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### Women's Unequal Citizenship at the Border: Lessons from Three Nonfiction Films about the Women of Juárez

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**WOMEN'S UNEQUAL CITIZENSHIP AT THE BORDER:  
LESSONS FROM THREE NONFICTION FILMS  
ABOUT THE WOMEN OF JUÁREZ**

(From *Gender Equity: Dimensions of Women's Equal Citizenship* (Linda McClain & Joanna L. Grossman, eds.) (Cambridge University Press 2009))

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**I. Illusive Borders, Illusive Citizenship**

It is widely assumed that the citizenship of American women is only tested at the territorial borders of the country, and then only occasionally, when they attempt to return from abroad. As travelers with American passports, American women are allowed to enter many other countries without visas. Moreover, a majority find it as easy to reenter the United States as to leave it. For a minority, however, getting back into the country has proven difficult.<sup>1</sup> Consider the African-American women who, because of their race and gender, were stopped and intrusively patted-down or strip-searched at airports upon their return from the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> Something as silly as a hat purchased on an island vacation could trigger scrutiny. Because these women were profiled as possible drug couriers, their U.S. citizenship provided them no security from intrusive surveillance as they stood at the gates of their country.

In fact, the vulnerability of American women to having their citizenship challenged when on U.S. soil changes along with the operative nature of the border.

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<sup>1</sup> Historically, women's reentry into the country has been harder than men's because women's American citizenship has been subject to greater divestiture on account of marriage. See Linda K. Kerber, *Toward a History of Statelessness in America*, in *Legal Borderlands: Law and the Construction of American Borders* 135, 142-46 (Mary L. Dudziak & Leti Volpp eds., 2006). Until roughly after World War II, an American woman who married a foreigner and lived abroad with him might lose her U.S. citizenship and essentially become stateless. *Id.*

<sup>2</sup> See *Bradley v. United States*, 164 F. Supp. 2d 437 (D.N.J. 2001), *aff'd*, 299 F.3d 197 (3d Cir. 2003); *Anderson v. Cornejo*, 199 F.R.D. 228 (N.D. Ill. 2000), 255 F. Supp. 2d 834 (N.D. Ill. 2002), 284 F. Supp. 2d 1008 (N.D. Ill. 2003), *rev'd in part and remanded*, 355 F.3d 1021 (7th Cir. 2004).

While borders are thought of as fixed, formally-recognized, well-settled boundaries that are drawn on maps, demarcated by barbed wire fences, and patrolled by soldiers or government agents,<sup>3</sup> current events indicate that the borders are actually more indeterminate and illusive. Contemporary American immigration regulation has both shifted U.S. borders well into the nation's interior and extended them way beyond the nation's territory.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, "internal borders" dividing this country from others are popping up everywhere and triggering "border conflicts" all over. Believing themselves compelled to act because the federal government is incapable of doing so, state, county, and municipal governments are pursuing anti-immigrant and pro-immigrant policies that smack more of international relations than domestic affairs. These border control efforts are ensnaring documented immigrants and full-fledged citizens alike. Controversies roiling small towns like Farmingville, New York (where residents fought over an outdoor hiring site for day laborers)<sup>5</sup> and Hazleton, Pennsylvania (which is litigating in federal court its right to enforce local ordinances aimed at landlords who rent to "illegal"

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<sup>3</sup> The controversy surrounding the building of an actual fence along parts of the Mexican-American border is well known. Less attention has been paid to the controversy over the physical border between the United States and Canada. Herbert and Shirley-Ann Leu have erected a four-foot retaining wall that infringes the ten-foot corridor on either side of the 49th parallel that the International Border Commission maintains must be kept free of trees and other obstructions. David Bowermaster, *Blaine Couple Fight to Retain Backyard Wall Near Canada Border*, Seattle Times, Apr. 11, 2007, at B5. The Leus, who assert that they were free to build on their property because they were not given notice that the fence might violate the law, have brought suit in federal court in Seattle to enjoin the destruction of their wall. The Bush Administration agrees with the Leus and has attempted to fire the U.S. representative to the IBC, Dennis Scharnack. Sara Jean Green, *Judge Upholds Firing of Boundary Official*, Seattle Times, Oct. 14, 2007, at B3.

<sup>4</sup> See generally Ayelet Shachar, *The Shifting Border of Immigration Regulation*, 3 Stan. J. C.R. & C.L. 165 (2007) (reviewing such border shifting devices as expedited removal from within 100 miles of the external perimeter, the collection of biometric information from prospective entrants prior to their departure from foreign soil, electronic passports that track the movement of visitors and citizens alike, airline interdiction of unwanted visitors prior to departure, and the creation of migration zones that are excised from a country's territory for the purpose of containing unwelcome visitors and restricting their rights).

<sup>5</sup> See generally Farmingville (2004) (Catherine Tambani & Carlos Sandoval, directors) (a fairly balanced presentation of the conflict over the establishment of a hiring site for day laborers).

immigrants and employers who hire them)<sup>6</sup> are calling the true value of American citizenship into question.

The immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina provided another example of the chimerical nature of borders. Residents of New Orleans were forced to leave their homes and hospital beds to seek higher ground after the levees broke. A great many of them were poor minority women, including mothers and grandmothers with small children, who lacked the cars, resources, good health, and wherewithal to escape the city prior to the storm. The Katrina disaster was extensively televised; in some instances news reporters had a better gauge on the extent of human suffering than public officials. Though they never left the territory of the United States, the inhabitants of New Orleans who were all over the small screen looked like impoverished “refugees” who had been forced to take flight on account of the inept or hostile action of a so-called “failed state.” A few commentators even referred to these Americans as “refugees” until sharp criticism shut them up. For some of these people, the denaturalization was literal. Tired and weary residents and visitors fleeing New Orleans were turned back on the bridge to Gretna, Louisiana by armed police officers who feared they were bringing with them the crime that was supposedly raging in New Orleans; for these people, the right to travel was suspended and the “border” closed.<sup>7</sup> American citizenship be damned; “internal borders” are a bulwark against (imagined) lawlessness.

