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Femicide Under the Eclipse of Narco-Conflict in Ciudad Juarez: Examining the Relationship Between Gender Violence and the Question of the Failed State

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Abstract Cover Page

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M.A., New School for Social Research, 2007

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Abstract

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By

Jenny Karubian

This thesis examines violence against women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico in light of the narcotics conflict in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The central theme of this thesis is the relationship between violence and state formation, and the ways in which violence against women bolstered state authority during an era of relative peace. While over five thousand disappearances and five hundred confirmed sexually motivated murders did not delegitimize state authority, the recent rash of violence has directly undermined state power. This thesis historically situates these two eras of violence in order to examine the relationship between violence against women and state authority.

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Contents

Introduction

Since 1993, over five hundred women have been murdered in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Hundreds of bodies have been found raped, mutilated, tortured and burned in the expanses of the surrounding Chihuahua Desert, while nearly 4,500 women remain missing (CMDPDH, 1). Sexually motivated violent crimes have earned this border region international repute as a center of human rights violations against women. Scholars within and outside of Mexico, foreign governments, the United Nations and international human rights agencies officially recognize what has been termed "femicide" (Fragoso 2002) and collectively demand that the Mexican state eradicate this violence.

Although femicide persists, recent developments along the US-Mexico border have shifted attention away from gender violence. In April of 2008, a federally sponsored crackdown on narcotics trafficking transformed the city streets into a veritable war zone. Several thousand people have been murdered since the latter half of 2008, including police chiefs, public officials, journalists and innocent bystanders. The sudden onslaught of violence at the US-Mexico border has captured the attention of foreign governments and the international press. Shocking stories of execution-style murders, decapitated heads found on street corners, and rivalries between local police and federal troops appear in newspapers around the globe. Although the press acknowledges the history of femicide in the region, it represents this rash of drug violence as a separate and unconnected incident. However, what these accounts overlook is the shifting relationship between violence and state power in the past two decades. I argue that these events must be historically situated in order to elucidate how violence in Ciudad Juarez solidified state authority but later undermined state power.

The guiding inquiry of this analysis is influenced by anthropological and sociological theories that examine the ontology of the state. A variety of scholars working within this tradition contend that the state is not an entity in and of itself. Rather, the state is accorded legitimacy and maintains coherence through a number of processes, performances, codifications between domains, and shrouding of social inequalities (Abrams, 1977; Corrigan and Sayer 1981; Mbembe 1992; Nugent 2007; Taylor 1997; Weber 1906). A general consensus among these individuals is that the state is a collective fiction that mystifies its ontological status. In "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," Phillip Abrams (1988) deconstructs the notion of the state. He maintains "the state is not a thing…it does not, as such, exist" (Abrams 2006, 123). Abrams' concern is not the utility of government or bureaucratic apparatuses, but the ideological power (121) of the state. In his perspective, a dichotomy exists between the "state-idea" and the "state-system." The state system is comprised of a number of practices and institutions, while the state idea is an ideological force that is the "mask of political practice…it is projected, purveyed, and believed in in different societies at different times" (125).

In contrast to the coherence of the "state-idea" that Abrams articulates in his work, the recent outbreak of violence in Ciudad Juarez demonstrates the incoherence of the state at local and federal levels. In the name of ending police corruption, federal troops have "cracked down" on municipal police and thus publicized the severed alliance between state and federal levels. Although the arrival of federal soldiers within the region is marketed to the Mexican people as "victorious" (Iliff 2008), local residents do not support the military occupation. It has spurred political demonstrations and mass migration to the United States. Failure of rule of law, divisions between elites (local police, military, federal government, organized crime), and public responses to this crisis exemplify a loss of faith in the state.

In considering these events, it is necessary to question why this narcotics crisis undermines state legitimacy while a decade and a half of femicide has not. This is a complicated question, as the Juarez femicide itself is fraught with inconsistencies and unclear divisions between the state and the unknown perpetrators. However, the blurred separation between criminals and state agents has bolstered the authority of the state since the femicide commenced. Continual disappearances of women, police inadequacy, death threats to victims' families and the overall longevity of this violence solidified state authority at a moment of radical social, political and economic transformations within the region. Femicide lurked in the shadows, evoked fear among the populace, and obfuscated the inner structure of the state. Suspicions and allegations of collusion between local police and organized crime perpetuated silence and stifled the movement for justice in the region. However, the public nature of violence associated with the current crisis lays bare the divisions between ruling powers. Whereas in the past these contours were invisible or unknown, divergences between ruling classes are part and parcel of the ensuing spectacle of violence.

