THE DOUBLE LIFE: Respectability Politics and Spatial Formation in Feminicide Films

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Abstract: *This article analyzes how documentaries and docudramas about the homicides of 1,500-plus women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico offer competing narratives about the respectability of victims, yet reinforce the "virgin-whore" dichotomy and their corresponding spatial formations. For instance, activist mothers of disappeared women in Juárez have publicly denounced the official government's theory that each disappeared woman led a secret "double life" that made them vulnerable to a dangerous lifestyle: virgin by day and whore by night. Activists seeking redress for their daughters emphasize so-called virgin values. However, in popular media, the state's explanation of the double life as the cause of these murders has been recreated for film audiences in local docudramas distributed on the streets of Juárez. I argue that both genres of cinematic representations rebuild a case against the victims rather than the perpetrators. I demonstrate that, in casting blame upon victims, the spatial politics embedded inside the logics of the double life reinforce binaries about public and private spheres. Spatial discourse about public space as posing considerable risk and harassment threats for women has been interpellated in a complex and important way in struggles to prevent further sex crimes. This analysis interrogates the limitations of the rebuttals made against mainstream discourses by activist mothers as they reinscribe the virgin-whore binary.*

Keywords: *feminicide, Juárez, sexual violence, spatial formation*

Three decades of homicidal violence against more than 1,500 women remain largely unsolved in Juárez, Mexico. What has become known as feminicide by international newspapers, scholars, and activists continues to draw concern and interest as a cloud of mystery remains regarding the hundreds of women who have been disappeared, or desaparecidas. Speculation about who is killing women receives considerable attention by cinematic storytellers. In 1994, after the first unresolved cases were exposed, an upsurge in local subculture films took place. Many films

documented the serial killings of missing women. On the streets of Juárez, street vendors started selling low-budget docudramas that reenacted alleged rape and murder of disappeared women in the last hours of their lives. These docudramas were based on news stories and police reports claiming that feminicide victims led risky lifestyles, including secret employment in prostitution rings (Fregoso 2000). Mothers of missing and murdered women have met these docudramas with protest.

Activist mothers of feminicide victims use film themselves as a tool to challenge these popular discourses surrounding the memory of their daughters as prostitutes. Speaking back to the narratives that their daughters were sexually deviant, these Juárez mothers paint a different picture of their daughters in order to advocate for justice. Mothers demand the Mexican government and U.S. multinational corporations who owned the maquiladoras that employed their daughters initiate further investigations into those responsible for the murder of their daughters (Bejarano 2003, 415). For more than three decades, mother activists in *Nuestras hijas de regrueso a casa* and *Hijas de Juárez* have worked alongside international women's rights advocacy groups to challenge the Mexican government and bring greater awareness to feminicide.

This essay examines the competing discourses of virgin-whore and their corresponding spatial politics as they have been attached to the feminicide victims in three Juárez docudramas and three activist documentaries. Out of dozens of docudramas available to purchase in Juárez, I examine three feature length films including: *Las muertas de Juárez* (The Murdered Women of Juárez), *Juárez ciudad de las muertas* (Juárez, City of the Dead Women), and *Pasión y crimen en Juárez* (Crime and Passion in Juárez). Released in Spanish, each film was created by male directors and producers from the United States.

Each film was created in the early 2000s after the first wave of feminicides were reported by newspapers in the 1990s. Based upon the spaces where films were distributed and personal observations in shops inside Juárez's downtown district, Juarenses make up the majority of its clientele.[1] What this means is that docudramas play a powerful role in storytelling about feminicide inside Juárez.

Indeed, docudramas contribute to the ways in which Juarenses view women's roles and spatial politics inside Juárez. Transnational capitalist interactions between México and the United States have created a variety of cultural interactions that have transformed Ciudad Juárez over the past century, and influenced this type of filmmaking. Along with exchanges in commodities that have been shipped to the United States, Juarenses consume U.S. culture on the Mexican side of the border. Juárez is a place where transnational first world cultures are transmitted through digital media and photography. Bootleg copies of Hollywood films are sold right next to popular Juárez docudramas that reenact feminicide victims' rape. Depictions of U.S. actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone holding guns next to half-naked women hang next to docudramas in video shops.

The three docudramas—*Las muertas de Juárez, Juárez ciudad de las muertas and Crimen y pasión en Juárez*—were selected out of a dozen films that were viewed for research purposes. Each of the three films were selected because they were emblematic of narratives and images found in docudramas that included female characters who were seduced by prostitution, drugs, and organized crime. Significantly, docudramas reproduce powerful stereotypical narratives by contrasting respectable womanhood against deviant women who seek refuge from the domestic sphere. In this way, docudramas draw from gender stereotypes where good women stay within domestic spaces, while bad

women seek refuge in the public sphere. Analysis of feminicide storytelling in docudramas reveals rigid views about womanhood that are often constructed by male producers. A recurring trope about feminicide victims is that they straddled the boundaries between respectability and deviancy by living double lives: good girl by day and whore by night.

Gender politics also plays out in the genre of documentary film. This essay also analyzes three documentary films made by Mexican or Chicana activists, including: *Señorita extraviada* (Missing Young Woman), *Juárez Mothers Fight Femicide*,[2] and *Preguntas sin respuestas* (Questions without Answers). These three documentaries rely on the mothers of the victims to shape the narrative, imagery, and tone of each film. Consequently, the films document the strategies and discourse these activist mothers use to achieve justice on behalf of the hundreds of dead women.