In truth, though, the people of New Orleans we saw on television hardly resembled what we imagine when we think of American citizens. It was as if they had crossed some invisible international boundary or border and ceased to be the subjects of the strongest, richest nation of the so-called “First World.” It was as if our leaders had forgotten that America’s best and highest calling was to protect its citizens from disasters, natural and man-made. Technically, the residents of New Orleans who were driven from their homes because the levees broke were “internally displaced persons,” a designation drawn from international law, which appears to provide more expansive protection for people in their situation than the laws of the United States.<sup>8</sup> As “internally displaced persons,” they

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<sup>6</sup> See *Lozano v. City of Hazelton*, 459 F. Supp. 2d 332 (M.D. Pa. 2006) (granting plaintiffs a temporary restraining order); *Lozano v. City of Hazelton*, 496 F. Supp. 2d 477 (M.D. Pa. 2007) (permanently enjoining the enforcement of ordinances that, inter alia, violate the Supremacy Clause and Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution).

<sup>7</sup> See Gardiner Harris, *Police in Suburbs Blocked Evacuees*, *Witnesses Report*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 10, 2005, at A13.

<sup>8</sup> See Lolita Buckner Inniss, *A Domestic Right of Return?: Race, Rights, and Residency in*

might have a “right of return” to their home city.<sup>9</sup> The “displaced” may possibly find comfort in the thought that, if their forced exodus virtually stripped them of their American citizenship, it landed them in a larger global body politic. Yet, I doubt that many of them would be sanguine about that. The shifting nature of borders can ensnare people in a confusing web of competing local, regional, national and international governmental entities and leave them defenseless, isolated, and uncertain as to where they should direct their claims to equal citizenship.

As the border goes, so goes women’s citizenship. Citizenship and its protections follow the location of the border which is determined not only by where lines are drawn on the ground or on paper, but also by where the border is literally acted out or performed. Law is one of the discursive tools by which borders are marked and law enforcement is among the performative acts by which borders are brought into relief. Thus, a border may be manifested through the operation of international law and immigration regulation or it may be evident in the scope of domestic law enforcement. Women who live on or at the figuratively-demarcated border may actually be subject to the impact of several competing and contradictory legal regimes and find themselves able to assert their rights as citizens with regard to none of them.

## **II. The Women of Juárez and Citizenship at the Border**

The expanding cross-border flow of goods and people that is known as “globalization” has contributed to making borders seem more illusive and the rights and privileges of citizenship, less definite and in some cases less secure. For those who live at or on the border, in the borderland that is betwixt and between sovereign states and at the periphery of a nation as opposed to its core, gaps in law enforcement and governmental accountability can generate a vulnerability that politically marginalized citizens have a hard time effectively overcoming. This has been true for women who reside south of the Mexico-U.S. border, in the city of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, which lies opposite El Paso, Texas.

Between 1993 and 2005, an estimated 300 young women were murdered in Juárez; more than a third of them were kidnapped, tortured, mutilated, and sexually assaulted before they were strangled or stabbed and their bodies left in the desert or dumped in various locations around the city. An additional 50 to 100 young women went

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*New Orleans in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina*, 27 B.C. Third World L.J. 325, 369 (2007).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 370-71. See generally *id.* at 364-71 (providing a overview of the right of return in international law).

missing. Patterns among the killings led surviving relatives, journalists, and other investigators to believe that the murders were the work of one or more killers who belonged to groups identified with changes in the social landscape of the fast-growing Mexican border town.

During this time period, elevated threats to the safety and security of the young women of Juárez came from three sources: globalized industrial development, immigration, and narcotics trafficking.<sup>10</sup> The factories owned by foreign multinational corporations, known as maquiladoras, attracted large numbers of female workers from the interior of the country whose fine motor skills and malleability made them attractive workers. This in turn caused a change in gender relations in the town which put the women in circumstances of heightened vulnerability, especially in the bars and clubs they frequented after work. Moreover, the employment generated by the maquiladoras spurred a level of residential development that outpaced the provision of such municipal services as water, electricity, and transportation. The inadequate transit system made the environment especially dangerous for women who went to work well before sunrise and came back well after sundown.

The prospect of employment in the U.S. attracted to the region human smugglers and would-be undocumented border crossers from the rest of Mexico and the countries of Central America and they contributed to a climate of lawlessness both as perpetrators and victims of crime. The murder victims who were settlers to the city by and large shared the low status accorded transients in the estimation of the indigenous inhabitants and officials of Juárez. In addition, the competing cartels of drug traffickers drawn to the border by Americans' insatiable demand for illegal narcotics, a demand which tough anti-drug policies could not obliterate, were a third source of increased peril.<sup>11</sup> The traffickers were aided by corrupt officials on both sides of the border whose complicity in the drug trade undermined law enforcement in general. Both undocumented immigration and drug smuggling involved the extraterritorial effect of U.S. laws about which Mexican citizens had little say. All of these systemic sources of danger strained governmental resources and undermined honest officials, some of whom also had reason to fear for their own safety. That and the government's lack of an effective response disrupted civil society, promoted gender-directed violence, and imposed extra burdens on the female citizens of Juárez.

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<sup>10</sup> See generally Alan B. Bersin, *El Tercer País: Reinventing the U.S./Mexico Border*, 48 Stan. L. Rev. 1413 (1996).

<sup>11</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, *Troublesome Border* 141-147, 151-52 (rev. ed. 2006).

At first, state and local government authorities and the police, adopting a “blame the victim” strategy, dismissed the murders as private violence perpetrated by boyfriends and johns. As the toll mounted, the officials destroyed evidence, focused attention on scapegoats, and otherwise failed to investigate the deaths adequately so that the perpetrators could be brought to justice. As a result the survivors of the young women were forced to mobilize to make the government reconsider its denigration of the victims and accept responsibility for the many derelictions of duty committed by law enforcement and justice officials in regard to their loved ones’ deaths.

