

DOCUMENTING FEMINICIDE: The Importance of Teaching Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada*

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*For almost a decade now, cultural producers have been creating works that attempt to document and theorize the femicide of women in Ciudad Juárez. From films to documentaries to art installations and music, countless productions exist that can aid in the dissemination of information about the violence in the border city. This essay argues that among the multitude of available resources, Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* remains one of the most important tools in educating an unaware audience. The film bears witness to the violence that has escalated in a city under an accelerated process of globalization and the very complex relationships that exist between transnational business interests, the state agencies in charge of the murder investigations, and the community's activists. Read alongside the documentary *City of Dreams*, Portillo's film also reminds us of what is at stake when the preconceptions of a director overshadow the responsible representation of a documentary's subjects.*

For the past several years, teaching Lourdes Portillo's documentary, *Señorita Extraviada*, has been an integral part of my classes. In the last couple of semesters, however, I have been questioning the practice of using such an intense film in my courses. The film does an amazing job of documenting the violence perpetrated on young women in Juárez, but I have recently felt much more ambivalent about screening the documentary. Most of my students have never heard of the violence in the border city and are genuinely appalled. They cannot believe the mass murder of women can occur with such impunity. Many cry while they watch the video and afterward express anger and rage at such horrific violence. They ask: What can we do? Who do we contact? Where can we learn more? After giving them the requisite web page addresses, urging them to write U.S. lawmakers, and

encouraging them to learn more about the plight of the Juárez community, I watch them leave the classroom and wonder how soon it will be before the women of Juárez will become just one more case of injustice they learned about in school. My students are not callous or ignorant of social justice issues and activism. It is just that Juárez is so far away. We are not in close geographic proximity to the border. We are not constantly looking across the Rio Grande at the destruction the maquiladora industry has unleashed in Juárez.¹ We are not witness to what has taken place on the border, and so it becomes much easier to just catalogue the information and file it under “transnational violence against women.”

In the past decade, scholarship on the Juárez feminicides has grown exponentially. In teaching about the dangers of uncontrolled industrialization and neoliberal transnational policies, it would be easy to simply replace the video with more of this written scholarship. My students are smart. They would understand the history, but would they get “it?” Maybe I am just being selfish. If I relied on paper sources instead of screening the documentary, I would no longer have to sit in a dark classroom and watch, once again, the anguish that envelops the faces of the families of the murdered women. I would not have to lead a discussion afterward about the ineptitude of the Mexican government. And most of all, I would not have to answer the questions I always dread: Has this violence ended? What has changed?

While I emphasize the activism of the community and the important changes that have taken place, like the creation of domestic violence shelters and the changes in public perception about violence and women, a part of me fears leaving my students with the sense of despair I am always left with after watching the documentary. I caution them, and myself, about the dangers of the fatalistic discourse that positions the murder of these young women as

inevitable, as such language automatically renders them disposable (Schmidt Camacho 2004). Which brings me to the question I have currently been grappling with: Why continue to teach *Señorita Extraviada*?

While I lack a simple answer, I am going to argue for the continued screening of the film, not just to educate, but now to position the documentary as a powerful form of intervention. With the various documentaries that continue to circulate and Hollywood's treatment of the murders, teaching *Señorita Extraviada* remains as important as ever. Portillo's film remains one of the strongest visual critiques of neoliberal policies and the consequences of globalization projects on local communities. It makes the connections between multiple structures of power—both local and global—operating in the city of Juárez. The analysis of violence through the lens of gender produces a strong feminist text that underscores the importance of specificity when analyzing transnational industrialization projects. The documentary continues to be an effective teaching tool because it offers a strong counter-narrative to an official state discourse that blames victims, advances multiple and complex possibilities for femicide, and documents the struggles of a community that refuses to be silent.

Femicide

The violence in Juárez is astounding. Since 1994 hundreds of women have been murdered and countless remain missing in Ciudad Juárez, the city located in Chihuahua, Mexico, across the border from El Paso, Texas. The number of murdered women varies depending on the source but it is estimated to be between 400 and 800.² In their edited volume that documents the rise in violence against women in Latin America, *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano argue for the importance of specificity in the analysis of the murder of women.

The ways in which we describe the murders becomes vital in making the conditions under which they are occurring visible. For these scholars, it is imperative to use the concept of feminicide to describe the murders. In their introduction to the volume, Fregoso and Bejarano define feminicide as a crime against humanity, “the murders of women and girls founded on a gender power structure...gender-based violence that is both public and private, implicating both the state...and individual perpetrators... [a] systemic violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities” (2010, 5). Under such a definition, the connection between violence being perpetrated on the women of Juárez and structural hierarchies becomes discernible. By analyzing the murders through the concept of feminicide, we can “shift the focus on how gender norms, inequalities, and power relationships increase women’s vulnerability to violence” (2010, 4). When looking at representations of the violence, we can also use the concept of feminicide to analyze the complexity of those representations and their effectiveness in documenting the murders.

Since the late nineties, various cultural productions have attempted to make sense of the violence being perpetrated on the bodies of women in Ciudad Juárez. From films starring U.S. actors like Jennifer Lopez and Minnie Driver, to independently produced documentaries, writers and directors have focused their attention and offered numerous theories and speculations on the murders often referred to as the “maquiladora murders.” Cultural critics like Rosa Linda Fregoso see the murders as part of a state-run campaign of terror (2003). Other sources, like *Frontera NorteSur*, have pointed to stories on the growing drug cartel movement and noted the close proximity of sites where the bodies of victims have been found to the narco-traficante areas of activity.³ The on-line news service has also reported a connection between the murders of some of the women, the computer school, ECCO, and the school’s

proximity to shoe stores (2003).⁴ Julia Monárrez Fragoso analyzes the serial feminicides as part of a backlash against women because of their newfound independence in the maquilas (2002). Others believe the victims are murdered by “Juniors,” the sons of the rich families in Juárez who kill women as a form of sport, while some believe the women are victims of satanic rituals. Regardless of what theory(s) one believes plausible, feminicide is a lived reality for the residents of the city.

The Hollywood Version

With so many accounts circulating about the violence, understanding the situation in Juárez becomes ever more difficult. Using *Señorita Extraviada* in the classroom has become an important way of intervening in the misinformation that is being promoted by more easily accessible Hollywood produced films. In the past few years, two movies have been released that center their narratives on feminicide in Juárez: *The Virgin of Juárez* starring Minnie Driver and the more well known *Bordertown*, directed by Gregory Nava and starring Hollywood favorite, Jennifer Lopez. Both films attempt to bring attention to the violence on the border, but because they are based on a system that creates movies for profit, they take creative license to package the murders of young women into a plot line that is more easily consumed and processed by the viewing audience.

