

Women in Mexico's Illicit Economy: Expendable as Pennies or Breaking Barriers?

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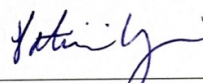
THESIS APPROVAL

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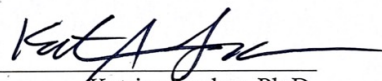
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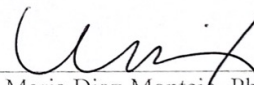
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Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	3
<i>Abstract</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Chapter One: Historiography</i>	11
<i>Chapter Two: The War on Drugs and the War on Women’s Lives</i>	37
<i>Chapter Three: Calderón’s Mexico and the Women Who Fuel the Illicit Economy</i>	54
<i>Chapter Four: Recruitment: The Manipulation of Women, Children, and Teenagers</i>	68
<i>Conclusion</i>	85
<i>Bibliography</i>	89

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Abstract

This thesis will examine how women's roles vary throughout the economic, social, and governmental domination and influence of Mexico at the hands of the narcotrafficking organizations. The chapters of this thesis are organized thematically and will analyze the hypermilitarized actions of illicit organizations and government entities while also utilizing previously established female scholars' interpretations of womanhood, identity, autonomy, and space to pinpoint that women are, in fact, taking on a large, or more prominent role, within narcotrafficking organizations. Although women are stepping into dangerous roles, they are pawns, barriers, or cushions for elite or higher members of the narco-society. This thesis will shed light on how women and children have adapted to life in a narco-driven society but as a result of the continuation of misogyny and the prolonged absence of equity in major areas of Mexican life. My intention with this thesis is to bring Women and Gender Studies to the field of Modern Latin America. Although there are ample scholars who discuss womanhood in Mexico, there remains little historical analysis focusing on women, womanhood, agency, and the possibility of women breaking free from the rapacious illicit and licit spheres of life and living the complicated role of present-day women. I use scholarship from various fields (historical, sociological, anthropological, literature, political, and legal) to showcase how women have and remain susceptible to manipulation and exploitation in Mexican society, especially that of the narcotrafficking-world. In addition to the multitude of secondary literature, this thesis will present primary sources detailing the growing number of young girls and teenagers who entangled in the narco-world, introducing a perspective of allure and opportunity to the complex lives of women. My thesis argues that women are, in fact, breaking economic gendered barriers but are still often falling victim to the toxic masculine tendencies of a patriarchal society, and therefore, creating a new and complex role for women in modern-day Mexico and Latin America.

Introduction

The effects of the War on Drugs remain ever-present in Mexico and the United States. In the United States, the War on Drugs is the proliferation of us vs. them, Americans vs. outsiders. However, in Mexico, the War on Drugs reverberated violence that destroyed families, communities, and economic opportunities. The War on Drugs ushered in state vs. illegal organization violence. Much of this violence stayed within the confines of the U.S.-Mexico border region, as Mexican President Felipe Calderón saw the region as the mecca for drug cultivation and distribution. The Golden Triangle of Mexican states (Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua) witnessed the most violence. Through President Calderón's Declaration of War, the Golden Triangle saw an increase in crime rate, murder, and police violence. In conjunction with the Golden Triangle violence, international corporations occupied much of the economic space in Mexico's northern borderland. These international corporations flooded the market, making small, local businesses unable to meet their financial obligations, forcing them to close down operations.

Violence and the lack of economic opportunity forced Mexican and migrant civilians to choose between working long hours at *maquiladoras* (international factories) or working in the illicit economy. Women who worked in the maquiladoras labored for long hours, with little breaks and usually at odd hours of the day. The maquila workers, in most cases, missed family interactions and remained unable to ensure the safety of their family. On the other hand, women who worked for cartels or gang organizations worked dangerous jobs (assassins, look outs, forced sex work) for large amounts of money. The women who took on these illegal positions

endured intensive training under the guidance of leading cartel/gang members and were instructed to commit crimes ranging from petty theft to murdering federal officials.¹

Despite these two roles, which range from one extreme to the other, both groups of women are exploited. Their bodies are hypersexualized and are easily disposed. Both the maquiladoras and cartel/gang organizations use women as if their bodies, and self, are worthless—women are often seen as expendable as pennies. However, this issues is very complex as women are also occupying more empowering spaces economically at the same time. This thesis will begin with a historiographical review of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and how, until recently, gender remained a less discussed aspect of the study. Following, the thesis will discuss the mass murders of women (femicide) that occupies much of the U.S.-Mexico border. Within that discussion, the role women obtain as la Malinche (la Chingada), or someone who fucks something or someone over, is the beginning of women taking on a more masculine—or equal—economic stance in Mexican society. The third chapter of this thesis will then look at how President Calderón’s War on Drugs inadvertently impacted women, especially their role as mothers. Lastly, the thesis will focus on how cartels/gangs recruit women and children as well as how social media/popular culture impact the younger generations perceptions of the illicit world. All in all, this thesis argues that women are taking on more equal economic roles within society but, at the same time, in many ways they continue to be exploited by the patriarchal mentality that they believe they are overcoming.

As briefly stated, the second chapter will focus on the relationship between maquiladoras, women who work at the internationally owned factories, women who choose to work with illicit

¹ Azam Ahmed and Paulina Villegas, “‘They turned me into an Animal:’ How one of Mexico’s deadliest assassins turned on his cartel, *The Independent*, December 16, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/mexico-drug-cartel-sicario-assassin-morelos-a9248331.html>

organizations, and how both groups of women embody major social change. Maquiladoras displaced small, local businesses, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to seek employment elsewhere (if not at the factories). Women hired to work the assembly lines within the maquiladoras work long, and often, odd hours, forcing them to leave their children and themselves vulnerable to the vices of the *barrio* (neighborhood). On the other hand, women who willingly worked for the cartels/gang organizations did so with the promise of prosperous financial stability. Women who chose to work with illicit corporations were not low-level drug smugglers but rose to new levels of power as hitwomen (sicarias). Sicarias obtain the ability to progress in their occupation, meaning they can receive promotions. Despite this new position within the cartels, sicarias are still beneath their male counterparts.

Both groups of women, those who participate in the legal and illegal sectors of society, are, no doubt, working in areas of society once predominately occupied by men. The women are taking advantage of their environment and the economic opportunity offered to them to create a foundation where they do not rely on their male family members. More specifically, maquila women are choosing to work in factories, far from their home, at odd hours of the day and night, leaving their children behind because it is work that is legal and not supposed to endanger themselves or their families. Similarly, sicaria's involvement in the cartels/gangs underpins the mistrust in the government to provide effective and worthwhile jobs that financially support their goals. Despite the individual intentions for their occupations, both categories of women remain under the control of toxic masculinity while also creating a modicum of liberation from traditional feminine domestic roles.

Following this introduction into the lives of women in Mexico, the third chapter of this thesis will specifically look at Mexican President Felipe Calderón's War on Drugs, how women

and their bodies were impacted, and a deeper look into the lives of women in legal and illegal spheres of society. In order to understand the immense impact illegal organization have on Mexico, it is imperative the reader knows the complex historical relationship Mexico maintains with cartels. Prior to the election of President Felipe Calderón in 2006 and the democratization of Mexico in 2000, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) worked closely (usually in the form of payment/bribes) with leading Mexican officials. The close working relationship with the PRI and Mexican officials allowed for drug smuggling, and other illegal activities, to flourish with little to no legal prosecution. This atmosphere of impunity cultivated from the relationship between PRI member and Mexican officials continued on through the early 2000s. President Calderón promised the Mexican people he would fight against illegal corporations, especially drug cartels, to provide a better and safer country for all Mexicans.

The War on Drugs welcomed in more violence and more death. Police and cartel violence occupied much of the U.S.-Mexico border region, unintentionally fueling the overall mistrust of the government. Accompanying this mistrust is the ideology and lens of fatalism, a belief that no matter the effort one's life is already decided. Fatalism is dependent on someone's environment, individual trauma, and generational trauma. In this chapter I argue that fatalism is one of the main reasons why women take on dangerous roles within society. Fatalism impacts both categories of women (those who work in the legal sphere and those who work with illicit organizations) because their environments are steeped in violence. There remains no escape from the violence for the women, whether they choose to work legally or illegally.

The last chapter of this thesis discusses the ways in which cartels and gangs recruit young children, teenagers, and women. However, the chapter begins with a focus on Harry Anslinger, the first commissioner of the Federal Narcotics Bureau. Despite the lack of chronological

organization, the introduction of Anslinger is important because he and his fellow U.S. government officials used gender as a way to demonize drugs and those who cultivated and distributed narcotics. Anslinger targeted Lola la Chata, the grandmother of the drug cartels, and her physical appearance in reference to her negative influence on American citizens. Her height, weight, and maternal status are used to provide an explanation that her actions, and herself as a person, were bad, evil, and no good. In comparison to the ways in which Lola la Chata's body was used to underpin her illegal actions, sicarias' bodies are also experiencing a similar form of attention. Sicarias are not explained as being fat or ugly but are described as models with curvy bodies. Their aesthetically pleasing looks propel the occupation of hitwomen to higher popularity. Sicarias are never considered ugly or maternal. They are skinny, pretty, and are hyper-sexualized.

The hyper-sexualization of sicarias was introduced on social media and other popular media platforms (twitter, Instagram, etc.). Children see, digest, and begin to believe that pretty women and the lives they live through their illicit occupations will provide them a life that other avenues are unable to provide. Cartels and gang organizations utilize social media and the hyper-sexualization of sicarias as a form of recruitment. Once children fall victim to the lavish lifestyles presented on social media, the illicit world becomes more appealing. Cartels promise consistent financial payments (in U.S. dollars) and ensure the opportunity of occupational growth. Despite the promises offered by the cartels and other illegal groups, young girls and women are arrested at higher rates. No matter the risks involved, women and children are convinced that their time spent with the cartels is unique compared to the lives of those who decide to partake in the legal sector of society. Indeed, these women are breaking free of

assumptions about the domestic roles of women while at the same time their bodies are exploited.

Chapter One: Historiography

The study of the U.S.-Mexico border remains a relatively new phenomena, as the field is constantly changing. Scholars grapple with the history of local people, indigenous peoples, transnational communities, U.S. history, Mexican history, and plenty of imperialistic tropes that stem from the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. All these histories intertwine to make the history of the U.S.-Mexico border. The study of the borderlands through a gendered lens is lacking in scholarship. Historians who study the border rely heavily on sociological, anthropological, political, and geographical studies which all discuss the idea of what constitutes a border region. Each field of study attempts to detangle the convoluted generations of change and forced assimilation to present the U.S.-Mexico border region as an area rich with culture; however, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is more than a product of imperialism and global economics. The gendered perspective is important because women make up the majority of the population who experience violence within the U.S.-Mexico border region. My thesis adds to the scholarship as I discuss the forms of violence, abuse, and vulnerability women within the U.S.-Mexico borderland endure on a daily basis.

What is present in more recent scholarship published during the late 1990s and onward is that the United States' attitudes and actions towards the U.S.-Mexico border focuses entirely on the militarization of the border, the declaration of War on Drugs, and the waves of Mexican migrants into the U.S, as well as slight inclusions of gendered understanding. The "us" versus "them," "pure" versus "impure," and "safe" versus "dangerous" ideas continue to shape the history of the U.S.-Mexico border, even when scholars analyze women's (and feminine-presenting folks)² role within the milieu of the borderland. The historiographical portion of this

² I use "Feminine-Presenting" to describe transgender women, gender diverse people, and femme men.

thesis will examine scholarship to show the ways in which various fields of study see and understand the use of excessive force, gendered stereotypes, and sociocultural division by the U.S. government as detrimental to the border region, but also to the lives of women living within the U.S.-Mexico Border region and Latin America.

This historiography will examine literature published after the year 1995 to determine how the border region is studied and understood from President Richard Nixon until President George W. Bush terms that fundamentally shaped the relationship between Mexico, the border, “sister cities”³ and the eventual development and understanding of those who live outside the U.S. The presidential terms discussed most within the literature consist of President(s) Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, and lastly—and briefly—George W. Bush. Each of these presidents contributed to the hyper-militarization, the barring of migration, and the perpetuation of the War on Drugs. One aspect of history that this historiography does not include is literature focusing on Mexican Presidents. This is not to silence the voices of scholars or people who published works detailing the Presidential terms of Mexico’s presidents but it is because this historiography would be too long and contain an enormous amount of information that would ultimately overshadow the purpose of this historiography: the introduction of gendered voices and people in the study of the U.S.-Mexico Border region.

During the Nixon administration (1969-1974), President Nixon passed several pieces of legislation targeting the use of narcotics at the same time as instilling Operation Intercept, which ultimately hindered the migration of Mexicans into the U.S. Although more liberal than his predecessor, President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) ushered in a larger Border Patrol and saw the

³ “Sister Cities” refer to cities that share the U.S.-Mexico international border (El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico).

Immigration Naturalization Service's (INS) funding expand by over 100%.⁴ The following president, Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), sought to gain control of the border by introducing new technology to the INS and Border Patrol, altering the fence separating the two nations, and centering migration as an issue of national security.⁵ Following President Reagan's stance on the U.S.-Mexico border, President George Bush (1989-1993) combined the Border Patrol and INS together.⁶ Border Patrol took on more power and responsibilities but lacked the INS training. Bill Clinton's presidency (1993-2001) marks the beginning of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an economic tactic placing Mexico in an even more dependent position on the U.S. NAFTA crippled the financial stability of Mexican citizens and the Mexican economic market.⁷ President George W. Bush (2001-2009) took measures to "protect" American citizens from terrorists by hyper-guarding the border.⁸ The literature throughout this historiography will review the actions of the mentioned presidents, showcasing the effects on humans and the limitations placed on their lives. This historiography will highlight that women's lives, voices, and struggles are neglected within the foundations of Borderland history and are now, finally, becoming the focal point for studying Borderlands history.

Timothy J. Dunn, a sociologist and author of two books discussing the U.S.-Mexico border region, is one of the leading scholars of the U.S.-Mexico border. Dunn's 1996 publication, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home*, argues that the actions of the U.S. government in conjunction with media attention towards illegal immigration and the international War on Drugs helped with the surging

⁴ Richard J. Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995) 37.

⁵ Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 43.

⁶ Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 80.

⁷ Dunn, *The Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 164.

⁸ Tony Payan, *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: drugs Immigration, and Homeland Security*, 14-15.

militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. Dunn uses the term “militarization” to refer to the use of military tactics, equipment, and terminology. For the purpose of this thesis, I will use “militarization” to refer to the same tactics, technology, and thoughts as Dunn does in *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border*.

In order to prove his claim, Dunn begins his review of government policy by discussing the administrations of multiple U.S. presidents. For example, Dunn informs the reader that President Jimmy Carter oversaw the upgrades of equipment along the U.S.-Mexico border but denied the expansion of agents along the U.S.-Mexico border.⁹ Although President Carter halted the personnel expansion of border patrol, the “improved” equipment and those apprehended along the border were housed on military property.

Dunn continues with President Ronald Reagan’s administration (1981-1989), laying out the passing of immigration acts, air surveillance, and the expansion of border facilities. President Reagan aimed to take control of the border from the “tidal wave” of migrants and “terrorist infiltration” from Mexico and other Latin American countries.¹⁰ During the latter years of Reagan’s presidency, the border patrol introduced “foot soldiers.”¹¹ These “soldiers” worked closely with local police departments in their attempts to curtail the influx of crime and narcotics, but the pseudo-soldiers created tension, as *borderlanders*¹² believed they killed eight civilians under suspicious circumstances.¹³ The Reagan administration created and deployed a group of border patrol agents trained specifically in combating terrorism. The Border Patrol during President Ronald Reagan’s administration utilized military grade weapons and executed similar

⁹ Dunn, *Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 37.

¹⁰ Dunn, *Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 42.

¹¹ Dunn, *Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 51.

¹² People who live within the U.S.-Mexico border

¹³ Dunn, *Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border*, 52.

duties as the Drug Enforcement Agency, blurring the lines between military personnel and *migra* (Border agents). In the early 1990s, George H. W. Bush also ensured immigration would remain a central concern for national security and border patrol would work closely with the federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Throughout the Bush administration, the border saw the creation of the “tortilla curtain.” The primary goal of the “tortilla curtain” was to reduce the smuggling of drugs and to hinder the flow of migrants.¹⁴ President Bush and the INS enlisted military personnel to clear lands and build walls in the most high-traffic areas, thus another tactic to hinder the illegal migration of people.

Dunn’s review of President Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush’s administrations underpin the increasing reliance on militaristic weapons, tactics, and people. Throughout the three presidential administrations, the border region separating the US and Mexico became a militarized zone. People could no longer walk across the international bridges which dot the border region but had to wait in long lines or cross inhabitable and life-threatening desert conditions.

Margaret E. Montoya’s 1996 published article, *Border Crossing in an Age of Border Patrols: Cruzando Fronteras Metaforicas*, highlights the way in which scholars grapple with the definition of “border” and the wider understanding that the border region no longer allows for transborder movements.¹⁵ It is now embedded with a meaning of sovereignty, belonging, and identity. *Border Crossing in an Age of Border Patrols: Cruzando Fronteras Metaforicas* begins with addressing the societal and governmental focus on the “illegal migration of low-skilled

¹⁴ Dunn, *Militarization of the US-Mexico Border*, 67.

¹⁵ Emeritus Professor of Law at the University of New Mexico and the first Latina to get accepted into Harvard School of Law.

persons from Mexico into the Southwestern portions of the United States.”¹⁶ Montoya analyzes more than Republican and Democratic debates swirling around “low-skilled persons from Mexico” but also the creation of a sense of those who belong and those who do not belong within the United States. The U.S.-Mexico border is an international border defined by “...war, political intrigue, and river morphology” but despite all those defining factors, Montoya emphasizes that cultural and economic relationships continue to bleed across the international boundary.

