“Una Herida Abierta”
Reports from the U.S.-Mexico Border

by

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Introduction

There is more than one Mexico.

There is a Mexico known by its margaritas and fast cars—twelve people to a sedan, no seat belts, trunk open to let in the salty smells of desert, asphalt, and the sea. It is a Mexico invoked by Cancun vacations, a romance of cowboys, outlaws, and spring break beaches. This Mexico is maintained by tourist folklore and an American nostalgia for a country that doesn’t exist, where tired men in sombreros will agree to play “La Cucaracha” just one more time. Underlying this artifice are more and more layers of Mexico, all simultaneous, each incongruous.

There is the Mexico of the American newspaper: a fledgling democracy with a president entangled in a drug war so savage the murders belong only to the realm of nightmare.1 In this country, detention centers release prisoners at night to work as hit men, children walking to school see human faces sewn to a soccer ball, and men like “El Pozolero,” (the stew maker) dissolve hundreds of bodies in vats of acid, making them disappear forever.2,3,4

Then there is the Mexico that is all drugs. It is a place where fighting occurs over who gets the narcotraficantes’ (drug traffickers’) money. Who is dirty and who is clean, who is part of the Sinaloas, the Zetas, or the Arellano Felix Organization is irrelevant. In this Mexico, under the guise of solving crime, officials detain and torture, and then inform for another side.5 This is a place where police are not the ones to call for help, and where a rich boy’s bodyguards kill journalists who talk too much.6
And then there is the Mexico of the border. A place that, to borrow the words of journalist Ed Vulliamy, “belongs to both countries and yet to neither.” Over two thousand miles long, the U.S.-Mexico Border winds its way from the waters of the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico. This border is integral to both the United States and to Mexico, and yet it is a place with its own hybrid, trans-border culture, where burritos are made with flour tortillas (an American invention), where the language is a blend of Spanish and English (“Entrada Parking,” and lonche for lunch), and where border vendors sell both churros and caricature drawings of American celebrities.

This is the Frontera, home to uniformed officials bearing AK-47s, children who grow up huffing paint thinner, families of ten that must survive on $26 a week, and where having the right papers means freedom. As novelist Gloria Anzaldúa says, “The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.” Before the wound can heal, she says, “it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.” In this third country, this border, the people are preyed upon, at best shunned, and at worst expelled by their neighbor to the north. Along the border death makes an ambivalent, constant pulse.

While this thesis is not about cartels, the Mexican drug war, or the U.S. response to that war, it is, like the border, deeply informed and influenced by such events. The focus of the following collected reports is instead directed toward the experiences of the people who live astride both sides of a militarized line. These residents along the border interact with and experience two countries, and are marginalized—and victimized—by both sides. More than anything else, this thesis is
a response to those who would like to look away, who hear the American
Government declare that “there is no spillover” and are assured that whatever is going
on down there is a Mexican problem that stays in Mexico. This thesis exists because
that comforting acquiescence is a lie.

Notes:

5 On General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo see: Vulliamy, Amexica, 43-47.
6 Hector Felix Miranda, co-founder of Tijuana investigative daily Zeta, was believed to be assassinated by a wealthy politician’s bodyguard. See: Sallie Hughes, “The Limits to Civic Journalism,” Newsrooms in Conflict (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 102.
7 Vulliamy, Amexica, 5
8 For a study of this “hybridization” see: Michael Dear and Andrew Burridge, “Cultural Integration and Hybridization at the United States-Mexico Borderlands,” Cahiers de Geographie du Quebec 49, no. 138 (December 2005): 301-318
10 Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands: The New Mestiza (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 3
Part I  Across the Line

Figure 1 Jonathan McIntosh. End of the Wall. Sept. 20, 2009.

*Es una frontera, no es una barrera… it is a border, not a barrier*

- Graffiti near the border
1. A Brief History of the (U.S.)-Mexican Drug War

Mexico’s drug industry never sleeps. Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, somewhere new plants grow, chemicals react, transporters carry loads, burros cross the border. And every day, somewhere in the United States, Americans buy drugs that passed through Mexico and inhale them in their lungs, snort them up their noses, or inject them into their veins. Kingpins rise and fall, teenagers experiment, and old addicts overdose, and all the time the drug machine keeps ticking on with the steady rhythm of the earth circling the sun.

–Ioan Grillo, El Narco, 2011

In Mexico, there is a good reason so many pray to La Santa Muerte, the skeletal, scythe-wielding saint of death: more than 120,000 lives have been claimed since the war on drugs was declared in 2006.¹ It is a war without a well-defined or tangible enemy, propelled by an immense greed—a desire for money, without regard to cost. This war begins at the U.S.-Mexico Border.

The frontera has long served as a corridor for illicit goods and cheap thrills, driven by the demands of American desire. Or as former President Calderón put it, Mexico just happens to share a border with “the biggest consumer of drugs in the world and the largest supplier of weapons in the world.”² Contraband smuggling has plagued Mexico since the start of the nation, a problem only worsened by the ample opportunity the Prohibition provided to make cash on bootlegging booze.³ In the 1970s, a combination of free-market reforms, growing rates of U.S. illegal drug consumption, and crackdowns in Colombia led to the promotion of Mexican gangs, from couriers to advanced trafficking organizations.⁴

Mexico’s drug war is inextricably connected to the country’s democratization process. In 2000, the election of President Vicente Fox of the National Action Party
(PAN) ended a seventy-one year political monopoly by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The collapse of PRI’s regime disrupted the alliances and established cash flows of the underworld; cartels were free to seek more power and smuggling territory than ever before. At the same time, Mexico had a broken judicial system and a poorly enforced rule of law. As drug production exploded, the cartels, unchecked, began organizing like paramilitary squads.

When Felipe Calderón replaced Fox in 2006, he promised to crackdown on the deeply rooted drug industry. Just days after being sworn in, he declared war on Mexico’s drug cartels, and sent some fifty thousand federal police and military soldiers throughout Mexico. The gangs responded aggressively to the government’s direct antagonizing. In 2007, approximately two hundred murders occurred monthly; in 2008, that number became five hundred. According to the Mexican newspaper Milenio, the average monthly death toll reached over one thousand in 2012. Violence affected the entire country, but was, and remains, most pronounced along the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2010, 84% of the killings took place in the border states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Guerrero and Baja California. Since then, violence has infiltrated other, more interior areas of the country as well.

Ostensibly, the murders, kidnappings, torture, and beheadings occur over money and access to the plazas that provide that money. The drug trafficking industry is extremely profitable. In 2009, the U.S. Justice Department reported the combined intake of Colombian and Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) as between eighteen and thirty-nine billion dollars annually. One of Mexico’s biggest industries, the drug trade generates 3-4% of the country’s one trillion dollar GDP, and
meanwhile next-door’s ravenous drug consumer only continues to demand more.\textsuperscript{12,13}

In 2011, surveys conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services revealed that 22.5 million Americans age twelve or older had recently used illegal drugs, up from 21.5 million in 2009.\textsuperscript{14}

The United States’ response to the Mexican drug war has mainly focused on tightening border security and criminalizing American drug users.\textsuperscript{15} Through the Merida Initiative however, the U.S. agreed to funnel $1.6 billion into Mexican and other Latin American countries’ governments to enhance their capacity to aggressively confront trafficking.\textsuperscript{16} According to a leaked Customs and Border Protection memo however, the Mexican and American forces mobilized along the border, as well as the combined expenditure of trillions of dollars, has failed to deter, or even make an impact on the industry’s trafficking.\textsuperscript{17} While during FY2011 Customs and Border Protection seized nearly five million pounds of narcotics, more than any previous year,\textsuperscript{18} best estimates approximate that the United States drug seizures represent only a small fraction of the trafficked goods.\textsuperscript{19} Of course, the important number, the amount of drugs that get through, will never be known.

Along the border towns of both countries, everyone knows someone whose life has been affected by the drug trade—a friend, a relative, a student, a neighbor… Children have lost parents, parents have had their children kidnapped, people are caught in the crossfire, or made witness to massacres. A Brookings narcotics expert estimated that as much as 40-50\% of the Mexican population works in the “informal” if not “illegal” economy.\textsuperscript{20} It’s easy to understand the allure of fast cash when more than 46\% of Mexicans—some fifty-two million people—live in poverty.\textsuperscript{21}
President Enrique Peña Nieto and President Obama continue to support fighting the drug war.\textsuperscript{22} Peña Nieto has pledged to alter the course of the war, however, focusing on reducing violence directed at the citizens by establishing a new, national force to bolster security in particularly ravaged areas.\textsuperscript{23} Neither president has acknowledged that militarization might not be working, or that the war may be a failure.

Notes

\textsuperscript{1} Like many statistics in Mexico, the number of people killed since the Mexican drug war was declared in 2006 is largely unknown. Comprehensive death counts may never be possible so many people have been lost, disappeared, buried in the desert, or otherwise made difficult—if not impossible—to find. Published figures documenting the six years of killing vary from 50,000 to 150,000. The number used here is from Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), which compiles data through death certificates. For more information see: Cory Molzahan, Viridiana Rios, and David A. Shirk, \textit{Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2012} (San Diego, CA: Justice in Mexico Project, Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego, 2012) Available at: http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/2012-tbi-drugviolence.pdf


\textsuperscript{4} David A. Shirk, \textit{The Drug War in Mexico: Confronting a Shared Threat}, Council Special Report 60 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011), 7


\textsuperscript{7} Grillo, \textit{El Narco}, 113-116.


\textsuperscript{9} Grillo, \textit{El Narco}, 117.


\textsuperscript{12} Shirk, \textit{The Drug War in Mexico}, 7

The 2011 numbers are from: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Results from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary on National Findings, NSDUH Series H-44 (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012), 13. The 2009 numbers are from the report by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration results from the 2009 national survey.


See the Customs and Border Protection Memo leaked by Public Intelligence: United States Customs and Border Protection Office of Intelligence and Operations Coordination, Drug Trafficking Organizations Adaptability to Smuggle Drugs across SWB after Losing Key Personnel [2011?], Available at: http://info.publicintelligence.net/CBP-NoChangeDTOs.pdf


Rawlins, “Backgrounder: Mexico’s Drug War.”


2. Mexico and the Collapse of the Fourth Estate

As I journalist I thought I had the right and the obligation to speak the truth. I didn’t know telling the truth was a death sentence.

-Jorge Luis Aguirre, editor of La Polaka

On November 13th, 2008, José Armando Rodríguez Carreón was about to drive his daughter to school. The forty-year old crime reporter was backing out of his garage when he was shot eight times and killed. His daughter watched from the back seat.¹

Rodriguez worked the police beat for El Diario, the largest daily in Ciudad Juárez. He was one of the first journalists to report on the raped and slain women on the outskirts of Juárez.² Months before his murder, Rodriguez began receiving warnings to “tone it down.” After two months of waiting out the threat in El Paso, Texas, Rodriguez decided to return to crime reporting and resumed work with no special protection. “The risks here are high and rising, and journalists are easy targets. But I can't live in my house like a prisoner. I refuse to live in fear,” he said during an interview shortly before his death. Although a motive for the killing was never confirmed, days before his murder Rodriguez published an article exposing a local prosecutor’s nephew who was claimed to have links to the drug trade. Nearly a year later, in July 2009, the lead prosecutor investigating the case was shot and killed. The replacement investigator was murdered less than a month after taking on the case.³

For two years, Rodríguez’s coworkers, friends, and family campaigned for justice, seeking federal involvement in the highly publicized case. Then in 2010, Mexican President Felipe Calderón announced that a suspect had confessed to the murder. According to El Diario, the suspect had been repeatedly abused until he confessed.⁴ The story broke after an employee at the paper informed a reporter that
his relative was being tortured with demands that he admit to killing Rodriguez. A trial of the suspect never occurred. There have been no further findings or investigations into any of the murders surrounding Rodriguez’s case.

In Mexico, Rodriguez has become emblematic of the dangers journalists face, as well as the rampant impunity and corrupt criminal justice system. Mexico has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world to practice journalism as organized crime groups systematically and strategically target the press. With frightening regularity, Mexican journalists like Rodriguez are threatened, tortured, disappeared, and even killed in retaliation for their reporting, especially when their investigations dig too deeply into the organized crime network. While it is often not possible to confirm that a journalist’s murder or disappearance occurred in direct relation to his or her writing, cases where notes were left with the body, as well as the widespread threats to journalists and media organizations that cover crime and political corruption, all point to a connection.

In 2011, Mexico surpassed Iraq as the deadliest country in the world for journalists, according to the International Press Institute. Conservative estimates list at least fifty-six journalists who have been killed or disappeared in Mexico between 2006 and 2012. Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization, maintains that at least seventy-six journalists have been murdered in Mexico since 2000. These counts tend, however, to rely on a classification of homicides that may not include every incident. Moreover, many victims simply disappear and are not counted in official tallies. According to one newsgerson, "Mexico and its journalists live in a situation similar to that experienced by countries at war," with the death toll, number
of journalists killed or missing, the army patrolling the streets, and the collapse of
democratic processes.\textsuperscript{11}

Though violence against journalists has certainly reached unprecedented
levels, attacks on the press are not new to Mexican history.\textsuperscript{12} As a country only
recently engaging in the process of democratization, efforts to create a free or
autonomous press have been ongoing. While such efforts are expanding, mechanisms
to protect journalists have not yet been established, even for those seeking to obtain
sensitive information.\textsuperscript{13}

From the 1940s until the 1990s under the Partido Revolucionario
Insitutucional (PRI), journalism primarily acted as mouthpiece for the government.\textsuperscript{14}
Most of Mexico’s mass media was owned and controlled by a small number of elite
families with vested ties in the PRI regime.\textsuperscript{15} In such an environment, journalists
perceived their role as substantiating the politicians, rather than beholden to or part of
civil society.