Thus, films can act as a powerful tool to transform social and power relations for activist women seeking restorative justice. The plurality of gender roles and spatial relations that emerge in film are often desired imaginaries created by Chicana and other activist filmmakers who reclaim control over how women are to be represented in the public sphere. Nonetheless, to counter the stereotypes about feminicide victims in the public and popular discourse, the activist mothers repurpose virginity and womanhood as a means to refute accusations that their daughters were prostitutes and justifiable victims in the documentaries. These documentaries can be understood to work inside and against popular discourses of the virgin-whore binary.

Ultimately, I draw from both Chicana feminist scholars and feminist geographers to understand the limitations of the virgin-whore dichotomy that pervades the filmic representation of the Juárez feminicides.[3] I pay particular

attention to the spatial politics that are bounded by notions of respectability as they function to elicit fear and hysteria. Throughout the essay, I trace the discourse of private women as it is rooted in larger histories of respectable womanhood situated both inside and outside Juárez.

Spatial Formation in Virgin-Whore Dichotomies

Chicana feminist scholars have written about patriarchal discourses that have collapsed women's sexuality into virgin-whore dichotomies. Chicana lesbian scholar Cherríe Moraga, for example, documented the historical residue left by Spanish colonialism that was later perpetuated by Chicano nationalists (1991, 257). In the Chicano cultural movements of the 1960s, la malinche was vilified as the broken Indigenous woman assigned to serve as an interpreter and sex slave for Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes. Born out of this courtship, la nueva mestiza (the new mestiza) was a bastardized race of mixed European-Indigenous children conceived by rape. Chicano nationalists interpret her rape as a sign of betrayal, while Malinche's resiliency as a survivor of rape was never acknowledged. In this account, malinchistas were banned from respectable domesticity and forced into the public sphere. Sexual violence, then, became a way to regulate women's sexuality. It is important to acknowledge that although there are distinct differences between Mexicanas and Chicanas based upon their relationship to race, class, citizenship, and nation (Alarcón 1989), both are subjected to patriarchal and racial systems that are used to manage sexuality among Chicanas and Mexicanas on both sides of the border. These similarities suggest a historical context for the morality that continues to shape gender roles for women in Chicana/o and Mexican communities. Such moralistic judgements are shaped by binaries that categorize women as obedient subjects.

La Virgen de Guadalupe, for example, masked Chicano male nationalist

portrayals of coercive sex by offering a rebuttal to the fallen woman (Calafell 2001, 12). Outside Mexico City, an indigenous man named Juan Diego allegedly witnessed an apparition of the Virgin Mary who appeared in the bodily form of an indigenous woman. As Bernadette Calafell examines, la virgen cast Chicana female sexuality in its appropriate form as asexual, pious, and devoted to her gente (2001). In cultural stereotypes repeated by Chicano popular culture, female sexuality was classified into two binaries where Chicanas were portrayed as either virgins or whores. The so-called 'pious' Chicana was spatially confined to the domestic sphere, whereas the whore abandoned her domestic responsibilities to further her own desires in the public sphere. Within this context, I trace how binaries between good and bad women structure societal discourses in anti-feminicide campaigns, arguing that such gendered categories continue to constrain women's roles and facilitate acts of violence upon Chicanas and Latinas in the United States and Mexico.

Stereotypes about Chicana female sexuality govern Eurocentric and patriarchal ideologies that police women's bodies. As Cinthya M. Saavedra and Michelle Salazar Perez (2017) examine, the power of the virgin-whore dichotomy is in how frequently it gets recycled by families and even activists. Saavedra and Perez and others argue that only when Chicanas embrace their inner deviancy will they invert the power taken away from them in falsified binaries (2017; Lara 2005). For those who are working against gender-based violence, discourses about women's piety can be an easily replicated as a way to redirect responsibility for the violence.

However, films can function as sites where Chicanas represent their gender and spatial relations in ways that traverse respectability politics that are locked by virgin-whore binaries (Baez 2007). Baez argues that, in film, Chicanas

balance both worlds as 'good' and 'bad' women because such rigid categories do not allow for the flexibility of their everyday lives. Here, I draw upon the work of Chicana feminists to interrogate binaries that perpetuate harmful dichotomies in feminicide advocacy.

Identifying these discourses is important, as these lasting narratives can be understood as cultural memories. Film studies scholar Marita Sturken defines cultural memory as "memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning" (1997, 3). Films transmit cultural memories, and this essay examines the memories about missing and murdered women found in film. The concept of cultural memory can help locate discourses that pit women as either virgins/whores and can also help articulate the ways in which filmmakers influence political discourse in the public sphere.

Additionally, this article places the work of feminist geography—particularly in regard to the public and private sphere—in conversation with Chicana feminism and film studies. Chicana feminism has yet to expand its scope of research into the field of feminist geography. When analyzing the history of land seizure, occupation, and migration caused by European and U.S. imperialism, certainly, a geographical lens can add a spatial dimension to how we understand the Chicana experience. At the same time, feminist geography can learn a great deal about women's relationship to space from Chicana feminists who have blurred the boundaries that allegedly exist between private and public spaces, such as the work of feminist geographer Doreen Massey who examines the ways in which spaces are a reflection of societal conflicts over gender and sexuality (1994, 233).