This point leads to Montoya introducing her own literature review of the U.S.-Mexico border as a bridge, or membrane, connecting two organisms together. The author reviews other scholarly works and discusses how scholars dissect the border region as a place of cultural production and a space for someone to identify with multiple cultures, making them someone of “infinite layers.”¹⁷ Montoya points-out that most scholars studying the border region grapple with borderland identity, economic survival, and discrimination of those who are both Mexican and American. *Border Crossing in an Age of Border Patrols* is interwoven with political and legal influences, perfectly defining the study of the US-Mexico border as a study that requires the reliance on multiple fields of study. Montoya consistently focuses on the border region as not being a permeable membrane, but a militarized boundary, separating acceptable people from unacceptable; the good and the bad; the legal and illegal; those who belong from those who do not.

Montoya is the first scholar within this historiographical essay to mention the individual lives of those throughout the border region, more specifically, those who are impacted by policy and stereotypes implemented by society and government. Despite publication of Montoya’s work

¹⁶ Margaret E. Montoya, “Crossing in an Age of Border Patrols: Cruzando Fronteras Metaforicas,” *New Mexico Law Review*, Vol 26, Issue 1, Winter 1996, 1.

¹⁷ Montoya, “Crossing in an Age of Border Patrols: Cruzando Fronteras Metaforicas,” 5.

in the mid-1900s, it is not until the early 2000s that scholars view gender as a category of analysis within the confines of the U.S.-Mexico border region. These scholars highlight how the cultivation of a militarized boundary, economic fighting-ring, and zone of production—legal or illegal—contribute to a gendered-society that targets women and young children. The border region is not simply a hyper-militarized zone resulting from years of tense policy-making but is a perpetuation of gendered exploitation at the hands of economic kingpins.

Montoya's understanding of the border is different from that of Timothy J. Dunn focuses on the militarization of the 2,000-mile-long-boundary, and Montoya does not focus on militarization tactics. Montoya focuses on the people of the region; and the alienation of a portion of the population.¹⁸ Her stance on the U.S.-Mexico border reflects the effects of the administrations of Reagan, Bush, and the early aftermath of NAFTA. Mexican migrants sought refuge in the U.S. but were denied entry, detained in detention centers, or deported across the once permeable border.

Another scholar who examines the hardships of the U.S.-Mexico border is Joseph Nevins. Nevins is a geographer from The University of California-Los Angeles with a preference for researching socio-territorial boundaries, violence and inequality, political ecology, and Latin America. The majority of Nevins' publications focus on the U.S.-Mexico border region and immigration, making him a sound addition to this historiography. *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on "Illegals" and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (2001) takes a closer look at the US-Mexico border by examining the effects of U.S. legislation on sister-cities San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico. Nevins' explores the "origins, meaning, and implications" of the border developments and the "strong political support" the boundary

¹⁸ Montoya, "Crossing in an Age of Border Patrols: Cruzando Fronteras Metaforicas," 9.

between Mexico and the U.S. enjoys.¹⁹ Even though Nevins is reviewing the San Diego-Tijuana border relationship/political expansion/social relations, Nevins believes it will show a bigger picture and provide a deeper understanding of the border.

Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond begins after the 1994 passage of Operation Gatekeeper, with aims at stopping/slowing down the flow of illegal migrants. During the early-to-mid 1990s, the San Diego-Tijuana boundary was the primary area for migrants to cross into the U.S.²⁰ The passing of Operation Gatekeeper during the mid-1990s is not the only piece of legislation passed in an attempt to bar people from entering the U.S. Proposition 187 passed in California during the 1990s denied education and healthcare to undocumented immigrants. This anti-immigrant sentiment and hyper-protection of the U.S. occurred during President Bill Clinton's presidency. Nevins underpins the U.S. government's need to regain control of the border region, a popular "us" versus "them" understanding of territory and people.

Nevins does discuss previous administrations but highlights the actions of the Clinton administration. The author points out that higher border enforcement correlated with the increased amount of transborder economic growth, which grew exceptionally after the establishment of North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The deepening of the economic relationship between Mexico and the U.S. (sister cities) only intensified the industrialization, population growth, and migration along/across/to the US-Mexico border.²¹ NAFTA contributed to the devaluation of the Mexican peso, resulting in the displacement of thousands and rising unemployment rates in Mexico. NAFTA also had a major role in the migration of people from southern Mexico, creating an inflated job market throughout the U.S.-

¹⁹ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on "Illegals" and the Making of the US-Mexico Boundary* (Routledge, 2002) 4.

²⁰ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 2.

²¹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, 9.

Mexico border region. Nevins argues the hyper-policing of the U.S.-Mexico border is simply to divide two nations with very different socioeconomic levels. He furthers this argument by explaining the U.S. increased policing, militarization, and othering of the U.S.-Mexico border deepens the integration and interactions between the two nations. The othering of a boundary and its people creates a race-based understanding of “alien,” “illegal,” or “migrant,” which Nevins relates back to the U.S.-Mexico War and territoriality.

Another work that analyzes issues pertaining to migration is Judith Adler Hellman in her book titled *The World of Mexican Migrants: The Rock and the Hard Place*. The 2008 publication of Hellman’s book reviews the lives of those who are connected to someone who migrated and to those who migrated (usually undocumented) into the U.S. Hellman presents the reader with historical context of policy passed by several U.S. presidents in an effort to create a solid foundation for the reader to see, and understand, that the U.S. is placing “Mexican migrants into an ever narrower and more dangerous” path of entry into the U.S. and American citizenship.²² This micro-historical approach to Mexican Migrants and the U.S.-Mexico borderland deviates from the policy-centered history that frequently occupy this historiography to highlight that it was not until the 2000s that scholars began to look at history through a humanitarian lens. Indeed, in many border studies actual people and their stories seem to be severely lacking. Hellman’s work also incorporates how women deal with the impact of their partner or themselves leaving their family for the U.S.-Mexican border, detailing mental and physical abuse at home as well as on their migratory journey.

Sergio González Rodríguez’s publication, *The Femicide Machine* will serve to underpin that women in Ciudad Juárez are prey. Women’s lives and bodies are exploited for the economic

²² Judith Adler Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants: The Rock and the Hard Place* (The New Press, 2009) 9.

gain of international organizations. Rodríguez's literature also shows how the inclusion of gender and women within the field of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands changes the overall perspective. Not only are all borderlanders experiencing some form of abuse but women are experiencing the heaviest forms of abuse. *The Femicide Machine* is an example of literature that incorporates many fields of studies, U.S. history, Mexican history, and economics, all in an effort to tell the stories of voices rarely heard: women.

Sergio González Rodríguez shares the same ideology as Nevins and states that Ciudad Juárez "normalized barbarism."²³ González believes that Ciudad Juárez, due to its relationship and proximity to the U.S., is an "apparatus" that created the conditions to allow the economic and physical exploitation of women and children. Ciudad Juárez is a witness to hundreds, possibly, thousands of murders, most of which targeting working women or children. In *The Femicide Machine* (2012), González Rodríguez discusses the evolution of Ciudad Juárez from a small border town to a globalized "machine" designed to murder women. The Ciudad Juárez machine is "composed of hatred and misogynistic violence, machismo, power, and patriarchal reaffirmations."²⁴ The entirety of *The Femicide Machine* discusses the history of Ciudad Juárez and its relationship to local and foreign powers, and aligns with commonly known history of the economic growth and social deterioration of those who live and travel to the border town-machine for opportunities (economic, social, or migration). The 2012 publication of this literature highlights the eventual growth of studying gender and gendered violence as a result of territory, power, and economics, specifically as a result of the U.S. Like many scholars discussed thus far, Sergio González Rodríguez does not neglect the role(s) of the U.S. He holds the U.S.

²³ Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2012) 7.

²⁴ Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, 11.

and Mexican government accountable for the “machine” they created in hopes of protecting U.S. citizens and economic interests.

Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond takes a historical look at the militarization of the US-Mexico border. Similar to Timothy J. Dunn, Nevins reviews U.S. presidential administrations’ actions with immigration, undocumented migrants, and narcotics. Rather than purely discussing the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, Nevins explains how previous administrations contributed to the “safeguarding” of American citizens from migrants and the illicit activity sprouting from Latin American countries.²⁵ The 2002 publication of *Operation Gatekeeper* aligns with the onslaught of increasing humanitarian attention on the U.S.-Mexico border. After the establishment of NAFTA and the devaluation of the peso, many foreign agencies removed their investments or avoided investing in the border region, creating a crippling rise in unemployment. During the beginnings of George W. Bush’s administration, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 created even more immigration hysteria amongst American people and others. Although these two works do discuss the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, they do not incorporate the lives of women or children. Unlike *The Femicide Machine*, Nevins’ and Dunn focus almost entirely on governmental policies and how those affected the border region as a whole. Rodríguez’s work emphasizes the intertwining of multiple fields of study and measures of statistics to tell the same story, but in a micro-historical fashion.

Although this thesis will focus on women’s lives, their bodies, and the role they must take in Mexican society (legal and illegal), it is imperative that the reader understands how entrenched in violence the border region truly is. In order for the reader to understand the

²⁵ Rodríguez, *The Femicide Machine*, 78. This is in reference to President Richard Nixon’s Operation Intercept, an attempt to curtail the influx of narcotics by the usage of planes, military naval ships, and coast guards, as well as “pointing the finger” at Mexico for being a source of illicit items,

complexities of this borderlands history, this historiography includes diverse literature focusing on women and gender, policy, and overall historical violence associated with the 2,000-mile-long stretch of land. Drawing from a wide variety of sources, this historiographical discussion not only underpins the necessity of various scholars/voices but to highlight that there still remains immense work to be done in order to fully understand how gender and womanhood have been affected by larger policy makers and economic determinates.

Kelly Lytle Hernández, a professor of history at the University of California-Los Angeles is renowned for research in African American studies, race, immigration, and urban planning. Hernández is the Director and Principle Investigator of the Million Dollar Hoods project, which is a university-based research project that maps mass incarceration of people in Los Angeles. Hernández's book, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (2010) tells the history of how Mexican workers became the primary targets of the U.S. Border Patrol and how the Border Patrol unintentionally shaped the understanding of race in the United States. In simplest terms, *Migra!* is the history of "how Mexicans emerged as the 'iconic illegal aliens.'"²⁶ This book chronologically reviews the history of Border Patrol and explores the creation and enforcement of Border Patrol as a device of violence, and control, throughout the border region.

In order to complete the task of unveiling the history of Border Patrol, Hernández relied heavily on primary sources and secondary sources discussing migration. The primary sources cited throughout this book unveils why migrants were stopped, inspected, and arrested. Hernández discusses instances where Border Patrol agents resulted to violence in an attempt to hinder the crossing of undocumented immigrants, or even sought revenge on the death of a fallen agent. It is evident that violence is a common trait of the U.S.-Mexico border.

²⁶ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Los Angeles: University California Press, 2010) 2.

Throughout the chapters of *Migra!*, Hernández highlights the aggressive and violent tactics used towards migrants and workers. Although much of the literature in this historiography discusses the actions of presidential administrations, Hernández proves to the readers that the U.S.-Mexico border and governmental agencies have maintained a very violent stance on America's national security. In a way, *Migra!* challenges the notion that the violence accompanying the U.S.-Mexico border is a new phenomenon. Around the time of this book's 2010 publication, the U.S.-Mexico border saw the effects of the rise of violence in Mexican border cities, such as Ciudad Juárez. As a result of the rising violence, the U.S. government sent military weapons to assist the Mexican government in their fight against the Mexican cartels. The increase in violence caused for a stark rise in migration, documented and undocumented, across the U.S.-Mexico border. The U.S. government responded with equipping the border, and its agents, with more weapons, surveillance, and intense interrogation prior to U.S. entry.

Border Rootedness as Transformative Resistance: Youth Overcoming Violence and Inspection in a U.S.-Mexico Border Region (2010), an essay by Cynthia Bejarano, addresses the struggles of Mexican immigrants and children of immigrants as they grapple with identity, space, and status in the transnational world of the borderlands. Bejarano is a professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Gender and Sexuality Studies at New Mexico State University. Her research interests focus on border violence, border youth, immigration, immigration violence, and gender violence along the U.S.-Mexico border. In *Border Rootedness*, Bejarano presents the ways border youth manage their transborder lives, the experiences of racism, and their daily fight for survival in a world designed around "aliens" and citizens.²⁷

²⁷ Cynthia Bejarano, "Border Rootedness as Transformative Resistance: Youth Overcoming Violence and Inspection in a US-Mexico Border Region," *Children's Geographies*, Vol 8, Issue 4, (2010) 391-399.

Bejarano begins her essay by discussing the lives of border youth, some youth crossing the international border by bus to attend primary and secondary education in the U.S. The author explains this relationship between the youth and the U.S.-Mexico border as a relationship that is mentally taxing, a psychologically and developmentally challenging relationship.²⁸ Children are able to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, without inspection or interrogation, but this innocence disappears when border youth turn eighteen. Bejarano explores how young adults deal with the sudden transition from innocent child to dangerous migrant (because they are not U.S. citizens), and compares the social shift to a violation of human rights. Not only does Bejarano discuss the human rights violations executed by border agents but also introduces the idea that globalization, capitalism, and the “underground economy” all impact the image of border youth.

Bejarano’s approach to the U.S.-Mexico border takes on a more cultural analysis, deviating from the majority of the scholars listed above, and introduces the cultural understandings of those who live in the border region. This introduction to the field (and this thesis) is important because it begins to humanize the border region. Rather than reviewing the past presidents or past border security measures, Bejarano looks at the U.S.-Mexico border as a place where identity has to be proved. Bejarano emphasizes that globalization and the surveillance which follows transnational power casts a dark shadow onto the peoples who live in the border region, especially border youth. Bejarano’s approach to the U.S.-Mexico border underpins the dissolving of a border community. The border community disappears for young adults and becomes a boundary separating them from their community.

Rachel St. John, a historian who is currently an associate professor at University of California-Davis is an expert in borderland history, 19th century history, and North American

²⁸ Bejarano, “Border Rootedness,” 392.

west. St. John's 2011 book, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western US-Mexico Border*, takes a similar approach to Bejarano and demonstrates that private individuals and government entities question the boundary (U.S.-Mexico border) set by two nations and argues that the border is a critical site for understanding the evolution of government priorities and negotiations of state power in Mexico and the U.S. For the purpose of this historiography, St. John's conclusion will be used to show how the study of the U.S.-Mexico border has changed since the mid-1990s.²⁹

Line in the Sand's conclusion takes a look at modern governmental actions, but continues to point out that the U.S. militarizes the U.S.-Mexico border in order to stop "unlawful entries...terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband."³⁰ St. John discusses the aftermath of 9/11 on the U.S.-Mexico border as well as on the American population of the border region. St. John relates the evolution of the US-Mexico border to the onslaught of capitalism and the decline of transborder communities in relation to the militarization of the boundary. U.S. capitalistic endeavors with Mexico bound the U.S. to that region, but it is evident the U.S. wants nothing to do with the people or their socioeconomic standards.³¹

Before the 2011 publishing of *Line in the Sand*, a new president, Barack Obama, took office. Obama's administration followed President George W. Bush, who focused on ramping up national security and protecting Americans from weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. President Obama also took office after the use of Mexican forces, by the President of Mexico, to combat Mexican drug cartels, resulting in the deaths of thousands of innocent citizens in 2006. Although both instances (George W. Bush and the casualties of Mexican innocents) would

²⁹ Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western US-Mexico Border*, (Princeton, 2012)

³⁰ St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 198.

³¹ St. John, *Line in the Sand*, 202.

encourage historians to approach the study of the U.S.-Mexico border in a more understanding way, historians primarily continue to review the history of the border in such a way that focuses on the actions of the U.S. government being a hyper-militaristic entity. By approaching history and the historical understanding of an area with purely a hyper-militaristic view, viewers are unable to see the lives impacted by such policies. Through the inclusion of people, their voices, and their bodies, the history of a land and people are reconstructed in a comprehensible manner. Rather than viewing the U.S.-Mexico borderland as a zone of militaristic people and moves, this thesis presents the U.S.-Mexico borderland by discussing the lives of women effected by larger economic and policing entities.

Line in the Sand, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*, and *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border* both place blame on the U.S. government for the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. The authors highlight that the U.S. used the safety of American citizens as an excuse to bar the influx of migrants or refugees. The U.S. government claimed the immigrants were dangerous and contributed to the rising use and distribution of narcotics. Not only did the U.S. government deem immigrants and undocumented people as “bad,” the media coverage of immigration created mass hysteria throughout the U.S. population.

In contrast to *Line in the Sand*, Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett look at the study of borderlands through a theory lens. Pekka Hämäläinen is a historian who specializes in indigenous history, environmental, imperial, as well as borderlands history. Hämäläinen also researches in global histories of empires, nomadic and indigenous societies, and the history of the Western Hemisphere. Samuel Truett is a historian and director of the Center for the Southwest at the University of New Mexico. Truett’s interests are borderlands history, environmental history, nineteenth century Mexico, indigenous history, and transnational history.

Hämäläinen and Truett co-authored *On Borderlands* (2011), which discusses the new interest of borderlands history that is sweeping throughout academia in North America.³²

Besides from pointing out the new interest in borderlands history, the co-authors discuss how scholars “[preserve] old distinctions” of history, separating old from new, immigrant from indigenous, and people and places that no longer present the true definition of “borderlands.”³³ Scholars who study the borderlands do so in a broader context, but there remains a narrow, or centered, narrative which dominates the scholarship. Based off of Hämäläinen and Truett, borderlands history sprouts from twentieth century scholarship, taking characteristics from the study of culture, imperialism, and globalization, however, the authors believe the study of the borderlands is now “cosmopolitan.” Although the study of borderlands is widespread, or cosmopolitan, the study of the borderlands is taking on a greater role in academia.³⁴ This inclusion of this work within this historiography is to show that despite the previously mentioned gendered works, scholars still grapple with the definition of a “border.”

