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# REDRESSING INJUSTICE: LAS MADRES DE LAS DESAPARECIDAS' FIGHT AGAINST FEMINICIDE IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ, MEXICO

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Perhaps no greater emotional trauma exists than reliving the memory of losing a loved one to a violent death. When collective action groups revisit memories of violence, they transform grief into a tool for resistance (Bosco, 2004: 387). Negotiating fear and the memory of sexual violence has become all too familiar for young women and mothers in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. For more than three decades, more than 1,500 young Mexican women have been kidnapped, raped, and brutally murdered in Mexico's northern industrial city of Ciudad Juárez (Maloney, 2017). With no sufficient leads in finding the killers, young women have had to endure the anxiety of mass serial killings (Bosco, 2004: 387). Juárez police officers dedicate more time to slandering disappeared women

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than pursuing leads to find perpetrators (Wright, 2001: 130). Since 1994, young Mexican women who primarily work in U.S. multinational corporations (maquiladoras) cope with the lingering threat of sexual violence and murder on their way to school and work (Fregoso, 2000: 138).

In response to increasing patterns of violence against young women in Ciudad Juárez, mothers of disappeared women organized collective action groups in protest against the Mexican government's impunity. In Juárez, activist mothers comb its desert landscape for dead daughters and mobilize massive public demonstrations (Wright, 2001: 130). The mothers demand that the Mexican government and U.S. multinational corporations who owned the maguilas initiate a probe to help stop the murders (Ibid.). Mothers have publicly politicized the memory of their dead daughters by demanding that both Mexican officials and U.S. multinational corporations initiate a probe to help solve sexual crimes. After years of neglect by Mexican authorities and maguiladoras, mothers are convinced the Mexican government is more interested in preserving investors' economic interests with U.S. corporations than protecting Mexican women's rights as citizens (Fregoso, 2000: 5). Although mothers are poor marginalized women who lived in shanties, they have renegotiated their roles within the barriers of patriarchal oppression and have transformed traditional Mexican motherhood into a tool for resistance, thus allowing them to reconstruct the public memory of their dead daughters as innocents and carve out public spaces as sites for resistance. In their demands, they request accountability and mutual respect for their daughters in reimagining a world without gender violence. This article is an account of those actions taken by activist mothers.

From January until September 2006, I conducted interviews with nine women from a variety of NGOs who have publicly protested against the feminicides, including activist mothers, international U.S. based activists, and the director of the only women's crisis center in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Data collected from interviews was used to examine mothers' perspectives on different tactics used to resist the feminicides. Interview data included activist women's perspectives on uses of transnational networks, and makeshift memorials in their activism.

In Ciudad Juárez, memories of death and spaces of absence are entangled in the city's landscape. Pink and black memory markers used to decorate lampposts across the city are reminders of emotional wounds created by what scholars and newspapers identify as feminicide. In this article, I examine the mothers' fight for public representation by describing the city's geo-politics as an urban border space and then examine the impact of urban poverty on mothers' activism. I examine how mothers politicize the memory of victims by examining the spatial politics of urban segregation, poverty, and respectability in memorials.

Recent studies on the politics of memory argue that practices of commemoration are not always about instinctual desires for people to recall on the past. Instead, the act of remembering is connected to present-day politics. As Pierre Nora argues, the memory of certain traumatic events is the product of a social project that is socially reconstructed for the purposes of political gain (Nora, 1989: 10). Therefore, public acts of remembrance are accompanied with a particular set of politics that serve the interests of activists, politicians, and the socially imagined nation. According to Nora, remembering a certain event, tragedy or loss isn't so much about the past as it is about political actors in the present (Ibid.).

In Juárez, public memorials dedicated to the tragedy of mass scale violence are like open wounds embedded in the landscape of the city. When I walk in Juárez's downtown plazas, hundreds of black and pink crosses that mothers have painted on lampposts are striking (see Figure 1). Crosses are visual reminders to *Juarenses* (Juárez residents) about the growing number of sexually violent acts against women. In their taking over of city landscape, activist mothers use the memory of their daughters in calls for justice.



Figure 1. One of the pink and black crosses painted on lampposts to commemorate the murdered and missing women in Ciudad Juárez. Photograph by the author.

