

Resisting Femicide in Mexico through Policy, Performance, and Research

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I. Introduction

Neoliberal policies have sparked a wave of gender violence across the Americas, exploiting the established inequalities of race, gender, and class resulting in the proliferation of femicide. Femicide describes the violent murder and forced disappearance of women, an issue ubiquitous from Ciudad Juárez to Tierra Del Fuego. Femicide was initially associated with Ciudad Juárez, Mexico on the U.S. border. The city has historically been home to maquilas, large scale transnational factories strategically located near the border where there is access to cheap and exploitable labor, established in 1965 by The Border Intensification Project. The maquilas are characterized by long hours, unfair working conditions, and low pay as important to their profitability. Those qualities have been intensified by neoliberal policies. Passed in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) opened the border for capital flows between the US, Canada and Mexico. NAFTA initially expanded the maquilas, making the region a destination for workers in Mexico while contributing to greater economic inequality. Femicide emerged as a pervasive problem in the wake of these changes. Initially confined to Juárez, the term has since been used to name a growing wave of gender violence that has swept across Mexico propelled by neoliberal economic reforms and the escalation of the drug war. Both have helped push up rates of femicide in other Mexican states, including Oaxaca.

This thesis explores the ways that activists, artists, and researchers have confronted the problem of feminicide. Collectively, their efforts address the problem as a process rather than a singular act, working to implicate the state, neoliberal policy, violence, patriarchy, and corruption. Informed by analysis of scholarly literature on femicide, this paper draws on interviews with activists, artists, and researchers in Oaxaca and Mexico City and analysis of performance works. Feminicide is an issue that occurs through the collision of multiple structural acts of violence. I utilized interdisciplinary methodologies for this project, because of the ways in which feminicide is a result of a multitude of processes. An issue as multifaceted and complex as feminicide necessitates a multi-scalar, interdisciplinary approach.

II. The “Femicide Machine”: Understanding femi(ni)cide as a social problem

As a particular form of gender violence, the emergence of femicide is inextricably linked to the intersection of structural reforms enacted since the 1970s, escalating levels of violence associated with the drug war, and historically entrenched inequalities of gender, race, and class. The term first emerged in the 1970s, as levels of violence against women heightened in the wake of the 1965 Border Intensification Project in Juárez. The term was initially introduced to describe the death and disappearance of women in the border zone due to their gender (Martin et al, 2016). By framing femicide as rooted in the misogynistic culture of the Global South, early definitions failed to recognize the structural forces that shaped femicide as a form of gender

violence now observed throughout Latin America. Many scholars continue to use the word “femicide” to expand understanding of the problem as one not solely rooted in a culture of misogyny. One approach has been to draw attention to the colonial origins of the patriarchal culture that exists in many Latin American countries today (Lugones, 2009). Feminist scholar, Martha Castañeda Salgado, has taken this effort one step further, distinguishing the importance of the word feminicide, a term that “introduces a linguistic stress on the female condition, and questions at the same time the social motives and the impunity derived from the lack of decisive action on the part of the state to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women” (Salgado, 2016, 1055). Salgado’s use of feminicide reframes the violence as a process rather than a singular act by recognizing the asymmetrical power relations present in male/female relationships and acknowledging how it interplays with an environment of neoliberalism, hyper-intensified capitalism, corruption, organized crime, and state violence. This terminology allows us to reframe our understanding of feminicide, implicating the state, patriarchy, and neoliberal forces.

Similar to Salgado’s terminology, journalist Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez argues that feminicide functions as a machine that developed from a multitude of structural entities. (Rodriguez, 2012). In doing so, Rodriguez analysis shifts attention towards a convergence of social inequalities, social change and policy. For Rodriguez, this operates at the intersection of the state, organized crime, neoliberal structural forms, the informal economy, and patriarchy. His analysis allows us to consider how this issue is not one that is committed by anomalous individuals, but rather is a product of an apparatus of inequity.

Attention to femicide reflects growing public awareness of the term, even as it continues to be predominantly understood as an aberration or unique form of crime. As Wright note feminicide has become so normalized throughout Mexico that “it now goes down as “natural death” in the records” (Wright, 2016, 249). Throughout this paper, I will unpack how actors, including the state, neoliberal forces, and organized crime, continue to sensationalize, decorporealize, and compartmentalize this issue, allowing it to occur with extreme violence at high rates. Simultaneously, I will dive into contemporary resistance efforts occurring in Mexico, highlighting the myriad of methodologies being used to work against feminicide. This examination allows us to better understand how different discursive understandings of feminicide are disseminated, causing the issue to occupy the liminal space between visible and invisible, inaction and action.

Over the past year, I’ve engaged with NGOs, collectives, and performance artists from regions where feminicide is prevalent to better understand how this issue is situated within the contemporary landscape. In the summer of 2018, I traveled to Oaxaca, a state in southern Mexico that has had some of the highest rates of feminicide since 2016 (Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity Oaxaca, 2017). There I conducted interviews with three NGOs and activist

organizations. Each of these organizations utilized different methodologies for publicizing and resisting the issue of femicide. They operated across public policy, online dissemination of information, performance works, and more. Over the following months, I analyzed performances emerging out of Mexico City, the nation's artistic and cultural hub, and Ciudad Juárez, the original hotspot for cases of femicide.

As mentioned above, a network of actors contributes to understandings of femicide that are sensational, depoliticized, and compartmentalized to the feminine or private sphere, causing many cases of femicide to be viewed in isolation and attributed to anomalous acts committed by violent individuals. The understanding of femicide that these actors have established forces the issue into the liminal space of visibility. This allows femicide to be visible in a hyper-sensationalized way while disappearing the processes and structures associated with it. While bodies continue to be found in the streets and graphic articles regarding cases of femicide plaster the front of newspapers daily, the state apparatus, patriarchal discourse, and other actors continue to delegate the issue of femicide into liminality by disseminating an understanding of the issue that masks and mystifies the processes that have caused it. Meanwhile, counter-actors, including academics, journalists, artists, and NGOs have begun to negotiate how femicide can be understood as a public issue that implicates the state, neoliberal policy, and corruption. By analyzing the role of both power structures and resistance movements, the ways in which femicide continues to occupy this liminal space becomes clearer. Throughout this analysis I will track how femicide functions as a multi-level apparatus that necessitates a coordinated multi-disciplinary response.