The scholars mentioned in this historiography do not approach the US-Mexico borderland in narrowed way, rather they incorporate many aspects of interactions to create a history of the people. Hämäläinen and Truett call on borderlands historians, as well as other scholars, to “replace the itineraries and blind spots of one history for another.”³⁵ To a certain extent, scholars are doing just that; *Line in the Sand* examines how presidential administrations’ national security measures and actions impact the border, a once permeable boundary; *Migra!* Reviews the history of the U.S. Border Patrol and how the Border Patrol contributed to racism

³² Hämäläinen, Pekka and Samuel Truitt, “On Borderlands,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 98, No. 2, 338-361.

³³ Hämäläinen and Truitt, “On Borderlands,” 339.

³⁴ Hämäläinen and Truitt, “On Borderlands,” 341.

³⁵ Hämäläinen and Truitt, “On Borderlands,” 361.

along the U.S.-Mexico border; *Operation Gatekeeper* reviews American political policy and the effects of such policy on *personas Norteñas* (Northern people of Mexico).

The 2011 publication of *On Borders* aligns with *Line in the Sand* and *Migra!*, proving their belief and assertion that borderlands history is gaining a lot of popularity in North America. Although I do not believe the literature chosen for this historiography are “cosmopolitan,” there is an understanding as to why borderlands history gained attention throughout academia. During the 2010s, the border experienced the effects of mass militarization, rapid globalization, and complete displacement of poor, rural people. Not only did the northern Mexican economy suffer, but people endured years of violence, local police corruption, and federal corruption as a result of the Mexican Drug Cartels. People needed answers to the questions surrounding immigration, narcotics, and border security—scholars did their best to answer societies questions.

Peter Watt and Roberto Zepeda, co-authors of *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy* (2012), discuss the history of the U.S.-Mexico border but do so by examining the globalization, industrialization, and capitalistic over-run of the border region. Peter Watt is a professor at The University of Sheffield and researches narcotrafficking, organized crime, human rights, white-collar crime, U.S./Latin American relations, and social movements in Latin America. Dr. Roberto Zepeda, a political scientist, experience ranges from research at the Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, previous professor at the Institute of International Studies at the Universidad del Mar, in Huatulco, Mexico, and the effects of migration in America.

Drug War Mexico tackles multiple histories within one piece of literature: U.S.-Mexico border, narco-history, and economic history. Watt and Zepeda pinpoint the beginnings of the

“War on Drugs” to the actions of the Nixon administration in the early 1970s.³⁶ President Nixon passed Operation Intercept, aiming to curtail the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S. In reaction to that, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (President of Mexico) sent thousands of troops to rural Mexican areas to maintain order during the beginnings of the War on Drugs.³⁷ The hysteria from Operation Intercept and the military occupation of Mexican villages created fear throughout Mexico, pushing Mexicans to seek safety elsewhere.

Watt and Zepeda’s research illuminates the effects that industrialization had on rural Mexican communities and frame the involvement of the U.S. as a Neoliberalist power. Based off of the literature, the Neoliberalism of the U.S. pushed Mexican people and its economy to become deeply integrated with the U.S., pushing Mexico to depend on the U.S., and inadvertently allowing the U.S. to involve itself in many aspects of Mexican policy.³⁸ The authors look at the U.S.-Mexico border as an area that has fallen victim to the capitalistic tentacles of the U.S. and presents Mexican citizens as the victims who are barred from positively changing their lives. Watt and Zepeda believe the 1994 passage of Operation Gatekeeper contributes to the criminalization of the border region but also give the U.S. government the justification they need to use the military budget and expansion of the military power on the US-Mexico border.

The research of St. John, Watt, and Zepeda underpins the rising societal concerns coming from the U.S.-Mexico border. During the early 2010s, Mexicans fled from their homes and communities as a result of the 2006 deployment of Mexican troops to the “Golden Triangle” (an area known for its fertile land and Poppy seed cultivation). Thousands of innocent lives were lost

³⁶ Watt and Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*, (Zed Books, 2012) 35.

³⁷ Watt and Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico*, 38.

³⁸ Watt and Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico*, 76.

as a result of Mexico's attempt to stop the drug trade. Not only did the Mexican government create more violence along the border but the growing acknowledgement of femicides in Ciudad Juárez brought more attention to the humanitarian crisis within the border region. *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la frontera* unveils the horrors of industrialization of the border region by showcasing the deaths of thousands (possibly more) of young girls and women. Although *Making a Killing* does not specifically discuss the history of the U.S.-Mexico border, it does highlight the rising humanitarian concerns of the border and also forces people to critically analyze the capitalistic actions of the U.S. Alongside *Making a Killing*, St. John and Watt and Zepeda's literature forces readers to challenge their preconceived understanding of the U.S. being a "savior" to society.

Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán introduce readers to the essays that fill *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera* with their chapter titled, "Feminicidio: The 'Black Legend' of the Border." Alicia Gaspar de Alba is a professor and former chair of the UCLA César E. Chávez Department of Chicano/a Studies. Her work focuses and explores gender, sexuality, Chicano/a art, border studies, and popular culture. Georgina Guzmán is an English professor at the California University, Channel Islands. Her fields of research are Chicana/o Literature, Latina/o literature, Gender and Feminist studies, race, immigration, and sexuality.

In Alba and Guzmán's chapter, the scholars introduce the 1993 discovery of hundreds of murdered women in Ciudad Juárez and deduce that many of the women were migrants from southern regions of Mexico. From the time of rapid industrialization in Ciudad Juárez, families migrated north to where the economic opportunities were—whether that be the *maquiladoras* or

opportunities in the U.S.³⁹ Alba and Guzmán see the maquiladoras as one of the reasons for the rise in murders of women. They believe that the multinational governments occupying the border and its factories are a manifestation of abuse, harassment, and violence against women and those who live in the border region. The corporations using northern Mexicans for cheap labor exploit women and their vulnerabilities within the border region to benefit the overall economic goal. The inclusion of gender within the study of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands humanizes the people of the region. Rather than only understanding the region as one encountering militaristic endeavors, the region is full of women and families who live through violence and abuse. The intersectionality of gender and the border region removes the title “alien” and gives rise for others to see the border region as a place where “people” live their lives.

In *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera*’ sixth chapter, “The Suffering of the Other,” Julia E. Monárrez-Fragoso discusses the atmosphere of justice throughout the U.S.-Mexico border, especially in Ciudad Juárez. Monárrez-Fragoso explains that those who first-handedly experience murder along the U.S.-Mexico border are the people who truly suffer (women and family).⁴⁰ The author explains, like Sergio González Rodríguez, that the legal/justice-seeking process favors those who fall within the “dominant culture,” not being a woman, working class, or poor.⁴¹ Monárrez-Fragoso explains that leading officials (the dominant culture) do not look to solve problems but use the pain to create “symbolic capital” or “Others” the people impacted by tragedy.⁴²

³⁹ Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010) 26.

⁴⁰ Julia E. Monárrez-Fragoso, “The Suffering of the Other,” in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera*, (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 2010) 183-200

⁴¹ Monárrez-Fragoso, “The Suffering of the Other” in *Making a Killing*, 185.

⁴² Monárrez-Fragoso, “The Suffering of the Other” in *Making a Killing*, 187.

Oscar J. Martínez, a Regents' Professor of History at the University of Arizona, is an author of multiple books focusing the US-Mexico border as well as Mexican migrants in America. Martínez's 2018 book, *Ciudad Juárez: Saga of a Legendary Border City*, is a historical review of the economic and social evolution of the sister-cities from the late 1840s to modern time. Martínez also examines the cross-border migration, population growth, industrialization, urbanization, living conditions, as well as crime which contributed to Ciudad Juárez recognition as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. For the purpose of this historiography, the chapter "War, Growth, and Mixed Progress" will be utilized to analyze how scholars study the U.S.-Mexico border after the actions of modern U.S. presidents.⁴³

"War, Growth, and Mixed Progress" in *Ciudad Juárez* analyzes the US-Mexico border from the onslaught of global conflict resulting from WWII and the Cold War. Martínez discusses the dire need for labor in the U.S. and the mid-1960s passage of Operation Wetback, which aimed to remove the workers who over-stayed their welcome of the Bracero Program. Martínez discusses the attempts the Mexican government made to hinder the flow of Mexicans into the U.S., providing a holistic approach to the history of the US-Mexico border.

Despite the efforts of both the U.S. and Mexican governments, Martínez states that Mexicans and Americans depended on each other for economic stability.⁴⁴ After establishing that both nations depended on each other for economic growth and commerce, Martínez follows suit with the previous scholars mentioned above. One aspect of *Ciudad Juárez: Saga of a Legendary Border City* that takes a different approach is that Martínez questions the effects transborder movement have on children. Martínez mentions the efforts of activists and anti-maquiladoras in

⁴³ Oscar J. Martínez, *Ciudad Juárez: Saga of a Legendary Border City*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2018)

⁴⁴ Martínez, *Ciudad Juárez*, 118.

showcasing the struggles children endure when their parents seek employment at the border factories or when they cross the U.S.-Mexico border. The author also mentions how single parents result to drinking, drug use, drug smuggling, or possible resentment towards family members.⁴⁵

Martínez's approach to the history of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso can easily be applied to the wider border region. His research underpins the immense displacement families throughout Mexico endured as a result of rapid globalization, urbanization, and industrialization. This aspect of his research reflects the rise in humanitarian concerns happening throughout the 2010s in America. No longer does research focus on simply the administrations' decisions to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border, but looks at the social and cultural implications resulting from the years of militarization, racism, and interception tactics used against the majority of a population.

A History of Violence: Living and Dying in Central America (2016) by Óscar Martínez does not present information solely about the U.S.-Mexico border but analyzes the border regions connecting southern Mexico to Central America. Within *A History of Violence*, Martínez separates the book in three sections, with each section focusing on the evolutionary steps of the present-day tumultuous zones (southern Mexican border region). Martínez presents the reader with several examples of weak centralized governments, the growth of illegal organizations, and the fear that occupy the border lands of all of Latin America. *A History of Violence* does look at Central America but the geographical context of this book is easily shared, mirrored, and seen, within Mexico's northern border. Martínez's work is essential for Borderland studies as it highlights the immense governmental and social exploitation of poor, rural women and the continuation of such an environment, despite evidence and literature detailing the atrocities.

⁴⁵ Martínez, *Ciudad Juárez*, 133.

It is clear that *Ciudad Juárez* and *Making a Killing* both provide a different outlook on the U.S.-Mexico border as they both discuss the effects of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and globalization on people. *Making a Killing* highlights the atrocities the urbanization of the U.S.-Mexico border have on the entire country of Mexico, but especially women. Women of the border region deal with the possibility of family separation as well as not having enough money to support themselves and their loved ones. The industrialization of the border and the devaluation of the peso, which is mentioned earlier in this historiography, forces parents to choose between working miserable hours for little wage or risk crossing illegally into the U.S. *Ciudad Juárez* also mentioned the social and cultural effects of militarization and racism, which specifically targets the youth of the border. The small inclusion of human lives and gender provides the reader with a deeper connection, understanding, and overall context for why families/people react the way they do in a society steeped in violence. People do what they can, with the tools given to them.

Through this historiographical essay, it is clear that much of the literature covering the U.S.-Mexico borderland tends to focus on broad policy impacts and moments at the hands of U.S. presidents. There is much more to the border region. Being a woman within the border region is more than dangerous, it is life threatening. Large global corporations and economic interests, and policy, obstruct the ability for justice by local, state, and federal entities. The lives of women are disregarded to ensure the proper functioning of economic production. It is clear that scholars who include and study women are more aware of how intensely the hyper-militarization and industrialization of the U.S.-Mexico border impacts people's lives.

By examining how the history of the U.S.-Mexico border has changed, it is clear that scholars are more concerned with how the militarization, policing, and globalization impact

people attempting to cross the border or those associated with narcotics. The majority of the scholars mentioned in this historiography approach this history from a political standpoint. Timothy J. Dunn's research is the only piece of literature that focuses purely on the militarization of the border. The 1996 publication of his work is a result of the administrations of Reagan and Bush, who both hyper-militarized the U.S.-Mexico border to the extent of increasing funding by over 100%. Margaret E. Montoya's 1996 journal article is vastly different from Dunn's, but this may be because of Montoya's Latin-roots or her field of study (law). Montoya can be considered a pioneer of approach the U.S.-Mexico border with a deep yearning for the people.

As time progressed, and the effects of presidential actions arise on the border, scholars begin to follow the footsteps of Montoya; scholars gradually focus more and more on how people are effect by the U.S. imperialistic endeavors. Nevins, Hernández, Bejarano, and Hellman approach their research of the U.S.-Mexico border in less of a militaristic manner and base much of their work on the displacement of people and how their culture is changed. Watt and Zepeda, and Sergio González Rodríguez tackle the multifaced machine that is the U.S.-Mexico border and conclude that neoliberalism contributed to the downfall of northern Mexico's economy and people. *Making a Killing*, *Ciudad Juárez*, and *A History of Violence* all focus on Ciudad Juárez and their concern for children, mothers, and separated families.

The history of the U.S.-Mexico border is slowly becoming more concerned with how the U.S. economic and political tactics impact families, especially women. This may be because the femicides, the forced migration through desert, or the extreme violence of the border, however, all these factors are results of the U.S presidents' (beginning with President Nixon) forceful approach to immigration and the drug trade. Each president contributed to the militarization of the border, the economic displacement of Mexicans, the devaluation of the peso, and the

discrimination of migrants. Scholars are slowly seeing the results of these actions. Scholars are slowly rewriting the history of the U.S.-Mexico border. My thesis will contribute a gendered understanding of how violence impacts women, their bodies, and the choices they make to better themselves and their families. Through the analysis of these foundational scholars, this thesis will not only contribute a gendered outlook on the War on Drugs, the U.S.-Mexico Borderland, and Mexico but will show the complexities of liberation and economic equality. The following chapter examines the lives of women occupying Mexico's northern and southern borders to underpin that women, their bodies, their lives, and their financial stability all fall victim to men, whether it be leading political figures, cartel/gang leaders, or romantic partners. Women's lives are constantly in danger.

Chapter Two: The War on Drugs and the War on Women's Lives

The violence reverberating from the War on Drugs is changing the social fabric of Latin America. Small, borderland communities along Mexico's northern and southern borders are policed by transnational gangs (*Maras*), regional cliques (*pandillas*), and human smugglers (*coyotes*.) These illegal organizations and occupations target traveling individuals, teenagers, and young mothers for monetary profit. Despite their already illegal activity, the violence associated with these mobs increases alongside the rise of local or federal involvement and interference. Mexico's border regions' relationship with illegal organizations and markets creates a dangerous environment for people, especially those who are displaced, women, or feminine-presenting people. This chapter will dive into the history of displacement and violence occupying Mexico's borderlands after the 2006 declaration of war against drugs.

Mexico contains roughly 2,000 miles on its northern border and approximately 500 miles on its southern border, but each region contains similar violent characteristics. Both borders symbolize transactions. Both borderlands serve as an area fraught with murder, torture, mutilation, and smuggling. Both borders "[represent] opportunities unavailable elsewhere."⁴⁶ Although Mexico's northern border is portrayed as a place of finance and production, the influx of migrants, international capitalist ventures, as well as the overall presence of the U.S. distorts true life. Regional legal enforcement is not in the control of local or federal forces but falls into the hands of capitalistic entities focused on production. This shift in control creates a scenario where local and federal officials are not able to assist in curtailing violence. In fact, illegal organizations in both the northern and southern borders are taking advantage of the power shift.

⁴⁶ Peter Watt and Robert Zepeda, *Drug War Mexico: Politics, Neoliberalism, and Violence in the New Narcoeconomy*, (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012) 76.

Northern illegal organizations are committing crimes at an overwhelming rate due to the lack of funding of local officials as well as the influx of Mexican migrants and migrants from Central America. Mexico's southern border does not match that of the U.S.-Mexico border in economic opportunities but does symbolize a door, or gateway, to the U.S.-Mexico border. Illegal organizations on Mexico's southern border exploit people for money, kill them, or sexually assault and exploit them simply because they are able to. The road to Mexico's northern border is deadly and death is expected.⁴⁷

Mexico's southern border is connected to Guatemala and Belize, which then leads to the remainder of Central America (Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Panama). Central America is full of illicit activity, most of which originated from southern California at the turn of the century.⁴⁸ Gangs such as la Mara Salvatrucha, Barrio 18, and Mirada Loktoes 13 originated in the U.S., but fuel the present-day violence at Mexico's southern border. Latino/Hispanic gangs approximated a majority of the gang organizations in Southern California during the 1990s. According to "Police Response to Gangs: a Multi-Site Study," organized by Arizona State University, the Los Angeles Police Department tripled the size of their Gang Unit (those hired to "combat gangs and drugs"⁴⁹) within the timeframe of 1990 to 1994.⁵⁰ The area of Los Angeles (as well as the surrounding communities) saw a consistent rise in violence, especially amongst rival gangs. Local "wars" (gun violence between two or more gangs) broke out in cities such as Inglewood, California, in 1994, killing several bystanders.⁵¹ Many of these gang members (roughly 8,000 people), whether leaders or followers, were deported back to

⁴⁷ Oscar Martinez, *A History of Violence: Living and Dying in Central America*, (New York: Verso Books, 2016), 214

⁴⁸ *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, ed. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner, University of Texas (Austin), 38.

⁴⁹ Police Response to Gangs: A Multi-Site Study, Department of Justice, 64.

⁵⁰ Police Response to Gangs, 14.

⁵¹ Police Response to Gangs, 67.

