-Cepeda's 2018 article, "Fronterizas in Resistance: Feminist Demands in Social Movements Organizations," they contend that during the data collection process for their study, interview responses indicated that during the military occupation in Ciudad Juárez, "some activists pointed out the misogynistic attitude on the part of male activists, who reproduce the practices of the macho hegemony which include the submissive role of women and sexist division of labor. Even though these male activists declare themselves to be feminists, they discriminate against women by acting based on the premise that women lack political experience. This attitude creates a vicious cycle within the social movements that limits and discourages the participation of women. When the participation of women is hindered, they cannot acquire the experience requested for the military in a relevant way. Alas, the required experienced is not obtained, restricting them from full participation." (p. 13)

(and failed) rebranding/sanitizing campaigns of Juárez's image were mentioned. Not long into the city's militarization, President Felipe Calderón visited Ciudad Juárez in May 2011 to appear at a ceremony to rename the city "Heróica Ciudad Juárez" in an attempt to rid the city of its negative identity in the international media. Later that same year in November, the memorial monument for victims of femicide was erected at Campo Algodonero, as stipulated by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' ruling. Victims' families attended in protest as no investigations into their deaths had been performed, and both events were examples of symbolic public relations campaigns lacking depth and commitment to eradicate violence against women. Study participants cited that in spite of public measures taken to assuage the community's protesting against violence, episodes of gendered violence continue to be grossly underreported by the media. Charles Bowden (*Murder City: Ciudad Juarez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields*, 2010) offers commentary on the State's responses to violence in Ciudad Juárez, suggesting that it engages in a performance of normalcy that attempts to obscure and forget the ubiquitous violence of everyday life, both normalized community violence and gendered-based violence; it is "the fruit of living without history. This is the result of amnesia in television, radio, and print. This is the sweet drug that comes from fantasy. The authorities are real. The police enforce the laws. The courts function. There is a consensus that here to believe the unbelievable, to insist that things are normal—the government is in charge" (Bowden, 2010, p. 61). He reflects on how violence feels casual in Juárez, it has become ingrained into life in Juárez; it is elemental to the human experience in the seemingly lawless geopolitical space: "Violence courses through Juárez like a ceaseless wind and we insist it is a battle between cartels, or between the state and the drug world, or between the army and the forces of darkness. But consider this possibility: Violence is now woven into the fabric of the community and has no single cause and no single

motive and no on-off button. Violence is not a part of life, now it is life” (p. 105). The violence Bowden identifies as a way of life in the city has been addressed (and continues to be) through acts of both large-scale and small-scale activism in Ciudad Juárez; the latter will be expounded upon in Chapter Four of this dissertation through the form of case study analysis.

Interview participants that actively engage in community-based work to combat unrelenting community violence spoke of the 2016 Violet Spring and the other waves of public large-scale activism in Juárez in recent history, reflecting critically on the aims and drawbacks of this type of public collective action (as opposed to smaller-scale works of activism). Before analyzing respondent experiences, it is important to mention a few contributions to the significant body of sociological scholarship that examines roles and levels of participation in works of organized civic engagement that echo the findings of this study. Pamela Oliver (“If You Don’t Do It, Nobody Else Will,” 1984) identifies three categories that participants subscribe to: non-members, active members, and symbolic members; McCarthy and Zald (“Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” 1977) differentiate between movement participants—those that are direct beneficiaries and those that are engaged because of ideology or conscience; Wiltfang and McAdam (“The Costs and Risks of Social Activism,” 1991) establish a cost-benefit analysis of engaging in activism (low risk-low cost versus high risk-high cost participation); and Passy and Giugni (“Social Networks and Individual Perceptions: Explaining Differential Participation in Social Movements,” 1984) explore the effect personal networks have on differential participation. Many study participants acknowledged the historical significance of large-scale collective action (protests, marches, etc.) and yet their inefficacy in creating lasting systemic changes in Ciudad Juárez. Similar to other contemporary social movements in other geopolitical spaces, many citizens participate in the symbolic action of

marches or protests—a type of performance of resistance—to send messages of discontent to governing bodies without continuing work on the ground after. However, as Scott (1985) contends, large-scale acts of open subordination can produce strong pushbacks and consequences, which is ultimately damaging and counterproductive to the organized effort itself or is dangerous for protesters. As such, participants in marches or demonstrations in Juárez often cover their faces with bandanas, scarves, or masks to conceal their identities because of the fear of retaliation by police or government agents that will identify and target them for acting as “social agitators.”

Many interview participants asserted that large numbers of Juarese citizens have attended these symbolic works of collective action with little—if any—follow-through or results long-term. Additionally, interview responses revealed that the community affected most by social issues often are not active participants in large-scale organized acts of resistance; those most affected are poor migrant girls or women who are non-politicized bodies in the community. Elena cited her experience with marches and the disconnect that manifests after; she suggested that large-scale protests or works of collective action do not instill lasting hope or confidence in the community as they are viewed as a temporary, symbolic solution to draw needed attention to a long-term problem that has yet to be resolved:

[I was] actively involved with some activists, with some people, and I realized ..., by that time I had been going to a lot of marches, demonstrations, sometimes barricading the bridges, and I realized that that kind of work in Ciudad Juárez didn't offer much hope to the community, because what we were doing didn't produce change, nothing changed and what we did had no impact on the community. ... Then I began to see that community work was ... I decided that I was interested in community-based cultural work and that I could practice activism in a different way than simply attending marches, and that discussions about what affects the community often occur between intellectuals and that the community doesn't actually participate and speak for themselves. (Elena, personal interview, July 2016)



Other participants cited similar experiences with large-scale works of collective action; they function in the short-term to draw attention to a cause. It is true that publicizing an issue is an important aspect of activism and organizing, however, organized efforts on the ground after the public act of mobilization is the key component to lasting systemic change, and therein lies the challenge with long-term follow-through in Ciudad Juárez.

Failing to invoke lasting commitment and participation was one of the central drawbacks to large-scale works of collective action mentioned in data collection for this study, however, interview participants cited that one specific advantage of large public acts of resistance is that they effectively create a dialogue with other activists surrounding an issue that affects the community. Also, these events are networking opportunities that bring like-minded citizens together despite violence and danger to create a type of gathered and symbolic resilience. Gabriela reflected on her experience growing up in the community and how participation in marches and protests allowed her to connect with other members of the community with similar social convictions:

By connecting with [likeminded] people, I was able to meet other people, people who were also activists, such as Esther Chávez Cano,<sup>53</sup> I began to learn about their experiences and their accomplishments, and I started to participate in marches against femicide, very large marches that were organized here in the city when I was still a student. I think that all these things helped to form my convictions, and when I graduated from the university, I decided I didn't want to continue studying, many people asked me "Aren't you going to do your Master's?", I said no, I don't want to study anymore, I want to work, I want to dedicate myself to activism, I want to do something for my city, I want to work on behalf of the rights of women. That is the moment when I begin to connect with organizations that work specifically on the topic of femicide, and I started my social work internships with those organizations, and, to date, I have continued to collaborate in these kinds of spaces on this topic. (Gabriela, personal interview, June 2016)

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<sup>53</sup> A well-known femicide activist from Chihuahua (1933-2009).

Gabriela spoke of how marches and large-scale civic participation during different waves of activism have aided in creating a critical consciousness and a discourse concerning the issues of human rights and women's rights for all community members, not just those who participate civically. After finishing her undergraduate degree during which she was actively participating in marches and protests, she was drawn to dedicating her life to social justice. Her experiences participating in large-scale works of resistance led to her activism in small-scale, everyday acts of resistance as a femicide researcher for a femicide think tank and a human rights defender (she accompanies families of victims of femicide through litigation as an advocate).

Similarly, Alejandra reflected on large-scale works of visible activism. In this study, interview participants were asked to define their position in the community as they saw themselves (the responses varied between activist, cultural activist, agent of culture, and community organizer, among others) and Alejandra precisely made the distinction between large-scale activism and small-scale works of resistance. She differentiated between the participation in organized, visible activism and a way of living that in itself is a means of resistance:

Activism is not limited to participating in marches; feminist political activism is constantly denouncing violence against women living in the city. This kind of community work is you, with your female body, out in the community with the goal of transforming that environment through specific actions. Sometimes, one can be considered an activist but not a community worker. (Alejandra, personal interview, June 2016)

Alejandra's reflection on the distinctions of activism and community-based work echoes that of Elena's assertion that effective and authentic community engagement is more than simply attending a march or a protest; it is working face-to-face with a community that is affected by the issues being protested. Elena asserted that "you need to be out in the community, you need to get your shoes dirty, you need to be in the streets" (Elena, personal interview, July 2016); small

works of resistance among many communities have the possibility to create larger-scale change. The four case studies conducted for the dissertation—656 Cómics Collective, La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma´Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta—exemplify this assertion; the four community initiatives use of cultural production as means to navigate trauma and cultivate individual agency in marginalized populations, and their work and impacts will be explored in Chapter Four.

The symbolic power and inspiration generated by large-scale organized public works of civic engagement are painfully counterbalanced by the toll this publicity takes on the lives of activists and organizers. Chapter Two explained the dangers inherent to the journalistic profession in Mexico; the media´s excessive representation (or marked lack of representation) of violence negatively affects community relationships and community´s access to public space, and media outlets or journalists that choose to report violence authentically do so at great risk. Activists and organizers—engaged in both large-scale and small-scale community engagement—experience similar threats to personal safety in this high-risk environment, and violent State rebuttals are frequent consequences of large-scale publicized activism in particular. Guadalupe recalled her own experience seeking asylum in the United States for having challenged the discourse of the State´s silenced talk of crime—specifically the plague of femicide—in Juárez. She suffered great personal loss because of her community work, eventually leaving Juárez to live in El Paso:

When I had to leave Ciudad Juárez (...) it was in March of 2011, because my child who´s the most involved with the organization and I received death threats, at that time we began to feel threatened because other activists in the city had been murdered. In 2009, my daughter's husband was also murdered, shot in the back, and then we had to leave Juárez. ... The whole family left, except my eldest, he stayed but now he is also in the United States seeking political asylum because he was kidnapped, tortured and shot for dead, he now is disabled because of his injuries, and he says he was savagely beaten by policemen, and that during the beating, they were saying things about me, and that they

wanted to know not only where I was, but wanted to hurt me by hurting my son. He says that with every blow, they would say, "This is for your fucking mother, who keeps opening her mouth." After that he had to leave with his family. And after we were in the United States, they also murdered my brother. I then decided that there was nothing more we could while do living in Mexico. (Guadalupe, personal interview, July 2016)

Guadalupe's experience and the sacrifices that came from her activism were shared by other study participants. Respondents cited receiving threats of violence or death, being followed to their homes by suspicious vehicles, and often feeling vulnerable because of their identities as activists. Well-known activists and organizers expressed a sense of insecurity in the community, as often they are unjustly villainized and misrepresented by the media as being culpable for damaging the city's reputation but continue their work because their drive to foment change is stronger than the culture of fear in Ciudad Juárez.

Community-based initiatives are underrepresented in the Juarenses media and community organizers and activists are often presented negatively, leading to greater feelings of insecurity and a tarnished public perception of the activist figure. Because of the systematic censorship and silencing the talk of crime in the media, many activists, organizers, and academics work to publicize the reality that exists in the city, despite negative government feedback and negatively biased media coverage. This theme emerged particularly among female participants who cited unfair representation in the media and receiving blame for damaging the city's reputation by pushing back against the sanitized representation of the city with the goal of drawing attention to the true socioeconomic, political, and cultural realities in the community. Margarita offered insights on gendered organizing and women in the community drawing attention to human rights abuses such as femicide and programs to prevent violence against women. In our interview, she referenced a recently published article about female activists in Ciudad Juárez and how women are negatively represented as social agitators: "there is a deputy who wrote an article about civil society in Juárez and portrayed us as agitators, because he said that we were always

bothering the government about having a bigger budget, always protesting, always fighting for rights” (Margarita, personal interview, June 2016). Similarly, Staudt and Méndez (2015) explore the role of Juarenses female activists, the effects of anti-femicide public protests, and contend that “one cannot fail to notice that that women leaders, mothers, and family members of female murder victims have often provided the rallying cry to mobilize social movements, organize groups, and build alliances against public policies that perpetuate police impunity and militarization strategies that do little to end drug and gun smuggling across borders” (p. 13). The rallying cries of female activists are published against a backdrop of ingrained cultural gender inequality and misogyny, which inevitably results in the public negative characterization of women who push back against the State.

Despite the Juárez mainstream media’s negative representation of activists, specifically women that self-identify as feminists and/or are associated with feminist social organizations or collectives, Carmen and Margarita, as well as other participants, suggested that this unfair and biased public characterization of their identities and erasure of their positive community engagement in some cases motivates activists and organizers to continue to push forward with their agendas for change. One participant asserted that the media represents female activists as “people who don’t have jobs, as resentful people, as people who don’t want to work just because they don’t feel like it, [the media] wants the community to believe that women activists are crazy” (Elena, personal interview, July 2016). Carmen, the founder of La Promesa and now serves as the director of a local women’s institute, cited that the media unfairly blames female activists for damaging the city’s reputation by drawing attention to social issues (such as femicide and violence against women, impunity, and disappearances, among many others):

What is at stake is that the media has profited by saying that we stain the city's image, and our reply to that is this: well, if you think we damage Juárez's reputation by being open about what really happens, the solution is simple, that [the government] shift their strategy and generate public policies that guarantee that no woman in this city disappears or is raped. When that happens, so much will change, because conditions will improve for women, and we as women just want to live better. So, the solution is very simple, super simple. The media has told us that we aren't the enemy, that the government is the real enemy, that the business class is the enemy because they fund crime and violence against girls and women. We just want to make it public, and that bothers them because that negatively affects investments in the maquiladora industry and they are financially impacted. And we know that we if work more diligently for change, they will generate programs because they are being financially affected. When crime is not spoken of and no one notices what is happening here, with just a small statement about it in the media, nothing will change because they aren't losing money. Now we see the power in public statements, that another woman has been murdered, that another case is unresolved. (Carmen, personal interview, July 2016)

Carmen reflected on the government's callous disregard of the femicide phenomenon in Juárez and critiqued its attempts to ignore this crisis. In our interview, she cited that the Congress' Special Commission for Documenting Femicide has tracked the cases of gender-based violence in 12 states in Mexico, however it is widely accepted that falsified data is being generated to minimize the severity of the femicide reality in the state of Chihuahua (specifically in Ciudad Juárez).

Interview respondents indicated that the sanitized version of reality that the State and Juarese media present effectively disregards the need for/existence of community activism through the systematic denial of various forms of community violence. Public support of community engagement is therefore limited and works of collective action that are being organized to rebuild civil society are being silenced. This erasure by the media (which is perpetrated by pressure from the government as previously discussed) is executed in a number of ways that emerged in interview responses. First, participants noted that the media ignores the important community work being done, actions and initiatives that—if publicized—could

potentially start to shift the narrative of violence and fear in the city and inspire more civic engagement. A participant reflected on the power of the media in Juárez—publishing stories of violence in marginalized communities that reinforce negative stereotypes of certain *colonias* (as the talk of crime effectively achieves)—and failing to publicize works of humanity and community engagement in these same communities that have the potential to create a positive ripple effect:

In my opinion, work done by the community—not necessarily all community-based work because all communities are different—but a lot of the projects in communities that demonstrate resistance and resilience, I believe that the media doesn't know how to express the dignity and value of those who work in and with marginalized communities, ... Unfortunately, I believe the mass media doesn't know how to portray the good, but rather focuses on X murder, that X man or X woman was killed, and of course the violence in the community must be denounced, but that's not how marginalized communities should be exclusively portrayed. (Elena, personal interview, July 2016)

Elena asserted that it is important to document violence in the community and publicize that it is still an everyday occurrence (despite that it is often minimized or erased by the media), however, she cited that coverage of the city's violence should be counterbalanced by stories of community initiatives and resilience. While activists and organizers do not necessarily expect recognition for their projects, all participants cited their frustration with how the media effectively ignores the works of collective action in the community and erases works of civic engagement, instead publicizing acts of brutality and violence that are often consumed as entertainment (as discussed in Chapter Two). Elena stated that every individual in Juárez has a personal connection to violence (whether it be first or secondhand experiences), and that activities of community engagement deserve attention to give the community hope and initiate change at the local level.

Many participants similarly shared personally traumatic experiences of both firsthand and secondhand violence during the period of *alta violencia*, often times occurring in vulnerable

areas of the city in which they were organizing. These experiences fueled their civic engagement and created a dialogue between likeminded community members who had suffered similar traumas due to community-based work. One anecdote in particular was noteworthy, as the participant relayed how her experience as a survivor of violence motivated her work as a community organizer. Alejandra described the trauma of being tortured by members of the military in her home and she reflected on the media's role in negatively affecting social organization and community relationships, and how violence has the potential to inspire community work but isn't highly publicized. In her experience, she described how the violence she survived motivated her to foster relationships and create a dialogue with people close to her in the community despite the media's negative influence that created paranoia and fear:

During my time as a community organizer, when I was working as a human rights defender, I was tortured by the army in my own home, fourteen soldiers entered my house to look for drugs, I dedicated myself to defending human rights, and it was very traumatic that I had to experience that, I think that a lot of people here in Juárez have had to endure torture because they live in a poor area, that [the authorities] saw that you dressed differently. I lived with my ex-husband at the time and they entered to look for drugs, we didn't have anything but what they wanted was ... what they could have done to us .... Really, it was a matter of insecurity, and that insecurity, in a way, undermined or prevented cultural work from becoming visible, and because of that, we had to meet in people's houses or in neighborhoods, but everyone was afraid of what could happen, we had to create community networks with everyone during that time, and the media makes you distrustful and makes you see your neighbor as the enemy. (Alejandra, personal interview, June 2016)

Alejandra spoke of her traumatic experience that resulted in her leaving formal community program and intervention work from 2009 to 2010. However, she cited this experience as a survivor of violence as being the catalyst for informal community organizing; she reflected that while the media's persistent talk of crime created paranoia and distrust among community members, it also stimulated the creation of networks of engagement and fostered dialogues that sought to shift the discourse of fear.



Second, it also must be mentioned that in the socioeconomic and politically volatile context of the borderland, community organizers and cultural activists also can experience a literal physical erasure/destruction because of their community involvement. As described in Chapter One, public civic engagement is considered risky; activists know there is the potential for violent retaliation by the State in response to their community-based work. In many cases, activists have been murdered for speaking out against State corruption and impunity. Respondents relayed experiences of losing family members, being followed, and receiving threats of physical violence and death because of their activism. One of the most famous cases of activist assassination was that of Marisela Escobedo Ortiz, an activist in Juárez who worked relentlessly to draw attention to femicide after the murder of her daughter, Rubí Frayre Escobedo, by Rubí's husband, Sergio Barraza. After providing the police with details of her murder as well as with her burned remains, Barraza was released by police due to reported "lack of evidence." The State's inaction inspired Escobedo Ortiz to begin a public campaign to bring perpetrators of femicide to justice, and Escobedo Ortiz was unapologetically vocal about police impunity. One week before her assassination, she publicly confronted the governor in front of a crowd, saying "You should be ashamed that a woman like me is doing your work" (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p. 63). On December 6, 2010, Escobedo Ortiz "was killed outside the governor's palace, her death captured on videotape for the world to see. In the video, viewers can see that the streets, normally bustling with police and security guards, have been cleared. A gunman (*sicario*) emerges, pulls out his weapon, chases Marisela across the street, and shoots her dead. Thus, in Marisela's son's eyes, 'this was a State crime'" (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p. 63). Interview participants cited State involvement in activist intimidation and assassinations that have become commonplace in Ciudad Juárez during and after the period of militarization (in the

case of femicide activists specifically, many assassinations predate the militarization). As such, community members are drawing on personal experiences to engage in smaller works of activism/organizing—and while these pockets of civic engagement are less visible and ultimately reach fewer constituents—they seek to create a ripple effect across the city that will over time create waves of change by showing forms of citizenship that characterize a true democracy. I will explore personal motivations behind these smaller works of collective action, what drew community members to engage civically in the next chapter of this dissertation.