Then in the 1980s, a new kind of journalism emerged alongside the northern
border’s protests against the one-party system.\textsuperscript{16} In 1980, the highly influential
Mexican newsweekly \textit{Zeta} was founded. Immediately setting itself apart from the rest
of the nation’s largely government-controlled media, \textit{Zeta} proposed a risky endeavor:
independent investigation into political corruption to promote an informed public, and
government accountability.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Zeta}’s first coverage of the drug cartels in 1985 was
revolutionary. Officials attempted to suppress the story, buying every copy of the	abloid, but \textit{Zeta} ran it again, as a cover story titled, “Censored!”\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Zeta}’s muckraking
came at a steep cost: two of \textit{Zeta}’s editors have been murdered, another nearly died
during an assassination attempt that lodged a bullet in his spine, and a fourth needed several military bodyguards during a period of intense threats in 2010.\textsuperscript{19}

Mexican cartel networks target journalists for the same reason the politicians do: information control. By threatening, torturing, and bribing journalists, organized crime groups manipulate a significant source of power. In directing and confining the media’s influence, cartels make calculated agenda setting efforts, shaping the media space to strategically further their campaign.\textsuperscript{20}

Through disseminating fear, the cartels often produce widespread censorship. In addition to threatening reporters and conducting kidnappings, cartels spread this fear through gruesome public messages left with the dead bodies of their victims. The “style” of killing can have symbolic meaning intended for interpretation by either the public or by another cartel organization. People who talked too much are shot in the mouth, traitors are shot in the neck, while a tongue cut off signals a police informant.\textsuperscript{21} In this macabre system, chopping off limbs, depositing corpses in piles, and hanging bodies from bridges all deliberately dehumanizes victims. Fearing these kinds of violent reprisals, news editors and reporters may abandon investigative reporting, as well as basic news coverage about crime and corruption.\textsuperscript{22} According to one pessimistic account, “There is no freedom of the press in Mexico, there is no government, there is no justice. The criminals are the ones who decide what is to be published.”\textsuperscript{23}

In certain states, complete media blackouts have been achieved. Mexico is now home to dozens of “zones of silence,” including the border city of Reynosa in Tamaulipas. In 2010, several journalists in the Zeta-infested city were kidnapped.
Reading the local press, one would not have known that anything occurred since, fearing violence against the newsroom, no Reynosa newspaper ran a story about the missing journalists. It took a correspondent from an American newspaper, Alfredo Corchado of the *Dallas Morning News*, to finally break the story.\(^{24}\)

In another instance of self-censorship for protection, the Juárez newspaper *Norte de Ciudad Juárez* adopted a policy of not publishing information that may be associated with drug cartels after the death of Armando Rodriguez, who was the star police reporter at the competing paper. “We have learned the lesson: To survive, we publish the minimum,” said *Norte* Editor-in-Chief Alfredo Quijano. “We don’t investigate. Even at that, most of what we know stays in the reporter’s notebook.”\(^{25}\)

While some media outlets retreat into self-censorship to protect themselves, others have become “*narco*-propagandist machines,” essentially reduced to mouthpieces for the gangs and cartels.\(^{26}\) In some cases, any news that is published is first authorized by a PR spokesperson designated by the cartel network. The cartels will go so far as to dictate to editors how to frame photographs in their newspapers.\(^{27}\)

The infamous case of “*narco*-propaganda” journalism occurred when the editors of *El Diario* asked the *narcos* for guidelines, publishing a front-page editorial directed to cartel leaders, “We want you to tell us what it is that you want from us, what you expect us to publish or not to publish,” they wrote.\(^{28}\)

Drug cartels also use the press as bulletin boards to communicate with rival cartels. In Durango state over the summer of 2011, for instance, four journalists were held hostage as gangs demanded media coverage of messages aimed at a rival cartel.\(^{29}\) Yet another way the cartels use the media to their benefit is to suppress stories of their
own violence while bribing journalists to emphasize the violence of a rival group.\textsuperscript{30}

The cartels may also attempt to damage competing operations by planting stories about corrupt officials or police chiefs.

The media's willingness to cede to cartel demands is largely by the collapse of the criminal justice system as well as the government's inability to protect news people.\textsuperscript{31} “If there is no punishment, not even investigation into journalists’ death, then why would you risk your life for a story that might not be printed anyways?” asked journalist Jorge Luis Aguirre. Despite the fact that freedom of speech and freedom of the press are protected by the Mexican Constitution, the criminal justice system has failed to prosecute more than 90% of the press-related crimes that have occurred over the last decade.\textsuperscript{32} Mexico ranks eighth worst on the Committee to Protect Journalists’ (CPJ) Impunity Index, which calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of the country's population.\textsuperscript{33} Mexico falls just short of Afghanistan.

In Mexico, most crimes against journalists are investigated by local authorities of the state rather than by federal units.\textsuperscript{34} However, complicity between police and drug gangs is assumed to be “so common that it routinely undermines justice and creates the widespread perception that the system is controlled by the criminals,” according to CPJ.\textsuperscript{35} During several cases authorities have been found to resort to unlawful methods to produce results, including coercion of witnesses (such as in the investigation of Rodriguez’s murder) and fabrication of evidence. In 2010, nearly 10% of Mexico’s federal police were fired on charges of suspicion of corruption and collaboration with drug traffickers.\textsuperscript{36} Further, many journalists say that local officials
are often the perpetrators. Zeta prints a weekly, fully page letter to Jorge Hank Rhon, a former mayor of Tijuana, asking him why his bodyguard killed Héctor Félix Miranda, who had a tendency to satirize Rhon in a weekly column.

In 2006, the Mexican government created a Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Journalists, but as many journalists have pointed out, this hardly ameliorated the situation. In the four years of its existence, the office has failed to take any significant prosecutorial steps or bring justice to a single one of the journalists’ cases. The office has a severely limited capacity to protect journalists as it lacks the authority to investigate and punish crimes. As one journalist summarized, "[this] is a kamikaze profession, whoever enters it knows that they will not have the protection of the government or the media, the only protection one has is one's own work."

As the Mexican press rapidly loses its freedom and control over the communications sphere, it is also pointedly demonstrating the interrelatedness of independent press and democracy. Pippa Norris, a Government Professor at Harvard, argues that a free press functions as a necessary foundation for an effective democracy, where the press contributes to “strengthening the responsiveness and accountability of governments to all citizens, and providing a pluralist platform and channel of political expression for a multiplicity of groups and interests.” Thus the perpetuation of intimidation and violence against journalists, an inadequate criminal justice system, and widespread self-censorship by both journalists and editors undermines the ancillary role the media should be playing in a well-functioning democracy.
The cartels’ appropriation of the power of the press and the current collapse of Mexico’s fourth estate represents a national crisis threatening basic human rights, democratization, and the value of the Mexican constitution. As the editors at Zeta and other journalists point out, it is then in the interests of the Mexican Government to take steps to better ensure the protection of journalists and importantly, to federalize crimes against the media. Though federalization would not necessarily halt the murders or the subsequent insecurities and censorship, it would relay a nation-wide message about the gravity of the situation and foster a sense of accountability.42

President Calderón proposed such measures in 2008 with a constitutional amendment that would render crimes related to "violations of society's fundamental values, national security, human rights, or freedom of expression..." a federal offense. The bill had to pass Congress by a two-thirds majority vote however, which never happened. States with the worst records for violence against the press were also the most vocal against the bill, citing it as an infringement on State authority.43

It would certainly be amiss, however, to claim that Mexico has completely ceded control of its information sphere. In addition to a few muckrakers like Zeta, journalists and citizens have sought to counter the spread of censorship through the use of “new media.” Twitter, Youtube, Blogger, and other social media sites are providing outlets to report and transmit information about the drug war despite information blockades and attempts by cartels to dictate the news agenda.44 The number of people reachable by such “new media” is limited, however. According to Freedom House, a recent Mexican survey found that only about 36% of the Mexican population uses the Internet.45 A combination of poor infrastructure and the cost of
service prevents the majority of civilians from going online. Additionally, bloggers and other users of social media who relay cartel information have recently proved vulnerable to cartel attacks. In October 2011, Maria Elizabeth Macías Castro, a journalist and blogger on social networking site Nuevo Laredo en Vivo, was killed for anonymously posting about cartels. Castro was decapitated and her body deposited alongside a thoroughfare in Nuevo Laredo. A note found with her explained she was killed for a blog post. Several other Internet would-be journalists have suffered similar fates, left in public places bearing messages, as the cartels attempt to scare off future online investigators.

The cartels themselves have also sought the Internet for their communications benefit, using online media sources like Youtube to transmit intimidating videos or discuss drug-related events. Cyberspace provides the cartels a method of instantaneously bragging about or showing off their recent actions.

Despite international outcry and the increasingly widespread violence against journalists, the Mexican government has failed to take effective steps toward mitigating the situation. The Mexican press corps has also not coalesced to create joint efforts that may better protect themselves and their outlet. Journalists from both sides of the line continue to be killed, inciting only more media blackouts. According to Zeta’s Director Adela Navarro Bello, the way forward for journalists cannot be through continued censorship. “When a journalist self-censors, all of society loses,” she said. “By not publishing information about these illegal activities we become accomplices.”
Notes

2 Jorge Luis Aguirre, personal interview, Aug. 18, 2012.
4 McGahan, “To Kill a Journalist: The unsolved murder of Armando Rodriguez.”
10 According to the Mexican government, a murder can be considered committed by an organized crime group only if: the victim was killed by high caliber firearms; the victim presents signs of torture or severe lesions; the victim was killed where the body was found, or the body was located inside a vehicle; the body was wrapped with sheets, taped, or gagged; the homicide occurred in a penitentiary or involved criminal organizations; or special circumstances occurred (e.g. the victim was abducted, or a narco’s message was found near the body). See: Viridiana Rios, and David A. Shirk, *Drug Violence in Mexico Data and Analysis through 2010* (San Diego, CA: Justice in Mexico Project at the Trans-Border Institute of University of San Diego, 2011), under “Approaches to Measuring Drug Violence in Mexico,” http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/2011-tbi-drugviolence4.pdf
14 Sallie Hughes, “Civic Journalism,” in *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 10
15 Hughes, “Authoritarian and Democratic Models of News Production,” in *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico*, 50
16 Hughes, “Civic Journalism,” in *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico*, 18
17 *Reportero* (Bernardo Ruiz, 2012, United States, Mexico)
20 According to communications theorists, agenda setting is the idea that a correlation exists between the emphases that mass media places on certain issues, and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences. By making some issues more prominent in an audience's mind (agenda setting), mass media can then influence the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about politics or issues. See: Dietram A. Scheufele, and David Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models," *Journal of Communication* 57 (2007), 11 doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00326.x
23 Jorge Luis Aguirre, personal interview, August 18, 2012.
24 Lauría and O’Connor, "Silence or Death in Mexico's Press," 5
27 Monica Medel, “Journalism in Times of Threats, Censorship and Violence, Report from the Seminar ‘Cross-border Coverage of U.S.-Mexico Drug Trafficking,” (Lecture, Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin, March 26-27, 2010)
30 Lauría and O’Connor, "Silence or Death in Mexico's Press," 23.
32 Lauría and O’Connor, "Silence or Death in Mexico's Press," 2.
35 Lauría and O’Connor, "Silence or Death in Mexico's Press," 7.


Lauría and O'Connor, "Silence or Death in Mexico's Press," 21-23.


Campbell, Drug War Zone, 26-27.

Adela Navarro Bello, personal interview, Aug. 21, 2013.
3. Adela Navarro Bello: An Interview

*Adela Navarro Bello is the co-editor and director of Zeta, a muckraking weekly with offices in a residential neighborhood. The yellow building is recognizable as the only one with bodyguards standing outside. This interview was conducted in person on August 21, 2012.*

**Question:** How would you describe the situation for journalists in Mexico right now?

**Adela:** Journalists are hostages to the government and the criminals. There is a lot of death and a lot of impunity. Here [at Zeta] we’ve had a sad history. We’ve lost two editors and Jesús [Blancornelas, the founder and former director] nearly died when assassins fired on his car. Francisco Ortiz Franco, the general editor, was killed in front of his two children.

**Question:** Have you ever received threats?

**Adela:** Of course, almost every day. Serious ones, sometimes. Two years ago the United States let us know that the *narcos* were trying to kill us. The [Mexican] military gave us bulletproof vests and armed bodyguards. Buts it’s not a solution. The solution is to put the murderers in jail.

**Question:** Why do you keep writing despite the attempts on your life?

**Adela:** I try not to think my life is at risk. I do normal things: I go to the store, I cook. But this is what I like to do, this is my vocation.