The intention of this essay is to examine the coherence of the Mexican state through the optic of violence. The continuum of femicide and drug violence in Ciudad Juarez reveals that when violence remained concealed it solidified state power, while its sudden movement into the public realm destabilized the state. At the heart of both instances are social divisions—public/private, rulers/ruled, state/civil society—upon which the ideological power of the state is founded. This essay draws upon anthropological and sociological examinations in order to discuss how the state creates, naturalizes, and relies upon these divisions. The focus of this analysis is twofold. First, I examine the relationship between femicide and the state. Here I argue that the outbreak of femicide was crucial to state power at a moment in which the ideological

force of the state was in crisis. I assert that this violence enabled the state to shroud its internal divisions, obfuscate separations between legitimate powers and organized crime, and reinforce a public/private dichotomy upon which the state constructed its authority. Local and transnational activist movements that agitated against the state for protection, when the state evidently had little or no control over the violence that ensued within its borders bolster this contention. Secondly, I analyze how the recent crisis has destabilized the separation between state and civil society by exposing divisions that exist within the state. Lastly, I question why the news media reports that femicide essentially has been replaced by drug violence in Ciudad Juarez, when numerous agencies in the region contend that it is still occurring.

Historical Background

The early 1990's were a moment of immense social and economic transformations throughout Mexico and its borderlands. Former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) ushered Mexico into modernity by implementing neoliberal policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), agrarian reform, and an increased availability of consumer credit. The Maquiladora industry rapidly expanded at the northern border, agrarian communities faltered under expanded international trade, and labor migration within Mexico rapidly increased. These changes incited sudden shifts throughout the country that ultimately led to an economic recession in 1995 (Marchand 2004, 88). Ciudad Juarez, located at Mexico's northernmost border was heavily impacted by the combination of socioeconomic shifts throughout the country and the expansion of the local Maquiladora industry. The economic recession and the expansion of Juarez's assembly plants precipitated a population boom. Between 1990 and 2000, the city's population nearly tripled in size (Castillo 2004, 36).

The crime rate rose steadily as the population increased in Ciudad Juarez. US-Mexico business partnerships under NAFTA increased border traffic and subsequently forged new pathways for drug trafficking. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reported this situation to U.S. Congress in 2003, "The introduction of NAFTA had a major impact on the El Paso/Juarez area. The people crossing the international bridges on a daily basis and the large transportation industry available in this area (air, bus, trucking and rail) provide drug traffickers with innumerable drug and money smuggling opportunities" (U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency 2003).

In 1993, women began mysteriously disappearing in Ciudad Juarez. Bodies were found in the surrounding desert, exhibiting signs of gang rape, torture, mutilation and strangulation.

Many of these young women were identified as Maquila workers who disappeared on their routes home from work, others were unidentifiable due to bodily decomposition and mutilation. The grotesque and brutal nature of these murders outraged the public. Local residents and concerned families demanded police support and a manhunt for the killer. The public could not comprehend this violence and initially attributed it to American serial killers or organ thieves (Diebel 1997, Nusser 1995, Herrick 1998). Over time, these theories were rejected, and residents of Ciudad Juarez began to suspect that the crimes were committed by local men who made sport of preying on the city's young women.

Local authorities were unresponsive to this sudden outbreak of violence. Rather than taking action to prosecute the murderers and stop violence against women in the region, state authorities and police blamed the victims for their fates. Their most pervasive and enduring claim is that victims lived "double lives" (*doble vida*) in which they engaged in licentious activities unbeknown to their families. Allegations of prostitution, drug use, premarital sex or simply "running off" with boyfriends were waged against murdered and missing women (Fragoso 2002, Fregoso 2000, 2003 & 2006, Wright 2000). This manifested in both the press and in police contact with families of the disappeared. Authorities used this sentiment to justify their inaction, quell public outrage, and turn away families who attempted to file missing persons reports (Staudt and Coronado 2004, 5).

In spite of attempts to silence and threaten families and activists (CEDAW 20), a social movement against femicide emerged. Countless examples of police neglect and implication in these murders led grassroots organizations to supersede the state and garner support from international bodies such as the United Nations (2005) and Amnesty International (2003). Although these organizations have made recommendations to the state as to how these murders

can be reduced and eradicated, the violence persists at the present time. One hundred and eight cases of femicide were reported in 2008, and nearly three hundred and fifty women have been reported missing in the past twelve months (Amigos de las Mujeres de Juarez 2008, Frontera Norte Sur 2008, Latin America Herlad Tribune 2008, Ortiz Uribe 2009).

