We cannot support any act of killing; no killing can be justified. But not to kill is not enough. We must also learn ways to prevent others from killing. We cannot say, “I am not responsible. They did it. My hands are clean.”


**Answering Difficult Questions through Art and Scholarship**

How do you tell the stories of hundreds of women who have been murdered? How do you give voice back to those who have been viciously silenced? How do you give dignity to the families who are left behind? . . . How do you not? I am a Latina artist and scholar. This makes me a border crosser between the art world and the academy. As an artist, I choose to direct works that are socially conscious and speak out against oppression and injustice. As a scholar, I hope to give voice to the victims of femicide who have been savagely raped and murdered. Through my research and art I attempt to plant seeds of social consciousness, weaving the message through academic writing and creative praxis. I have always believed that the ivory tower would be worthless without the conversion of theory into practice throughout the broader context of society. I agree with Jill Dolan when she argues that “progressive academics need to translate and promote the
usefulness of their work to wider audiences, and that activists need to respect and engage the potential of knowledge generated in academic settings” (2001, 3). These two sides of my identity combine to make me the activist who will not accept things as they are.

In my work as a theatrical director I combine a human rights activist lens with a *transfronterista* feminist perspective and respond to the hegemonic structures in our society. Only by speaking through all of these voices can I write about my experiences with the stories of the women of Ciudad Juárez. I situate this chapter at the interdisciplinary nexus between theatre/performance-based activism and transnational feminist theory (see this book’s introduction), posing several ethical questions embedded in international human rights debates examining the rights of women and of human beings in general. At the heart of this narrative lie the stories of women, some who have been brutally silenced and others who, in response to this violence, refuse to be. I begin with my own first encounter with these women’s stories eight years ago, in order to contextualize for the reader how I came to direct the three plays I discuss in this chapter. Next, I offer a panoramic view of the femicide plaguing Ciudad Juárez and recognize that this gender-based terrorism is spreading to other cities. Finally, I use my experiences directing three plays addressing the topic to frame a discussion regarding performative activism as a tool that engages theatre as a performance medium to help people see the human lives behind these stories, rather than just the statistics.

**Crossing Borders between the Academy and the Arts**

During the course of my doctoral studies in theatre at Arizona State University, I took a seminar called Borderland Survival Texts: Race, Trauma, and Gender in the Global Age, taught in the Chicana/Chicano Studies Department by Dr. Arturo Aldama. We studied multimedia artistic texts, fiction, and academic essays dealing with the pressing implications of globalization. Almost ten years after the first bodies were discovered in abandoned lots in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, I was introduced to the stories of these women through the haunting documentary *Señorita Extraviada*, by the feminist filmmaker Lourdes Portillo. Over the image of a young woman painting a black cross on a pink background on a telephone pole in the streets of Ciudad Juárez, Portillo narrates: “It is impossible to know the exact number, but in the last decade somewhere between two and four hundred young women have been killed. Only a few of these crimes have been solved. Why are
the deaths of so many young women being ignored? And why are the murders still happening?” (2001).

Devastated by the atrocities described in the film, and searching for a theoretical contextualization for this wasteland known as the U.S.-Mexico border, I turned to Gloria Anzaldúa’s metaphor of a “1,950 mile-long open wound” (1999, 24). In Borderlands/La Frontera, Anzaldúa vividly sets the stage for the development of a transfrontierista feminist lens through which to explore this open wound explaining that “before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (1999, 25). Describing both the physical and metaphorical signification of this geographic construction, she writes, “[A] border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (1999, 25). Her warning is clear: “Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger” (1999, 25–26).

For days the images portrayed by Portillo plagued every thought that crossed my mind. I began to realize that if my picture were placed side by side with the photograph of any of the hundreds of young women whose faces are plastered all over Ciudad Juárez, one would be hard pressed to differentiate between the maquiladora worker and the doctoral student. Why was my life worth more than theirs? How could so many women disappear, many of them turning up as corpses in abandoned lots? And why were the federal and local authorities so unresponsive to this atrocious violation of human rights? Portillo explains in her documentary that the laws of supply and demand operate in this border region; for every young woman who loses her life, there are at least a dozen more ready and willing to take her place in the production lines at the maquiladora (factory or sweat shop). The more I read about the borderland, the more I realized that these borders were being crossed more frequently as the age of globalization progressed, and I felt the need to stand up and testify for the victims of this phenomenon; I needed to bear witness. But I was in school; I had to write a dissertation and finish my PhD. I could not imagine doing both simultaneously.

Parallel to my studies, I had been working with a local bilingual theatre company for several years. I had stage managed, directed, and
acted in several productions from living room comedies about infidelity and friendship to ethnodramas dealing with the contentious immigration issues involving border crossings from Mexico into the United States. When it finally came time for me to focus on the dissertation stage of my studies, the artistic and managing directors of the production company gave me their blessing to go out, do my fieldwork, and sit down at the computer to write. I began an arts-based qualitative case study with the bilingual youth theatre for social change group I had been directing for several years. We focused on using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques as qualitative research methods to explore the concept of Latina adolescent identity. In the back of my mind would always be the young women who had lost their lives in Ciudad Juárez and how they would never have the chance to participate in such a positive experience. The teenagers I worked with had either crossed the border themselves or were in the United States because their families chose to come here for better opportunities. Many of the young women in Ciudad Juárez were often caught up in the web of trying to make enough money to cross over into the United States. My thoughts were on both sides of the border as I continued to complete my fieldwork.

In November 2004, I received an unexpected phone call. The artistic director of the theatre company needed to consult with me. I saved my work on the computer and turned my attention to this conversation. He explained to me that a board member had presented the company with a script she wanted to direct; however, she had recently gotten married and found out she was going to have her first child. She believed in the play and felt the timing was right to bring light to these issues. A second director was approached but declined the offer. Although I had been given a reprieve from my work with the company to finish my degree, I was being asked to direct the play that would forever change the course of my life. Without any promises, I agreed to read the text, and the artistic director emailed me the play that evening.