In this essay, I trace the evolution of femicide from the implementation of the first neoliberal projects on the United States/Mexico border chronologically to the current moment. Then, I unpack the theoretical underpinning that connects the eruption of femicide in the nineties to a web of forces including organized crime, neoliberal policy implementation, and state corruption. I situate this theory within the work of feminist scholars, highlighting how the coalescing of the aforementioned factors with the patriarchy contributes to the compartmentalization of femicide into the private sphere. Finally, I unpack how contemporary resistance movements and academic research combat the invisibilization of this issue by attempting to highlight the structures and processes associated with it. I will reveal how a network of actors have caused femicide to occupy the liminal space between visible and invisible.

III. The Evolution of Femicide and Neoliberal Policy on the United States Mexico Border

The network of actors implicated in cases of femicide are directly involved in the evolution of neoliberal policy in Mexico. The intensification of neoliberal policy on the US, Mexico border created an environment defined by asymmetrical wealth distribution, organized

crime, corruption, and violence. Scholar Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez documented the development of this environment in Ciudad Juarez as it transformed into a full-functioning apparatus, naming it the “Femicide Machine.” The “Femicide Machine” refers not only to the violence, organized crime, and corruption that created, “the conditions for the murders of dozens of women and little girls, but developed the institutions that guaranteed impunity for those crimes and even legalized them” (Rodriguez, 2012, 7). Rodriguez’s machine framework is beneficial for naming and analyzing the apparatus of economic exploitation, corruption, state violence, and organized crime. I want to adopt Rodriguez’s framework and utilize Salgado’s shift from femicide to feminicide, elaborating upon the machine with the terminology I outlined above. By doing so I dually name feminicide as a process rather than a singular act, using Rodriguez’s machine analytic to implicate the state and transnational policy in establishing the exploitative environment that has provoked the intensification of feminicide. Using this framework I will trace the path of intensification of neoliberal policy on the US/Mexico border to the contemporary moment, analyzing how feminicide came into being and its subsequent effects.

Beginning in the early 1960’s the Mexican government began border industrialization programs in cities like Juárez that established maquilas-- factories developed from foreign investment to provide the cheap, exploitable labor required to produce profit under capitalism (Rodriguez, 2012). The economic expansion that occurred under maquilas incentivized Juárez population to increase 40% between the years of 1970 and 2000. The city lacked the infrastructure for this massive population growth, forcing many people moving to Juárez to live in poverty without adequate access to water and other basic resources. Economic insecurity caused by asymmetrical wealth distribution oftentimes forces individuals to seek capital in other economies in order to meet their basic needs-- food, water, shelter, etc. This insecurity contributes to the development of informal economies. Because the informal economy is defined by its illegality, it is unregulated and oftentimes dangerous for those participating in it. Individuals living in poverty are, in many cases, economically coerced into participating in informal economies to supplement exploitative wages and meet their basic needs. This forces impoverished individuals in particular to subject themselves to violent and dangerous environments to fill the gaps that governmental structures and institutions have failed to meet.

Reliance upon informal economies is especially common among working class communities in border towns that have been affected by the intensification of capitalism (Rodriguez, 2012). In these areas, “informal economies-- like contraband and goods piracy, the underground economies of drugs, arms and human trafficking, money laundering, extortion, theft, prostitution, and child/teen exploitation---[oftentimes become] interconnected with the formal economy” (Rodriguez, 2012, 20). The connection between formal and informal economies demonstrates the high levels of state corruption that exacerbate violence and

impunity. Permeable boundaries between the formal and informal economies facilitate the flow of arms and weapons that contribute to phenomenally high levels of violence and impunity present in Mexico today. These processes heightened along the border region of Juárez after the implementation of NAFTA, disproportionately affecting the marginalized, including impoverished black and brown women.

In many Mexican border towns, the expansion of economic insecurity and violence directly correlates to the implementation of neoliberal policy. NAFTA has illuminated this pattern. Signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, in 1994 NAFTA opened borders for capital by implementing a series of regulations that triggered the intensification of neoliberal policy and practice between North American countries. Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez describes this process as the acceleration of Juárez's "city-machine's function," documenting how NAFTA exacerbated the violent and exploitative environment of border towns (Rodriguez, 2012, 9). Subsequently, towns located along the border region plummeted into an ever more exploitative capitalist environment, increasing the asymmetry of wealth distribution, causing the quality of labor conditions to decrease, and increasing violence and corruption-- all of which disproportionately affected women and other marginalized groups (Rodriguez, 2012).

The exploitative and violent environment that developed in the wake of the neoliberal policy of the 1990s was exacerbated in 2006 when the Bush and Calderón administrations signed the Mérida Initiative and launched the Mexican War on Drugs. The Mérida Initiative aimed to stop drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime in the United States, Mexico, and other Central American countries (Lakhani, et. al, 2016). The United States appropriated a phenomenal amount of funding and arms to Mexico, resulting in the mobilization of "48,000 [Mexican] soldiers every month" equipped with a vast arms stockpile, provided by the United States (Lakhani, et. al, 2016). After 2006, Mexico's military spending doubled and, from 2008 to 2012, the United States gave \$1.9 billion US dollars to Mexico (Rodriguez, 2012; Paley, 2015). In the following years, the body count in Mexico continued to rise and violence spiked (Paley, 2015).