One blind spot in feminist geography (as a field) has been its overreliance

on documenting white women's experiences as the basis to theorize the universality of womanhood (Mollett 2018; Faria 2016). In many studies, white women's particular experience remains the primary site of analysis to understand how gender inequity is carried out in both public and private spheres. In the 1960s, for example, white women argued that the clutches of domestic obligations were a way to control their economic power by making them bound to patriarchy. Under this presumption, white women assumed that employment in the public sphere would free them (and all women) of gender inequities inside the home. In post-World War II, white women outsourced their labor in the pursuit for economic freedom in the public sector by assigning responsibilities to Black women and Chicanas as domestic workers. In this way, Chicanas did not experience space in the same ways that white women did, precisely because of the ways in which their bodies were regulated based on race, sex, and class. Accounting for race in order to understand space, then, is necessary for feminist geographers. When brought together, feminist geography, film studies, and Chicana feminism move us towards a radical vision of a Chicana feminist geography that accounts for the ways in which women of color have hybridized, mixed, and made messy, the boundaries that separate their lives between public and private spaces.

The Double Life

In the Juárez docudramas studied here, cultural memories of las desaparecidas are shaped by police accusations that the victims led a doble vida: good girl by day and whore by night. In these "technologies of memory," cultural memories of the double life get reproduced for cultural consumption transmitted via docudramas (Sturken 1997, 9). Cultural memories are tied to the place in which people reside because they are confronted with this urban pop culture that gets transmitted in film. Although docudramas represent exaggerated and misguided visions of the last moments of victims' lives, this

wave of feminicide docudramas has become part of a much larger popular culture in Ciudad Juárez, filled with stories of mystery, adventure, and murder.

In the docudrama, *Juárez ciudad de las muertas* (Gatica 2003), victims are portrayed to be prostitutes who walk the streets late at night. Fabiola, the protagonist character, plays the good-hearted prostitute who leads a double life. By day, Fabiola is a pious woman who is obedient to her father, but by night she secretly transforms into a hooker who roams the streets waiting to perform sex work.

In its opening scene of the docudrama Las muertas de Juárez (Murillo 2002), police surround the body of yet another feminicide victim. When police examine an anonymous woman's bloody corpse, the conclusion they draw is that she must have been a prostitute who got caught in a bad drug deal. Her body so badly mutilated, the police bury her without identification (Murillo 2002). In reality, regardless of identification, Juárez police pay little regard to murdered victims who are suspected of prostitution. According to Melissa Wright, "the discourse of prostitution as the degraded outcome of the public woman is therefore a technology for normalizing female disappearance in a context where creating a sense of a normal city is vital" (Wright 2004, 377). As a result, it becomes normalized when deviant women suffer immeasurable harm when attacked at night (Wright 2004, 377). The banality of violence against women in the public discourse not only makes it an acceptable outcome for prostitutes to be killed in these docudramas, but also makes it easier to objectify women's bodies when reenacting these sensationalized memories on film.

When respectability is limited by the dualities of a double life, this articulation constrains the ways in which women's respectability can be

honored. In Las muertas de Juárez (Murillo 2002), for example, Fabiola's respectability is determined by her obedience to stereotypical roles assigned to Latinas/Chicanas. Outside of her role as a daughter (virgin), she is cast as a prostitute (whore). Such rigid categories demonstrate how Chicana sexuality is locked into these moralistic dualities. As Baez remarks in her analysis of Chicanas in film, the problem with virgin-whore binaries is that they prioritize patriarchal attitudes that emphasize sexuality as a means of judgement (Baez 2007). For poor working-class women of color, represented by Fabiola, sex work is rather an economic reality, even a necessity. Women who engage in labor classified as deviant might be providing a crucial, even the only, means of subsistence for a family. In this way, the virgin-whore dichotomy makes rigid the binaries between public and private women. Some women do sex work partly in public space in order to be a support in the private space of their home and family.

Feminist geographer Gillian Rose considers the private sphere to be a space where women's traditional roles have been assigned under patriarchy (Rose 2016). For Rose, the public sphere has historically been a space reserved for men. One possible area of oversight in Rose's analysis, and widely in feminist geography, is its focus on the spatial experiences of white men and women. Chicanas/os experience space differently. Indeed, for women of color, hybridization across public and private spheres is a matter of survival. Expanding Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa's work, I argue that Chicanas' inability to fit neatly into categories requires a spatial analysis that demands plurality (Anzaldúa 2012). Informed by Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands experience of Chicanas, the existence of distinct private and public spaces/women does not exist. The incongruity, messiness, and hybridization of space that Chicanas perform in their daily lives (as daughters and workers), thus, allows us to understand feminism and geography in a Chicana context.

In this way, virgin-whore dichotomies limit spatial thinking because they

do not allow for the plurality of semi-publics that Chicanas reimagine in borderland spaces. Each docudrama and documentary offer political possibilities to reimagine women's role in civil society. If women are constrained to pick between private and public (virgin-whore), there is little flexibility in allowing women to progress past these categories that have been assigned to them by patriarchal stereotypes. In this way, Chicana geographies attached to the virgin-whore dichotomy challenge the rigid boundaries that exist in Eurocentric worldviews about women's place in society.

