Border Horror:
Genre, Geography, Gender and Death on the US-Mexico Border

by

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Dedication

Con amor a mi familia, mi mamá Orquidia, papá Gumercindo, y hermana Dulce.

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Abstract

"Border Horror: Genre of Death and Violence on the US-Mexico Border" examines representations of death and violence along the US-Mexico border in film, television, and graphic novels from 1994 to 2014. The study introduces border horror as an analytic category through which to identify, categorize, and respond to representations of death in this highly charged borderland after the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This project studies discourses about violence, dying, death, and the undead with gender, genre, and geography to illuminate the legacies of colonization and conquest that are buried in cultural memory. I argue that an analysis of these images within the border-horror generic category gives us an understanding of how communities living along this space are coded as disposable. Grounded in media studies, my formulation of border horror analyzes societal discourses found elsewhere—in political, academic, artistic, and mainstream texts, as well as in media—that focus on the communities living and dying along the borderlands. The genre thus extends across a range of cultural productions and discourses, from B-movies to academic works, journalistic accounts, and graphic novels.

Each chapter of the dissertation highlights the specificity of border horror, focusing on three key generic tropes that link gendered bodies with genre and border geography: personification of the border, conflation of the female body with the geography, and the use of indigenous motifs to explain violence. Through personification, the border is given power over human life; whether intentional or not, the personification of the border and the framing of the border as a murderous, dangerous space inherently shifts the focus away from

sociopolitical forces that lead to violence and death. By conflating the female body with the geography, the border itself becomes feminized, and the devious and dangerous border that we see in the previous trope influences the disposability and pain that female bodies—here, especially, the bodies of women of color—endure. The appropriation of indigenous histories to create narratives about the border perpetuates the idea that Mexicans, particularly those who live in the liminal, lawless border space, are meant—even expected—to die. I argue that representations of death and violence set on the US-Mexico border, the border-horror genre, is a transgeneric genre, one that exists across existing and recognized genres of cultural productions.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The dead body occurs without reference to cultural encoding. Death happens whether we want it to or not, and we are compelled to provide a meaning for it. It erupts into ordered life and takes whomever it "chooses," whenever it chooses. Because of this transgressive and disruptive quality, death must be tamed. Death is wild.[1]

—Philippe Aries

In March of 1989, the city of Matamoros in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas made front-page news in the United States and Mexico after the disappearance of twenty-one-year-old University of Texas pre-med student Mark Kilroy. Kilroy's friends reported him missing on March 15, 1989, after he failed to return to his hotel in South Padre Island, Texas, after a night of partying in Matamoros. The international search for Kilroy soon started, and many feared he had been robbed, kidnapped, and/or murdered. There were no leads in the case until April 1, when a local man, Elio Hernandez, failed to stop at a routine checkpoint in Matamoros. The police tailed Hernandez, who led them to Santa Elena ranch. There, police expected to find marijuana, other drugs, and weapons. What they found instead was the headquarters of Adolfo Constanzo, a Cuban American from Florida who had recently established his home in Matamoros. As the police dug deeper, they found the bodies of thirteen victims buried behind the ranch, some mutilated beyond recognition.[2] Among the bodies was that of Mark Kilroy. The discovery of this narco-satanic[3] cult, as it was called in the news on both sides

[1] Aires, *The Hour of our Death*, 75.
[2] A total of thirteen bodies were found at Santa Elena ranch, and two additional bodies were found at another location owned by the Hernandez brothers and Constanzo. The total number of victims fluctuates in reports between fifteen and sixteen victims.
[3] The term *narcosatanico* was first used in the Mexican press, particularly tabloids and *notas rojas* that included pictures of the gravesites. *Narcosatanico* roughly translates to "satanic drug dealer."

of the border, led to growing concern about the already heavily debated topic of drugs and drug cartels in Mexico. The war on drugs campaign, initiated by Richard Nixon in 1971 and intensified by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, had slowly shifted its focus from drug smuggling from Colombia through Florida to drug smuggling from Colombia and Mexico through the US-Mexico border.