**Question:** How do you keep your kids and your family safe?
Adela: I don’t talk about my kids. And I don’t talk about my personal life. It’s too dangerous.

Question: What steps have you as an editor taken to protect your reporters and writers?
Adela: We try to protect our journalists by putting special emphasis on confirming our investigations. And we put “Zeta investigation” instead of the author’s byline on all crime and narco articles.

Question: Why do you think the cartels target journalists?
Adela: They want a blind and deaf society. They want to take away our voice.

Question: And what can be done to counter their attacks on the press? How can Mexico become safer to practice journalism?
Adela: We like to think that with our journalism we’re doing justice: when we print a picture, we show this is who is hurting us. When we do an investigation, we show this is how they’re killing us. Journalists need to not self-censor, that’s giving the criminals what they want. Mexicans should vote for changes that will end the drug war and stop the corruption.

Question: Have you ever thought of leaving, going somewhere safer for journalists?
Adela: No, never. I love Tijuana. I love my country.
Part II  San Diego – Tijuana

Figure 2 Coke Brown Jr. Slums. 2008.
For many Americans, Tijuana is the Mexican Las Vegas.

The highway from the world’s busiest international border crossing point empties onto *Avenida Revolucion*, the tourist district, which proudly declares itself the most visited city in the world.¹ Open-air, block-long pharmacies lined in mirrors sell everything from Viagra to Valium while men with donkeys offer pictures for five dollars. Salesmen hawk at customers, trying to lure Bermuda shorts families into restaurants with the promise of half-rate specials. Men and women tango in the afternoon in open-air ballrooms for those seeking Latin culture. In the adjacent streets of *Zona Río* (the red-light district), women and the Internet are for sale in the same small, colorful houses. Signs declaring a fine for littering stand guard over decomposing garbage. Scorpion corpses lie buried in shop window bottles, while next-door cheap hotels advertise strippers, dancers, gambling, and booze in what would be neon signs if they’d turn on again. The infamous Agua Caliente dog racing track is just around the bend. And this is all many Americans ever see of TJ. But there is a lot more to Tijuana than the mirage of a tequila shot glass.

A city of 1.5 million people, Tijuana is fueled by migrants, many of whom traveled from the south for proximity to the U.S. border, or were deported back, expelled from that very border. Migration feeds the urban sprawl, drives the industrial workplace, and overwhelms the city’s already limited social services and *casas de huespedes* (shelters).²
Tijuana is the largest consumer of drugs within the country. In the 1980s, the Arellano Felix Organization set up hundreds of tienditas (neighborhood drug shops), throughout the colonias (slums). According to journalist Ioan Grillo, this strategy added “an extra dimension to Mexican drug violence. Now it wasn’t just about moving tons over the border, it was also about slinging crack to addicts.” Street fights drove up the violence, and in the 1990s, Tijuana’s underworld went to war.

The fighting lost any of its prior pretenses of discretion; the casualties now included powerful figureheads. Catholic Cardinal Juan Jesús Posada Ocampo was killed in 1993, allegedly by members of the Arellano Felix Organization. Tijuana police chief Frederico Benítez, seen as an honest, if naïve official confronting the drug underworld, was assassinated in 1994. These events signaled the start of a major crisis. At stake was the profitable smuggling corridor of Baja California. With access to the drug markets of California through land, sea, or plane, Tijuana provided an extremely valuable plaza.

According to Victor Clark-Alfaro, Director of the Binational Center for Human Rights, “Nineteen ninety-eight was the most violent year in the history of Tijuana.” But Clark-Alfaro spoke too soon. After President Calderón’s offensive against the drug cartels began in 2006, thirty-three hundred federal police were sent to Tijuana to quell the violence and stop the pervasive corruption. Between 2007 and 2008, the fighting escalated. In the last few months of 2008, nearly 500 people were murdered in the city, compared to 1998’s count of 357 murders. The killings also became more gruesome and more public, and kidnappings became common. The victims now included families and kids. Venturing into public meant risking a grisly
sighting: decapitated bodies were displayed in public squares, dismembered women were put in trash bags, and shootouts occurred during daylight. In September 2008, thirteen bodies, some with their tongues cut out, were dumped across the street from an elementary school.

Then, in 2009, an anomaly occurred: the violence in Tijuana tapered off. Drug-related killing slowed overall, although towards the end of the year another spasm of killings left approximately eighty bodies in its wake. As the number of homicides slowed, Tijuana was held up as a success story, and for some, considered a paragon of Calderón’s war on the narcos. “The official explanation thanks the military and police for being effective and diminishing the cartel violence,” said Clark-Alfaro. “But what really happened was a business agreement between the cartels. It was a new kind of model, with business in mind. The violence was bad because it attracts the attention of the media, of the federal police, the military, and the DEA.”

Clark-Alfaro pointed out that by comparison, Tijuana today is an “ideal” world. “Now you can walk down the street without fear. The tourists are returning,” he continued. “But if you go to the outskirts of our city, the other Tijuana, it’s a different story.”

Notes

2 Sebastian Rotella, Twilight on the Line (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 33.


6 For an account of Benítez and his assassination, see: Rotella, “Narco-politics: Benitez and Beyond,” in *Twilight on the Line*.


10 For the 2008 count see: Finnegan, “In the Name of the Law: A Colonel Cracks Down on Corruption,” and for the 1998 count see: Manson, “In a State of Bloody Mayhem.”


14 For an investigation into how the officials contributed (or not) to restoring the peace in Tijuana see: Finnegan, “In the Name of the Law: A Colonel Cracks Down on Corruption.”

15 Victor Clark Alfaro, Personal interview, August 20, 2012.
5. Casa Madre Asunta: Sheltering Deported Mothers

The greatest consequence of the so-called American Dream is the disintegration of the family.

–Paolo, a deportee, quoted in Joanna Dreby, Divided by Borders, 2010

A blue oasis among beige residential buildings, Casa Madre Asunta overlooks the cluster and traffic of central Tijuana. The two-story plaster house is encircled by a sea-blue iron gate, beyond which a tiny lawn browns and a cement patio emanates heat. On days when smog doesn’t consume the city below, the U.S.-Mexico Border is a discernable zigzag just under three miles away. A shelter for migrant women, Casa Madre Asunta was built in the 1990s by a Catholic order called the Scalabrinis, and is run by Portuguese nuns and volunteers. They accept all women, regardless of nationality or religion. Since they receive minimal funding from the government, the shelter operates mostly on contributions from past migrants and foreigners, with donations of food and clothing from locals. The forty-two-bed facility provides women with a place to sleep, clothes, and prepared meals, while volunteer doctors and social workers are available to consult with the residents as well.

Sandra Augilar, a short, matronly woman with black hair pulled tightly into a ponytail, sits on the patio at Casa Madre Asunta, fanning herself with her hands. She says she counts herself lucky to have found a place to sleep. Sandra is one among thousands of deportees stuck in Tijuana. She arrived without a place to stay, equipped with only an American cell phone and the list of groceries she was on her way to buy before she was arrested. Like the majority of those deported here, Sandra
had never seen the city before, and knows no one along the border. “When I came here I didn’t know where I was going to go,” she said. “The hotels [by the border] are very cheap, but there is no security, there are drunks, drug addicts, and many people steal.”

While Casa Madre Asunta was originally built to house migrants on their way north to pursue the American Dream, Sister Adelia Contini, director of the shelter, says that about 90% of the women who stayed in 2012 were deportees. “Women used to come here with their children going from the south to the north,” she said. “Now we are receiving those children back as women who are being deported.”

As the largest city on the border, Tijuana receives more deportees than any other deportation site. In 2011, an average of 254 migrants a day were deported from the United States via the San Ysidro border crossing point, according to Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM). While the majority of deportees have historically been working-age males, an increasing number of females are finding themselves repatriated. In fact, INM found that women and girls made up 10% of all Mexican deportees in 2012. Casa Madre Asunta can confirm that trend: in 2012, all of their beds were occupied nearly every night.

Outside the shelter, men approach the gates to talk to the women and to ask for water. Some are the male relatives of the women staying here, and all are sleeping at the nearby Casa del Migrante, a shelter for men. “They don’t get treated as good as us there,” said Sandra, as she passes the men bottled water through the gaps in the fence. Another one of the women picks up the garden hose and sprays the men sweating in Tijuana’s summer afternoon. “Perros! Perros!” (dogs), she teases. The
men go back to loitering across the street, shouting to passing cars that they’ll wash the windows, clean the cars.

At the sound of a hand bell the women go inside to eat lunch. In the dining room, a single picture of the grieving Virgin adorns the white walls. The women carry plastic plates filled with a simple meal—rice, beans, and corn tortillas—to the foldable tables covered with picnic-style, gingham tablecloths. Before eating, they stand and say a prayer in unison, led by Sister Adelia. They cross themselves and sit down to eat, silently.

While the interactions may seem placid and the speaking minimal, in the halls of Casa Madre Asunta stories of deportations, separated families, kidnappings, and sexual assault circulate. “These women suffer so much violence,” said Sister Adelia. “And they have given up everything and anything they might have had, their land, their house, to go to the United States. Besides their family, they have nothing.”

Sandra was first deported six years ago, after she was pulled over for a traffic violation near her home in Los Angeles. She hasn’t seen four of her five children since then, her only connection to them a nightly Skype chat. She has already tried—and failed—twice to cross the border that separates her from her family. Sandra had been living illegally in the United States for nearly fourteen years. The breadwinner of her family, she worked as a housekeeper, raising her five kids, now ages twelve to twenty, with the help of her mother and sister, who also relocated from southern Mexico to Los Angeles.
“In Mexico I owed a lot of money, but from the U.S., I was able to work and pay it back in three months. I bought my kids new clothes for the first time,” Sandra said.

After being detained for over two months in a detention center run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Sandra was put on a bus with other deportees and driven to the border. She and the other handful of passengers were given a brown paper bag containing whatever possessions they were originally arrested with, and then directed to pass through a metal turnstile gate with a blue deportation notice. Sandra arrived in Mexico homeless, effectively stateless, and without her family.6

Deportee shantytowns clog the border canal, swollen from a cluster of gathered rubbage to large homeless camps. The deportees in these camps are at risk for robbing, kidnappings, or sexual assault.7 Mexican gangs have been known to target deportees, assuming that they have family in the United States who will pay a ransom.8 The camps, many of which are adjacent to Zona Rio, or Tijuana’s infamous “red light” district, are plagued with H.I.V.9

Lupita and Ynez, who share a bunk bed next to Sandra at Casa Madre Asunta, were horrified that they might have to stay in the canal after they were deported. Cousins from Oaxaca, the women crossed the desert with coyotes (border runners who will smuggle people across for a fee), to join their families in the United States. Ynez, a portly woman with features distinctive to southern Mexican states, was headed home to her husband and her three young boys after visiting her elderly parents in Oaxaca. Lupita, a baby-faced nineteen-year old, was lured north by the
prospect of a job: her older brothers, who work as waiters in Los Angeles, promised her a busboy position. Each woman’s family paid $4,000 for them to cross. “Here, the economy is bad, the wages are so low you barely have enough to eat,” Lupita said.

The women traveled with five other people, walking through Tecate, a small border city thought by the U.S. Border Patrol to be a nonviable port of entry due to its mountainous terrain. The coyotes led the dehydrated and exhausted group over the border fence and then to a cave where they took everyone’s phone, money, and anything else of value, and began making ransom calls to the American family members. Once they were satisfied money had been deposited, the coyotes abandoned the group, telling them to run. “I was afraid they would kill us,” said Ynez. “But they just left us.”

After being deported, the cousins took refuge in a rundown hotel, renting a cheap room in, “un luga peligroso,” (a bad place). Fearing for their safety, the women relocated to Casa Madre Asunta while they decide what to do next. Ynez thinks she’ll try to save money to cross again. But for Lupita, that option is out of the question. “It’s very expensive and too much of a waste,” she said. For Ynez, it’s a matter of getting back to her boys, and her home of over ten years. “If I had my children I would stay,” she said. “But right now they are studying and I don’t want to bring them here. They were born there [in the U.S.], and there’s nothing for them here.”

According to Casa Madre Asunta’s social worker, Ynez and Sandra’s situation, with deportation severing them from their children, is increasingly common among deportees. With their families, their husbands, and their children on the other end of the international divide, many of these women believe that remaining close to
the border, instead of traveling to their interior or southern hometowns, will provide more options to see and eventually return to their families. Their fear of separation is not just hypothetical; it is becoming an increasingly common nightmare. According to Sister Adelia, every week Casa Madre Asunta receives new arrivals urgently seeking assistance regarding the custody of their children.

The escalating trend of deportee mothers can hardly be surprising, considering that in 2008, an estimated 5.5 million children in the United States (more than 7% of the total child population) had unauthorized parents. Of these kids, more than three-quarters were U.S.-born citizens. According to an investigation by Color Lines, federal data obtained through a Freedom of Information Act revealed that between July 1, 2010, and Sept. 31, 2012, nearly 23% of all deportations—over 200,000—were issued for immigrant parents with citizen children. Some experts expect the total number of deported parents to be even higher, as many deportees do not alert authorities that they have children. Color Lines estimated that every year, more than 90,000 parents are separated from their U.S.-citizen kids upon removal from the United States. A significant percentage of these children are under the age of five.