Released in 2006 by Las Mujeres, LLC, *The Virgin of Juárez* was written by Michael Fallon and directed by Kevin James Dobson. The film stars Minnie Driver as Karina Danes, an L.A.-based reporter who is assigned to write a story on the murders occurring in Juárez. Also released in 2006 by Capitol Films was Gregory Nava's more well-known film *Bordertown*. In *Bordertown*, Jennifer Lopez plays the role of the investigative reporter, Lauren Adrian. In both films, the protagonists find themselves embroiled in the chaos of the

city as they attempt to solve the murders. While Dobson's film turns into a paranormal thriller, the similarities between the two films go beyond the protagonists' occupation. The films attempt to connect the industrialization of the border to the violence, but do so without incorporating the tangible historical context. Out of context, this connection comes across as superficial and is ultimately ineffective. Instead, the films focus on sensationalizing the violence and center their narratives on the protagonists in order to advance their plot lines.

While students are perfectly capable of approaching the Hollywood films with a more critical eye, we know that the images projected on a movie screen are powerful and enduring. As Carlos E. Cortés reminds us, "Movies teach...they form, in short, a powerful public textbook...long after school education has ended, we continue learning through the media" (1992, 91). One can argue that at least people are learning about the violence, and that this is in itself a worthy endeavor of the films.⁵ However, bad information is sometimes worse than no information. Leaving an audience with the view of Mexican citizens as religious zealots, ignorant, and illogical, does not help the community. Believing that some of the murders are being solved and that criminals are facing justice allows the audience to feel better, but it does nothing to advance a transnational movement of opposition to violence against women. The emphasis on a coherent plot line demands a linear narrative structure that cannot adequately explain what is occurring in the city. When looking at the complex networks of power operating in Juárez, it becomes clear that a simple tale of mystery does not do justice to the lives of victims. The intricacies surrounding the violence must be viewed through an analysis that takes into consideration the fluid movement of agents and structures working for the interests of global capital. No single text could be expected to sort out the complex conditions under which feminicide is occurring, but Portillo's

Señorita Extraviada provides a more comprehensive analysis of the intricate web of power operating in Juárez today.

The “Real” Version?

Despite the fact that Portillo’s documentary was released in 2001, it remains a valuable teaching tool. While not perfect, or as “up-to-date” as more current cultural productions dealing with femicide, the documentary informs viewers about the violence while also demonstrating the power that documentary film, as a genre, can have in creating meaning for the viewer. *Señorita Extraviada* aired on PBS in 2001 as part of its POV series.⁶ Portillo is a California-based filmmaker, born in Mexico, who identifies as a Chicana and has strong connections to the country of her birth. *Señorita Extraviada* is not her only Mexican (or border-based) documentary, and her familiarity and knowledge of the country comes through in her work. Like other filmmakers, Portillo is interested in visually documenting the violence being perpetrated against women and making connections between the industrialization of the border and femicide, but her work is much more consciously situated within the community through her reliance on testimonios from activists, victims, and the victims’ families. Her relationship with Mexico provides Portillo with an understanding of the culture and the social structure of Juárez that allows her to create an analysis of femicide that goes beyond the superficial level of sensationalist films.⁷

I teach *Señorita Extraviada* alongside the BBC’s *City of Dreams*, directed by Bruno Sorrentino, in order to illustrate to students the importance of critically reading documentaries.⁸ Both films aired on their respective country’s public broadcasting station. This is significant because audiences tend to watch programming on these stations through a less critical eye, assuming that because it is not produced for mass distribution and profit (unlike Hollywood

productions), the programs on these stations are therefore more “true” or “real.” While other documentaries on Juárez feminicides exist—including Ursula Biemann’s *Performing the Border*, Lorena Mendez’ *Border Echoes*, Rafael Montero’s *Preguntas sin Respuesta*, and Pati Revelo’s *La Batalla de Las Cruces*—I place these two specific cultural productions in conversation because of the very different message that gets disseminated to the viewing audience.⁹ Teaching *Señorita Extraviada* alongside *City of Dreams* becomes a project of both informing students about the violence in Juárez and the dangers of assuming documentaries are unbiased and real.

Originally aired in January 2001 in England, *City of Dreams* is a forty-five minute BBC documentary directed by Bruno Sorrentino and produced by Gianfranco Norelli. While both Sorrentino and Norelli are well-known, award-winning filmmakers who have produced/directed several documentaries that deal with subaltern communities, there is no evidence that they are in any way connected to Mexico, or that they have a deep understanding of the country or the city of Juárez. Their approach to the murders is definitely framed by their position—they are outsiders looking in and trying to impose their own analysis of the events occurring in Juárez. While being from the area, being an “insider,” does not guarantee that a director will necessarily be able to capture the complexities of an issue—the ability to decode structures of power within the global—but understanding the specificity of the local becomes imperative, when treating such a sensitive subject.

The documentary, shot like a made-for-television special, focuses on the murders of women and attempts to offer possible reasons for feminicide. Unfortunately, most of Sorrentino’s theories are based on widely circulated state strategies of what Fregoso has defined as negation and disaggregation.

In *meXicana Encounters*, Fregoso argues that the state's discourse of negation first refused "to acknowledge the reality of systemic and calculated acts of violence" and then went on to blame the victim "by emphasizing their alleged transgressive sexual behavior" (2003, 3–4). The state then shifted to a discourse of disaggregation, where it "now conceded the fact of the murders, but it refused to accept their interconnection" (2003, 5).

The pairing of the two films helps students recognize the ways in which documentaries are constructed. Many assume that the genre is free of bias and that the director is just "documenting" what is occurring at a certain moment in time.¹⁰ However, by showing the two very distinct documentaries on feminicide, it becomes clear to students the importance that responsible production plays in the message that is given to an audience. They begin to realize how easy it is to frame and manipulate information to create a specific scenario. Not all documentaries are created with an equal amount of background research. Students can become adept at reading how cultural productions understand—or misunderstand—histories of inequalities. In "Work, Immigration, Gender," Lisa Lowe writes that "cultural forms of many kinds are important media in the formation of oppositional narratives and crucial to the imagination and rearticulation of new forms of political subjectivity, collectivity, and practice" (1997, 357). While not all cultural forms participate in oppositional articulations, in analyzing cultural productions that surround the mass violence against the women of Juárez, students learn to distinguish between those productions that are providing oppositional narratives through their analysis and understanding of the social and material conditions for feminicide and those productions that sensationalize the murders. In examining documentaries that have attempted to treat the situation through the lens of a historically situated analysis of globalization, we can begin to see how those productions function both

within and outside the state narrative.