Mexico and Central America.⁵² The U.S.-based-Hispanic-gangs cultivated zones and communities where their gang-style living blossomed. This “gang globalization” spread throughout communities, targeting people in need, teenagers, and women.⁵³

Although U.S. state and federal officials believed “[booting] to the other side of the border” proved sufficient in curtailing gang related violence, the Hispanic gangs did not disappear, nor did they stop their illegal corporations.⁵⁴ Central American gangs are practically in control of local and state governments throughout nations encompassing the Central American region. Many of the notorious gangsters who wreak havoc on the communities, bribe, threaten, or extort local governmental officials. These gang members create “friendships” with lawyers, prosecutors, politicians, criminals, border patrol agents, as well as truck drivers in an effort to mask their illegal activity.⁵⁵ Not only do the previously mentioned connections cover up their illegal activity but they also distort—rather positively—their reputation in society. Through these connections, the gangsters are no longer gangsters. They are donors, supporters, and contributors to the local government and economy.⁵⁶

Central American families are fleeing from the illicitly run local and state governments. Families are wanting to provide a better and safer life for their families. In some cases, families have no choice but to hire a *coyote* (a person who smuggles someone or multiple people over international borders). In *A History of Violence*, Martínez introduces a coyote, who faces charges of murder for assisting Los Zetas (a notorious Mexican gang)⁵⁷ with massacring over ten people

⁵² Maras: *Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, 38.

⁵³ Maras: *Gang Violence and Security*, 39.

⁵⁴ Óscar Martínez, *A History of Violence: Living and Dying in Central America*, Translated by John B. Washington and Daniela Ugaz, (London, New York: Verso, 2016) xx

⁵⁵ Martínez, *A History of Violence*, 11.

⁵⁶ Martínez, *A History of Violence*, 16.

⁵⁷ I will discuss Los Zetas later in this chapter.

attempting to cross illegally into the U.S.⁵⁸ Although *A History of Violence* discusses the unfortunate murders of people wanting to migrate into the U.S., the U.S. Department of Security details the deportations of Central Americans apprehended at the international border and are eventually sent to detention centers (or waiting centers) in Mexico.

According to “United States of America v. Marlon Isaac Guevara-Medina,” Guevara-Medina illegally crossed into the U.S. to escape from gang violence in Honduras. Guevara-Medina explains the harassment and death-threats he received for denying entry into a local gang.⁵⁹ Similarly to Guevara-Medina’s case, Nora Idalia Alvarado Reyes and her two children attempted to cross the U.S.-Mexico border, but were “returned” to Mexico, despite fleeing from Honduras.⁶⁰ The Reyes family had never visited Mexico nor did they have family or friends to live with. During her time in Mexico, Reyes remembers “men beating migrants with wooden planks” and shares a story of another woman who suffered a sexual assault while in Mexico while waiting to hear news regarding their own legal crossing. Another migrant caught for illegally crossing the U.S.-Mexico border details the extortion they endured at the hands of local gang members looking for easy money.⁶¹

The two discussed U.S. Department of Security court cases detail the lives and struggles of migrants wanting to have a better life for themselves and their families. Despite the families approaching safety in an illegal manner, their actions and risks highlight the immense dangers they are trying to abandon. They no longer want to live in fear. They no longer want to experience the horrors of rape. They want to feel as if they can go outside, walk to work, walk to

⁵⁸ Martínez, *A History of Violence*, 192.

⁵⁹ United States of America v. Marlon Isaac Guevara-Medina, United States District Court, S.D. California, August 20, 2018.

⁶⁰ Andrés Oswaldo Bollat Vasques v. Alejandrop Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security, United States District Court, D. Massachusetts, February 13, 2021.

⁶¹ Andrés Oswaldo Bollat Vasques v. Alejandrop Mayorkas.

school, or send their children outside to play without fear of death. The amount of violence happening in Latin America is on the rise.⁶² Women, indigenous people, and poor families deal with the effects of rapid industrialization, capitalism, neoliberalism, and corruption. Cartels and illegal gang activity not only ravage international relations as well as economic relations but destroy the trust between people and their government. In Central America, cartels and gangs control local law enforcement by funneling money as well as crafting relationships with leading politicians. Families in Central America and Mexico are tasked with the toughest job of all, surviving in a constant state of violence and abuse.

For women who are able to make it out of Guatemala, many women stay within the “zone of tolerance” right inside Mexico’s southern border.⁶³ The Zone of Tolerance houses small strip clubs who—usually—hire young women and mothers traveling to the U.S.-Mexico Border, aka Central American women. These strip clubs utilize the constant flow of women crossing Mexico’s southern border to fill the “market” that keeps the small towns afloat.⁶⁴ Central American women see their involvement within the Zone of Tolerance’s market as a self-employed entrepreneur, working to send money back home or pay for a coyote to guide them and their families to the U.S.⁶⁵ Despite the alluring factor of economic opportunity within the Zone of Tolerance, women and their bodies take on a monetary form—they become credit cards.⁶⁶ By partaking in prostitution, Central American women “buys [safety], a little bit of cash and the assurance that travel buddies won’t be killed.”⁶⁷ Central American women endure brutal

⁶² “Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico: Special Report 2021,” Department of Political Science and International Relations, *Justice in Mexico*, (University of San Diego, 2021) 42

⁶³ Óscar Martínez, *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail*, (New York: Verso, 2013) 68.

⁶⁴ Martínez, *The Beast*, 68.

⁶⁵ Martínez, *The Beast*, 70-71

⁶⁶ Martínez, *The Beast*, 73

⁶⁷ Martínez, *The Beast*, 73.

rapes and physical assaults on the road to the U.S.-Mexico border and rarely report assaults to local officials.⁶⁸ Women know, and expect, assault on the way to the land of the free.

Young adults set out on the path from Central America to the United States because there remains little economic opportunity to succeed, but many women and feminine-bodied people flee because of sexual and physical violence. In the 2019 article by Azam Ahmed, Ahmed interviews a 16-year-old (mother-to-be) as she remembers the domestic violence she experienced at the hands of her boyfriend. The young mother feared she would lose her child to her boyfriend's rage. She fled to her parents, who lived close to the Mexico-Guatemalan border, in hopes that her boyfriend would leave her and her unborn baby alone.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the soon-to-be-mother reunited with her boyfriend...who later assaulted both her mother and father. Despite the assault of two people, the boyfriend was only charged with a short prison sentence and is still (under Guatemalan law) able to see his unborn baby.⁷⁰ Another instance of gendered violence in Guatemala is the recent (2021) murder of Luz Maria, a government worker and mother.⁷¹ Neighbors hear her screams and pleads of help but no one believed they should call the police.⁷² Luz Maria's death in 2021 contributed to the approximately one death (of a woman) per day that Guatemalan officials investigate. According to "Hidden in Plain Sight: Violence Against Women in Mexico and Guatemala," Guatemala's treatment, involvement, and protection of women (especially Indigenous women) is not a historical phenomenon. Authors Adriana Beltrán and Laurie Freeman explain that Guatemala endured an almost 40-year war where women were

⁶⁸ "Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico: Special Report 2021," Department of Political Science and International Relations, *Justice in Mexico*, (University of San Diego, 2021) 19 and 23

⁶⁹ Azam Ahmed, Women Are Fleeing Death at Home. The U.S. Wants to Keep Them Out, *New York Times*, August 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/18/world/americas/guatemala-violence-women-asylum.html>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Oliver Pieper, In Guatemala, Women Fear for Their Lives, *Deutsche Welle*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/in-guatemala-women-fear-for-their-lives/a-57397987>

⁷² Pieper, In Guatemala, Women Fear for Their Lives.

brutalized by men.⁷³ In fact, the UN estimates that during the internal Guatemalan conflict about 50,000 women simply disappeared.⁷⁴

Women and feminine-bodied folk are not protected by the government of Guatemala.⁷⁵ The rapes, domestic assaults, and murders of women and femme-bodied people are under-investigated and under-funded. In an attempt to alter the lack of judicial prosecution by Guatemala, officials organized a “‘safe home’ for vulnerable and orphaned children, many of whom are escaping abuse, kidnapping or trafficking.”⁷⁶ Even though Guatemala organized and opened The Hogar Seguro de la Virgen de la Asunción to help survivors of sexual assault, incidences of abuse within the shelter remain present. A multilingual podcast “Women Resisting Violence” discusses a multitude of gender-based issues in Guatemala, Brazil, and the UK.⁷⁷ The podcast “aims to share important learning from workers and survivors themselves” in an effort to positively influence and bring change to policies pertaining to violence against girls and women.⁷⁸ A Guatemalan woman, Stef Arrega (and co-founder of Ocho Tijax⁷⁹) details how she and other women do not feel protected by authorities or the institutions “that should be there to protect [women].”⁸⁰ Arrega, Ocho Tijax, and the Guatemalan feminine community work together to protect each other, as friends and women standing in solidarity.

⁷³ Hidden in Plain Sight: Violence Against Women in Mexico and Guatemala, pg. 6.

⁷⁴ Hidden in Plain Sight

⁷⁵ “Women in Guatemala,” *USAID*, <https://www.usaid.gov/guatemala/women>

⁷⁶ Jelka Boesten, Cathy McIlwaine, and Rebecca Wilson, “Women in Sisterhood Resisting Violence in Guatemala,” *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, November 25, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2021/11/25/women-sisterhood-violence-guatemala/>

⁷⁷ “Women in Sisterhood Resisting Violence in Guatemala.”

⁷⁸ “Women in Sisterhood Resisting Violence in Guatemala.”

⁷⁹ Suan Shaw, “Inside Ocho Tijax: Meet the Women in Guatemala Offering Support in the Face of Horror,” *MS*, 11/20/2017, <https://msmagazine.com/2017/11/20/inside-ochotijax-meet-women-guatemala-offering-support-face-horror/>. Ocho Tijax is a grass-roots organization created by five Guatemalan women, Mayra Jimenez, Quimy de Leon, Maria Pena, Marianita Palencia, and Stef Arrega. Ocho Tijax supports survivors and aims to seek justice for survivors, especially those ignored and forgotten by the Guatemalan government.

⁸⁰ “Inside Ocho Tijax: Meet the Women in Guatemala Offering Support in the Face of Horror.”

Mistrust and disappointment in the government is urging women to take control of the narrative and attempt to change the social understanding of women's lives. La Cuerda is an online website that publishes essays, arts, and other literature in an effort to disseminate feminists ideologies as well as women's voices and experiences in Guatemalan society.⁸¹ This online newspaper publishes a variety works that focus on topics such as equity, positive sexual health education, and human rights information. La Cuerda's mission is to "[build] the feminist political subject, generating and strengthening processes of awareness and political action in favor of women"⁸² and presents this literature to everyone for free via PDF download. Despite La Cuerda's efforts in educating people on the importance of gendered equity, Guatemala remains one of the most dangerous places for women in the world.⁸³

The violence happening in Guatemala increased after the formation and dissemination of Los Zetas, a former security unit for the Gulf Cartel to one of the largest transnational illegal organizations operating in Central America.⁸⁴ It is important to give context about Los Zetas, a militarily trained group that continues to terrorize Guatemalans and Central Americans as they make their way to the U.S.-Mexico border. The illegal organization formed at the same time as Mexico's 2006 War on Drugs. The Gulf Cartel, located along Texas's southern border (closer to the Gulf of Mexico), contained several popular land and ocean ports, both leading to foreign nations. Several leading Mexican cartels (for example, The Sinaloa Cartel) made several attempts to take control of the Gulf Cartel's multiple drug plazas. In order to protect themselves and their drug territory, the Gulf Cartel hired deserters of the Mexican police force, who obtained

⁸¹ Asociación La Cueda, <http://lacuerdaguatemala.org/>

⁸² Asociación La Cueda, <http://lacuerdaguatemala.org/>

⁸³ Americas and the Caribbean, *UN Women*, <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/guatemala>

⁸⁴ Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, *Los Zetas Inc: Criminal Corporations, Energy, and Civil War in Mexico*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2017) 21.

experience in counter-insurgency.⁸⁵ Los Zetas protected The Gulf Cartel for several years but later took on monopolistic tendencies when they spread to southern regions of Mexico and into Central America. Since their introduction in the 2010s to Central America, Los Zetas broke into several regional groups, all operating on their own rules, with their own people, and involved in different illicit activities.⁸⁶

The insurgence of Los Zetas at the southernmost tip of Texas came as a surprise to the United States government, as no one knew The Gulf Cartel intended on curating a squad of federally-trained soldiers.⁸⁷ The soldiers and the Gulf Cartel caused violence to increase in Mexico's third largest city, Monterrey, and swayed local citizens to rally together (roughly 8,000 people) to protest the unwanted and unnecessary violence erupting in their city.⁸⁸ The violence witnessed in Monterrey soon became a commonality along all of the U.S.-Mexican border. Los Zetas and other maras crossed borders within Mexico and grew alongside narcotrafficking organizations.⁸⁹ The culmination of violent groups (narcotrafficking organizations, Los Zetas, and Maras) in the U.S.-Mexico border region, Mexico, and Central America created an environment of fear. As stated earlier in this chapter, the local and federal police department/agents did not have the ability (financially or logistically) to arrest, incriminate, and prosecute those causing all the violence. Illicit organizations turned cities along the U.S.-Mexico border into violent "buffer zones," as people from various areas of Central America and Mexico migrated to this area in hopes of smooth transitioning into the U.S. or a place where they could financially prepare themselves for their migration to another nation.

⁸⁵ Correa-Cabrera, *Los Zetas Inc.*, 21.

⁸⁶ Correa-Cabrera, *Los Zetas Inc.*, 51

⁸⁷ U.S. Department of State, Case No. F-2012-22873, Doc. No. C05261017, 1/2013, 2.

⁸⁸ U.S. Department of State, Case No. F-2012-22873, 3.

⁸⁹ John P. Sullivan, Transnational Gangs: The Impact of Third Generation Gangs in Central America, *Air & Space Power Journal*, 2008.

Ciudad Juárez, the sister-city to El Paso, Texas, came under close investigation by human rights organization for the hundreds (if not thousands) of missing and murdered women between the mid 1990s and early 2000s. Girls, teenagers, and adults fell victim to gendered violence, violence associated with women breaking free of the gendered norm which plagues much of Mexico and Latin America. The rise in the employment of women throughout northern Mexico is traced back to the 1960s, where foreign industries established factories (*maquiladoras*) along the border region. These maquiladoras hired both men and women, but women proved more agile and docile, making them the preferred employee. Maquiladoras attracted women from the interior and southern portions of Mexico, causing Ciudad Juárez (as well as other border cities) to become inundated with a booming population but little infrastructure to maintain the demographic changes. The economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s came to an abrupt halt with the devaluation of the peso, causing hundreds of maquiladoras to shut down.

North Mexico is so entangled in the economic transactions of the U.S. and other foreign powers that there remains little chance for the area to prosper on its own. The Mexican government is in partnership with Fortune 500 companies (General Motors, for example), allowing large corporations to settle on indigenous land, use the natural materials to create expensive products, and then export such products with little or no taxes or tariffs.⁹⁰ The corporations occupying the region utilize borderlanders and migrants for cheap, easy, and quick labor. These corporations use and abuse the land, employ poor, migrant young women to work at their production factories for approximately 12-hour shifts, earn very little in comparison to their male counterparts at the same time they are more likely to die or disappear.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Anzadúla, *Borderlands*, 32.

⁹¹ Natalie Panther, "Violence Against Women and Femicide in Mexico: The Case of Ciudad Juárez", (MA thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2007), 56.

The maquiladoras first dotted the border region during the Nixon administration (1969-1974). After the initial establishment of maquiladoras, the northern Mexican border region witnessed “hundreds of thousands” of migrants either crossing the border into the U.S. or settling in the border region, for economic stability.⁹² This first wave of migrants (late 1960s to early 1970s) from the southern portions of Mexico and sections of Central America filled maquiladoras until the devaluation of the peso during the 80s. The devaluation of the peso resulted in thousands of people losing their job or having little to no job opportunities. Thousands of people were jobless, and needing to support their family, people crossed the U.S.-Mexico border for economic opportunities. It was not until the 1990s that another resurgence of maquiladoras occurred, inviting the second wave of migrants to venture to Northern Mexico. Hundreds or thousands of people remained jobless, at the same time, the second wave of migrants traveled to Northern Mexico, creating an unmanageable population size. Along with deportations rising and the presence of maquiladoras, the border region’s population rose to unprecedented levels, creating dangerous living conditions for women.⁹³

In the early 1990s, the bodies of mutilated, raped, and murdered girls, teens, and young women were found in isolated areas throughout Ciudad Juárez and the surrounding desert. As bodies were discovered, the Mexican and U.S. authorities did nothing to slow or stop the killings. The Mexican local and state police did not complete proper investigations of crime scenes and the U.S. government (thinking of its economy) did not consider the killing of the Juárez women in their jurisdiction to investigate.⁹⁴ In *Border People*, Oscar Martínez conducted

⁹² Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press: 1994), 145.

⁹³ Martínez, *Border People*, 146.

⁹⁴ Christina Marín, “Staging Femicide/Confronting Reality: Negotiating Gender and Representation in Las Mujeres de Juárez,” *Gender Forum*, (2007), 2.

interviews with borderlanders, including a woman who had endured an attempted abduction. While this maquila worker waited for the bus, two men attempted to pull her into a car, but the woman got away. The woman and her family reported the attempted abduction to the local police, but the police neglected to assist the family. Martínez details how the local police requested the young woman's father for financial assistance to conduct a proper investigation.⁹⁵ Despite women being the prime workers for the maquiladoras, the safety of women remained low and women's bodies became "as expendable as pennies" in the machine that is Ciudad Juárez.⁹⁶ The shifts for the factories require women to walk through the dark at odd hours, placing them in dangerous situations as they venture from impoverished neighborhoods to the corporate-funded bus stop, taking them to their shift.

The large portion of the women who are found raped, mutilated, and murdered throughout the Ciudad Juárez region are those who work in maquiladoras. Studies show that the way in which the female victims are tortured is a form of control and power, eluding to the notion and hypothesis that the mass murders of women is *femicide*, the intended violence against women in an attempt to show control.⁹⁷ Femicide is used to maintain some sort of social, cultural, and/or economic control and occurs in areas with little political infrastructure and economic status.⁹⁸ In the case of the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez, a large portion of the women who experienced a violent death worked at the maquiladoras, reinforcing the idea that men (whether it be police, illegal corporations, or serial murderers) are killing women as a way

⁹⁵ Martínez, *Border People*, 188

⁹⁶ Alicia Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female: The Millers Compensation for 'Free' Trade" in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera*, ed. Alicia Gaspar de Alba with Georgina Guzmán, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 63.