Deportation often results in permanent changes to family dynamics. Children may be placed in foster care, find themselves in a single parent household, or given to the care of relatives when one or both parents are deported. In some cases, the whole family, including U.S. citizen children, may be uprooted and moved to Mexico, where they may not even speak the language.

From the moment parents are arrested and then detained, they are physically separated from their children. This separation often comes with no notice; the
children might arrive home from school to find their parent(s) gone. The sudden separation often becomes permanent. While Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) maintains that primary caregivers are not a priority for deportation (except in situations of repeat immigration violators or convicted criminals), Casa Madre Asunta remains skeptical. So many mothers arrive with kids left behind in the U.S. that the shelter brought in a pro-bono lawyer to work on family separation cases.

Often, when parents enter deportation proceedings, their children are placed in the custody of the U.S. child welfare system or in juvenile courts. Though parents have the option of putting their children in the custody of another relative, ICE will not allow kids to reside with another undocumented immigrant who could also be deported at any time. This means women like Sandra and Ynez don’t report that they have children, worried their kids may be taken away. Ynez said she constantly thinks about what will happen if her husband is deported too.

Every day, hundreds of immigrant parents lose custody of their children. In 2011, the Applied Research Center estimated that at least 5,100 children were living in foster care after an immigrant parent’s detention or deportation. The report also projected that if deportation policies continue, in the next five years at least fifteen thousand more children could be placed in similar circumstances. According to lawyers and child welfare caseworkers, as rates of deportation increase, so too does the number of children from immigrant families ending up in foster care. According to University of California at Irvine Professor Ana Elizabeth Rosas, “The ease with which children born in the United States can be denied the right to be raised by their
parents has created a distinct form of alienation that inspires citizen kids to feel like
disenfranchised undocumented individuals.\textsuperscript{19}

Once a child enters the foster care system, detained or deported parents may lose communication, unable then to have any input in the outcome of their child’s care. One of the key problems is that both the minor and the adult become lost in Kafka-esque bureaucracies that operate separately, when they need to be working in tandem. A detained parent is unavailable to participate in Child Protective Services’ case plans, due to the isolation of the detention centers.\textsuperscript{20} The detained immigrant parent may be transferred to any detention center around the country, which often results in the parent being held far from the hearings and proceedings that determine a child’s care. Further, once parents are taken into custody it becomes difficult for caseworkers to track them down. The parent is arrested and recorded as an inmate of a jail, and then moved to a federal detention center where records are not public and information on detainees is not readily available. The parent may also be transferred from one facility to the next without any notice given to the caseworker; on average, the detainees are held over 300 miles from their home.\textsuperscript{21} All of these factors increase the chance that parental rights may be terminated.

Even in circumstances where the caseworkers are able to inform the parents of procedures and hearings, ICE refuses to transport the detainee to juvenile court hearings where decisions about their children’s custody will be made.\textsuperscript{22} Unable to attend the hearings, and without access to legal counsel or other forms of assistance, the detained immigrant parents are incapable of providing the necessary documentation and evidence to prove their capacity to parent their children.\textsuperscript{23}
After parents are deported, reuniting with their children becomes even more complicated than it was from detention. Sandra says she has nightmares that she will never get to take her kids to school, walk with them, or live with them again. She breaks down while talking about her five children. While the other women console her, Sandra pulls at the collar of her bright pink “Hollywood” shirt to hide her crying. “All I want is to be with them again,” she says. “And how can I do that? I make here in one day what I made there in one hour.”

In the case of children in the custody of the foster care system, the Applied Research Center found a "systemic bias against reunifying children with parents in other countries." It is difficult for the deported parents to demonstrate that they are able to satisfy standards of care (including health and welfare needs) that allow restoration of legal parental rights. Further, some social workers and family court judges maintain that children of deported immigrants are better off living in the United States, even if that means remaining in the foster care system. In most cases, children will be reunited with their repatriated parents only if foreign consulates get involved and advocate on the parents' behalf.

For parents like Ynez and Sandra who have so far been lucky in retaining legal custody of their kids, the barriers to reunification are lower. The Pew Research Hispanic Center estimates that since 2005, some 300,000 U.S.-born children migrated from the United States to Mexico. Sandra and Ynez worry, however, that bringing the children to Mexico will interrupt their schooling, and may mean a poorer quality of life. Relocating children to another country is not only disruptive to children’s lives, but negatively impacts the United States, which loses the potential and
productivity of native citizens.28

Aside from the obvious personal tragedy that deportations entail, there has been little research into the effects that the contemporary deportation policies have had on the experience of Mexican immigrant families in the United States.29 Yet when people are deported and forcibly separated from their loved ones, particularly children, the event can take a psychological and emotional toll. A 2010 report by the Urban Institute detailed a number of behavioral changes among children with detained or deported parents. These changes included frequent crying, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, clinging behavior, an increase in fear and anxiety, and an aversion to law enforcement officials.30 Children who live with such insecurity as the constant looming threat of deportation are not only “hyper-aware” of legality, but are also vulnerable to anxiety, exhaustion, and fear.31,32

Deportation’s psychological effects extend beyond the children of the family. Another Pew survey found that 68% of Latino respondents worried that they, a family member, or a close friend might be deported.33 Researchers have also found that the fear can progress to trauma when a family member is involved in deportation proceedings. A 2004 study that surveyed deportees, family members, and “parties connected to detainees/family members” found that 70% of respondents showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.34 Similarly, and unsurprising to the nuns running Casa Madre Asunta, depression is common among immigrant mothers separated from their children. Ynez says she gets headaches from worrying about her sons. “It’s terrible. I feel sick,” she said.
In addition to the psychological distress that deportation may inflict on all members of a family, when a deportee was formerly a primary breadwinner, the family may be reduced to extreme financial hardship. Many working class immigrant families have been reduced to poverty in this manner, without recourse to food stamps, Medicaid, or other government assistance programs. Deprived of a major source of income and additionally burdened with the financial strains of legal fees for bail or lawyers, families may no longer be able to pay rent, and may lose their homes to foreclosure.

Meanwhile, deportees like Sandra often have difficulty finding work. Sandra spends most of the day looking for a job in Tijuana. “I don’t have any I.D. so they don’t hire me,” she said. This problem is common; many deportees arrive with no form of identification, either because they destroyed their Mexican paperwork in the U.S., or, frequently, because they never had any to begin with. Mexico’s National Registry estimates that between seven to nine million Mexicans lack a proper birth certificate. Victor Clark-Alfaro, Director of the Binational Center for Human Rights in Tijuana, notes the irony of being doubly undocumented. According to Clark-Alfaro, "Because they lack Mexican legal forms like a driver’s license or voter’s card they are essentially ‘undocumented’ in their own country.” But for Sandra, there isn’t an option to give up; she wants to return to her children.

Many of the women at Casa Madre Asunta, Sandra and Sister Adelia included, don’t understand how a country can separate children from their parents so decisively. “It shouldn’t be so hard for parents to be with their children,” Sister Adelia said. While the U.S. does not protect the right to family unity, the right to live
with one’s family is protected under international human rights treaties. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) establishes that, “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” UDHR further states that, “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home… everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference.” It is important to note that the constitutional rights of parents (established by the fourteenth amendment) apply not just to citizens, but also to immigrant parents who have the right to the care and custody of their children. In many deportation cases, however, the judges are not allowed to take into consideration the extent to which family members—even U.S. citizens—will be affected by the deportation of a relation.

Sandra, Ynez, and many of the other women at Casa Madre Asunta refuse to let their legal status subsume their ability to protect their families. Despite the enormous cost and life-threatening risks, they say they will cross the border over and over again to be with their families. Though Sandra nearly died of dehydration during her last unsuccessful attempt at crossing, and Ynez thought her kidnapper-coyotes were going to kill her, both women plan to find a way to get across the border again.

“I have five [U.S.-born] kids, and they keep asking me when I’m going to come home,” said Sandra. “I wish I had an answer.”

Notes

1 The names of all deportees in this piece have been changed to protect their anonymity. The quotes from the residents of Casa Madre Asunta and Sister Adelia Contini come from a personal interview on August 23, 2012.


Wessler, “Nearly 205K Deportations of Parents of U.S. Citizens in Just Over Two Years.”


22 Wessler, “Nearly 205K Deportations of Parents of U.S. Citizens in Just Over Two Years.”


33 Dreby, “The Burden of Deportation on Children in Mexican Immigrant Families,” 833.

34 Luz Maria Villanueva-Gonzalez, “Psychological Impact of IIRIRA (Tittle III) on Legal Permanent U.S. Residents and Their Families” (PhD Diss, San Diego University for Integrative Studies, 2005), 71.


36 Wessler and Hing, “Torn Apart,” 159.

37 In Mexico, newborns are not automatically registered at birth, they must be taken to the civil registry office where the parents pay a fee to get the paperwork. For the many people in Mexico, this registration is simply an unnecessary fee and hassle. See: Monica Ortiz Uribe, “Helping Mexico’s Undocumented People,” *Public Radio International*, Jan. 4, 2013, http://www.theworld.org/2013/01/mexico-undocumented/

38 Victor Clark-Alfaro, Personal interview, Aug. 21, 2013.


6. Cristina Palacios and the Search for Missing Persons

Cristina Palacios Hodoyán is dying of lung cancer, but if you ask her, she’ll tell you it’s not the first thing on her mind. She has died twice before, she says, when two of her sons were taken away from her.¹

Palacios is a seventy-two-year old woman with gaunt cheeks and white hair cropped close to her chin. In her office, boxes are stacked on top of each other, containing the names, pictures, and a short description of people who have not been seen for years. As President of the Asociacion Ciudadana Contra la Impunidad (the Citizen’s Association Against Impunity), Palacios advocates for the families of missing persons. Her Tijuana-based organization began in 2007 with a group of families demanding justice—or at least some investigation—into the disappearance of their loved ones. Official statistics estimate more than 26,121 people have disappeared in Mexico over the course of the drug wars.² Journalist Charles Bowden contends that the figure undercounts, representing only the reported and officially recorded cases of missing persons. In his book Murder City, Bowden cites a study that found only 52% of the Mexicans surveyed thought they would “very probably” report being a victim of crime.³ There is little incentive to report a disappearance, according to Human Rights Ombudsman Raúl Plascencia; most cases are never investigated.⁴ Even when they are reported, disappearances have no legal definition under Mexican federal law, which means the crime cannot be federally prosecuted unless the perpetrator committed another punishable offense.⁵
Baja California’s former Secretary General Jose Francisco Blake Mora claims the majority of the disappeared persons were involved in organized crime. The statement makes Palacios angry. She maintains that the accusation is false, and says her organization has plenty of case files to prove it so. “The truth is that the [official] investigators aren’t interested in finding people,” she said. Since very few of the cases of the thousands of missing people have been solved so far, the members of the Citizens’ Association do what they can to move investigations forward. They have created online databases with names and pictures of the missing, and every Friday they gather outside the Tijuana Municipal Government Building holding signs, pictures, and megaphones, calling for government action.

Palacios’ search for her own missing son Alejandro Hodoyán, Alex, is long over. Between sips of water, she relates how Alex disappeared—twice. The first time was in 1996. And the second time, in 1997, he was kidnapped in front of her. Though she pursued officials for information, hired several private investigators, and conducted searches through Baja California’s morgues herself, she never found him. It’s a story she has told many times before. It starts with a tree.

Wealthy young men of Palacios’ community used to gather under the tree at the edge of their gated neighborhood. It was their rendezvous spot, their known hang-out. They were the “Juniors,” the heirs of Tijuana’s elite, from families known in the newspapers’ society pages. Alex and his younger brother Alfredo enjoyed a privileged upbringing. American citizens born in San Diego, they attended private Catholic schools across the border where they played football, and belonged to a well-connected family of civil engineers and business owners. Their mother wanted
them to become lawyers or engineers themselves, but according to Mexican law enforcement, the brothers became involved with the Arellano Félix Cartel instead.⁷

Palacios says she remembers Ramón Arellano Félix well, a man once on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list and considered the most violent member of one of the most violent drug cartels.⁸ Palacios recalled that he would always wear shorts and a mink coat with no shirt underneath, only heavy gold chains. “Everyone knew him, he came to all the parties with champagne,” she said. “He heard about the tree and came with a truck and coolers full of beer." Arellano Félix quickly bought the allegiance of Tijuana’s young and bored upper class with the enticement of drugs, alcohol, and illicit trafficking. Alex was a law student in college then, but soon dropped out, addicted to cocaine.

In September 1996, Alex was abducted. He disappeared for eighty days, held captive by General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo of the Mexican military.⁹ At the time Alex was detained, the military was allowed to hold suspects for up to forty-eight hours.¹⁰ Alex was kept for over two months without any arrest warrant or police report.¹¹ At an empty military barracks, Alex was interrogated until he admitted belonging to the Arellano Félix Cartel, and gave testimony against its members, including his own younger brother.¹² When Alex was released, Palacios said he revealed that he had been tortured and that his confessions were coerced. “They burned him, they hit him with spikes, they put out cigarettes on his feet and his testicles, they used electric shocks on his feet…Alex was a very happy person, but when he came back he was frozen, he was another person.” Palacios also said that Alex had Stockholm syndrome, and kept defending the indefensible and illegal
actions of his capturers.