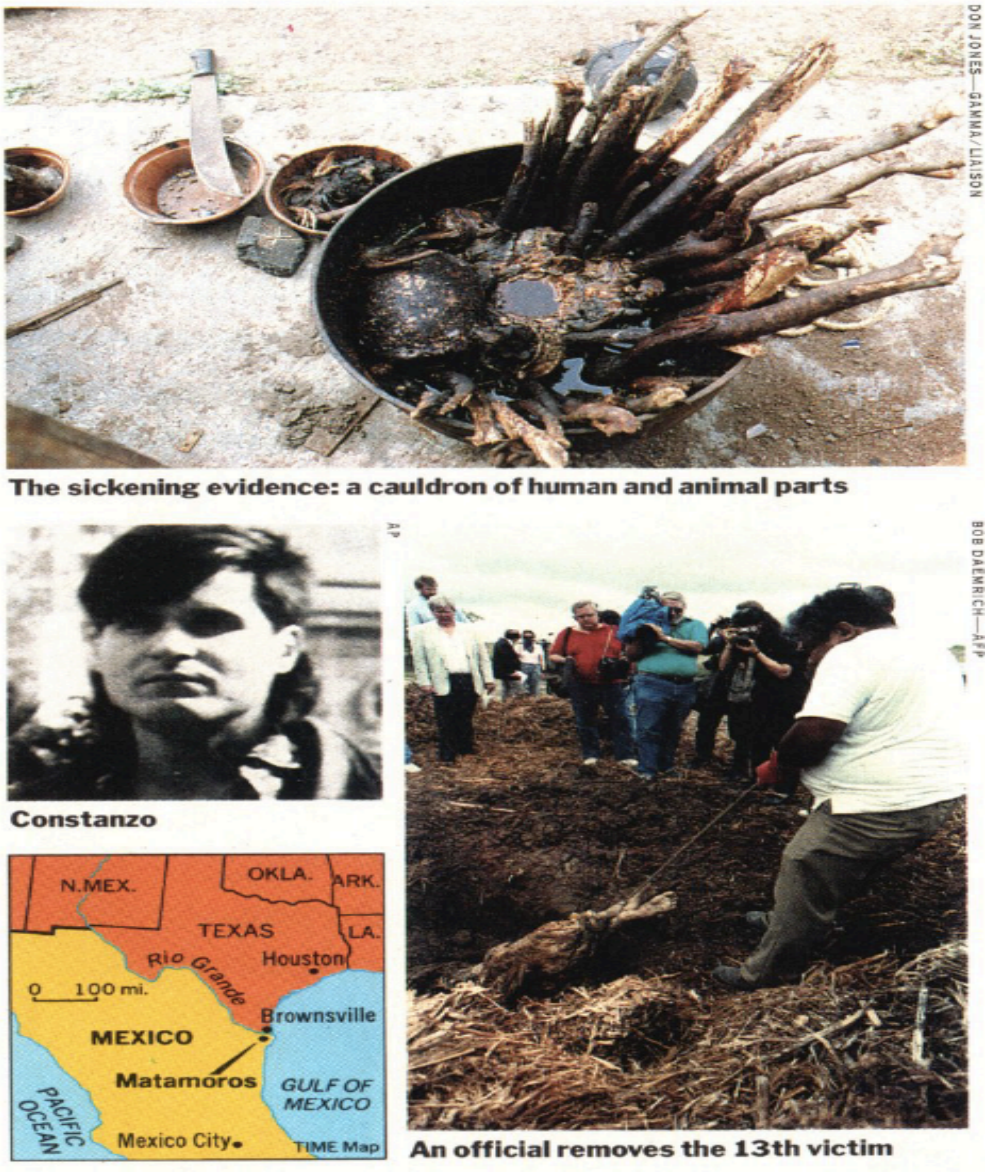

Figure 1-Images from *Time Magazine* article "Cult of the Red-Haired Devil," published April 24, 1989.