Gendered Violence:

Connecting Labor, Industrialization, and Globalization

Because the feminicides began in the early nineties, during a period of continuing mass industrialization of the border and a year after the signing of NAFTA, it is difficult to separate an analysis of the feminicides in Juárez from the material and social changes that have taken place during this time. In her essay on the labor structure of the maquilas, Melissa M. Wright points out that “[a]fter the passage of NAFTA in 1994, the maquila industry grew by 29 percent throughout the country, with the highest growth rates occurring in Ciudad Juárez” (2001, 97). Scholars like Jorge A. Bustamante, Julia Monárrez Fragoso, Elvia R. Arriola, Rosa Linda Fregoso, and Alicia Schmidt Camacho have written extensively on the violence in Juárez and the impact that the industrialization of the border has had on the economic and social structure of the city. Both documentaries focus a significant amount of attention on the maquiladora industry, but do so in different ways, offering students the opportunity to analyze how processes of globalization can be framed and represented based on the cultural producers’ frame of reference.

City of Dreams begins by making the connection between the changes in the city and the mass industrialization of the border. Michael Kramer, the narrator, informs the viewer of the multinational corporations that employ mostly women and whose presence on the border has “swollen the population of Juárez six fold in recent years” (Sorrentino 2001). The documentary makes the claim that “most of the women killed were factory workers” and draws the visual connection between female workers and the foreign-owned maquilas through shots that focus on a worker leaving the Philips factory (Sorrentino 2001). Sorrentino connects the rising population with the increase of violence

in the city. He incorporates an interview of Casa Amiga Centro de Crisis founder, Esther Chávez Cano, to emphasize the violence against women, while also reporting the high number of men killed annually in relation to drug trafficking.¹¹ While the documentary seems genuinely interested in drawing attention to the murders, the overall framing of the women in the documentary—both the victims and maquila workers—serves to reinforce a state narrative that blames the victim and functions within a patriarchal lens that continues to position women as responsible for the violence levied against them.

In an effort to make the connection between the maquilas and female victims, Sorrentino's camera follows two young maquiladora workers, Soledad and Maribel. He uses their interviews to point to their labor within the transnational factories, but also to illustrate the changes women laborers have experienced as a result of their employment. Both Soledad and Maribel discuss the fear they constantly live under, especially during their walks to and from the maquilas.¹² However, because Sorrentino does not use captions to translate their words, and relies instead on a voice-over dubbing, we barely hear Soledad and Maribel speak. Instead, what the viewer hears is the crisp British English of the interpreter. Students are often quite critical of this practice because they feel a disconnect between themselves and the young women on the screen. The young women's words and stories are mediated not only through Sorrentino's framing, but also through the dubbing process that denies them a voice.¹³ Even more problematic, Sorrentino uses the interviews with Soledad and Maribel to emphasize the idea that women choose to place themselves in danger through their activities.

Throughout the segment, Sorrentino switches from different shots of uncovered graves, decomposed bodies, and what he refers to as “the red light

district.” Interspersed within these shots are clips of the interviews with Soledad and Maribel. Right after discussing their fear of living in the city, the focus of their narrative shifts significantly. They go from wearing plain t-shirts and jeans, when discussing their fears, to changing into what can best be described as club clothing as they discuss their newfound purchasing power. The framing of the young women’s words emphasizes their excitement in embracing consumer culture and the freedom that having a paycheck has given them. The young women come across as shallow and looking for a good time, working in the maquilas for the sole reason of providing funding for their entertainment.¹⁴ The film’s construction of Soledad and Maribel makes invisible the role that young women who work in the maquilas play in economically supporting their families. Instead, the absence of an unpleasant economic reality makes the viewer more comfortable with the narrative.¹⁵ Furthermore, the camera’s framing of their bodies invites one to voyeuristically watch Soledad and Maribel getting ready for a night on the town. The narrator’s voice guides our reading of their actions:

All week long Soledad and Maribel look forward to their Friday nights on the town. But their newfound freedom comes at a price. Young factory workers are the most likely targets of rape and murder.... The only release for young assembly line workers is in the discos and nightclubs of the red light district.... It’s here that the police believe many of the women meet their killers...Maribel and Soledad have made their choice. They will risk the danger in order to have their freedom. (Sorrentino 2001)

Kramer’s words draw a direct connection between the women’s victimization and their activities, assuming that somehow they are the ones that place themselves in danger and as a result, are responsible for their victimization.

While it is true that the women have more access to activities outside the home, by making such statements and framing them with shots of smoky nightclubs, half-dressed women framed as prostitutes, and women consuming alcohol, Soledad and Maribel's choice to attend a disco is automatically associated with aberrant, immoral behavior.¹⁶ The documentary blames women for choosing to spend time in nightclubs and the women are seen as accomplices in their own victimization. Sorrentino ends up visually illustrating Attorney General Rascon's public claim that the victims "put themselves in harm's way by dressing provocatively and frequenting unsavory after-hours nightclubs" (Stowers 2001, 5). Sorrentino's inability to analyze the young women's actions outside of a moralistic, patriarchal frame of reference perpetuates the authorities' argument that these young women are "bad" and therefore not true victims. By constructing the young maquila workers as irresponsible, the documentary becomes implicated in the further victimization of women even as it tries to position itself as objective.¹⁷

Sorrentino becomes guilty of the type of documentary practice Trinh T. Minh-ha addresses in her essay, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning." In another context, Minh-ha argues that,

The socially oriented filmmaker is thus the almighty voice-giver... whose position of authority in the production of meaning continues to go unchallenged, skillfully masked as it is by its righteous mission. The relationship between mediator and medium or, the mediating activity, is either ignored—that is, assumed to be transparent, as value free and as insentient as an instrument of reproduction ought to be.... (1993, 96)

Because Sorrentino situates the documentary as an objective project, interested in finding the truth about the murders in Juárez, he never considers

how his positionality as a privileged white male from outside the community affects his analysis of the violence. He readily accepts the patriarchal discourse that polices women's bodies. The mediation that takes place not only through the narratives of those interviewed, but also through the visual framing of women as objects, remains unstated. In the end, Sorrentino provides the viewer with an analysis rife with inaccuracies and sexist/racist ideologies, but because he is the filmmaker, he enjoys artistic license to mediate meaning for the viewer. By providing the audience with only Soledad and Maribel's narrative as a representation of maquiladora workers, the film makes a dangerous argument that ultimately places the blame on women for the violence perpetrated against them. In contrast, Portillo offers a more complex analysis of global structures of power responsible for the maquila industry and the connection to violence against the women of Juárez.