While U.S. diplomats knew of Alex’s imprisonment and a member of the American Embassy even visited him at the barracks, they did nothing to assist him, even though he was an American citizen. Alex did not report his torture to the official, but during the interview he was chained to a bed and blindfolded. Alex was eventually released after providing an eight-hour, filmed testimony against the Arellano Félix Cartel. General Gutiérrez Rebollo meanwhile, was promoted. During Alex’s detainment, his twenty-five-year old brother Alfredo was arrested at a beach house in San Diego. Alfredo was wanted for the murder of Baja California’s police commander Ernesto Ibarra Santes, but was arrested by the FBI and officials from the Drug Enforcement Administration for other, relatively minor charges.

In 1997, U.S. officials in San Diego offered Alex to be a part of a witness protection program in exchange for more information. They were interested in Alex’s former captor, General Gutiérrez Rebollo who, two months after his promotion, was revealed to be working for the Juárez Cartel. Alex spent ten days in San Diego talking to United States government officials. He was also again asked to testify against his imprisoned brother. One morning, without telling anyone where he was going, Alex crossed the border back in Tijuana. “He was thirty-five, but he was still a Mama's boy. He called every day,” said Palacios, “and he was worried he would disappear into their protection program without being able to see or talk to us again. He wanted to think it over.”

Less than two weeks later, Alex was kidnapped from his mother’s car. "They took my son away in front of me,” she said. “They pointed a gun at me and a gun at
him and took him into their van. I was screaming, a lot. I told them to let him go, begged them to leave him.” Palacios has not seen Alex since. “I don’t think I’m ever going to find him,” she said, “but I just wish that I could know where he went, where he was taken.” She admits however, that she knows what happens to most of the kidnapped people who have betrayed a cartel, “They are dissolved in acid. The residues are so disintegrated that it is impossible to extract even a DNA sample.”

Palacios’ younger son, Alfredo, remains in jail in Matamoras, Mexico where he is serving a 167-year sentence. Alex’s testimony, once held up as a breakthrough in fighting Tijuana’s organized crime, was dismissed by the United States as obtained through torture, and thereby invalid.

Palacios continues helping families who, like her, suffer the pain of continuing to search for a loved one without any support from police or officials. "When I started looking for him I was frustrated. I felt like the only person in Mexico who had to deal with this," she said. "At the beginning it’s always very hard, you always hope that you will find your child alive. You follow any lead, no matter how small. I don’t know how many times I gave money to people who came and said if you give me $5000, I’ll bring your son back."

Palacios notes that people are still going missing in Tijuana (“though this year it’s only twenty-six so far”), and that the system of law enforcement still needs major improvements. “We are never going to find our people unless they start investigating as soon as someone goes missing,” she said. “We need to keep pushing for this until it happens, for the victims’ sakes, and for the families.”

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In March 2013, Cristina Palacios Hodoyán passed away after battling cancer for more than ten years. Her daughter, Adriana Palacios Hodoyán, continues with the work of the Associacion Ciudadana Contra la Impunidad. Before Cristina died she saw Alfredo’s prison sentence reduced to fifty years, but never discovered what happened to Alex.

Notes

1 Cristina Hodoyán Palacios, Personal interview, Aug. 22, 2012.
3 Charles Bowden, Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields (New York: Nation, 2010), 82.
11 Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, “Arraigo Made in Mexico: A Violation of Human Rights,” See chap. 6, no. 11 for more on arraigo.
18 Vulliamy, *Amexica: War Along the Borderline*, 44.
Part III     El Paso – Ciudad Juárez

Figure 3 Photo by author. One of the border bridges as seen from the El Paso, Texas.
7. Introduction: El Paso – Ciudad Juárez

Surrounded by mountains and Yucca trees, El Paso’s highway descends into Texmexica with the promise of Del Taco, Los Banditos, El Pollo Loco, Chico’s Tacos, and El Taco Tote. The highway turns alongside the north bank, while train tracks continue across the Rio Grande (which Mexicans call the Rio Bravo), and into Ciudad Juárez. Just beyond a chain link fence, nearly naked children play with an old tire in the lingering trickle of a river.

The river is a stopping point, a guttural end to the chaos and haphazard lean-tos and shantytown colonias built up to the banks of the Juárez side. Expansive concrete slabs forming the manmade riverbed prevent that chaos from bleeding over into El Paso, where the streets pick up clean and crisscross beyond the suburbs until they end, abruptly, in desert sand. But neither the river, nor the three perimeter fences can prevent the porous leaking of the border, the silent seepage of contraband goods, trafficked people, illegal entrants, and narcotics. Nor can the Rio Grande, the fences, the helicopters, and the numerous border patrol cars alleviate an echo of fear as it permeates both sides of the international line.

These two cities, El Paso in Texas and Ciudad Juárez in Mexico, share a basin, a desert, and a common water supply. Identities of the people in both cities defy the border. Eighty-one percent of El Paso’s population self-identifies as Hispanic. El Pasoans who grew up in Juárez live in El Paso during the week and cross the border to Juárez for weekends with their family. The division between the cities continues to blur. Many El Paso businesses migrated from the now vacant Juárez boulevards. During the afternoons, the streets from downtown El Paso to the
border are crowded and industrious. Vendors throughout the block play portable
boom boxes that compete with each other. The government buildings release air-
conditioned men and women in suits, who exchange the Courthouse for City Hall.
Piñatas and Quinceañera dresses are peddled with ferocity. At dusk, the streets empty
as patrons from across the river make their way back through the clinking border
turnstile to navigate home through Juárez before dark.

From El Paso, Juárez looks, “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues,” a sin-city of
prostitutes, sickness, and drugs. The Texas side of the line is happy to report that the
violence has only rarely, if ever, transferred over from its blood-soaked neighbor. In
2010, Juárez buried 3,622 dead; that same year, El Paso counted only five murders.

Before the drug war, before the cartels started fighting each other, and before
Calderón sent in soldiers and the federal police, Juárez’s homicide record was set in
September 1995: by end of the month thirty-nine people were reported murdered.
According to author and journalist Charles Bowden, these were the golden days of
peace in Juárez, when Americans still crossed the border casually for lunch and a hair
cut, before the daily murder count reached double digits. According to Bowden, this
was “a time when death made sense in Juárez. You died because you lost a drug load.
Or you died because you had a drug load. Or you died because you tried to do a drug
deal. Or you died because you were a snitch…”

The cause-effect logic to the killings had disappeared by January 2008 when
Mexico’s largest and most powerful DTO, the Sinaloa Cartel, declared war on the
Juárez Cartel. The message was delivered via the body of policeman, a public corpse
made almost unrecognizable by bullet holes. In addition to his murder, a banner
appeared, placed on a monument to fallen police officers: “For those who do not believe,” it said, listing the names of four assassinated officers believed to have belonged to La Línea, a group of officers supporting the Juárez Cartel. On the other side were the names of seventeen more officers: “For those who continue not to believe.” And so began the stream of killings. Juárez witnessed some 10,800 men, women, and children killed from 2008 to 2012, a disproportionately large number of the 120,000 homicides throughout the country. Extreme violence—mass graves, tortured bodies, bodies hanging from bridges—became the norm.

Homicide counts peaked at the end of 2010, and by 2012, the violence began showing a new trend: decline. The American press was quick to declare the fighting finished: the Sinaloa Cartel beat out the Juárez Cartel and has control of the plaza. Hard-line Police Chief Julian Leyzaola, who was brought in from Tijuana where he purged the city of criminals, was congratulated for the improvement. Now with an estimated homicide rate of 148 people per 100,000 (compared to New Orleans’ fifty-eight murders per 100,000), Juárez is no longer the murder capital of the world, passing the distinction on to Honduras’ San Pedro Sula.

But of course, it is not that easy to return to a sense of normalcy. Residents of the city are left with unexplained deaths, missing persons remaining to be found, crimes that have only victims, and where, regardless of social status, income, or employment, any moment may still lead to kidnapping, murder, or violent carjacking. Fear in Juárez is unremitting, a constant white noise that residents live with. The curtains are drawn, the doors are locked, the parks are empty, and Avenida Juárez—a once-busy street at the center of the city’s commerce and nightlife—displays empty
shop windows. More than 10,000 businesses have closed in Juárez, another casualty of the violence. Houses—in some places whole neighborhoods—stand abandoned.

The Mayor of Juárez lives in El Paso; the publisher of the city’s daily paper lives in El Paso; and the publisher of the daily paper of Chihuahua lives in New Mexico. Those who had the money and the legal documents fled.

“Juárez?” remarked Gabriel Chivas, a resident crossing the border from El Paso just before dusk, “It’s still hell over there.”

Notes

3 “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues” is a song by Bob Dylan.
7 Bowden, Murder City, 10.
11 The numbers come from a nonpartisan Mexican think tank’s research report. The report acknowledges that the officially reported figures may, or may not, be skewed in favor of a lower homicide rate. See: Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal A.C. “San Pedro Sula, la ciudad más violenta del mundo; Juárez, la segunda,” January 11, 2012,
13 Bowden, Murder City, 7.
8. ASYLUM

*People have lost their sensitivity. People get used to seeing it, seeing people die.*

—Saul Reyes Salazar, Asylee, Activist

*The biggest persecutor of the Mexican people is the Mexican state.*

—Carlos Spector, Asylum Lawyer

Though it is mid-August, Marisella cannot stop shivering beneath her flannel shirt and jeans. She holds a white sign amidst a demonstration in front of the Mexican Consulate in El Paso, Texas. While children suck on rocket-shaped popsicles, and others in the crowd press sweating water bottles to their faces, Marisella answers reporters’ questions quickly and delicately; her voice could belong to a young child.

“*Esta es la razón,*” her construction paper and glitter-glue sign reads on one side, and on the other, “*Vive Inez,*” is written underneath a picture of a curly-haired woman with her kids. The woman is Marisella’s mother, Inez Hernandez, and the thirty or so Mexican nationals gathered outside the Consulate are protesting the one-year anniversary of her disappearance. Inez was taken from her home in Guadalupe, on the outskirts of Ciudad Juárez, in 2011. Marisella was there the day her mother was kidnapped. Masked gunmen beat and kicked the family, took Inez, and told the others to leave. “We lived with fear,” Marisella said. “Nothing had ever happened until my mom disappeared. After that we decided to come here.” The teenager admits that she still has trouble sleeping and worries every day if the men who took her mother will find her too.

Marisella’s experience is unfortunately common among residents of the Juárez Valley, a sparsely populated rural outcrop that has become one of the most
violent areas of Mexico. Just across the U.S. border fence from El Paso, TX, the Valley is a contentious drug smuggling corridor: a site of the warring Sinaloa and Juárez Cartels. Formerly farmland for the production of cotton, the small towns populating the Juárez Valley now contain burned-out houses and abandoned fields.² It has been called, “the deadliest place in Mexico,” a big claim for a valley just east of Ciudad Juárez, nicknamed, “Murder City.”³ Violence peaked in Juárez in 2010, with nearly ten murders per day in a city of around 1.5 million people.⁴ By contrast, the “Valley of Death” has a murder rate of 1,600 per 100,000 inhabitants, or six times the rate in Juárez, making it likely the most violent locale in the country, if not the Western Hemisphere.⁵

It’s hard to shock residents of the area with news of the violence or with murder statistics. November 2012 provided a gruesome, but typical headline: Mexican officials discovered fifteen shallow graves holding twenty bodies, all of which appeared to have been beaten, strangled, and shot.⁶ Such violence has driven Marisella and the others protesting Inez’s disappearance to seek refuge in the United States. They are applying for asylum, many with the help of immigration lawyer Carlos Spector. Fifty-eight-year old burly, red-haired and red-bearded Spector has become a champion of the asylum cause. He takes the cases of the Juárez Valley residents personally—he is the son of lawyer from Brooklyn and a Mexican woman from Guadalupe.

Forty-five minutes outside of Juárez, Guadalupe is one of the many small towns dotting the “Valley of Death.” Just three thousand people live in Guadalupe, a town with a history of assassinated officials. The last member of the police force was
the twenty-eight-year old niece of a former mayor. She was kidnapped from her home in December 2010; her body was found in the desert several months later. Now, the town has no police force as no one volunteered to replace her.

In 2008, the Mexican military arrived in Juárez Valley. Officially they were there to protect civilians and dissolve the cartels, but residents of Guadalupe believe the army came with an alternative agenda. Townspeople like Marisella, who lost family members during the military’s occupation, blame the soldiers for colluding with the cartels and helping to perpetuate the violence. “In Mexico it is a cardinal sin, one for which you will lose your life, if you speak the truth that everybody knows,” said Spector, “Which is that there is a relationship between the drug cartels, the Mexican military, and the Mexican government.”