This region received magnified attention from federal and local governmental agencies in both countries. However, what the Kilroy case highlights is an increased demonization in public discourse of the borderlands themselves as was exemplified by the coverage in *Time Magazine* (figure 1). Kilroy's disappearance and death was partly a result of the inability to stop the rise of drug cartels like that of the Hernandez brothers, Elio and Serafin, who worked with Constanzo to traffic drugs from Mexico to the United States. However, Kilroy's gruesome murder, as well as that of the other fourteen people whose bodies were found in Rancho Santa Elena, led to another conclusion: that the drug cartels were not only poisoning American youth through their drugs but were also kidnapping and torturing them for their satanic rituals. Adolfo Constanzo, known as el Padrino, and his accomplices, Sara Villareal Aldrete, Elio Hernandez, Serafin Hernandez, and Sergio Martinez, were followers of Palo Mayombe, a form of the Santería religious system whose adherents believed that by sacrificing people, they could become invincible to law enforcement. Reports allege that Constanzo asked his accomplices to find an American man to sacrifice to increase their protection. The news coverage about the Constanzo *narcosatanico* gang marked a mixture of images about violence along the US-Mexico border, uncontrolled criminals, drug excess, and savage violence. This image spread across the Unites States and Mexico.

As the decade of the 1990s began, savage violence and death became tropes used to represent the US-Mexico border in cultural productions, news coverage, and political discourse on both sides of the border. The murders by Constanzo and his followers embodied the discourse and visualization of the border that continue to influence perceptions of it. This case inspired numerous US and Mexican cultural productions, including books, movies, and songs. Books like *Los Narcosatanicos de Matamoros y otros crimenes espeluznantes* (1995), by Tomas Doreste,

and *Cauldron of Blood* (1989), by Jim Schutze, focused on the salacious details of the crimes, casting Voodoo and Santería as backward and savage traditions of Afro-Latina/os. Dark dramas like *Perdita Durango* (1997), directed by Alex de la Iglesia, focused on the romantic relationship between Constanzo and Aldrete, who were portrayed as a Mexican borderland Bonnie and Clyde. On the other side of the spectrum, the film *Narcosatanicos diabolicos* (1991), directed by José Juan Munguía, was a bawdy Mexican comedy. Most recently, the horror film *Borderlands* (2007) followed the case more closely, focusing on how a group of young American men were kidnapped, tortured, and killed by a group of Mexican drug traffickers.

Figure 2. Small selection of books inspired by the Constanzo case.

Figure 3. Selection of movies inspired by Constanzo's crimes.

Borderland, directed by Zev Berman, was marketed as a movie "inspired by a true story," and even though the film is set on the Texas-Mexico border, it was filmed in Ensenada, Baja California Norte. *Borderland* is the story of three friends—Ed, Henry, and Phil—who drive to Mexico for a good time. Henry and Ed convince Phil to lose his virginity with a local prostitute named Amelia. However, when Amelia's baby starts crying, Phil is unable to complete the act. The next night, after partying at a carnival, Phil leaves Henry and Ed and goes to look for Amelia to give her son a stuffed teddy bear. On his way there, Phil is kidnapped. The rest of the film revolves around Henry and Ed's search for their missing friend, whom they learn has been taken by a *narcosatanico* cult, led by one Santillan, that believes that sacrificing humans leads to more power and protection from the law. Phil and Henry are ultimately killed, as is Santillan, who is killed by a disgraced Mexican police officer who had helped in the search for Phil. In the end, only two characters—Ed and Valerie, a young bartender who has joined them—survive and

cross into the United States to escape the remaining cult members. In the film, the borderlands are presented as a dangerous territory, a geography that destroys anyone who comes in contact with it. Specifically, in the film, the US-Mexico border is one full of superstition, drugs, and lawlessness.

These cultural productions are all examples of the deluge of representations of death and violence set on the US-Mexico border produced in Mexico and the United States. The Constanzo case traveled across multiple genres, including true crime, art film, horror film, *sexicomedia*, and documentary. In this example, we see the valuing of some deaths over others, since in news coverage and cultural productions inspired by the event, it was only Kilroy's death and the deaths of other Americans that were considered victimizations, while Mexican deaths were considered a normal part of life on the border.