Rape Aesthetics

Rape aesthetics are the aesthetic practices used by filmmakers that reenact sexual violence. In sensational docudramas, rape scenes prominently include aesthetics that eroticize sexual violence. On the cover of *Pasión y crimen en Juárez* (Estrada 2003; see Figure 1), for example, an anonymous young woman who portrays a feminicide victim glares into the camera while wearing a tight outfit. According to Linda Williams, women's hypersexualized bodies that are used in sexually violent films help to make rape erotic (1993). Influenced by both the U.S. porn industry and patriarchy upheld by the Mexican nation-state, *Juarenses* remain vulnerable to gender hostility in aesthetic practices that appear in docudramas.

When violence against women is made erotic, the boundaries between sexual violence and pornography are murky. In the film Las muertas de Juárez (Murillo 2002), rape scenes include horror music playing in the background while women are stalked. An anonymous prostitute is kidnapped by one of her customers to be taken to an empty parking lot in the evening. After raping her, her perpetrator slashes her throat, stomach, and spills her intestines on the floor (Murillo 2002). Women's abuse, rape, and torture on film is what Catherine MacKinnon (1993) calls another type of sexual violence. During

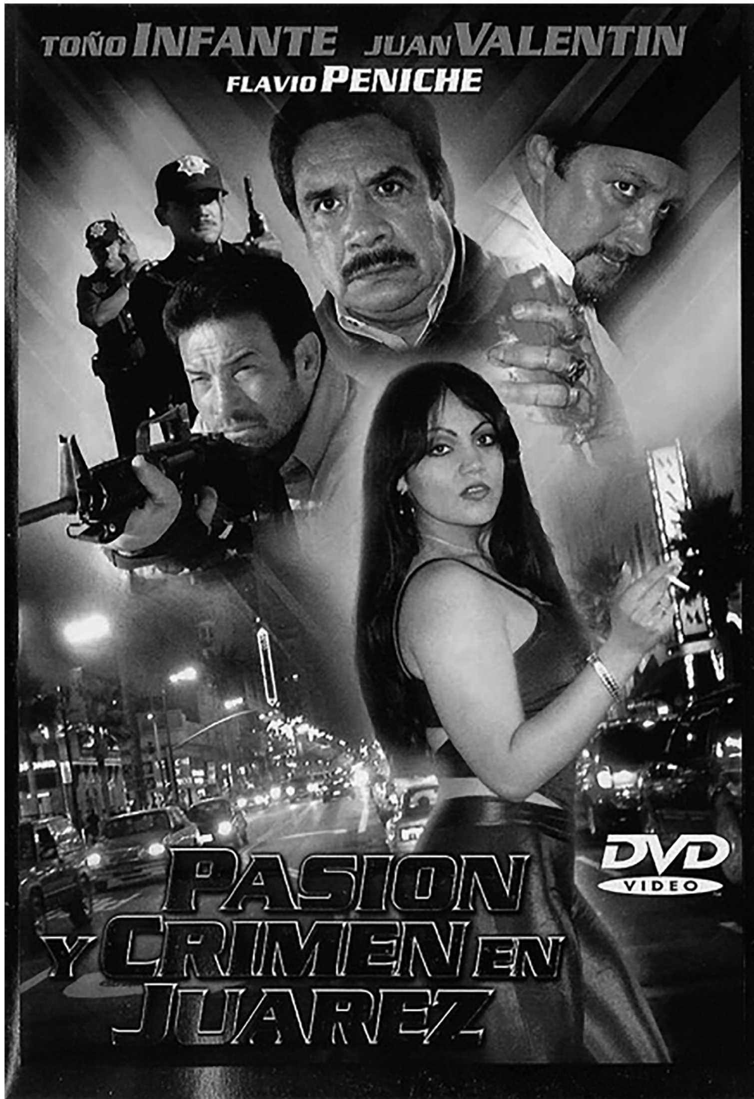

Figure 1: Front cover of the Juárez docudrama, Pasión y crimen en Juárez (Estrada 2003).

production, female actresses are expected to undergo sexual domination as part of their participation in violent films (MacKinnon 1993). Sexual domination illustrates the ways in which feminicide is made to be sexual.

Rape aesthetics intersect with the economic, racial, and political forces that draw upon sexual stereotypes about Mexican womanhood. Various iterations of fallen women in Mexican society comprise what Norma Alarcón calls the myth of Mexico's "sexual legacy" (1989, 80). According to this myth, "fallen women" are prone to be labeled malinchistas because of their inability to fall within the boundaries of Mexico's sexual respectability. In this way, the historical remnants that preside in Mexico's consciousness seep into the ways feminicide victims are talked about in docudramas. As Alarcón poignantly identifies, it is the sexual legacy of fallen women that perpetuates gender stereotypes that remain harmful against Chicanas and Mexican women. When targeted by docudramas as the subject of ridicule, feminicide victims are subjected to another round of abuse by members of their own community. In this way, sexual violence against women, already imbued with the legacies of Spanish imperialism, so too has to deal with further forms of imperial influences by U.S. media.

Beyond the historical legacies created by Spanish colonialism in Mexican culture, U.S. film companies hybridize local stereotypes, converting them into a narrative about an international conspiracy to kill Mexican women. Each of the three docudramas studied here, for example, were produced in Southern California, yet only distributed inside Mexico. *Juarenses* who purchase docudramas made in the U.S. are exposed to the cultural manifestations of sexual degradation of "fallen women" and U.S. rape aesthetics. Rape aesthetics, according to MacKinnon inflict corporeal harm against women by reproducing sexual violence upon their physical, psychological, and emotional

wellbeing. MacKinnon's assessment is especially true for poor women of color subjected to sexual violence in films (1993).