⁹⁷ Natalie Panther, "Violence Against Women and Femicide in Mexico: The Case of Ciudad Juárez", (MA thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2007), 4.

⁹⁸ Martha Idalia Chew Sánchez, "Femicide: Theorizing Border Violence," *The Latin American Studies Association*, 49 (2014), 265-266.

to maintain societal control. As stated in “Violence Against Women and Femicide in Mexico: The Case of Ciudad Juárez,” Dr. Natalie Panther explains that the murders are “ an [attempt] to maintain the patriarchal system and to ensure the continuation of the subjugation of women in Mexico.”⁹⁹ Panther’s research underpins that there remains little scholarship that focuses on both gender and the border region.

Women occupying a secondary role in Mexican society is not a novel idea but rather a normality in Mexican culture. Mexico and Mexican culture are steeped in being patriarchal; Men are the leaders and providers of the family. In *The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the categories of women in Mexico. The women are *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, *la Chingada*, and *la Llorona*—The Three Mothers.¹⁰⁰ Women are expected to embody *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, an important figure in the Mestiza identity. The Virgin of Guadalupe is the fusion of the Old world to the New, the spiritual symbol of Mexico, and the symbol of hope and survival. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* represents anything from mother to feminism—she is the model for Mexican women. *La Llorona* is the mother who lost her children, she weeps and cries for her loved ones. Her pain and longing came as a result of jealousy when she witnessed her husband committing adultery. *La Llorona*’s jealousy fuels her rage and the killing of her children. She represents a mother who has not only failed her children, but her husband. Lastly, *la Chingada* is understood as a slur or negative understanding/representation of a woman. *La Chingada* is one of the many nicknames for Malinche, the indigenous woman who is known for becoming Hernán Cortés’s lover and a person who assisted in the demise of the Aztec empire. Women who fall into this category deviate from their families, economic roles, or societal roles, it is understood that they “fucked” someone or something over. When women break away from their societal or familial roles,

⁹⁹ Natalie Panther, “Violence Against Women and Femicide in Mexico,” 2.

¹⁰⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 53.

Anzaldúa states that envy follows closely behind.¹⁰¹ Women are “the stranger, the other,” they are expected to remain in the culturally established norms, laws, and expectations. Laws and culture are made by men.¹⁰²

This patriarchal way of life is still present in modern-day Mexico, and still dominates much of the political thought and action surrounding the missing and murdered women. Prior to the Presidential election of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador told his supporters he would seek the incrimination of those who are abducting and murdering women throughout Mexico, but since his time in office, President Obrador has not focus on curtailing the rising statistics of the Mexican Femicide. President Obrador “[fails] to take rampant sexual assault seriously” and seems to feel more comfortable in cartel-operated cities.¹⁰³ While traveling throughout regions of Mexico, President Obrador surrounds himself with massive security details when experiencing protests or outcries from women, pleading for him to take a stronger stance against the missing women, begging him to find missing mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends.

All women of Mexico and Central America are impacted by the country-wide femicides. Women journalists are conducting their own research, collecting data from missing person’s reports, local police stations, and social media to provide a detailed map, timeline, and memorial of the missing and murdered women, teens, and children. Frida Guerrero, a journalist and popular blogger, believes the Mexican femicides need to be seen as a national emergency.¹⁰⁴ Guerrero’s blog, “El Blog de Frida” contains the dates and locations of where the bodies of women and children are found. The blog also releases information regarding the victims:

¹⁰¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 40.

¹⁰² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 38.

¹⁰³ Miriam Berger, “Women in Mexico are Protesting Femicide. Police have Responded with Force,” Washington Post, 5/9/2021.

¹⁰⁴ Tom Phillips, “Mexico: Activists Voice Anger at [President’s] Failure to Tackle ‘Femicide Emergency’,” *The Guardian*, March 5th, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/05/mexico-femicide-emergency-activists>

messages from families, messages detailing how loved ones are impacted by femicide, as well as allowing visitors to view an interactive map detailing locations of dumped bodies.¹⁰⁵

Guerrera's physical and virtual forms of activism rallies women together, bringing a sense of community in a time where women feel as if they do not matter. In response to Guerrera's activism, President Obrador states that the violence (protests) of women are an attempt to obstruct his political control of the Mexican government. President Obrador sees the women's demonstrations as a neoliberal political move from previous and/or competing political organizations.¹⁰⁶ Despite President Obrador's promise to take a harsher stance against sexual violence and femicide, President Obrador interprets the demonstrations and protests organized by women as a threat, which relates to La Chingada, who Anzaldúa mentions in *Borderlands*. Those women who break away from the social norm, take a stand, and fight for their basic human rights are no longer seen or understood as women—they are traitors. They are fucking something up.

Similarly to la Chingada, present-day women are no longer remaining quiet and complacent in the political, social, and economic treatment they endure. In "Perdomo v. Holder," Lesly Yajayra Perdomo, a native and refugee from Central America, sought asylum due to the "high incidence of murder of women" between the ages of fourteen and forty, and "her own status as a woman." Perdomo goes on to explain that if she went back to Guatemala she would "be considered an American with financial resources" because she resided in the U.S., even as an undocumented immigrant.¹⁰⁷ Not only is Perdomo afraid for her safety as a result of her gender, the risk of complete isolation (no family or friends) creates a conducive (dangerous) environment

¹⁰⁵ El Blog de Frida, <https://fridaguerrera.blogspot.com/?view=timeslide>

¹⁰⁶ Phillips, "Mexico: Activists Voice Anger at [President's] Failure to Tackle 'Femicide Emergency'"

¹⁰⁷ Perdomo v. Eric H. Holder Jr., Attorney General, United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit, No. 06-71653, (2010).

for people to commit crimes with little or no prosecution.¹⁰⁸ For Perdomo, her pleas for safety were ignored. The judge denied Perdomo's application for asylum because the ages that Perdomo mentioned were targeted were too large to create much concern.¹⁰⁹ Looking more deeply at the Gender Guidelines of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, it explains "that females, or young girls, or a particular clan [meet] our definition of a particular social group."¹¹⁰ Although this example does not specifically discuss the U.S-Mexico border region, it does underpin that women do live in a constant state of fear. The idea of the Three Mothers, economic stability, and masculinity intertwine together to create regions safe to kill and abuse women. Perdomo's experience outside and inside the courtroom show that despite her presenting the information of mass-murder and litter persecution to a body of government, there remains minute action to safeguard women from murder, torture, and abuse.

Frida Guerrero's personal work and investigation skills challenges the role of local law enforcement as well as all of the governmental entities spanning throughout Mexico. Guerrero proves that one person, one organization, and one determination can provide information on those who are missing. Women and activists like Guerrero undermine the role of the Mexican government and shed light on the neglectfulness executed by local, state, and federal police. La Chinagada does maintain a negative reputation in some Mexican literature (Malinche being Cortez's interpreter), however, for the purpose of this thesis, la Chingada represents social change; la Chinagada is a rebel; la Chingada represents women breaking free of a controlling society. The women of Mexico are taking a stand and are crying-out for assistance in this decades-long mass-murdering of women. Women, like la Chingada, are turning their backs on a

¹⁰⁸ Perdomo v. Eric H. Holder Jr., 5.

¹⁰⁹ Perdomo v. Eric H. Holder Jr., 5.

¹¹⁰ Perdomo v. Eric H. Holder Jr., 9.

society that continues to abuse them and are working tirelessly to create a better, and safer, society for women to work and be respected by men, law enforcement, and the government.

The toxic masculine culture that makes up Mexico (and that of Latin America) is challenged by the actions of women working in the maquiladoras. Women are no longer maintaining their roles as perfect symbols of mothers, daughters, and wives (la Virgen de Guadalupe), but are tackling the capitalistic giants that are dominating the U.S.-Mexico border. Although women are taking on bigger economic roles within the society of northern Mexico, they are also subject to rape, murder, and living in fear of future attack.¹¹¹ Despite the amount of murdered and reposted abductions, the Mexican local/state governments neglect the proper handling of cases, eluding to the notion that Mexican society is built for men, by men. The lives of women are not taken seriously, even though women constitute the majority of the maquiladora work force. Women of Ciudad Juárez and the entirety of the U.S.-Mexico border region are exploited for American and Mexican economic gain. The following chapter examines the lives of women who occupy an economic space within the border region during the early years of the War on Drugs. Women and their environment, social pressures, and economic identities will curate a deeper understanding for the reader to comprehend that the complex roles women obtain in society are perpetuating a cycle of exploitation at the hands of patriarchal corporations.

¹¹¹ Perdomo v. Eric H. Holder Jr.

Chapter Three: Calderón's Mexico and the Women Who Fuel the Illicit Economy

The relationship between the United States, illicit drugs, and Mexico spans from the early 1900s to present day. Drugs did not instill worry for Mexico, or the United States, until the rise of morphine and the employment of Harry Anslinger as the first commissioner of the Federal Narcotics Bureau in the U.S. From the 1920s onward, the relationship between drugs and Mexico erupted into a war between government entities, cartel organizations, and women's bodies. Violence associated with this tumultuous relationship reached new levels of concern when Mexican President Felipe Calderón started his *sexenio* (six-year Presidential term) in 2006. President Felipe Calderón pledged to break up the illegal organizations and to "[strengthen]...the justice and police institutions."¹¹² President Calderón did not tackle this feat on his own but received immense support from the U.S. military and government entities.

The 2006 declaration of war in Mexico, by the Mexican President, truly embodies the definition of intrastate violence¹¹³ and contributes to the dismantling of Mexican society and economic opportunities. The war in Mexico and the violence associated with it cultivate an environment where people are unable to comfortably live their lives without fear. President Calderón's War on Drugs inadvertently led to more violence, more corruption, and more pain. The War on Drugs and President Calderón ushered in an appetizing allure to the illegal market of narcotics. Rather than strengthening Mexico's justice and police organizations, Calderón created a society where illegal participation proved more feasible than legal living. Through the 2006 declaration of the War on Drugs in Mexico, generations of children and women felt as if there

¹¹² Jorge Chabat, *Combatting Drugs in Mexico under Calderón: The Inevitable War*, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas: Mexico, 2010, 1.

¹¹³ Intrastate violence is the sustained political violence that takes place between armed groups representing the state and one, or more, non-state groups. The violence associated with this term usually has significant international risks or effects.

remained no viable option of life, leading them to take-on fatalistic tendencies. In order to underpin the societal pressures felt by Mexico's children and women, this chapter will review Calderón's presidency, the collapse of the formal Mexican economy, and how the lack of economic opportunities leads to a fatalistic outlook on life and dangerous economic decisions for women, teenagers, and young girls.

Prior to Calderón's admission as President of Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governed Mexico with the support and connections of illegal organizations, especially drug cartels.¹¹⁴ PRI and illegal corporations worked together to ensure the continuation of control and profit. These two sectors of society ("legal" and illegal) flourished with the rise of smuggling drugs/narcotics across the U.S.-Mexico border. Under the reign of the PRI the "labor environment [was] characterized by precarious jobs, informality, and unemployment."¹¹⁵ There remained a level of tolerance amongst the illegal corporations and the local, state, and federal branches of the Mexican government, allowing for a form of harmonious duality.¹¹⁶ Despite the blurring of illegal and legal sectors of society ("harmony"), the 2000 democratization of Mexico led to an increase in violence, distrust with the government, and a proliferation of drug smuggling. There remained little to no accountability for officials impugned in corruption.

The trend of impunity and active illegal organizations remained present in Mexico as Felipe Calderón took office in 2006. President Calderón entered his presidency with the belief that he was drug cartel's "worst enemy."¹¹⁷ Calderón and his administration launched "police-

¹¹⁴ Jonathan D. Rose and Roberto Zepeda. *Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico: The Transition from Felipe Calderón to Enrique Peña Nieto*, (Lexington Books: Maryland), 2016, 3.

¹¹⁵ Rose and Zepeda, *Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico*, 9

¹¹⁶ Jorge Chabat, *Combatting Drugs in Mexico under Calderón: The Inevitable War*, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas: Mexico, 2010, 2.

¹¹⁷ *El Narco: La Guerra Fallida*. Punto de Lectura: Mexico, 2009.

military operations” in states with higher cartel and drug activity.¹¹⁸ Baja California, Chihuahua, and Sinaloa saw Calderón’s *Plataforma México*, a program Calderón designed to professionalize the Mexican police force, create an interconnected system of communications, and provide military training.¹¹⁹ Although Calderón believed his declaration of war against drug cartels would curtail the illegal narcotic trading as well as limit the amount of corruption associated with the cartels, his War on Drugs introduced Mexico, and its people, to a prolonged emotional depression. Mexicans grew scared of their neighborhoods, their community, and for their loved ones. From the time President Calderón took office in 2006 until the end of his term in 2012, it is estimated that approximately 60,000 Mexicans died from the violence associated with the War on Drugs.¹²⁰

In 2007 President Calderón enforced the *Mérida Initiative*, with the purpose of assisting the Mexican government in their fight to combat trafficking and organized crime.¹²¹ The U.S. government supported President Calderón and his assertion of the initiative but created stipulations for the Mexican government to abide by.¹²² One of the stipulations explained that 15% of the money and resources used to fund the initiative would be utilized to “prevent human rights abuses” in Mexico, throughout Central America, and sections of the Caribbean. The *Mérida Initiative* allocated most of the resources (85%) to providing military training to Mexico’s police force, renovating the judiciary system and revamping security institutions all in efforts of combatting illegal drug corporations.¹²³ More specifically, the initiative focused on

¹¹⁸ Jorge Chabat, *Combatting Drugs in Mexico under Calderón: The Inevitable War*, 6.

¹¹⁹ Chabat, *Combatting Drugs in Mexico under Calderón*, 7.

¹²⁰ Ioan Grillo, “Mexico: Calderón’s Legacy of Blood and Busts,” <https://theworld.org/stories/2012-11-30/mexico-calderon-s-legacy-blood-and-busts>, November 30, 2012.

¹²¹ Jonathan D. Rosen and Roberto Zepeda. *Organized Crime, drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico: The Transition from Felipe Calderón to Enrique Peña Nieto*, Lexington Books: Maryland, 2016.

¹²² Rosen and Zepeda, *Organized Crime, drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico*, 18.

¹²³ Rosen and Zepeda, *Organized Crime, drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico*, 20.

boat and air surveillance, training for police and judicial systems, updating inspection equipment, and programs to prevent overall crime. Although the Mérida Initiative's creation focused on the curtailing and eradication of drugs, the use of military force by the state increased the violence and death resulting from drug cartels and illegal corporations.¹²⁴ Within Mexico's military surge, President Calderón also focused his attention on capturing Kingpins of cartels. The "Kingpin" Strategy focused on capturing the leader of drug organizations in hopes that it would dismantle the foundations of the illegal corporation.¹²⁵ The Kingpin strategy proved that despite the death of a leader/kingpin, drug organizations will continue to flourish when there remains demand for narcotics. The Kingpin strategy proved effective in bringing down the leaders of cartels but the strategy inadvertently led to the splintering of one organization into several small clans or *maras*.¹²⁶ There is no decrease in violence; There is no stopping of drug trafficking; There is adaptation, accompanied with violence. Women's ability to remain active in society is their form of adaptation to the bustling violence that encompasses much of the border region and Mexico. Through their economic decisions, women are doing the best they can in an environment focused on curtailing the cartels and illicit organizations.

In conjunction with Calderón's declaration of war in Mexico, the Mexican economy struggled to stay afloat. Whilst the War on Drugs raged, maquiladoras occupied much of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The maquiladoras displaced small, local businesses that once benefitted the regional economy and financially displaced locals.¹²⁷ Women served as the population maquiladoras usually hired because "the tasks performed required the precision of

¹²⁴ Jonathan D. Rosen and Roberto Zepeda. *Organized Crime, drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico*, 24.

¹²⁵ Rosen and Zepeda, *Organized Crime, drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico*, 25.

¹²⁶ Rosen and Zepeda, *Organized Crime, drug Trafficking, and Violence in Mexico*, 27.

¹²⁷ Mike Tapia, *Gangs of the El Paso-Juárez Borderland*, "Ciudad Juárez: The Epicenter, Then and Now," 2019, 84.

small hands.”¹²⁸ Despite the massive hiring of women (a feat that is reminiscent of social progress) much of the problems occupying the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are all associated with women, their lives, and their bodies. The hiring of women and the displacement of small businesses, and subsequently businessowners, created an environment where people grew economically desperate. According to “Todos Somos Juárez,” Ciudad Juárez saw a 24% decrease in formal jobs, putting Ciudad Juárez’s unemployment population above all of Mexico’s unemployment statistics. In fact, studies show that even though men lived in the same household as their family members (wives, mothers, sisters, etc.), they usually remained unemployed or underemployed.¹²⁹

Borderland and migrant women living in Ciudad Juárez filled an economic space that shattered the social norm of Mexico. Rather than live at home, raise children, and tend to household duties, women take on a “masculine” role by working long and often dangerous hours at the maquiladoras. For all women (migrants and local borderlanders¹³⁰), the “border represents opportunities unavailable elsewhere” and is seen as steady income.¹³¹ Working and making money is the driving force of employment at the maquiladoras. The workers (women) are paid relatively nothing in comparison to the cost of the products and entire corporation revenue. At the same time as President Calderón’s War on Drugs (2006-2012) and the “duty-free”¹³² international corporations access to 60% of the world’s economy¹³³, women recall earning less

¹²⁸ Felipe Calderón, “Todos Somos Juárez: An Innovative Strategy to Tackle Violence and Crime,” *Latin America Policy Journal at the Harvard Kennedy School*, 3.

¹²⁹ Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, *The Maquila Women: The Characteristics of the Work Force in Ciudad Juárez*, “For we are solo, I and my people,” 49.

¹³⁰ I use this term to refer to those who live in a borderland region.

¹³¹ *Border People*, “Migrants and Workers,” 146.