In this chapter, I established a chronology of gendered activism in Ciudad Juárez, and I situated femicide activism within the broader context of civic engagement in the borderland community of Ciudad Juárez. I also explored the dialogical relationship between gender-based violence and Mexican culture, how violent gender power manifests in works of cultural production, as sociocultural elements contribute to works of collective action. By doing so, we are able to identify the changes in activism over time, how it has ebbed and flowed, how it has shifted from public to clandestine as violence has continued to increase in the community, and how an international human rights discourse has emerged that frame women's rights as human rights on a global scale. As such, considering the trajectory of gendered activism in Juárez is necessary in order to contextualize current works of activism and community organizing and to emphasize femicide activism's importance in Juárez, as it intersects with all other forms of activism and serves as continued inspiration for social justice work across Mexico. The next chapter will consider new forms of engaged citizenship in which activists draw from personal experience to respond to increasing community narcoviolence and the violence of poverty, and I will analyze four aforementioned small-scale community projects with the aim of restructuring the identity of Ciudad Juárez, the city that has come to be known in Mexico as “the national

tomb of the dead” (Turati 2009, 11). I will consider 656 Cómics, La Promesa, La Biblioteca Independiente la Ma´Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta, I will analyze their works of cultural production, and their long-term missions of creating systemic and cultural change through on-the-ground engagement in Juárez.

*Fieldnotes Journal Entry: June 20, 2016*

*I meant to write last night about my feelings about June 18<sup>th</sup>, but I was too exhausted. Saturday I had two interviews, one at 9am with Carmen, and one at 2:30 with Alma. Carmen is a very well-established important feminist activist in the community (she was recently named Juárez Woman of the Year for 2016 for her work in the community). We met at Café Único at 9, grabbed coffees, and drove out to the pre-trail for a man that murdered his girlfriend (Karla) this last week, burned her body, and dumped her in the desert an hour outside of the city. She worked at the Electrolux maquila and was around 30 years old. Two days before I arrived, three women were murdered, and their bodies found, and in total in the month of June more than 10 women have been murdered. Supposedly the man who killed Karla Ivonne was dating her and another Electrolux employee simultaneously, and when Karla ended their relationship, he didn't want the two women finding out about one another, so he murdered them both. The body of the other woman was found in a shallow canal.*

*We arrived at El Cereso state prison for the pretrial and didn't know if we would be able to enter because it started at 9 and we arrived at about 9:30. There were two seats left in the room, so we handed over our bags and coffees and went through security and into the chamber. We were two of 12 people there in the audience; there were three lawyers for Karla's family and one for the defendant, and the judge. Three members from the defendant's family were there—his mother, brother,*

*and sister(?). Both sides presented their information and the prosecution asked for a sentence of between 30-60 years. The man had already confessed to Karla's murder, and therefore the sentence is likely to be reduced to 27 years, as is shockingly customary in femicide cases here. After we left the chamber, Carmen and I went outside and to find Karla's family, waiting in the punishing midday sun, having missed the pretrial because no one had informed them of its start time. Karla's father, aunt, brother, and sister-in-law met us and were incredibly stoic. No one cried, it was all business; I would imagine they were in shock. One of their lawyers, Carmen, and two other female human rights defenders spoke with the family about next steps to take, who to talk to, etc. We left then to go to Carmen's office to conduct the interview. In route to her office in her turquoise gutted-out van, windows rolled down as the summer desert heat flowed in, Carmen told me about living in this city. About how hard it is to see endless pain and murder and suffering and to have to keep moving forward. Eyes focused on the road, she spoke to me of her community work and how she has seen countless bodies and how she has been to so many of these trials that she has sadly lost count. She told me about a young girl, Julia, who was part of a community project she started. Julia's mother abandoned her when she was just one year old; Julia's grandmother then cared of her until she went blind when Julia was 10. Julia gave birth to a baby when she was 15, and when she turned 16, she disappeared. Because her grandmother couldn't identify her, the responsibility has fallen on Carmen to identify her remains and give closure to her child, who grew up not knowing their mother. Carmen believes Julia was likely buried in one of the unmarked common graves somewhere in the city, and she carries this weighty responsibility with her. She began to cry and said she feels she failed Julia, and that are so many Julias here in this place.*

#### IV. COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM: CULTURE AND RESILIENCE AS FORMS OF RESISTANCE

*“The night is always darkest before the dawn.”* (Carmen, personal interview, July 2016).

*“We live in very difficult times, very hard times, and we can’t walk away from any fight. We must continue fighting and we must fight with great intention, because nothing will defeat us, until we take our last breath. Nothing.”* (Guadalupe, personal interview, July 2016)

*“I am hopeful that we can change things, and I will continue to believe that as artists, as creators, there is always a way to change the negative into a piece of art. So, take all these terrible things that have happened and write a song, or draw a picture.”* (Alejandra, personal interview, 2016).

Acts of community organizing and cultural activism are contextually dependent; they will assume—or must assume—different identities and manifest in distinct ways according to the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural environments that inspire them. In specific contexts of oppression, the imbalanced dynamic between the powerful and the weak is widely known, accepted as the status quo, and is seemingly met with silence. However, if one listens closely, small rumblings of consciousness-raising noise can be heard in protest of abuses of power. In these contexts of suppression, traditional forms of public organized resistance and critique must be reimagined and nuanced, taking on the form of what James C. Scott (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, 1990) refers to as “hidden transcripts.”<sup>54</sup> Expanding upon his previous scholarship in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985; cited in Chapter I of this dissertation) and in an attempt to understand class relations in a Malay

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<sup>54</sup> As opposed to “public transcripts,” which is the “discourse that casts light on subordinates’ formerly contained voices in the presence of authority or the dominant” (Staudt and Méndez 2015, 55).

village, Scott discusses his observations concerning power relations and their discourses, asserting that unequal relationships of power are the lived experiences for “millions who spend most of their waking hours in power-laden situations in which a misplaced gesture or a misspoken word can have terrible consequences” (p. x). Recalling the powerful nature of subtle strategies of resistance, Scott describes “hidden transcripts” as mechanisms through which one can explore, understand, and interpret the resistance of the subaltern or groups in positions of subordination: “Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a ‘hidden transcript’ that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed” (p. xii-xiii). Scott contends that given complex (and often tenuous) socioeconomic and political power dynamics, the actions of the oppressed cannot be analyzed outrightly, as subtle forms of resistance (for example songs, folktales, jokes, rumors, etc.) are employed either anonymously or with care/caution when resisting hegemonic power. He asserts that the threat of retribution (of many kinds) demands that public conduct of those in positions of subordination greatly differs from their authentic actions when away from under the gaze of power.

The previous chapters of this dissertation have underscored the high stakes nature of community organizing and cultural activism in the complex context of Ciudad Juárez. Given the community violence, oppression, and impunity rooted in ineffective sociopolitical and economic systems, the four case studies conducted in 2016 are examples of hidden transcripts, the Juarenses behind these initiatives having chosen to approach community-based organizing and activism from the perspective of culture as a change agent. In this chapter, I will present study findings regarding participant motivations for engaging in works of collective action based in

experiences of trauma and survival. Additionally, in order to situate and ground my analysis, I will present the histories of the four case studies I conducted: 656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma´Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta. These cases will be analyzed through the lens of capital and cultural production, as they function as examples of resilience as resistance during and after the militarization period in Ciudad Juárez, as the community members who founded the initiatives did so after suffering personal and community trauma. I seek to demonstrate how the cultivation of capital—cultural, social, and symbolic capital specifically—offers marginalized communities the opportunity to develop tools to imagine new possibilities/futures outside the violent cycle of poverty, in turn creating a new generation of engaged citizens that seek to write new narratives of nonviolence and resilience for Ciudad Juárez.

The scholarship of Staudt and Méndez (2015) employs Scott’s theory of hidden transcripts as they examine manifestations of citizen resistance in response to the militarization of Ciudad Juárez. They define the process in which transcripts shift from hidden to public as when “formerly hidden individual resistance that [becomes] public and collective in their performance and consequences” (p. 54). They analyze three watershed moments within the organizing and activism space in Juárez (that were discussed in Chapter III of this dissertation) during which hidden transcripts became public and led to large-scale changes, and now serve as important examples of tenacity and courage. First, the 2009 Campo Algodonero case *González et al. v. Mexico* and Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling against the Mexican State demonstrated the power of shifting the hidden discourse of femicide to public through

organizing and activism. Not only did the ruling<sup>55</sup> inspire a new wave of activism in Ciudad Juárez and resonate internationally within the human rights space, but the memorialization of the victims of Campo Algodonero serves as a physical reminder of feminicide activism's presence and efforts. Second, social justice and feminicide activist Marisela Escobedo Ortiz publicly and furtively denounced State and police impunity in relation to her daughter's murder and the overwhelming epidemic of feminicide. Her public activism, "a two-year process that embarrassed Chihuahua governor César Duarte and law enforcement officials in the state of Chihuahua" (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p. 62), shifted the hidden transcript of gender-based murder and police and State impunity to public. Because of her outspoken criticism of police impunity and the State's efficacy in prosecuting feminicide perpetrators, Marisela Escobedo Ortiz was murdered on December 16, 2010 after organizing a sit-in outside the Governor's palace in Chihuahua City; the video of her murder was captured by palace surveillance cameras and published on YouTube. Peaceful protests were organized and held in the days following Escobedo Ortiz's murder. Marisela Ortiz (no relation) of Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa, an anti-feminicide organization in Ciudad Juárez, reflected during an interview that "The way in which she was assassinated, and everything surrounding the case, leaves a clear message for the community of social activists and human rights workers that we should be quiet. But for those of us who are dedicated, the murder is pushing us to unite and continue this fight." Staudt and Méndez contend that Marisela Escobedo Ortiz's legacy is that she identified hidden discourses and exposed them: "In Marisela Escobedo's long journey toward justice, the way in which the state colluded with criminal groups seemed to be uncovered and shifted from being hidden into

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<sup>55</sup> It must be mentioned that the Mexican State has failed to comply with the majority of the stipulations outlined in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling.



the realm of public knowledge. After Marisela's assassination at the doorstep of the governor's palace in the capital city of Chihuahua, the collusion of the state and government officials in the protection of criminal groups could be more clearly seen" (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p. 64).

The most recent example in which a hidden transcript has been made public occurred in the wake of the Villas de Salvácar massacre on January 30, 2010 (mentioned in Chapter II). In the days following the mass killing of 15 community teenagers in southeastern Juárez and President Calderón's baseless and immediate characterization of the victims as participants in the narcomarket, the Juarese community at-large publicly decried Calderón's seemingly reflexive character assassination of the victims based on socioeconomic status and criticized the president's militarization of the city as a failed strategy to eradicate narcotrafficking. In the days that followed, President Calderón launched the polemic social program *Todos Somos Juárez: Reconstruyamos la Ciudad* (published in the form of a 160 actions to address the structural issues that were contributing to the violence in the community; 15 community roundtable meetings were held to discuss action steps) as the government's "strategy of appeasement" (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p. 55) to a hidden transcript becoming public; the governmental initiative sought to create strategies of nonviolence in marginalized *colonias* through the design and implementation of cultural activities and workshops. Although public spending for these community-based projects temporarily increased following the government's problematic response to the killings in the southeastern *colonia*, it soon became evident that there was a gap between the initiative's planning and execution, "proof of the failure to which policies that do not situate citizens and their dignity at the center are destined" (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p.101) and reinforcing the principle that "in transitional justice, as elsewhere, all politics is local" (Arriaza and Roht-Arriaza, 2008, p. 153). Luz María Dávila, a maquiladora employee and

mother of two of the young men killed in the Villas massacre (her seventeen-year-old son, José Luis Piña Dávila, attended high school and her nineteen-year-old son, Marcos Piña Dávila, attended a local college), snuck into a public meeting President Calderón held at Cibeles<sup>56</sup> with community members, organizations, entrepreneurs, the mayor and governor, and the local chamber of commerce concerning the design of *Todos Somos Juárez*. Dávila made her way to the front of the meeting space and responded to the mayor and governor's comments regarding the State's failed attempts to quell the violence. She publicly addressed President Calderón, who responded "yes, of course" throughout her public admonishment and demand for justice:

I am sorry, Mr. President, but I cannot say you are welcome because in my eyes you are not. I want justice. My sons were youngsters that were attending a [birthday] party. I want you to retract what you said. You said that they were gangsters. Lies. My two sons studied and worked. They were not on the streets. They were my only children and I don't have them anymore. Now I want justice. You always talk and do nothing. I want you to put yourself in my place and feel what I am feeling right now. ...Here, in this city, in the last two years, murders have taken place. A lot has been taking place and no one does anything. I just want justice, not just for my kids but for everyone. [And] don't tell me 'of course'; do something. If it had been your kid who was murdered, you would look under rocks for the assassins. But because I don't have the means, I can't look. (Dávila, 2010)

Dávila's public assessment and criticism of the ineffective militarization of Ciudad Juárez inspired activists' work in the wake of the Villas massacre. Her courageous outcry against the status quo in which the hidden was made public galvanized members of the community to form two political action groups, Frente Plural Ciudadano (Plural Citizens' Front) and Grupo de Articulación Justicia en Juárez (Staudt & Méndez, 2015, p. 61).

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<sup>56</sup> An exclusive convention center in Ciudad Juárez. Protests were organized outside the meeting site; protestor chants could be heard: "A estudiar, a aprender, para chota nunca ser" and "Juárez, Juárez no es cuartel, fuera ejército de él" (Staudt and Méndez, 57).

The four cases studies in this chapter are examples of distinct forms of culture—the medium of comics and mosaic, and the promotion of literacy and the creation of literary spaces—that are utilized to challenge the status quo of economic, social, and political oppression that defines the Ciudad Juárez in the hope of shifting the discourse of violence. However, it must be mentioned that through the data collection process, it was determined that the community initiatives analyzed for this study don't seek to publicly critique of power in order to invoke large-scale community changes, as did the activists in the aforementioned examples. Rather, these hidden transcripts and their works of cultural production look to foster resilience, critical consciousness, and distinct forms of capital (social, cultural, symbolic) through small-scale works of collective action that serve as symbols of resistance to the many forms of violence in Juárez, with the ultimate goal of creating a new narrative and collective identity not rooted in violence.

Antonio Gramsci's framework is a useful lens through which to examine culture's transformative effect on civil society. Gramsci's work speaks to the power of culture as a tool for radical change and meaning-making that intersects and dialogues with Bourdieu's notion of capital creation and cultural production. A revolutionary of his time that sought to shift capitalist society by identifying the intersection of the political and the cultural, Gramsci was concerned with culture as an agent for change and collective meaning-making that might unite intellectuals and the subaltern (Doyle, 2011, p. 7). As Kate Crehan (*Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 2002) suggests, Gramsci's work seeks to answer the question "how might a more equitable and just order be brought about, and what is it about how people live and imagine their lives in particular times and places that advances or hampers progress to this more equitable and just order?" (Crehan, 2002, p. 71). In this way, culture is a force for change that can bring about

radical shifts to time and place through collective understanding, critique, and action. The individual becomes the collective that seeks to address larger-scale societal concerns through collaboration, as Gramsci ruminates in his *Prison Notebooks*, “Creating a new culture does not only mean one’s own individual discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in critical form of truths already discovered their ‘socialization’ as it were, and even making them the basis of vital action, an element of coordination and intellectual and moral order” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 325). That said, culture cannot be divorced from the hegemonic system in which it is created; culture resides in all members of the system and is an expression of the dominant power’s ideologies and values, in turn becoming the economic, social, and political status quo (cultural hegemony).<sup>57</sup> Borderland researcher Kerry Doyle, an expert on cultural movements, politics, and institutions in Ciudad Juárez, works from Crehan’s scholarship to explain that while Gramsci’s work is a rumination on a very distinct context (early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy versus 21<sup>st</sup> century Ciudad Juárez), it effectively “articulates the contradictory consciousness that exists between the world-view of the dominant group (who are dominant because of their economic role in society) and the implicit and unarticulated understanding of how things are on the part of the subaltern class, who will absorb to different extents the dominant world view, which holding (most unarticulated) sense of how things really are for them in their state of oppression” (Doyle, 2011, p. 10). By participating in the culture of the hegemon, the subaltern class—Gramsci employs the term “proletariat” to indicate “working class”—is

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<sup>57</sup> In the context of this study it is important to acknowledge that both Bourdieu and Gramsci’s analyses of culture as a change agent is rooted in the identity of the bourgeois and intellectual classes as both producers and consumers of culture (Big C culture). The four cultural initiatives to be discussed in this chapter approach culture from a different perspective; the organizers and activists behind the community-based projects were members of marginalized communities that are making culture accessible to *colonias* in the hope of cultivating cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

participating in the very system that perpetuates its own oppression and prevents its emancipation. Rooted in the Marxist distinction of class-in-itself versus class-for-itself, a working class is created within a capitalist system “by treating labor as a commodity, where (implicitly male) workers sell their labor power or capacity to work in order to survive. However, in order to extract effort, and thus profit, capitalists must coerce and control workers, resulting in mounting misery and resistance. These objective conditions of exploitation create a class-in-itself, a class experiencing similar circumstances” (Nancy Plankey Videla, 2012, p. 4). Once a subjugated group arrives upon a mutually shared consciousness and ideological system, only then can it transform into a collective—and potentially revolutionary—class-for-itself (Nancy Plankey Videla, 2012, p. 4). However, history demonstrates time and again that even a radical collective consciousness seldomly leads to an uprising against hegemonic power, as “it is a dynamic process that neutralizes opposition by providing brief spaces of resistance that then serve to legitimize dominant rule” (Nancy Plankey Videla, 2012, p. 5).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak problematizes Gramsci’s meaning and use of “subalternity” and the postcolonial identity that he associates with members of the proletariat/working class in his writing. Central to Spivak’s work is her interrogation of the term “subaltern” in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*; she contends that the subaltern lies outside the bounds of the socially oppressed class and capitalist system that depends on one’s participation in the labor market. Spivak asserts that there are certain groups of people in civil society that are so under-represented that they in fact exist outside the realm of possibility of ever having power of any sort or kind, or the opportunity of upward mobility. In a 1999 interview with scholars Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean regarding her 1988 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that has received both positive and critical attention and analysis since its publication, Spivak defines her

use of “subaltern” as a person who exists without agency and without any potential to cultivate it: “I was talking about the space as defined by Ranajit Guha, the space that is cut off from the lines of mobility in a colonized country. You have the foreign elite and the indigenous elite. Below that you will have the vectors of upward, downward, sideward, backward mobility. But then there is a space which is for all practical purposes outside those lines” (Spivak, 1999, p. 298-9). Regarding her famous assertion that “the subaltern cannot speak,” Spivak clarifies that “nonknowledge”—meaning ignorance or even unfounded biases—manifest as subconscious reflexes against the subaltern. She asserts that “We act out of certain kinds of reflexes that come through, by layering something through learning habits of mind, rather than by merely knowing something” (Spivak, 1999, p. 299). These reflexes, whether consciously acted out against the subaltern or not, create a compounding relationship with the subaltern’s inherent lack of upward mobility, that demands the subaltern’s militantly oppression, subjugation, and silence.