The hyper-militarization that occurred as a result of the Mérida Initiative brought about a period of extreme violence in Mexico that is still occurring today. The Mexican War on Drugs has increased deaths in Mexico tenfold and is deeply intertwined with feminicide. This violence is staggering, and becomes even more atrocious when blended with asymmetrical patriarchal relationships. Since 2006, "more than 200,000 people have been killed in the drug war and 31,000 people have gone missing" (Malkin, 2017). The body count elucidates how the US and Mexican administrations successfully implemented a war against the general population of Mexico, particularly those that are marginalized, rather than one targeted at stopping drug trafficking.

The state's priorities lie not in protecting and ensuring a higher quality of life to everyday citizens, but rather in protecting the economic interests and those of the corporate elite. This becomes particularly evident when analyzing the connections between organized crime and the state in the context of Mexico's War on Drugs, which is by no means a new relationship. In Mexico, examples of organized crime working in collusion with the state precede the institution of NAFTA (Rodriguez, 2012). These relationships are significant because they suggest the state's priority is less invested in stopping organized crime groups than their legislation and discourse would suggest. In the early 1990s, it was found that drug cartel groups near Mexico's northern border had bribed state officials for judicial immunity. These relationships matured and, in 1993, "a former federal security police commanding officer, who had until then been the boss of Juárez cartel, was assassinated so that a drug trafficker...could replace him" (Rodriguez, 2012, 80). These connections reveal extremely high levels of corruption and allow us to question where the state's priorities lie, as it appears they are not in disbanding organized crime groups.

Relationships between organized crime, corporations, and the Mexican government suggest that these bodies are more connected than state discourse and legislation would imply, allowing for phenomenally high levels of impunity. Impunity contributes to the landscape of femicide by not only creating the conditions "for the murders of dozens and women and little girls, but developing the institutions that [guarantee] impunity for those crimes" (Rodriguez, 2012, 7). As Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez and other scholars have outlined it, capitalism, organized crime, and the militarization of civilian groups work in coordination with high levels of corruption and impunity to produce an environment in which phenomena like femicide thrive. In 2009, rates of impunity for femicide in the state of Chihuahua were at an unprecedented high of 95% (Atencio, et. al, 2012). These absurd rates are common throughout Mexico and prevent justice for the families of the victims of these atrocities.

The evolution of neoliberal policy in Mexico has colluded with patriarchal hegemony, thus establishing the Femicide Machine. The high femicide rates from the 1980s onward, ranging from 1,089 to 1,460 cases per year from 1985 to 2007, make clear the extent of the apparatus. After the onset of the War on Drugs in 2006, femicide rates sharply increased and, by 2011, the number of cases occurring per year had more than doubled (ONU Mujeres, 2017). In 2016, there were 2,746 femicides in Mexico (Olmos, 2018). Over the last decade more than 23,800 women have died under femicide (Olmos, 2018). Unfortunately, because of the nature of femicide, data is likely underreported and these numbers fail to encompass the totality of the violence occurring against women in Mexico today. Nonetheless, these numbers function as a direct expression of the exploitation and violence occurring in the wake of neoliberal policies in the border region.

While neoliberal policies effects on femicide are explicitly visible in a quantifiable way, feminist geographer Melissa Wright highlights how these numbers play out in extremely

qualitative and visceral ways on the corporeal territories of third world women (Wright, 2006). Wright frames these women as the protagonists of neoliberal globalization, their bodies functioning as the territories in which physical and discursive expressions of patriarchy, state violence, and neoliberal ideology are executed. For Wright, these uses of discourse and physical violence not only perpetuate feminicide, but mystify the processes associated with it, contributing to high levels of impunity and inhibiting resistance efforts (Wright, 2017).

IV. Discursive Mechanisms of Patriarchy: Exacerbating Feminicide and Mystifying its Associated Processes

In the previous section I outlined how neoliberal and profit focused policy has contributed to the violence, wealth inequality, corruption, and exploitation in Mexico. In this section I will analyze how neoliberal policy is exacerbated by patriarchal hegemony, allowing contemporary violence in Mexico to disproportionately affect women. While casualty rates are at an all time high among all genders, journalist Granados demonstrates that women in Mexico are murdered in far more cruel and brutal ways than men (Granados, 2018). Sharp objects are 1.3 times more likely to be used on women than men, and women are three times more likely to be hung, drowned, strangled, choked, burned, etc. Asymmetrical violence and cruelty against women suggests that patriarchal power structures inform the violent landscape of Mexico, targeting women and intensifying the physical policing of their bodies.

The exploitative capitalist work environment works with patriarchal norms and culture to develop a violent apparatus that proliferates feminicide. Historically, maquila employees were predominantly men (McCullar, 2010). However, as McCullar demonstrates, a myriad of factors including economic pressure and contemporary feminism have pushed women into maquila employment. Patriarchal culture socializes many women into being docile and compliant employees, causing the capitalist work environment of maquilas to be particularly dangerous for women. In addition to this, women working in maquilas are oftentimes subjected to long bus rides to and from work, overtime shifts, poor safety and security, and low pay. Furthermore, in order to earn a living wage many women are coerced into participating in sex work and other occupations in the informal economy. The patriarchal discourse of the 'promiscuous woman' uses these women's sex-work as justification for violence committed against them as part of outdated, misogynistic narratives that suggest women employed in this line of work are immoral and deserve the violence they receive. The dangers of the informal economy in combination with the dangers inherent to being a woman employed in maquilas create particularly violent and perilous conditions for women employed in these environments.