“Las Mujeres de Juárez” (The Women of Juárez), written by Rúben Amavizca Murúa, gripped my heart and led me to a place where, as a socially conscious theatrical director, I could attempt to give voice and dignity back to the hundreds of young women who had been swallowed up by the border. I knew that directing this play would also have an impact on my dissertation work. As we struggled to conceptualize Latina adolescent identity in a border culture using theatre, the young women in the study helped me realize that the stories of their counterparts in Ciudad Juárez contributed to the emerging global identity of Latinas. They asked the same questions I had been struggling with. Why? Why are our lives worth writing a book about, but their lives are worth nothing? How can they be considered disposable? I worked
on my dissertation during the day and began to rehearse the production of "Las Mujeres de Juárez" at night. I revisited the research I had started in Dr. Aldama’s class, and the geopolitical artist/activist in me went to the drawing board. I encountered another *transfronterista* artistic activist who wrote music lyrics that would inspire me through the process of bringing the world of these women to the stage. According to Sarah Ramirez, “Mexican singer Lila Downs presents a clear example of transnational feminist politics and identity” (2002, ¶ 3). Downs “expresses a . . . critical stance towards both the United States and Mexico. . . . attempts to voice issues of gender and ethnicity as they relate to national identity, transnational economies, and power . . . [H]er music critiques relations of power . . . and gendered ethnic niches in which women become exploitable pools of labor” (2002, ¶ 5).

As an artist looking through a *transfronterista* feminist lens, my goal was to portray the human side of this tragedy that has affected too many families and taken too many lives. I needed to depict the everyday routine of these people who live and die on the border between the United States and Mexico. Even deeper than that, I wanted to convey to the audience that these atrocities are not only occurring on our border, but wherever, in Anzaldúa’s words, “the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (1999, 25).

Through my director’s lens, I envisioned the opening of the play as a multimedia prologue, not actually written in the script by the playwright. Set to Lila Downs’ song, “La Niña,” a video projection appears above the set. The whirling lights of a nightclub in Ciudad Juárez fill the screen, and the audience is transported into the nightlife of what has been referred to as “The Murder Capital of the World” (Kolb 2012, ¶ 19), a place where even the devil is afraid to live (Bowden 1996, 44). The camera pans the dance floor where lively couples sway to the *cumbia* rhythm. But as the scene progresses the women begin to disappear. Each of the men is left dancing alone, never reacting to the absence of his partner. Through this artistic metaphor, I hoped to portray how life goes on in Ciudad Juárez *a pesar de todo* (in spite of it all). Certainly the authorities have not bothered to give a second thought to these young women for almost twenty years.

I return to Ramirez’s article because I feel her words capture Downs’ lyrical message succinctly. “In ‘La Niña’ Downs sings directly to Rosa Maria, a dark-haired girl with a sad face, who toils without end or escape in the *maquiladora* border factories. . . . Not only does this young girl realize that her job is taking its toll on her, she also realizes that all her efforts, dreams, and desires are becoming distant memories” (Ramirez 2002, ¶ 6). Lila brings to life the harsh world of these women through her lyrics, as Lourdes Portillo has through
documentary film, and as I have attempted to on the stage. We actively bear witness through our art forms and denounce the impunity that plagues Ciudad Juárez. I believe theatre has the potential to serve a higher purpose on many fronts; through performance as an artistic product, as well as dramatic activities like the ones I employed with my youth theatre group in the dissertation study, it offers us an artistic activism through which to address political issues and human rights violations.

The three plays I discuss in this chapter have given me the opportunity to look beyond the statistics into the lives of both the victims and the survivors of this femicide. I turn now, with the help of several journalists and activist organizations, to offer a panoramic view of a city that seems to be imploding on itself.

**Provoking Critical Reflection through Performance**

According to Nancy Pineda-Madrid, “how we perceive the suffering of others can make an enormous difference in whether we see, or not, its origins in social structures of human making” (2011, chap. 1, ¶ 1). Since 1993, the wasteland between Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and El Paso, Texas, has been plagued by a gender-based violence that has claimed the lives of hundreds of women and left families searching for hundreds more who are missing. A recent Fox News Latino report reveals:

> According to statistics provided by Casa Amiga, between 1993 and 2007—before Mexican President Felipe Calderón escalated the war against the cartels in Juarez—there were a total of 385 women reported murdered. From 2008 through 2011, there were 789 women officially reported murdered, a more than 100 percent increase despite a saturation of military and federal police in the city. Through June of this year, 60 women have been killed, reports show. (Kolb 2012, ¶ 10)

While this statistic is frightening, the grassroots activist group Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas (Justice for Our Daughters) maintains a list on their website that tallies over 120 women murdered in Ciudad Juárez and the city of Chihuahua through the first week of June 2012 (Femiciidios). Theories abound regarding serial killers, police corruption and involvement, foreign predators, snuff films, and organ trafficking. No one has any concrete answers for the activists who continue to fight for justice in a city where justice has turned a blind eye. Due to the atrocities of this “phallic terrorism” (Donohoe 2004, ¶ 6) the region
is in mourning and the desert bleeds. Once, after a performance of “Las Mujeres de Juárez” in Phoenix, Arizona, I was approached by an elderly priest who was traveling with some of his novitiates from Ciudad Juárez. He explained to me, with tears in his eyes, that what people from the outside do not understand about existence in Ciudad Juárez is that it is like living in hell on earth. And in 2005, a New York Times article revealed the alarming reality that “there are growing signs that the serial-style killings have spread to other cities, like Chihuahua, 200 miles along the border; Toluca, a suburb of Mexico City; the Gulf Coast capital of Veracruz; and Tuxtla Gutiérrez in the southern state of Chiapas” (Thompson 2005, ¶ 14).

There are endless issues that can be investigated concerning the ethics of how we represent human rights violations through theatrical performance. Questions regarding who has the right to tell these stories, who should be the target audience, what the limitations of live theatre are, and what an audience can psychologically process in terms of violence enacted on stage all come to mind. Respect must be paid to the families who have suffered these tragic losses. Through the theatre we create to portray their lives we must stand in solidarity; we must not confound the problems.

For the past eight years I have focused both my academic research and theatrical practice around how theatre can be used as a tool to educate people about human rights violations and social justice issues throughout the world. As an artist, I ponder; if theatre holds up a mirror to nature, then the reflection we examine must also reveal the difficult truths many people face on a daily basis in countries all across the globe. As an educator, I am intrigued by the question: can theatre help people grapple with these often controversial, often heart-wrenching topics, without overwhelming them? I believe that theatre offers us a way into some of the most difficult human rights topics by giving these atrocities a human narrative. I believe that when we reveal stories about human suffering through theatre, we have the potential to provide public testimony and engage in performative activism. We can work to change the reflection we see in the mirror and not accept it as a foregone conclusion.