Gramsci and Spivak’s conceptualizations of the subaltern are important to consider within the context of Ciudad Juárez’s recent militarization and works of community organizing and activism. The four community-based initiatives researched for this dissertation were founded shortly before or during the militarization period (2008-2013) with the goal of creating works of cultural production and cultivating social, cultural, and symbolic capital in marginalized (subaltern) *colonias* in Juárez lying outside the social periphery that lack State investment. In the study “Disrupted by violence: children’s well-being and families’ economic, social, and cultural capital in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico” (2012), Alma H. Hernandez and Sara E. Grineski utilize Bourdieu’s framework to consider the many impacts violence has on Juarese families’ access to different forms of capital, and they identify a strong negative correlation between diminishing economic, social, and cultural capital and Juarese children’s overall social, mental, physical,

and emotional health and well-being. They effectively establish the violent socioeconomic and political context of Ciudad Juárez, and cite the three primary interrelated factors (that have been discussed in other chapters of this dissertation) that create the circumstance in which violence has and continues to thrive: the lack of infrastructure systems to support and absorb the migrant population that has emigrated to the borderland in search of employment opportunities, the exploitative maquiladora industry (Ciudad Juárez is the home to more than 345 maquilas and over 200 multinational corporations (OECD, 2010, p. 27-8) that fails to provide a living wage,<sup>58</sup> and the subsequent violence of poverty as community members seek earning power by entering the narcomarket (as previously mentioned, narcoviolence is concentrated in marginalized *colonias* in Juárez).

Hernandez and Grineski acknowledge that Bourdieu's capital framework has been utilized by other population health research studies; they define the forms of capital for their readers as they apply the terms to the context of Juárez in their scholarship: "Economic capital refers to the money and other material resources that one possesses; social capital involves how one can activate resources through group membership, trust, and support; and cultural capital refers to legitimate knowledge in terms of education knowledge and skills" (Hernandez & Grineski, 2012, p. 373). As Bourdieu suggests and upon which Hernandez and Grineski elaborate, differing levels of access to these forms of capital during formative childhood years can negatively impact population health outcomes and quality of life. Therefore, Hernandez and

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<sup>58</sup> "Most *maquiladora* workers take home less than 55.55 MXN pesos (approximately US\$ 5.00) a day, which is only 30% of what a family of four requires to meet its basic needs. ...An estimated 10,000 small businesses have closed or moved across the border to Texas since the violence began in 2008. ...The ongoing drug war has left more than 10,000 children in Mexico orphaned and more than 40,000 relatives of victims affected by the violence" (Hernandez & Grineski, 2012, p. 374).

Grineski's analysis draws from a sampling of 300 Juarese families enrolled in a child development intervention between 2009-2010 with the community organization *Gente a favor de gente* to illustrate the relationship between increasing violence and decreasing forms of capital. A small purposeful sampling was taken, which resulted in nine photo interviews and 16 in-depth interviews that were conducted with study participants (14 mothers, two fathers).

Hernandez and Grineski's study documents the experiences of a small sampling of members of the Juarese community that represents a larger cross section of the population; a number of compelling conclusions were drawn from the 2012 study concerning the impact violence has had on capital losses across categories (social, economic, and cultural) in Ciudad Juárez that echo interview responses collected for my study in 2016. First, pervasive narcoviolence was found to decrease economic capital and employment as most participants attributed loss of income to employment insecurity due to extortion, the mass exodus of businesses and employers from Juárez, and the subsequent economic recession (Hernandez & Grineski, 2012, p. 375). As such, in the study findings "a pervasive theme was parents experiencing nearly constant worry about their children's well-being related to their poverty, and many of them expressed that they struggled to meet their children's day-to-day needs during these tenuous and economically uncertain times. This situation negatively affected the children's well-being; for example, parents were not able to provide their children with adequate nutrition" (Hernandez & Grineski, 2012, p. 375). Additionally, during the years of high violence, it was determined that women lost economic capital and earning power because many chose to stay home with children given the high probability of suffering violence in public spaces. In the purposeful sampling determined by Hernandez and Grineski, 62.5% (10 of 16) women interviewed stayed home with children, 12.5% (2 of 16) vended goods from home, and 25% (4



of 16) were employed outside the home (three maquiladora employees and one shoe vendor). Of the 16 study participants, 11 women self-identified as survivors of violent crime in Juárez.

As participants in Hernandez and Grineski's study revealed that increasing incidents of community violence led them to stay home with children and negatively impacted the family's economic capital, the study also determined a correlation between increasing community violence and diminishing social capital. Chapter II explores the talk of crime and its damaging social effects on networks and community relationships; distrust of one's neighbor manifests as a common worry given the random nature of violence and the clandestine nature of cartel maneuverings and unknown cartel connections. Sergio Guadalupe Sánchez Díaz's 2011 study, *Diálogos desde la subalternidad, la resistencia y la resiliencia: Cultura obrera en las maquiladoras de Ciudad Juárez*, affirms Hernandez and Grineski's argument that social interaction and the navigation of space has radically changed in Ciudad Juárez—particularly for women—since Juárez became the country's largest site of maquiladoras and experienced a proliferation of narcoviolence. Sánchez Díaz argues that all Juarese women—not only those employed in the *maquilas* upon which he situates his study and analysis—have had to learn new ways of living that are distinct from previous generations of women in the community: “La desconfianza cunde y ellas se protegen. Es que cualquier persona, incluso gente del trabajo, medianamente conocida, puede representar una amenaza potencial. ...Ahora salen menos de noche, la noche ya no es el espacio del goce y la diversión, ahora es el espacio del peligro, aunque realmente el peligro ha invadido ya todo su tiempo” (Sánchez Díaz, 2011, p. 179). Therefore, as Hernandez and Grineski contend, social connections outside the domestic space decreased as violence increased—even social interactions within nuclear and extended family

networks—as navigating public spaces was considered high-risk and too dangerous. All 16 participants in Hernandez and Grineski’s cited that

violence was a deterrent in being able to fully utilize the resources of familial networks because people were forced to limit the time they spent with family and friends. Families who lived across town did not want to commute through the dangerous city to visit relatives, the culture of fear dictating their everyday movements through public space. Leaving after dark was out of the question as parents feared they might be in danger while driving to and from a relative’s home. Therefore, violence directly reduced the opportunities for children and parents to develop and utilize social capital. (376)

Additionally, a participant in Hernandez and Grineski’s study cited being unfairly associated with drug violence because a family member had been caught in rival narco crossfire; talk of crime within her *colonia* surrounding the event led to her family’s unfair stigmatization and their relationships within other community members suffered, causing the family to self-isolate. Ultimately, withdrawing indoors and minimizing social contact with neighbors and family was a reaction to increasing violence, further isolating families and reducing their opportunities to gain social capital.

Interview respondents engaged in my study discussed the relationship between the violence of poverty—a type of cyclical, multi-faceted violence that is passed from generation to generation that is determined by limited access to quality infrastructure systems such as education and healthcare (among other public goods)—and community violence that is bred in marginalized Juarese *colonias*. In the OECD’s<sup>59</sup> study *Higher Education in Regional and City Development: The Paso del Norte Region, Mexico and the United States* (2010), social indicators in the Juarese community—forms of social, economic, and cultural capital—were examined

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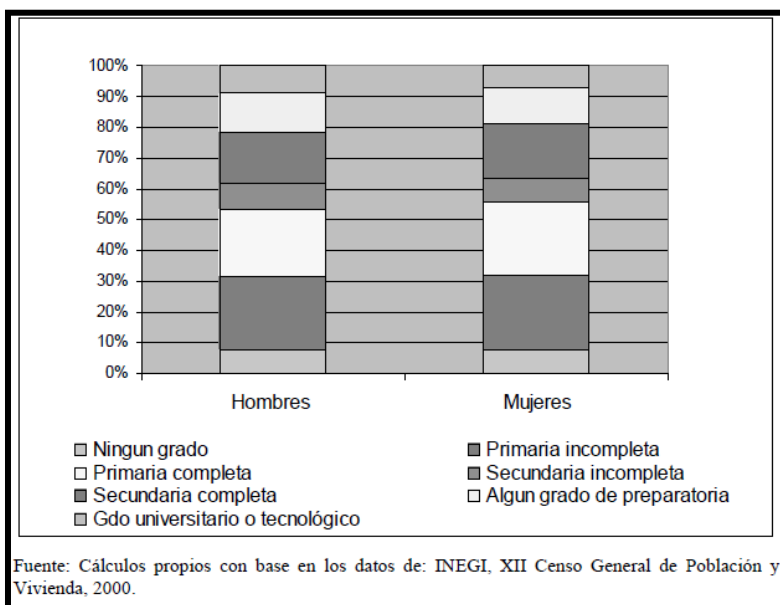
<sup>59</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

with relation to El Paso and within the larger regional and country-wide context. It was determined that 45% of the city's population 15 years and older has basic education that is incomplete, and 38% of homes were reported to have at least one member has less than nine years of education. The scholarship of Cevera Gómez, Monárrez Fragoso, Montero Mendoza, Brugués Rodríguez, Rubio Salas, Coronado Rampirez, Cruz Piñeiro, and Cital Beltrán (*Diagnóstico geo-socioeconómico de Ciudad Juárez y su sociedad*, 2005) breaks down the education statistics in Ciudad Juárez further by examining formal educational experience between female and male binaries. They assert that “there is little difference between the two sexes in terms of levels of education. ... In effect, the proportion of people that do not have any degree in school is practically the same; the proportion that finished primary school is that of 22% of men and 23.8% of women, respectively; the percentage who finished secondary education is 16.5% men

	Mexico	Chihuahua State	Ciudad Juárez
% population 15 years and over illiterate	8.35	4.41	2.36
% population 6-14 years not attending school	5.29	5.83	4.40
% population 15 years and over with incomplete basic education	45.98	47.45	44.79
% population without medical insurance	49.78	35.96	30.63
% houses with members 15-29 years old in which at least one has less than 9 years of education	36.12	36.45	37.70
% houses without floor	9.93	5.21	2.18
% houses without toilets	9.90	9.67	9.14
% houses without running water	11.05	6.11	2.02
% houses without sewer system	11.67	7.73	1.49
% houses without electricity	6.12	9.04	7.95
% houses without washing machine	39.04	23.73	23.70
% houses without refrigerator	23.22	13.64	10.91
Average number of inhabitants per room	1.12	0.95	0.02

Source: CONEVAL (2007), *Los Mapas de Pobreza en México*, CONEVAL, Mexico City.

*OECD Higher Education in Regional and City Development: The Paso del Norte Region, Mexico and the United States 2010, 52*



*Diagnóstico geo-socioeconómico de Ciudad Juárez y su sociedad 2005, 57*

and 17.5% women, whereas the percentage of the people who attended some high school or college is slightly favorable toward men” (Cevera et al., 2005, p. 56).

Similarly, Hernandez and Grineski’s research determines a connection between violent crime and diminishing cultural capital in Ciudad Juárez that is cross-generational. None of the 2012 study participants gained access to education beyond high school, and 50 percent of study participants abandoned their education in middle school to work to support their families. As such, participants attributed their low socioeconomic status to the lack of cultural capital gained from little exposure to formal educational experiences (Hernandez and Grineski, 2012, p. 376). This is important to acknowledge it has been shown that parental deficits in cultural capital impact children’s future access to cultural capital, particularly in the context of Ciudad Juárez where the median earning power is low, employment is uncertain, and where personal safety and random acts of violence are common concerns. Hernandez and Grineski suggest that although study participants’ children were enrolled in formal school-based education,

Apart from the formal educational sector, children are also less able to gain cultural capital through informal experiences. Parents reported that children spend most of their time outside of school isolated in the home—not interacting with cousins or young neighbors or playing sports in parks—because of safety concerns. Therefore, they have fewer opportunities to learn practical skills (e.g., sharing with others, working together in teams, and “street smarts”), which would serve as cultural capital in their lives. At the same time, the limited nature of the time spent outside the home limits their abilities to attend events (e.g., free concerts, soccer games, school programs), where they would gain cultural capital. ...The isolation of families within their homes, which was clearly evident from the interviews, has not only affected their social capital, it has severely reduced their access to cultural capital. If the violence continues, it is likely that cultural capital will continue to decline; the isolation (month after month and year after year) can have negative effects on children’s well-being as they are not gaining the benefits of interacting with others, and children may be forced to drop out of school because of concerns for safety and economic needs. Given that the marginalized and semi-employed youth of Juárez have become readily employable for cartels, gangs, and kidnapping/extortion rings, this situation is especially troubling. (p. 376-7)

Hernandez and Grineski's scholarship concerning the intersection of economic, social, and cultural capital and violence is necessary to consider as it relates to my 2016 study in Ciudad Juárez. Interview responses indicated that entering into the narcomarket is a common eventuality for young people that live in subaltern *colonias*. In *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgency* (2011) journalist Ioan Grillo describes the transformation of the *sicario*—a hired assassin—identity since the US' war on drugs was declared:<sup>60</sup> “In the mid-twentieth century, assassination was a lucrative and niche trade in Mexico. The killers were known as *gatilleros*, or ‘trigger men.’ They were skilled professionals who carried their trade into middle age, using pistols and dispatching their victims at close range, often in the dark of night” (p. 154). Today, cartel-employed *sicarios* are most often young boys or men that have been recruited from marginalized *colonias* in Ciudad Juárez, drawn into the narcomarket by the promise of quick cash<sup>61</sup> and a sense of belonging.<sup>62</sup> *Todos Somos Juárez: Reconstruyamos la Ciudad*, published in the wake of the Villas massacre, cited that 120,000 Juárez youth aged 13-24—45% of the total—

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<sup>60</sup> The term “war on drugs” was first used and popularized by President Nixon in 1971 to describe the war on drug addiction in the United States. In 1996, President Clinton publicly criticized Colombia's failed cooperation and inefficacy in addressing the drug war and rampant drug-related violence. To contextualize the effects drug cartel violence has had on Colombia and Mexico, Grillo asserts that “Back in 1991, Medellín was the most murderous city per capita on the planet with some 6,500 homicides, among a population of 2 million. Now that crown has been passed to Ciudad Juárez. But while Medellín has reduced the numbers of killings, it is still very violent, with 2,899 homicides in 2009” (Grillo 2011, 155).

<sup>61</sup> At the time Grillo conducted interviews for his 2011 book, interview participant and teenage *sicario*, José Antonio, asserted that 1,000MXN—\$85 USD—was the widely-accepted rate for hired killings.

<sup>62</sup> In an interview Grillo conducted with a Juarese *sicario* named José Antonio (a seventeen-year-old nicknamed “Frijol” who at the time of the interview had been sentenced to the Juárez School of Improvement, a teen penitentiary), the young man revealed that he found community by joining a gang while both his parents worked long hours in maquiladoras: “The gang becomes like your home, your family. It is a place where you find friendship and people to talk to. It is where you feel a part of something. And you know the gang will back you up if you are in trouble” (Grillo 2011, 164).

were not engaged in any formal education or formal employment. Study participant and active supporting organizer of ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa Margarita was interviewed by Grillo about her experience growing up and working with youth in *colonias* in violence prevention; she asserted that teenage *sicarios* “are the result of systemic alienation over the last two decades. The slums were a convenient place for factory workers but got nothing from the government. As the factory jobs slumped with the economy, the slums were left to rot” (Grillo, 2011, p. 165-6). Echoing the responses she offered during our interview for my study in 2016, Margarita when interviewed by Grillo for his book, asserted that the average day wage for a maquiladora employee is \$6 USD, while a *sicario* may earn \$85 USD to carry out a cartel murder:

The government offers nothing. It can't compete with a thousand pesos. It is only the mafia that comes to these kids and offers them anything. They offer them money, cell phones, and guns to protect themselves. You think these kids are going to refuse? They have nothing to lose. They only see the day-to-day. They know they could die and they say so. But they don't care. Because they have lived this way their entire lives. (Margarita in interview with Ioan Grillo, 2011, p. 166)

Study participant Alejandra discussed her work in the neighborhood Colonia Plutarco Elías Calles and contended that navigating the transition from childhood to adolescence in Juárez is tenuous; it is difficult to envision one's future in a geopolitical space where everyday life is marked by the violence of poverty, and the option of entering the narcomarket is a future many community youth choose to take to generate earning power:

... my intervention was to work with women leaders to develop alternatives for improving their neighborhood environments, they lived in levees<sup>63</sup>, in streams where (...) a stream ends...I got to know the stories of adult women and elderly people who had to sleep on the street because the rain [flooded the levees where they had built their houses],

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<sup>63</sup> El dique de Anapra, located in western outskirts of Ciudad Juárez, is an unregulated space that has become the site of many improvised dwellings constructed by low socioeconomic status Juarenses that cannot afford to purchase or rent a formal dwelling. The area is high risk; after a heavy rainfall, the river swells and has flooded homes, which has resulted in drowning deaths.

women who lost everything and their families, young girls who disappeared, daughters of prostitutes, daughters of women who transported or distributed drugs, I also worked with coyotes. That is, in those neighborhoods, the forms of employment (...), actually some people do work in the maquila, but they are spaces where the entire border comes together, border violence, those who dedicate themselves to that violence as a way of life, a way of survival rooted in crime organized and human trafficking. ... I think that deals have been made in which the State and drug trafficking are the same thing, pacts have been made to reduce the violence a little but the drugs don't stop circulating and don't stop being consumed, one of my relatives is totally consumed by drugs, he has a terrible addiction and has not been able end that addiction and why? Because there is an ease, because there is an accessibility to drugs, and while children and young people have no alternative in life other than one of family violence and the maquila, it will be difficult to want to change that way of living, and because [they see] glimpses of what life is like in the drug game, the momentary power and having money, how do you deal with that from the perspective of community work ? It is complex. (Alejandra, personal interview, June 2016)

Alejandra's assertion that diminishing economic power and accessibility to drugs has made marginalized communities the sites for different forms of violence, human trafficking, and addiction. Interview participants contended that Juarenses that make up these *colonias* possess many subaltern identities that are present and reproduced by the intersection of larger systems in place<sup>64</sup> that I have previously problematized: they are the subjects of unconscious, reflexive, and unjust biases concerning narcoviolence and drug trafficking; they are the women who navigate the maquila system, employed because of their docility, their feminine features and attributes forcibly exploited on the production line; they are the murdered women whose deaths remain mysteries as their perceived promiscuity made them deserving of rape and murder; and they are

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<sup>64</sup> Naomi Klein's scholarship in *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) asserts that the advancement of the socioeconomic and political elites' agendas and preferred policies are prioritized during times of crisis to maintain the oppressive status quo, and the subaltern inevitably sustains this flexing of power. Joint Operation Chihuahua is an effective example of this; two years into the military occupation, record-breaking incidents homicide and feminicide were recorded in 2010 despite heightened military presence in Ciudad Juárez. Victims were rendered disposable given their assumed involvement in narcotrafficking, their gender, and their socioeconomic status.

the families of victims of femicide, who by challenging impunity receive threats of violence, are silenced. The work of the four initiatives analyzed for this dissertation serve as examples of organized resilience that demonstrate that culture is a site of struggle and has the potential to create distinct forms of capital, and it can empower the voiceless to speak, in the hope of eventually shifting the city's discourse of violence.