While Portillo allows for several theories about the murders to surface throughout *Señorita Extraviada*, she also focuses on the changes Juárez has undergone because of the maquiladora industry. Her voice informs the viewer that 80 percent of maquilas are U.S.-owned factories attracted to Juárez by low wages, stressing the fact that the maquila industry makes \$16 billion in revenue per year (Portillo 2001). She makes the connection between the maquilas and migration to Juárez and subsequent pressure on the city's infrastructure. Portillo explains that, "as a model of globalization, Ciudad Juárez is spinning out of control." By beginning her conversation of the industrialization of the city with statistics that tie that industrialization project to the U.S.-owned factories and the profits that these transnational corporations make, Portillo is implicating the United States and its industries in the problems being encountered by the residents of Juárez. Through the ties she establishes between the maquila industry and the rising violence against women, she also holds U.S. transnational corporations accountable for some of the feminicides.

Portillo uses several examples to show how the maquiladoras are connected to the murders of many of the young women. In her treatment of Omar Latif Sharif, a prime suspect in the feminicides, she emphasizes the fact that he was a chemical engineer for a maquila and that he had served five years in the United States for sexual harassment and battery. While Portillo never claims Sharif is the murderer the state has portrayed him to be, she does seem interested in making visible his connection to the maquila industry and his previous history of violence against women. After all, many of the supervisors and engineers that work in the maquiladoras are U.S. citizens and other outsiders. When discussing the employment of several victims, Portillo allows the interviews of several victims' families, like those of Sagrario González and Maria Isabel Nava, to make the connection between the victims' work in the maquilas and their murder.¹⁸ Portillo includes captions that translate the words of those being interviewed for a non-Spanish speaking audience, but does not impose commentary on the words of the interviewees. Portillo provides the outlet for those she interviews to voice their own opinions without meditating their meaning for the viewer through the translation practice of dubbing. For students, the ability to hear the actual voices of the interviewees stands in sharp contrast to the lack of voice in *City of Dreams*. The comparison of the two films allows for a conversation on the significance of being able to talk back to power with one's own voice and the politics of language (i.e. which one is more valued).

In drawing the connection between the maquilas and feminicide, Portillo underscores the importance of several practices common to the maquiladora industry—an important element completely absent in Sorrentino's production. Through her interview with activist Judith Galarza, a member of Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares Detenidos-Desaparecidos, Portillo draws attention to the objectification of women that

takes place in the maquilas. Galarza discusses the fact that several pictures of Sagrario were taken before her kidnapping. She claims that it is very common in the maquila for photographers to take pictures of the girls, and that they (the killers) choose them through photographs. The pictures are taken in the maquila with the consent of management. This objectification is consistent with Norma Iglesias Prieto's findings that show "[w]omen in the factories are daily treated as sexual objects, which negates their individual integrity while reproducing and reinforcing a sexist ideology" (1997, 76). Through her focus on the maquila bus drivers' involvement in the violence against the workers, Portillo shows how intimately connected the maquiladoras are to the victimization of their female workers.

Unlike *City of Dreams*, which blames the maquiladora workers (and implicitly their nightlife) and does little to critique the industry, Portillo holds the maquilas accountable in the murders. She also makes the viewer aware of the impunity of the maquilas and the role the state has played in protecting the industry. Galarza believes that, "The maquiladoras are untouchable.... Nothing is investigated at the maquiladoras because they are the biggest investment for the Mexican government" (Portillo 2001). Portillo does not insert any commentary regarding Galarza's claims, but she does support Galarza's argument that "the government is responsible in every way" through her treatment of governmental responses to femicide. While Portillo does not describe the murders as a form of femicide, the analysis she uses to connect a transnational industry, state officials, and law enforcement illuminates the multiple actors involved in making young women vulnerable to this form of violence. The film gives students the opportunity to make connections they might have missed otherwise. It also offers an example of the possibilities of creating a production that relies on valuing different forms of knowledge and not just that which is considered "official."

Throughout the documentary, Portillo is interested in disrupting the state's hegemonic rhetoric that seeks to explain the circumstances surrounding the murders. Portillo whittles away at the state's narrative of negation and disaggregation by showing how the actions and words of various state agents represent the lack of a real commitment to ending the killing of young women. She includes an interview with Victoria Caraveo who gives an account of the state's argument that the women murdered led two lives, but instead of commenting on Caraveo's words, Portillo points to what she sees as "an interesting solution" to the rise in murders: imposed curfews. To illustrate the absurd reaction of the state, she follows Caraveo's segment with the press conference of Assistant Attorney General Jorge Lopez. During this conference, Lopez suggests that "the community could choose to impose a curfew and all the good people should stay at home and let the bad people be out on the street." When an interviewer poses the question, "What about the women who work in the maquilas during the second and third shift who have to be on the street?" Lopez confusingly answers, "It's all a matter of looking at things. You can't impose them on workers. But let's start with those of us who can. People who work follow a clean path and dress a certain way" (Portillo 2001). Lopez is making the claim that only bad women who dress inappropriately and are out on the streets at night are being murdered. The assistant attorney general, acting as an agent of the state, thus reinforces the idea that the victims are to blame. Portillo does not openly refute Lopez's words and relies instead on the words of Judith Galarza to debunk the state's myth. Galarza argues that the government, the PRI, and the PAN, have "increased the murders by blaming the women," thereby justifying the violence (Portillo 2001). By sandwiching Lopez's argument between the interviews of activists Caraveo and Galarza, Portillo effectively challenges the state's narratives on the murders through the words of actual community members.