I bear witness to the stories of the women in Ciudad Juárez through the artistic and creative praxis of theatre. Beginning in 2004, through Rubén Amavizca Murúa’s ethnodrama “Las Mujeres de Juárez” (The Women of Juárez) mentioned earlier, Marisela Treviño Orta’s allegorical account in “Braided Sorrow,” and the testimonial drama compiled by Humberto Robles in “Mujeres de Arena: Tesimonios de Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez” (Women of Sand: Testimonies of Women in Ciudad Juárez), I have worked with designers and actors to illustrate a vivid
image of what it means to succumb to life and death in Ciudad Juárez in the flower of youth. We do this with the utmost respect for the families for whom this phenomenon is a reality, and not just a theatrical production.

In the following section I discuss my experience directing Rubén Amavizca Murúa’s play, “Las Mujeres de Juárez” (The Women of Juárez), to contextualize how this playwright captures the lived experience of numerous families who have lost loved ones in Ciudad Juárez through ethnodrama or docudrama.

**Staging Impunity: An Ethnodramatic Account of Life and Death in Ciudad Juárez**

According to Johnny Saldaña, one of the most prolific contemporary scholars on arts-based qualitative research methods, “Ethnotheatre employs the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or the researcher’s interpretations of data” (2005, 1). Los Angeles–based playwright Rubén Amavizca Murúa employs personal interviews, news reports, and journalistic sources to piece together the fictional narrative that mirrors the disturbing realities of the citizens of Ciudad Juárez. “The goal [of ethnotheatre],” Saldaña explains “is to investigate a particular facet of the human condition for the purposes of adapting those observations and insights into a performance medium” (2005, 1). Amavizca Murúa is more than a playwright, he is an artistic activist committed to unearthing the voices silenced in this forsaken bordertown through theatre.

I had the opportunity to meet Rubén in California in 2005 while I was directing his play. He was traveling with Norma Andrade and her daughter Malu (Maria Luisa) Garcia Andrade, who were speaking out against the femicide on this side of the border, educating people who attended a talk at the University of Southern California. In our conversation he explained to me that these stories are not finished yet and that the women he was traveling with continue to inspire him through their strength and perseverance. I recall this conversation now because within the last two years Norma Andrade has been attacked twice in Mexico. In December 2011 she was shot twice outside her home in Ciudad Juárez, and more recently in February 2012 she suffered a knife wound to her face in Mexico City (Nobel, 2012). Andrade’s daughter, Lilia Alejandra Garcia Andrade, was the victim of sexual assault and murder over ten years ago. Her body was found on February 21,
2001, after she had been missing for almost a week (Osborn, 2004). Norma Andrade and her daughter Malu Garcia Andrade are two of the cofounders of the activist group Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa (May Our Daughters Return Home), who continue to actively demand justice from the Mexican authorities.

As a director, I have often been drawn to plays that reveal the harsh realities that some people may find hard to confront. Saldaña reminds us that “the traditional western canon of dramatic literature consists primarily of literary and commercial works whose content is more generally fiction than fact” (2005, 3). He further explains that “ethnodrama differs by maintaining close allegiance to the lived experiences of real people while presenting their stories through an artistic medium—‘creative nonfiction,’ as some genres of qualitative inquiry have been labeled” (2005, 3).

I believe my connection to this play is rooted in the fact that when I first read it I was deeply engaged in my own qualitative research study and found the style of writing compelling. As I prepared to direct “Las Mujeres de Juárez” I conducted the dramaturgical research (a contextualization of the world of the play) through newspaper articles and other journalistic reports. I collected scores of resources for the actors to read in notebooks I brought to every rehearsal. I wanted us all to be prepared to speak with audience members after the performances through formal talkbacks and in more informal settings, such as the lobby of the theatre. Norman Denzin recalls the work of ethnodramatist and scholar Jim Mienczakowski who “[used] postperformance discussions with informants and audience members as a way of making the performance of ethnographic texts more responsive to the demands of praxis and social critique” (Denzin 2003, 29). It was important to me as a director and human rights activist that the performers not see this work as just another acting credit for their résumés. I also wanted to make sure that the audience recognized the performance they saw as one reflecting the harsh realities of the lived circumstances in Ciudad Juárez, not just a fictionalized account. I saw this production as a source of education, not only for audience members, but for every one of us as a member of the production company.

With every newspaper article I read and with every documentary I watched, I began to notice how similar all of the reports were. The profiles of the victims were similar; the numerous theories involving drug traffickers, gangs, police corruption, snuff films, and even organ trafficking were ubiquitous; and the patterns connected to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the multinational corporations who operate factories along the U.S.-Mexico border were
 alarming, Corie Osborn’s article “Femicide Made in Mexico” gives us an example of one such account:

Since the passage of NAFTA in 1994, which allows for an economic open door policy between the U.S. and Mexico, Juarez has been filled with factories owned by various multinational corporations. Currently over 400 maquiladoras operate in Juarez and produce tens of billions of dollars in goods for export into the U.S. annually. Maquiladoras employ mostly young women, a group they believe to be docile and unlikely of unionizing or striking for more pay.

Young women from around Mexico flock to the overpopulated border town just south of El Paso with the hopes of finding economic security in Juarez’s many maquiladoras—U.S. owned assembly plants producing goods for export.

Thousands of young women in Juarez commute to maquila jobs everyday before dawn to work twelve-hour shifts where they will be lucky to make anywhere from $4.50 to $6 a day. For these women, a lack of outdoor lighting in the shantytowns and maquilas increases danger for those who face a long, unlit walk to the nearest bus stop. Women who arrive even three minutes late for their shifts are turned away into the dark night; as in the case of 20-year-old Claudia Ivette who was later found in a ditch alongside the bodies of eight other women. The meager Juarez police force of 1,200 does little to protect women against the rampant violence and crime in Juarez. (2004, ¶ 6–8)

In the DePaul Law Review Elvia Arriola concludes that “in general, what can be said about the maquiladora system is that it is hardly a humane system of employment and hardly something the knowing United States citizen would want to support” (2001, 35). We need to ask ourselves if this system is one we would choose to work in ourselves, or if we believe that these young women choose to subject themselves to these conditions. We need to speak out against a system in which “women’s bodies and their essential attributes are suitable for particular kinds of harsh, detailed, high-producing volumes of work, paid at low wages and on long work schedules” (Arriola 2001, 5).