While the violent system outlined above is explicit in occupational spheres, it permeates all aspects of women's lives from public spaces to the home. In the wake of expanded employment, women began to occupy and gain visibility in public spaces in ways that they

historically had not. Because women's bodies are not traditionally associated with these spaces, many women faced heightened violence and policing for occupying new roles in previously male dominant spaces. Women's presence in public spaces complicates the understanding of femininity that relegates women to the private sphere. Women's bodies become sites of warfare as power structures attempt to police them for disrupting the power structures inherent to patriarchal spaces. Women's bodies are then subjected to "greater degrees of violence in both [public and private spaces]" as they are policed for disrupting patriarchal power systems. (McCullar, 2010, 3).

As Melissa Wright demonstrates, neoliberal policy ends up playing out on the bodily territories of women living in Mexico (Wright, 2006). These women are exposed to the physical representations of their disposability through the exploitative work conditions of maquilas that McCullar illuminated. Wright examines how the effects of the maquila on third world women operate, "both within and beyond factory walls... through the "myth of the disposable third world woman" (Wright, 2006, 1). For Wright, this myth is not only physically expressed by the exploitative environment established in the maquila, but also by the discursive regimes that allow this, "international tale [to be] told by people from all walks of life, including factory managers, corporate executives, and consumers across the globe who buy their products" (Wright, 2006, 2).

Wright's myth analytic can be connected to queer, chicanx writer Gloria Anzaldua's work. Anzaldua highlights how the physical corporeality reacts in equally visceral ways to discourse as it does to real, lived events (Anzaldua, 1987). For Anzaldua, "the spirit of the words moving in the body is as concrete as flesh and as palpable" (Anzaldua, 1987, 71). Furthermore, as neoliberal policy interplays with patriarchal hegemony, women, particularly black and brown women, become "a form of industrial waste, at which point [they are] discarded and replaced" (Wright, 2006, 3). Feminicide is the direct representation of the disposability of these women. In contemporary Mexico, militarization and foreign policy have constructed a violent, war-time landscape that exacerbates these processes, causing further violence to play out on third world women's bodies.

Feminist scholars Jules Falquet and Rita Laura Segato connect militarization and violence to a machista culture that uses women's bodies as tools of warfare. In her work, Segato documented a case in Brazilian prisons in which men would use crimes against women as a way to prove themselves to other men (Falquet, 2018). Segato uses this case study to describe feminicide as a language that is sent between men of rival mafia groups, using the tortured bodies of women as a means of communication. "For Segato, this becomes a new language of terror, power, and control of the territory that takes root in the emblematic border areas of globalization" (Falquet, 2018). In Mexico, the War on Drugs has created an environment in which this phenomenon is occurring between narcotraficantes and their State counterparts. Falquet's work establishes the necessity of not voyeuristically blaming the 'machista culture' of

countries in the global south. Instead, Falquet encourages us to understand how transnational policy, organized crime, and the state work in coordination with patriarchal hegemony to generate an environment of violence, impunity, and corruption. In Mexico's case, gendered phenomena have worked in tandem with militarization and neoliberal policy to produce the violence against women that exists today.

Feminist geographer Melissa Wright highlights how patriarchy exacerbates the physical violence occurring to women and mystifies the power structures at play (Wright, 2017). Wright tracks how patriarchal discourse destabilizes the spatialization of feminicide by creating an unnecessary binary between public and private spaces. While patriarchal discourse has traditionally delegated issues regarding women to the private sphere, globalization, economic opportunities for women, and the War on Drugs has complicated this spatial delineation. The demarcation of femininity as 'being of the home' attempts to delegate the issue of feminicide entirely to the private sphere, deeply hindering efforts to visibilize feminicide as a public issue. The logic that delimits women as being of the private sphere makes "women and the places and processes associated with them invisible, outside of history and geography, and thereby, unknowable and unthinkable" (Wright, 2017, 258). By rendering feminicide as a women's issue, it becomes one that is of the private sphere, a crisis of anomalous individuals and not of the public or the state. This construction of feminicide cripples resistance efforts that connect individual cases of feminicide to a larger body politic. When feminicide is a crisis of individual women, understood as an act committed by individuals in the private sphere, the possibility of implicating the state and transnational politics in the violence occurring against women becomes nearly impossible.

Nevertheless, as violence in Mexico heightens, women's bodies continue to be found in incredibly public spaces-- streets, the dump, etc.-- thus challenging the notion of feminicide as a private issue. The expansion of the War on Drugs correlates with an increase in the deaths of women in Mexico and a shift in their spatial distribution (Equis Justia Para Las Mujeres, 2018). This suggests that feminicide is in fact a public crisis and is directly linked to heightened levels of violence throughout the nation. The spatial distribution of feminicide shifted after the implementation of the War on Drugs in 2006. From 1997 to 2009 the majority of feminicides occurred within the home. Since 2009, year after year, the majority of feminicides are occurring in public spaces by firearm (Equis Justia Para Las Mujeres, 2018; Granados, 2012). From 2006 on, The War on Drugs established a violent environment particularly fraught with firearm violence in Mexico. Thus, the shift in spatial distribution of feminicides that occurred in 2009, just a few years after 2006, suggests a connection between the militarization of Mexico and the change in spatial distribution of feminicides. Feminicides occurring in the public sphere should complicate the binary spatial understanding of feminicide. However, the patriarchal state continues to delimit this issue as being of the private sphere, out of its scope of responsibility.

The states lack of accountability on an issue that has become so clearly a public matter calls into question how the historical territorialization of the feminine body has made it more susceptible to modern forms of biopower (Segato, 2016).