#### *4.1 SITUATING THE CASE STUDIES:*

The community organizers/activists that founded the four case studies conducted for this dissertation exemplify resilience as resistance after surviving and/or being personally affected in some way by the different manifestations of violence in Ciudad Juárez (sexual, physical, emotional, socioeconomic, among many others), using their experiences of trauma to engage and create change in their communities. They conceptualized culture as a grounding and energizing force and identified the potential in works of cultural production and bringing cultural interventions to marginalized *colonias* in order to cultivate capital and foster empowerment. The communities identified for organizing and activism activities/projects are *colonias* that exist on the socioeconomic periphery and would otherwise not see necessary improvements to infrastructure that would positively impact the quality of life, nor would receive necessary community outreach/social programming from the State. It is through these initiatives that they have sought to reimagine everyday existence through the creation of community, capital, and symbolic meaning. In this sense, these projects—small forms of resistance in nature, as Scott would characterize—together seek to counter the city's narrative of violence and oppression, and effectively show resilience in the hope of rebuilding community and inspiring long-lasting change in civil society. Additionally, in the context of this study, it is important to note that



works of cultural production in the context of Juárez are more community-based and less individualistic. It is precisely through the field of cultural production and the creation of social and cultural capital that enrich and rebuild civil society that these works also seek to gain symbolic capital, as they serve as public symbols of collective action and resilience in the redefined notion of civil society since the militarization period in Ciudad Juárez.

Before I present the histories of the four community initiatives (and in the case of 656 Cómics Collective, I will tie it into the larger artistic cultural landscape of Mexico because of the historic significance of the comic medium), it is necessary to first contextualize the recent history of State-sponsored culture in Ciudad Juárez; in order to ground my analysis, I will situate the community-based initiatives within the city's larger State-sponsored cultural landscape. Shortly before the Border Industrialization Project (BIP) was enacted in 1965 that would expand the maquiladora industry and intensify exploitative neoliberal capitalism in the borderland, President López Mateos (1958-1964) created the Programa Nacional Fronterizo (PRONAF) in 1961. PRONAF functioned as an initiative that sought to integrate the oft-neglected borderland area into the country's overall economic and political development agenda by shifting its industrial image—and reputation as a lawless space of excess for North American tourists to access alcohol, drugs, and prostitution—to one of a cultured “continental show window that [extended] from Tijuana to Matamoros” (Dillman, 1976). PRONAF aimed to modernize and integrate culture into the 14 sister cities along the border by promoting an “urban border proposal that would serve as a transnational space between the American city and the Mexican City, an urban center that establishes a primary gateway to a new international border crossing between the two cities” (Rodríguez & Rivero, 2010, p. 196). Ultimately, Ciudad Juárez was the project's primary beneficiary; Juárez's Zona PRONAF was envisioned and constructed between 1962-1966 as a

modern urban cultural and retail zone that used United States urban modernity as a point of reference, and was constructed away from the historical center of Ciudad Juárez “in an attempt to separate or negate the existing old city, [which was] understood as complex, declining, and nonfunctional” (Rodríguez & Rivero, 2012, p. 203). Kerry Doyle ruminates on the location of Zona PRONAF and its goals for offering access to cultural spaces and increasing international tourism: “Physically removed from the city center and far away from both poor neighborhoods and the centers of alcohol, prostitution, and gambling that had traditionally attracted border tourists, the new development was more directly connected both geographically and idealistically its northern neighbors, turning its face towards the bi-national Chamizal park and the newly developed Bridge of the Americas” (Doyle, 2011, p. 24). PRONAF also funded the construction of INBA<sup>65</sup> Ciudad Juárez Museum of Art in 1963, which would later serve as a meeting and collaboration space for local artists and hosted installations and exhibits of local, national, and international artists. By the late 1980’s, State funding for the Zona PRONAF had waned and the formerly modern cultural space was physically deteriorating alongside many other areas of the city as federal funding was funneled away from maintaining infrastructure and public goods and into the expansion of the maquiladora industry. More recent examples of State-sponsored investments in culture are the construction of el Centro Cultural Paso del Norte in December 2007 (after 15 years of construction) and the August 2016 founding of IMAC (Instituto Municipal de Arte y Culturas).

It is clear from the historical trajectory of government-funded cultural initiatives in Juárez that most federal monies are spent on the creation of cultural spaces that promote big C culture (fine arts, literature, cultural institutions, formal cultural spaces, etc.) rather than small-scale

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<sup>65</sup> Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes

cultural initiatives that are accessible to all members of the community. That said, the State government and the Secretary of Culture do offer small grants that can be applied for to advance community projects to promote culture in the state of Chihuahua through PACMyC—el Programa de Apoyo a las Culturas Municipales y Comunitarias—a government initiative founded in 1989. Projects must be proposed, and goals and impacts must be outlined before passing an approval process to receive funding; in 2016, \$4,814, 844 101MXN pesos (\$239,227.93USD)<sup>66</sup> funded 101 community cultural projects across the state of Chihuahua.<sup>67</sup> However, due to limited financial assistance and a consistently large pool of PACMyC applicants, most organizers and activists must pull from their own (and most often limited) personal resources to realize their goals of bringing culture to marginalized communities across the city.

During the data collection process for this study, interview respondents contended that public funding for community-based cultural initiatives increased in the wake of the January 30, 2010 Villas de Salvárcar massacre after the inception of the polemic social program and media campaign *Todos Somos Juárez* (discussed in Chapter Two as well as at the beginning of this chapter). When answering interview protocol item *What was your experience (if any) in using State funds to create projects that seek to address negative impacts that the government has caused in certain sectors of the community?*, study participant, Emilio, expressed that utilizing State resources unnecessarily complicated Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta's mission of bringing literacy to public transit. He asserted that in his opinion, accepting government funding diminishes one's complete agency over a project as the project is now framed as the government investing in the

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<sup>66</sup> Conversion from Mexican peso to US dollar was based on currency value in December 2018.

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.chihuahua.gob.mx/contenidos/abre-convocatoria-del-pacmyc-2017>

community, which for many study participants, presents a great conflict of interest: “When you use government funding, instead of it being your own community work, your project is now a way that the government is trying to improve the city, so what I do not like about working with the government is the need of having to promote the government’s involvement. Hoja de Ruta was supported by PACMyC, and they asked me to put seven state government logos on the booklets” (Emilio, personal interview, December 2017). Luis, a research assistant at la UACJ, similarly reflected on *Todos Somos Juárez* and the influx in funding for community-based cultural projects, contending that the initiative was borne out of government desperation to shift public perception through short-term, superficial measures:

Specifically in 2010, following the event of Villas de Salvárcar, the murder of young people in Villas de Salvárcar, the environment that that event created, solutions were offered, but it all was a result of the government's weakness. That is, the government made a tremendous mistake, in addition to militarization and all that, in criminalizing young people, then the anger was so intense, that many people publicly denounced the government’s response, people came out to participate in different ways, and they forced the government to respond. I refer to Villas de Salvárcar as the watershed moment, but since before then, since 2009 there had already been a series of movements, mobilizations that were underway, the Medical Committee, people, students, those of us who opposed the militarization, that is, there was an environment of people who were actively resisting. But Villas was the breaking point and the government created *Todos Somos Juárez*. The *Todos Somos Juárez* program had different areas of work and one of them has to do with society, with citizen participation, where culture is a topic that is important, and they go with it. However, as is often the case, when the government generates these initiatives, many people participate that do not necessarily have the necessary experience and knowledge. On the other hand, during that time, many men and women, young people, were active in culture, in activism but you have to understand, there was no work, there was intense violence, and there was the possibility that culture, what skilled people were already doing, would help solve things. (Luis, personal interview, July 2016)

In our interview, Luis, as well as other interview responses, indicated that in the wake of Villas de Salvárcar, *Todos Somos Juárez* brought short-term funding to community-based projects and workshops, what Luis referred to as “workshopitis” in Chapter II. Both Luis and Emilio acknowledged that implementation and follow-through of community engagement workshops

and initiatives that were funded by *Todos Somos Juárez* was minimal, most ended when funding ran out, and the key to a project's success is long-term investment and continuity. Fernando of 656 Cómics also evaluated the efficacy of many of the community-based initiatives in Juárez, asserting that the longevity of their implementation and consideration of the community's context are direct determinants of their success:

There are very capable, very committed organizers who are giving their all for their community, but there are others who do not, who come to the workshops and really do not care about the context, and I think that is what makes the workshops inefficient. The lack of follow-up, that lack of commitment, those are rooted in issues of funding, structures, infrastructures, knowledge. And I believe that if we want to work on the long-term or even short-term issues here, we cannot try to change all those in a 20-hour session. (Fernando, personal interview, June 2016)

Ultimately, the short-term funding for generating social and cultural capital through the disorganized government program was a quick and ineffective fix for large-scale systemic problems that required more long-term investments of resources and trained, competent leaders. Motivated by increasing narcoviolence, personal ties to marginalized *colonias*, lived experiences of violence, and the failure of *Todos Somos Juárez*, civically engaged Juarenses developed and created the following four community initiatives.

#### *4.1.a. Context for Case Study I: 656 Cómics Collective*

Before describing the work of 656 Cómics, I will offer a brief overview of comics/the pictorial narrative tradition in Mexico from which they have evolved. After the Mexican Revolution, the use of the lithograph allowed journalists and writers to explore the new national identity through images, including fully illustrated publications for entertainment as well as works of political and social satire. An important aspect of a nation's modernity is a recognized shared identity, and in the case of Mexican identity in the post-Revolution period, this was in part achieved through the

use of visual culture.<sup>68</sup> During this period of nation-building, liberal and conservative viewpoints were hashed out in works of combative journalism—both written and visual—and a strong base of cartoonists emerged. Armando Bartra and Juan Manuel Aurrecochea (*Puros Cuentos: la historia de la historieta en México*, 1988) suggest that “in the 1920s there [existed] a new consumer public with new attitudes with regard to recreation and entertainment possibilities, and the post-revolutionary state [was] also forging a new cultural politics with a popular and nationalist character” (Bartra & Aurrecochea). The 1940s in Mexico marked a period of accelerated urbanization and rapid industrialization with mass rural migration to urban centers. Moving forward, comics served as a means of educating this new urbanized population, and it continued to be a medium through which critical consciousness was created and social, political, and economic issues were addressed. Forms of popular culture, such as comics, film, dance, and music created a national identity and reinforced a value system of Catholicism, vigorous nationalism, and mestizaje.

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<sup>68</sup> In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson addresses the notion of the development of national identity and communal national conscience. Anderson discusses what he calls “nation-ness” (Anderson, p. 50) and the formation of modern national identity; Anderson identifies what constitutes a nation, defining it as a socially constructed and imagined political community that is limited by its boundaries and in which created a sense of communion and mutual cultural responsibility to one’s fellow countrymen. He asserts a nation’s identity is “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, p. 6-7). While Anderson’s argument centers on Spanish colonial sovereignty and the identity of nationhood, I argue that it is important to reflect on Mexico’s current socio-political state when considering Anderson’s definition of a nation. He suggests that “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.” (7). Anderson’s concept of national identity could not have anticipated the disintegration of Mexican civil society and the elimination of “horizontal comradeship” in recent years due to the drug war and neoliberal reforms.

Creators of *historietas* (comics) strongly believed in the positive value of their craft, as they served a source of entertainment, an educational and moralizing tool, and reinforced a unified national identity (Rubenstein 1998, 135). It should be noted, however, that *historietas* with themes such as superheroes, wrestlers, biographies of famous figures, eroticism, and comics imbued with political criticism were two separate genres that remained siloed: “always influential, political cartoons existed in Mexico since the early days of press. There was constant generation change and, though at times they aligned with power, they usually fulfilled a critical purpose from an independent position. Nevertheless, there was little communication between *historietas* and political cartoons” (Peláez, 2009, p. 210). However, the work of Eduardo del Río (penname: Rius) bridged the two genres and was able to reach a large readership through his pointed use of humor, simplicity, relatability (he consistently “persuaded viewers that he was no more trained or talented an artist than they were” (Ruis as cited in Rubenstein 1998, 154), his unique creative perspective and aesthetic, and his work’s didactic value. An active member of the Mexican intellectual Left, Rius contributed to nearly every printed news publication as he developed his style and evolved as an artist. His most popular work entitled *Los Supermachos* (and eventually the series *Los Agachados*) humorously critiqued the Mexican political machine and whose plots reflecting everyday life included themes such as “various political topics, including elections, state violence, and currency devaluation” (Rubenstein, 1998, p. 157). Although his *historietas* were widely popular among all social sectors, Rius shifted to the *Para Principiantes* publication series after citing increased government censorship, and swiftly lost his audience. This series of *infolibros* served as educational tools but did not have the same artistic and entertainment value as his previous work, and Rius had effectively failed to create a popular Leftist alternative to *historietas*. Rius’ vision of reaching all classes through popular visual

culture had ended; reflecting on a 1967 marketing survey of his readership in a 1979 interview with Harold Hinds and Charles Tatum, Rius regrettably discovered that most of his readers were “students, [and] after that middle-class professionals—doctors, engineers, teachers—and then to a small degree workers and peasants, one percent or something like that. I already knew it. I had more or less imagined it from the kind of letters I received and the people I saw on the street buying the magazine. Those were my readers: students, and certain people of the middle class with certain political worries” (as cited in Hinds and Tatum, 1979, p. 14).

The Massacre of Tlatelolco of 1968 marked a period of cultural stagnation with relation to the comic tradition (as well as other forms of culture), as “the state machinery established a more or less explicit, mutually beneficial alliance with cultural monopolies (television, press, radio, and film), according to which they received government support and assistance with commercial hegemony in exchange for mass entertainment and complicity with power” (Peláez, 2009, p. 210). Comics with socio-political themes were repressed into silence and it wasn’t until the 1980s that comics based on Mexican literature and history were published by editorial houses, and it has been calculated that country-wide production and readership reached 70 million per month by the early 1980s (Campbell, 2009, p. 4). Shortly after this boom and due to the economic crisis and increasing consumption of entertainment through television, the sales of comics declined during this period, and marked the rise of comic conventions, superhero publications, the popularity of the *manga* style, and auteur comics. However, 20 years later, country-wide consumption of comics remained at more than seven million per month, representing a major portion of Mexico’s print consumption. Bruce Campbell (*¡Viva la historieta!: Mexican comics, NAFTA, and the politics of globalization*, 2009) cites the National Reading Survey conducted by the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, “where



respondents are likely to significantly underreport the less prestigious consumption of comic books, found that more than 12 percent of the country's population reads comics" (Campbell, 2009, p. 5). It should be mentioned that both youth and adults comprise that statistic of comic consumers.

In more recent history and during the period of neoliberalism and increasing globalization, even entertainment *historietas* have characters and plots that mimic contemporary national figures and current national events that reflect the consequences of cultural and economic globalization. The line between superhero figures and works of sociopolitical satire and critique has become blurred, as protagonists are reflections on the Mexican bourgeois, members of the upper transnational business class, working class, and consumers of popular culture. It is evident that contemporary cartoonists and comic books approach the cultural and social politics of globalization through their work, as well as reimagine the evolving Mexican national identity, as Benedict Anderson and others suggest the role the novel has served throughout history as a vehicle through which national identity is created (Campbell, 2009, p. 5). The medium of comics, however, is an interactive narrative form, both literary and visual, with which audiences can connect with greater ease. The public is able to visually interpret and consume national and global realities, actors, and processes through visual storytelling, and comics as a tradition for sociopolitical and cultural critique continues to be a powerful force in post-NAFTA Mexico.

656 Cómics was chosen as a case for this study because it precisely subscribes to these dimensions of the comic tradition in Mexico; their work is a poignant sociopolitical critique of the reality of Ciudad Juárez in the form of consumable and accessible



entertainment to people of all ages. Their work is available for purchase and is distributed at book fairs, comic conventions, and local events. By utilizing a form that is accessible to youth through which to confront community issues, 656 is interrogating the reality of the borderland and questioning the representation of the traditional comic figures of superheroes and villains. The collective's goal is to foster new meaning-making and a critical consciousness in the younger population of Juarenses that reads their work in which both community youth and adults can imagine themselves/identify with the protagonists; a young child who is an orphan due to the drug war, a young child with an abusive home life, youth without dreams and as consumers of violence (through media), and possible reproducers of violence given the context to which they are exposed. The themes the collective addresses are those that pertain to the border city: the glorification of narcoculture, gendered violence, neoliberalism and its deleterious effects on infrastructure, and innocence forcibly lost in community youth.

Following in this artistic genealogy and drawing on the complex narrative and multitudinous challenges of the sociopolitical context of Ciudad Juárez as inspiration/motivation, 656 Cómics was started in 2005 with the mission of exposing children and young



people to the teaching of artistic expression and the cultivation of social and cultural capital. The organization promotes local artistic talent through collaborative projects and seeks to create a comic scene through workshops and community intervention with youth. Founded in 2005, 656 Cómics' comic narratives are ruminations on the reality and the imagination of the Juárez community and serve as examples of counterhegemonic works of cultural production. Community issues such as violence, feminicide, narco-trafficking, the city's large orphan population due to drug-related violence, the export manufacturing sector, and political corruption and impunity are themes that are confronted through 656's work. Through community interventions and workshops intended to disseminate culture and provide youth with means of creative expression, 656 fosters a culture of reading, illustration, storytelling, and narrative, and provides youth with safe spaces in which they can explore their experiences navigating childhood in a city that is marred by narcoculture and violence.

The initiative has a horizontal organizational structure in which projects are funded using personal resources that are pooled by the group's eight members or through institutional grants. 656 is directed and coordinated by Fernando (Director) and Daniel (Art Director), and twenty

volunteers support the group's work and donate their time to help organize drawing workshops for Juarese youth. 656 has collaborated with partners such as the Chihuahuan Institute of Culture, the Support Program for Municipal and Community Culture, the National Board of Art and Culture, the National Fund for Art and Culture, the Autonomous Metropolitan University, the Mexican Autonomous Institute of Technology, and the Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology. The collective has gained international recognition for their work and mission and has held workshops and given lectures in Venezuela, at University of Michigan, Harvard University, US Consulate in Ciudad Juárez, the Autonomous University of Chihuahua, State High School 3042, Comic-Con, and the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, among others.

*4.1.b. Context for Case Study II: ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad /La Promesa*

Movimiento Pacto por la Cultura was a political movement founded in 2004 by a small group of local activists whose platform cited rights to culture are basic human rights. The founders of the movement approached this issue of mass accessibility to culture from two distinct perspectives—either as established members of the cultural elite in Ciudad Juárez (playwrights, musicians, filmmakers, writers, among other professions) or as community organizers promoting culture in *colonias*. Recognizing that traditional forms of culture such as fine art are consumables that only elite members of society can afford, this group of activists identified the need for heightened visibilization of accessible culture in Juárez. Carmen, one of the founders of Movimiento Pacto por la Cultura, suggests that culture is an empowering force in a community suffering the effects of violence and neoliberalism, and she started organizing community workshops and art initiatives with the hope that art can serve as a mechanism through which citizens navigate their

trauma and life in Ciudad Juárez while cultivating cultural and social capital. The movement's overall goal was to promote arts and culture as a strategy for recuperating civil society and a mechanism to organize community life in the city; the group's 2005 document, *Refundando Juárez*, defines the term "culture" and in both the narrow and broad sense. Kerry Doyle suggests that in the broad sense, members of Movimiento Pacto por la Cultura "consider[ed] culture as an unexplored alternative perspective that can help to visualize, to respond to and reverse the process involved in the weakening of collective identities and capabilities in human action." In the narrow sense, they [saw] culture and art as having the capacity to encourage individuals and communities in social processes of self-reflection on their condition, and see culture as a pedagogical tool for developing community relations" (Doyle, 2011, p. 39)<sup>69</sup> and raising critical consciousness. Reflecting Gramsci's idea of drawing together "the common sense perspective of the subaltern classes with the evolved social and economic critique of sympathetic intellectuals to create a new kind of intellectual and engender a broad reengagement of the subaltern class

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<sup>69</sup> Doyle articulates Gramsci's notion of "organic intellectual," suggesting that "Gramsci held that because of the domination experienced by the subaltern classes, and the confusion of ideas and ideologies that made up their culture, that it was impossible for an intellectual class to rise organically to promote the hegemony of subaltern values. That is not to say that a peasant could not become an intellectual, but rather to say that if he did, he would become an intellectual for the dominant class and not an intellectual for the subaltern. And yet, Gramsci holds out as a proposition, the uniting of intellectuals in support of the revolution with the common sense and emerging intellectuals of the subaltern classes to create a new kind of intellectual, and a broad reengagement with the subaltern classes based on the production of shared intellectual activity. Intellectuals and the subaltern need one another because intellectuals are capable of knowing in a larger way the systems of oppression as they affect society as a whole, and the subaltern are capable of this unique 'common sense' or way of feeling what is happening on a concrete, local level" (Doyle, 2011, p. 11-2).

with activities of intellectual and social production” (Doyle, 2011, p. 39), after years of collaborating on this mission to promote culture as a unifying and galvanizing force, members of Pacto came to



struggle with internal differences in ideology and eventually split; certain group members supported big C cultural efforts that promoted formal cultural institutions while others prioritized mobilizing works of cultural engagement in low socioeconomic *colonias*.