The history behind the U.S. film industry has proven to be racist, sexist, and misogynistic when representing Chicana communities. In the case of *Pasión y crimen en Juárez* (Estrada 2003), Latina actresses were hired with the intent to reenact feminicide against brown women. Historically, U.S. representations of Latinas in the media have depicted Latina bodies as hypersexual (Roberts 1993). Motivated by entanglements between U.S. capitalism and cultural stereotypes about malinchistas, docudramas illustrate the flexibility in gender norms used to construct sexual morality. In this way, representations of feminicide victims as malinchistas are motivated by U.S. historical depictions of Latinas as inherently erotic and hypersexual women (Beltrán 2002). All of the feminicide victims represented in Juárez docudramas were represented as hypersexual, primitive, exotic, and uncontrollable women (Beltrán 2002). Currently, the Latinization of mainstream U.S. rape aesthetics reinforces white male fantasies by eroticizing subaltern bodies (Beltrán 2002). There is no merit in the existence of pornographic images of women (MacKinnon 1993). Pornography is a form of sexual violence made against women that helps to perpetuate rape (MacKinnon 1993). In this way, Juárez docudramas rely on U.S. film images that objectify Latinas, normalize rape, and buttress Spanish imperialist ideologies that also justify these actions. In essence, they are snuff films because they are based on real life rapes created and potentially recreated for arousal. And, distressingly, one area of economic growth over the last two decades in the U.S. film market is dedicated towards the objectification of women of color.

Film reenactments of victims who lead a double life are largely tied to defining women's spatial boundaries through the discourse of the private

and public woman. Patriarchal attitudes have constructed honorable women's space as the private sphere, while deviant women, such as the prostitute, occupy public space late at night (Savedra and Perez 2017). Thus, reenactments of the double life in Juárez docudramas have been largely tied to gendered representations of the spatial and temporal boundaries that women are supposed to occupy. The spatial definition of women's proper domains normalizes violence against women who defy the spatial gender order.

Recodifying Memory of Disappeared Women

In the Chicana documentary films relating to the murders of the women of Juárez, the aesthetic practices of commemoration contribute in different ways to how the victims are remembered. In the film, *Señorita extraviada* (Portillo 2002), for example, Chicana feminist Lourdes Portillo uses artistic practices created by mother activists as a way to recognize the pain caused by feminicide. These films opened up new avenues for mothers to publicly attest to crimes made against their daughters, and to also publicly acknowledge the human being behind the sensationalism. In her film, Portillo features images of victims' bedrooms, interviews with family members, and countless artifacts such as clothing, photographs, and pink crosses. An assemblage of ephemeral art is used to personalize the deaths of women by providing a brief biography, including struggles with labor rights, femininity, and familial obligations. Portillo was one of the first documentarians to provide a Mexican and Chicana interpolation of women's advocacy across two nation-states. Included in her film is the paralyzing autonomy provided by interviews, testimony, and family advocacy. When interviewed by Chicana film scholar Rosa Linda Fregoso (2001) about her technique in her acclaimed film, *Las madres de Plaza de Mayo*, Portillo explained that Chicana feminism motivated her to document what was made invisible. The domestic spaces where murdered and missing women performed domestic labor, built community, and imagined

new futurities as young Mexican women is what Portillo is able to craft in her narrative about innocent victims. In this way, Portillo's documentary is a space where activist mothers take possession over the public knowledge about their daughters' lives. Examples include black crosses with pink backgrounds painted on lampposts by family members throughout Juárez's landscape (see Figure 2). In doing so, they refute claims that their daughters led a double life. Memories are transmitted "through a variety of objects through which memories are shared, produced and given meaning" (Sturken 1997, 9). In this context, mothers deny that their daughters were "bad women," or malinchistas. In this way, the respectability politics throughout the space of the city aim to recognize the humanity of each feminicide victim in Juárez's built environment.

Figure 2: Black crosses with pink backgrounds painted on lampposts by family members throughout Juárez's landscape.

Figure 2: Explanation
Activist filmmakers have used a variety of techniques to honor victims on film, including showing memorials dedicated to them (Sturken 1997). An iconic symbol that has become associated with feminicide are the black and pink memory markers that activist mothers have installed throughout Juárez to commemorate the women. For example, in Lourdes Portillos' documentary *Señorita extraviada*, repetitive spliced images of pink and black crosses slice across the screen for viewers to consume (Portillo 2002). Cultural memories of the young women produced in the material landscape are transmitted "through a variety of technologies through which memories are shared, produced and given meaning" (Sturken 1997, 9). Documentaries, then, become a site where victims are memorialized. Thus, viewers consume meta-memories of victims by watching memorials that have been constructed in the material landscape. What results is a double memorial, where the original memories are re-memorialized in film.