What Is the “Truth?” De/Centering of Knowledge and Information

Both documentaries also offer differing representations of the state agencies responsible for the investigation of femicide. In *City of Dreams*, Sorrentino includes a segment that documents the visit of Dr. Candice Skrapec, a Canadian criminologist and expert in the psychology of serial killers. The narrator informs the audience that Dr. Skrapec has spent several months in Juárez aiding the police department. We see the individual whom the film has established as the “authority” warmly greeted by local investigators. As Dr. Skrapec stands over Suly Ponce—the head of a special victims unit charged with investigating femicide—she uses hand gestures and imitation to explain a face recognition software program. The visual message conveyed is an extremely patronizing one—the educated white woman from the north looming over and imparting her knowledge to the less intelligent “native.” The documentary then includes Dr. Skrapec vocalizing her theories on the existence of more than one serial killer. The “expert” provides no new information, but the framing of Dr. Skrapec in the film positions her as much more knowledgeable than Suly Ponce and her staff.¹⁹

While it is hard to argue with the fact that the official investigation into the murders has been inept at best, this section illustrates the problematic practice of placing outsiders as more intellectually capable of solving conflicts of subaltern communities. Many have critiqued the tendency of cultural productions to perpetuate the ideology of the “savior from the North” that reinforces the racist portrayal of Mexican people as incompetent. The notion that the community needs to be “rescued” is one that infantilizes the country and places the “developed” countries in the continual role of guardian. The documentary perpetuates this patronizing practice, which functions to reinscribe colonial strategies of the past and does little to advance the community’s cause.

Right before this section, Sorrentino's film highlights the work that the community group Voces Sin Eco has performed in demanding justice for the women who have been murdered. However, the work of this group gets lost, as Dr. Skrapec becomes central to the narrative. Unlike the community organizing, the criminologist's work is represented as logical and objective. To make things worse, the filming of a family showing up at the police station to demand an investigation into the disappearance of their daughter, sixteen-year-old Veronica Martinez, follows Dr. Skrapec's interview. The film follows the women to the home of Veronica's boyfriend—whom they believe has abducted Veronica—where they confront the boyfriend's father. The actions of the community members, however, are framed as reactionary and the viewer is witness to the scolding the community members receive by Suly Ponce.²⁰ Dr. Skrapec, who has suddenly taken an interest in Veronica's case, enters into this chaos.²¹

The interactions between the police, the family, and Dr. Skrapec are very telling of the ways in which (mis)information is used to rationalize the disappearance of young women. Unfortunately, the documentary does nothing to reject the practice and instead visually supports the official narrative provided by the state agents. After meeting with Veronica's mother, Dr. Skrapec sits down with the detectives assigned to the case. The detectives—who remain un-named even as we watch them speak with the criminologist—report that tension existed in the Martinez family. During their conversation, the narrator informs one that Veronica's life was "not what it seems." The nameless detective (who never speaks to the camera) tells Dr. Skrapec that Veronica's father "took her out of school and put her in the maquila so she could start working, but he was over jealous. He didn't want her to have a boyfriend or anything like that" (Sorrentino 2001). At this point, the conversation between the criminologist and the detectives takes a strange turn and becomes somewhat confusing.

Dr. Skrapec: If [her father] actually did kill her intentionally, what have you learned about the case? Did he actually threaten to kill her?

Detective: Yes. At one time he even told her you know ‘I wish a lot of guys would kill you’ and you know I think it was ‘rape you’ that he told Veronica. (Sorrention 2001)

Dr. Skrapec makes the assumption that it was the father who could have killed Veronica. This supposition is reached solely based on the detectives’ words, even though no other evidence has been presented and the theory goes against everything Veronica’s family has indicated. While it is possible that Veronica’s father could have been abusive, there is no tangible evidence to support Dr. Skrapec’s sudden assumption. The segment, however, only grows more disturbing.

As the detectives continue their conversation with Dr. Skrapec, the blame shifts from the father to Veronica herself. The male detective informs her that,

One of the things that we saw in each letter that she was writing to one of her boyfriends she was always stating that “you are the love of my life” and stuff like that and “I want to live the rest of my life with you” and then two weeks after another letter practically the same letter. (Sorrentino 2001)

Through the detective’s account, Veronica’s love life becomes suspect. Dr. Skrapec asks if the other letter was “To the same boy?” to which the detective responds, “No, to another boyfriend. So within only two weeks, she was writing the same thing to another guy” (Sorrentino 2001). Even though Veronica is only sixteen, her love letters are used against her. She is guilty of having more than one boyfriend. There is no mention of the fact that, like many teenage girls,

actively dating is not out of the norm. However, the detectives' narrative frames her actions as deviant and as such, blames her for her own disappearance. The criminologist never questions the conclusions the detectives draw and instead uses those assumptions to formulate her own hypothesis.

Based on the information she has been given by the detectives, Dr. Skrapec completely dismisses the concerns of Veronica's mother. Instead, she relies on the conclusions made by the police detectives to provide the viewer with her own expert opinion.

I could quite understand that a teenage girl coming from a home such as Veronica's could easily find herself attracted to a dream that a young man comes into her life might offer her, but that dream of course is in terms of an immediate future, but it's a way out. Unfortunately, that's the hope, that's the dream, that's the fantasy. But the reality that she would find herself in is more of the same. She's going back into the same kind of situation that her mother married into. (Sorrentino 2001)

Now, the fault of Veronica's disappearance lies not only with the young woman, but also with her family. According to Dr. Skrapec, Veronica followed her mother's footsteps into a bad relationship. Besides the detectives' narrative, the documentary does not provide any tangible evidence to support the theory that Veronica has simply run away with her boyfriend. While the possibility exists that the young woman could have left home to be with her boyfriend, the fact that the family and community's concerns are easily dismissed is extremely problematic. By framing the women of the community as reactionary and emotional and positioning Dr. Skrapec as the expert with logical answers, the viewer is left with the representation of the Mexican family

as violent and oppressive and the message that gets disseminated is one that frames the disappearance of young women as voluntary. Completely absent is a critical analysis of the connected structures of power that have led to the vulnerability of young women like Veronica and the role of the U.S. trade policies that have led to the explosion of industry in the city.

The interactions between Dr. Skrapec, the police department, and the family offer students an opportunity to witness the ease with which the disappearances of young women are trivialized and dismissed. At this point, it becomes important to discuss with students the ways in which Sorrentino's camera frames the "expert" as basically solving the mystery of Veronica's disappearance and provides us with the opportunity to see how the construction of meaning can occur. The film's rush to offer an explanation—no matter how unfounded—illustrates Sorrentino's own paternalistic attitude toward the community members. His positioning of Dr. Skrapec as the "authority" displays his own lack of knowledge on the subject matter he is attempting to document. In her analysis of the ways in which feminicides of the women of Juárez communicate messages about sovereignty and control, Rita Laura Segato argues that occurrences around the murders cannot be dismissed as mere coincidences. For Segato, "Everything works as part of one complex communication machine whose messages are intelligible only to those few who, for one reason or another, are able to break the code. Thus, the first problem that the hideous crimes of Ciudad Juárez pose for foreigners and distant audiences is that of intelligibility. And it is precisely in their unintelligibility that the murders take refuge..." (2010, 71). For individuals—insiders and outsiders—who do not understand the ways in which networks of power are ambiguously constructed, it becomes very difficult to comprehend the conditions under which the violence is taking place. Sorrentino tries to provide a "logical" explanation to a situation that defies simplistic notions of logic.