The women of Juárez responded to their elected and appointed officials in two ways that are characteristic of feminist assertions of citizenship. First, they rejected the distinction between the public and private spheres insofar as the murders were concerned. The survivors asserted in essence that the deaths were “not a private matter but . . . rather a consequence of women’s lack of political and socio-economic power and the roles and identities imposed upon them.”<sup>12</sup> In maintaining this stance, the survivors and their allies also defended the character and good name of the victims. Furthermore, they linked the widespread violence inflicted on the young female victims to a threat to and denial of women’s right to equality in general.<sup>13</sup>

Second, when the women of Juárez initially demanded competent criminal investigations and accountability from governmental actors in regard to the deaths, the women acted out of a sense of familial and personal responsibility; they spoke out as mothers, aunts, and sisters of the victims. They went on to build informal networks of mutual support and volunteer associations aimed at providing services to other women. Over time, their informal pressure groups achieved greater public visibility and political viability, while some of the women became recognizable leaders.<sup>14</sup> Along the way they picked up valuable support and affirmation of their indictment of the state from international feminists, journalists, scholars, and documentary filmmakers.

This summary cannot do justice to the obstacles faced by the survivors of the murder victims of Juárez and the courage the survivors displayed in struggling to get

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<sup>12</sup> Geraldine Lievesley, *Women and the Experience of Citizenship*, in *In the Hands of Women: Paradigms of Citizenship* 6, 9 (Susan Buckingham & Geraldine Lievesley eds., 2006) [hereinafter *In the Hands of Women*].

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 8, 29.

justice over the course of a decade or so. It threatens to squeeze what they said and did into a narrow Western feminist formula which denies the unique, organic qualities of their activism and how it responded to a host of specific material conditions that ranged from local to the global. However, it is possible to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the crisis of citizenship experienced by these women of Juárez and the way in which they were burdened by, yet responded to, the complex interaction of illusive borders, mass violence, and women's unequal citizenship by considering three documentaries dealing with the deaths of the young women who lived, worked, and died in Ciudad Juárez. Those films are *Performing the Border* (1999), *Señorita Extraviada (Missing Young Woman)* (2001), and *Battle of the Crosses* (2005). One could not ask for a more stimulating and challenging exploration of women's citizenship at the border than these films provide.<sup>15</sup> They offered the women of Juárez the opportunity to reach a broad audience with their stories as told in their own words, and allowed them to undermine the ability of their allies (including the filmmakers) to speak for them. The women's "experiences and the knowledge gained from them are important. Academics, policy-makers and practitioners in the field [of law and feminist political theory] need to listen to them."<sup>16</sup>

## II. The Juárez Documentaries

### Ciudad A. *Performing the Border*

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<sup>15</sup> In addition to the three films reviewed here, there are at least three other full-length documentaries, in English or with English subtitles, about the wave of femicides that befell the women in Juárez over the past decade or so. See *On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez* (Detritus 2005) (Steen Hise, director); *Border Echoes* (2007) (Lorena Mendez-Quiroga, director); *Juárez: The City Where Women Are Disposable* (Lasper Las Delmar Films 2007) (Alex Flores & Lorena Vassalo, directors). As for feature films, both *The Virgin of Juarez*, which stars Minnie Driver as an intrepid Los Angeles reporter investigating the murders, and *Bordertown*, which stars Jennifer Lopez as an intrepid Chicago reporter investigating the murders, had no American theatrical releases, but were distributed on DVD. *The Virgin of Juarez* (Las Mujeres 2006) (Kevin James Dobson, director); *Bordertown* (Mobius Entertainment Ltd. 2006) (Gregory Nava, director). See generally Pat H. Broeske, *400 Dead Women: Now Hollywood Is Intrigued*, N.Y. Times, May 21, 2006, § 2, at 23 (describing numerous plays and feature and documentary film projects dealing with the Juárez killings; a correction indicates that Mexican law enforcement officials put the number of dead at 90).

<sup>16</sup> Lievesley, *Identity, Gender and Citizenship: Women in Latin and Central America and in Cuba*, in *In the Hands of Women*, *supra* note 12, at 127.



*Performing the Border* is a 1999 film essay by Ursula Biemann, a Swiss artist and curator who has worked and studied in Mexico and the United States.<sup>18</sup> As a film essay, Biemann intended her work to be “experimental, self-reflexive and subjective,” while being, at the same time, “socially involved and explicitly political.”<sup>19</sup> *Performing the Border* begins with a postmodern deconstruction of the border that is eloquently stated by New York-based Mexican artist and critic Bertha Jottar. Jottar notes that “the border is always represented as this wound that has to be healed, that has to be closed, that has to be protected from contamination and from disease. . . . through various systems of militarization, purification, cleansing.”<sup>20</sup> Instead, she says, the border should be seen as “highly constructed” and “highly performative.” It is “a constructed place that gets reproduced through the crossings of people, because without the crossing there is no border, right? It’s just an imaginary line, it’s a river or it’s just a wall. So you need the crossings of bodies to produce the discursive space of the nation state and also to produce a type of real place as a border.”<sup>21</sup>

Jottar also observes that performances at/of the border reflect economic and political relationships and have economic and political consequences and import. Under

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<sup>18</sup> *Performing the Border* (Women Make Movies 1999) (Ursula Biemann, director). The script of the film is included in Ursula Biemann, *Been There and Back to Nowhere* (2000) [hereinafter Biemann, *Been There*].

<sup>19</sup> Ursula Biemann, *The Video Essay in the Digital Age*, in *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age 8* (Ursula Biemann ed., 2003) [hereinafter *Stuff It*].

<sup>20</sup> Biemann, *Been There*, *supra* note 18, at 89.

<sup>21</sup> The synthetic quality of the border is reinforced by the director’s use of filmmaking techniques that suggest the constructed nature of reality. The film signals its own performative nature by employing nontraditional (for a documentary) elements like “nonsynchronized sound and images, time-lapse filming uncoupling the image from real time, image enhancement, and a meditative voice-over. . . . [to] distance and disturb the viewer’s relation to reality.” Rosa Linda Fergoso, *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands 13* (2003). In addition, the score is modern, futuristic, computer-generated; Biemann refers to it as an “electronic sound carpet.” Ursula Biemann, *Performing Borders: The Transnational Video*, in *Stuff It*, *supra* note 19, at 83, 86 [hereinafter *The Transnational Video*]. Text—emphasizing points made in the voice-over, advancing the narrative, or simply dropping the names of multinational corporations and the complex products they employ the women of Juárez to assemble—is liberally used. The footage of Juárez makes it plain that the part of town where the workers live sprang up amid the dust of the desert. The houses are made of packing materials and scraps tossed by the maquiladoras. The hardscrabble home life of the workers is palpable.

NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), the transport of goods produced by the hundreds of maquiladoras or golden factories that dot the U.S.-Mexican border makes for “happy crossings”; the migration of undocumented people across the border does not. The “corruption and excess” that are associated with the border are not natural; they are a response to material conditions. According to director Biemann, borders shape women’s lives through their institutionalization of power.<sup>22</sup> Yet, as women encounter and cross the border, happily or not, they continually engage in struggles with that power and thereby reshape the border.<sup>23</sup>

*Performing the Border’s* focus on the border per se soon gives way to director Biemann’s own postmodern analysis of gender relations on the Mexican side of the boundary. Biemann’s scripted narration strains everything through a theoretical sieve of global capitalism’s impact on women’s bodies and their gender identities. The analysis seems particularly apt when applied to the jobs the women perform in the assembly plants and to their roles as leisure seekers in after-work venues like the bars and dance halls into which the camera takes us. This postmodern take on the fragmentation of the female body becomes problematic, however, when Biemann extends it to an examination of the feminicides or femicides of young women in Juárez. In the film, Biemann offers a social psychological profile of the serial killer that makes the murders a direct manifestation of the logic of globalization, with the murderer supposedly extending globalization’s fragmentation of the female worker into the realm of gender relations.<sup>27</sup>

Latino Studies professor Rosa Linda Fregoso has challenged Biemann on precisely this point: “[A]lthough there is no doubt that the process of economic globalization is ‘out of control,’ globalism is a monolithic top-down analysis that neither captures nor explains the complexity of feminicide. Nor does conflating the *exploitation* of gendered bodies with their *extermination* offer us the nuanced account of violence that feminicide demands.”<sup>28</sup> In Fregoso’s view, that “nuanced account” would identify the crucial role

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<sup>22</sup> Doris Wastl-Walter & Lynn A. Staeheli, *Territory, Territoriality, and Boundaries*, in *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography* 145 (Lynn A. Staeheli et al. eds., 2004).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> See Jessica Livingston, *Murder in Juarez: Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Global Assembly Line*, 25 *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 59 (2004) (attributing the killings to “macho backlash” or “the displacement of economic frustration onto the bodies of women who work in the maquiladoras”).

<sup>28</sup> Fregoso, *supra* note 21, at 8; see also Amy Sara Carroll, “Accidental Allegories Meet ‘The Performative Documentary’: *Boystown, Señorita Extraviada, and the Border-Brothel*

that globalism plays “in deflecting attention away from the complicity of the state in creating a climate of violence”<sup>29</sup> and consider the “multiple sites where women experience violence within the domestic and public spaces that are local and national as well as global and transnational.”<sup>30</sup> It is the “patriarchal state” that has “creat[ed] the conditions . . . for the proliferation of gender violence.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, according to Fergoso, *Performing the Border* employs “a discourse that produces [sic] the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez solely as objects of global capitalism.”<sup>32</sup> Like other treatments of the circumstances of so-called “Third World” women by so-called “First World” feminists, Biemann’s film also fails to document the efforts of the women to resist capital and patriarchy.<sup>33</sup>

Biemann’s own assessment of her film confirms Fergoso’s criticism of the filmmaker’s directorial intent and narration: “All these relations that characterize the underlying order of this border town speak about global forces that are much bigger than the place itself. This lousy little border town is the unassuming non-place across which many multidirectional strings of meaning can be narrated.”<sup>34</sup> She sees her video essay as “extend[ing] the meaning of a particular place beyond its documentable reality.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore she says of her narration:

There is no particular subject behind the narration, even though this narration is highly subjective. It speaks from a particular position that I could describe as that of a feminist, white cultural producer who is in the process of moving from a Marxist to a post-Fordist, post-humanist place and trying to figure out

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→*Maquiladora Paradigm*, 31 Signs 357, 377 (2006) (arguing that *Performing* “swerves into an allegorical interpretation of the women’s deaths that reduces the victims to representations of a quantifiable and expendable workforce”).

<sup>29</sup> Fergoso, *supra* note 21, at 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> Biemann, *The Transnational Video*, *supra* note 21, at 85.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

how to transpose old labor questions into a contemporary aesthetic and theoretical discourse in a globalized context.<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless, the women of Juárez who are interviewed in the film do counter Biemann's postmodern thesis to a certain extent. When these women speak for themselves, drawing on their own experiences, they do what ordinary people in documentaries often do, *i.e.*, they subvert the filmmaker's best efforts to negate their subjectivity and their agency. The women speak past the filmmaker, directly at the audience. The interviewees, most of them activists, offer a measure of insight into the way in which women in Juárez reacted to and challenged the impact globalization had on the multilayered power relations at the border between Mexico and the United States.

By far the frankest informant is Juana Azua, a middle-aged former prostitute who dispenses condoms as part of an AIDS prevention program. She is interviewed wearing a pastel cotton nightgown in the surroundings in which she lives. She became a prostitute at age 31 (before there was social pressure on johns to use condoms), when her brother needed money to pay his medical bills and support his seven children. She described a Juárez "before the War" (that is, before the crackdown at the border) when Americans crossed into Mexico to spend their money on sexual services. The maquiladoras have drawn an influx of young women to Juárez who, according to maquila worker Sonia Auguiano, have turned to prostitution because they lack sufficient education to gain employment in the factories and do not have references with which to secure jobs as domestics. Juana Azua maintained that young maquila workers also engage in prostitution on the weekends because their factory salaries are inadequate. Azua's discussion of young prostitutes seems colored by her own class position which aligns her with their older competitors. The viewer has to credit Azua comments to some extent because they appear to be based on firsthand knowledge given that she hands out thousands of condoms a month.