On the outskirts of Juárez's downtown district in *Colonia Nuevo Hipodromo*, the office of *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* (May our Daughters Return Home) are located on a dirt road facing the city center. Its office is known as the headquarters for activist

mothers. To be more precise, the organization's offices were located in a gated property next to the home of one of the oldest living activist mothers named Ramona Morales, mother of Silvia Elena Morales. *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* is one of three Mexican NGOs that have been started by activist mothers for the purpose to serve mothers of the disappeared (Interview with Marisela Ortiz, January 2006). Local feminists, academics, and U.S. activists have led other local women's advocacy groups, yet other organizations lack activist mothers' leadership. According to M. Ortiz, cofounder of *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* and former teacher of a murdered teenager,

"Non-profits such as *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* were created to support the families of the young victims. The mothers were crucial in bringing a collective authoritative voice to anti-feminicide resistance." (Interview with M. Ortiz, January 2006). In addition to providing legal guidance to mothers, *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* is an extended family of support for mothers. Its resource center provides counseling services, financial assistance, and take activists to medical appointments.

Urban segregation has contributed to displacement of victims' families to the outskirts of the city center. In 2004, the Chihuahua state government offered 47 free homes to mothers of feminicide victims (Rodríguez, 2004). The 47 homes were part of a development plan to transplant victims' families into one neighborhood called *Los Ojitos* (Little Eyes) located in the southern part of Juárez (Ibid.). *Los Ojitos* is located in a segregated district of the city where few *Juarenses* come in contact with family members (see Figure 2). According to activists Marisela Ortiz and Ramona Morales of *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*, the government uses homes to bribe poor mothers, halting future protests and separating families to isolated areas of the city (Interview with M. Ortiz, January 2006; R. Morales, January 2006). Activist mothers Doña Eva Arce and Paula Bonilla Flores claim neighborhoods like *Los Ojitos* create a new type of invisibility for victims' families (Interview with E. Arce, March 2006; Interview with P. Bonilla Flores, March 2006). According to Arce, "Who will remember us or our daughters for that matter if we are no longer present in the city? How can we fight for justice and visibility if we are pushed to the sides?" (Interview with E. Arce, March 2006).

As Karen Till argues absent bodies contribute to a process of forgetting (Till, 2005: 8). Hence, by spatially dislocating victims' families outside the city, the memory of the victims could be more easily forgotten (Ibid.). Relocation can be read as an attempt to remove families' presence from daily pedestrian activities in the city center. According to activist mother P. Bonilla Flores during a personal interview, "removal from the city center immobilizes mothers and segregates victims' families even further because of a lack of money and transportation. Without transportation, it is difficult to meet with one another and hold protests. And without the mothers, how will the memory

of daughters remain alive in order to stop further deaths" (Interview with P. Bonilla Flores, 2006). *Los Ojitos* displaces the memory of the victims to the edge of the city by removing victims' families bodies and thereby immobilizes poor *colonia* activist mothers. Relocation and bribes discourse victims' families from continuing their activism in the city. Without this family based activism to resist the feminicides, the memory of the victims will be slowly erased from public memory.



Figure 2. This is the community of Los Ojitos where victims' families have been segregated as part of the Chihuahua state government's reparation plan to provide homes for mothers. Photograph courtesy of Connie Aramaki 2006.

### **Absence in the City**

Spaces of absence are embedded throughout Ciudad Juárez's memorial landscapes. In 2001, the bodies of eight women were found in a barren lot facing the *Asociación de Maquiladoras* (AMAC) building, a non-profit established by U.S. multinational corporations. AMAC was created to strengthen the maquilas' public image shortly after the feminicides gained international media attention. AMAC is the official representative for maquilas and has made repeated defamatory comments against women workers who have come up missing and dead (Riley, 2006). Since 2002, local activists and police have referred to this specific set of killings as the "Cotton Field Murders" (Ibid.). Shortly after police recovered the remains of the women from the field, activist mothers constructed a makeshift cemetery made of pink wooden pallets dedicated to victims. Until this day, the memorial faces the AMAC building where it stands alone in a landscape filled with absence (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. This is the site of the "Cotton Field Murders" where eight dead bodies were found in a deserted lot across the street from AMAC headquarters in the year 2001. Photograph by the author.