The Mexican military has incurred thousands of reports of human rights abuses, and has sparked the concern of several human rights organizations. Surveys conducted in Mexico show that people have little faith in the ability of government or the police forces to ensure their security and safety. The protestors outside the Mexican Consulate in El Paso all echoed the refrain of impunity: crimes are not investigated, perpetrators are not brought to trial, and underpaid police are accused of corruption, bribed by the cartels. The presence of armed forces has failed to improve the situation, and the army admitted that its actions sometimes put civilians at risk. Like many of the residents of Guadalupe, Marisella was originally thankful for the arrival of the military, but soon, she grew to fear their presence. “There was no possibility for justice,” she said of her mother’s kidnapping. “The authorities will do nothing, the military will do nothing. They will not even look for the missing people.”
"There’s a lot of complicity between the army and the police with the organized crime groups," said Saul Reyes Salazar, another of Spector’s clients. A former city secretary, Saul watched the disintegration of Guadalupe’s local government. The mayor and the city council left after two council members were shot in 2009. The next mayor, Jesús Manuel Lara, was killed in front of his wife and kids shortly after they had fled to Juárez in 2010. Saul is a kind-faced, but serious man in his late forties who gained international media attention during his asylum case. His entire extended family was forced to flee the Juárez Valley after six of its members were murdered between 2008 and 2011. All that’s left of the family’s legacy in Guadalupe is the charred site where their bakery once stood—across the street from the army barracks.

The Reyes Salazar family, eight siblings plus matriarch Sara Salazar, had lived in the Juárez Valley since the 1960s. They were known for their bakery and for their social and political activism. In particular, Saul’s older sister Josefina gained a reputation for her commitment to human rights, protesting the missing women from Juárez and Juárez Valley even while others stayed silent. After the military arrived as part of “Operation Chihuahua,” people came to Josefina seeking advice for their missing or detained relatives. In mid-2008, after the military arrested thirteen of Josefina’s neighbors and placed them in Mexico’s infamous “pre-charge” detention, Josefina went to Mexico City to protest with other rights activists against the wrongfully detained. “In Mexico, often the same person will be arrested for multiple crimes they could not possibly have done. Or they’ll detain people on no charges,” said Alejandra Spector, Carlos Spector’s daughter and assistant. “It’s scapegoating.”
When Josefina returned to Juárez Valley she led a march against the soldiers, which initiated a series of painful retaliations. A week after the march, Josefina’s eldest son, Miguel Angel, was arrested by the army. Josefina went on a hunger strike for sixteen days until they released her son. When the soldiers returned him, he had broken ribs, a fractured nose, and badly burned and blistered feet from electric shocks. Just months later, Josefina’s younger son was also targeted. Julio César was killed after masked gunmen arrived at a wedding, searched the guests, and then shot him in the heart. “The military was very close by,” said Saul. “But they did nothing to stop it, and nothing afterwards except to put yellow caution tape around the body and tell everyone to go.”

Saul said his family petitioned the army for an investigation of Julio Cesar’s murder. “There was no investigation, even though I went many times to ask the police,” said Saul. “When I went, there was no file that would talk about the case. There was only one sheet of paper with a statement that a body had been taken to the morgue.”

Shortly after the shooting, the entire Reyes Salazar family began receiving threats. Elias Reyes Salazra, Saul’s elder brother who was partially paralyzed, was kidnapped by soldiers, and forced to drive with them around Guadalupe pointing out where each of his family members lived. Josefina moved closer to Juárez, hoping she would be safer. The Reyes Salazar family gathered together in Guadalupe for New Years 2009, the last time they would be all together. In January 2010, on her way back to Juárez, Josefina was killed in front of a barbeque stand, shot nine times by masked gunmen.
Still, the family refused to stay quiet. They continued protesting against the military, the murder of two of their family members, and the other Guadalupans who had gone missing. The attacks against the Reyes Salazar family continued: Ruben Reyes Salazar was shot in Guadalupe just months after his sister was killed. “He was just going to buy milk,” his sister Claudia said. “After that I never left the house except to take my kids to school.”

The violence affected other residents of the Juárez Valley as well. Gunmen terrorized townspeople, and in neighboring Porvenir and Esperanza leaflets were thrown into the streets bearing the message, “You have just a few hours to get out.” Many of the region’s residents attempted to flee. According to Saul, it was not uncommon to see trucks piled with furniture leaving the Valley; families deserted their homes or left behind only smoldering structures. While exact numbers of displaced people in Mexico are disputed, a 2009 survey conducted by the Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juárez estimated that 220,000 people fled Ciudad Juárez since 2007. The survey also found that half of the displaced population (115,000) went across the border to the United States, while the other half took refuge in other Mexican locales, becoming internally displaced people. The Municipal Planning Institute reported up to 116,000 empty homes in Juárez, while the Chamber of Commerce noted roughly 11,000 business closures in the last three years, and the Secretary of Education revealed that thousands of students have not come back to school throughout the State of Chihuahua. These are all signs that region’s population is decreasing, but the numbers fail to distinguish between forcibly displaced peoples and other, voluntary migrants. One statistic however, does support
the idea of a violence motivated mass exodus: the enormous increase in Mexicans seeking asylum in the United States. Between 2007 and 2012, the number of asylum applications more than tripled, from 2,917 to 9,706, an occurrence that corresponds to the escalating death tolls.23

In February 2011, efforts to exterminate the Reyes Salazar family continued. Just outside a military checkpoint, armed men stopped Elias’ car as he was driving with his wife Luisa Ornelas, his sister Maria Magdalena, as well as Sara Salazar and her granddaughter. The gunmen forced Sara Salazar and the granddaughter out of the car and drove off with the other members of the family. Having now lost six loved ones, the grieving family went on a hunger strike. Seventy-six-year old Sara Salazar protested outside the State Attorney General’s Office in Ciudad Juárez along with other Chihuahua families who had lost kin, as part of the organization, Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa, (return our daughters). Saul and his nephew Jorge went to Mexico City to protest and set up a hunger strike outside the Mexican Senate. During the family’s strike, Sara Salazar’s house was burned down, along with fellow activist Maria Louisa Garcia Andrade’s home.24 The arson caught the attention of the Chihuahua State Human Rights Commission member Gustavo de la Rosa Hickerson, who opened an investigation into the event, which occurred just 350 feet from the military barracks.25 “They said they never saw anything,” said Saul. “The criminals burnt my mothers house across the street from the army and yet they didn't see anything.”
In Mexico City, Saul found the threats followed him. Intimidating messages were directed through posters barring his name. “They told me they were going to cut off my head and kill my family,” he said. “I felt like I was dying.”

After nearly two weeks of the hunger, the army discovered the bodies of Elias, Luisa, and Maria Magdalena. The corpses were cut up and dirty as if they had been buried and dug up again. "When they get sick of us asking for justice they bring up the bodies and throw them on the street," said nineteen-year old Jorge Reyes Salazar, Saul’s nephew, and Maria Magdalena’s son.

Soon after burying his siblings, Saul began receiving threatening calls and messages sent from Elias’ cell phone. Saul decided that his family, including his children ages thirteen, seven and three, needed to leave. Without packing anything, the family got into a friend’s car, hid under blankets, and were dropped off at the U.S.-Mexico Border where they asked for asylum.

In Guadalupe, having been associated with the Reyes Salazar family was dangerous. In August 2011, eight gunmen came to Marisella’s house. Marisella’s mother Inez often looked after Sara Salazar’s great-grandchildren, but that day only Marisella’s family was home. “They asked us about people that we didn't know,” said Marisella. “They also asked about the Reyes Salazars.” The same day her mother was kidnapped, Marisella’s family, like Saul’s, went to the border to ask for asylum.

Both families discovered that the asylum process is a long and difficult one, requiring that they retell their horrific stories multiple times, as well as justify the veracity of their accounts and demonstrate the need for asylum. In the United States, to be approved for asylum applicants must show that they have a well-founded fear of
persecution in their own country, and that their race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group is the basis for their persecution. The foundation for U.S. asylum law was established by the Refugee Act of 1980, which maintained that any alien had the right to apply for asylum to the U.S. In addition to bringing the U.S. into compliance with international law standards, the act established the norm that the burden of proof rests with the applicant.

In a letter to the New York Times, a spokesperson for the State Department wrote, “It is not enough for the applicant to state he faces the same conditions that every other citizen faces. Why are you different from everyone else in your country? How have you been singled out, threatened, imprisoned, tortured, harassed?” Applicants have the chance to explain and defend their story in a screening called a “credible fear” interview. The interview is conducted to determine if a “credible” or “reasonable fear of torture” exists.

Asylum applicants from Mexico face incredibly unpromising odds. In 2012, of the 9,206 asylum applications from Mexico, of which, only 126 applicants were granted, or slightly less than 1.4%. By contrast, 403 out of 750 (54%) applications were approved for Nepal, and 5,383 asylum requests were granted to China out of 10,985 applications (49%).

One reason so many applicants are unsuccessful is that the United States does not provide legal representation for asylum cases ( unlike criminal cases). However, the asylum process is difficult to navigate, and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has found that legal representation
statistically improves the chances of a favorable outcome.\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore, the asylum form itself may prove problematic. The form, called the 589, lacks cultural sensitivity. Document oriented, the 589 requires marriage and birth certificates (for both adults and children), documents which may not be available for an applicant fleeing without notice, or may never have existed at all.\textsuperscript{34}

Some asylum advocates, Spector included, maintain that the limited number of asylum applications granted has to do with politics. Some have gone so far as to claim that U.S. asylum policy acts just as another arm of foreign policy. Bruce Einhorn, a retired immigration judge who helped draft the U.S. asylum laws, admitted that while the federal government is legally prohibited from politically motivating asylum decisions, U.S. judges experience some diplomatic pressure. According to lawyer and professor Daniel Kanstroom, U.S. refugee admissions laws have been partial since the first codification. “One could hardly imagine a more partisan refugee law—it limited admissions to those who had fled persecution from a 'Communist or Communist-dominated country.'”\textsuperscript{35}

According to Spector, diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Mexico have substantial bearing on asylum outcomes. Spector claims that judges tend to avoid making decisions where they would imply that the Mexican government is incapable of protecting its citizens, or acknowledge that its own police and army are at fault. “If you read the State department’s human rights reports on México, which are part of the evidence used by asylum adjudicators, you’ll find that it’s a very delicately frayed description of democracy in México,” said Bruce Einhorn. “The problems that affect human rights…are handled gingerly.”\textsuperscript{36}
Einhorn also maintains that immigration judges are swayed in favor of democracies. He says that judges have difficulty admitting that Mexico, a democratic country, could have problems with displaced people persecuted by the government. A 2009 study by the University of California San Diego corroborated Einhorn’s theory: applicants from nondemocratic countries are much more likely to secure asylum than applicants from democratic countries. Moreover, the researchers showed that when U.S. exports to and imports from a country increase, asylum seekers from that country have a decreased likelihood of a successful claim. Applicants from countries that receive U.S. military aid also showed a significantly greater probability of approval, nearly 8% over others.

According to Spector, however, U.S. military aid to Mexico makes asylum cases like Marisella and Saul’s more likely to be declined rather than accepted. “The United State does not want to grant asylum to Mexican applicants because doing so would mean recognizing that Washington is financing military abuses against the Mexican people,” said Spector. Saul Salazar Reyes agreed, “The United States government does not want to admit that their cousin is corrupt and a murderer.”

For those willing to overlook the odds, there are two ways to apply for asylum in the U.S. Both Saul Reyes Salazar and Marisella’s family applied through what is called an “affirmative” application, which occurs when the individuals is under no orders of removal and submits an application within one year of entering the United States. The second route to asylum is through a defensive process. In this latter scenario an applicant who has been apprehended by the Department of Homeland Security for unauthorized immigration status, can appeal deportation proceedings by
claiming fear of return. While affirmative applicants have a hearing with an asylum officer that an result in application approval, denial, or forwarding on to an immigration court, defensive applicants may only file an asylum application through an immigration court. In the adversarial court hearing, a government attorney argues against the asylum claim, and the applicant is cross-examined.  

The U.S. asylum process, especially for defensive applicants, has a notably punitive tinge. After various immigration reform bills were passed in 1996, the United States became the second among developed nations to allow the detention of any arriving asylum seeker. Under INA § 236(c), asylum seekers are subject to mandatory detention when they arrive at a U.S. port of entry without valid travel documents, or if they apply during deportation proceedings. Applicants may escape fear of persecution in their country of origin only to find themselves imprisoned by the United States.

Such was the case for Emilio Gutierrez Soto, a journalist from Chihuahua who has spent the last five years fighting for asylum. Emilio began receiving death threats after he wrote a series of articles for the Juárez newspaper El Diario about human rights abuses committed by the army. In 2008, he fled to the United States, driving a motorcycle towards the border with his teenage son. At dawn, he arrived at a New Mexico border crossing where he asked for asylum. To his horror, Emilio was separated from his son and detained in a DHS facility for seven months.

Though detention may not be on the same level as the terrors many asylum seekers experience in their home countries, being jailed comes with its own torments. Detainees may be held in solitary confinement, and they are often prevented from
communicating with relatives. DHS detention centers have also become infamous as places where, “women and children [are] sexually abused; private correspondence [is] photocopied for government prosecutors; money and property [are] stolen; phone calls [are] tapped; refugees [are] denied access to translated legal forms and documents; and many [are] denied access to legal counsel.”