Like Sorrentino, Portillo also spends a significant amount of time pointing to the role that the police department has played in the investigation of the murders, but her treatment of the official investigations is quite different. By interviewing Suly Ponce, Portillo provides the viewer with one version of the investigation. In her interview, Ponce tells Portillo about the difficulties her office has experienced, from the contamination of murder scenes to the lack of basic forensic equipment. This segment of Ponce's interview is followed by Guillermina Flores's account of her family's dealings with Ponce's office, after the disappearance of her sister Sagrario González that offers another version of the investigations. Flores points to the ineptitude of the police when she recounts how after the first DNA test came back negative, Ponce requested another test, but the wrong body was exhumed. Portillo then includes another part of Ponce's interview where she specifically addresses Sagrario's murder claiming, "We have some leads, but we need evidence...and we haven't found it" (Portillo 2001). A few minutes later, Portillo reports that right before Ponce's appointment, the police had burned over 1,000 pounds of victims' clothing collected over the years. She does not make reference to the importance of such an act, but allows the viewers to come to their own conclusions. Through the inclusion of multiple versions of the police department's role in the investigation, Portillo undermines the authority of the police for the viewer, allowing one to question the effectiveness of the investigation and the validity of Ponce's statement.

Portillo's documentary stresses the complete disregard for the rights of victims' families as they report the constant run-around they are given when trying to search for the truth about the murders. Unlike Sorrentino's film, *Señorita Extraviada* does not portray these community members as emotional and irrational, but instead places responsibility on the official investigators. The film provides damning evidence of actual police involvement in the

violence against women through the inclusion of Maria's story, a woman who was raped by a police officer while in custody. The rape occurs with the consent of his fellow officers and amidst sexual harassment by other members of the squad, making the entire department complicit in the violence against Maria. After her rape, that same police officer took pictures of Maria and threatened, "If you say anything, if you report us, with these photos we will find you...and we will kill you and your family" (Portillo 2001). Despite the warnings, Maria and her husband reported the rape and Portillo includes a video clip of the arrested officers juxtaposed with pictures of headlines reporting the rape. Even with all of the media attention focused on the rape, and Ponce's claim that her office believed everything Maria had reported, Portillo informs the viewer that, "The police officers who raped Maria were never sentenced" (Portillo 2001). Both instances illustrate the protection that is afforded to members of the police department and the complete disregard for the rights of victims.

Portillo's choice to challenge the dominant hegemonic discourses surrounding the murders through the use of narratives from community members adds a complexity to her film missing in Sorrentino's documentary. Minh-ha explains that

meaning can be political only when it does not let itself be easily stabilized and when it does not rely on any single source of authority, but, rather, empties it, or decentralizes it. Thus even when this source is referred to, it stands among many others, at once plural and utterly singular. (1993, 100)

By allowing individuals an opportunity to offer counter-narratives, Portillo is decentralizing the state as the source of information. Unlike *City of*

Dreams, she does not allow the state's narratives to go unchallenged or continue to perpetuate the view that women are ultimately to blame for their victimization. She does not offer her own interpretation of the murders, but instead relies on the experiences of others to cast doubt on the state's investigations and findings. Also, by choosing to incorporate several rumors into her film, Portillo offers alternative understandings of the conditions under which women exist in Juárez.²²

While *City of Dreams* establishes the state and its agencies as the source of valid information, Portillo's film seems more interested in documenting the community's reasons to distrust the police as a result of their awareness that, historically, law enforcement officials serve the interests of the politically and economically powerful citizens of the city, while ignoring the needs of the less affluent. It is easy for them to imagine the state and its agencies protecting the interests of the maquila industry at the expense of young women or to link the uncontrolled trafficking of drugs and the corruption associated with the drug industry to the trafficking of young women. As a result of the police failure to investigate the initial murders, the botching of investigations, the mishandling of evidence and their lack of results, the community has begun to see not only their ineptitude or disinterest, but to suspect their actual involvement in the murders. Portillo's documentary reserves judgment on whether or not any of these rumors are true, leaving it up to the audience to decide. In *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, Patricia L. Turner argues that rumor scholarship "reminds us that all folk groups may accept as fact implausible information that individuals outside that group perceive as utterly specious. Such is the nature of legends and rumor" (1993, 205). By incorporating interviews that circulate rumors without directly commenting on them or attempting to discredit them, Portillo is respecting the community's need to explain the murders in their own way, regardless of how their theories may be viewed by

her audience. In the end, what becomes important is how the community uses those rumors to mobilize and put pressure on state agencies.

Portillo's practice of decentering the state and its agents as official channels of information remains one of the most important reasons for teaching her film. In their discussion of community-based responses to the violation of human rights, Fregoso and Bejarano identify transitional justice as one approach to dealing with the feminicides in Juárez. For them, "transitional justice aims to reveal the multilayered causes of violence, heal the wounds caused by this violence, and create systems to stop future human rights abuses" (2010, 23). At the center of transitional justice is the challenge to the logic provided by systems of power:

Transitional justice projects are considered to be victim-centered because they validate the truths derived from witness-survivors' own *testimonios*, and provide a forum for contesting official state narratives that often misrepresent and obfuscate the truth behind human rights atrocities. Moreover, in transitional justice projects, the narrative truth produced by family members in the form of *testimonios* of human rights violations they have experienced at the hands of state officials, who harass and intimidate and mislead relatives about investigations, is given just as much weight as forensic or legal evidence. (2010, 24)

While Fregoso and Bejarano's concept of transitional justice relies more on working with legal systems, it is possible for us to use the concept of transitional justice projects to describe projects that attempt to address "feminicidal violence" (2010, 25). Portillo's emphasis on using the stories of the community to tell the story of femicide allows us to frame her

documentary as a transitional justice project. As such, we can position the documentary as an example of a community-based production that advocates for the rights of those who are most marginalized. Portillo's reliance on the families and activists of Juárez provides students with an alternative way of thinking about knowledge production.