Mexican activists like Rafael Montero relied upon family testimony to account for victims' innocence. In Montero's documentary, Preguntas sin respuestas (2005), victims are represented as good girls who were bounded by familial obligations to the extent that they did not go out at night. Activist mother Paula Flores stated in his film, "my daughter was a good girl who taught catechism and worked hard for her family in the maquiladoras. She did not mean any harm to anyone (weeping). They took my baby away from me when she was coming home from the maquila" (Montero 2005). Like most activist mothers of the disappeared, Flores centers personal memories of the young victims as being honest and hardworking. By characterizing their daughters' innocence and purity, mothers actively participate within and against discourses attached to the double life. When recalling victims, mothers strategically use language that constructs the murder of innocent

women. Whereas docudramas rely upon the narrative of victims who succumbed to a life of deviancy, documentary films feature moralistic interpretations to account for women's sexual ethics (Bejarano 2003). In this way, mother activists publicly redress injustice against their families.

In 2005, Chicana feminist Zulma Aguiar released *Juárez Mothers Fight Femicide* which discloses personal family archives as a means to reach public sympathy. In it, she accesses family photographs, albums, and unaccounted spaces where women leisured. Aguiar uses archival photographs of victims during milestone celebrations like quinceañeras (Aguiar 2005). Releasing family archives opens domestic spaces that are often hidden away from public discourse. Family archives carry distinct significance about the temporal and spatial dimensions that recreate virginal qualities (like la Virgen) that allow the public to identify with recoverable female subjects, rather than dishonorable malinchistas.

Some documentaries illustrate the brutality of these crimes by using real-life images of decomposed bodies. Nothing is more sensational than watching dead victims' bodies on film. As difficult as it is to watch, it has recently become a visual tool that has been used to weave together the narrative of feminicide. In Montero's documentary, Preguntas sin respuestas, images of the victims' bodies lying in the land are used as a way to dramatize the horror (2005). Montero often incorporates photographs of mutilated bodies in his films. For his documentary about the feminicides, these images are from archival documents donated by activist mothers who saved evidence impending criminal trials (Montero 2005). Much like the popular docudramas, Montero uses similar shock value in his documentary to construct a sensationalized narrative. However, his film is complemented with testimonies from mothers and photos of the victims when they were young

(Montero 2005). Pictures of the bodies reinforce the trauma that victims experienced when they were assaulted. In viewing images of decomposed bodies, spectators can visualize themselves witnessing horrific sex crimes against women (Sturken 1997). The memory of the victim gets constructed as a broken body. Images cannot be masked because they provide evidence to elicit sorrow, shock, and disgust.

Women's Safety and Toxic Masculinity in Public Space

Both genres of film analyzed here suggest that urban spaces, nighttime, and macho men are to blame for the feminicide in Juárez. Historically, discourses surrounding urban public space at nighttime have constructed *the city* as an uncontrollable cesspool of deviance, crime, rape, and male aggression (Wilson 1991, 140). Global cities have historically been associated with dangerous places for women (Wilson 1991). Specifically, the discourse surrounding fear of urban public spaces at night reinforces the idea that city environments are particularly more dangerous than domestic spaces. Yet, on a global scale, women are raped at a much higher rate in domestic spaces like the home, at school, and at work, by close male acquaintances, including fathers, friends, and husbands (Wilson 1991, 140). In Ciudad Juárez, media representations have reinforced women's fear of public space through re-performing sensationalized memories of how the victims died in public space at night.

In the popular docudrama, *Pasión y crimen en Juárez* (Estrada 2003), mysterious perpetrators target women who walk the streets late at night. All representations of rape, trauma and torture against women are performed at nighttime. By reproducing the urban public space as a place of terror at night, women's fear of public space becomes reinforced. As Hille Koskela argues, "An ideology of fear [for women in urban public space] is supported by crime news items in the media which focus on sensational issues, exaggerate violence

and tend to blame victims for their destiny (1999, 115). Hence, docudramas have used the memory of the disappeared to construct urban space in Juárez as a place to be feared. Sensationalized memories about women being picked up in urban spaces only reinforces popular discourse about staying away from urban places at night, particularly for women. Thus, constructing Juárez's urban space as a deviant place is temporal. The temporality of these sensationalized memories is used to justify fear.

Fear can be used as a form of power to regulate and control bodies in subtle ways (Foucault 1995). In Ciudad Juárez, fear has been used not only to silence victims' families, but also to incite hysteria amongst Juarenses. Filmic reproductions of women who go out late at night and get killed sends a subtle message to women living in Juárez: women who come out late at night should be afraid for their life (Koskela 1999). Reenactments of women getting butchered are meant to condition women to be good pious women who act like virgins (Koskela 1999). Thus, popular memories of how the young victims died become a way for women living in Juárez to learn their proper "place" in society. Memories of the victims are used to justify surveillance and monitor women's behavior. Regulating women's spatial mobility is complicit in this discourse of the public versus private woman.

These gendered discourses regulating women's spatial mobility are positioned around classist and chauvinistic views. Docudramas do not cite that a predominant number of victims were raped on their way home from their jobs in the maquiladoras. It is irrational to assume that poor women can afford to stay at home (Wright 2004). As Alicia Gaspar de Alba (2010) notes in her research, poor brown women are not afforded the same security as white women. In maquiladoras, for example, women are required to undergo pregnancy exams so that they may undergo employment discrimination for

being women. While U.S. multinational corporations actively discriminate against women, there are no laws prohibiting such policies. Women bear the brunt of their public scrutiny from employers. When gone missing, factory workers are often viewed as disposable to such an extent that basic lighting is not provided while walking home for their safety. In other words, women are either expected to starve to death by not working in the maquiladoras or face the risk of falling victim to sexual predators.