In April of 2008, violence in Ciudad Juarez transformed when President Felipe Calderon deployed over two thousand federal troops into the city (Corchado, Another Top Police Official Slain in Mexico 2008). This military occupation aimed to stifle the drug trade and mounting violence within the region. In the two prior years, over four thousand men were murdered as a result of the narcotics trade (Tancredo 2008) in Ciudad Juarez. Between January and May of 2008, police found mass graves on the grounds of two different private residences, holding as many as ten dismembered bodies.

Contrary to Calderon's objective to eradicate drug related violence in Ciudad Juarez, the murder rate has rapidly increased since the military occupation began. Over twenty-five police officers were killed within the first two weeks of the military occupation (Corchado, Another Top Police Official Slain in Mexico 2008). Elementary schools, a medical rehabilitation center, popular nightclubs and restaurants have been attacked since May of 2008. High-ranking police officials (BBC News 2008), a federal prosecutor (Associated Press 2008), a university professor (Borunda 2008), a prison warden, and a number of children are among the casualties (Alvarado 2008). In November of the same year, Calderon's "drug czar" was arrested for accepting nearly half of a million dollars per month from drug lords in exchange for protection (Iliff 2008).

In order to compensate for the outbreak of violence that has occurred as a result of the military occupation of Ciudad Juarez, President Calderon has aired a television ad campaign

throughout Mexico that construes the increased death count as evidence of victory (Iliff 2008). Nonetheless, Mexican residents in Ciudad Juarez and Mexico City alike have staged protests in response to the violence and continually claim to distrust the military presence (Ellingwood 2008). In August of 2008, over a thousand people publicly demonstrated against federal troops, alleging that these individuals were ransacking homes and torturing innocents (Keane 2008). Likewise, three thousand middle class families in Ciudad Juarez migrated to El Paso within four months of the military occupation (AFP 2008), and requests for immigration visas skyrocketed in the latter half of 2008 (Frontera Norte Sur 2008).

At the present time, public discourses concerning Ciudad Juarez evoke the notion of a "failed state." However, this terminology was not used to describe the border region until 2009. In spite of allegations of corruption and gross negligence on the part of state officials, activists at local and international levels collectively pressured the Mexican state to eradicate violence against women in the borderlands. All of the major international bodies who have attempted to intervene, such as Amnesty International (2003) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 2005) focus upon structural changes that can be made at the state level. However, the recent violence suggests that these agencies attributed more power to the state than it deserves. If military attempts to end narcotics related violence at the border have only led to an increase in murder and a loss of control over the populace, then it is necessary to question if Mexican authorities were capable of eradicating femicide during the years prior to the recent outbreak of violence.

NAFTA, the Disappeared, and the Solidification of State Power

Since the violence began in 1993, official responses to femicide have been grossly inadequate. Police investigations are insufficient, a small number of perpetrators have been brought to trial, and the state expresses a "lack of political will to deal with the situation" (Amnesty International 2003, 34). The police ignore sufficient leads as to the whereabouts of missing women and often require a waiting period before allowing families to file missing persons reports. Rather than pursuing criminals, the police force engages tactics through which to rationalize their inaction. Although these responses to violence can be easily explained by abundant evidence of police complicity in femicide, recent events demonstrate that years of inadequate responses to violence carries with it a different set of implications. In this section, I maintain that femicide solidified state authority at a moment in which rule was in crisis.

The enactment of NAFTA radically transformed configurations of sovereignty (Fregoso 2006, 113). Increased foreign presence, drug cartel expansion, and the population boom put enduring modes of governance into a state of conflict. Rosa Linda Fregoso (2006) contends that these transformations inaugurated an expansion of organizations of "uncivil society," and radically altered systems of rule. At the crest of these changing social tides, the outbreak of femicide enabled the state to reinforce its authority in Ciudad Juarez, and shroud the authorities' inability to control crime in the region.