A Question of Framing: Bodies on Display

Most visually disturbing about Sorrentino's documentary is the sensationalist lens with which he approaches the situation in Juárez. Sorrentino employs shocking images, from dramatic opening shots of police cars, helicopters, images of a partially decomposed body being pulled out of a grave, to bodies covered in plastic sheets and the arrests of countless men, in an effort to emotionally move the viewer. The melodramatic words of Kramer: "Death stalks the city. Over two hundred women have been killed in the past few years. Their bodies turn up regularly in wastelands outside of town. This nightmare has transformed what was supposed to be a city of dreams," are juxtaposed with those violent opening scenes, further emphasizing the sensationalism of the text (Sorrentino 2001). Later in the documentary, Sorrentino shows footage of police raids in bars and focuses the camera on the bodies of women, providing an almost voyeuristic gaze for the viewer. The documentary reaches an ultimate low when Sorrentino focuses the camera on pictures of fourteen-year-old rape victim Nancy Gonzalez in the hospital, her face beaten to an extent where she is unrecognizable.²³ Why would Sorrentino choose to include such a dramatic shot of an innocent victim? Again, Minh-ha's work offers a possible explanation.

The silent common people—those who "have never expressed themselves" unless they are given the opportunity to voice their thoughts by the one who comes to redeem them—are constantly summoned to signify the real world. They are the fundamental

referent of the social; hence, it suffices to point the camera at them, to show their (industrialized) poverty, or to contextualize and package their unfamiliar life-styles, for the ever-buying and donating general audience “back here,” in order to enter the sanctified real of the morally right, or the social. (1993, 91)

The emotional effect of the documentary meant for a British audience requires that Sorrentino use shocking images to emphasize certain aspects of the violence in Juárez. The documentary is packaged for the easy consumption of a viewing audience that is most likely unaware of the conditions surrounding the murders. By creating a sensationalist film, the documentary becomes more attractive to viewers because it offers images they cannot create on their own. In helping to place the blame on the victims, the documentary also alleviates any guilt the viewing audience might feel over the poverty and exploitative working conditions in which most of these women find themselves.

Unlike the histrionic approach of Sorrentino’s text, Portillo’s documentary relies mostly on the words of community members in attempting to record and reveal the circumstances surrounding feminicide. She does not provide one concrete analysis of the murders, like Sorrentino, but instead allows the different narratives to provide their own analysis based on the interviewee’s experience. Through her use of victims’ pictures and the recording of Maria Isabel Nava’s funeral service, Portillo displays the grief and sorrow of a community in mourning, but she does it in a way that respects the families and the victims.²⁴ In contrast to *City of Dreams*, *Señorita Extraviada* does not give in to the temptation to utilize a “pornography of violence” when framing the bodies of victims in order to elicit a strong viewer response. She never succumbs to shooting footage aimed at shocking the audience or dramatizing

the killings, but allows the un-translated words of those she interviews to express the horror of the murders. Throughout the documentary, Portillo remains cognizant of her role as mediator behind the camera and does not attempt to become the all-knowing omnipotent voice present in the other documentary.²⁵

In our discussion of the choice to show, or not show, the bodies of victims, some students will argue that by showing the bodies, Sorrentino's film is forcing the audience to confront the brutality of the violence. While I understand their position, it becomes important to encourage students to problematize the ways in which we think women's bodies should be displayed. I ask them whether or not the use of photographs in Portillo's film is effective in creating a connection to the victims of feminicide. Do we necessarily have to witness the destruction of their bodies in order to feel the injustice of the violence? Is it necessary to have a visual example to understand the agony of their deaths? Is the anguish of family members enough? What about respecting the bodies of these young women, even in death? While I do not necessarily offer them my own answers, I hope that by raising such questions students begin to think more critically about the practice of documenting violence against women of color.

Conclusion

Today, the city of Juárez is in the headlines again, but this time more attention is being placed on the escalating violence on the border. Of course, it seems like no coincidence that the reason the violence is making headlines is because of the fear that it will cross the border into El Paso. As a result of the drug cartel war being waged on the streets of Juárez, the number of city residents who have fallen victim to the violence is astounding. Many innocent people have been gunned down in the crossfire of the fight over the control of territory. In the

past year alone, more women have died than in any previous year. *El Paso Times* reports that in 2008, eighty-six women were killed, “38 more than in 1995, when the next-highest number of slayings was reported during the past 15 years” (Washington 2009). Under such an escalation of violence, it has become easy to erase the specificity of murder. The danger is now the collusion of violence against women and the general violence in the city. Portillo’s documentary provides a visual history of femicide that we must not allow to be subsumed under the rhetoric of drug wars and collateral damage. As Sergio de la Mora argues, “*Señorita extraviada* trabaja como correctivo contra la invisibilidad, la desaparición y el olvido” (2004). It is more important than ever to keep attention focused on the murders of Juárez’s women, to use the film to fight the invisibility, the disappearance, and the forgetting of these women. We must not allow their femicides to fall out of the discussion of violence on the border.

It is also important that we teach our students about the dangers of irresponsible documenting of marginalized communities. Sorrentino’s film functions to create a distance between the audience and those on the screen. While I am not encouraging students to necessarily see themselves in the lives of this community, I warn them against seeing the people of Juárez as existing outside of a common reference. When discussing genocide, Segato reminds us,

Historical conditions that can transform us into monsters or the accomplices of monsters threaten us all, and the menace of becoming monsters hangs over us all, without exception, as does the threat of becoming victims. All it takes is the creation of a strict and exact frontier between an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ for the process to begin. (2010, 88)

The threat that documentaries such as *City of Dreams* pose is the disassociation it can create/perpetuate between the audience and the

community. Portillo's film rejects this separation and instead works to dismantle the frontier that location creates. As far away as my students might be from Juárez, they can still feel anger and sadness at injustice and can learn to understand the importance of speaking back to power. They can see the film as an example of the difference that an individual can make when committed to social justice. It allows them to see possibilities for intervention and leave the classroom without feeling utter despair.

Señorita Extraviada remains one of the most important pedagogical tools for teaching students about the violence against women in Juárez and the power of documentary in bearing witness. Portillo's framing of feminicides, while painful to watch, also gives viewers a much more nuanced understanding of the process of globalization and the impact it has on women's lives. The pairing of the films provides a cautionary note for the simplistic reading of all documentaries as "real," and pushes students to think critically about the genre. And so I will continue to sit through dark screenings of Portillo's film and prepare myself to answer difficult questions—after all, should questions of violence ever be easy to answer?