I use Karen Till's term absence to describe invisible memorial landscapes as places of forgotten tragedy (Till, 2005: 8). According to Till, absence is the material space occupied by nothingness, emptiness and invisibility (Ibid.). Invisibility and absent bodies only add to the process of forgetting victims of past atrocities. Mothers resist invisibility when constructing memorials directly across from AMAC. Symbolically, the cotton field memorial confronts multi-national corporations to help stop the feminicides. Mothers use the power of the symbolic to contest AMAC's slanderous comments against feminicide victims.

Although the cotton field is located next to a highly trafficked road in one of Juárez's middle class neighborhoods, virtually no one visits the memorial except family members, researchers and journalists (Interviews with R. Morales and M. Ortiz, January 2006). Walking past the memorial for nearly two weeks, I never came across anyone visiting the site. From a distance, the memorial resembles a tiny pink island of wooden fixtures in a sea of rugged desert terrain. Like many recovery sites where murdered women have been found, the cotton field is isolated from everyday pedestrian activity found in the city center. The landscape is a physical reminder of how the perpetrators wanted to silence the echoing of any screams during the assaults. By placing memorials at sites of trauma where victims were murdered, mothers have carved out a space for representation for the murdered women. In this way, the mothers have resisted the feminicides. Mothers transform traumatic places into active sites of organized resistance.

Symbolically, the remoteness of the cotton field represents a presence of absence. The topography of the cotton field memorial evokes feelings of abandonment and annihilation (see Figure 5). Similar to Till's description of spaces of absence as open wounds at sites where past traumas have occurred, the cotton field represents an emotional scar etched in the city's landscape (Till, 2005: 8). The isolation embedded in the landscape is symbolic of the trauma and desperation victims must have felt during their last moments alive. The topography of the cotton field symbolizes the material void in the public memory of the young women.

For mothers, place-making negotiates emotional pain for individual family members. According to organizers Nakar Ortiz and Marisela Ortiz of Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa, "Mothers create cemeteries to honor daughters individually. Usually mothers bring drawings, create a headstone with the name of the women, and bring clothes. It's one of the few places they create to cope with their loss" (Interview with N. Ortiz and M. Ortiz, January 2006). Cemeteries are much more intimate spaces for family members to express suffering using the land. Collective memories of the murdered women are shared throughout Juárez using crosses painted on lampposts. However, there is a distinct difference between the hundreds of lampposts memorials on the streets of Juárez and makeshift graveyards created at sites where victims' bodies were recovered. Makeshift cemeteries represent individual memories of particular victims, honoring particular women who died at specific locations. Naming makeshift graves, marking the date a particular woman died, and placing artifacts belonging to victims express personal memories of the victims. Clothes, pictures, and family heirlooms are usually found near makeshift cemeteries. Personal memories symbolize the murdered women weren't just nameless victims published in Juárez newspapers (Interview with N. Ortiz, January 2006). Naming the victims is particularly important for family members since many of the women were represented in Juárez newspapers as unnamed prostitutes.

Mothers have also used cemeteries as material spaces to invoke their daughter's spirits to connect with the dead. According to Till, landscapes of tragedy are like "open wounds" haunted by ghosts (Till, 2005: 97). Areas of the city where women's bodies have been found are haunted by recent memories of women being tortured, raped and mutilated in Juárez's urban landscape (Till, 2005: 13). According to activist Doña Eva Arce, mother of Silvia Arce, "Silvia just disappeared. It was like a phantom swept her away. Sometimes when I walk to the site where my daughter was found I feel her presence. I believe her ghost is still at that site and won't leave until there is justice" (Interview with E. Arce, March 2006). Activist mothers P. Bonilla Flores and R. Morales argue their daughters' ghosts continue to visit them in dreams where they communicate with the dead (Interview with P. Bonilla Flores, March 2006; Interview with R. Morales,

January 2006). During my personal interviews, Flores and Morales argued they have a personal responsibility to ensure the killers are found to allow their daughters to rest in peace. The discourse of paranormal ghosts symbolizes a lack of justice. As mothers argue, victims' ghosts cannot rest in peace until there is justice. The haunting of cemeteries represents the material space mothers can use to express the injustice and ghosts haunting them daily.