Amavizca Murúa captures this harrowing landscape in a short scene between the two narrators who appear throughout the play. In the version I directed in 2004–2005, these narrators took on the guise of diverse characters who commented on the situation in Ciudad Juárez. This particular scene was delivered by two men dressed as maquiladora guards who were out behind the factory smoking a joint:
SCENE 19

Narrator 1: The victims work for multinational corporations that do not pay taxes in Mexico. 70% of Fortune 500 companies use maquiladoras (factories) and the number is increasing annually.

Narrator 2: There are more than three thousand companies employing over a million people, with an annual product volume of $40 billion.

Narrator 1: 98% of this product is American. 90% of the factories are situated along the northern border of Mexico and one third of these are in Ciudad Juárez.

Narrator 2: These multinational corporations offer absolutely no security for their employees, the majority of whom are women who often have to come and go in the middle of the night.

Narrator 1: These corporations that make millions of dollars in the city should subsidize public security measures and help the government and civic organizations to put an end to these murders once and for all. (2004, 25)

This scene reveals how the play reflects the economic turmoil plaguing Ciudad Juárez. I used the two guards smoking a joint during this scene to portray the blatant disregard for the safety of the female workers in the factories that I read about over and over again through my research.

As an ethnodramatic text, “Las Mujeres de Juárez” draws the audience inside the life of the fictitious Martínez López family and reveals their everyday idiosyncrasies. However, this family is not based solely on the playwright’s creative imagination; he draws from interviews and the personal accounts of many families who have suffered this unspeakable loss. He stands in solidarity, side by side with members of these families, and his play pays homage to their daughters, sisters, cousins, aunts, and friends.

The protagonist in this play is Maritza Martínez López, a young maquiladora worker who is also studying to be a nurse. She has a boyfriend, a younger sister, and two adoring parents. She keeps her every hope and dream in a diary she writes in throughout the play, and she is a hopeless romantic. She likes to sing and hopes to have children someday. She is your average teenager, only she lives in one of the most dangerous parts of the world. One day, as she waits for the bus, two men attack her. They rape and stab her and then leave her abandoned and bleeding to death. This gruesome depiction can by no means capture...
the final moments of the hundreds of young women who have lost their lives in similar situations, but Amavizca Murúa does his best to portray these atrocities respectfully and artistically.

When Maritza does not return home, her family mounts a search through the desert that surrounds their home, goes to the Red Cross, and goes to the police station to file a missing persons report, but the police officer tells them that they must wait two days before filing such a report. When she returns after two days the police officer insults the mother by insisting that her daughter must have gone off with her boyfriend. In taking notes for the report he implies that the clothing she was wearing was probably tight-fitting, that perhaps she drank or did drugs, and that she had undesirable friends and multiple boyfriends. Here, Amavizca Murúa reflects the harsh treatment received by many families when the authorities insist that the young women who fall victim to this femicide led double lives and were looking for danger. Recently The Los Angeles Times shed light on the perception of the officers expected to uphold the law, “Mexicans have long been wary of police at all levels. Officers are notorious not only for soliciting the little bribes known as mordidas, but for shaking down innocents, running kidnapping rings, and serving as security forces and death squads for the drug gangs. One 2010 poll found that only 8% of respondents felt strong confidence in the police” (Fausset 2012, ¶10). If this is the security force in place protecting the citizens of Mexico, it is no wonder they have little trust in the police.

Amavizca Murúa also reflects the real world in “Las Mujeres de Juárez” when, at the opening of the second act, the two narrator characters take on the roles of activists who assist the Martínez López family in their quest for justice. International activists join Mexican citizens through numerous groups including Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa (May Our Daughters Return Home) mentioned earlier, Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas (Justice for Our Daughters), the Mexico Solidarity Network, and Casa Amiga Esther Chávez Cano (Friendly House Esther Chávez Cano) to protest the impunity that has become endemic along the U.S.-Mexico border.

From December 2004 through October 2006, I directed the same core cast of actors in performances sponsored by the Phoenix, Arizona-based Latino theatre company Teatro Bravo. We opened in March 2005 at Phoenix College for an extended three-week run and then traveled to Reno, Nevada for two performances in April, sponsored by the University of Nevada at Reno Latino Research Center. Later that month we performed for hundreds of high school students through the Latino Institute at the Phoenix Civic Plaza. On May 10, the day Mothers’ Day is celebrated annually in Mexico, we constructed an outdoor stage and
performed “Las Mujeres de Juárez” in front of the Arizona State Capitol. Several of the cast members drove to Ciudad Juárez to bring several of the mothers/activists to see this performance of the play and share their experiences with us. The final performance sponsored by Teatro Bravo took place in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico, as a benefit for the Mexican Red Cross and to build a cafeteria for a local senior center. Our final performance with this production was sponsored by Amnesty International for the Western Regional Conference that took place in Tucson, Arizona, in October 2006. Throughout this run it was gratifying to be able to educate people about a topic too many U.S. Americans know little about. During the final scene of Amavizca Murúa’s play the actors take the stage and recite the names of over two hundred women whose bodies have been identified in Ciudad Juárez. We bear witness to this femicide and stand in solidarity with the families who mourn these women. The closing lines of the play are spoken by the character of the mother:

Madre: The only thing we ask for is justice. That the murders be solved and that there not be a single murder more. We want to live and work in peace. We want to be able to go out in the street without the fear that one of us will not return. We want you to join us and say, “Enough!” Is that too much to ask? (Amavizca Murúa 2004, 46)

Ruben Amavizca Murúa asks the question that is on the lips of too many mothers in Ciudad Juárez, “Is that too much to ask?”

“Las Mujeres de Juárez” was the first play I directed that addressed the topic of femicide. When I graduated and left Arizona to take a job at New York University, I found a second play that caught my director’s eye. Marisela Treviño Orta’s play “Braided Sorrow,” which I take up in this next section, offers us a fictional, poetic depiction of Ciudad Juárez through the lives of the Cardenas family.