Power structures continue to mask and mystify acts of violence against women by demarcating them as being of the private; meanwhile, globalization has ushered in new forms of biopower that grant the state even more control over women's bodies. As illustrated by Foucault, while state structures shifted throughout the past three centuries from feudalism to the modern state apparatus, so did the ways in which governments exercised control over their populations (Foucault, 1990). Feminist scholar, Rita Laura Segato claims that a third shift in biopower began in the 1980s as international powers brought about a wave of globalization and neoliberal policy. The economic shift toward neoliberalism blurred borders by granting more and more power to non-state actors including corporations, transnational organizations, and paramilitary groups (Segato, 2016). In doing so, state controlled populations became less of a static group defined by national borders, and more of a fluid herd. This shift complicates notions of biopower, allowing the state to exercise more control over specific bodies. The state's fluidity of control becomes particularly evident in the case of women, a demographic group whose bodies have historically been a dimension of property and territory. Modern forms of biopower allow the scope of the control of the state to shift from the entire population toward individual bodies, allowing the state to distance itself from any implication in the acts occurring against women. The state's ability to choose when to exercise power over its population and when to not becomes clear in that "all of the modern trappings of biopolitical governance—birth certificates, educational and medical records, digitized government identification records, marriage licenses, property titles—fail to" tackle the impunity exercised on cases of femicide (Wright, 2017). This is a blatant expression of the state shifting when and where it chooses to delimit its population and when and where it can leave women outside the scope of its responsibility.

As a result of the very real implications of patriarchal discourse and rhetoric, women's bodies begin to exist in the liminal space of the state's governance. Delegating femicide to the private sphere causes it to continue without being perceived by public opinion as full occurrences of the public sphere because all types of crimes against women are contaminated by the atmosphere of the space of intimacy (Segato, 2016). Constructing femicide as a private issue allows the patriarchal state to acquit themselves of any responsibility in the matter. By granting themselves immunity, the state is able to continue to implement policy that furthers the interests of economic elites without taking responsibility for the violent repercussions it has on the rest of the population.

Tangible work must be done to contribute to a new understanding of femicide; work that moves beyond shifting terminology. In order to resist femicide, conceptions of femicide must recognize the fluidity of the public vs private divide and how modern forms of biopower

blur the scope of the population the government is responsible for into a fluid herd. One methodology for generating a new understanding of femicide is transitioning the discourse away from the public vs private binary, connecting individual cases of femicide to a larger body politic, and implicating institutional forces in the deaths of women across Mexico.

Ultimately, femicide exists as a machine-like structure devised by neoliberal policy, the state, organized crime, patriarchy, etc. Nevertheless, “this machinic integrity is complemented by the human (individual, group, or collective) element that devised it, keeps it running, and at some point, can destroy it” (Rodriguez, 2006, 10). I became increasingly interested in this human element, and began to research how contemporary scholars, artists, and activists are organizing against femicide.

V. Theories of Change: Resisting Femicide and Performance as a Methodology for Disrupting Discourse

Methodologies for resisting femicide must strategically highlight the state's implication, construct femicide as a crisis of the public, connect individual cases to a larger body politic, and recognize the role of neoliberal policy and corruption in generating the high levels of violence and impunity occurring in Mexico today. Feminist geographer Melissa Wright notes the importance of new methodologies of resistance (Wright, 2017). Wright highlights the necessity of taking an overly normalized, ubiquitous issue like femicide and bringing it back in to the visible, public gaze thus challenging the established discourse surrounding the issue.

Wright suggests that we look toward current movements against acts of violence in Mexico. These movements are mobilizing in solidarity with the forced disappearances that have occurred under United-States initiated dictatorships with pro-neoliberal politics that have occurred since the Cold War era in the Americas. Wright states that these methods, “offer many important lessons for organizing alternatives to the pervasive triangulation of social hatred, state terror and global capitalism in many other parts of the world, especially where social minorities are targeted by cruel legislation, incarceration, police brutality and exploitation” (Wright, 2017, 252). These movements include the work of activists and artists of all stripes.

Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor illuminates how performance has the capacity to destabilize discourse as it comes into being (Taylor, 2016). Taylor offers insight into the capabilities of performance, while simultaneously noting the necessity to not overstate the capacity of performance in destabilizing oppressive power structures. Because of the ways in which misogynistic discourse has been used to mystify femicide and its processes, performance is able to combat the invisibilization of femicide and generate new understandings of the issue. Performance has the capacity to disrupt the discourse that invisibilizes femicide and the mechanisms associated with it..

Likewise, Taylor demonstrates that performance pieces have the capability to implicate the real through the presence of living bodies (Taylor, 2016). In a state in which headlines throw femicide cases into people's faces everyday, a methodology that reconnects individual cases of femicide to real, visceral, corporealities is particularly strategic. This is especially true in instances in which victims' bodies have been disappeared or mutilated past the point of recognition. In the absence of bodies, the use of living bodies re-enacting the violence allows us to connect these individual cases to a larger body politic that can implicate capitalism, state violence, and impunity.

Taylor demonstrates that performance has the ability to create new discursive regimes by shifting signifiers and associations that become malleable in the context of a performance (Taylor, 2016). For Taylor, new understandings and connotations of social problems can be created through performance. In the case of femicide, performance work that occurs directly in public, urban spaces, challenges the patriarchal discourse that seeks to mystify processes of violence against women by delegating them to the private sphere. By disrupting and shifting discourse, performance becomes a particularly effective methodology for stringing disparate cases of femicide together into one body politic, simultaneously framing the issue as a crisis of the public sphere and a crisis of neoliberal violence playing out in an urban context.

VI. Methodology

In order to better understand how femicide, a hyper-visible issue, has continued to rise in fervor with relatively little public response I analyzed current resistance strategies being used in Mexico. I began by conducting an extensive multidisciplinary literature review. This literature review included topics of neoliberal policy, feminist theory, performance theory, biopower, critical geography, Mexican history, drug trafficking, state corruption and more. Then, I witnessed 11 performances created around the issue of femicide. I performed an in depth analysis of 6 of these performances, 5 of which were created in Mexico and 1 of which was created in Guatemala. I then analyzed the production elements of 3 of these performances and situated them in conversations about identity, politics, and space. I conducted field research in Mexico by interviewing NGOs and activists about the work they are currently doing to resist femicide. In Oaxaca City, several feminist organizations lead the movement through public policy initiatives and education. I conducted interviews with two: Luna Del Sur and Consorcio Oaxaca. Additionally, I interviewed an activist collective based in Mexico City, Las Geobrujas. I conducted one hour and a half interview with each of these groups and followed up with questions throughout the process electronically. This survey was in no way exhaustive, but provided insight into the type of legislative and artistic work being done in these urban centers.