¹³² Mexico’s Economy: Facts, Opportunities, and Challenges, *DIMSA*, <https://dimsa.com/mexicos-economy-facts-opportunities-challenges/>, 5.

¹³³ Mexico’s Economy: Facts, Opportunities, and Challenges, 3.

than 300 pesos in one work week and still not having enough money for food.¹³⁴ Women discuss leaving their young children behind, sometimes with a neighbor or sometimes on their own.¹³⁵ Women also recount the copious amounts of sexual harassment they endured while on the clock or while going to work.¹³⁶ Even though women are hired at a higher rate than men to work at the maquiladoras, women endure more social prejudice, violence, and less social agency.

Calderón's War on Drugs did not only declare a full-scale assault on narcotics but also on the lives of children and young women. As stated earlier in this chapter, young mothers took on a more "masculine" role within society by working at maquiladoras. Mothers had to leave their children behind in order to embody the role required of them by the international maquiladoras. Accompanying this "new" type of woman in Mexico is "the lack of schools, day care facilities, community centers" that provided children a safe place to go while their mother's worked.¹³⁷ The lack of resources and activities to occupy children placed them in an extreme place of vulnerability to participate in "anti-social" behaviors.¹³⁸ Children (boys and girls) took part in drinking, abusing drugs, violence, and gang involvement.¹³⁹ Felipe Calderón states "the abandonment" of these children by their mothers (those who are statistically hired more frequently than men by the maquiladoras) are causing children to partake in illegal activities. Rather than place blame on the social framework of the U.S.-Mexico borderland, local/state/federal corruption, or the economic collapse of the local economy, Calderón believes that lacking a mother figure detours children from living a prosperous life. In reality, children of

¹³⁴ Interview by David Bacon, "Mexico: The Life of a Maquiladora Worker," 8/9/1996, <http://dbacon.igc.org/Mexico/07MaLife.htm>

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ *Border People*, 163.

¹³⁷ Calderón, "Todos Somos Juárez: An Innovative Strategy to tackle Violence and Crime," 3.

¹³⁸ Calderón, "Todos Somos Juárez," 3.

¹³⁹ Calderón, "Todos Somos Juárez," 3.

the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and/or children who live with a working mother are not subject to illegal participation because of their mother, but as a result of the environment around them.¹⁴⁰

Rather than blame women for the younger generation's actions, children are born into a society that diffuses fatalism or fatalistic tendencies. Fatalism is the belief that no matter the decisions or actions one makes within their life, their fate is predetermined.¹⁴¹ Fatalism and fatalistic understandings of life result from several societal characteristics, such as the economy, generational trauma,¹⁴² and the understanding of "self-protecting behaviors."¹⁴³ The War on Drugs and the Maquiladoras, together, created an environment that facilitates the idea and understanding that despite legal efforts and legal participation in society, there will always be some form of "deterioration" of oneself or one's circumstances.¹⁴⁴ Children and young women who experienced the War on Drugs suffer from an "absence of any real [opportunity]" and thus turn to whatever option is available to them—legal or illegal.¹⁴⁵ While mothers are working, being the breadwinner of their family, children are faced with the task of surviving in the same *barrios* (neighborhoods) as cartel and gang members.¹⁴⁶

Although women are embodying a more ostensibly masculine and, by definition, liberating job by working at the maquiladoras, they still remain beneath, or subordinate, to men. Women's bodies and minds are occupied with the thoughts of simply living to the next day.

¹⁴⁰ Javier Valdez Cárdenas, *The Taken*, 96.

¹⁴¹ Gabriele Ruiu, *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*, "Is Fatalism a Cultural Belief" An Empirical Analysis on the Origin of Fatalistic Tendencies," 2.

¹⁴² Trauma that is not just experienced by one person but is continued on through the latter generations. Generational Trauma is also known as Transgenerational Trauma or Intergenerational Trauma.

¹⁴³ "Is Fatalism a Cultural Belief", 2.

¹⁴⁴ Andreas Maercker, Menachem Ben-Ezra, Oscar A. Esparza, and Mareike Augsburger, *European journal of Psychotraumatology*, "Fatalism as a Traditional Cultural Belief Potentially Relevant to Trauma Sequelae: Measurement Equivalence, Extent and Associations in Six Countries, 2.

¹⁴⁵ "The War on Drugs Victimized a Generation. Now We Have to Give Them a Future: An Interview with Pedro Carrizalez," Interviewed by Kurt Hackbarth, 1, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/04/war-on-drugs-amlo-pedro-carrizales>

¹⁴⁶ "The War on Drugs Victimized a Generation. Now We Have to Give Them a Future: An Interview with Pedro Carrizalez," 2.

Femme maquila workers “busy [themselves]”¹⁴⁷ with machinery and the long hours in an attempt to escape the horrors of society. Women believe obtaining a formal job will provide for their family, but women inadvertently contribute to the continuation of illegal corporations. This is not an intended effect of women working but one resulting from Mexico’s War on Drugs hyper-militaristic approach (violence) to tackling the drug trade.

Women work, children are unsupervised, and fathers (if present) work occasional legal or illegal jobs all of which fall victim to the exploitation of illicit organizations. For the children and women who are recruited or choose to partake in the illicit economy, they are actively using their oppressors’ tools in an attempt to change their life or to dismantle the foundation of the oppressor.¹⁴⁸ Rather than live inactive in a patriarchal society, women (whether they work in the legal or illegal sector) are proclaiming a larger space in their environment; they are utilizing their maternity to “open social power [to] women.”¹⁴⁹ Women’s usage of this notion of maternity creates a connection within oneself and within the female population. Women partaking in the multiple sectors of society are no longer relying on men but are relying on themselves, cultivating a stronger sense of self, community, and belonging. Within the case of the women who work in the maquiladoras, there is a sense that their legal participation in the economy is a fight against the illegal, and corrupt, sector of society. Maquila women are law-abiding people who live with little money or resources but they are resisting the temptations of illegality. The children and women who seek another route of employment (illegal employment) understand

¹⁴⁷ *Boderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 67.

¹⁴⁸ *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 95.

¹⁴⁹ “The Masters Tools Will never Dismantle the Masters House,” Audre Lorde, 1.

that their participation is (like Malinche/la Chingada¹⁵⁰) “fucking” the Mexican society that contributed to the fracturing of Mexican culture, life, and economy.

Women who are active in the illicit economy are reminiscent of la Chingada because they actively engage in something that is socially different, “deceptive,” or aggressive.¹⁵¹ There are many ways to use and articulate the phrase “la Chingada” but almost all of the time it is used in an aggressor manner. La chingada “denotes violence, an emergence from oneself to penetrate another by force.”¹⁵² When applying the phrase, la chingada, to a person or a population, it is understood that people are “breaking” away from someone and/or something. In the case of women departing from their socially determined role of “mother,” they are acting in the same sense as the phrase (or verb) la chingada. Women are stepping into a masculine role within the economy, “[ripping] open the chingada,”¹⁵³ and challenging the notion of normality.¹⁵⁴ Rather than use this phrase as an offensive term towards women, this thesis uses it as a way to underpin that women *chingar* on social norms, they inflict some form of action on their economic relationship with men and the Mexican society.

The generation of people living in Mexico during and after the War on Drugs grew up in a society steeped in violence and illegal activity. Women’s participation in the formal economy and the lack of reliable resources (day cares, schools, community centers, libraries, etc.) created an environment perpetuating the illegal lifestyle through the use of children and teenage boys and girls. One young woman who evolved into a symbol of women empowerment in the drug trade is someone known as la Catrina. Not only is la Catrina known as the goddess of death, but

¹⁵⁰ La Chingada/Malinche is the mythical Mother. She represents Maternity. La Chingado is the mother who suffers, physically or metaphorically.

¹⁵¹ Octavio, The Sons of La Malinche, 1

¹⁵² Octavio, The Sons of La Malinche, 1

¹⁵³ Octavio, The Sons of La Malinche, 1

¹⁵⁴ Octavio, The Sons of La Malinche, 2

is understood as a fierce symbol for “laugh[ing] at death itself” and a symbol of equality—everyone is equal in death.¹⁵⁵ La Catrina, or Maria Guadalupe Lopez Esquivel, came from poor origins in Tepalatepec, Mexico, and is referred to as a “narco [junior].”¹⁵⁶ Within the slang of narcotics, women who are involved are organized into a group known as “narco juniors,” even though they are young adults and armed with heavy-military grade weapons. La Catrina trained as a *sicaria*, a hitwoman, and impressed leaders of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. In October of 2019, she orchestrated an ambush on state police which resulted in the death of 14 police officers. Within the same month, la Catrina also assisted in the planning of another ambush, this one targeting 40 state police officers. La Catrina is recognized as one of the leading assassins and plaza bosses, an esteemed position for *sicarios/sicarias* in the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. Despite her alias (la Catrina) and her record with the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, Maria Guadalupe Lopez Esquivel is grouped in a subordinate role or categorization.

Plaza bosses¹⁵⁷ create their own killing-squad and have the power to orchestrate assassinations and peddle drugs to other plazas. La Catrina followed the demands and instructions given by el Menchito, el Mencho’s son and high-ranking member of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, and did so with pride and ambition. Although la Catrina is known for her ruthlessness, she died in January 2020 during a shoot-out with state police officers who blocked the entrance/exit of the plaza la Catrina controlled.¹⁵⁸ La Catrina embraced her role as an assassin

¹⁵⁵ Christine Delsol, “La Catrina: Mexico’s Grande Dame of Death”, Christine Delsole, *SFGate*, 10/25/2011, <https://www.sfgate.com/mexico/mexicomix/article/La-Catrina-Mexico-s-grande-dame-of-death-2318009.php>

¹⁵⁶ “La Catrina,” Del Glamour y las Armas Chapadas en Oro al Videro de sus Últimos Instante de Agonía.” *El blog del Narco*, January 20, 2020, <https://elblogdelnarco.com/2020/01/20/la-catrina-del-glamour-y-las-armas-chapadas-en-oro-al-video-de-sus-ultimos-instantes-de-agonia/>

¹⁵⁷ Those who control a specific area correlated with the drug trade. Once someone is a plaza boss, they lead gunmen, instruct hitmen, and hire their own workers.

¹⁵⁸ “La Catrina,” Del Glamour y las Armas Chapadas en Oro al Videro de sus Últimos Instante de Agonía.”

for the Jalisco New General Cartel and remains a symbol of the “success” women can achieve in an overwhelmingly male-dominated occupational sphere.

Another Mexican drug cartel, The Gulf Cartel, partakes in the recruitment and training of sicarias. In August of 2019, Blog del Narco posted an article discussing the Gulf Cartel’s recent social media posts showing off young girls totting and firing guns. According to Blog del Narco, the Gulf Cartel, as well as other rivaling cartels, exploit innocent young girls, some who are not of legal age. In this case for The Gulf Cartel, the young girls featured on social media are presumed to be “hawks,” informants, to alert higher-level cartel members of any invading presence or person.¹⁵⁹ The *Marucheros*, a group of adolescent cartel members (hawks), are tasked with alerting other members of strange or dangerous actions. Within The Gulf Cartel, the *marucheros* are also used as drug mules, but if they are young girls, it is presumed they are sexually exploited and used as bait.¹⁶⁰ Other Mexican cartels use *marucheros* for security and local surveillance. The “hawks” are the lowest level of the drug organization and some eventually climb up the ladder of prestige—if they do not get arrested or killed.¹⁶¹

At the age of 23, la Güera, Daniela “N,” was the leader of a group of hitmen, and prior to her leadership role, she served as a “hawk” for the Northeast Cartel.¹⁶² La Güera is suspected of ordering the killing of anti-kidnapping prosecutor Lucia Patricia Butrón River.¹⁶³ It is also

¹⁵⁹ Los Jovenes Sicarias De Los Marucheros Célula del C.D.G Presumen Su Belleza Y Exhiben Sus Armas En Redes, *El Blog Del Narco*, August 6, 2019, <https://elblogdelnarco.com/2019/08/06/las-jovenes-sicarias-de-los-marucheros-celula-del-c-d-g-presumen-su-belleza-y-exhiben-sus-armas-en-redes/>

¹⁶⁰ Los Jovenes Sicarias De Los Marucheros Célula del C.D.G Presumen Su Belleza Y Exhiben Sus Armas En Redes.

¹⁶¹ “‘Los Marucheros’”, la célula del cártel del Noreste que recluta mujeres y niños”, *La Silla Rota*, November, 7, 2019, <https://lasillarota.com/nacion/los-marucheros-la-celula-del-cartel-del-noreste-que-recluta-mujeres-y-ninos/298265>

¹⁶² “Las Marucheras”: los jovenes sicarias del Cartel del Noreste”, *Infobae*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2019/04/19/las-marucheras-las-jovenes-sicarias-del-cartel-del-noreste/>

¹⁶³ “La joven de 23 años que era jefa de una célula de sicarios del Cártel del Noreste”, *Infobae*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2019/04/08/la-joven-de-23-anos-que-era-jefa-de-una-celula-de-sicarios-del-cartel-del-noreste/>

assumed that la Güera was recruited between the age of 9 to 11 years of age. Once the recruited children reach the age of maturity, and complete cartel-related tasks, children have the opportunity to operate their own plaza. This is the path la Güera took and the path which other children aspire to take. The arrest of la Güera and the incredible surge of young girls in the drug cartels mark the end of the original role of women as the boss' wife, money manager, or the business manager—now they are active players and are seeking positions of power.¹⁶⁴ Within this, they still occupy a subordinate role to their male counter-parts. Although some do reach levels of notoriety, as seen in the case of la Catrina.

Maria Celeste Mendoza, a teenage hitwoman for Los Zetas Cartel, received a monetary offer three-times larger than the national average.¹⁶⁵ Mendoza received 12,000 pesos, roughly \$1,000 US dollars, every two weeks for her work as a hitwoman. The Binational Center for Human Rights in Tijuana states that organized crime is now a promising job opportunity for younger generations. This is because the youth unemployment rate doubled in the last ten years, thus making it incredibly difficult for teenagers to financially support their dreams and future endeavors.¹⁶⁶ In fact, in “The Youth Employment Crisis” online article, statistics shows that younger people become involved in the informal economic sector because of the lack of occupational opportunities. Within the same economic article, local Mexican businesses do not offer benefits or reliable pay, thus leaving the younger Mexican generation with little to no money for savings, education, or retirement. In June 2011, six teenage recruits were arrested in Mexico for their participation in organized crime. One teenage girl saying, “I’m a hitwoman for

¹⁶⁴ “La joven de 23 años que era jefa de una célula de sicarios del Cártel del Noreste”, *Infobae*.

¹⁶⁵ Dave Graham, Mexican Teenage Girls Train as Drug Cartel Killers, *Reuters*, June 17, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-drugs-teenagers/mexican-teenage-girls-train-as-drug-cartel-killers-idUSTRE75G5F820110617>

¹⁶⁶ Dave Graham, Mexican Teenage Girls Train as Drug Cartel Killers.

the Zetas. I spent two months in training and I've only been one [a hitwomen] for three or four days.”¹⁶⁷ Based on *Reforma* Newspaper, minors charged with involvement in organized crime increased from eight people in 2007 to over two-hundred in 2010.

The women mentioned above are all examples of how fatalism and the War on Drugs can create an understanding that illegal occupations have the same, or possibly more, opportunities of growth as legal jobs. Rather than take on a legal role within society, women perceive the illegal market as a functional way to earn money, create a legacy, and to participate in something that will influence change (whether it be for their family, themselves, etc). The women who partake in the illegal economy and women who choose to work in maquiladoras both embody a role that is abnormal for women in Mexican society. Rather than devote hours at home, tending to the family or tidying their surroundings, women are actively placing themselves in danger, despite the risks associated—and widely known risks—with their occupational decisions. Fatalism, the hyper-militaristic environment of post-democratized Mexico, and the little economic opportunities contribute to women's changing role within Mexican society. The changing role of women in Mexican society is inadvertently killing and continuing the exploitation of women, regardless of their legal or illegal ties. Despite the social progress of women's role in the economy, their lives, their contributions, and their bodies are abused for the sake of the continuation of an economic entity. President Felipe Calderón's War on Drugs did not only cause the increase in violence throughout Mexico, but it also created a social calling of women to approach their lives through a fatalistic lens, forcing women to ask themselves “what do we need to do to survive?”

¹⁶⁷ Geoffrey Ramsey, Poverty a Recruitment Tool for Mexico's Criminal Gangs, *Insight Crime*, July 20, 2011, <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/poverty-a-recruitment-tool-for-mexicos-criminal-gangs/>

The lack of a mother figure or motherly supervision is not the cause for the involvement of children and teens in the illicit economy. Children, teens, and mothers alike analyze their environment through a fatalistic lens and the economic opportunities around them to decide on how they can or should financially support themselves, their family, and the economy. For the women who work in maquiladoras, they are choosing to work barely livable wages, in dangerous conditions, all in an effort to break away from the illegalities of the drug trade. On the other hand, women who involve themselves in the illicit economy take it upon themselves to alter their financial present and future. Both groups of women believe they are making some form of social change for themselves and their family. These women are utilizing the tools and weapons that once caged them, separated them from men, and forced them in an disadvantaged place in life. Their involvement, legal or illegal, in the economy is similar to that of la Chingada and her “fucking” someone, something, or an entire entity. Women are breaking away from their paternalistically determined role and embodying more space in Mexican society. Legal or illegal, women are paving the path for society to see and understand them as more than pawns. Indeed, they are unstoppable. The social power women hold will be the focus point of the last chapter, as it will analyze different roles women have historically obtained in cartels. The following chapter will also examine how cartels, maras, and pandillas recruit new members of the illicit economy, which consists of the promise of beautiful women, extravagant living, and undying financial freedom.

Chapter Four: Recruitment: The Manipulation of Women, Children, and Teenagers.