As Avery Gordon argues, ghosts are symbolic of the pain left when someone is abducted, murdered or disappeared (Gordon, 1997: 113). The spirit and memories of the disappeared occupy a space even when victims' bodies are absent (Ibid). Mothers have transformed makeshift cemeteries (recovery sites) into metaphysical spaces where they can talk to the dead (Ibid.). Recovery sites are places where mothers can physically touch the land and be spiritually connected to their daughters. Paranormal contact with the dead is not uncommon in Mexican religious tradition. Perhaps one of the more important holidays in Mexico is Día de los Muertos (The Day of the Dead) when the living pay tribute to the dead. During Día de los Muertos, mothers create altars with pictures of victims as young innocent girls at burial sites, offer food and sing songs to give reverence to the dead. Mothers integrate cultural practice into their activism. During celebrations, mothers are regarded as spiritual connectors between victims and other activists. According to Mexican/Indigenous mysticism, mothers are the only people who can understand the pain children endure. Mothers assume childrearing responsibilities even beyond death. Mothers are the mediums between the material world and the paranormal world. Usually, the media visits activists' homes or recovery sites for ceremonies. Commemoration ceremonies are used to combat allegations that victims died because of risky behavior. Religious rituals have created a space for mothers to perform memories of the victims and cope with grief using the material landscape.

In Juárez's downtown district near its main plaza over 400 pink and black crosses have been painted on lampposts. Paula Bonilla Flores' group *Voces sin Eco* (Voices without Echo) is credited with painting the first set of crosses in 1998 (Interview with P. Bonilla Flores, March 2006). Shortly after Flores' daughter disappeared and was found murdered, she formed a network of victims' families to fight against the feminicides. It was one of the first activist groups led by victims' families of the disappeared. The group's biggest accomplishment was its lamppost memorial campaign bringing greater awareness to people living in the interior of the city.

Activists Ramona Morales and Marisela Ortiz of *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* argue *Voces sin Eco* was the first group to bring a visible fight to the streets of Juárez using crosses (Interviews with R. Morales and M. Ortiz, January 2006). According to Ortiz during our interview, "Flores' group paved the way for NGOs like

*Nuestras Hijas* to resist creatively. Mothers painted crosses using the few resources they had to fight against injustice". Mothers radicalized the few instruments they had to resist the feminicides. Activists transformed buckets of pink and black paint into weapons for public contestation. In doing so, Flores' group carved out public spaces for representation in the urban landscape.

Voces sin Eco disbanded in early 2000 due to internal fighting amongst activists. However, the group's legacy continues on the streets of Juárez. Activists from multiple NGOs continue to share in the maintenance of crosses in order to keep the memory of victims alive (Interview with R. Morales, January 2006). According to activist mother Doña Eva Arce during the interview, "The key to painting crosses is to engage the public with us. We want to share our private pain with everyone to let people know what it feels like to lose a daughter. I share my pain to help other women and it helps me by expressing myself". Placing lamppost memorials in the downtown district is symbolic of mothers' fight against invisibility created by poverty, urban segregation and fear. Lamppost memorials are highly visible to people living in the interior of the city. Residents confront the emotional pain mothers endure daily. Grief is transformed into a tool for empowerment when mothers paint crosses.

Pink and black crosses have been critical in the cultural formation of the antifeminicide movement. As Marisela Ortiz and Ramona Morales argue, crosses are symbolic of the solidarity that exists between victims' families (Interview with M. Ortiz and R. Morales, January 2006). Unlike makeshift cemeteries found on the outskirts of the city, none of the crosses represented in the downtown district are named. Each cross stands in union with the others representing over four hundred victims' cases. Activist groups are not represented individually. Instead, victims are remembered as a collective group of women tyrannized by violence.

Lamppost crosses carry two important symbolic meanings: (1) femininity and (2) the destruction of innocence. According to activist mothers Paula Bonilla Flores, Doña Eva Arce, and Ramona Morales during personal interviews, the color pink represents femininity and innocence, while black symbolizes death taking victims away in the night (Interview with P. Bonilla Flores and Doña E. Arce, March 2006; Interview with R. Morales, January 2006). According to Morales, "we use specific colors to symbolize first that victims are women and second we use a cross to let people know our daughters were not prostitutes. They were good women who came from good families" (Interview with R. Morales, January 2006). Mothers use color to engage in the discourse of the double life: good girl by day and whore by night. In 1994, when women started to disappear police argued victims led a double life and died because of risky behavior (Wright, 2004: 378). As Melissa Wright argues, the discourse of the double life was a way of

normalizing violence against women by claiming they were disposable victims, especially prostitutes (Ibid.). Pink and black crosses used in lamppost memorials carry discursive meanings for activists. Crosses reconstruct the memory of victims as good family oriented women. Non-subversive iconography such as crosses reinforces the memory of innocent victims.