Inspired by the original goals and successes of Movimiento Pacto por la Cultura, the community organization ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad was created in 2011 with the mission to foster community, art, and equity in marginalized communities in the northwestern region of the Ciudad Juárez. Organized by Carmen (a founding member of Movimiento Pacto por la Cultura) and supported by Margarita (another founding member of Pacto) and many others, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad worked to build La Promesa, an urban art community initiative and cultural center on Calle Puerto de Palos in northwest Juárez that hosts weekly classes and workshops for women and youth and is a meeting space for community organizers and activists. La Promesa’s creation has a unique story and embodies the type of grassroots work that the space houses. Teresa Margolles, a Mexican ex-pat visual artist residing in Germany, visited Juárez during the period of high violence and noted the overwhelming number of abandoned houses in the city. During the period of *alta violencia*, the city experienced a mass exodus due to the increasingly unsafe conditions, and in most cases, abandoned homes instead of selling them. Margolles photodocumented this phenomenon—entire neighborhoods of

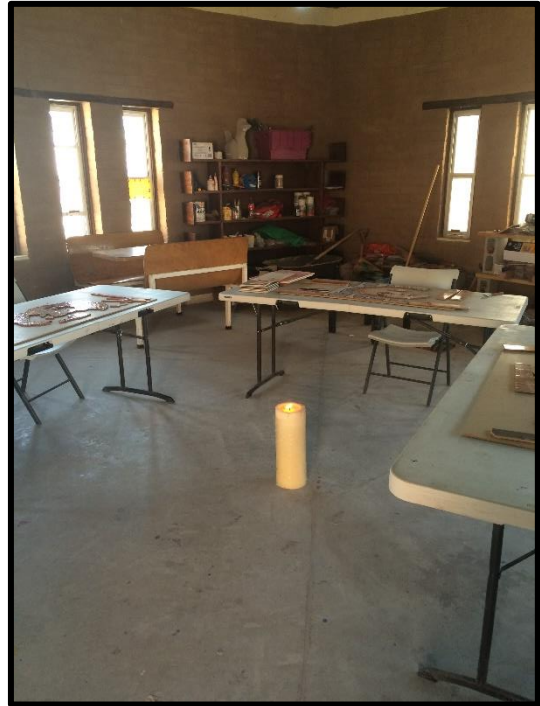
thousands of abandoned houses—and interviewed community members about the shift in community relationships and the destruction of civil society. Margolles purchased an abandoned home on la Calle Puerto de Palos in the northwestern area of Juárez, which had been the site of a



femicide, after which the family fled the city. Margolles had the house razed and the rubble was transported by truck to Mexico City, where she constructed a sculpture using the house's remains and entitled it "La Promesa" ("The Promise"). Margolles explains that the sculpture symbolically "serves as one of the many memories of the 60 thousand murder victims in the country, of the unfulfilled promises, of the promises to young people—the promise of "study and you will become something great"—it serves as just one of many fragments of failed promises" (Margolles, 2015). Margolles donated the empty housing plot to ColectivARTE, and the community center, La Promesa, was constructed in the space.

La Promesa is an inclusionary social space that supports the creation of new discourses, ethos, and a collective community vision with an emphasis on human rights. The mission of the organization is achieved by using art as a didactic, pedagogical, and theoretical tool that supports the rebuilding of civil society/community in the post-militarization period. Additionally, La Promesa is dedicated to helping families whose daughters have been victims of femicide navigate grief through art. Carmen identifies families of victims of femicide in the community and offers them to opportunity to participate in a mosaic workshop. The families gather at the

community center weekly for a three-hour session, and over the course of fifteen weeks, they reflect on their daughters' lives and create a large mosaic portrait of their daughter to be installed at the victim's gravesite. The tangible act of creating a portrait of their lost child is therapeutic and cathartic for the families who choose to engage in the mosaic workshops; the workshops also offer the opportunity to navigate shared grief in a communal space and cultivate community relationships between community members who otherwise would have never met. Carmen and Margarita's work at La Promesa has fostered meaningful relationships in particular between mothers of victims of femicide who have developed a passion for the medium of mosaic. As such, Carmen founded BorderCraft Mozaique and employs a number of women who create mosaic art pieces to sell on Etsy and at local markets and events. BorderCraft's motto is "Cada pieza es un suspiro."



#### *4.1.c. Context for Case Study III: Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana*

Founded by study participant, Elena, a former maquiladora employee and recent doctoral graduate, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana was opened during the height of the violence on August 22, 2010<sup>70</sup> in Colonia Campestre Virreyes in southeastern Ciudad Juárez. It serves as a community space in which neighborhood youth can gather, borrow books, and participate in

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<sup>70</sup> The years of high violence were 2008-2013.



workshops that cultivate critical consciousness, social and cultural capital, a humanistic value system, and community solidarity. Biblioteca Ma'Juana is housed in the front room of Elena's parents' home, the house she grew up in as a child, and as such, Elena is connected to and deeply invested in the community. Elena's parents still live in the home and prepare the space (both inside and the outdoor patio) for organized activities, as well as prepare food for the children who attend. Elena works both independently and in collaboration with her mentor, Silvia ( former director of the graduate program in Interdisciplinary Gender and Women's Studies at Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez), and together they co-facilitate literacy initiatives in Colonia Campestre Virreyes as well as other cultural projects around the city (for example, in January 2016 during a preliminary fieldwork trip, I documented and participated in a literacy and Christmas gift event at the Lexmark maquiladora for children of employees who were striking for better wages). Both Elena and Silvia escaped cycles of violence and abuse before entering into the academy, and they use their ties to marginalized areas of the community and formal spaces of pedagogy and research to offer children the opportunity to participate in informal cultural and social capital experiences.

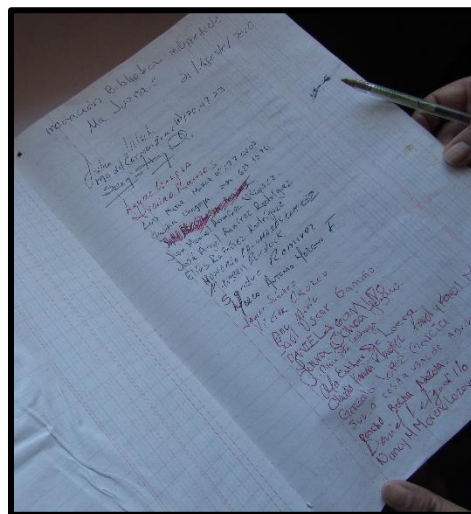
The community library was founded during the height of violence in Juárez to show children of the community that literacy and education are fundamental to a successful future. Elena and Silvia hold an activity for children in the *colonia*



on Sundays (at least once a month); they are also invited by schools, non-governmental organizations, and business (situated locally and across Mexico) to conduct literacy workshops and lectures on their experiences as literacy promoters and organizers.

Elena won the Premio Nacional de Promoción a la Lectura México Lee in 2009 for her work promoting community literacy with Colectivo Palabras de Arena, and Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana received an honorable mention by the Premio Nacional de Promoción a la Lectura México Lee in 2011. When asked what inspired her to open the community library in Colonia Campestre Virreyes during the period of *alta violencia*, Elena cited “I decided to open la Ma'Juana there because communities began to lose public space ...especially spaces for children” (Elena, personal interview, July 2016). The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes from my January 2017 fieldwork trip to la Ma'Juana during which Elena and Silvia organized a literacy event; the notes are reflections on the physical space of the library:

We are at Elena's family home today; she and Silvia transformed the front room of her childhood home into a small community library in which she houses an extensive collection of children's books. The library is housed in the front outward-facing room; it has been painted in vivid shades of yellow, royal blue, and cardinal red. There is a large wooden bookcase that stands at

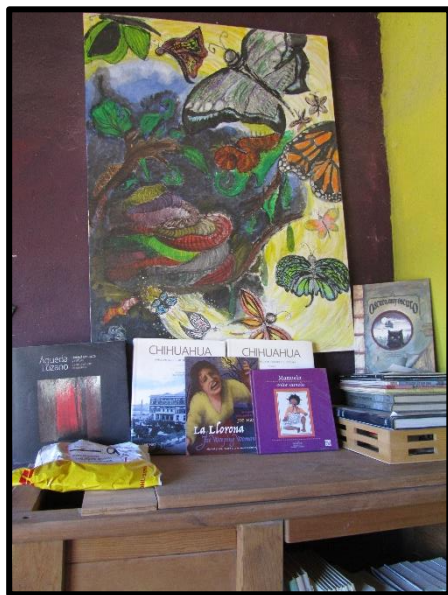


*The library's ledger from its inauguration in August 2010. Attendees and participants sign the ledger for every event and activity.*



**Silvia and Elena, January 2017**

the entrance, its shelves are lined with canonical texts and novels, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and picture books for younger readers. Under the windows that face the unpaved street, pock-marked with deep puddles due to the *colonia*'s poor drainage system, hand-built shelves line the walls containing books and puzzles. A hand-painted image of Frida Kahlo overlooks the library and a bust of Mozart sits on a small shelf hanging from the wall. Opposite the library across the street is a mural Ana Laura commissioned from a friend; it shows a young boy and girl reading together, along with the quote “y desde tu cabeza... pintaremos el mundo.”<sup>71</sup>



<sup>71</sup> Mensen, a New York City muralist and community organizer, painted the mural while in Juárez collaborating with 656 Cómics and other cultural activists and organizers.

4.1.d. Context for Case Study IV: Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta

Study participant, Emilio, founded Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta on November 20, 2011 with the intention of exposing the Juarenses community to literature by distributing reading materials and conducting public readings on specific public bus routes throughout the city. In our interview, Emilio reflected on the important role that reading and writing poetry has had in his life; he began attending literacy workshops



when he was 17 years old and would eventually publish his first book of poetry at the national level in 2000 at age 26. Drawing inspiration from these experiences, Emilio saw the need to bring culture to the Juarenses community and described his initial attempt to draw other writer-activists/writer-organizers to the idea of establishing permanent community projects rooted in culture around the city, but was met with little support:

In 2011 that I participated in organizing an independent meeting, without government support, and it was called the *Primer Encuentro de Escritores por Juárez*, the objective of that meeting was one, to gather all the writers in Juárez, two, to protest the murder of the poet Susana Chávez, and the third objective, which was my idea, was to be able to come up with permanent, recurring activities throughout the year that would benefit the community, there was not much response from the others, yes they came to the meeting, they read and presented their work, but as soon as we started talking about long-term activities, most, if not all, said they could not commit. (Emilio, personal interview, December 2016)

Motivated to personally begin a cultural community project, every two weeks Emilio, his wife, children, and a small group of volunteers boarded buses (called “rutas” in Juárez) in groups of three to distribute *cuadernillos* that featured short stories and poems by regional and international writers.



Emilio and the other Hoja de Ruta participants then would begin a group reading in which passengers participated and took turns reading out loud. It is important to acknowledge the central role that public transit plays in Ciudad Juárez; given the poor infrastructure and design of the city’s sprawling urban and industrial spaces, “Maquiladora workers and citizens are often forced to travel long distances to reach work, libraries, hospitals, and other services, and these trips are undertaken on public buses” (Driver, 2015, p. 33). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s 2010 study cites that “60% of the Ciudad Juárez labour force is employed in manufacturing... [all] other sectors of the economy, including business services, trade, and transportation, support the dominant manufacturing sector” (OECD, 2010, p. 15), emphasizing the importance of public buses as a site for community outreach. Since its inauguration in November 2011, Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta has distributed 500 *cuadernillos* twice monthly and more than 35,000 *cuadernillos* in total aboard public buses. Printing costs for the reading materials are covered by Emilio and his wife; for a very a



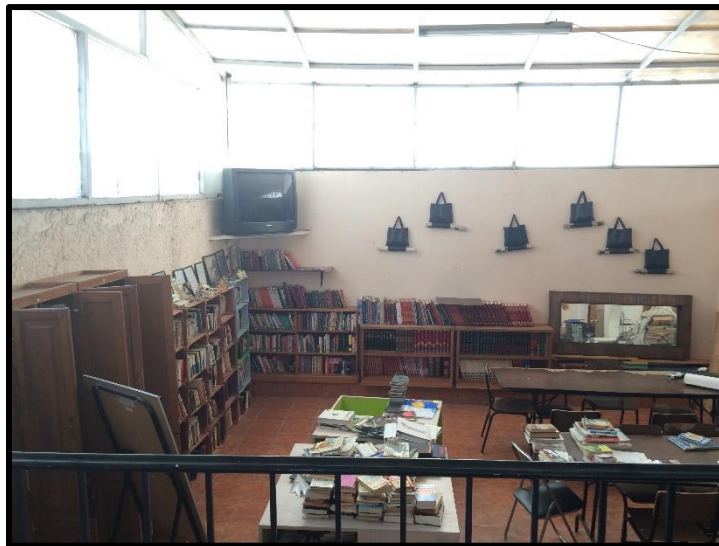
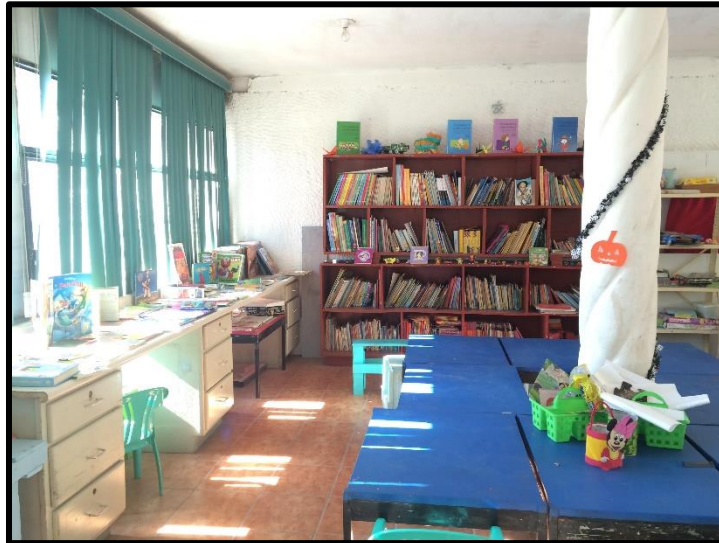
short time, Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta received government funding to cover the costs of printing the *cuadernillos*.

Hoja de Ruta received an honorable mention by the Premio Nacional de Promoción a la Lectura México Lee in 2012, just one year after Emilio began his literacy organizing in Ciudad Juárez. Later that year, drawing inspiration from Elena's work with Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana in Colonia Campestre Virreyes. Emilio opened a physical space for the library in Colonia Infonavit Casas Grandes in 2012 to offer children in the *colonia* a safe community space grounded in culture. The library is situated in southeastern Ciudad Juárez, and during our interview, Emilio reflected on the *colonia* as a space of intense violence during the period of *alta violencia*:

We opened the library in Colonia Infonavit Casas Grandes, which turned out to be one of the areas most affected by the violence during those years of high violence, during Calderón's administration, because according to the statistics, Infonavit Casas Grandes was where most homicides of young people took place during that time. Then without knowing what it would turn into and without really planning long-term, because the space we use belongs to my mother-in-law, we opened it there. ... Those were very hard years, the city was very tense, our family dynamics had to change, for example, the common thing here was that the whole family went shopping together, and we had to stop doing that, just my wife or I started going because there were executions in the street, executions outside the mall, it was too risky for us all to go. My wife witnessed a shootout at the grocery store. I witnessed the first murder in our neighborhood, it was a half a block, *half a block* from our house, by the park, a young man was murdered, shot and killed in his car. The next day in front of that same park where that boy's body was found, they burned a van, one of those old vans, they burned during the night, and I thought it had been caused by a short circuit or something, but it turns out that inside the truck were five corpses. So it took off from there, we soon discovered that we lived in the *colonia* where many employees of the cartels lived. After that, they burned houses, things got very ugly. (Emilio, personal interview, December 2017)

Emilio and his family relocated to El Paso, Texas in 2013 for work. At the time of my site visit to Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta in June 2016, the last public transit literacy activity had taken place in

March 2016, and the library continues to be open two days a week so that young members of Colonia Infonavit Casas Grandes may access the space.



#### *4.2 CITIZEN-TURNED-ACTIVIST AND INSURGENT CITIZENSHIP: SMALL-SCALE ACTIVISM INSPIRED BY TRAUMA AND LIVED EXPERIENCE*

Resilience and resistance are reactions to surviving personal violent trauma and extreme community violence among Juarenses citizens engaged in works of collective action. However, differing from the APA definition of resilience (one of adapting to a new way of living after sustaining a traumatic experience), private citizens saw the need for grassroots works of civic

engagement because due to a lack of State involvement in issues negatively impacting the community at-large (all study participants had been impacted personally by these same issues) and resist this form of disengaged, irresponsible governing. Nearly all participants of this study are activists and community organizers with initiatives that focus on culture (a comics collective, community libraries, mosaic workshops, among others) and all works of community engagement started shortly before or during the years of *alta violencia* in Juárez. It is important to situate resilience and community organizing and cultural activism within the context of Juárez's violent civil society. Ileana Rodríguez (*Liberalism at Its Limits: Crime and Terror in the Latin American Cultural Text*, 2009) explores the roots of liberalism and its effects on civil society; she asserts that liberalism's project includes inherently undemocratic elements, and, in many contexts, it gives way to extreme State and community violence, socioeconomic inequality, and neocolonialism. The misuse or exclusive formal adoption of liberal principles in socially and politically unsteady environments are often the cause of political turmoil, and Rodríguez contends that liberalism as an ideology is insufficient to empower communities and transition nation states into democratic roles in global society. Using the frameworks of Hegel, Hardt, Gramsci, Foucault, and Deleuze to critically approach the concept of civil society within the context of the border city, she suggests that unregulated labor and migration patterns prevent civil society from becoming a political society (where conflicts and people's needs are resolved) because the Mexican State has assumed the role of the accomplice in a criminal state (the political has become the criminal). Centering her analysis on Ciudad Juárez, Rodríguez explores the notion of both limits and borders; she contends that in the context of Juárez and with the presence of liberalism, specific groups lie outside liberalism's limits and fall victim to it. Women's bodies and the bodies of the poor often become the site of liberalism's limiting powers



and she problematizes the failed relationship between the State, violence, and marginalized communities.