The majority of my analysis focused on work coming out of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico City, and Oaxaca City. These three cities have a specific local context that make them an important

site to analyze responses to femicide. Oaxaca is one of the poorest states in Mexico and is located on a path that migrants frequently travel on. In recent years the capital, Oaxaca City, has had one of the highest national rates of femicide (Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity Oaxaca, 2017). Secondly, in Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez is the city in which the term femicide originated. It lies on the border between the US and Mexico, and is a hotspot for economic exploitation, neoliberalism, and maquilas. Ciudad Juárez has historically received the most attention for femicide and is a central point of discussion for this issue. Finally, Mexico City is the capital of the nation and is often revered as the political and cultural hub of Mexico.

I put the literature review, performance analysis, and fieldwork in conversation with each other to explore not only how femicide came into being, but how people are mobilizing against it today. This approach was intentionally multidisciplinary, as femicide is an inherently multidisciplinary issue. I emphasized this throughout the paper, utilizing Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez's machine analytic to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of femicide. The nature of the multi-level femicide apparatus not only informs my methodological process, but explains the myriad of ways in which folks are mobilizing against this issue today.

VII. Resisting Femicide: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Resisting a Multilevel Issue

Throughout this paper I have illuminated how femicide is an issue that is operating at a multi-scalar level. Femicide operates at the intersections of domestic and foreign policy; interactions in the private sphere; the exploitative conditions of the work space; misogynistic discourse; the interactions of criminal organizations; state corruption; and more. In addition, these effects are occurring multi-spatially; in the workspace; in the home; in public; in private; within the physical territories of third world women; within corporate board rooms; on the visceral flesh of female bodies; and all of the spaces inbetween. In light of this, it is no surprise that the methodologies being used to respond to femicide are equally diverse.

A. Consorcio Oaxaca - Policy, Maps, Outreach, and Education

Consorcio Oaxaca is one of the oldest feminist civil organizations in Oaxaca City. Formed in 2003, they're an NGO that currently consists of around 20 female employees. They alone are responding to femicide through public policy advocacy, information dissemination, media, education, and outreach. In their public policy efforts, Consorcio was a key actor in establishing a legal codification for femicide in the state of Oaxaca. In 2001 in Ciudad Juárez, the Campo Algodonero femicide case was taken to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Tello, 2018). In this case, 8 women were found dead in a field in Ciudad Juárez. After seven years in the court system, the perpetrators were found guilty and in 2009 a legal definition for femicide was decided upon in the state of Chihuahua. Since then, other Mexican states have adopted their own version of this legal codification; Oaxaca, being one of them. The Oaxacan codification for femicide outlines the crime as being extremely violent, committed in the public

space, and oftentimes done by a stranger. Consorcio discussed how the codification they established outlines severe consequences for perpetrators of femicide, yet, incredibly few people have been prosecuted under the new policy. Even when cases match the majority of the points required to be considered femicide, officials try the aggressors under homicide, a legal codification with less serious consequences than that of femicide, demonstrating how corruption causes femicide to face high rates of impunity. This elaborates the complexities and nuances of resisting femicide. While Consorcio was able to get a policy put into place, most criminals are never tried under it.

In addition to their legal codification for femicide, Consorcio recognizes 5 other types of violence occurring against women in Mexico today. These are: sexual assault, domestic violence, suicide, political violence, and forced disappearances (Tello, 2018). By delimiting suicide as a category of contemporary gendered violence in Mexico, Consorcio connects directly to Anzaldúa's understanding of discourse as having visceral effects on women's corporealities. Consorcio recognizes that lived experiences and discourse compile on women's physical and mental well-being, oftentimes contributing to cases of suicide. In this way, Consorcio recognizes how Wright's myth of the third world disposable women has visceral effects on Mexican women's bodies.

In addition to public policy initiatives, Consorcio pushes against femicide by publishing fact-based, annual reports that are distributed to government officials and disseminated to the public online (Tello, 2018). Over the past several years, Consorcio developed an online map database that spatializes femicide data gathered from local newspapers (see Figure 7.1). Consorcio categorizes and displays this data for every municipality, county, and region of Oaxaca. These reports and maps are published online and are accessible to everyone with an internet connection. This allows for femicide to shift out of the spaces it happens in, to a wider online audience. It projects the territories of women's individual bodies into a larger media body, transferring this information in new ways.

Consorcio has faced considerable pushback from government officials in Oaxaca. They distribute their annual reports to local officials in an attempt to pressure them into taking action against femicide. However, in 2017 they were accused of falsifying these reports. These accusations were false. Consorcio gets their data from newspaper articles, and it is likely an underrepresentation of the number of femicides occurring. Government pushback is representative of the corruption and impunity that is complicit in cases of femicide.