Maintaining the memory of victims is central to mother activism. Nakar Ortiz and Ramona Morales of *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* argue lamppost crosses symbolize activists' unwillingness to forget victims (Interviews with N. Ortiz and R. Morales, January 2006). During a personal interview Ortiz explained, "The number one reason why we paint crosses is to remember the victims. Without mothers, the public will forget the women and the violence [against women] will continue" (Interview with N. Ortiz, January 2006). Heightened visibility of crosses maintains the memory of victims. Invisibility eventually leads to the process of forgetting the victims.

However, some U.S. activists have argued hypervisibility of lamppost memorials leads to new forms of invisibility (see Figure 4). According to Irasema Coronado, a local activist and professor living in El Paso, Texas:

One of the questions I ask myself as an activist is how many crosses do we need in order to create change. I question if all these crosses and demonstrations are truly effective in bringing awareness or are they more about ceremony. There are so many crosses in Juárez and it kind of feels like memorials get normalized. People kind of get conditioned to accept this trauma in the everyday. Symbols almost become invisible when confronted everyday (Interview with I. Coronado, February 2006).

U.S. based Chicana activist Zulma Aguiar argues the mass quantity of crosses is overwhelming to the point where people are not allowed to digest the gravity of the feminicide (Interview with Z. Aguiar, February 2006). Thus, as some U.S. activists argue, hypervisibility desensitizes people living in the city when confronted with mass scale crosses on a daily basis. Crosses inundate the downtown district to the extent where they become saturated by the material landscape. According to Andreas Huyssen, when people consume mass scale visual iconography repeatedly, landmarks/memorials lose their significance over time (Huyssen, 2003: 57). Mass scale lamppost memorials are just one part of the larger feminicide visual culture taking over Juárez. International media, movies and the Internet also contribute to the hypervisibility of feminicide culture in Juárez's material landscape.

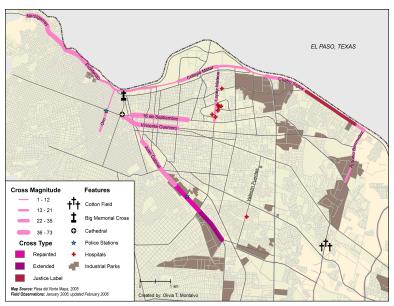


Figure 4. Map of crosses posted by mother activists. Courtesy of Olivia T. Montalvo, 2006.

Walking past lamppost memorials in Juárez's downtown district I felt the magnitude of trauma expressed in the landscape. Pink and black death markers are inescapable. As I walked passed and touched lampposts, I felt the rugged edges of the splintered wood masked by sloppy paint. The sloppiness of the crosses reminded me of the urgency activists must have felt when first painting them. I couldn't help but feel the immense sadness created by these murders. Yet, as an outsider I was one of the few people in the main plaza who took time to stop and ponder about the trauma victims endured. Rarely anyone paid attention to the crosses because they had become saturated by the landscape. By the end of my second week in the city I became immune to seeing crosses in every direction. I realized overtime how easy it would be to forget entirely about the crosses. As U.S. activists argue, pink and black crosses appear to be hypervisible to extent where they become saturated. Saturation caused by hypervisibility creates a void in the collective consciousness of remembering victims.

In my walks while conducting research, there was an absence of place in Juárez where the public can express its feelings about the feminicides (Huyssen, 2003: 57). No official place like a park, museum or public center dedicated to the victims exists in Juárez. *Juarenses* lack a space to share in grief and negotiate fears, anxieties and anger over the feminicides. The feminicides have taken a toll on the entire city, in terms of capital investment and Juárez's public image. Plenty of memorials are dedicated to revolutionaries like Benito Juárez and Madero. Essentially, mothers carry the burden of maintaining the memory of victims and negotiating mass scale trauma, which afflicts the

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entire city. It is difficult to imagine a city that has endured tragedy such as the feminicides has no place for people to congregate collectively beyond lampposts and makeshift cemeteries on the outskirts of the city center. Although the mothers endure immediate pain of losing daughters, little attention is given to how the city copes with one of its greatest tragedies in over a decade. Without a place to grieve for mothers and the public, a void remains embedded in the landscape (Huyssen, 2003: 55). As Andreas Huyssen and Karen Till argue, voids in historical landscapes of tragedy become saturated over time and thus memories are forgotten (Huyssen, 2003: 55; Till, 2005: 8). Permanence is rare in Juárez. Eventually, lamppost memorials will fade away. Makeshift cemeteries will be destroyed. When activist mothers die, the memory of these young women will be painted away by something new. Without an official place for people to come to terms with the feminicides, a void will persist in the city.