Additionally, James Holston's concept of insurgent citizenship (*Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, 2008) is important to consider when reflecting on activism and community organizing in Ciudad Juárez. He suggests that all nation-states are challenged with the task of managing social differences among citizens, which aptly applies to this study and its context, as Juárez is a socioeconomically polarized community due to the presence of the maquiladora industry and neoliberal capitalism that created the violence of poverty the community endures.<sup>72</sup> He cites slavery and genocide as extreme measures taken by governments to manage these differences, while it is more likely that democracies "have held a particular promise for more egalitarian citizenships and this for greater justice and dignity in the organizations of differences. In practice, however, most democracies experience tremendous conflict among citizens, as principle collides with prejudice over the terms of national membership and the distribution of rights" (p. 3).

Holston suggests that in recent history, new emerging forms of engaged citizenship<sup>73</sup> to confront unjust entrenched practices have started to destabilize the status quo regarding

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<sup>72</sup> As study participant Carmen, cited, "[En Juárez] ¿no será que hay inequidad?; ¿no será que la ciudad está siendo utilizada como gran maquiladora en muchos sentidos y que no devuelve la dignidad? Nos han robado la dignidad en esta ciudad a todos queriéndolo o no queriéndolo."

<sup>73</sup> Holston considers democracy's role in urban peripheries of São Paulo that seek to redefine community, among other forms of insurgent citizenship in the contemporary Brazilian context. Holston emphasizes two perspectives in his work: "First, that the realization of citizenship is the central and not the collateral issue of democracy; and second, that the processes and practices that define citizenship are inherently disjunctive—not cumulative, linear, or evenly distributed among citizens but always a mix of progressive and regressive elements, unbalanced, heterogenous, and corrosive. In this way, democracy is necessarily connected to a fuller conception of citizenship, one expanded beyond the political, and its evaluation bound to the complexities of citizenship's realization in particular historical contexts. ... Thus, I stress that the

economic privilege and rights, and these shifts often occur in densely populated urban centers. Holston considers the role of urban spaces as incubator sites of oppression and injustice, noting that “if cities have historically been the locus of citizenship’s development, global urbanization creates especially volatile conditions, as cities become crowded with marginalized citizens and noncitizens who contest their exclusions. In these contexts, citizenship is unsettled and unsettling” (Holston, 2008, p. 3). The result is the creation of a unique kind of citizen that seeks to expand democratic rights and the simultaneous creation of new forms of violence that pushes back against them. The organizers and activists engaged in this study are precisely seeking new forms of citizenship within the violent context of Juárez, one of civic engagement and that demonstrates resilience in the face of corruption, unequal economic opportunity, and extreme violence as Holston suggests.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, the very nature of defining the role of the State is simultaneously called into question through these works of engaged citizenship. In a context marked by human rights abuses and a lack of cultural and social capital, it is important to remember that “if we separate rights of citizenship from human rights we risk reducing rights of citizenship primarily to their civil and political components, thus losing their social, economic, and cultural aspects. By adhering to this division, the state becomes simply a defender of rights rather than also a guardian of the economic well-being of its citizens” (Faulk, 2013, p. 169). Study participants identified that *colonias* have the greatest need for community outreach initiatives and

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extension of democracy to the civil, socioeconomic, legal, and cultural aspects of citizenship is as central to the concept of modern democracy as its extension to the political” (Holston, 311).

<sup>74</sup> Holston’s scholarship considers socioeconomic and political factors in Brazil that closely mirror the reality of Ciudad Juárez. He suggests that “Under the political democracy that Brazilians achieved in 1985 ...Brazilian cities experienced a generalized climate of fear, criminalization of the poor, support for police violence, abandonment of public space, and fortification of residences” (p. 13).

communicated that the violently complex context of Ciudad Juárez complicates civic engagement and indicated hesitancy by members of the community at-large to engage marginalized groups in community-based initiatives and interventions due to the likelihood of suffering violence in specific *colonias*. However, study participants asserted that by starting initiatives and imbedding themselves in *colonias* that had been/continue to be spaces of violence, they seek to resist this violence not through public, large-scale protests, but rather in a new way of living through resilience. By creating smaller-scale projects of collective action, they demonstrated community resiliency in the face of the drug war, the damaging neoliberal economic reality, and the military occupation.

It was found that participants began their community-based civic engagement despite the city's extreme violence in two distinct ways. For some participants, their activism or community organizing was unplanned; their involvement in community initiatives or interventions flourished in reaction to the city's increasing violence and/or sustaining a personal trauma or violence. Others relayed subjective experiences with violence (growing up in violent *colonias*, surviving different forms of violence, etc.) that served, along with living in the violent context of Juárez, as catalysts for a new form of insurgent citizenship they exercised by organizing or activism at a community level. While violence was peaking in Juárez, the participants of this study sought to redefine what it meant to be *juarense* (whether it be living in fear of violence or participating in violence) by creating initiatives that challenged the brutal narrative of the city.

Guadalupe reflected on her unexpected transformation of citizen-turned-activist after the murder of her young student. It was this transformative experience that served as her call to activism, as well as the increasing instances of unprosecuted femicide in Juárez, that led her to engage civilly as she co-founded a well-known organization that seeks to eradicate femicide.

The work of the organization is that of publicized, large-scale resistance; for example, on March 8, 2013 the organization, along with other human rights organizations in Ciudad Juárez, organized a march from Ciudad Juárez to Mexico City to inspire a national movement of consciousness against femicide. This national movement that resulted in the march brought mothers from other states together for a common cause. Given its large-scale works of activism, it should be mentioned that Guadalupe's organization is one of the most well-known organizations in Juárez and has received a great deal of media attention since it was established. Her activism has allowed her to travel internationally for speaking engagements at human rights conferences, as well as allowed her to meet and gain the support of Hollywood celebrities who support the organization's cause. She spoke of how her life has unfolded because of her activism and the trauma she has subsequently endured because of her government opposition:

My work as an activist was never planned. My work as an activist can be seen through my involvement in the public sphere, I think that if I had been given the choice to be an activist or not, I would have chosen to be an activist, even despite everything (...), I can't say that [the trauma I experienced as a result of my activism] was negative because I do not like to view life like that. I see the terrible things that have happened to me as opportunities to strengthen myself, to get involved, to improve, to look for other solutions, to find other strategies, but I experienced very hard things during the last years of my life, we have gone through very painful times, very hard, but despite that, I do not regret our work, I think I regret not having acted sooner. I can't forgive myself for having waited until I felt in my heart the need to create change, to feel that pain that makes you fight and look for a way to move forward and to end this phenomenon [of femicide], I regret that I didn't feel it before. But hey, that's the way it is and it's never too late to fight. (Guadalupe, personal interview, July 2016)

It is true that Guadalupe has become widely known locally and internationally for her work as a femicide activist, however, this fame has brought sacrifices, pain, and challenges. Guadalupe reflected that she regrets not engaging civically sooner; she cited that while she has suffered great personal loss of friends and family members because of her publicized activism, she has felt compelled to continue her advocacy to create change in Ciudad Juárez.

Many study participants asserted that their roots in community-based work began in their experience growing up in marginalized *colonias* in Juárez and experiencing the different species of violence that are inherent to such spaces. Margarita commented on her experience living in Colonia Guadalajara Izquierda<sup>75</sup> as a young woman; she asserted that living in a vulnerable community inspired her civic engagement that started at a young age. She reflected on her early participation in projects in her *colonia* that eventually led her to join the organization Casa Promoción Juvenil with which she spent 11 years organizing youth projects around the city:

I started when I was young, I was 15-16 years old when I started to actively get involved in my community, in my neighborhood. The neighborhoods are not official communities, they are symbolically demarcated by the youth and by the people, more by the young people than by the adults, and their boundaries are not geographically established by the government or can be seen on official maps, but rather a neighborhood is a symbolic space that the young people identify with: this is *my* neighborhood; And neighborhoods are also determined by gang disputes, the gangs are gaining territory, then the neighborhoods are growing, then they are shrinking. I grew up in a neighborhood that was very poor, I was a street kid, I was always on the corner with the boys, and there I started to participate. ... The neighborhood is in the Colonia Guadalajara Izquierda, to the west of the city. The west is a very old area of Juárez, it's almost 50 years old, something like that. And it's a very marginalized area because it is at the foot of the hills on the edge of the city, so the government doesn't bother offering basic services there because it was very expensive to bring them there, while in El Paso, Texas, the nice houses are in the hills, here the poor houses are in the hills. Well, because this area is very old, has lots of history, and has many social and community networks, due to how long it's been around or whatnot, but people know one another and organize a lot. And in my neighborhood, all the children and young people spent time outside, we played in the streets, we were always in the streets, and I grew up on the street, so I think that's why I'm very community-oriented, very engaged, and that is where I started my activism. (Margarita, personal interview, June 2016, emphasis added)

As previously mentioned, subaltern neighborhoods like Margarita's are the site for many types of violence (economic, gendered, sexual, intimate, etc.) and are marked by a profound lack of social and cultural capital. Many study participants cited surviving a multitude of different forms of

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<sup>75</sup> A marginalized and dangerous neighborhood in Ciudad Juárez.

violence that are part and parcel of vulnerable *colonias*, and that their on-the-ground activism and organizing was rooted in first-hand experiences that have translated to small-scale acts of resistance and exercising a new form of citizenship.

Firsthand experience with violent trauma was a catalyst for many participants' community engagement. Elena's path to community organizing was particularly unique; in many ways, her story began as the status quo for women living in Juárez: Elena was in a violent relationship when she had her first child at 14, she stopped attending school, and began working in a maquiladora. During this time, she survived different forms of violence, and she also spoke of her experiences being mentored and inspired by women (teachers and professors) in the community to change the trajectory of her life. Elena eventually graduated high school and college, received a master's degree in public action and social development, and recently finishing her doctoral degree in a literature department at the University of Sonora in Hermosillo. The guidance and encouragement Elena received through these relationships, as well as her personal resilience in the face of trauma, inspired her to community organizing, as she felt compelled to support young people in the community as she was supported:

First, [I] am a survivor of gendered violence; and then community violence in aspects that I prefer not to address here, I'll just mention them in a general sense, so I am a survivor of sexual violence, gendered violence and community violence. So, what inspired my work was finding people in my life with a strong feminist conviction, militant feminists. That value system is what inspires my work. Since I was a child, I grew up in a context that would be important throughout my life and that has also made me reflect on and see that not all people have experienced my context. First, although my family comes from a context of extreme poverty, and along with extreme poverty comes a great deal of violence, many types of violence, extreme poverty is always accompanied by other kinds of violence. (Elena, personal interview, July 2016)

Elena cited that poverty—a form of violence itself—is inevitably accompanied by other forms of equally traumatic violence. The context she grew up in, along with her first-hand experience of

navigating trauma, led her to begin community-based organizing and initiatives. Many participants shared similar experiences of trauma and violence that served as inspiration for civic engagement in marginalized communities and with marginalized populations (maquiladora employees, young children, Raramurí, sex workers, LGBTQI+ community members, etc.).

One personal history of violence and survival stood out in this study; the excerpt from our interview is lengthy and yet to synthesize it would be an injustice. Silvia prefaced our conversation as one of a “viaje a la semilla”<sup>76</sup> as she relayed her life journey and how she became involved in community-based work. She recalled formative moments of her life with fondness and passion as she was exposed to works of literature and activism when living in Mexico City that cultivated a critical consciousness, while also recalling traumatic events of violence and sexual abuse that she would have to overcome and that inspired her work with community youth:

At the National College for Teachers, it turned out that a march was organized on June 10 in the Casco de Santo Tomás in memory of the students killed on June 10, 1971; and another on October 2 in commemoration of the Tlatelolco massacre. I was 15 years old, Anna, I was a little girl who didn't understand what was going on and I happened to go to a march from the Casco de Santo Tomás to the Zócalo of Mexico City, I still remember it and I still get chills, how I felt crossing the causeway that goes from the Casco de Santo Tomás (...), the Causeway Tacuba, that goes from the Casco de Santo Tomás to the Zócalo of Mexico City. And when I got there, there wasn't room for one more soul, it was full, I'm talking about the [Tlatelolco Massacre] of 68 and the [Corpus Christi Massacre] of 71, they were 3 years apart. I didn't really understand it all, Anna, but what I did understand was that the military had killed young people who were the country's future, and I was a young girl. The voices, the intensity, the sound, the people there in solidarity at the Zócalo of Mexico City changed my view of the world, it radically changed. Also when I was in the teaching academy, I had a Spanish teacher whose name I'd like to remember but I can't, during our first year in the teaching academy assigned us for example, *Huasipungo*, to read, which is an indigenous novel. He also assigned *Balún Canán*, by Rosario Castellanos, a novel that also centers on the indigenous experience in Chiapas. He assigned us a book that isn't used much anymore called *Sánchez's Sons*, written by a very famous anthropologist, Oscar Lewis; the book is a life story, the author interviewed a family in Tepito, in Mexico City, the family was very poor, and then the daughter in the family manages to break the cycle by studying to become a teacher. So,

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<sup>76</sup> A reference to Alejo Carpentier's 1944 novel meaning “a journey back to the source.”

that literature that I was given to read, I was also given to read this novel by Martín Luis Guzmán, *The Caudillo's Shadow*, which deals with the Mexican Revolution; *The Underdogs*, of Mariano Azuela, that speaks of the peasants who answered the call to arms.

All this literature, Anna, made me aware of class, made me aware of my country's history, because I had a hazy..., it made me realize that my entire childhood and adolescence had been spent, not in a protected little bubble, but had been spent in an environment of intense violence, very hard, something that is very common in this country. A family where intrafamily violence was an everyday occurrence, where the first images that I remember from 3-5-6 years were of my father dragging my mother around by the hair on the banks of that drainage ditch, of my father being very violent with my mother, not with us, but with my mother, and images of a mother overwhelmed because there was no money to feed her seven children, a mother who when her seventh daughter was born, decided to separate from my father and the violence just got worse; because when they separated, my father used to constantly come to our house and intimidate my mother at the front door of the house where we were living at the time. This separation led to great economic deficiencies for us, great familial deficiencies, emotional deficiencies. ... Then I lived in a primary school, in a primary school; here in Mexico, it was customary that in schools, the administration has a small apartment for the janitor to live in in exchange for work, so she asked if we could live in the school because then my mother would be able to both work and care for us. So, we left our house and lived in the school. ...it was not a nice apartment, it wasn't built by a contractor, the apartment was shoddy and the building was unstable; there, we had to help my mother sweep the classrooms, mop the offices, we helped her with her janitorial duties. She had to sell food at recess, she had to clean houses to make money, she had to clean apartments to make money, and all of that helped us financially. ... And that was the one advantage, that we went to school there. We lived there, we studied there, we helped our mother there, and she took care of us. That was a big plus. And I tell you this because in that environment of terrible economic, emotional, *machista* violence - now I know that's what it was; my father's misogyny, his sexism, the economic violence toward my mother, he didn't give my mother a penny to raise the seven of us, and he was symbolically, verbally, and very physically violent with my mother, and even though he wasn't living with us, it impacted me greatly. So, what I did, Anna, to escape from this world of violence in my home, one day I went to the Primary School Office and there was a small bookcase there with some books locked inside, so what I did was I took the key from my mother's keyring, I stole the key, I opened the bookcase and I took out a book, I remember what it was, *The Lawyer of Glass*, by Miguel de Cervantes. I didn't understand anything that happened, I only understood that the protagonist, when he was of sane mind, no one respected him, he wasn't good with words, but when everyone believed that he was made of glass, everyone respected him, everyone showed him respect, so I liked it a lot. And then I read other books that in the bookcase, behind the padlock. And literature, the words, the books, the writing (...), they weren't picture books, there were few images, it was more text. I read *El Ramayana*, I didn't understand anything from that book but I read it, and well, I read the children's classics, fragments of *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, *The Thousand and One Nights*. So, when the violence at home was too much, I hid in the office and



began to read, and in a way, I created a safe bubble of words around myself to get away from the violence.

So, I as reflect on that time of my life, I go back to where it all began like Carpentier does, because every path around me in my life then was leading to hopelessness. My aunts, my uncles, my cousins lived in the same or worse conditions than we did. My aunt was a prostitute, and her daughters started to prostitute themselves when they were 12-13 years old, so I had no model of how to escape from that world. My mother never went to school, she never had the opportunity to go to school, she was maid for several years before getting married, and she married my father at age 14. When her first child was about to be born, she asked my dad "hey, where do babies come from?, are they going to cut me open?, will they open my stomach up?" And my father, from his masculine, uneducated point of view said, "don't worry, your stomach is full of water and when the bag of water in your stomach breaks, a small worm comes out and when it is exposed to air, it turns into a baby, so don't worry, everything is going to be fine." She was 14, and my dad was 21. Although I don't appreciate my father for who he was, I do understand that he was a man who was a product of that era and his circumstances, surely he did not have anyone to support him in any way. His father was equally violent, even more violent with my grandmother than my father was with my mother, so domestic violence was passed from generation to generation, and it scarred my body, scarred my eyes, scarred my emotions, scarred my feelings from a very early age, and it came with many economic shortcomings.

So, when I lived in the elementary school, I discovered a world through literature that no one else could give me, there weren't havens or safe spaces, there weren't moments of tranquility, of security in my life, and at that time, I found those things through literature.

So, let's keep going, I'll fast forward through my story, and around high school I didn't have much of a chance to think about where I was going in life because I went to live with my godparents when I was 11 years old, and my godparents were models for me, they were not my real godparents but I went to live with them for a while to take care of their children and because they had (...), they were Physical Education teachers, and through them, I saw another way of life and I wanted to live with them, and I owe them a lot. They showed me other paths, they demanded that I was a good student, they demanded a lot of me, but I also worked hard taking care of their three children who were very young: one was 3 months, another was a year and half old, and the other was 5. I had to work and was essentially their nanny, and pampered them, washed clothes, washed diapers, prepared food, cleaned the house, et cetera. And unfortunately, during the time I lived with my godparents, my godfather began to sexually abuse me and raped me.

So, my whole story, Anna, all these life experiences, from when I went to school to become a teacher to when I started to work in marginalized communities ... don't cry for what I have already mourned, don't cry, I don't want to you to feel sad because of my story and I am trying not to cry myself, I try not to cry, Anna, because yes, my story is sad, but the saddest thing is that this not just my sad story, but the story of thousands of other sad people.

So, the sexual abuse I endured by my godfather started when I was 14-13 years old and ended when I was 20, it lasted 7 years, but it was an experience where, if it had not been for the abuse, Anna, I would not have left that violent context, I would have stayed there forever. That experience was very hard, it was a hard price to pay, very hard, but I had to go through it in order to escape it. (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016)

Silvia's experience as a survivor of economic, emotional, and sexual violence is one case of many thousands of women in Mexico that have endured the same. Silvia reflected that it is because of her childhood trauma and finding refuge in literature that she has dedicated her life to civic engagement through both teaching and literary activism with a strong feminist and humanist viewpoint. Her story echoed other participants' narratives that found their way to activism and organizing because of lived experiences and first-hand trauma.