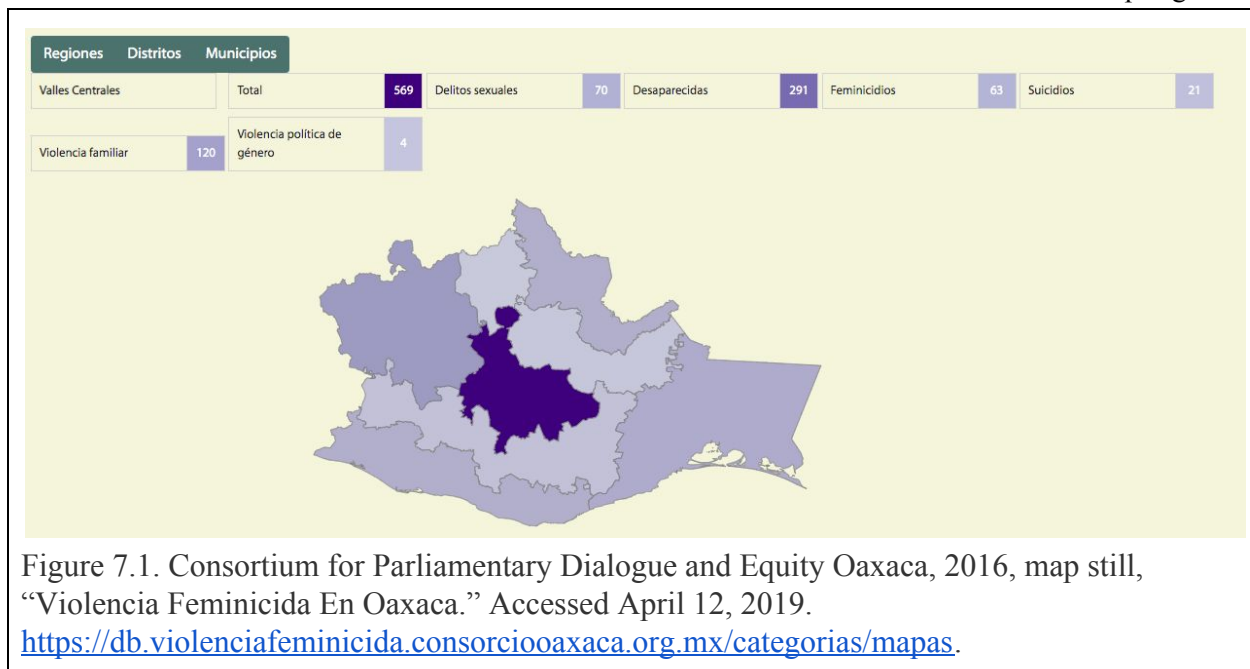


Figure 7.1. Consortium for Parliamentary Dialogue and Equity Oaxaca, 2016, map still, “Violencia Femicida En Oaxaca.” Accessed April 12, 2019.
<https://db.violenciafemicida.consorciooaxaca.org.mx/categorias/mapas>.

B. Luna Del Sur - Legal Advocacy and Education

Working within the legal system, Luna Del Sur, a Oaxacan based NGO comprised of twelve lawyers, seeks to challenge the heteropatriarchal structure of the legal and political system through educational programs offered to female lawyers in training (Lilli, 2018). These programs use decolonial feminism as a pedagogical framework, challenging young women to question the ways in which the legal system is inherently rigged against women and other marginalized groups. Their goal is to educate female lawyers on public policy while allowing them to develop a decolonial feminist disposition that can be utilized to push against the oppressive structure of the legal system (Lilli, 2018). Luna Del Sur has run into government pushback from their community work. In the past year Luna Del Sur was removed from a special council on femicide in the District Attorney’s office in Oaxaca. They had been invited to participate on this council several years ago and were recently asked to step down from the council without being provided a reason for their removal (Lilli, 2018). Luna Del Sur was directly affected by corrupt state agents working to delegitimize organizations resisting femicide in Oaxaca.

C. Las Geobrujas - Embodied Workshops & the Self as a Territory

Meanwhile, Las Geobrujas are offering accessible, public workshops that allow women to develop their own political consciousness and analyze how the environment of femicide affects their individual corporeal territories (see Figure 7.2). This strategy allows women to understand how the state delimits certain bodies as being outside of national boundaries, and thereby the scope of the state’s responsibility. By allowing women to connect the effects of

nebulous structural forces including neoliberalism, patriarchy, and the state to their own living, breathing corporeality, Las Geobrujas successfully ignite a political consciousness amongst women in the community that disrupts the invisibilization of violence. Similar to Anzaldúa, the Geobrujas use feminist theory to construct women's bodies as a physical territory. In doing so, women are able to politicize their corporealities and better understand how their physical body can be a site of violence and warfare. The Geobrujas workshops make space for women to process how living in an environment that tells them they are disposable has real, embodied effects on their mental and physical wellbeing. Attributing women's bodies to territories disrupts the myth of the disposable woman and politicizes individual bodies into active methodologies of resistance.



Figure 7.2. Las GeoBrujas, 2018, community workshop photograph, "Las GeoBrujas - Comunidad de Geógrafas." Accessed April 12, 2019.

<https://www.facebook.com/geobrujas/photos/a.2227200750847780/2227202910847564/?type=3&theater>.

D. Lorena Wolffer - Performance

In “*Mientras Dormiamos*” Lorena Wolffer draws acts of violence from individual cases of femicide that are being narrated by the sound-score onto her own, naked body (see Figure 7.3). This performance connects cases that may be decorporealized in another context to her living and present body, contributing to a new understanding of femicide that is visceral and embodied. Wolffer attempts to combat the normalization of femicide by connecting them to her living, breathing corporeality. Wolffer, a light-skinned, academically trained artist performs this work as a solo in a gallery space. This deeply contrasts the context of her later work, “*State of Emergency*”.

Wolffer adjusted to critiques that her performances were removed from the spaces that femicide occurs and created the “*State of Emergency*” project (Sierra, 2018). In this work, Wolffer constructed a public room in the middle of a lower-income, urban space in Mexico City. Here, anyone could initiate a conversation or present artistic work about femicide. “*State of Emergency*” is particularly interesting in the ways it inserts the issue of femicide into the public space, directly challenging the discursive regimes that binary femicide into the private sphere. As opposed to “*Mientras Dormiamos*”, “*State of Emergency*” hosted conversations and performances from everyday, community members-- as opposed to Wolffer, a professionally recognized artist. By having community members perform the work, “*State of Emergency*” juxtaposed Wolffer’s “*Mientras Dormiamos*.”