# **Redressing Injustice**

In March of 2006, New México State University (NMSU) held a three-day conference dedicated to addressing the Juárez feminicides. NMSU is located forty-five minutes away from Ciudad Juárez in a neighboring border town called Las Cruces, New México. During the conference, activists and professionals from across the United States and México came to present on the feminicides. Filmmakers and academics such as Lourdes Portillo and Rosa Linda Fregoso gave compelling presentations on issues of representation of the young victims in the media. The highlight for spectators was when activist mothers gave testimonies in front of a large crowd of students in an auditorium.

Attending conferences and providing testimony abroad has been an effective tool in creating solidarity with U.S. activists, thereby reconstructing boundaries of resistance for mothers. As poor *colonia* women, activist mothers have relied on transnational networks to reconstitute power relations with the Mexican government to help stop the feminicides. Mothers hope that people living in the United States will listen to their pleas since Juárez authorities have repeatedly neglected them. Testimonies and interviews are perhaps one of the few times mothers have to gain an audience that is willing to listen to them. Testimonies are filled with a passion and suffering that no filmmaker or artist could ever capture or reproduce. Mothers' participation in conferences is perhaps one of the more critical times to network. Since U.S. activists have greater access to technology, capital, and mobility, mothers rely upon trans-border coalitions to bring a greater awareness about the feminicide. Mothers believe that with increased international pressure from the Global North the situation in Juárez will change and finally obtain justice for their daughters.

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During the NMSU conference, mothers shared intimate details about the types of women their daughters were and gave graphic details about how the women died. Mothers referred to their daughters as good Catholic women who worked hard, obeyed family rules, and didn't go out at night. Mothers cried along with the audience during their testimonies. Testimony is one of the ways mothers have been able to express themselves through discourse. Mothers tell their own stories without being represented by filmmakers, U.S. activists or academics. Mothers are regarded as authority figures because of the personal trauma that they've endured. The tragedy that they've experienced as grieving mothers gives them legitimacy when speaking in public. Thus, mothers have used public mourning as a source of empowerment to gain support.

In these testimonies, mothers use their identities as protective mothers seeking justice for dead daughters to their political advantage. A weeping mother pleading with powerful governments to help find the truth about missing children resonates with many people on both sides of the border. Just like Mary, the virgin mother in the Christian story, endured a perpetual mourning for Jesus, mothers are the sole beneficiaries of grief and sorrow that comes with the death of a child. As Cynthia Bejarano argues, Juárez mothers use the idea of perpetual mourning to gain sympathy from the public (Bejarano, 2003: 415). Thus, as Bejarano argues, public dramas of mourning in public spaces are strategic methods to gain compassion. Sympathy is a powerful tool because it has allowed mothers to use their maternal role as poor third world women seeking help from imperialist nations to save them. Mothers turn to first world people to essentially "save" them from their governments. Thus, activists have used their identities as maternal grief stricken women to invoke sympathy from spectators and thus generate support abroad. But, visual iconography has also been used to transform power relations abroad. Specifically, during the NMSU conference a memorial installation called "Re-Dressing Injustice" evoked feelings of sympathy, anger, and trauma for spectators.

"Re-Dressing Injustice" was a temporary installation that was constructed during the NMSU conference. The installation was created by a Las Cruces artist name Irene Simmons. "Re-Dressing Injustice" was one of the largest installations created by U.S. activists thus far. The memorial was composed of over four hundred wooden crosses, each symbolizing a feminicide victim. On each cross, hung a torn dress that was painted in red to symbolize blood with the names of victims. Some dresses carried yellow police tape, stab wounds, photos of hands bounded together, and poetry (see Figure 9). Symbolically, the memorial evoked shock, anger and grief by viewing all of the crosses bunched together in a tiny field. From a distance, the dresses almost came alive as they swayed in the wind. Dresses were reminders of absent bodies that were once tortured in Juárez's desert landscape (Gordon, 1997: 113). Dresses symbolized the victims' clothes

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that were ripped off their bodies when raped. To re-dress the women was a symbolic act to nurture absent bodies that were once stabbed, raped and mutilated.