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Notes

¹ For more information on the Border Industrialization Program and the maquiladora industry in Mexico, see influential texts like Jorge Bustamante's "Maquiladoras: A New Face of International Capitalism on Mexico's Northern Frontier" (1983); María Patricia Fernández-Kelly's *For We Are Sold, I and My People* (1983); Norma Iglesias Prieto's *Beautiful Flower of the Maquiladora* (1997); and Susan Tiano's *Patriarchy on the Line: Labor, Gender, and Ideology in the Mexican Maquila Industry* (1994).

² For example, using the latest reports in the El Paso/Juárez area, *Frontera NorteSur*, an online U.S.-Mexico border news service, writes that, “At least 750 women were murdered” in the Juárez area between 1993 and the first week of May 2010. *Frontera NorteSur* also reports that, “El Paso author and journalist Diana Washington Valdez documented a greater number of murders” and “if subsequent homicides reported in the press are added to Washington’s figures, then at least 808 women have been murdered between 1993 and the first week of May 2010” (“A Mother’s”).

³ *Frontera NorteSur*’s online news service is part of the FNS outreach program of the Center for Latin American and Border Studies of New Mexico State University.

⁴ Several of the victims were students of the school while several other victims either worked or visited the shoe stores, Tres Hermanos and Zapatería Paris, which are located in the same area as the computer schools (“Ten Years”).

⁵ In fact, Jennifer Lopez received Amnesty International’s “Artist for Amnesty Award” for her work on *Bordertown* (2007).

⁶ The title of the POV series comes from the cinema term “point of view.”

⁷ For a more in-depth account of Portillo’s process in filming *Señorita Extraviada*, see Rita González’s essay “The Said and Unsaid: Lourdes Portillo Tracks Down Ghosts in *Señorita Extraviada*” (2003).

⁸ In his essay, “Towards a Poetics of Documentary,” Michael Renov highlights what he sees as the fundamental characteristics of documentary. He categorizes them into four objectives: “1. to record, reveal, or preserve, 2. to persuade or promote, 3. to analyze or interrogate, 4. to express” (1993, 21). How documentaries go about achieving the goals of the visual discourse is specific to the director and the production process, but they are always present because, for Renov, the “four functions operate as modalities of desire, impulses which fuel documentary discourse” (1993, 22).

⁹ I also pair the two because they were released the same year and it is much easier to evaluate the information that was available at that historical moment. Later documentaries are able to incorporate more information that was not known in 2001.

¹⁰ In fact, in their introduction to *Post Script*’s documentary film issue, Ken Nolley and Steven Mintz argue, “Through much of the twentieth century, the words associated with the documentary were ‘objective,’ ‘apolitical,’ ‘factual,’ [and] ‘authentic’” (2007, par. 1).

¹¹ “Two hundred men are killed every year in gun battles linked to drug trafficking” (Sorrentino 2001).

¹² For an insightful reading of the ways in which Portillo documents the fear and apprehension in the community and the impact it has on the creation of a culture of terror, see Sergio de la Mora’s “Terrorismo del genero el la frontera de EUA-Mexico” (2004).

¹³ The practice of dubbing over interviewees’ voices continues throughout the documentary, creating a distance between the viewer and those speaking.

¹⁴ Volk and Schlotterbeck, who analyze the response to the feminicides in the works of Carlos Fuentes, Julián Cardona, and Los Tigres del Norte, make a similar observation. They argue that “As many cultural productions locate women’s active incorporation into the wage labor force as the engine that generated Juárez’s ‘disorder,’ then it follows that ‘order’ can only be restored when female passivity is reasserted” (2007, 55).

¹⁵ It also dismisses the physical difficulties of maquiladora labor. Environmental anthropologist Devon Peña reports that possible risk factors include: “(1) direct contact with toxic chemicals and wastes, (2) inhalation of toxic fumes and vapors, (3) exposure to and direct use of dangerous machinery (including conveyor belts), (4) exposure to dangerous methods and processes (for example, assembly-line speed-up, inappropriate time and motion sequences, and intense managerial supervision of productivity standards), and (5) exposure to abusive managerial behavior” (1997, 294).

¹⁶ Norma Iglesias Prieto also discusses young women’s recreational activities, but she presents them in a different way: “To go out dancing, to see a film, to eat, or to have drinks with one’s girlfriends on Friday and Saturdays are common diversions among the young female workers” (1997, 77). She doesn’t make value judgments about their activities or connects them to deviant behavior.

¹⁷ As students watch this segment, I encourage them to recognize the rhetoric of victim blaming as similar to the type of strategy used to dismiss violence against women in our own spaces.

¹⁸ Portillo reports that Sagrario’s mother told her that someone at the maquila changed her schedule and she left work that day without the protection of her family. Maria Isabel Nava disappeared right after applying for a job in a maquila where her mother worked.

¹⁹ Portillo offers a much more insidious reason for the official investigation’s lack of results, including the actual involvement of police officers in the murders of women.

²⁰ Not surprising considering Ponce’s attitude toward victims’ families. Sergio de la Mora’s essay includes a quote by Ponce, where she claims that “Hay psicosis en Ciudad Juárez: media hora de retraso de una mujer a su hogar es suficiente para que los familiares estén pidiendo ayuda para localizarla” (2004, 116).

²¹ The cynic in me is tempted to believe that the criminologist’s sudden interest in Veronica’s case is partially motivated by the presence of the cameras filming the event, but, of course, this is my own reading.

²² In her book, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* (1993), folklore scholar Patricia A. Turner analyzes the role of rumors in an African American community. While her research is specifically situated in the African American community, her treatment of rumors and their significance in communities of color is helpful for analyzing Portillo’s choice to include the circulation of rumors as an element in her film.

²³ Nancy Gonzalez is the maquila worker who was brutally raped, beaten, and left for dead by the maquila bus driver, El Toteca.

²⁴ See Juana Suárez, “Review of *Señorita Extraviada*,” for a discussion on the ways in which Portillo

employs the photographs of the young women (2004).

²⁵Randy Cordova in a review of the film in *The Arizona Republic* criticized for her approach. Cordova claims Portillo “is a sloppy filmmaker...[who] doesn’t dig very deeply, letting things go unchallenged and failing to answer follow-up questions. If this were a TV news show, her style would be more sentimental Barbara Walters than probing Mike Wallace” (2004).

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