Figure 7.3 Lorena Wolffer, 2018, performance video still, “*Mientras Dormiamos*”, accessed April 12, 2019. http://www.lorenawolffer.net/01obra/11md/md_frames.html

E. The Hemispheric Institute - Performance

In 2015 the Hemispheric Institute facilitated a performance of “Mexico Es Una Fosa Comun” in San Cristobal de Las Casas. The Hemispheric Institute is based out of New York City and facilitates a meet up of artists, academics, and activists from across the hemisphere on an annual basis. In this piece, predominantly non-Mexican performers paraded through the streets of San Cristobal de Las Casas, culminating in a stationary performance of people painted as skeletons rolling in the dirt of a large constructed grave in the city square. The performers carried emblems representing the many ways in which people in Mexico dying today-- one of which was a pink cross, a symbol that signifies femicide. This presentation was done in the tourist-centered part of Chiapas--San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Throughout the video you can see that audience members occupying the streets represent a myriad of different identity groups, from indigenous merchants, to Mexican citizens, and foreign tourists.



Figure 7.4 Hemispheric Institute, 2015, performance video still, “*Mexico es una fosa común*”, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://chiapas2015.tome.press/chapter/art-and-performance/>.

F. Red Denuncia Femicidios - Performance

The final performance I analyzed was “*Rostros De Fuego del Bordo a la Esperanza*” presented by Red Denuncias Feminicidios (Red Denuncia Feminicidios, 2016). This performance occurred outside of Mexico City in Ciudad Satelite and was performed by folks working-class folks with a more direct connection to femicide. “*Rostros De Fuego del Bordo a la Esperanza*” was performed by a collective of non-white women in a low-income working class space. The spatiality of this work directly juxtaposes that of “*Mientras Dormiamos*” and “*Mexico Es Una Fosa Comun*”. The performers held up photos of their lost loved ones, and read their narratives in the first person (see Figure 7.5). The narratives focused more on the women’s lives up to their deaths, as opposed to the violence inflicted upon them as Wolffer did in “*Mientras Dormiamos*”. The performance occurred in Ciudad Satelite, just outside of Mexico city, somewhere a tourist would likely never end up.



Figure 7.5 Roberto Gloria Rivas, 2016, performance video still, “*Rostros de Fuego Del Bordo a la Esperanza*” Accessed April 12, 2019.

<http://kajanegra.com/rostros-fuego-del-bordo-a-la-esperanza/>

Conclusion

As Melissa Wright states, “it seems that femicide is such old news, so everyday and ubiquitous in all ideologies, that it now goes down as “natural death” in the records” (Wright,

2017). News headlines, informational documents disseminated by NGOs like Consorcio Oaxaca, and performances delivered by activists and artists continue to demonstrate the persistence and fervor of femicide, and yet, they are continually met with a rise in deaths and a lack of government and public action. Meanwhile, the state, organized crime, and patriarchal discourse continue to mystify processes associated with femicide, exacerbating the issue and pushing it further into the liminality of visibility. Thus, it is important to consider and, “illuminate the political sophistication of activists who have organized, for decades, against state terror as they expose the centrality of disappearance to modern governance across the world” (Wright, 2017). In this way we can continue to understand the nuanced relationship between resistance efforts and structures of power, helping us to understand how the state continues to benefit off of the, “rendering invisible and unknowable whole populations” (Wright, 2017).

Contemporary expressions of femicide are the result of state, neoliberal, and patriarchal actors. They have seek to erase the states implication in the Femicide Machine, invisibilizing femicide and the processes associated with it. The Femicide Machine is “composed of hatred and misogynistic violence, machismo, power and patriarchal reaffirmations that take place at the margins of the law or within a law of complicity between criminals, police, military, government officials, and citizens who constitute an a-legal old-boy network” (Rodriguez, 2012). These networks operate under an expansive range of power, one that is exacerbated by modern forms of biopower, allowing actors to violently and powerfully cast femicide and the mechanisms associated with it out of the public gaze. Patriarchy colludes with the Femicide Machine to exacerbate violence and utilizes discourse to cast femicide and its associated processes into the liminal space of visibility. More research needs to be done on how acts of violence affect all gender minorities in Mexico-- not just cisgender women. Trans and non-binary individuals face the highest levels of gendered violence and comprehensive studies exploring how neoliberal policy, patriarchy, and Mexico’s landscape of violence affects these individuals is necessary.

I’ve explored how a network of counter actors continues to fight against the invisibility of this femicide, contributing to an understanding that connects individual cases of femicide to structural violence and a larger body politic. It is important to understand how historical acts of imperialism, violence, and neoliberalism have ushered us into the contemporary moment of violence in Mexico. Meanwhile, we must look toward activists and artists alike to consider how we can continue to destabilize and disrupt the dissemination of discourse that invisibilizes and mystifies processes of violence.

Throughout this paper I have unpacked how femicide exists as a machine, intersecting myriad institutions, spaces, and actors. Because of this, it makes sense that a coordinated front of multidisciplinary approaches has emerged in response to this issue. Each of the resistance efforts works I analyzed worked to destabilize femicide by creating space for it to be analyzed, deconstructed, and made known. Collectives, NGOs, and artists are applying different

methodologies for resisting the feminicide machine, employing multidisciplinary approaches to deconstruct feminicide, an issue that works across spatial and conceptual boundaries. We can only hope that, “the human (individual, group, or collective) element that devised [the Femicide Machine], keeps it running, and, at some point, can destroy it” (Rodriguez, 2012, 10). The lineage of this movement sits within the history of state violence, neoliberalism, and forced disappearances since the Cold War Era in the Americas. Feminicide is just one expression of the violence that transnational corporations, the economic elite, and state entities have inflicted upon populations across the hemisphere and will likely not be the last of these atrocities.

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