"Re-Dressing Injustice" resembled many of the makeshift cemeteries found in Juárez. U.S. activists have used the exact visual iconography that mothers have used in Juárez. It is through these symbolic acts of commemoration that activists in the U.S. express their solidarity with mothers in Juárez. Just as many of the mothers inscribed Juárez's landscape with scrap materials, U.S. artists used similar materials to show their support. Thus, symbolic practices of mourning that transformed Juárez's landscape have become a method of demonstrating solidarity on a transnational scale. Pink crosses that have become associated with the feminicides carry an emotional solidarity for activists on both sides of the border.

"Re-Dressing Injustice" carried several symbolic meanings for mothers. Specifically, at the end of the conference a small group of mothers from *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* visited the memorial by themselves. Since I had accompanied the mothers throughout the conference and had interviewed them earlier in the year, the leaders asked me if I would escort the mothers to look at the memorial. It was the first time the mothers had walked through the memorial by themselves without journalists or massive crowds taking photos of them. When we approached the memorial, the mothers searched for their daughters' names and dresses. Symbolically, it was heart wrenching to watch a group of the mothers searching for their daughters' dresses that were hung in the memorial. Re-searching through the maze of crosses represented their yearning to find their daughters. Walking through the maze of crosses was symbolic as a viewer of how painful it must be for these women to have to re-live their trauma in front of people repeatedly.

The symbolism within "Re-Dressing Injustice" was very much related to absent bodies of the victims. Some mothers haven't been able to give their daughters a burial because some bodies were never found, and, in some cases Juárez police gave family members the wrong remains (Interview with Morales, January 2006). After mothers walked through the "Re-Dressing Injustice" memorial, I realized some mothers never found a dress with their daughters' name on it. Although the artist never intended to exclude any of the victims, some mothers expressed how it was a reminder that some women were never found (see Figure 5). As activist mother Paula Bonilla Flores said shortly after searching through the memorial, "I see that some mothers don't have a dress, even though there was a cross put up for their daughters. There are mothers who are still searching for their daughters and never recovered a body. At least I have the peace of knowing that my daughter was buried" (Interview with P. Bonilla Flores, March 2006). Missing dresses eerily symbolized missing bodies that were never found. A body at least

symbolizes a sense of peace. To disappear forever is to simply live in an unknown space that can never be materially placed. But, for a body to re-appear is to bring the victims back from absence.



Figure 5. Activist mothers in front of the installation "Re-Dressing Injustice" in Las Cruces, New México. Photograph by the author.

A final way "Re-Dressing Injustice" politicized the memory of victims was by its endorsement of family claims that estimate victim totals at 1500. A major field of research amongst forensic anthropologists has been to help identify the victims and how they died. In 2004, the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, the official organization established by the human rights groups CONADEP and *Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo* to exhume unidentified remains involved in human rights abuses, was invited by family members to examine victims' bodies. Bodies have been exhumed repeatedly for identification and analyzing how the women died. In addition, there has been a conflict between family members and police over what constitutes being a victim of feminicide. Juárez police continue to argue there are fewer victims than families estimate. When artists who contributed to "Re-Dressing Injustice, they publicly stood in solidarity with victims' families by handing authority back to families to decide the criteria about whose pain is made visible.

When mothers mark their pain in public, police are forced to contend with their grief. Despite impunity, the imaginative power that mothers create by using art, politics, and culture demonstrates the powerful nature of women's activism into the public sphere. In pursuit of justice to restore the memory of their daughters, mother activists have

redrawn the landscape of politics of Juárez over the last three decades. Currently, there are rampant investigations that cross sect and have inspired a new generation of activists seeking human rights. This has spread into the accounts by activists to search for the missing and murdered students at Ayotzinapa in 2014, as well as a broad range of gender based violence issues that impact the wider Mexican society. In this way, the collective power of everyday individuals to imagine another world without gender violence is commendable. What makes the mother activists special is they take what some might argue is unimaginable in order to inspire others to seek out justice. Their commitment to social justice teaches us all that another world is possible if we take the risk to seek out its potential.

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