#### *4.3 CULTURE AS A CHANGE AGENT: CONCEIVING NEW COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES OF NONVIOLENCE THROUGH THE CREATION OF CAPITAL, CULTURAL PRODUCTION, AND RESILIENCE AS RESISTANCE*

*"Pobre de México, tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos."* (attributed to President Porfirio Díaz)

*"Culture is a powerful tool against discrimination that provides options and identity to thousands of young people who do not know with certainty the trajectory of their future and are harassed by organized crime groups. The Mexican State cannot abandon them to their uncertain fates."* (María Guadalupe Morfín Otero, 08 de junio de 2004)

Study participants reflected on the concepts of resistance and resilience through their unique and different forms of cultural activism and community organizing that serve as examples of successfully channeling trauma and experience to drive positive community engagement that may inspire enduring change. As we understand from Scott's scholarship, resistance can assume

many forms and it has been discussed in this dissertation that large-scale organized collective action—while it does hold symbolic weight to an extent—does not necessarily facilitate long-lasting systemic change in contexts of oppression. Instead, interview responses indicated that together many small works of community civic engagement are seeking to change everyday life in the city. Moreover, participants cited that resilience is the driving force behind these acts of resistance in its myriad forms; activists and organizers embody Holston's vision of insurgent citizenship by drawing on personal experience to inspire initiatives. In that sense, given the loss, terror, and fear the city has (and continues to) endure, resilience in itself is a form of resistance.

Unlike the ineffective short-term workshops funded by *Todos Somos Juárez*, 656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta are enduring examples of personal resilience and culture being utilized in distinct ways to challenge the status quo of economic, social, and political oppression in the borderland. They employ different strategies to cultivate enduring forms of social and cultural capital and resilience in subaltern communities that are isolated both socially and geographically<sup>77</sup> and experience high levels of violence (gender-based, familial, interpersonal, narco, among other forms). They seek to create social community environments that facilitate connections among community youth and adults and seek to offer informal educational experiences in atypical educational environments that teach participants new skills that can be mastered and used throughout life (cultural capital, in other words). Therefore, through works of cultural production and by bringing social and cultural capital opportunities into marginalized communities (and in the case of Hoja de Ruta, bringing culture to marginalized

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<sup>77</sup> Marginalized *colonias* are situated away from the city's center where citizens of higher socioeconomic status have access to community cultural institutions such as museums, theaters, and libraries.

Juarenses on *ruteras*), activists and organizers are cultivating new forms of capital and consciousness in communities and reorganizing community by reconceptualizing the local versus the State.

The community initiatives documented for this dissertation utilize culture and works of cultural production differently; cultural products are created in the forms of comics and mosaics, and printed works of cultural production (short stories, poems, children's books) are employed didactically and for enrichment. The four case studies and their works of cultural production subscribe to Bourdieu's framework although in a very specific way he himself does not necessarily identify: their engagement with and creation of works cultural production serve as forms of resistance to a failed system. I have established that works of cultural production in Juárez are very much community-based, and through the field of cultural production and the creation of different forms of capital that seek to enrich and rebuild civil society, these works also seek to gain symbolic capital. I must clarify that by "symbolic capital" within the context of this specific geographic space, I contend that these initiatives seek to establish themselves as small-scale public symbols of collective action and empowerment in what remains of civil society since the militarization period in the borderland community. Activists are claiming their own subjectivity and agency by symbolically occupying space through community works of collective action. It is clear through the data collection process that this symbolic power that activism/works of collective action as a whole create over time is done with symbolic meaning-making in mind; this is to say that these small works of resistance and resilience are carried out with the hope of creating larger, systemic changes over time by building networks of like-minded and engaged members of civil society.

Both works of literacy community engagement that I documented for this dissertation seek to cultivate social, cultural, and symbolic capital in subaltern communities that are ground-zero for violence in Juárez. Given the prevalence of violence in the *colonias* in which both libraries were founded,<sup>78</sup> is important to mention the unique nature of Elena and Emilio's community engagement and what differentiates their two works of community organizing/activism from other examples in Ciudad Juárez. Many interview responses indicated that in Juárez—as well as in other contexts of oppression—cause-and-effect relationships can be identified in which specific episodes of violence inspire works of collective action. In our interview, Elena situated la Ma'Juana within the larger activist context; she reflected that the violent reality of her community inspired her to open the community library:

most of the organizations that we have worked with have arisen as a result of an unfortunate circumstance, for example, the femicide of some girl, then this non-profit is founded; the disappearance of some person, then another type of organization is created, Ma'Juana arises in a totally different context, Ma'Juana arises in the pure context of violence itself, and yes everyone was questioning us, but the library emerged more in a context of community, and in a context of what our community needed, how we visualized ourselves individually and as a community (...) the trigger for Ma'Juana was the violence, we are not going to say that it was not violence, but it had to do more with how it was shaping our community, how violence was affecting us and how we wanted to represent and respond to it. (Elena, personal interview, June 2016)

Interviews with both Elena and Emilio revealed that the locations of the two literacy initiatives documented for this study—Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana in Colonia Campestre Virreyes and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta in Colonia Infonavit Casas Grandes—were chosen with intention and hold symbolic capital. Elena lived in Colonia Campestre Virreyes for most of her life, a marginalized neighborhood in the southeastern area of the city that was marred

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<sup>78</sup> In our interviews, Elena reflected on the murders of several children and/or family members of children in Colonia Campestre Virreyes that actively engaged with Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana.

by violence during the years of *alta violencia* and the site of many of the city's drug-related homicides. She recalled her experience moving from Mexico D.F. to Ciudad Juárez during her childhood, and how her early exposure to books and cultural capital would eventually lead her out of her violent context and to start her community library in 2010, an initiative that is actively supported by her parents and Silvia:

There was a lot of misery, human and economic, but there were people we had access to who had greater cultural capital than we did, so my dad started (...), in the Federal District it was much easier to do (...), to buy books, to have books, then, even though we lived in poverty, there were always books in the house because my dad had books all his life. Then, during childhood and in different times of solitude, the books became a refuge for me, the books were there and being a young and curious girl I came upon them in the house, then I read, I started reading from a very young age to face the loneliness I felt, because when my brothers were born, my brothers were almost four years younger than me and they were twins, then they grew up together as boys and being the same age, they were very close and I grew up without a sister. The books became a form of companionship for me, after that I was diagnosed with dyslexia, one of the exercises I was given for dyslexia was to read two books. At that time it was not known what dyslexia was, they thought that I had some type of mental retardation when I was a child, so the exercises that I was given for my brain, was to read two books at the same time and to be able to think, and from that point, books were very important to me, however, when we as a family emigrated to Ciudad Juárez, much of that cultural capital was lost, because obviously we emigrated in conditions of extreme poverty to this colony where to this day la Biblioteca Independiente Ma'Juana has been, and this colony has made some progress but really very little. So when we emigrated (to Ciudad Juárez in 1989) we obviously could not come carrying books or bring our social connections with us, maintaining social networks in those days was not so easy because the internet did not exist, for example, and if it did exist, it was not available to us. The communication to the south was still with letters, so written correspondence took a month to arrive, it was not easy to have communication back then. So, we as a family had to start from scratch when we arrived here to this *colonia*, here where we are right now and where Ma'Juana is, and I have a very deep love and respect for this space, I think Ma'Juana is very important because it is an example of what the community in Ciudad Juarez really is for me, it's an important presence in my life, of all the people who are really sustaining the whole system in Ciudad Juárez, it's a place like Ma'Juana. So, for me this place has been very important. When we arrived here to live, the houses weren't here legally, we arrived here, I don't know if you know the word in English, but we arrived like paratroopers because these weren't legal pieces of land, it wasn't under our name, we arrived and just sort of invaded la *colonia*. There weren't bathrooms, there was no plumbing, when we arrived here to live, it was very hard. (Elena, personal interview, June 2016)

Similarly, the physical space of Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta is housed in Emilio's in-law's family home near the house Emilio and his family occupied before relocating to El Paso. Emilio asserted that his decision to create the didactic space of refuge from violence was not a reaction to a particular event, but rather was rooted in his desire to offer young Juarenses options that can have meaningful long-term impacts:

For us the intention of creating the library was precisely to give young people an option, an alternative, because we discovered that, without these spaces, young people were exposed to life in the streets, and were either becoming addicts or working for the narcos. So, given our sad experiences during those five years of violence, we decided to open that space, so that they have a choice, and we did it because when we were younger, 15-16 years ago we had those options, there were those kinds of spaces for us, there were the workshops for writers, painting workshops, so from there arose the need to open that space in our *colonia* to basically save lives, and that motivated us. (Emilio, personal interview, December 2017)

I previously mentioned that Emilio was motivated by Elena's work with la Ma'Juana to open Hoja de Ruta; Elena and Emilio share the vision that critical consciousness, empowerment, and liberation can be cultivated and realized through cultural and social capital creation, and they regularly participate in other another's community-based activities. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes journal from a fieldwork trip to Ciudad Juárez in January 2017. This passage documents an event that I attended at the Biblioteca Independiente Ma'Juana, and effectively demonstrates the notion of bringing culture and social consciousness into marginalized, forgotten communities in Juárez. Elena and Silvia led the reading and reflection activities for a group of children in Colonia Campestre Virreyes shortly after the new year:

About 15 children came today for the reading and lesson that started at 1:30PM. The books we read were called *Hic* (as in "hiccup") and *El niño que no tuvo cama*. The children are now doing a drawing reflection on something they want in the new year for the community, their families, etc.—something not material. One participant said that in the new year he didn't want there to be a "gasolinazo" (gas is currently very expensive) and that he didn't want Peña Nieto to lie so much. Children are reflecting the worries of their parents and what most troubles them these days. Some children look sad and lost

and some are acting out. Others are happy with bright eyes and neatly braided hair. Others are wearing dirty clothes and short sleeves, without jackets to face the winter cold. The children are hanging their drawings up on the walls and windows of the patio where the reading was held; they seem proud of their works being displayed. I wonder what these little people have seen. They are now enjoying hot chocolate and rosca de reyes; they are eagerly waiting to see who has gotten the baby and now has good luck for the next year and whose wishes will come true.

What does good luck mean to these little ones and what wishes do they want fulfilled? Some of the children's wishes for the new year are that the price of tortillas doesn't increase, that the price of gas stays low, that the dollar doesn't rise anymore because it is crushingly high right now. A small girl just said that her wish was that there isn't so much violence. Silvia told them that for those that are poor in Ciudad Juárez, the only thing they can do is go to school and get good grades.

Life here is so hard for them, innocence must be lost at such a young age, as the brutality of life has already made itself known. To wish for the things they wished for...how sad for them to grow up with such deep worries. (Fieldnotes Journal Entry: January 8, 2017)





Both la Ma'Juana and Hoja de Ruta offer community youth access to didactic and culturally rich spaces away from the violence of the streets and they create alternative social opportunities rooted in literacy and intellectual development. During our interview, Emilio underscored his belief in the humanizing power of literature and cultural capital, and the importance of a child's access to works of cultural production with humanistic viewpoints. He suggested "I do believe that reading changes people, and that it is important to encourage children to establish it as a habit, it helps mental development and emotional development, because books make you more sensitive, more reflective, more interested in learning, so for me, promoting reading it is an important part of creating change" (Emilio, personal interview, December 2016).

Ultimately, when asked what values motivate their works of cultural community organizing, Elena and Emilio indicated that they seek to cultivate community unity and new narratives of nonviolence, solidarity, and resilience in subaltern *colonias*. Emilio indicated that

Through my work I seek the unity of the community, I think that if we focus on being united in something, it can give us strength. So one of my ideals is for the community to be united, another is to generate a different way of coexisting in solidarity, a way that is more peaceful, more sociable, less violent and aggressive and impulsive. ...In Juárez no one believes in solidarity, everyone has their own interests, everyone wants to get ahead, and nobody cares about the common good, so I think our future depends on being united, being supportive and promoting coexistence, even if just on your own block. Because we want every child on this block to take these values to the block where they will live in the future and pass these values onto others. (Emilio, personal interview, December 2016)

Similarly, 656 Cómics' aesthetic and works of community cultural activism serve as pointed commentaries of resistance concerning the city's socioeconomic and political reality by challenging the lack of various forms of capital due to a lack of investment in civil society. Their published comic-narratives are indeed works of cultural production as defined by Bourdieu as they remain subordinate to the field of power; yet, they differ from Bourdieu's framework in a

specific. First, they inhabit an in-between space between the two subfields of cultural production, the field of restricted production (what is normally thought of as “elite culture,” “high art” or “classical music” in which economic profit is disavowed (Johnson, 1993, p. 15)) and the field of large-scale production (works of “mass” or “popular” culture in which economic power is celebrated (Johnson, 16)). As Randal Johnson suggests in the introduction to *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (1993), “Between these poles is a range of cultural practices which combine the two principles of legitimacy to various degrees. ... While today these principles are found in the opposition between ‘mass’ and ‘elite’ culture, they may vary according to the specific country in question and the specific historical moment of analysis” (Johnson 1993, 16). Aesthetically, 656 Cómics’ works are neither art for art’s sake nor are they examples of purely consumable popular culture but rather exist at the intersection between the two principles. They serve as a form of artistic resistance to a failed system and seek to enrich and rebuild civil society through the creation of a critical consciousness as evidenced by themes of their work. The problematic themes 656 critiques are femicide, impunity and corruption, *machismo* and patriarchal society, and the city’s vast population of orphans due to drug-related violence.

656 Cómics Collective organizes workshops in marginalized *colonias* in Ciudad Juárez in which neighborhood youth are instructed in the mediums of comic creation, drawing, and painting (and muralism and theater in the case of a State-sponsored workshop I documented in



2016) to cultivate cultural and social capital and symbolic power. 656 Cómics member Fernando asserted that 656's work is grounded in lived experience growing up in marginalized areas of the city. He acknowledged the challenge of escaping the cycle of violence in the *colonias* and posited that the collective encourages workshop participants to draw from their personal experiences and the context of Ciudad Juárez as inspiration:

Part of our identity as 656 Cómics, one of our visions, or missions, of the collective is to tell your lived experience, so Juárez is our context, the *colonias* were our context, we know very well where we come from, we know the shortcomings of the *colonias*, so these marginalized communities are our priority, because those kids do not have options, they do not have opportunities, it is a circle from which they cannot escape, they cannot easily leave. So they need support, and not the support in the form of giving them things, I do not support that idea of giving them material things for free, but rather to show them, to teach them that they can improve their self-esteem, so that they can see that they are human beings that are valuable, and that they are worth as much as the next person, so we start from there to try to ensure that lifelong change. (Fernando, personal interview, June 2016)

Both Fernando and Roberto reflected on their experiences hosting workshops in vulnerable communities. They cited the importance of engaging youth from these areas of the city to encourage them to explore their futures by offering them social and cultural capital opportunities through which they can imagine new identities and possibilities. Roberto spoke of exposing community youth to alternative ways of living (options other than joining a gang or working in the maquiladora, which as previously mentioned, are very common paths to take for Juarenses youth) and that 656's primary objective is to encourage young people to recognize their power and to envision their context in a different way. In a specific activity the



group employs during these workshops, 656 will ask youth to create their own character or superhero as a way in which they can reflect on their context and how to find strength and resilience in what are often complicated and challenging everyday realities. Children craft dynamic and socially-engaged identities for themselves and imagine their futures through their superheroes and lenses of empowerment and liberation; in our interview, Roberto described the activity as a cathartic—yet hopeful—experience for those that participate:

We have an activity called "Create Your Own Character," and when we do this, many children like to express themselves through their character, because they have to create this protagonist, where he or she comes from, what he or she does; For example with a superhero, you need to give them a name, decide where they are from and what powers they have, you have to decide these little details of their life. This is where we see the children project themselves onto these superheroes, we have seen the kids reflect on hard things, things that have happened to them at home or have happened in their families. (Roberto, personal interview, June 2016)

Fernando explained that the overarching goal of the collective is to offer youth the opportunity to explore their talents and to cultivate critical consciousness through social and cultural capital development:

As 656 Cómics collective, our gig is ..., our work with the community is a way to expose kids to knowledge, open paths to new options, whether it's the graphic novel, or scriptwriting, illustration, all aspects of creating comics are viable options for young people. If we host a comic book workshop, it doesn't mean that everyone leaves a comic book artist, or that everyone should learn the art of comics, as I was saying before, the comic book encompasses two forms of artistic expression, literature and drawing or illustration. In our workshops, maybe a boy or a girl would rather write, create stories, novels or even poetry, they don't necessarily have to draw comics; And maybe others will say: I like drawing, I like to paint, I want to make pictures. It's like a watershed for different things, so what makes me think is that you give the boy or the girl, the young man, several options of what to do, of how to see life with in a different way, to see that there are other options, other than joining a gang or going to work at the maquila, you can do other things that really fulfill you, that you really enjoy. (Fernando, personal interview, June 2016)

By organizing these initiatives in *colonias* that are all but forgotten and through the publication of their work that acts as sociopolitical critique, 656 Cómics is creating symbolic capital by

establishing themselves as public symbols of resistance and resilience in their pursuit to rebuild community and civil society.

ColectivARTE, Equidad y Comunidad/La Promesa also creates works of cultural production that also serve as manifestations of symbolic power and resilience and Carmen founded La Promesa with the intention of creating a space in which community members could



engage in cultural and social capital opportunities and cultivate empowerment. In the context of this study, I documented the community center's mosaic workshops in which mothers and families of victims of femicide gather weekly over the course of 15 weeks to create mosaic portraits of their daughters to place at their gravesites. The mosaics are works of cultural production, while the model of La Promesa and the workshops also function as works of symbolic power. Carmen spoke of La Promesa's mission to facilitate healing through art:

My own personal history of getting involved with [a local thinktank] and researching the subject of democracy, citizen participation, I mean, all that lead me to think that both emotionally demanding and pleasurable experiences can be navigated through art. So I believe that these women who are working with us give us the opportunity to see that even in the moments when their sorrow is overwhelming, when they fall apart because their daughters were murdered, their daughters didn't just die, they were murdered in the most cruel way- in the face of this phenomenon [of femicide] and when there is so much suffering, such intense mourning, so many things, the art that we offer these women, art that is so focused, so dedicated to their daughters, that as a mother you are literally recreating your daughter's face, and that you focus on every little piece and where it can fit in the larger picture, the same goes for one's feelings and where they fit in the heart, the good, the terrible, the loving, it serves as a good metaphor. It makes them

think and it makes them weave these memories together, it makes us do the same, because it is in that fraternal, loving, and respectful dialogue where we build life. The art that we are creating allows that to occur. So, I think that's very valuable, to be able to weave collective memory through creative actions, while it is painful, that's what makes you into a person who has the capacity to be resilient. When you are able to distance yourself from and become used to everything that's kept in your heart and mind, but also allow for hope, and love, and justice. ... So this is art that allows that to happen, allows women to dialogue, to chat, to demand, but above all to memorize, to think about weaving everything that passes through their minds and our minds with threads of love and to find exactly where the stories intersect. To me, this is important. (Carmen, personal interview, July 2016)

The visual commemoration of the lives of victims of femicide is a way in which families navigate the intersection of trauma, grief, and memory. I attended the weekly mosaic workshop at La Promesa during my fieldwork. The sessions begin with a time for reflection and an intention was made upon which the mothers and family members would focus their work. The families meticulously worked on their own child's portrait and helped other mothers cut and place tile pieces



while recalling memories of their daughters and the struggles they encounter in the grief process.