**Allegorical Representation, Metaphor, and Mythology: Artistically Rendering a Lamentable Reality**

The use of allegory offers us a theatrical and literary device to tell one story through another. A multiplicity of meanings enriches the work and offers the reader/audience a myriad of possible interpretations from the same stimulus. This device has the ability to underscore the literal with the figurative, transforming characters, actions, and even stage properties into signifiers that lie beyond the text. "The surface
level of metaphor is the named, exterior comparison, while the conceptual level is a more fundamental and less obvious comparison upon which the surface metaphor is built” (Aigner–Varoz 2000, 48). Gloria Anzaldúa describes the metaphor emblazoned on the flag of Mexico, one that belies its hierarchical order and gender dynamic since the migration of the Aztecs:

Huitzilopochtli, the God of War, guided them to a place (that later became Mexico City) where an eagle with a writhing serpent in its beak perched on a cactus. The eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother). Together, they symbolize the struggle between the spiritual/celestial/male and the underworld/earth/feminine. The symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the “higher” masculine powers indicates that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre–Columbian America. (1999, 27)

With such a symbol flying high above the Mexican countryside it is not difficult to read into the male domination that leaves the families who have lost their loved ones in Ciudad Juárez with nowhere to turn. Through theatre, we have the potential to enter the world of Ciudad Juárez and bear witness to the atrocities being perpetuated, not only against the women, but on the survivors of these vicious crimes, their families.

San Francisco–based playwright Marisela Treviño Orta, has offered a poetic rendering of the dismal circumstances that exist in this forgotten corner of the world. Through her play “Braided Sorrow,” she weaves together the real with the surreal and leads the audience on a fatal pilgrimage, one to which too many young women have fallen victim. This journey is one that many families in Ciudad Juárez are condemned to: searching for answers and finding none, seeking justice and encountering impunity, grasping at memories that slip through their fingers like wisps of smoke.

Treviño Orta’s play employs the allegorical figure of La Llorona to give the audience a sense of how mysteriously abysmal life can be in Ciudad Juárez. In the preface to Secrets in the Sand: The Young Women of Juárez, a book of poetry written by Marjorie Agosín, Celeste Kostopulos–Cooperman describes this haunted landscape:

Pink crosses painted on the telephone poles that rise from the dry earth serve as monuments to the dead. They are constant reminders of the silenced victims whose brutal deaths demand
that justice be served. They also underscore the need for serious measures to be taken to provide for the safety and protection of the women and girls living in the city who are most vulnerable to the predators that continue to threaten their lives yet escape from local, state and federal authorities. (2006, 15)

In “Braided Sorrow,” we enter this terrain through the lives of the Cardenas family, but their experience is endemic in Ciudad Juárez, leaving behind grieving mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and in many cases, orphans. Ginger Thompson captured a glimpse of this despair for The New York Times in 2002:

It has been seven years since Irma Perez steamed a plate of her daughter’s favorite vegetables and waited all night for her to come home from work. Weeks later, a bag of bones was the only answer she got back from the police to explain why her daughter was missing. They lifted a chalky skull out of the bag and asked: is this your daughter’s face?

The bodies of many women and girls had begun to surface in the desert that surrounds this city like an ocean. Ms. Perez soon joined with other mothers in a quest for justice. But years of dead-end detective work, of public pleas for government action, of watching more daughters disappear have taken a toll on her body and mind.

“Why should she keep talking?” interrupted Ms. Perez’s father, who declined to give his name. “She has told the story thousands of times. What has she gotten but pain? What progress has been made?”

Ms. Perez bowed her head, as if accepting her father’s bitterness. Then she sat up straight and shook her head. “I will never stop talking about Olga,” she said. “I cannot stop until the violence stops.” (Thompson 2002, 1)

I am reminded of the title of this book, Taking Risks, when I consider the embodied activist conjured by Marisela Treviño Orta in the figure of La Llorona. Like many of the women who mourn their loved ones, she is persistent, tenacious, and in a constant search for the truth. Treviño Orta describes this character as “the weeping woman, an apparition, a mourning mother who has lost her daughter and a woman murdered in the desert. She is displaced by time and loss” (2010, 2). Through this character, all of the people of Mexico who struggle against the rampant impunity in this situation find a voice.
Most of the families in Ciudad Juárez are left without answers. Diana Washington Valdez covered the murders in this region from 1999, when she was assigned by the *El Paso Times* to cover the border. “Her 2002 series ‘Death Stalks the Border’ won a Texas Associated Press Managing Editors award and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize” (Braine 2006, ¶ 15). When eight more bodies were discovered in an inner-city lot, she interviewed one of the mothers: “‘She was my only daughter, my dream girl. . . . They took that away from me,’ Irma Monreal said before she broke down and cried. ‘The police wouldn’t even let me see her body. They told me it would be too much for me to handle. They only showed me her clothes’” (Washington Valdez 2002, 1).

In “Braided Sorrow,” Alma Cardenas, a sixteen-year-old girl from San Luis Potosí, comes to Ciudad Juárez to help her brother, Carlos, make enough money to send back to their parents. This is not an uncommon practice in Mexico; many young people leave the small ranches or pueblos where their families live in the interior to get closer to the border in hopes of crossing over into the United States. But what they find is a border city replete with danger. Pheona Donohoe reports, “Juárez is unique as it is a third world factory city relying heavily on a transient workforce. This means many of the two million residents of Juárez have no immediate family or support networks. The shantytown living conditions offer little security in the case of emergency, with telephone access minimal and police protection questionable” (2004, ¶ 2). This is hardly the epitome of a safe haven for young women, many of whom work the graveyard shifts and leave from their homes or travel back to them in the dark, desolate hours of the night. And as a global community we must ask ourselves, are these conditions we would allow our own daughters to work under? Are we willing to stand in solidarity and demand justice for these women?