In The Great Arch, Corrigan and Sayer (1985) contend that state legitimacy is based upon sharp delineations between domains. Within this schema, social divisions are maintained through state rituals that continually reinforce authority and separations between the state and civil society (Corrigan and Sayer 1981, 10). In Ciudad Juarez, ritual violence against women was

central to constructing dichotomies of this nature. Women consistently disappeared, were infrequently found in desolate spaces outside the city, and it was unknown when the killers would strike again. Through discursive and violent tactics, authorities relegated femicide to the private sphere. Their narratives constructed an image of violence lurking in the darkness awaiting women who transgress the bounds of the domestic realm. This fostered a culture of terror that was buttressed by continual disappearances and murders.

Discursive tactics enabled the state to superimpose its internal crisis onto the population. Reconfigurations of sovereignty, internal divisions and conflicts with organized crime undermined state authority. Public outrage against femicide and its continual relegation to the private sphere allowed the state to conceal its inner inconsistencies and ongoing collusions and clashes with drug cartels. The complex interweaving between public and private created a discursive spectacle that called attention away from ills that plagued the state structure. As more women were murdered and public response heightened, the state reinforced its authority. Although in later years state failure to obscure disagreements between elites (state-level authorities and organized crime leaders) resulted in a breakdown of the local state, for over a decade, femicide allowed this mirage of social divisions to persist.

In a similar vein, the separation between the police and organized crime is exceedingly unclear. Despite investigations by international agencies, recognition by foreign governments, and a thriving social movement against femicide, the actual murderers have never been discovered. Some sources provide evidence that the police are perpetrating these crimes (Portillo 2001), while others claim that gang members affiliated with the Maquiladora industry are to blame (González Rodríguez 2002; Washington-Valdez 2006). However, I contend that

questioning who committed (and continues to commit) femicide is irrelevant when considered within the context of state authority.

Police inadequacy and state apathy towards femicide dichotomizes the subaltern populace and dominating elites. Through this division, the state authorizes its power and differentiates itself from civil society. Whether police or unaffiliated criminals perpetuate this violence is insignificant, for the affect is the same. By allowing the divisions between elites to remain unclear, the violence of organized crime becomes incorporated into the state. Systematic murder of police officers by drug cartels in 2008 suggests that the police were never in a position of power to eradicate femicide. Rather than revealing their inadequacy and powerlessness against criminals, the police engaged in tactics that concealed their relationship with organized crime. Although the conflicts between these dominant forces have come into view in 2008, and ultimately unraveled the structure of the local state, this previous configuration allowed elite powers to coexist under one rubric and dominate the population through the threat of violence.

The 2008 events that will be discussed in the following section do not suggest that the police force is a benevolent institution that was simply rendered powerless against drug cartel leaders. Reports of police corruption are widespread, and evidence suggests that police officers collude with organized crime. However, by pairing recent events with police response to femicide over the past decade and a half, it is apparent that the police cannot be conceptualized in Manichean terms. But because the illusion of the state requires internal inconsistencies to be shrouded, the divisions between corrupt and legitimate police are unknown.

From the moment femicide commenced in 1993, local police and politicians alleged that women who suffered this violence were immoral and lascivious. The notion that authorities

engaged in blaming-the-victim strategies is widely cited throughout literature on femicide. In considering the ways in which these murders solidified state authority, it is unclear why a moral war against these women was necessary. When the very threat of violence ordered the city's population in particular ways, why did the state need to publicly defame these women as well? If taken into account, Roseberry's contention demonstrates that femicide enabled the state to obtain moral control over the population. The juridical forms of power were concealed, divisions between elites were shrouded, while moral and cultural control was achieved through femicide. More significantly, the state espoused a morality that buttressed divisions between public and private. Public statements by authorities, such as "Women who have a night life, go out late at night and come into contact with drinkers are at risk. It's hard to go out on the street when it's raining and not get wet" (Amnesty International 2003, 9) constructed femicide as a moral issue, a transgression of traditional female roles, and a social ill that the public needed to reckon. This discourse ensured a moral hold on the populace, divided rulers and ruled, and reinforced false divisions of public and private upon which the state based its authority.

The relative success of the state prior to the outbreak of violence in 2008 is evidenced by its capacity to construe femicide as a private issue. This construction did not exist solely in abstract or theoretical terms. The inextricable relationship between the public/private divide and femicide has been widely recognized by scholars, human rights agencies and activists. For example, Amnesty International (2003) maintains "the response of the authorities over the past ten years has been to treat the different offences as ordinary acts of violence committed within the private domain, without recognizing the existence of a continuing pattern of violence against women" (Amnesty International 2003, 34). Although Amnesty's report aims to elucidate the state's failure to eradicate femicide, it implicitly highlights the state's relative success.