The 20th century marks a major shift for the United States' stance on drug policy. In 1914, the American government saw the passage of the *Harrison Narcotics Act*, which placed a tax and excessive limitations on the transportation of opiates and morphine.¹⁶⁸ Although the *Harrison Narcotics Act* of 1914 passed into legislation, American politicians saw a continuing rise of addiction rates as addicts were turning to the "Black Market" (in this case, Mexico) for their drug of choice. In 1920, the passage of the *Prohibition Act* sent another wave of addicted-Americans to Mexican border cities, creating an unbreakable bond between Americans and Mexicans.¹⁶⁹ The U.S. government appointed Harry Anslinger as the first director of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics where he attempted to hinder the spread and consumption of drugs through passing of the *Marijuana Tax Act* in 1937. Similarly to the *Narcotics Act* of 1914, the *Marijuana Tax Act* placed a tax on the purchasing of marijuana but also required buyers, and sellers, to register with the federal government.¹⁷⁰ Harry Anslinger also narrowed his focus on women and children.¹⁷¹ Anslinger and New York City officials partnered together to create anti-drug education for young children and teens, with aims at discussing the horrid effects of marijuana cigarettes on younger generations.¹⁷²

With the influx of narcotics and illegal contraband (people included) flowing across the Southern US border, the American government started the process of militarizing the approximately 2,000 mile-long-border separating Mexico and the United States. In 1924, the

¹⁶⁸ Lisa N. Sacco, "Drug Enforcement in the US: History, Politics, and Trends", Congressional Research Service, 7-5700, R43749, 2

¹⁶⁹ Nicole A. Guajardo, Ground Zero for the War on Drugs: Mexican Government Efforts to Curtail Trafficking and Violence, *American Intelligence Journal*, 33, 2, 24

¹⁷⁰ Sacco, Drug Enforcement in the US: History, Politics, and Trends, 3

¹⁷¹ "Campaign Battles Marihuana Weed", *New York Times*, August 3, 1937

¹⁷² "Campaign Battles Marihuana Weed."

creation of the U.S. Border Patrol ushered in a new form of security for the American population. Agents were tasked with inhibiting the influx of immigrants and foreigners across the wire-fence which signified the international boundary between two nations.¹⁷³ Border Patrol agents struggled with surveying the entirety of the border region.¹⁷⁴ Border Patrol did not have enough agents nor was their focus on Mexican citizens, they turned their attention on Chinese immigrants because of the opium cultivation, distribution, and consumption in US cities.¹⁷⁵ The soldier against narcotics, Harry Anslinger, wrote *The Murderers*, where he elaborates on how drugs kill and destroy people's lives. Within *The Murderers* Anslinger describes Chinese opium dens as the epicenter for the prostitution of young American girls (who he referred to as "dream girls") and a common place for murder.¹⁷⁶ Anslinger also describes his personal experience with drugs and his ability to purchase a jar of morphine from the local pharmacy as a young boy.¹⁷⁷

For those living in the Northern Region of Mexico, participation in illegal activities is deeply ingrained in the regions history. Prior to the *maquiladoras* (which will be discussed in the later paragraphs), Northern Mexicans benefitted off of the 1920 United States decision to prohibit the creation, selling, and consumption of alcohol. The illegalization of alcohol affected American cities in such a way that crippled their reputations. Northern Mexico—or the "*gringo*" tourist destination—housed extravagant hotels where Americans drank, gambled, and consumed drugs.¹⁷⁸ El Paso, Texas, morphed into a doorway leading to an area where drugs, alcohol, and

¹⁷³ Chapin Hill, Where Gambling Flourishes Along the Mexican Border, *New York Times*, September 28th, 1930. 176

¹⁷⁴ Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America*, January 13, 2016, 225.

¹⁷⁵ Andreas, *Smuggler Nation*, 225.

¹⁷⁶ Harry Anslinger and Will Oursler, *The Murderers: The Stories of the Narcotic Gangs*, 21 and 26

¹⁷⁷ Anslinger and Oursler, *The Murderers*, 8.

¹⁷⁸ R.I. Duffus, "Our Changing Cities: Glamorous El Paso," *New York Times*, 119, May 29, 1927

prostitution were prevalent. These hotels accumulated an estimated \$100,000 a month from El Paso, Texas.¹⁷⁹

In conjunction with the extravagant hotels, “sister cities” (Ciudad Juárez) smuggled narcotics across the border; Mexico responded to American craving of opium, cocaine, and marijuana.¹⁸⁰ Two notorious women, Lola la Chata and Ignacia la Nacha, established drug trafficking networks that smuggled narcotics throughout portions of the U.S. and to the Canadian border. Both women grew up in poverty, lived surrounded by illicit economies, and maintained close ties to the local police forces. Ignacia la Nacha and her family “supplied drugs to El Paso and other U.S. Cities” for roughly 50 years.¹⁸¹ La Nacha initially entered the illicit trade with the help of her husband, and after his unexpected death, la Nacha continued to sell narcotics from her home and “operated labs, fields, and legitimate businesses.”¹⁸² La Nacha portrayed herself as “Robin Hood” to her community and regular visitors because she ensured they remained happy and content with their narcotic purchase.¹⁸³ Lola la Chata started her trafficking career as a local drug peddler for her mother (as well as other traffickers) in Mexico City, Mexico.¹⁸⁴ She “used the space of the open street market” to fuel her narcotic enterprise with the help of her children and local community members.¹⁸⁵ Lola la Chata and Ignacia la Nacha truly profited from smuggling narcotics, becoming financially able to support themselves and their families.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ Duffus, “Our Changing Cities: Glamorous El Paso, 130

¹⁸⁰ *El Narco: Inside Mexico's Criminal Insurgence*, 27

¹⁸¹ Elaine Carey and José Carlos, “The Daughters of La Nacha: Profiles of Women Traffickers,” *NACLA Report of the Americas*, 23.

¹⁸² Carey and Carlos, “The Daughters of La Nacha,” 23.

¹⁸³ Howard Campbell, *Female Drug Smugglers on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, pg. 249.

¹⁸⁴ Elaine Carey, “Selling is More of a Habit than Using,” 63.

¹⁸⁵ Elaine Carey, “Selling is More of a Habit than Using,” 63.

¹⁸⁶ Carey, “Selling if More of a Habit than Using,” 65.

Ignacia la Nacha, the “first famous mobster in Mexico,” owned a poppy field in the Sierra Madres where she and her workers worked the land, later selling the products (opium).¹⁸⁷ La Nacha’s opium, or “mud,” was so highly praised that “...customers came as far as Albuquerque, NM...” to purchase her drugs.¹⁸⁸ As her “mud” gained notoriety, violence and prosecution followed. Harry Anlinger tried, and failed, to extradite la Nacha to the US for her illicit activity. Additionally, a US congressman denounced la Nacha’s activities after some of her workers were arrested with 55 ounces of morphine.¹⁸⁹ La Nacha and her opium’s popularity curated an environment where she did not only symbolize opium but she became a symbol of the entire community.¹⁹⁰

Lola la Chata, also known as the grandmother of the drug cartels, had an early start in the illicit economy. La Chata worked as a smuggler for her mother and eventually operated her own market in a bustling community plaza.¹⁹¹ The plaza was the mecca for feminine economic growth and individuality, and la Chata maintained a legitimate business. When she started her own endeavors of smuggling drugs, la Chata worked closely with her daughters, establishing a matriarchal system. La Chata slipped past Border Patrol by disguising her opium in little packets with religious stamps or within children toys. It was not uncommon for children to participate in the smuggling and selling of drugs in plazas or playgrounds. The arrests of la Chata occurred seven times between 1934-1945, and when she was finally incarcerated, la Chata’s daughters had extended visits and their own airplane landing strip.¹⁹² Lola la Chata and Ignacia la Nacha are

¹⁸⁷ *El Narco: Inside Mexico’s Criminal Insurgence*, 33.

¹⁸⁸ *El Narco: Inside Mexico’s Criminal Insurgence*, 34.

¹⁸⁹ Elaine Carey and Jose Carlos Cisneros Guzman, *The Daughters of la Nacha: Profiles of Women Traffickers, NACLA Report of the Americas*, 23

¹⁹⁰ *El Narco: Inside Mexico’s Criminal Insurgence*, 34.

¹⁹¹ Elaine Carey, “Selling is More of a Habit Than Using” *Narcotraficante Lola la Chata and her Threat to Civilization, Journal in Women’s History*, 21, 2, 63-64

¹⁹² Carey, “Selling is More of a Habit Than Using,” 68.

examples of people who will commit illegal crimes for financial gain. More superficially, both women underpin that despite being women and mothers, they are capable of more than the socially established norm that this thesis focuses heavily on. The age and physical appearances of Lola la Chata and Ignacia la Nacha became the main topics of discussion when mentioning either woman. In many cases, journalists referred to la Chata as manly, ugly, and fat while simultaneously talking about the drug cultivation and distribution that happened under the control of la Chata.¹⁹³ Her actions were deemed wrong, bad, immoral, and her “fat” body fueled the understanding that she was a bad person to society.¹⁹⁴ Dr. Salazar in 1938 wrote Lola la Chata a letter explaining that if Lola la Chata was beautiful, he would have fallen under her feminine charm.¹⁹⁵



Fast forward to the presidency of Bill Clinton and the passage of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement, people across the country of Mexico found themselves in the same position as Lola la Chata and Ignacia la Nacha—working for the illicit economy. They needed to support themselves and their families. During the 1990s, crossing the U.S. border became a daunting and

¹⁹³ Carey, “Selling is More of a Habit Than Using,” 71.

¹⁹⁴ Carey, “Selling is More of a Habit Than Using,” 70.

¹⁹⁵ Carey, “Selling is More of a Habit Than Using,” 71.

¹⁹⁶ Lola la Chata, <https://analepsis.org/2019/03/21/lola-la-chata-375/>

expensive task. People no longer walked across the Rio Grande but now pay thousands of U.S. dollars to *coyotes* (professional border-crossing guides), who are supplied by Mexican drug cartels.¹⁹⁷ The Mexican cartels outsource the job of smuggling people across the border to local *coyotes*, who are required to pay a tax directly to the cartels to utilize the cartel's paid-off resources (protection from migra and police forces).¹⁹⁸ In addition to outsourcing jobs to local Mexicans, cartels focus their energies on recruiting young Mexican and American boys, girls, and teenagers to transport narcotics, money, and guns and ammunition across the US-Mexican border. They believe children attract less suspicion. Not only are young children and teens recruited as smugglers of various items, but they train as hitmen/women.

During Bill Clinton's first year as president, the U.S. Health Department and Human Services gathered data showcasing the approximately 10,000 person increase of hospitalizations relating to the consumption of marijuana.¹⁹⁹ A large portion of the marijuana seen and used in the United States is imported from its southern neighbor, Mexico. Even though the U.S. government has fought the distribution and consumption of marijuana, the popular drug is still transported over the southern border daily. In an attempt to curtail the constant flow of narcotics, President Bill Clinton bolstered the security of the border by manning the land, adding cameras to the fence, and increased the militarizing of the border zone. It became difficult for borderland peoples to live their daily lives. President Bill Clinton also created the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which opened up Mexico to international trade. Presently, Mexico sends

¹⁹⁷ Tom Wainwright, *Narconomics: How to Run a Drug Cartel*, Chapter Nine: Diversifying into new Markets: From Drug Smuggler to People Smuggler, (Ebury Publishing, 2016) 194.

¹⁹⁸ Wainwright, *Narconomics: How to Run a Drug Cartel*, 201.

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Preliminary Estimates of Drug-Related Emergency Department Episodes, Advance Report Number 11, November 1995.

80% of their exports to the United States.²⁰⁰ NAFTA also crippled Mexico's agricultural livelihood. Rather than rely on local farmers or local businesses for production, Mexico purchased from humongous foreign agribusinesses, who used their land and people to tend to the farms. It is impossible to compete with large agribusiness corporations; Mexican farmers lost their ability to support their families. Mexican citizens have to decide how they will support their family, will they work in the low-paying *maquiladora* or will they work their native land for little to no profit? That is the question many Mexican men, women, and teenagers have to answer.

Maquiladoras located along the northern border of Mexico do provide the border community occupational opportunities, but the salary earned is rarely enough to support families. International businesses establish factories in third-world countries in order to save money, as it is cheaper to produce items, and the average wage is lower than foreign standards. In addition to the *maquiladoras*, the 20th century ushered in the establishment of new drug cartels. As old drug cartels died and splintered, cartels such as the Gulf Cartel, Guadalajara Cartel, Los Zetas, and deadly leaders such as El Chapo decimated the foundation of Northern Mexico.²⁰¹ In conjunction with the War on Drugs, the US government continued to dump militarized tactics and people on the southern border.

Life in North Mexico became deadly. People fled for their lives. But, for those who could not afford a *coyote* or a visa, participation in narcotics became a form of survival. Almost every level of society was controlled by the hands of cartel leaders. *Caciques*, people who control cartel territory or local political boss, distribute monetary bribes, and salaries, to local law

²⁰⁰ Sharay Angulo, Mexico's Dependence on US Demand Spells Trouble for Weak Economies, *Reuters*, August 1, 2019.

²⁰¹ Ground Zero for the War on Drugs, 28.

enforcement and local government entities in assurance that no legal prosecution will follow the distribution of drugs and the violence associate with it.²⁰² The deep economic entanglements the cartels have created solidified the almost symbiotic relationship between the illegal and “legal” spheres of society. As a result of the symbiotic relationship, those not involved in the multi-layered corporation that is the drug trade either have to partake in the illicit economy or risk death by living a “normal” life.²⁰³

The group of people most susceptible to the tentacles of the cartels are children, teenagers, and women. Children, mostly young girls, are kidnapped and forced into the hells of sex trafficking.²⁰⁴ Teenagers, women, and their financial shortfalls are all manipulated by the drug cartels in an attempt to lure them in with possibilities of economic success and growth. The cartel does not intend on adding the teenagers or women to their steady payroll. Mexican drug cartels seek out people who have little to no familial connections to high-level cartel members, and recruit them only for small tasks, such as drug transportation.²⁰⁵ The recycling of women and teenager participants in the illicit economy ensures the safety of the cartels. In the 1980s, someone arrested for transporting one-pound of cocaine could be sentenced to five years in prison.²⁰⁶ Prison time was determined by the type of drug, the amount of the drug, and the criminal history of the transporter. During questioning, the transporter would receive the offer of a shortened sentence if they could provide information regarding the source of the drugs, but tracing the cartels proved to be difficult. Not only did the cartel secure their secrecy, the cartel

²⁰² Arthur Rizer, “Hannibal at the Gate: Border kids, Drugs, and Guns – And the Mexican Cartel War Goes On,” *Georgetown University Selected Works*, 12.

²⁰³ Rizer, “Hannibal at the Gate: Border kids, Drugs, and Guns – And the Mexican Cartel War Goes On,” 83.

²⁰⁴ Gobierno de Mexico, “Niñas y Mujeres, las más vulnerables en la trata de personas,” July 2018, <https://www.gob.mx/sipinna/articulos/ninas-y-mujeres-las-mas-vulnerables-en-la-trata-de-personas?idiom=es>

²⁰⁵ Adam B. Weber, “The Courier Conundrum: The High Costs of Prosecuting Low-Level Drug Couriers and What We Can do About Them,” *Fordham Law Review*, 87, 4, 1753.

²⁰⁶ Weber, “The Courier Conundrum,” 1753.

strongly believed women are better at transporting drugs, biologically speaking.²⁰⁷ Cartels instruct women to use their vagina, breasts, ability to bear children, and surgical implants to successfully smuggle drugs across the international border. Girlfriends of cartel members are not immune to the exposure of illicit participation and also risk their legal freedom to appease their abusive partners. Pregnant women fall victim to the manipulative economic opportunities the cartels utilize. The cartels shift the smuggling responsibilities onto one of the most susceptible groups of people, women, to appear “clean” in the eyes of Mexican and International law.²⁰⁸

In the film *Maria Full of Grace*, Maria becomes pregnant by her boyfriend and her family is unable to afford the cost of childcare.²⁰⁹ Maria is forced to seek employment at a factory, which barely provides enough financial security for her and her family. The mother-to-be is approached by a man with the offer of a better paying job. Maria meets the stranger and is instructed to swallow narcotics wrapped in film and dipped in oil. When the time comes to travel from Latin America to New York City, Maria sees the horrors of ingesting drugs as one girl experiences an unintended overdose from the pellets of drugs bursting in her stomach. *Maria Full of Grace* depicts the possible everyday trials Latinas who are approached by the cartel undergo. In essence, women’s bodies, romantic vulnerabilities, and parental status are molded into a tool for the cartels to exploit for their own financial gain.

There remains no realm of society untouched by the expansionist mentality of the cartel leaders. Some women who engage in the drug trade embrace the opportunities as a form of liberation from the grip of male dominance or a step closer to gendered equality.²¹⁰ This form of

²⁰⁷ Weber, *The Courier Conundrum*, 1766.

²⁰⁸ T. Huling, *Women Drug Couriers: Sentencing Reform Needed for Prisoners of War*, *Criminal Justice*, 62.

²⁰⁹ *Maria Full of Grace*, Directed by Joshua Morston, January 18, 2004.

²¹⁰ Howard Campbell, *Female Drug Smugglers on the US-Mexico Border: Gender, Crime, and Empowerment*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81, 1, 237.

liberation provides women with a greater sense of “rights,” “freedoms,” and “empowerment.” Involvement in the drug trade provides an escape for impoverished women and momentarily inducts them into roles of power, leadership, and resources once historically unavailable to them. Money is the most attractive aspect of the illicit economy that is the drug trade.

Young girls, boys, and teenagers involved in the drug trade seek some form of liberation, leadership, and prominence in their life. Economic aspirations and gender vulnerability are two characteristics the Mexican drug cartels manipulate to seek out recruits in the poorer Mexican populations. Within the gendered spheres of Mexican culture, young girls are reminded of the little knowledge they have of the outside world.²¹¹ The glimpse of reality they see showcase women as submissive and catering to the multitudes of male-dominated occupations. As discussed in the previous chapter, women are entering the economic sphere of Mexico in larger numbers.²¹² Their small hands, smaller bodies, and their vulnerability place them in a position where employers can exploit their time and energy. This use of women’s bodies is evident in maquiladoras and in cartels/gangs throughout Mexico. Drug cartels and street gangs utilize young children (especially female bodied people) as unsuspecting spies or gun-toting-assassins. Despite someone’s age, the cartel/street gangs promise their recruits thousands of U.S. dollars, something that the Mexican government and economy are unable to provide to their people.