In Ciudad Juárez, Alma and Carlos live with their Tía Socorro and Carlos’s wife, Yadria. The audience follows Alma as she begins her new life on the border, but they are not the only ones watching. There is La Llorona (the Weeping Woman), whom Alma meets at the bus station when she first arrives in Juárez, saves Alma at a time when she needs help, and only Alma can see. She appears as a constant reminder of the oppression that has plagued Mexico for centuries in one form or another. Interestingly, however, the fact that only Alma can see her can also be viewed as a powerful metaphor for the marked invisibility of the hundreds of women whose bodies have been recovered in the abandoned lots in and around Ciudad Juárez, as well as the hundreds of young women who are still missing. La Llorona acts as a spectral representation on behalf of all of the mothers whose daughters have traveled, unprotected, so far from home, vigilantly keeping watch over
them. She tells Alma, “I know all my daughters, even before they are named. But I can’t save them all. I can’t do this alone, I never could” (Treviño Orta, 2010, 54).5

The first time Alma encounters her, at the bus station just after arriving in Ciudad Juárez, we hear La Llorona echoing a distant history:

LA LLORONA: (Looking at the ground as if seeing water)
Have you ever seen the waters of Texcoco? (Pronounced: Tesh coco) Moonlight, the canals shimmered with it and when you dipped your hands beneath its surface you could feel it envelop your skin, its coolness race up your arms and spread over your body until you glowed, white stone in the rain . . .(Treviño Orta 2010, 10)

Through the memories of the character, La Llorona, the playwright conjures the first meeting between the Aztec leader, Moctezuma, and Cortés; a meeting of two worlds, a prophetic encounter near Lake Texcoco, described throughout literature and political histories as tense and awkward. A conquest hidden in ritual greetings, lost in a cross-cultural crossfire, La Llorona mysteriously alludes to the waters in which, legend has it, she drowned her children.

In an attempt to untangle the mythology surrounding the character of Doña Marina/Malintzín/Malinali Tenepat/La Malinche, in many cases a historical and literary figure “intertwined with a Mexican legend that predates the Conquest and that in colonial times became known as La Llorona (The Weeping Woman),” Matthew Restall describes her as “a symbol of betrayal; an opportunistic sexual siren; a feminist icon; an Aztec goddess in disguise; the mother of the first mestizo, and thus of the Mexican nation; the ultimate rape victim of the Conquest” (86). It is this final allusion that figures prominently into the portrayal of the character in “Braided Sorrow.” A surrogate for each of the young women who has lost her life in Ciudad Juárez, she is a poetic manifestation of mourning and loss. Historically, La Malinche is remembered as

a Nahua noblewoman from the eastern edge of Nahuatl-speaking central Mexico. As a child she was either stolen by slave traders or sold into slavery, and ended up among the Chontal Mayas whose small kingdom lay a little further east on the Gulf coast. In 1519 she was given by the Chontals along with 19 other native women to Cortés and his colleagues as part of a peace agreement, an inducement to the Spaniards to keep traveling west. Still a teenager, she was baptized Marina and assigned
to one of the captains of the expedition, Alonso Hernández de Puertocarrero. (Restall 2003, 83–84)

This notion of woman as property is one that has not been ameliorated, especially in today’s global market. In Ciudad Juárez, as in many cities in the global South that serve as laboratories of globalization, young women are not seen as autonomous individuals, but in a very Marxist sense, they are regarded as disembodied hands that perform labor. “Materialist feminism,” according to Jill Dolan, “deconstructs the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations” (Dolan 1991, 10). Their value is measured by their productivity, much as La Malinche was of value for her particular ability to translate the indigenous languages, Nahuatl and Mayan, into the colonial Spanish. Echoing Gayle Rubin’s emphasis of the disparate power dynamics, Dolan reminds us “that through a system of social relations, females are fashioned into generalized products that are exchanged on a political economy that benefits men” (Dolan 1991, 11). As the story of La Malinche, the interpreter, is woven together with the story of the Weeping Woman, we encounter a voiceless entity; “her historical identity is based upon what she said. Yet because she spoke the words of others, as their interpreter, she is also strangely silent” (Restall 2003, 86). This hauntingly echoed, strangulated silence overtakes Alma, the young maquiladora worker, who confesses painfully to her brother after being attacked by three men on her way home from work: “They grabbed me in . . . I, I couldn’t scream. I tried, I tried, Carlos I swear I tried. But my voice, it wouldn’t, it wouldn’t (Catching her breath)” (Treviño Orta 2010, 44). The silencing of women along the U.S.-Mexico border dates back further than the 1993 discovery of bodies in abandoned lots in Ciudad Juárez; the silencing is centuries old; similarly, this impunity has a long legacy.

We can examine the emblematic role taken up by La Llorona in Treviño Orta’s play through a transfronterista feminist lens, developed by Gloria Anzaldúa. Sonia Saldívar-Hull suggests:

In keeping with this new feminism, the New Mestiza dramatically reclaims the female cultural figures that were marked traitors to the community. . . . By rewriting the stories of Malinalli, la Llorona and the Virgen de Guadalupe, Anzaldúa is strategically reclaiming a ground for more female historical presence. Her task here is to uncover the names and the powers of the female deities whose identities have been submerged in Mexican memory of these three Mexican mothers. (1999, 6)
Mark Fortier writes that “feminism attempts to create a woman reader who sees otherwise and brings a different and other perspective to bear on culture” (1997, 71). Treviño Orta employs the depiction of La Llorona as a historical legend, deeper than myth, and rooted in spiritual beliefs tied to motherhood, mourning, and betrayal. Anzaldúa proposes, “En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness” (1999, 102). The figure of La Llorona in “Braided Sorrow” takes on a transnational activist stance against the impunity that has plagued the border for almost twenty years. By reclaiming the rights of every mother to the elusive answers regarding her daughter’s murder, and by demanding justice, this character embodies the transfronterista feminist.

Set against the backdrop of this brutal femicide, Treviño Orta casts La Llorona as an extended metaphor in her play to capture the sociopolitical trauma inflicted on a society whose daughters are being savagely murdered, all in the name of global profit. The allegorical mystery of La Llorona, a haunting figure seen and heard by many people all throughout Latin America and the North American Southwest, represents the enigmatic circumstances of a patriarchal society unable (or unwilling) to solve the crimes perpetrated against the young women who work in the maquiladoras in the border towns of Mexico’s northern region. This imposed modern-day slavery has a history that, like the silence, has deep roots. Anzaldúa, speaking in the voice of Malintzin, professes:

Not me sold out my people but they me. Because of the color of my skin they betrayed me. The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. For 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people (and in Mesoamerica her lot under the Indian patriarchs was not free of wounding). For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. The odds were heavily against her. (1999, 44–45)

And the odds are heavily against the young women of Ciudad Juárez.
The figure of La Llorona takes on numerous meanings in this script. She embodies the protective stance of the mothers in Mexico who would give anything to shield their daughters from harm. She reflects the mothers in mourning who have already lost their daughters, but who offer their endless support in service to those who are still looking for their girls. And in a metaphorical sense, she represents the bigger picture of the country herself, Mexico, a country that has buried too many of her young flowers along the bleeding border that runs for almost two thousand miles. I believe Treviño Orta captures the multiplicity of layers that politicians; local, state, federal, and transnational authorities; and even journalists too often fail to portray.