Studies have also shown that detention has negative effects on refugees’ mental health. Physicians for Human Rights found that 86% of aslyees detained suffered from depression, 77% suffered from anxiety, and 50% showed signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The government maintains the detention of asylum applicants is necessary for two reasons: first, to protect American citizens from any threat the detainees may pose if released, and second, to avoid having people disappear to live as undocumented migrants. However, research case studies have found that over 90% of those released do appear for hearings. Between 1997 and 2000, the Vera Institute considered the alternatives to detention, including paroling applicants with a U.S.-citizen accepting responsibility for them, and found that they were highly successful. Even with extensive monitoring, such alternatives cost 55% less than incarceration.

While Saul Reyes Salazar and his family were not detained during their case adjudication, they did encounter the restrictiveness of post-September 11th asylum reforms. Fear that terrorists or terrorist sympathizers could enter the United States through the asylum process motivated increased security measures. Since the September 11th terrorist attacks, fewer asylum applications have been granted and focus has shifted towards homeland security and border enforcement, rather than refugee resettlement. The 2005 REAL ID Act empowers judges to demand
corroborating evidence, and allows them to deny cases based on the applicant’s body language or demeanor. More importantly for the Reyes Salazar family, both the Patriot Act and the REAL ID Act affected asylum decisions for anyone with relatives who may have been extorted by terrorist groups. According to Kanstroom, "Any noncitizen who has provided 'material support' to an individual 'terrorist' or to a 'terrorist organization' is barred from asylum. The asylum seeker may be barred if he 'knows or reasonably should know' that the object of his support 'has committed or plans to commit a terrorist activity.'"50

In 2009, the Mexican military arrested Josefina’s son, Miguel Angel, a second time. They alleged that he had been working for the Juárez Cartel. Despite the family’s protests that such an accusation was unfounded, Miguel Angel was incarcerated, and even now, almost four years later, he has not been brought to trial. Though Miguel Angel’s arrest could have compromised the Reyes Salazar’s family asylum case, the judge ruled in their favor, and Saul, his wife, and his three kids were granted asylum in 2012. Meanwhile, Marisella, Jorge Reyes Salazar, and Emilio Gutierrez Soto all continue to wait for decisions on their pending asylum applications. Gustavo de la Rosa Hickerson, the overseer of Mexico’s Commission on Human Rights, has also applied for asylum in the United States.

Now exiled from their country, Saul and his family still seek justice for their relatives and loved ones in Mexico. Along with the other clients of Carlos Spector’s office they have formed a group, Mexicanos en el exilio (Mexicans in Exile). They protest frequently and speak out around the country demanding an end to impunity.
and for the recognition that it is not just the cartels perpetrating violence against the Mexican citizens.

"I can do nothing more than survive, hope, and speak out," Saul said. "[My children] are sleeping at night and waking up in the morning, waking up without nightmares. That's the best thing this country gave us, and that can't happen in Mexico."

Notes

1 Marisella, Saul, and Jorge’s quotes come from personal interviews, Aug. 14, 2012. “Marisella” is a pseudonym, as is the name of her mother. Their names have been changed to protect their anonymity upon request. All other names in this piece have not been altered.


4 Figure compiled by Molly Molloy, a New Mexico State University professor and librarian known for keeping comprehensive counts of those killed in Juarez. See her up-to-date tally at: “Frontera List,” http://fronteralist.org

5 del Bosque, “The Deadliest Place in Mexico.”


8 Carlos Spector, Personal interview, Aug. 12, 2012.


12 del Bosque, “The Deadliest Place in Mexico.”

del Bosque, Melissa. “The Deadliest Place in Mexico.”

In 2008, a series of constitutional reforms legalized arraigo (pre-charge detention) for suspected organized crime offenders. The detainment may be extended for as many as eighty days, and the suspect may be denied all but limited contact with family or a lawyer. See: Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, “Arraigo Made in Mexico: A Violation of Human Rights” (Report before the Committee Against Torture, Oct. 2012). Published by The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights available at: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/ngos/CMDPDH_OMCT_Mexico_CAT49_en.pdf


del Bosque, Melissa. “The Deadliest Place in Mexico.”


del Bosque, Melissa. “The Deadliest Place in Mexico.”

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Mexico: Displacement Due to Criminal and Communal Violence, 5.


Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Mexico: Displacement Due to Criminal and Communal Violence, 4.


U.S. Department of Justice EOIR, Immigration Courts FY 2012 Asylum Statistics.

According to USCIRF, the success rate is only 2% for an asylum seeker without a lawyer, as compared to a 25% success rate for an applicant with a lawyer.


Fernandes, Targeted, 126.


9. Growing Up On the Line: Youth in the Drug War Zone

Lots of people say children have guardian angels, but I say that’s not true, because lots of children have died.
- Verito, a seven-year old resident of Ciudad Juárez

About 80% of our kids have PTSD, and 100% of our kids have been affected by the violence.
- Susan Crews, lead school counselor in El Paso, TX

Imagine a place where supermarkets hand out emergency safety fliers to their shoppers, and where residents keep their blinds shut and no one answers their phones. Where, at schools, teachers are made to forfeit yearly bonuses to extortionists in exchange for their pupils’ safety, and children as young as ten have been made to act as lookouts or drug peddlers. This is Paso del Norte, where instead of cops and robbers, the kids play sicarios (assassins) and narcos. They chase each other and then, “Bang! Bang!” one shouts, while the victim falls. To make the game more realistic, students carry tightly folded plastic bags of flour—pretend cocaine—so that they can more convincingly imitate drug lords.

Children are often over-looked victims of the drug war. Yet, drug-related violence is the leading cause of death for young people in Mexico; in 2010 alone, the newspaper El Universal recorded 3,741 deaths of youth aged fifteen to twenty-nine. Many minors who survive the killings have lost one or both parents. A Juárez-based university research group recently found that ten thousand of the city’s children under the age of fourteen have been orphaned due to the violence and escalating death toll.

“What’s going to happen with this generation of kids if nothing is done to counter the effects of death and the drug culture?” asks Denise Ortega, an art teacher who grew up in Juárez, in what she says was a very different city. “I never had this
constant paranoia that something really bad could happen. We’d stay out until eleven or twelve playing soccer,” she said. Denise’s concern for the next generation in Juárez motivated her to start *Juárez Presente Y Futuro*, an art therapy project aimed at elementary school students. Denise and her sister Mariana began visiting third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms in Juárez in 2009. The sisters bring markers, crayons, paints, and colored pencils for the students to draw their city as they see it now, and as they envision it in the future. For the most part, when the kids draw their visions of the future Denise says the depictions are surprisingly optimistic. “In the future drawings, the city is beautiful and clean,” she remarked. “But there are no people.”

By contrast, many people appear in the drawings of the city in the present, which almost always include violence and killings. “This third grader, he drew just one house in the center, with clouds around everything,” Denise recalled. “A single lightening bolt struck the house and in front of this was a mom holding a baby. The picture followed a bullet trace back to the shooter who had killed the mom and the baby. This was the boy’s family.”

The schools have welcomed Denise’s project and the students participate enthusiastically. “They get excited that somebody cares and wants to validate their opinions,” she said. *Juárez Presente Y Futuro* is a rare project, however. Most schools lack any sort of outlet for students to positively express their grief. Private counseling is expensive, and public services almost nonexistent. According to Denise, the Chihuahua State Commission for Human Rights only has twenty psychologists at its disposal to treat victims of the cartel war. Yet pervasive signs of trauma were
evident from Denise’s first visits to the Juárez classrooms. On one occasion, a helicopter flew over the school where she and her sister were leading a workshop. One of the students ran from his seat and into the corridor screaming over and over, “I am afraid! I am afraid.” Another morning when Denise arrived at a participating school, one of the students had just received news that her whole family had been killed shortly after dropping her off. “She said, ‘Why didn’t they kill me, I want to die too,’” Denise recalled.

Afraid of extortionists, killers, and the effects a culture permeated with violence might have on their children, many residents of Juárez seek refuge north of the border. Esperanza Gallegos, a court interpreter in El Paso, is an American citizen who, until two years ago, spent her whole life as a resident of Juárez. But when Gallegos decided living in Juárez put too much stress on her family, they joined a growing number of middle class that have decamped to El Paso. “In a way, we were practically hostages in our own community,” she said. “You feel hopeless and defenseless. You can’t go to the police. You can’t trust anyone.”

Gallegos maintains that she moved not out of personal fear, but out of concern for her children and the lack of freedoms they could enjoy. “Even something as simple as taking your kids to the movies, you had to be so specific about the logistics, and discuss them quietly so no one would overhear,” she said. “Some parents don’t let their children go out at all, but that’s not a way for kids to grow up.”

Gallegos added that many in Juárez feel antagonistic toward the people who leave. “There is a big group that feels the people who go are cowards, and are
abandoning the city at a time it needs them most,” she said. “I wish I could still be in Juárez, but every time someone died I was horrified that that could’ve been my kids.”

The horrors of Juárez do not remain exclusively south of the border, however. According to Susan Crews, lead counselor for the El Paso Independent School District, classrooms along the Texas side of the border are overwhelmed with children experiencing severe trauma. Crews said it is not uncommon to find victims of the drug war, children of drug dealers and of border patrol officers, undocumented students, and asylees all in the same class. “The young people I know literally straddle the border,” she said. “They belong to two countries.”

Crews maintains that this double identity leads to the events of one side of the line affecting children on both sides. “When you’ve held your mother after her throat has been cut, how are you supposed to recover, let alone study?” she asked. “We have a seventh grader urinating in class. When he walked home one day [from school in El Paso to his home in Juárez], he saw heads cut off and put on spikes. Our children have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder].”

While El Paso’s military base, Fort Bliss, offers training for school counselors to assist the children of military families, Crews says that the district as a whole is not prepared for the psychological needs of its young victims. “We don’t have any organized community to help support these kids the way we can the military kids,” said Crews. “But if you don’t deal with trauma right away, you’re going to have more violence, and you’re going to have children repeating the violence they have seen.”

Lacking any formal outlets to share their stories and grief, many students suffer silently. Others cope with the inappropriate things they have witnessed or heard
about by reacting in destructive ways. Psychologist Carmen Serna works at a public clinic near the border and says that many of her clients are children who have experienced the violence of Juárez either personally, or indirectly via the affects on a relative. “emotionally, the children are very depressed,” she said. “They have a lot of aggression. They become violent with their families and with their school mates.”

Elsa Hernandez Gonzalez, principal at Colegio de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológicos in Ciudad Juárez, frequently encounters behavioral issues with her students. She says the problems are indicative of the drug war’s psychological toll. In September 2012, just one day after the school year began, police arrived to arrest a student on charges that he and other youth had murdered a boy by cutting his ear off and then burning him alive. The victim’s ear was later discovered in a student’s bag.

El Paso is not immune to the drugs and gang life so rampant in Juárez. The El Paso Police Department estimates that there are up to 246 gangs operating at any one time, a disproportionately large number for a mid-sized city. El Paso native Rob Gallardo has been attempting to reach out to the youth in these gangs through his intervention program, Operation No Gangs. Gallardo estimates that there are approximately 500-600 gangs in El Paso, if rebel crews and loose alliances are included in the count. “The majority of gangs in El Paso are mostly kids between twelve and seventeen. They keep a low profile and are mainly involved in neighborhood delinquency,” he said. “Some are simply social networks and don’t engage in criminal activity.”

While some of the youth gangs may only be a group of taggers, other youth gangs carry guns. Two of the former gang members Gallardo works with, Victor and
Eddie, have both had friends die through gang-related activity. At ages eighteen and seventeen respectively, they have also both served jail time. “They’re really smart kids, they’re just not getting the support or protection they need,” said Gallardo.

In addition to holding weekly meetings with former gang members, Gallardo also helps them find jobs and access testing for STDs and pregnancy. “A lot of them have STDs, and they get them at a young age,” he said. This is how Gallardo learned about the “sex parties.” Kids as young as eleven would leave school together during lunch break and fool around at their empty houses. “When you have eleven-year olds with STDs, you know you have serious problems in your community,” he said.

Not all of the El Paso gangs are limited to sex parties and neighborhood vandalism, however; some are transnational and have links to the narcos. The “Barrios Aztecas” for example, span both sides of the border and have a known affiliation with the Juárez Cartel. The Aztecas gained a reputation for kidnapping people on the American side and driving them to Juárez to be killed. Cartels recruited gangs, and gangs on both sides of the border turned to youth. According to Howard Campbell, an El Paso-based anthropologist, narcos have been soliciting teens to traffic drugs and work as assassins for decades.15 The most vulnerable teenagers are known on the border as Los Ninis, young men and women who, “ni estudian, ni trabajan,” (neither work, nor study). According to the Colegio de La Frontera Norte, as many as 45% of the Juárez residents between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four fall under this category.16 In Juárez, one out of three kids doesn’t go to middle school, and attendance in high school is half the national average.17
The void created by the absent responsibilities of school and work is filled by the cartels. *Ninis* are recruited as *sicaritos*, child assassins, some as young as ten-years old. Gangs favor these young assassins because of a loophole in Mexican law: Mexico does not have a system to try minors on a federal level, and children under fourteen can’t be prosecuted. In February, federal police arrested a thirteen-year old boy who admitted he’d participated in at least ten homicides, three of which he confessed to executing. Just weeks later, the boy was found dead among six other bodies, all of which had been killed, execution style.