Further, the Constanzo case is a clear example of how representations of death and violence set on the US-Mexico border—the border-horror genre—is a transgeneric genre, one that exists across existing and recognized genres of cultural productions. Most interestingly, all of these examples that were inspired by a single event come from different genres and modes of production and distribution, and each is intended for a different audience. What they share in common is that just like the texts we will see in the ensuing dissertation chapters, they all participate in a discourse that equates the border with violence, death, and savagery, all part of the border-horror genre.

Methodology: Reading Border Horror

My dissertation uses textual analysis to document the tropes and images in the border-horror genre. My work looks at how repeated images of violence and death set along the US-Mexico border actively participate in the erasure and disposability of communities of color living

in this space. Further, I look at trade publications, movie reviews, and online blogs and community posts from the United States and Mexico to scrutinize how this genre is consumed, appropriated, and added to the discussion surrounding the representation of violence. Specifically, I am interested in how death and dying are defined and how they fit into questions of the construct of Latinidad, nation formation, citizenship, and gender identity. Because I define genre through both the text itself and through the collateral work that promotes and supports it.

Border horror is a genre that spans traditional generic registers, borrowing from disparate modes of production and distribution and appealing to different audiences. To read the nuances within this genre, I turn to the work of bell hooks, Jacqueline Bobo, and Robin Means Coleman. hooks, Bobo, and Means Coleman critique the erasure of people of color as audiences in film studies. bell hooks critiques feminist film theory because it excludes the gaze of African American spectators. Bobo conducts interviews to investigate the way African American women respond to and interact with specific filmic texts, arguing that just because black women audiences like or watch a film does not mean they agree with or believe the stereotypes. Both argue that the audience is not comprised of empty, passive, individuated spectators but rather forms a community of viewers who discuss these texts and compare their diverse expressions as films, books, television, and new reports. Finally, Means Coleman focuses on the African American community's relationship with horror. These three scholars address how media studies, film studies, border studies, and horror studies, respectively, erase certain histories of violence and conquest that change how texts are read and classified. Perhaps more directly, they all push against the construct of a heteronormative audience.

Because border horror borrows from and is influenced by so many micro-genres and discursive practices, it is hard to pin down an intended audience of the genre as a whole. To get

at the construction of the audience from numerous angles, I turn to the advertising material that was produced in support of the films, television shows, graphic novels, and art exhibits that I analyze. Further, I argue that audiences and consumers participate in the construction of border horror as a genre, while noting that these audiences differ across the genre based on text production and distribution practices. Ramon Lobato, for example, argues that distribution is a key yet understudied approach to genre. Specifically, he writes that what gets distributed and how it gets distributed (theater, straight-to-video, etc.) shapes the texts' impact.[4] My own work is informed by Lobato's advocacy of studying distribution alongside production and reception; in the case of border horror, by studying distribution, reception, and the text itself we can trace how the genre is created and how it changes over time.

Setting the Stage

The border in border-horror texts, such as the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise, *Feeding Ground*, *Ahí va el diablo*, and *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*, becomes a place where the value of human life is constantly re-signified and contested in popular culture. Due to the way in which death is portrayed by the dominant media, such as depictions of *narcofosas*,[5] drug violence,[6] immigrant deaths,[7] and violence perpetrated against women, particularly maquiladora workers,[8] violent death seems like an unavoidable fate for those who live in communities on the

[4] Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.
[5] *Narcofosas* (narco graves) have been found along the border and Mexico in recent years. A study from 2011–14 by the Secretary of National Defense in Mexico found 246 *narcofosas* containing a total of 534 bodies.
[6] Many of the incidents of drug violence begin with kidnappings. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, there were 105,682 kidnappings in 2012 alone.
[7] A 2014 report by the International Organization of Migration found that 6,000 people had died attempting to cross the border between 2000 and 2014.
[8] As in the case of drug violence, death and disappearances go hand in hand. Many women disappear, and their bodies are never found. In the introduction to *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americás*, Rosa Linda Fregoso defines femicides in Ciudad Juárez as "the murders of women and girls founded on a gender power structure" (5).