Fergoso objects to the editing decision that sandwiched Azua's interview between a segment dealing with maquila workers and the subsequent discussion of the femicides, which focuses on the psychopathology of a serial killer. According to Fergoso,

Biemenn's [sic] film equates exploited bodies with exterminated bodies visually through a linear sequence of narrative elements that creates a chain of associations: maquila workers–sex workers–victims of feminicide. . . . In its metonymic association of globalization–nonnormative sexuality–feminicide, *Performing the Border* fails to disrupt the premise of the discourse of

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<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 86.

globalism, especially the notion that the extermination of women's bodies proceeds from the same logic as their exploitation: global capitalism.<sup>37</sup>

It is true that Azua directly links maquila workers to sex workers and perhaps by sequencing Biemann links maquila workers to the dead. Government officials made the same connections for reasons much less benign than Biemann's. It is clear, however, that prostitution predated the maquiladoras. The limited educational opportunities and employment choices open to women who became prostitutes in Juárez cannot be blamed exclusively on global capitalism, but can be placed at the feet of the state. At the same time, globalism as exemplified by the AIDS pandemic is changing the nature of the so-called "oldest profession." The spread of the disease and activism to fight it suggest that a purely local or national analysis of women's status in Juarez would be insufficiently complex.

Finally, there is the journalist Isabel Velásquez who highlights the class implications of maquila labor. She says, "We believe there is a price for modernization but the price has to be shared. Working women don't have to pay that price. If you are producing progress you should also share in that progress."<sup>38</sup> While the narrator is fixated on the fragmentation of the assembly line worker and the stringent workplace regulation she endures with respect to her sexual and cultural integrity, Isabel Velásquez focuses on economic exploitation, not simply by the bosses, but by the Western female consumers of the products the worker produces:

Take a lingerie maquiladora. A woman in Germany, Switzerland or the U.S. who buys some negligee has no idea that the women who made it had to get up at 4:30 in the morning and had no fresh water to bathe themselves before going to work. Everything should be shared, there is a social price that's not being shared and there is wealth that's not being shared. It's not enough to pay minimum wage. It is not enough to give breakfast to your workers. It's not enough. It's also an issue of time, because you sell your time to your company, you sell your life and you should get something back.<sup>39</sup>

Velásquez makes it clear that the femicides constitute a manifestation of the state's failure to protect *poor* young women:

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<sup>37</sup> Fregoso, *supra* note 21, at 13.

<sup>38</sup> Biemann, *Been There*, *supra* note 18, at 113.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

It is horrible. The form in which these women and girls are treated is cruel and horrible. But what it's saying is that as a society we have allowed this to happen. We haven't mobilized, we haven't protected our young women, and it's well known that all of these women are poor. A lot of them were workers, others were students but all of them were poor, that's their common denominator.<sup>40</sup>

These informants, Mexican women in Juárez, not only provide details but also offer commentary on women's lives at the border that is genuine and anchored in the lived contradictions of existing at an intersection of the local, regional, national, and international. They express an understanding of the history of women at the border, they are aware of their class position as poor women, and they are critical of the state which failed to protect them and other women as equal citizens. The interviewees' commentary is much smarter and grittier than the abstract analysis spouted by the director/narrator. It is somewhat amazing that the subjects' agency was able to shine through given that they were at the mercy of Biemann's misguided, self-involved attempt to focus on the metaphorical significance of Juárez and the lives that are lived there.

Biemann's goal of bringing postmodernism to bear on the subject of women's lives on the border between Mexico and the United States may be ambitious, but I doubt that a documentary format using/exploiting the voices and images of real subjects was the most ethical tool for pursuing it. Nonetheless, the viewer must be thankful that women from Juárez were given the opportunity to speak about their situations in the film and to subvert, if not sabotage, the filmmaker's agenda. One can only wonder why the filmmaker did not pay more attention to their message in scripting her narration and work up, as it were, from there, *i.e.*, from the local to the global.

Despite these criticisms, *Performing the Border* is, nonetheless, worth watching. It is insightful in its visual and conceptual deconstruction of the "border." Furthermore, it is seminal in that its themes and visual effects are copied by other films about the women of Juárez. *Performing the Border* is ultimately disappointing because its reliance on Western meta-theory seems dismissive of the particular reality of a group of women living on the Mexican side of the border who have their own unique history, culture, and material circumstances. *Performing the Border* is appealing to viewers who oppose the excesses of globalized capitalism, but it fails to account for the crime and exploitation of border women that existed before there was such globalization and continues thereafter. It does not sift through the "local" information that might provide homegrown explanations of the women's marginality and their government's unresponsiveness to

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<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 129.

their physical vulnerability, explanations that are less likely to be of interest to a bourgeois American and European feminist audience prepared to see the deprivations endured by the women of Juárez only as a variation on the theme of their own oppression. Nor does the film thoroughly plumb what globalization means in an environment where significant aspects of the economy are illegal and multinational corporations offer a measure of liberation from the constraints of traditional female subordination and poverty. Wedded to a top-down analysis with little interest in thoroughly pursuing self-critical reflection, the filmmaker never considers how the local might be global in a way that capitalists will not claim to have invented.

#### B. *Señorita Extraviada (Missing Young Woman)*

*Señorita Extraviada* is a requiem by the Chicana documentary filmmaker Lourdes Portillo for the young Mexican women who were murdered or who disappeared in and around Ciudad Juárez.<sup>44</sup> Portillo, a feminist artist of a more traditional activist stripe than Biemann, says at the outset of her film that she has come to Juárez “to track down ghosts and to listen to the mysteries that surround them.” The somber mood evoked by these words is sustained throughout the film by its haunting musical soundtrack, which consists of Gregorian chants sung by a mixed chorus or played on a piano. The imagery by contrast is bright and awash in pastels. The young women of Juárez are lovingly captured in barely detectable slow motion, while shots of the traffic of Juárez are speeded up, as befits a city “spinning out of control.” Crosses, especially black crosses on pink backgrounds painted on telephone polls, suggest that the victims are virgins/martyrs in a way, entitled to respect regardless of who they were and how they lived. Portillo is the narrator/investigator of the film but she does little to bring attention to herself; her accented female voice maintains a subdued, “contemplative,” “personal” or “intimate” tone.<sup>45</sup> The result, however, is a public memorial that turns the private grief of the young women’s survivors into a cause for mass public sorrow.

The spirits of the dead and missing young women haunt the film in that their images are never far from the viewers’ eyes. There are many, many photographs of the victims in life, most of them black and white. There are few if any photographs of the victims in death. In lieu of corpses or skeletons, there are shoes, lots of shoes—arrayed in

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<sup>44</sup> *Señorita Extraviada (Women Make Movies 2001)* (Lourdes Portillo, director).