According to this critique, discourses that intended to privatize femicide in Ciudad Juarez were successful. Even though the populace did not believe this sentiment, all forms of resistance against femicide negotiated and engaged the false separation of public and private spheres.

Activists, scholars and human rights organizations have contended with the public/private dichotomy since the femicide began. As in the case of the Dirty War in Argentina, the movement against femicide is led by mothers who invert the separation between the home and city streets (Bejarano 2002; Wright 2005). In recent years, the movement has united under a common name, *Ni Una Mas* (not one more). This movement is led by women who *perform* a maternal role, even if they do not have children. Melissa Wright (2005) maintains that activists perform roles of mothers, sisters, or wives, but never lawyers, human rights workers, or politicians (Wright 2005, 284). According to Wright (2005), "The *Mujeres de Negro*…take to the streets…as women whose provenance from the private spheres legitimates their public activities" (280). Marchers often don a common dress that unites them as a community, naturalizes their differences, and allows them to publicly appear as mothers in search of their lost children. As such, demonstrations against violence reinforce rather than resist the public/private divide.

Virtually all forms of international support for femicide victims have been framed within the context of the family. Amnesty International's 2003 report is illustrated with pictures of grieving mothers, more than half the pages of the United Nations's 2005 CEDAW report discuss issues pertaining to the family, and US Congressional Resolution 90 is titled, "Conveying the Sympathy of Congress to the Families of the Young Women Murdered in the State of Chihuahua" (Amnesty International 2003, CEDAW 2005, United States Congress 2006). In considering these constant allusions to the family, it is necessary to question why resistance to

femicide is consistently framed within the public/private dichotomy. Why do activists and human rights agencies reinforce the dichotomy that has been employed against victims?

The answer to this question lies within state practices of signification. Since the femicide began, the virgin/whore dichotomy has been discursively mapped onto conceptions of public and private. As previously mentioned, officials in Ciudad Juarez have continually attributed women's murders and disappearances to their presence in the public sphere. However, the "public sphere" is a code for the more pernicious notion that the victims were prostitutes. Because this discourse defames the victims' moral characters, activists attempt to resignify femicide victims as private women in order to protect their reputations.

The state's objectives to conceal its internal contradictions, divide public and private spheres, and morally control the population are essentially bolstered by activist practices that contend with state discourses. Through its attempt to resignify femicide victims, the public reproduces the division upon which state authority is constructed. Although the movement against femicide has successfully challenged negative constructions of the victims, the terms of the discussion are not their own. Rather, they have been set by the state's larger attempt to reinforce its authority by privatizing violence against women.

Violence and the Unmaking of the State

In recent months, state authority has been destabilized in Ciudad Juarez. The private violence of femicide that buttressed the state at a critical historical moment has given way to a public spectacle of violence. As was discussed in a previous section, the onslaught of violence began in April 2008, when President Felipe Calderon ordered the deployment of several thousand troops into Ciudad Juarez. Since that time, numerous public officials and police chiefs have been murdered. In comparing these events to femicide, the ensuing violence represents an unraveling of state authority.

In the previous analysis, I argued that the state coherence relied upon a division between public and private domains, the concealment of internal inconsistencies, a shrouding of divisions between organized crime and the state, a projected appearance of a united elite, and a firm division between rulers and ruled. In recent months, each of these divisions and obfuscations have been overturned by drug cartels who are battling for control over the region. The populace of Ciudad Juarez has overtly lost faith in the state. School teachers have closed schools to protect children, doctors have threatened to shut down medical facilities city-wide, and the middle class is migrating en masse to El Paso, Texas.

In considering these events, it is necessary to question why this violence has had such deleterious effects on the state apparatus. More significantly, how has a wave of violence in a notoriously violent region caused the state to unravel in a relatively short period of time? I contend that the federal government's project of cracking down on local authorities exposed divisions that exist within the state. Within several hours of "Operation Chihuahua" federal soldiers raided the police force, thus declaring the local state illegitimate (Corchado 2008). At

the same time, these federal soldiers began to set up check points in an effort to stifle narcotics trafficking across the US-Mexico border. These initial actions conflated the police with drug traders, and created a public spectacle of dissolution between the state and federal government.