Carmen and Margarita facilitate the workshops at La Promesa, and during our interview,

Margarita reflected on the workshop's mission to cultivate healing and empowerment that is grounded in memory:

So when Carmen told me her idea about the portraits, we sat down and talked about how the methodology of the project could help the mothers to start rebuilding, and I was very insistent and said: look Carmen, we have to anchor the mothers' lives to their daughters' lives, not to their deaths, we have to transcend victimization, so when they tell me about their daughters, they are reflecting on their daughters' lives: during her life, my daughter was like that, my daughter liked to eat this. If the daughter died and they have her

remains [that is one thing], but if they don't have the remains, we will continue to fight for them to be returned and that justice be done, but [the mother] has to transcend all that, not get stuck, because it doesn't help the daughter come back, and if the mothers get stuck [in their grief], they can get sick, that's what has happened, they've been getting sick, they've been diagnosed with cancer, and we don't want that for them. I think this is why I have been seeking more professional training, trying to provide them with more accurate guidance, the academy has helped us a lot with that. I also get great satisfaction seeing the results later on, because they do succeed [in this process], I always say that we are, have you seen the movie *Dumbo*?, we are like the feather. That's what I tell them. (Margarita, personal interview, June 2016)

La Promesa shows that death and grief have the power to foster strength and create community; during the session, mothers from previous mosaic portrait workshops arrived at the community center to share a coffee and converse with participants. The work of La Promesa is symbolically powerful in the sense that mothers, fathers, and families of victims of femicide are gathering in a common space to collectively remember the lives of women the State has deemed disposable and challenge the status quo



of indifference regarding gender-based murder. This artistic experience allows families to reappropriate their daughters' lives and deaths by constructing a countermemory that deviates from the memory of State-sponsored and narcoviolence. Often poverty and economic factors force victims' families to leave the city and surviving family that does remain is often left to fight against State abandonment of femicide cases. Calling to mind Agamben's notion of "bare

life,”<sup>79</sup> “victims of femicide, and the community of family and friends that attempts to remember them, confront a political and judicial system that affords them few rights” (Driver, 2015, p. 21). Through their experience and participation in cultural production, families are making visible the trauma they have endured and are showing personal strength and resilience in the face of injustice.

During our two interviews, Carmen spoke with pride of her experience starting the mosaic collective, BorderCraft, with mothers from the mosaic workshops at La Promesa. Additionally, Carmen spoke of art as a powerful didactic and pedagogical tool that can be drawn upon to navigate the context of Juárez and can support the rebuilding of civil society in the post-militarization context. The goal of Carmen’s activism and community-based initiative is that art will become humanizing force of resilience in the community and a way in which civil society can change the violent narrative of Ciudad Juárez, as she contends that the right to culture is a human right:

We said: if we can make people see art as a means of ... as a mechanism of changing this violent context, perhaps art—this was the hypothesis that we had—perhaps art in future generations in Ciudad Juárez can be converted to a way of believing in the city, and for us it is very important that people believe in the city because there is a certain detachment here, so the simple fact of believing in the city is not a minor thing in a city where you aren’t allowed think or dream, in a city where you are a robot working in the maquila, and you don’t allow yourself to dream and think of other ways of living. And if we can’t dream and imagine this, this city will continue to deteriorate, the levels of violent crime will increase, women’s standard of living will decrease... So, while we keep discussing democracy, citizen participation, no, people are dying at very young ages because of the social deterioration here. So, culture and art can hopefully become a way to express things, to navigate emotions, and even when you can’t change things, to be able to express yourself, to give them what you’ve got, to be able to use your voice to speak and

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<sup>79</sup> The opposite of political existence, those who exist in the state of “bare life” have had their sociopolitical rights stripped, rights that make them citizens and members of civil society.



scream and protest, because what we are finally talking about here are peoples' fundamental rights [that are being violated]. (Carmen, personal interview, July 2016)

The work of 656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma´Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta demonstrate the power of harnessing personal and/or community trauma to inspire intentional works of community engagement, and they exemplify the notion of culture as an inalienable right that can be used as a change agent. Other interview participants reinforced the importance of access to culture and resilience as resistance in the militarization and post-militarization period in Juárez as means to navigate traumatic events. Participants recognized tenacity in the new generation of Juarese youth that are occupying and using public space in the community, even with the city's infrastructural challenges and limitations. Similarly, they cited that in the years following the militarization, young people are exercising more active forms of citizenship and are becoming more involved in civic engagement, effectively a type of community rebirth in the wake of years of extreme violence. A study participant asserted that Ciudad Juárez's resilience is evident and that

It's true that this city is impressive, because despite all the violence, young people here have incredible strength. Although moving around the city can be hard for them, they stand up for their rights, they demand to be able to occupy public space, demand to have normal lives, and they take to the streets in organized demonstrations, go out to work in the community, to do cultural work, to do political work, but also go out at night to have fun, continue going to the clubs, continue going to bars, go to universities, go to work, leave their homes. (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016)

Another item in this study's interview protocol attended to what values drive one's community engagement and what they seek to achieve through their work as an activist or community organizer. Silvia relayed her experience with the creation of symbolic capital through literature and occupying public space during the years of high violence. This creation of symbolic capital through occupying public space that is lost or reappropriated during times of

violence, as Caldeira suggests in her work, serves as an everyday act of resistance. In Silvia's experience, she recalled the power of public assassinations and mutilated bodies being hung from bridges, acts of narcocrime intended to terrorize and instill fear. She spoke of deciding to resist the narrative of fear during those years in Juárez as she went to the streets with two friends to read aloud, their reaction to the violence serving as a symbolic act of resistance and an act of humanity:

The history of cultural activism here, we were starting to crumble, because between 2007 and 2008, Ciudad Juárez was under military occupation and the executions began, the beheadings, the public hangings in the city, and in 2008, there was one very grotesque scene in particular [that I remember]: One morning, early, the body of a person was hung up on one of the overpasses in the city, the Upside Down Bridge, as it is called here, or the Rotary Bridge, and it was hanging over Pan American Avenue and the Avenue de la Raza, so that day was particularly hard because the news, the newspapers reported that at 8 o'clock in the morning, the time when children were going to school, there was a decapitated man [hanging over the school bus route]. Every day I pass by that bridge and every day I shudder when I think about that scene, so after that day, my two former students who were already my best friends, my partners-in-crime, we decided that we were going to start reading in the streets, to confront the violence, in front of these cordoned-off spaces, there were murder scenes and police tape everywhere, you went through the streets and you saw the bodies lying there, you heard the ambulances, you heard the police and their sirens screaming, the murders were part of our everyday life. From 2007, 2008, 2009, during that period my two friends and I decided to go out and read in the streets, we were not going to stop the bullets, but we were going to create an oasis for the children and adults that we read to. We started going to the Plaza de Armas, where the Juárez Cathedral is, we went to the international bridge downtown, [we read] on Juárez Avenue, we read in hospitals, we read in the central park, we started to board the public buses to read, we read on them on Sundays because we thought that in the face of so much violence there had to be a little safe space, to create some peace through words ... and for almost three years, we read in the streets, we read everywhere. (Silvia, personal interview, July 2016)

Many participants cited similar experiences of calculated resilience as resistance in which they used experiences of trauma to fuel their cultural activism and community organizing during the years of *alta violencia*. One study participant cited that civic engagement during the militarization was “a matter of resistance, a matter of survival, but above all, a matter of

resilience. How? We had to survive here and not lose hope that we could create change” (Elena, personal interview, July 2016).

In this chapter, I suggested that the discourse of violence and the socio-politically complex context of Ciudad Juárez demands that manifestations of resistance assume hidden and nuanced identities. As such, I analyzed four community organizing and cultural activism initiatives from the perspective of culture as a potential long-term agent for change; 656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma´Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta are examples of works of cultural production and culture being utilized to foster critical consciousness, create social, cultural, and symbolic capital, and resilience as resistance as a mechanism to empower the subaltern by channeling trauma to inspire community engagement.

Ultimately, after exploring the complex (and to many in the community and beyond, seemingly hopeless) reality of Ciudad Juárez and seeking the insights from those engaged in community organizing and activism space, interview responses revealed that the future of the borderland city rests in hope. Other values that were cited as driving forces behind works of collective action were courage, solidarity, feminism, equality, and survival, but overwhelmingly hope for eventual change is a core value that inspires the work of the activists and organizers documented for this study. Participants asserted that they are hopeful that together across the city many small seeds of organized resilience will flourish to shift the narrative of Juárez and to inspire future generations of Juarenses to continue works of civic engagement. Resilience is rooted in hope and diverse forms of community agency, and in the context of Juárez, one must have profound fortitude to continue small scale works of action in the face of violence, trauma, impunity, and sociopolitical and economic challenges. In all interviews, respondents were asked

if they believed many small-scale works of activism and organizing have the capacity to foster networks of engaged citizens that seek to create sustainable, long-lasting systemic changes in

Juárez. Carmen responded:

I hope so, because that's why I'm working so hard. I like a phrase "the night is always darkest before the dawn." I think we are there right now, we are in the darkest moment. This city has suffered for so long, we are the product of profound pain and mourning, and I think that this can't go on forever because no one could endure that. My hope leads me to believe that we are going through a time where we have sown the seeds of justice, we have sown many bonds of brotherhood, we have sown many dreams, dreams I have for myself and others, and it takes time for those seeds to germinate, growth is not immediate, it can take generations, but it's going to happen, [the city] is going to be reborn, and when it is, it's going to be a light that shines brightly, a city where we can have better jobs, where we can express ourselves, where men don't feel that they can abuse the bodies of women, where dignity is a right. We are fighting now for dignity and justice, and even if I don't experience the fruits of this labor in my lifetime, I have hope that my daughters will. Knowing that is possible makes it all worth it. (Carmen, personal interview, July 2016)

## V. CONCLUSION

This dissertation determined a connection between an individual's resilience and agency to be civically engaged despite community violence and collective forms of cultural production that are necessary to rebuild civil society in Ciudad Juárez. It was determined through interviews with 25 community organizers and activists that resilience is what fuels small acts of resistance in the community at a fundamental level; this is to say that reconstructing civil society after the period of the militarization of Juárez is the driving force behind community organizations and works of cultural activism. Works of communal collective resilience that utilize culture as a tool serve as intentional mechanisms to rebuild community and cultivators of social and cultural capital in order to empower subaltern communities. The ultimate goal of the four community organizing/cultural activism initiatives documented for this study—656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta—is that many small manifestations of resilience in Ciudad Juárez will promote larger, systemic change borne from the humanizing perspective of culture.

The study findings presented in this dissertation demonstrate intersecting and cause-and-effect relationships between sociopolitical, economic, and cultural dimensions of civil society that serve as motivations for community engagement. First, crime and violence—both narco and gender-motivated violence—were found to impact community interaction and social organization. The discussion of crime has contributed to the community's culture of fear and has led to social reorganization that falls along socioeconomic lines, and space as a public good has been lost and is in the process of being recuperated. Sensationalistic journalism tactics have also perpetuated Juárez's culture of violence and fear by drawing community attention away from the causes of community violence, such as poor infrastructure, an exploitative labor market, failing

social programming, and the national culture of patriarchal misogyny that excuses gender-based violence. Alternatively, as described by some participants involved in community organizing or activism on a local level, the media's coverage of violence—in particular the coverage of femicide—has gone through a silencing process as demanded by the government, softening the city's violent image while negatively misrepresenting organizers and activists and their community initiatives. All these various dimensions surrounding the community's exhaustive talk of crime serve to foster dialogues and cultivate networks of ideologically likeminded engaged citizens. The findings of this study show that the violence of poverty and lack of different forms of capital serve as catalysts for civic participation, and are being addressed through works of community organizing, cultural activism, and cultural production that serve as forms of resilience and resistance.

The crux of this dissertation's analysis lies in the new forms of engaged citizenship that employ culture as a tool to educate, navigate trauma, and promote enduring change in the community. Kai T. Erikson (*Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*, 1976) demonstrates that collective trust and societal bonds can be weakened to the point of dissolution in the face of collective trauma and oppression: "The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it...[there is] a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared" (Erikson, 1976, p. 154). 656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma'Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta were founded before or during the militarization and serve as symbols of community, resilience, and resistance to Juarese corrupt sociopolitical reality, the community's desperate economic conditions, and its culture of normalized violence. I

have documented their impacts of utilizing culture and their creation symbolic power and social and cultural capital to enrich, fortify, and rebuild the fabric of a community that has sustained significant trauma.

It is important to mention that there is a meaningful body of literature that examines art as a mechanism for healing that effectively dialogues with and validates the work of 656 Cómics Collective, ColectivARTE, Comunidad y Equidad/La Promesa, Biblioteca Independiente la Ma´Juana, and Biblioteca Hoja de Ruta as they seek to foster the creation of cultural tools to navigate trauma and to harness and cultivate creativity, capital, and empowerment in both community youth and adults. In her pioneering research that centered on literacy strategies and practices with socially and culturally marginalized Maori children, New Zealand poet-educator Sylvia Ashton-Warner described the mind of a marginalized, traumatized child as “a volcano with two vents: destructiveness and creativeness” (Ashton-Warner, 1986, p. 33). As such, van der Kolk’s scholarship (2014) determines that in the wake of trauma—whether it is a one-time event or long-term sustained trauma—traditional forms of talk therapy or other common cognitive interventions are often ineffective in making sense of the event (Kuban, 2015, p. 18). Caelan Kuban, practitioner-researcher and program director at The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, similarly asserts that because verbal memory in the wake of a painful experience complicates a survivor’s ability to orally communicate the event—especially young survivors—art is a nonverbal effective medium for navigating trauma and promoting resilience in child and adolescent patient populations:

More than words, art activities allow children to access and externalize the sensations, memories, and visual images shaped by trauma. Youth benefit from drawing when used to safely communicate and provide symbolic representation of their experiences. In a sense, a picture is worth a thousand words and helps adolescents describe memories. Art

also provides youth with a medium to express and explore images of self that are strength-based and resilience-focused. (Kuban, 2015, p. 19)

Similarly, works of adult-centered research also consider the effect art can have on trauma healing. Working from the scholarship of Wertheim-Cahen (1991), Smeijsters (2008), and Johnson & Lahad (2009), Schouten, de Niet, Knipscheer, Kleber, & Hutschmaekers (2014) consider art as a tool to navigate post-traumatic stress disorder in trauma survivors. They contend that “Art therapy enables the processing of traumatic memories by communicating and documenting images of traumatic memories and rituals...therapeutic art interventions provide the possibility to distance oneself from emotion and provide cognitive integration of emotion and stimulate meaning-making processes...while increasing emotional control [and] improving interpersonal relationships” (Schouten, de Niet, Knipscheer, Kleber, & Hutschmaekers, 2014, p. 2). However, access to both youth and adult trauma-informed behavioral or mental health services is uncommon in contexts such as Ciudad Juárez; such services are often not subsidized or affordable, and a patient’s long work hours and their access to transportation and childcare complicate engaging in mental health treatment. Also, it is important to acknowledge that traditional forms of therapy do not address and deconstruct dominant contextual narratives of injustice, inequality, and oppression that are necessary to confront; in doing so, one cultivates agency and power by critically reimagining their context with the goal of fostering enduring change in their community. American writer, activist, artist, and educator Walidah Imarisha speaks of the power of this “visionary fiction:”

When we talk about a world without prisons; a world without police violence; a world where everyone has food, clothing, shelter, quality education; a world free of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism; we are talking about a world that doesn’t currently exist. But collectively dreaming up one that does means we can begin building it into existence. ...That’s why decolonization of the mind is the most dangerous and subversive decolonization process of all (Imarisha, 2015)



As such, the four community initiatives documented seek to cultivate new forms of citizenship by promoting different forms of capital, self-awareness, self-regulation, healing, and resilience from a perspective of culture. By creating small-scale works of collective action to address both personal and larger systemic problems (as opposed to larger works of activism that are considered to be mostly ineffective with minimal follow-through), organizers and activists seek to redefine everyday existence and create an interconnected network of changemakers. The goal of these organizers' small pockets of resilience is to serve as a greater, collective symbol of resistance that will inspire long-lasting change and will reconstruct Juarese civil society.

Though participants indicated different motivations that led to their cultural activism or community organizing, all expressed the hope that many seeds of resilience can flourish to eventually shift the context of Ciudad Juárez through examples of engaged citizenship. It is true that one must be fearlessly strong to be a community organizer or a cultural activist, and in the violent context of the borderland, one would assume that being civically engaged is uncommon given the possible repercussions and dangers. I discovered through this study, however, that there are many individuals working independently toward the common goal of shifting the city's violent narrative, project by project.

The concept "resilience as resistance" and the power of harnessing trauma for change can be applied to many diverse groups of people in different contexts that merit exploration by scholars, scholar-activists, and practitioners. As mentioned, due to the large body of literature centering on resilience, it is important that researchers and practitioners frame their working definition of resilience according to the context to which it is being applied. In this way, it is critical to be conscious of community nuances when employing this concept; resilience will manifest in a multitude of ways that depend on the community's geopolitical space and

sociopolitical and socioeconomic reality (following Scott's experience and framework). Most importantly, scholars and practitioners must understand that "resilience" does not translate to "unity" in community settings. Employing the term "resilience" to a community-at-large can unfairly portray an image of a cohesive and unified community while ignoring community issues that often unjustly fall along racial and socioeconomic lines. This can be seen in many contexts of trauma; for example, Black activists in post-Katrina New Orleans confronted this misuse of the term "resilience" that created a false sense of community unity, equality, and equity, citing that a community will only be unified if every person is afforded the same opportunities and face the same challenges (racial, social, economic, etc.). Considering the socioeconomic and politically polarized context of Ciudad Juárez, it is unlikely the community-at-large will ever be unified, however, this study documented small pockets of engaged citizens unified around a common goal.

This research demonstrated that resilience as a form of resistance in conflict or post-conflict areas has the ability to rebuild community and civil society. As evidenced in this study, organizers and cultural activists stood in for local government by personally establishing community initiatives despite great personal risk and adversity. Personal resilience and the determination to create community change inspired their works of collective action. Considering the multitude of challenges these study participants face, future research regarding both publicly supported works of civic engagement and unsupported initiatives (such as those documented in this dissertation) in different sociopolitical, geopolitical, and socioeconomic contexts would offer important insights on the impact small works of resilience can have on community at different levels. I will continue my research on activism and organizing in Ciudad Juárez and intend to

delve deeper into the community's use and reappropriation of spaces in the post-militarization period in future practitioner-researcher scholarship.

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## APPENDIX

### *Personal Background of Participant*

1. How long have you lived in Ciudad Juárez?
2. Can you tell me more about yourself and how and why you started your cultural activism/community work/community organizing?
3. Do you think Ciudad Juárez has changed in your time living here? If yes, how so?
4. Can you tell me how you view Ciudad Juárez versus how it has been portrayed in international media?

### *Background and History of Community Work*

5. Could you describe your work as an activist/community worker/community organizer and what inspired you to start?
6. What core values drive your work? Why do you think they are important? What specific goals do you hope to achieve through your work as an activist/community worker/community organizer?
7. Is there a specific sector of the community your work targets? Who specifically are you seeking to reach with your work? Why is this group important to you? How do you feel your work affects that group of people? How do you resolve community problems you identify or with this group of people? How do you see your work affecting Ciudad Juárez as a whole?
8. Can you tell me about a time you felt your work was most impactful and it lived up to your vision? Can you tell me about a time you felt your work did not live up to your vision? What did you learn from that experience? Did you change your approach going forward? If yes, how so?

### *Cultural Activism in Ciudad Juarez*

9. How do you think culture and the arts have played a role in shaping activism in Ciudad Juárez?
10. Are there specific people or organizations in the community that are most helpful to your work? Who would you consider allies or supporters of your activism? Who does not support your work and what the biggest barriers or challenges you face as an activist/community worker/community organizer?
11. What are different ways activists create culture in Ciudad Juárez? In your opinion, do all activists share similar values? In your opinion, are certain forms of cultural production more legitimate than others?
12. How is your work funded?

13. What role (if any) does the government play in your work? Do you receive or have you received state funding for your projects? If so, how do/did you feel using this funding to protest the negative impact government has had on a certain sector of the community or Juárez as a whole?

14. Ultimately, how do you view cultural and community activism/work/organizing in Ciudad Juárez? Do you feel it is effective in creating change in society? How so?

15. Is there anything I missed or would you like to add anything else?