In a similar respect, Juárez docudramas reinforce women's fear in reenactments of rape and murder in the same ways that activist documentaries recycle the same discourses to construct women's oppression in Juárez. In the opening scenes of Montero's *Preguntas sin respuestas* (2005), the narrator explains different theories for crimes against women. Amongst many of his claims, Montero cites the breakdown of the traditional Mexican family and the absence of a working male as possible reasons for violence against women (2005). According to Montero, women's participation in the global factory and a rise in single parent homes run by women has created resentment amongst "macho" men and thus resulted in feminicide (2005).[4] Along with his narration, Montero flashes pictures of Mexican men standing around street corners in the night to show that they are lurking (2005). Montero argues that feminicides are a response to a crisis in Mexican masculinity caused by global capitalism not being compatible with traditional Mexican culture. According to Montero, Mexican men cannot handle women working and thus cannot control an animal desire to kill random women. Thus, women should fear random acts of violence by Mexican men who are driven to kill random women in Juárez. Montero reinforces the idea that Mexican men are overly aggressive men who cannot control their temper, thereby arguing that machista culture causes feminicide.

Wright claims that the rationale that a crisis in Mexican masculinity causes feminicide can best be described as "death by culture" (Wright 2000, 128), which reinforces the idea that women should be generally afraid of Mexican men who depend on working women to survive. By indicting Mexican men, Montero uses fear of the urban unemployed male as a way of inciting hysteria amongst women. Women in Juárez are conditioned to be afraid of urban night culture. Images of random Mexican men in Juárez cause the viewer to be afraid of Juárez's urban environment. Fear is used as a tool to regulate women's spatial mobility in the city. Thus, patriarchal attitudes about excluding women from urban public space are reiterated in Montero's documentary (Wilson 1991, 140).

In documentary film, activists also question the root cause of this excessive violence against women. In *Preguntas sin respuestas*, Montero's (2005) cinematic decisions are important in highlighting the toxicity of Mexican masculinity. In particular, his critiques of using women's bodies as political sites where rage is physically expressed tells a great deal about how he and activist mothers choose to frame this toxic masculinity. Chicana feminist Aishih Wehbe-Herrera, for example, has written about toxic masculinity in Mexican cinema (2011). In her research, she finds that Mexican male expression of desire, grief, and anger was propelled by the nation-state to recover a sense of masculinity in the post-Mexican revolutionary moment. To her estimation, cinema was a political site to generate male and masculine subjecthood fraught over desires to transform Mexico itself into a cohesive nation, while at the same time reconciling vast poverty, internal strife, and uniformity. Clearly, male expressions in cinematic performance in documentaries to perform heroism or culpability tells us a great deal about the competing masculinities that occur within Mexican communities. In this way, bodily expressions of male desire acted out in docudramas and critiqued

by documentary film carve out new publics of political transformation for women. Documentaries that use terror as a site for political dialogue may trigger fear, but ultimately are about endorsing a new civil society.

The counter publics that mother activists find themselves engaging, therefore, ignite a political discourse that is aimed at a mutual accountability for restoring justice. Restorative justice for their daughters means having to work inside and against a set of discourses that seemingly buy into respectability politics or what Audre Lorde identifies as the "master's tools" (2018). However, for these activist filmmakers, the emergence of a society that is moving toward ending gender harassment and terror requires doing the ideological work of creating new vocabularies, knowledge, and codes of conduct of mutual responsibility that ensure gender terrorism must not continue.

When activists call upon the law to restore justice for murdered and missing women, they reawaken what Alicia Schmidt Camacho identifies as a political imaginary, one that evokes another world without gender violence (2005). Part of the work entailed in producing this imaginary, therefore, traps activist mothers into a political conundrum. When mothers call upon the law, for example, they find themselves locked into the discourse of the double life where the specter of police corruption haunts them. Impunity and corruption have been well-documented by journalists who cover feminicide in Juárez. To call upon the law means activists mothers work within a set of discourses that bind them to constructing their daughters as innocent. In this way, the political imaginaries opened up by mothers, while constrained, lay the foundation so that future activists may come forth in order to create a world without gender violence that is so desperately needed in Juárez.

The Paradox of the Double Life

A paradox exists in the methods that victims' mothers use to resist sexual violence (Wright 2005). Mothers emphasize that their daughters were not prostitutes in order to make evident that their daughters were virgins. One blind spot in their activism is the absence of prostitution as a measurable site of vulnerability for women. Most representations of feminicide victims used in activist documentaries represent them as virgins. In Montero's *Preguntas sin respuestas* (2005), for example, the filmmaker reinforces the depiction of victims as innocent virgins and domesticated women by inserting images of the women's bedrooms and white dresses worn in religious ceremonies. Montero accompanies images of virgin-like qualities with activist mothers' commentary. In his film, mothers argue that their daughters were religious and never associated with drugs, alcohol, or sex. In Aguiar's *Juárez Mothers Fight Femicide* (2005), still shots of victims are used to convey innocence with soft piano music playing in the background. Aguiar uses images of the women when they were little girls or when they celebrated quinceañeras (2005). Gendered images of coming-of-age celebrations reinforce innocence in honor of the dead young women. Memories of the young victims become fixed in imagined pasts, where the young women were untainted by the brutality of sexual violence. Youthful images remind viewers of how vulnerable victims were when attacked. Virginity, then, is a way to combat allegations that the young victims were prostitutes who roamed the streets late at night. Without representation for prostitutes, violence against sex workers remains normalized in Juárez. Violence against prostitutes is unchallenged when prostitutes remain absent from women's rights activism.