When I first read the text, the character of La Llorona conjured in me images of the mothers I had met: Norma Andrade, Patricia Cervantes, Paula Bonilla Flores, and Eva Arce. These women are transfronterista activists who still tell their daughters’ stories in countries all around the world, demanding justice and inciting social action. In a scene frozen in time, La Llorona appears to Alma and implores her to carry out a task only she is capable of completing:

**LA LLORONA:** I need you to be my messenger. Listen to what I’m about to tell you. In the outskirts of town, outside the police station in Anapra, withering in its shadow is a rosebush. Go there and bury your braid deep into the ground. Dig up my river. Dig up my river of blood.

(ALMA starts to walk to away. LA LLORONA stops her.)

**ALMA:** No. I can’t go there. Anapra is far away, it’s dangerous.

**LA LLORONA:** Yes, it is far away. Yes, it is dangerous. But I will be watching over you. If you need me, all you have to do is call me and I will come.

**ALMA:** No. No.

**LA LLORONA:** You must. You must dig up my river and let the earth bleed its sorrow. Tell them that the river will bleed into the desert as long as my daughters are hunted. They must be held accountable, they must be forced to act. Tell them that the river will bleed until the murders stop, until my daughters are safe, until there is justice in Juarez. It has to be you, Alma. (Treviño Orta 2010, 57–58)

La Llorona figures into this script as mysteriously as she figures into the legends of Latin America, an evocative spirit who teaches, frightens, mesmerizes, tricks, and betrays. The allegory of a mother, condemned to spend eternity searching for the children she herself

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has drowned, lends a surreal effect to the complex aesthetic experience offe
red by Treviño Orta. When she appears in a crowded marketplace at a fruit stand, the two comadres, Socorro and Eulalia stand speechless, mesmerized, as she delivers a monologue recounting the day her daughter never returned home:

LA LLORONA:

It was a little boy
a little boy who found her
while playing out in Lote Bravo.
They wouldn't let me identify her.
They said they were sure it was her.
Her factory name tag
was found next to her body.

(LA LLORONA puts the pomegranate back on the table.)

All they gave me was her torn
faded blue shirt,
crumpled, thick with dust . . .
(As she exits)

Torn, faded, thick with dust . . . smelling like the desert.

(The pomegranates begin to bleed juice. A dark stain spreads
down the length of the tablecloth, the juice spills onto the floor. EULALIA takes hold of SOCORRO’s arm.)

EULALIA: Madre de Dios.
(Lights shift). (Treviño Orta 2010, 22)

In another scene, the stage directions read,

(To one side of the stage stands a pink telephone pole. The majority of the telephone pole is covered with Missing Posters, some old and tattered, some new. All the posters have the pictures of young women, all with long dark hair. Underneath their photos in bold type is the word “Desaparecida.” There is one very large poster, the eyes of the girl stare straight ahead. The top of the pole that is above one’s reach is speckled with black crosses) (2010, 60).

In this haunting scene La Llorona looks at the poster of the girl whose eyes stare straight ahead:

LA LLORONA:

Do you see her? Blanca. Blanca Gómez.
The night I came to you
That night in the alley
On the other side of the city
She also needed me.
But I came to you.
I come to you again. (Treviño Orta 2010, 58)

As Alma contemplates what she cannot seem to comprehend La Llorona slowly exits saying:

LA LLORONA:
Look at your sisters.
I carry them inside me
All their pain
Your sisters, Alma
They beg you.

Look! Look how they cry.
(The eyes of the girls in the posters weep black ink, it runs
down the pole. The haunting sound of water dripping. Mes-
merized, ALMA reaches out and touches the tears, looks at
her fingertips.)

ALMA:
No, no! You can’t make me! You can’t make me! (Treviño
Orta 2010, 59)

These surreal stage directions enhance the feeling that this alle-
gorical character enters the world of this play from somewhere beyond;
she reaches up from a place below the waters of Texcoco where her
children lie sleeping, or a place beneath the sands of the desert where
her daughters lie waiting to be discovered. The poetry and the poetic
imagery used in this play are a gift from Marisela Treviño Orta to audi-
ence members and readers alike. She offers a buffer and acts as a sur-
real tour guide through the cavernous depths of hell on earth, to reveal
what has too long been buried beneath the desert sand . . . justice. Trev-
iño Orta is a feminist activist who crafted this world through words and
bears witness to the impunity in Ciudad Juárez through her art form,
theatre.

From September 2007 through March 2008, I directed four dif-
ferent casts for staged readings of “Braided Sorrow.” We presented the
play as a conference session in Baltimore, Maryland, for the Pennsyl-
vania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) at the National Sexual Assault
Conference in September. We followed this performance in November
with a reading at the Palladium Residential Hall of New York University sponsored by the Explorations Program and La Herencia Latina student group. An audience member at this performance invited us to stage the reading at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, New York, the following February. The final performance I was involved with took place in March, during Women’s HerStory Month, at New York University again, sponsored by the student-organized chapter of Amnesty International on campus. Again, following each of these performances the company of actors and I engaged the audiences in a talkback in an attempt to tie up any loose ends the spectators may have experienced through the play and answer any questions they might have. It has always been my experience that at least some people in the audience admit to never having heard of this phenomenon of femicide and they feel embarrassed that they are so ill-informed on the subject. I try to assure audience members that they should not feel guilty because the press and the media in both the United States and Mexico have managed to keep a tight lid on murders of women in Ciudad Juárez. Irma Casas, the director of Casa Amiga Esther Chávez Cano (Friendly House Esther Chávez Cano), a woman’s rights advocacy and counseling center, expresses her belief that “there is a concerted effort by the [Mexican] government to avoid the topic of violence against women in the media. She claims there is an agreement that keeping accurate statistics is daunting because of poor record keeping, institutional interests, public relations, and silence of the victims” (Kolb 2012, ¶ 18). I often add that what I believe is important is not what people did not know about yesterday, but what they are willing to do after learning about this human rights issue through this performance. How are we going to educate ourselves more about this topic, and how can we inform more people about what is going on in Ciudad Juárez?