The people of Ciudad Juarez originally welcomed Operation Chihuahua (Corchado 2008). Once the federal troops ransacked homes, abused residents, and swept the police from city streets, the populace began to view them as corrupt. At that time, public demonstrations against the federal soldiers became widespread and were publicized in the news media. This posed a challenge to the rule of law and state legitimacy. The "corrupt" police force was siezed by "legitimate" federal soldiers, who in turn, demonstrated their own corruption to the populace.

As the crisis of rule ensued, the drug cartels emerged from their subterranean location into the public sphere. They began murdering municiple police officers and police chiefs. Although these police officers were viewed as corrupt by the federal state, their deaths called into question collusion with drug lords. Why would drug cartels murder corrupt police officers? This relationship between federal troops, municiple police and drug cartels destabilized divisions between rulers and ruled that pervaded the region during the previous decades.

The emergence of drug cartels into the public sphere demonstrated their separation from law enforcement. In previous years, divisions between drug cartels and law enforcement were unknown. Their unidentifiable connection projected an image of a united authority. However, as law enforcement agents became the newest target for murder, the dissolution between these entities became public knowledge. While in the previous era, state power rested on obscure boundaries between these ruling elites, the exposure of their divergences exposed this obfuscation.

The most striking feature of the recent onsluaght of violence is that it has transformed the city streets into a public spectacle of violence. Since May of 2008, several thousand people were killed, bodies were found on street corners, and decapitated heads appeared in public spaces. The endless violence and brutality pervade public spaces and silence those who speak out.

As the state has faltered in the midst of this public spectacle, it is necessary to question how the quotidian lives of the population are affected. In early December 2008, National Public Radio broadcasted a program regarding Ciudad Juarez. The individuals they interviewed asked to remain anonymous. Many of their interviewees said they had taken up arms to protect their businesses and families. Others had witnessed shootings in their neighborhoods. Most individuals claimed to feel powerless in this situation, and wanted the federal soldiers to vacate the area so they could resume their daily lives (Beaubien 2008).

A significant detail is ommitted from international press coverage of the conflict in Ciudad Juarez. "Federally" sponsored Operation Chihuahua was funded by the United States. As part of the Merida Initiative, in 2008 the United States congress allocated five hundred million dollars to the Mexican government to reduce the drug trade, "stop the flow of arms, and criminal organizations" (US Department of State 2008). However, documentation of this initiative does not articulate plans to protect the people of Juarez and innocent bystanders throughout the country.

Corrigan and Sayer's percpetions of state performance raises a significant question in regards to US involvement in Mexico's drug war. When the state states, which state is speaking and to whom? Calderon's willingness to delineate the federal government from the state of Chihuahua may be a mechanism through which to realign federal authority with American interests. The

failure and unraveling of the local state may in fact be a component of a larger hegemonic process to reformulate levels of power and centralize the Mexican federal government. Although this hegemonic process is inchoate at this moment, US sponsorship of the Mexican state's drug war is suspect and warrants further analysis.

Conclusion

In December of 2008, Esther Chavez Cano, an activist against femicide in Ciudad Juarez, was awarded the *Premio Nacional de los Derechos Humanos de México*, Mexico's National Prize for Human Rights. Awarded to her by Felipe Calderon at a widely publicized ceremony, Calderon touted Chavez's efforts to transform Mexico into a more just country (*"El trabajo de personas como doña Esther Chávez Cano… es indispensable para transformar a México en un país más justo")* (Associated Press 2008). As the leading activist against femicide in the region, Chavez founded the sole rape crisis center in Ciudad Juarez and initiated investigations by Amnesty International and the United Nations.

The recognition of Chavez's work is well deserved and long overdue. However, this human rights award also appears to be a way in which to bring closure to femicide in Ciudad Juarez. Although these murders continue to the present day, the article that discusses Chavez's ceremony states that the murders have declined in the past three years. English and Spanish news media have framed femicide as a bygone occurrence since the rash of drug violence began. Claims that over eighty percent of the murders have been solved circulate throughout government discourses and the press. However, grassroots organizations in Ciudad Juarez report that femicide has actually increased since the drug conflict began in April 2008 (Latin America Herald Tribune, 2008).

The conception that femicide was replaced with drug violence in 2008 has a number of implications. For the purposes of this analysis, what is significant about this notion is the supposed historical shift that occurred when federal troops descended upon the region. Violence went public, private violence disappeared into the shadows, and women were thus protected

from femicide. In Calderon's new "victorius" country, women's activism deserves recognition and women no longer have to fear violence. Although this timeline is exceedingly false, Calderon's regime is attempting to use the drug war to bolster its own authority at the federal level.

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