<sup>45</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, *Devils and Ghosts, Mothers and Immigrants: A Critical Retrospective of the Works of Lourdes Portillo*, in *Lourdes Portillo: The Devil Never Sleeps and Other Films* 81, 100 (Rosa Linda Fregoso ed., 2001) (describing Portillo’s signatures as a filmmaker).

store windows, being slipped off and on, or buried in the sand still on victims' feet. Portillo holds the victims' memories in esteem, unlike the government officials who initially accused them of being prostitutes or having the wrong kind of male friends. To the contrary, she tells the viewers that "[i]n Juárez predators have no problem finding prey. The only facts about the victims that we're sure of [are that] they were all poor, slim, they were dark, and they had shoulder length hair." This signals what the photos may not reveal: the victims were by and large socially marginalized mestizas from the south of Mexico. The deaths of these "internal immigrants" thus bespeak xenophobia, racism, and classism, as well as misogyny.<sup>46</sup>

Portillo is deferential too toward the victims' relatives, mostly mothers, and the stories they tell about the last time they saw their children, their interactions with the authorities, and the circumstances in which they identified the bodies. Portillo acknowledges the women's efforts to investigate their loved ones' disappearances and death. The hands the viewer sees taking notes at the beginning of the film belong not to Portillo, but to an interviewee, the mother of a victim. As a collaborator interested in showcasing the subjectivity of the women, Portillo lets them tell their stories their way. One mother describes how she was herself kidnapped and raped when she was pregnant with her disappeared daughter, but the mother escaped the fate to which her child succumbed years later. Another mother describes the signs that portended her daughter's death; one of the child's "prescient" parakeets died the same day she did while the other flew from his cage on the day that her body was discovered. Finally, there is the activist who passes on the rumor that the victims were selected on the basis of the photographs for which they posed on Fridays after work. The filmmaker does not present these women as objects of pity or bemusement. The viewer must respect them for their efforts to find out what happened to their children and loved ones, to push the authorities to act, and to identify the criminals who are responsible for their deaths or disappearances. Portillo shows how their personal pain set them on the path to demanding recognition of their rights as equal citizens.

The physical border and what lies beyond in the U.S. do not loom especially large in Portillo's account of the murders. It is noted in passing that a famous FBI profiler suggested that the killer was an American who took advantage of the border by crossing over, committing the crimes, and then crossing back again, but that idea seems not to have enjoyed much traction. A more likely systemic source of physical danger to the women of Juárez was the material or economic relations between Mexico and the United

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<sup>46</sup> Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba & Patricia Ravelo Blancas, *Battle of the Crosses: Crimes Against Women on the Border and Their Interpreters*, *Desacatos: The Journal of Social Anthropology*, Winter 2003, at 122 (Craig Epplin trans.) (on file with author).



States and the lawlessness they promoted at the boundary between the two countries. Early in the film, in describing the preexisting context in which the murders occurred, Portillo notes that Juárez was a hub of Mexican narcotrafficking which is fueled by the massive demand for illicit drugs in the United States. The U.S. is the largest market for illegal drugs in the world. The suggestion that the demand side of the equation is implicated in the women's deaths is not explicitly drawn, though. There is also a hint of a connection between the U.S. corporate-owned maquiladoras, Mexican narcotrafficking, and the murders, but it too is very vague. Some of the victims worked for the maquilas, but most did not. There was drug use at the plants but it was not investigated because it increased productivity and the maquilas were immune from investigation because of their significance to the economy.

Toward the end of the film, Portillo lays the blame for the deaths squarely on the government. She pronounces the young women's murders deprivations of their rights as citizens: "Justice has been corrupted at the highest levels and [as a result] the lives of hundreds of young women have been lost." Connections between government officials and narcotraffickers interfered with the investigation of their deaths, if not the prevention of the crimes. The scapegoating of suspects, some of whom were coerced or tortured into confessing, was part of the coverup. Says Judith Galarza of the Latin American Federation of the Families of the Disappeared, "The government is through negligence, submissiveness, and participation wholly responsible. They're either covering it up or doing it. So they're the ones who must solve this because they're responsible in every way." She continues, "They're violating the right to safety, the right to justice, the right to move around, the right to peace . . . for families." Portillo nonetheless concludes the film on a positive note insofar as women's citizenship is concerned; the relatives of the missing and murdered young women of Juárez are shown mobilizing and forming organizations of support and protest, like the Argentine mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who were the subjects of an earlier film by Portillo.<sup>47</sup>

*Señorita Extraviada* is a model of the tactful and sensitive portrayal of the victims of sexual violence and their survivors. Portillo, whose film work is influenced by her cultural affinity, does not exploit her subjects to advance an agenda that is not compatible with their own. She does not use their grief to create vicarious sufferers or to exonerate the audience. Portillo made a film that has proven valuable for her subjects' efforts to inform and recruit others to join them in demanding justice for the dead and disappeared. Though she certainly could have done more to indict the audience on the American side of the border and government officials on the Mexican side of the border, that was not her

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<sup>47</sup> Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (1986) (Lourdes Portillo & Susana Muñoz, directors).

object. Rather, she forces the audience to understand that the young women of Juárez whose murders were neither prevented nor investigated as they should have been represented precious social, economic, and political resources. As a sine qua non to enforcing the claim that they were denied the benefits of equal citizenship by the state, Portillo is reconstructing/rehabilitating the image of the young women who lived, worked and alas died or disappeared at the border, not simply the physical border between the U.S. and Mexico and Northern and Southern Mexico, but the metaphysical border that is artificially constructed by gender, race, ethnicity, class and regional exploitation, discrimination, intimidation, and violence.

### C. *Battle of the Crosses*

While *Performing the Border* draws its aesthetic sensibility from the humanities, *Battle of the Crosses*,<sup>48</sup> a film in Spanish with English subtitles,<sup>49</sup> invokes a realism that is grounded in sociology and anthropology, the academic disciplines of the film's investigators. Text at the beginning and end of the film indicates that it is intended to be a work of visual sociology. As such, it conveys sociological or anthropological data and theory albeit in a documentary film format.<sup>50</sup> *Battle of the Crosses* offers its audience not a memorable story, but a visual, academically informed panorama that captures the complexity of the conflicts that resulted in and arose out of the deaths of so many poor young mestiza women at the northern border of the country with the United States.