After reviewing the lives of *sicarias*, it is clear that their economic and social environment contributes to their understanding of social progress. Children, teenagers, and especially femme bodied people evaluate their surroundings and determine the best course of action for them, legal or illegal. Cartels ability to recruit new trainees is dependent on the

²¹¹ Sonia Saldivar-Hull, Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminism, *Cultural Studies*, 13, 2, 254.

²¹² Calderón, Todos Somos Juárez, 3

constant cycle of death, incarceration, and impunity.²¹³ The revolving door allows for quick, easy replacements, as well as face-to-face communication for anyone willing or needing to partake in a job that provides for one's family.

The deaths of hit-women are reported at an alarmingly higher rate than their male counterparts, *sicarios*. When examining the recruitment tactics of Mexican cartels on the U.S. side of the border, research and journalism shows that young teenage boys are targeted more so than women. In the online article, "Mexican Cartels Lure American Teens as Killers," Reta, a teenage boy, recounts his time as a recruit for the Los Zetas cartel. Los Zetas promised Reta "high pay, fancy cars, and sexy women" and an expensive house to live in. Reta explains how the cartel hire American teenage boys for smugglers or murder-for-hire with the income of \$500 a week and thousands of dollars in commissions for assassinations.²¹⁴ The cartel and gang members "raffle off automobiles, firearms, and even dates with attractive women" to maintain a consistent group of teenage workers. For Reta, working as a Los Zetas hitman provided better for him than "[living] in ramshackle houses on dirt lots" and as a kid, Reta saw the narcotic traffickers as heroes. Cartels and gangs promise teenage boys "[belonging], power and money,"²¹⁵ all of which are present in a society crippled by a hyper-violent society.

The cartels occupying much of Mexico utilize social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to recruit new members as well as unknowingly lure people into working for the cartels/gangs. The majority of the online activity seen on Facebook is the "[glorification] [of] the gang lifestyle."²¹⁶ Members of cartels flaunt their cartel/gang affiliations at the same time as

²¹³ Thomas C. Bruneau, Pandillas and Security in Central America, *Latin American Research Review*, 49, 2, 163.

²¹⁴ James C. McKinley Jr., Mexican Cartels Lure American Teens as Killers, *New York Times*, June 22, 2009, pg. 3

²¹⁵ Josefina Salomon, Mexico Criminal Groups Increase Child Recruitment Tactics, *Insight Crime*, July 17, 2019. <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/mexico-criminal-groups-child-recruitment/>

²¹⁶ Irene Orellana, The Language of Persuasion Used by the Mexican Drug Cartel, (MA thesis, Hofstra University) 29.

advertising the illicit lifestyle as “a culture, religion, [and] way of life” with dependable income.²¹⁷ Social media targets younger generations of Mexican citizens who enjoy witnessing the luxurious life and cars of cartel members, and, eventually, aspire to pursue a career with a cartel. Cartels operating in Mexico “hire” “an estimated 25,000 to 35,000 children” in some complicity: drug trafficking, immigrant smuggling, or local lookouts.²¹⁸ The children’s tasks are determined based of their physical abilities and their “criminal capacity.”²¹⁹ For example, some children are asked to smuggle drugs and people across the U.S.-Mexico border.²²⁰ According to the Child Rights Network in Mexico, children as young as 12-years-old brandish military-grade weapons. The same 12-year-old children also “guard safe houses”²²¹ and, as they age, are expected to commit larger and more serious crimes.²²² By the age of 16, cartel/gang members carry out crimes such as extortion, murder, kidnapping, drug smuggling, and (in the case of young women) sexual exploitation.²²³ Women are not the only pawns utilized by the cartel; children are as expendable as pennies and women.

Mexican women endure regionalized gender narratives, staunch gender norms, and strict social limitations all due to their biological identity. Women in border regions live in a volatile environment, with little ability (except for the *maquilladoras*) to escape the vices. Women of low economic standing do not have the economic freedoms of those in the middle or the high class to

²¹⁷ Irene Orellana, *The Language of Persuasion Used by the Mexican Drug Cartel*, 30.

²¹⁸ Greg Moran and Kristina Davis, *Drug Cartels Lure Teens into Violent World of Trafficking*, *San Diego Tribune*, December 19, 2010. <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/border-baja-california/sdut-drug-cartels-lure-teens-violent-world-trafficking-2010dec19-story.html>

²¹⁹ Moran and Davis, *Drug Cartels Lure Teens into Violent World of Trafficking*.

²²⁰ Arthur Rizer, *Hannibal at the Gate: Border kids, Drugs, and Guns – And the Mexican Cartel War Goes On*, *Georgetown University Selected Works*, 42.

²²¹ Tania L. Montalvo, *Children in Mexico: Criminals or victims?*, *CNN*, January 19, 2012. <https://www.cnn.com/2012/01/17/world/americas/mexico-children-crime/index.html>
Through a payment of 8,000 pesos (\$800 USD), a young girl served as a lookout in north-central Mexico.

²²² Mexico Criminal Groups Increase Child Recruitment Tactics, *Insight Crime*

²²³ Mexico Criminal Groups Increase Child Recruitment Tactics, *Insight Crime*

afford the continuation of their education or pay for their children's education, which inadvertently decreases their options for work. Although there remains little opportunity of escaping the lower class of Mexican society, women do take advantage of the situations placed in front of them. Young women, such as la Catrina and Maria Celeste Mendoza, are examples of women who, through cartel recruitment, took the illegal path to economic liberation and gender liberation. Other women are introduced to the illegal economy through romantic relationships, violent beatings, or forced sexual practices.²²⁴

Once women are inducted into cartels, they follow the orders and instructions of plaza bosses or gang leaders. For cartels such as New Generation Jalisco Cartel (CJNG), their recruitment of young girls is on the rise. In an article published by El Blog del Narco, roughly 3,000 women were sentenced or charged with drug-related crimes in 2019.²²⁵ Women like La Catrina post their endeavors, guns, and accessories on social media, creating and lending to a social understanding that participating in the violence associated with the drug cartel is more prosperous than maintaining a legal job.²²⁶ Sicarias are now popular figures and models for younger generations of Mexicans. Sicarias humanize the drug cartel. At the same time they they challenge the role of “bosses wife,” passively in the background, they lead men into battle—illegal battle.

The CJNG cartel is known for their hiring and training of sicarias. Most of their sicarias are feared and eventually achieve a level of notoriety (such as plaza boss) amongst their fellow cartel members. Women, like la Catrina, lead men, organize secret missions, and become some of the most trusted people in the illicit world. La Estrella, Rosalina Carillo Ocho, served as a

²²⁴ Pandillas and Security in Central America, 9.

²²⁵ “La Catrina”, Del Glamorous y Las Armas Chapadas en Oro al Vídeo de sus últimos instantes se agonía, 2020.

²²⁶ Ibid.

hitwomen for the CJNG and then as a plaza boss.²²⁷ Rosalina Carillo Ocho's is known for her "cruel" and "bloody" actions...most of which happened in "cold blood."²²⁸ The CJNG is not the only cartel to use women as sicarias, rather it is becoming more common for women to maintain a position of power in the cartel ranks. Veronica Mireya Moreno Carreon (a police officer turned Los Zetas assassin), Joselyn Alejandra Nino (Gulf Cartel assassin), and Nancy Manriques Quintanar all symbolize and embody the changing atmosphere of gender and economic equality in the illicit economy.²²⁹

Despite women liberating themselves from the constraints of a patriarchal economy and society, their role within the cartels/gangs still fall victim to sexualization and exploitation. Through *corridos* (songs) and popular culture (social media and television), there is a narco-sensibility of authoritarian behavior within the illicit society.²³⁰ Through the ingestion of social media, people witness major rewards resulting from the drug trade and other illegal activities (nice cars, expensive clothes). Narco-television and TV culture provide young children and teenagers a framework of how to live their life and what goals they should aspire to reach.²³¹ More specifically, Mexican media outlets (television, social media, literature) promote certain lifestyles and appearances women feel as if they must abide by.²³² Within this trope of illicit living and narco-sensibility is the understanding that women are the most dangerous of all other members. Women involved in the drug cartels/gangs "in their own way both empower women

²²⁷ El Blog del Narco HD, "Lista de las Sicarias Mas Peligrose y sanguinarias del cartel de jalisco nueva generation," Youtube video, 2:36, March 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GknrkaH6E8Q>

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ El Cartel de Las Flacas...el sanguinario y peligroso grupo de jovenes mujeres asesina, *Vanguardia*, November 12, 2018, <https://vanguardia.com.mx/noticias/nacional/el-cartel-de-la-flacas-el-sanguinario-y-peligroso-grupo-de-jovenes-mujeres-asesinas-GOVG3424543>

²³⁰ O. Hugo Benavides, *Drugs, Thugs, and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-dramas in Latin America*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008) 90.

²³¹ Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminism, 253.

²³² Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminism, 255.

and play into the patriarchal male heterosexist fantasy.” Thus, women are not men’s equal but are falling into the role of sexual and professional subordinate.²³³ Although *Drugs, Thugs, and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America* explains that women’s participation in the illicit world is somewhat in a macho or leadership hierarchy, women still fall victim to “an extreme, fetishized objectification of violence.”²³⁴ Telenovelas present the understanding and stereotype that women reserve a submissive role in whatever relationship they have with the cartel/gang organization.²³⁵

Claudia Ochoa Félix, also known as Kim Kardashian of Organized Crime and the Empress of Anthrax, served as El Chapo’s lead sicaria. It is rumored Ochoa Felix led a murder squad, Los Anthrax, “a bloc of enforcers that operate as an armed wing of the Sinaloa Cartel.”²³⁶ Ochoa Felix gained notoriety on social media after posting a picture of herself holding “pink and gold” AK-47s.²³⁷ The Empress of Anthrax is described as a “curvy brunette” model with deadly tendencies.²³⁸ *Las Flacas*, The Skinny Ones, is a group of sicarias working for different Mexican cartels. These women share the same deadly tendencies as Ochoa Felix and all have a “Vogue-ish figure even in body armor.”²³⁹ Despite the murderous roles obtained by these women, their body is still subject to hyper-sexualization. Comparing the descriptions of these present-day women to those of Lola la Chata and Ignacia la Nacha, it is clear that women’s bodies and their actions are deeply intertwined. Unlike the early-1900s written entry of Lola la Chata’s body,

²³³ Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminism, 91.

²³⁴ Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminism, 92.

²³⁵ Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminism, 255.

²³⁶ About: Claudia Ochoa Felix, https://dbpedia.org/page/Claudia_Ochoa_F%C3%A9lix

²³⁷ Amanda Woods, Claudia ochoa Félix, dubbed the Empress of Anthrax, died from drug overdose, *New York Post* September 20, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/09/20/el-chapos-kim-kardashian-of-organized-crime-died-from-drug-overdose/>

²³⁸ Claudia ochoa Félix, dubbed the Empress of Anthrax, died from drug overdose, *New York Post*, <https://nypost.com/2019/09/20/el-chapos-kim-kardashian-of-organized-crime-died-from-drug-overdose/>

²³⁹ Michael Daily, The Curse of the Cartels Skinny Hitwoman, *Daily Beast*, 2, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/curse-of-the-cartels-skinny-hitwoman>

women involved in the drug cartels and Mexican gangs today represent model-like figures. The Skinny Ones, the Kim Kardashian of the drug world, and the emphasis on “curvy” bodies underpins that despite women being in a dangerous role, their actions are always associated with their bodies. Sicarias and other women participating in drug cartels have little to no occupational agency. Their work is overshadowed by their physical appearances, which are perpetuated through popular culture and social media. The role women play within the economic spheres of Mexico is complex, their economic equality remains hindered by the constraints of a society unable to distance itself from the toxic masculinity of a patriarchal environment.



The need for economic stability is pushing the younger generation of Mexican women to take informal jobs. Due to the incredibly low youth employment rate, the drug cartels offer

²⁴⁰ El Chapo's 'Kim Kardashian of Organized Crime' Found Dead in Presumed Lover's Bed, *New York Post*, <https://nypost.com/2019/09/18/el-chapos-kim-kardashian-of-organized-crime-found-dead-in-presumed-lovers-bed/>

²⁴¹ “La Catrina”, Del Glamour y Las Armas Chapadas en Oro al Video de sus últimos instantes se agonía, 2020

weekly paychecks that are above the national average, as well as the opportunity to grow in the “company.” Presenting the idea of growth within cartels evokes a sense of equality amongst men and women. The cartels still use women as legal bait to distract officials from leaders of the organizations. Not only are women used as disposable employees, but young girls are still sexually abused and trafficked by cartel organizations. It is difficult to see the cartel as equal for both genders when women and girls are exploited for sexual favors. Though women are taking on roles not normally seen as typically feminine, the cartels continue to operate in such a way that exploits, abuses, and usually leads to women dying for the overall growth of the drug trade.

Conclusion

The effects from the 2006 declaration of war by Mexican President Felipe Calderón still reverberates throughout all of Mexico and into areas of Central America. Although President Calderón believed his War on Drugs would curtail the power and supplies of the cartels, the War on Drugs initiated the splintering of cartels, the creation of street gangs, and the exaggeration of Mexico's economic dependency on international powers and corporations. Violence erupted along the U.S.-Mexico border resulting from Calderón's splintering of cartel organizations through his introduction of increased police presence. The U.S.-Mexico border evolved into a battle ground where borderlanders, cartel members, and Mexican police forces fought each other for territorial control. Those living in the border region fell victim to bloodshed within their own communities. In conjunction with the state sponsored violence²⁴² the U.S.-Mexico borderland housed international corporations who utilized the local civilian population to run their tax-free-revenue-making-machines. Women encompass the majority of their employee demographics.

The U.S.-Mexico borderland housed gun violence and economic disparities, whether legal or illegal. The legal economic disparities focused on women and their bodies as international corporations hired women at a higher rate because their small hands and nimble bodies proved conducive for the machinery in the maquiladoras. Although maquiladoras are a form of economic and financial stability for the women, their daily lives proved hyper-complicated. Femme maquila employees worked abnormal hours (overnight shifts or late shifts),

²⁴² I use this phrase to describe President Calderón's declaration of War on Drugs and his continued use of force to dismantle the illicit society and organization that is led by cartels and gangs.

leaving their children and themselves vulnerable to the community violence sparked by the War on Drugs. Women's murdered, tortured, and raped bodies filled empty parking lots, city playgrounds, and the surrounding deserts. Despite all the mutilated bodies, the lack of effective investigative tactics and powers perpetuate an environment of impunity. The mass murders of women within the U.S.-Mexico borderland underpin the idea and practice of exploitation.

Women are hired for their small frames. Women are placed in a spot of vulnerability for working at a maquiladora. Women's children fall victim to community violence.

Despite all the effects of the War on Drugs and the maquiladoras employment of women and their bodies, women's voluntary involvement in the legal economy is them taking a more liberated stance in a society entrenched in violence. Women are following the ideals of *mujerista* theology, where empowerment and the validation of one's life, one's circumstances, and one's existence is central in their ideology.²⁴³ Through the *Mujerista* Theology, women's identities and physical place/space is recognized as "sacred"²⁴⁴ and a way to understand that the person's current stance in life is not minimal, but in fact, unique for the environment they live in. *Mujerista* Theology aims to bring men and women who "work for the good of the people," the common good. The work required for *Mujerista* Theology "requires the denunciation of all destructive sense of self-abnegation."²⁴⁵ This theology and the practice of economic involvement and liberation gives women power, and makes space, for them to become leading figures Mexican society. Within this new ideology, women grapple with societal norms, morals, and cultural importance to determine who they are, what they should do, and what course of actions

²⁴³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chapter One: Decolonizing Feminism, 21.

²⁴⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 23.

²⁴⁵ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Orbis Books, DATE) 62.

to take.²⁴⁶ Thus, the women's employment in the maquiladoras is their form of liberation, liberation and economic empowerment.

The same understanding of feminism, liberation, and economic empowerment can be used in assessing the lives of women who partake in cartel and gang activity, especially the women who become sicarias. The women who take on these illicit roles are breaking gender barriers of women simply being drug mules or wives of cartel bosses. They are becoming leaders; They are organizing their own movements; They are hiring their own hitmen/hitwomen. By using and understanding the Mujerista Theology discussed above in conjunction with Audre Lorde's speech,²⁴⁷ it is easy to understand how women in Mexico believe their economic actions (and economic equality to men) is a liberating force. Through this lens, women are no longer solely dependent on their husbands, but are piloting their own financial stability.

This thesis, which builds off the works of scholars such as Elaine Carey, Howard Campbell, and others, contributes a less stringent and bi-nary understanding of gender in Mexico, and specifically, how gender impacts one's economic standing and abilities. Through the use of a multitude of news articles, blog entries, and interviews, this thesis is able to show that women are, in fact, becoming economically equal to men. Despite their rising economic equality²⁴⁸ women and their bodies continue to be exploited. They are hired to occupy a manufacturing or cartel position but remain replaceable. The mass murders and individual murders of women are still underreported and under investigated because of the environment of impunity. Going forward, this thesis and research will evolve into a wide review of women, their

²⁴⁶ Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology*, 62.

²⁴⁷ Masters Tools with Never Dismantle the Masters House.

²⁴⁸ I use this term to describe the growing role women have in both the legal and illegal sectors of the economy. Although I say they are obtaining "equality," it is obvious that women are not completely equal to men. Mexico is a patriarchal society which exploits the bodies and lives of women.

lives, and the governmental entities which have failed them throughout Mexico and Central America. Mexico's southern border will become the main focus point as well as countries that encompass Central America.

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