Massacres of youth are not uncommon in Juárez. The first large-scale killing of teenagers is known on both sides of the border as the “Birthday Party Massacre.” Masked gunmen fired indiscriminately into a crowd of teens at a birthday party, killing sixteen people. The victims were described as honors students and high school athletes; the youngest was thirteen. Officials later said the shooting was a mistake; the teenagers had been confused with members of a rival gang. According to Susan Crews, students in the El Paso School District were friends of some of the murdered teens. “Nothing, in my opinion, is being done for them,” she said.

Meanwhile, Denise Ortega continues to bring her art therapy project to schools in Juárez. She hopes to inspire other, similarly inclined programs, or at least to provide some outlet, however temporary, to the youth of *El Paso del Norte*. “The most worrying part of all this is that it’s not being addressed,” said Denise. “When you ask kids what they want to be when they grow up, they say ‘Oh, I want to be a *narco*, and I want to be a *sicario*.’ You ask them why and they say they would rather be a predator than [be] preyed upon. That’s not just a Juárez problem.”
Notes

1 This title was inspired by Howard Campbell’s Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juárez
5 Cory Molzahan, Viridiana Rios, and David A. Shirk, Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2012 (San Diego, CA: Justice in Mexico Project, Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego, 2012), http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/2012-tbi-drugviolence.pdf
7 Denise Ortega, personal interview, Aug. 30, 2012.
8 See Appendix C for the image.
9 Esperanza Gallegos’s quotes are from a personal interview conducted Aug. 18, 2012.
10 Susan Crews’s quotes are from a personal interview conducted Aug. 17, 2012.
14 Rob Gallardo’s quotes are from a personal interview conducted on August 15, 2012.
The country is in a very delicate condition. They’re facing some sort of revolution as their culture pulls apart,

-Luis Alberto Urrea, *By the Lake of Sleeping Children*
Epilogue: Movements for Peace

You see, when a country unites it creates less space for criminals.
-Julian LeBaron, Chihuahua farmer and activist

On August 27th, 2012, a Mexican poet bends before a wooden table. He concentrates on an electric saw. A crack sounds, and he stands, bearing the two pieces of a halved AK-47. Hundreds of people in his audience cheer. “Nunca mas,” he says: never again.

A bearded, bifocaled man favoring cowboy hats and solitude, Javier Sicilia used to write poems about God and spiritual mysticism. Now he leads marches tens of thousands strong, and carries banners with painted red letters, “No [more] + blood.” The AK-47 demonstration in Houston, Texas was one among several of his anti-militarization, anti-drug war protests held during the Caravan for Peace, a month-long, 5,700-mile motorcade across the United States. Sicilia has been organizing peaceful marches and protests for two years, gaining the attention of other activist movements, advocates, and victims. In Cuernavaca, where Sicilia’s son was killed, he marched with twenty-five thousand others in a silent walk. They painted the fountains red, and at the end of the protest, they read out the names of the deceased.

Once one of Mexico’s most beloved contemporary writers, Sicilia abruptly stopped writing in 2011. He wrote his last poem after burying his twenty-four-year-old son, who was suffocated to death by members of a drug cartel: “The world is not worthy of words…” Sicilia suffered an anguish familiar to many grieving Mexican families; not only had he lost a child, but government officials did not conduct an investigation. Rather than taking the impunity for granted, Sicilia publicly stated that
if President Calderón and Governor Adame were incapable of guaranteeing peace and security in the country, they should resign. "Estamos hasta la madre de ustedes," he said, (we are fed up with you). This was the beginning of Sicilia’s Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (MPJD).  

Sicilia took his movement north to the United States in 2012. The Caravan for Peace began on August 12th as sixty people in buses and private cars crossed the Tijuana-San Diego border at seven o’clock in the morning. Others joined the group at Friendship Park (Parque de la Amistad), a historic site where trans-border families used to meet on the weekends to talk and share food through the chain link fence. That evening, the Caravan launched with a vigil for victims of the drug war and their families. Mexican women who had lost children to the fighting embraced American mothers who likewise had lost children to drugs and violence. With the slogan, Hasta la Madre! the Caravan traveled through twenty-seven states, from Tijuana and San Diego, to Washington D.C.

More than just solidarity, Sicilia’s movement offers a nonpartisan, bi-national plan to mitigate the effects of the drug war. His group has solidified a five-point manifesto: they demand an end to the money laundering that finances cartel activity, measures to prevent arms trafficking from the United States, the creation of a drug policy not based on the idea of prohibition, the discontinuation of America’s and Mexico’s militarized responses to the cartels, and a reform of immigration laws that ceases to criminalize migrants.

Sicilia’s movement is one among many answers to the issues affecting Mexico and the border. In Ciudad Juárez, members of a Christian youth group dress
up like angels and carry signs asking the killers to repent. The evangelical teens cover themselves in robes and silver makeup before adorning ten-foot goose feather wings. Directly addressing the cartels and corrupt officials, the group, which calls itself “Messenger Angels,” says they want to “prick the consciences of the people who have caused this city so much pain.”

Another group of proactive youth, the YoSoy132 movement grew out of disenchantment with Mexico’s democratic processes. Dubbed the “Mexican Spring,” the #YoSoy132 protests evolved into a countrywide youth movement, mobilized largely through Twitter and social media. The name originated as a way to express support for 131 university students vilified for speaking out against the leading presidential candidate during the national elections. The movement mainly opposes the reinstated PRI party and the “biased monopolization” of Mexican media. During a rally in Mexico City in 2012, 90,000 people joined the YoSoy132 protesters.

There are other threads of peace activism as well, some focus on providing humanitarian aid as a way to counter the violence. In Juárez a club called, “Las Guerreras,” (The Female Warriors), delivers food and medicine to impoverished families via pink motorcycles. Along the San Diego-Tijuana border, the “Border Angels” leave water, clothes, and medical supplies at stations in remote areas of the desert. Each of these different movements grew from a common origin. They all respond to the call for solutions to move beyond the six years of war, and to provide for the poor, the orphans, and the fractured border communities. They all feel the overriding need to somehow, eventually, restore peace.
“If I see something, I have to do something about it,” said Enrique Morones, founder of Border Angels, and a presenter during the Caravan for Peace. “And there’s a lot to see at the border.”

Notes

6 More about the MPJD can be found on their website: Movimiento por la Paz, http://movimientooporlapaz.mx
10 Enrique Morones, Personal interview, Mar. 28, 2013.
Appendix A: El Diario Editorial


Gentleman of the different organizations that are fighting for the plaza of Ciudad Juárez: The loss of two reporters from this press in less than two years represents an irreversible grief for all those who work here, and, particularly, for the families.

We are communicators, not fortune-tellers. Therefore, as communications workers we want you to tell us what it is that you want from us, what it is that you expect us to publish or not to publish, so that we know what to expect.

You are, at the moment, the de facto authorities in this city, since the legally mandated entities could not do anything to prevent our colleagues from continuing to die, although we have repeatedly demanded they act.

That is why, faced with these unobjectionable realities, we’re coming to you, because we do not want another of our colleagues to be the victim of your shootings.

While the journalism profession all along the border has suffered the consequences of this war that you and the federal government are involved in, El Diario has, undoubtedly, been hurt the most so far, because no one else has suffered the death of two colleagues like us.

We don’t want more deaths. We don’t want more injuries or more intimidation. It is impossible to do our jobs in these conditions. Therefore, tell us what you expect from us.
This is not a surrender. Nor does it mean that the work that we have been doing. It’s a truce with those who have imposed the rule of law in this city, provided that they respect the lives of those who are dedicated to the craft of reporting.

Faced with the vacuum of power that Chihuahuans are breathing, in the midst of an environment in which there are no sufficient guarantees for citizens to go about their lives and routine activities safely, journalism has become one of the riskiest professions, and El Dario can affirm that.

For those who are at the forefront of this publishing company, our goals and mission has been inform the community for thirty-four years now, at this time, we find it makes no sense to keep putting the safety of many colleagues at risk, so that their valuable lives can be used as message carriers, encrypted or not, between organizations, or to the official authorities.

Even in war there are rules. And in any outburst there are protocols or guarantees between warring factions to guard the integrity of the journalists who cover them. So, we reiterate, to the various leaders of the narcotrafficking organizations, to tell us what it is that you want from us so we can stop paying tribute to the lives of our colleagues.

And it is a message that one of these groups left on a blanket placed yesterday morning at the corner of Army and Technology, we confirm it as the murder of photojournalist Luis Carlos Santiago Orozco, recorded on Thursday afternoon in a shopping center.

The banner contains a threatening message aimed at alleged commanders and a commissioner, and they warn that the same thing will happen to our photographer if
we do not give up a sum of money.

Since these messages started appearing in blankets or as paint on walls, *El Diario* has not taken it lightly, especially because they have been shown to be accurate warnings as several of these threats have been met.

Instead, just around two years since the murder of our colleague Armando Rodriguez Carreon, we are too skeptical to believe that the alleged justice authorities who are leaving office will deliver a reliable clarification…
Appendix B: Emilio Gutierrez, An Interview

Interview with former journalist and current asylum seeker Emilio Gutierrez on August 13th, 2012, translated by Amanda Lezra.

Question: How long has your asylum process been going on?

Emilio: Since June 16th, 2008.

Question: What led you to apply for asylum?

Emilio: I was being persecuted by the Mexican army. In 2005, I was writing some articles in which I was making it known that assaults, robberies, and violations of human rights were being propagated by the army.

Question: Were you receiving threats?

Emilio: General Alfonso Garcia Vega made it understood that if I wrote another article, he would kill me. I wrote a fourth one in which I denounced the public ministry. And then in 2008, on May 6th, the army came to my house and destroyed it...the mattresses, the chairs, everything they could tear up. They were masked. They threatened us [my son and I] with their rifles, they dragged us into the street in our underwear, they were saying that they were looking for weapons and drugs after being tipped off anonymously. They didn’t find anything. They wanted me to denounce the criminals. They left my house destroyed, and left me with total emotional shock. Later on, a friend who was romantically involved with a military man called me. She said she wanted to see me. She was nervous. She said, “Emilio you have to leave because they are going to kill you. It’s obvious.” The person she
was involved with was giving orders to soldiers to find me, kidnap me, and kill me.

He was a captain. That night, I hid in a ranch with my son. It was a Saturday. I waited all day Sunday. On Monday, I crossed to the U.S.

**Question:** And then you were taken to the border detention center?

**Emilio:** When I crossed to the U.S., they took me from the border processing camp to the detention center in El Paso. I was in jail for seven months. My fifteen-year old son was there for two months. They jailed me simply for crossing, even though I was asking for protection. They let me go in February, 2009. Just like they detained me with no legal explanation, they let me go without a legal explanation.

**Question:** What is going on with your case now?

**Emilio:** My case is being managed by *Las Americas*. We have a court date on October 16th. I think it will be prolonged because my case is the most documented of political asylum cases and it could open the door for others like me to get asylum. The government wouldn’t want that. It would mean recognizing that the Mexican war is absurd and that the U.S. is investing in a lot of money for nothing.

**Question:** If your case gets denied what would you do?

**Emilio:** I trust that we will win. There are no elements in which we cannot win. In the remote possibility that I am denied the asylum, I have to live. I have to make sure my son flowers as a human being.

**Question:** Why do you feel the news industry in Mexico has become so corrupt?
**Emilio:** The media lives on the money given to them by the government, and because it [the government] is inherently corrupt, the papers become corrupt as well. It’s the worse thing possible. Newspapers are supposed to work for the good of the society, as is the government.

**Question:** What are the effects do you think of a country with no free press?

**Emilio:** When there isn’t honest press, it sets back education, and it sets back democracy. They are provoking Mexico to be a country of the ignorant.

**Question:** What did you think of *El Diario’s* front-page editorial asking the *narcos* what to write?

**Emilio:** How is it possible that a press that says it defends the truth will ask the *narcos* what they want them to do? It is shameful that because of that editorial, they gained recognition. They are cowards. The company has a duty to take care of the family of a killed journalist. If you need to stop publishing about crimes, you do it to take care of the journalist. You cannot be an accomplice of the crime and leave the journalist defenseless, like they did with me.

**Question:** What can be done to better protect journalists in Mexico?

**Emilio:** To protect the journalists, the papers would have to stop covering the crimes including the crimes that the government commits. Investigative journalism is extremely limited because it involves taking huge risks.

**Question:** Will you continue writing in the United States?
**Emilio:** I’ve tried to write in the *Diario de El Paso* but I couldn’t handle how they treated me. They were horrible, they humiliated me. They told me I didn’t know what I was talking about. I lasted there a month. I’d been a journalist twenty-six years at that point. Right now, I cook, I sell food, I cater, I garden, I landscape, I install fountains, trees, plants. Las Cruces is a big place. There is calm. Money is tight, we have unfulfilled needs, but we are alive thank god.
Appendix C: Drawings from: “Juárez Presente y Futuro”

These drawings were originally printed in Denise S. Ortega and Mariana Ortega, “Juárez: Presente y Futuro, A Children’s City Drawn.” The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth 5, no. 2 (2012). The drawings are reproduced here with the permission of Denise Ortega.
Figure 6 Reproduced with permission. Denise Ortega Juarez Presente y Futuro. Drawing 2.
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