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<sup>48</sup> *Battle of the Crosses* (La Batalla de las Cruces) (CIESAS & Campo Imaginario 2005) (Patricia Ravelo Blancas & Rafael Bonilla Pedroza, directors).

<sup>49</sup> The English-speaking American viewer is somewhat at a disadvantage in assessing *Battle of the Crosses* because allowance must be made for the limitations of subtitles. The film itself reveals little about its backstory or the circumstances surrounding its making, such as how the social scientists/investigators came to make a film incorporating their scholarship, and what relationship they had with the other people who appear in the film, particularly the victims' survivors. Two of the investigators have written a book and a scholarly article, both in Spanish, about the Juárez murders. See Patricia Ravelo Blancas & Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Entre Las Duras Aristas De Las Armas: Violence y Victimization En Ciudad Juarez* (2006); Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba & Patricia Ravelo Blancas, *La Batalla De Las Cruces: Los Crímenes Contra Mujeres En La Frontera y Sus Intérpretes*, Descatos, invierno 2003, at 122-33 [hereinafter *Crimes Against Women*]. This review of the film relies on a translation of the article procured by this author and deemed acceptable by one of the investigators.

<sup>50</sup> See generally Marcus Banks, *Visual Methods in Social Research* (2001); Sarah Pink, *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses* (2006); Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (2000).

As befits a work of visual social science, *Battle of the Crosses* explores the social groups and institutions that were implicated in or impacted by the femicides, the discourses they employed to advance their positions in the public debates over the murders, and the economic and political power they had at their disposal. On the list of *groups and institutions that sought to build a consensus in the public sphere around their claims to knowing the murders' true import* were governmental authorities and functionaries; political parties; journalists; academics and intellectuals; the Catholic Church; evangelical churches; citizens; the police; intelligence agencies; community leaders; business people; and families of the victims.

Seeking to be an encyclopedic survey of the Juárez femicides, the film begins with an attempt to state the precise number of the dead and the precise number of cases that had been solved and cleared (although without convictions or sentences). It also contains lists upon lists: *of the victims by status* (little girls, young women, teenagers, maquiladora workers, students, mothers, dancers, sex workers), *the "official" causes of their deaths* (drugs, domestic violence, accidents, sexual assaults/rapes/murders), *the likely perpetrators* (serial killers, drug dealers, snuff movie producers, organ harvesters, street gangs, lone assassins, ramera/bus drivers, police and detectives), and *the number of public officials whose inaction allowed the deaths to go unpunished* (3 presidents, 2 state governors, 5 state prosecutors, 8 federal prosecutors, 7 investigators, 8 special prosecutors).

Some of the social institutions that are implicated in the femicides and the corruption and incompetence that allowed the perpetrators to escape punishment get more analysis than others. The film highlights the misogynistic culture of the maquilas or factories where at least 30 of the murder victims worked; the seedy world of bars and places of amusement where the nightlife brought young women into contact with a broad spectrum of deviants including pimps, sadists, perverts, and murderers; the underground economy; the corrupt police who expended great effort in falsely accusing men who did not commit the crimes while failing to arrest and prosecute those who did; and the border or *frontera*, which has produced a city where women were in the majority but the local government had largely failed to meet their needs.

*Battle of the Crosses* reveals more detail than the other films about the price some of these residents of Juárez paid to claim the benefits of equal citizenship on behalf of themselves, their dead loved ones, and their loved ones' surviving children. As suggested earlier, involvement of the survivors in the public sphere was not so much a matter of choice on their part as it was a fulfillment of their responsibility as relatives of the murdered and disappeared. According to Rosario Acosta, who still exhibits the anguish she felt when her 10-year-old niece was kidnapped, strangled, and murdered, these were women for whom even filing a missing person's report was not easy: "There are cultural

factors that dissuade you from going to lodge a complaint. They detain you, question you, and after all, questionings and guilt are what we women are made of. True? Besides, she was your daughter, so where the hell did you leave her?" The grassroots activism of these women carried a high risk of danger; they were subjected to death threats, surveillance, physical assaults, and police harassment. They were also exploited by professional activists who attempted to displace them. According to the film, though the professional organizations did not train the Juaranese women to be self-empowering, the women nonetheless came to constitute "a genuine leadership recognized by society."

While many of the interviewees are familiar faces from the other two films, in *Battle of the Crosses* they are presented as activists, spokespersons for organizations, and interpreters of the events surrounding the murders. There is a long list of *local organizations that were formed to pursue justice on behalf of the victims*; it includes Voices Without Echoes, Daughters Back Home Again, Coalition for Women's Rights, Justice for Our Daughters, Integration-Mothers of Juárez, and the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. Furthermore, the organizations generated a list of *demands*: punishment of the killers and the government officials who shirked their responsibilities; reparations for the survivors' losses; implementation of scientific methods of investigation (suggesting the impact of the American *CSI* television shows); investigation of the murders by local, national and international bodies, including the International Criminal Court in the Hague; and respect for women in government.

The women's quest for answers and accountability found support in the journalistic community. Diana Washington Valdez, an investigative reporter for the *El Paso Times* and the author of *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women*, is probably the best known person interviewed in *Battle of the Crosses*.<sup>51</sup> She crisscrossed the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo del Norte, moving back and forth between El Paso, Texas and Juárez, Mexico, following leads, to amass evidence of a trail of interconnected crimes and official corruption that impacted both sides of the border. Washington's contributions in particular provide the kind of contextualization of the Juárez femicides that Fergoso calls for in her critique of *Performing the Border*. Washington traces the corruption and practice of silencing defendants and their lawyers through extermination, something that occurred in connection with the femicides, back to the 1970's and Mexico's "Dirty War"

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<sup>51</sup> Diana Washington Valdez, *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women* (2006). The book was also published in Spanish. Diana Washington Valdez, *Cosecha de Mujeres: Saferi en el Desierto Mexicano* (2005). A documentary entitled *Border Echoes* is said to focus more extensively on Diana Washington Valdez than *Battle of the Crosses* does. The former film has been screened in a few venues, but no general release date has been announced. It was reportedly shopped to HBO.

against leftist dissidents. By her account, the government's possible involvement in the murders ranged from actual participation in the perpetration of the crimes, to intentional coverups, incompetent forensic investigations of the women's deaths, and the use of torture to extract confessions from wrongfully accused men.