In fact, in Ciudad Juárez, prostitution is a common form of employment for women who migrate to the border. Prostitution provides income for

migrant women to earn money for food and shelter. When mothers focus on the respectability of their daughters' virtue, it locks them into reinforcing virgin-whore dichotomies. In this way, activists unintentionally reinforce patriarchal discourses used to regulate women's spatial mobility in the city. While mothers denounce acts of violence against all women, prostitution remains a blind spot in their activist work to reimagine a world without violence despite deviancy. Because of the "social fantasy that certain women are made for killing, that is, to be used up to the point of extinction," activists invested in political transformation are tied and bound by such constrained rhetoric (Camacho 2004, 24). In their absence, prostitutes remain an invisible majority that are denied advocacy because of the stigma that is attached to sex industries. Certainly, that stigma would bleed into the advocacy work of the mothers, which makes sense as to why they would want to steer away from being associated with prostitution. Furthermore, mother activists illustrate the constrained ways that advocacy can entrap women into recycling binaries that undermine liberation from patriarchy.

Conclusion

In Chicana feminism, the radicality of its social imaginary is to envision a world that does not yet exist. In the same spirit, Juárez mothers offer us an imaginary that makes concessions in order to transform the larger dialogue about social justice for women of color. One dimension that mothers expose is the ineffectiveness of the liberal state to protect its citizens because of its priority to secure private capital. Mother activists emulate models of engaged citizenship that prioritize mutual responsibility to protect one another. As Elena Poniatowska points out, mother activists belonging to groups like *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* carve out new spaces for mutual care and responsibility (2004). Indeed, as she notes, the Mexican government's impunity will not protect women from further forms of violence. Protection

must come from civil society. In this way, the publics that activists create will hopefully destroy virgin-whore dichotomies that they may find useful in the immediacy to fight against gender terrorism.

While Chicana feminist scholarship is a field built upon 50 years of knowledge production, virgin-whore dichotomies teach us that the historical residue of Spanish and European colonialism thrives within our communities past the walls of the academe. When recycled, Eurocentric attitudes about race, space, and gender, can be deadly. Docudramas illustrate that when women are forced to reenact trauma, cycles of violence that originated 500 years since the Europeans first encountered the Americas continue to be perpetuated. In the same manner, activists lock themselves into traps by recycling false binaries between the virgin-whore dichotomy.

In this essay, I analyze how race, gender, and space intersected in virgin-whore dichotomies. Representations in film illustrate the multiple ways in which women experience space differently because of race. Chicana feminism helps activists, filmmakers and scholars to point to the hybridization of space between public and private spheres. When feminist geography expands its scope of space based upon experiential knowledge by women of color, we honor the diversity of women and how they experience spatial formations differently. The mixing between public and private worlds that Chicanas embody point to geographical forms of knowing that have yet to be documented. The dismantlement of false binaries that abide by respectability politics can make way for new vocabularies, geographies, and dissident practices in order to imagine the world for which mother activists have only just begun to fight. Indeed, as Chicana feminist Irene Lara notes, it is when we embrace our inner deviance that we seek transformative alterities that reimagine a world that does not abide by the standards of Eurocentrism and patriarchy (Lara 2005).

Activist mothers model the type of citizenship that is necessary to transform a world that is in dire need of reconstruction. While political imaginary that mother activists use may fall short of a Chicana feminist approach to respectability politics, the paradox for Chicana feminists is how to acknowledge what lessons can be learned from activist women whose priorities may not align with the political imaginary needed to stop gender violence. The work that activist mothers engage in is necessary in order to create other world making where gender violence is obliterated. In this way, Chicana feminism can learn a great deal from activist mothers who pave the way for future generations of feminists to confront gender terrorism.

Acknowledgements
Special thank you to Fernando Bosco, Doreen Mattingly, and Irene Lara for their guidance on this research project. Editorial feedback by anonymous reviewers and Sonya M. Alemán, as well as, proofreading assistance by Jeremy Yu and Daniel Olmos helped me take this article to the next level.

Notes

[1] I visited these shops once a month between June and December in 2015 as part of my research study.

[2] Human rights groups use femicide and feminicide interchangeably to identify the intentional homicide that targets women.

[3] Feminist geographers have written about the ways in which virgin-whore dichotomies impact spatial relations for women. For more information on the topic, please see: Clare Lewis. (2010)"Woman, Body, Space: Rio Carnival and the Politics of Performance," *Gender, Place, and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 3(1): 23-42; Mae Ngai. (2013) "Embodied Cosmopolitanisms: the Subjective Mobility of Migrants Working in the Global Sex Industry." *Gender, Place, and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 20(1): 107-124; Melissa W. Wright, (2004): "From Protest to Politics: Sex Work, Women's Worth and Ciudad Juárez Modernity." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94: 369-386.

[4] In contrast to Lourdes Portillo's and Zulma Aguiar's film, Montero's film focuses on toxic masculinity in urban spaces. While it is beyond the scope of this essay, it is noteworthy to address

the ways in which Chicana filmmakers direct films differently than male filmmakers about the feminicides in Juárez.

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