**Without a Conclusion in Sight, I Continue This Work:**

**Theatrical Testimony through “Mujeres de Arena”**

(Women of Sand)

For many years now I have prayed for an end to the atrocities of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, but the drug wars that have claimed the streets of Juárez and the border between the U.S. and Mexico have perpetuated a violence that no longer discriminates between gender and age. There seems to be no end in sight.

The most recent project I have been involved with began in 2008 when I was introduced to the play “Mujeres de Arena: Testimonios de Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez” (Women of Sand: Testimonials of Women
in Ciudad Juárez). To date, I have directed fifteen diverse casts at different colleges, conference, and community venues throughout New York, New Jersey, Chicago, and Boston, and have recently received funding from Emerson College to further develop my work on this staged reading compiled by the Mexican playwright Humberto Robles. I felt drawn to this play from the moment I read it because it is so closely linked to Rubén Amavizca Murúa’s script of “Las Mujeres de Juárez.” Many of the lines appear verbatim in both plays, and that is a result of both playwrights conducting research with the same families. While Amavizca Murúa weaves all of the interviews and writings he researched into a fictional narrative that follows one family through their traumatic ordeal, Robles calls for ten presentational scenes in which the actors deliver the text without any formal production staging. “The idea for the play was the result of watching the mothers and relatives of the victims of femicide giving talks and conferences on the subject; they sit on a panel and begin to give their testimonies in order to educate, denounce, and give information about these crimes. This is what the play intends to reproduce” (Robles 2010, 1). For the most part, the words tell the stories, the actors deliver these scenes from scripts behind music stands. But the power of this play grips the audience as much as the narrative fiction. “Women of Sand” is a living document connected to an active blog kept by the playwright. This blog is updated regularly, and the play script reflects the evolving story and the lengthening list of names. The testimonials are collected from both men and women who raise their voices to denounce the human rights violations that have devastated their world.

But reality in Ciudad Juárez is darker today than it ever has been. In Ciudad Juárez/2008–2010: A Photographic Testimony of Our Pain, Guillermo Cervantes recalls: “2008 changed our lives. During its first weeks executions began to take place. Alarmed, we wanted to believe these were just isolated events, underworld quarrels prone to end soon and everything would be just as it was before. However, the killings did not stop, and increasingly became more sadistic and violent. We would wake up just to find bodies hanging from our bridges as we drove to work or to take our children to school” (2010, 7). Since 2008, the citizens of Ciudad Juárez do not walk their streets alone. They are constantly accompanied by the Mexican army, the federal police, and several major drug cartels who all fight for the lucrative smuggling route through the border between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, Texas. “Here drug gangs are the law—judge, jury and executioner—vehemently defending trade routes in what the U.S. Government Accountability Office estimates is a $23 billion a year industry” (Baxter 2009, 7). It can be difficult to reconcile the fact that El Paso
“is consistently ranked as the second- to third-safest big city in the United States” (Staudt 2008, x). But the violence is bleeding over onto the U.S. side of the border, of that we can be sure: “There have been increased incidences of kidnapping. Refugees from war-torn Juarez have begun to cross the border, seeking shelter in the States. Hotel capacity is often near 100%, with Juarez citizens looking for one night of peace. El Paso’s city council unanimously signed a solidarity agreement to support Juarez. The trouble in Mexico is beginning to be noticed in America” (Baxter 2009, ¶ 3). And so I will continue to stand in solidarity with the families who fight for justice. I will stage play after play, performance after performance, in order to educate others about the femicide in Ciudad Juárez.

For me, as a director, the theatrical stage is an arena where we must risk telling stories that people might not want to hear. It is onstage and through performance that I answer Professor Arriola’s call to arms that we must “reveal the human drama that underlies this historic economic conflict and inter-dependency between Mexico and the United States” (2001, 760). In my work, I insist that we must tell the stories of “workers, of people entitled to the minimum human rights of food, shelter, clothing, education, and medical care” (Arriola 2001, 761). Arriola asserts that “[a] human rights perspective based on women’s narratives is able to capture graphically the tremendous social conflict and pain that is [sic] also a byproduct of the wildly ‘successful’ NAFTA along with the expansion of the maquiladora program at the border” (2001, 761). It is my belief that by combining a human rights perspective with performance theory we approach a critical feminist lens through which an examination of the difficult truths many people face on a daily basis might be possible.

Over the last eight years, many people have asked me what Ciudad Juárez is really like. There was a time when I struggled with this question because, the truth is, I have never been there. In 2006, when I had the opportunity to speak with Norma Andrade, Patricia Ceravantes, Paula Bonilla Flores, and Eva Arce, all mothers who have lost their daughters to the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, they each cautioned me: “Don’t come to Juárez . . . then who would tell this story here on this side of the border. We can’t lose any more daughters . . . We have already lost too many.” I am compelled to support the women of Juárez in telling their stories, to synthesize their desperate pleas for justice through performance so that more and more people will join them and shout, “Basta! Stop the impunity, not a single murder more!’ Is that too much to ask?” (Robles 2010, 8). Theatre is the medium I choose to tell these stories through, because as an artist/scholar who is also an activist, I still can’t distinguish my image from theirs.
Notes

1. The ¶ symbol references paragraph numbers in all online and electronic resources.


3. All page citations for “Las Mujeres de Juárez” are from the unpublished text provided by the playwright. All translations from the original Spanish playscript are mine.

4. Breaking from the convention that only Alma interacts with La Llorona, the two comadres, Tía Socorro and Eulalia see her as a woman in the marketplace buying fruit. Treviño Orta, act 1, scene 6, “A Mother in the Market,” 19–22. Likewise, the men who attack Alma are also able to see this female figure as she recites haunting stanzas recounting the overthrow of the city of Tenochtitlán and distracting them so that Alma can escape their clutches. Treviño Orta, act 1, scene 10, “Narrow Escape,” 36–40.

5. All page citations for “Braided Sorrow” are from the unpublished text revised in 2010 and provided by the playwright.

6. The DC Rape Crisis Center outlines some of the emotions and reactions experienced by rape victims, including guilt, fear, avoidance, anger, distrust, loss of control, numbness, and reexperiencing. For more information please visit http://www.dcrcc.org/support_counseling/adult_sexual_assault_survivors/C120/emotional_effects.

7. All page citations for “Women of Sand” are from the unpublished English translation of the Spanish script provided by the playwright. The last revision of this translation was completed in 2010.


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