According to Washington, the cross-border trafficking of drugs was more significant to the femicides than the cross-border transportation of maquila-assembled goods or undocumented workers. In the film, she says that the sexual murders were the work of "two or more serial killers, two violent gangs, some drug dealers who have killed women with impunity . . . , and a group of powerful, wealthy men." By far the most controversial aspect of her claims relates to "Los Juniors," the scions of wealthy Juárez families who allegedly engage in orgies that end in the death of young women. Los Juniors find protection from prosecution because of their links to the powerful Juárez drug cartels. Washington is most emphatic in blaming the murders on ordinary organized crime as opposed to the maquilas. "This is a police story, she said flatly [in an interview in the *Columbia Journalism Review*]. It's not about socio-economic conditions in Juárez. It's not about the maquilas. It's about people killing women and getting away with it. When the police catch the killers, that's when the murders will stop."<sup>52</sup>

The social scientists/investigators also appear in the film and offer a theoretical reading of events. Typically at the end of a segment, one or two of them literally "drop" a brief nugget of social science theory (drawing on feminism, cultural studies, and postmodernism) into the film, *i.e.*, she or he provides a short sound bite that interprets or relates to the documentary footage that preceded it. They make pronouncements like: "In a society where men are socialized to rape, women harbor a fear of rape"; "Violence is a business; otherwise, it cannot be explained. Someone gains from killings"; The maquilas are "a machinery that consumes bodies. [The workers are] fodder for a global economy"; and "the Juárez society with the contradictory conservative split begins to view the women as maquila crazies, who come out to go wild with the nightlife, with the nightspots, and so a stigma begins to form around women from the maquiladoras, who are also associated with prostitution." The only bit of critical tension in this commentary comes when one of the directors, Patricia Ravelo Blancas, refers to the survivors' status as victims: "They don't break out of the framework of victimization; they don't want to because it's in their interest to continue being victims." Ravelo does not develop the point further and Héctor Domínguez responds with remarks that seem corrective in nature. There was obviously much more that these academics/investigators might have said and there were surely issues that they might have debated among themselves. The academics' theoretical contributions as a whole do not have the coherence of the

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<sup>52</sup> John Burnett, *Chasing the Ghouls*, *Colum. Journalism Rev.*, Mar./Apr. 2004, at 12, 14.

sustained but flawed postmodern analysis that drives *Performing Borders* (some of which is echoed in *Battle of the Crosses*).

*Battle of the Crosses* does convey one lesson more emphatically than any other. Over and over again, it hammers on the linkage between the killings and the government's failure to protect the young female citizens of Juárez and to allow their killers to escape punishment. One term, repeatedly invoked, encapsulated the state's culpability. It was *Impunity!* Impunity or *impunidad* means in this context a blatant and contemptible exemption or freedom from punishment for lawbreakers and law enforcers alike. It was used by nearly everyone seeking justice on behalf of the murdered young women. The sociologists/investigators Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba and Patricia Ravelo Blancas offer a rich description of impunity in their article. They note that political action responding to the crimes against women was often followed by the discovery of more victims which was read as a symbolic message from the killers. Dominguez and Ravelo continue:

The sender of these messages, just like the recipient, is undetermined, yet directs our attention toward a sacrificial system carried out by a group with power and not by a pathological mind. It is important to emphasize the depathologization of the perpetrator in order to focus on the structural and symbolic conditions in which victimization is produced. To the end of sustaining the impunity, agreements were made, a web of procedures is woven, strategies of deception are practiced, and those with compromising information are threatened, disqualified, defamed, and eliminated. Precisely the traffic and possession of information is a factor that determines many crimes committed by this group with power that benefits from impunity.<sup>53</sup>

They conclude:

The executions related to the drug-trafficking business, the disappearances of various people and the serial murders of women share the common denominator of having been committed by an organized armed class. Gangs, police, drug-traffickers, and magnates are not strangers to each other, but are instead the beneficiaries of the system of impunity, in that common interests associate them, since besides enjoying access to arms, whose use is tolerated in

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<sup>53</sup> Domínguez & Ravelo, *supra* note 46.

Juárez, they have complete liberty to conduct their business outside of the law.<sup>54</sup>

*Battle of the Crosses* illustrates how the Juárez femicides occurred “within a mix of fetishism, xenophobia, racism, misogyny, and classism against the women who do not belong to the elite of local society—that is, they are poor mestiza immigrants.”<sup>55</sup> Rather than enduring the poverty and limited life chances to which gender and geography relegated them, they made the escape to the border. Unfortunately the border proved to be a place where young women’s entitlement to the benefits of equal citizenship was extremely weak. Instead of being protected by law and order, they were doomed by lawlessness, disorder, and impunity, the product of what the film’s academic/investigators believe is a strong social conspiracy involving the state which citizens are powerless to break.

### III. Conclusion

Each of the three documentary films dissected here examines a different aspect of the murders that befell the young women of Juárez: *Performing the Border* tweaks the viewer’s imagination regarding the nature of borders and their impact on the citizenship of women who live at the intersection of local, regional, national and international legal regimes; *Señorita Extraviada* is an intimate portrait of the victims which shows why the private grief of their survivors is a cause for public national mourning; and *Battle of the Crosses*, the product of the investigation of social scientists, educates its viewers by offering a panoramic description of the complicated social terrain on which the Juárez femicides occurred and their meaning was fought over. Together, the films suggest how borders are constructed and “performed” through law and law enforcement in ways that jeopardize women’s rights as citizens. The films also show how women in turn challenge law and law enforcement to transcend the limitations of social, political, and economic borders and assert their right to equal citizenship.

Confronted with state intransigence in the face of the murders of dozens of young females, the women of Juárez used their traditional female roles as a springboard to political engagement. Overcoming the debilitating effect of class and ethnic marginality, patriarchal mass violence, and governmental corruption and lack of accountability, the women turned back the state’s effort to diminish the murders as private matters and the victims as deserving of their fate. The documentaries together provide a vivid case study

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<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

that illustrates the importance of understanding the synthetic quality of borders and their relationship to women's rights to equal citizenship in a globalizing world, a world where borders can pop up anywhere and at anytime.