borderlands. To many of us, the US-Mexico border is more than these images of death; it is home. My dissertation was inspired and informed by my own visceral response to the visually grotesque and violent images of the US-Mexico border that circulated when I was growing up on the Texas-Tamaulipas borderlands in the late 90s and early 2000s. The border was imagined as a mono-dimensional space of violence and death, particularly on the Mexican side. As soon as one crossed the border, death was waiting. And not just any death; a violent, grotesque death.

"Border Horror: Genre, Geography, Gender, and Death on the US-Mexico Border" examines representations of death and violence along the US-Mexico border from 1994 until now in films, television, and graphic novels. I use border horror in two ways: first, as a meta-genre, a group of cultural productions that share similar tropes and images; and second, as a framework through which to see how moments of terror permeate multiple definitions of border, including but not limited to the physical US-Mexico geography.[9] In this dissertation, border horror provides a lens through which we can understand the multiplicity of deaths and representations of deaths that occur along the US-Mexico border.

Throughout the dissertation, I refer to border horror as a meta-genre, a macro-genre, and a transgeneric category. These terms, which I use interchangeably, highlight how border horror functions as a broad grouping with shared tropes and conventions. The genre thus extends across a range of cultural productions and discourses, ranging from B-movies to academic productions. The three major tropes in the genre are the personification of the border, the conflation of the

[9] Here I borrow from Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of border and borderlands. She writes, "The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-US Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between individuals shrinks with intimacy" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* preface).

female body with the geography, and the use of native figures and histories to mark the borderlands as a savage space. While my formulation of this category draws insights from media studies, border horror as a genre is in conversation with societal discourses focused on communities living and dying along the borderlands that exist not just in media but in political, academic, artistic, and mainstream texts.

I also use border horror as an analytical framework by which to read cultural productions. As a framework, border horror is a tool with which to identify and categorize representations of death set on the US-Mexico border. In using a border-horror framework, I combine categories of analysis, such as gender, genre, and geography, that intersect with representations of violence, dying, death, and the undead. I do this to illuminate the legacies of colonization and conquest buried in cultural memory. Finally, I begin to excavate the painful roots of contemporary representations of this geography to dismantle the naturalization of state-sanctioned violence on the geography I call home.

This framework, one that brings together different genres, different production histories, and texts intended for different audiences, is necessary as a way to capture the full dimension of border violence and death. Previous work has clearly and helpfully looked at how border violence and death is addressed in films,[10] literature,[11] journalism,[12] and other cultural productions.[13] My use of border horror as a genre and as a framework shows that these texts all inhabit the same terrain and together participate in creating a stagnant image of the border as a

[10] Norma Iglesias, *Entre yerba, polvo y plomo: lo fronterizo visto por el cine mexicano* (Tijuana: B.C. Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1981).
[11] Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, *Border Women: Writing from la Frontera* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)
[12] Diana Washington Valdez, *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women: The Truth about Mexico's Bloody Border Legacy* (Los Angeles: Peace at the Border, 2007).
[13] Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzman, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera* (Austin: UT Press, 2011).

place of death. By studying them through a single lens, we can begin to understand how cultural productions, including my own academic production, participate in the creation of a discourse that cloaks the real US-Mexico border under a label of death and violence.

This dissertation focuses on the films *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996), *From Dusk till Dawn: Texas Blood Money* (1999), *From Dusk till Dawn: The Hangman's Daughter* (2000), and *Ahí va el diablo* (Here Comes the Devil, 2012); the television shows *From Dusk till Dawn: The Series* (2014–16) and *The Bridge* (2013–14); the graphic novels *Feeding Ground* (2011) and *Dreamland: The Way out of Juárez* (2010); and the art exhibit *State of Exception* (2015). Through the study of border horror as a genre, we can bring together cultural productions such as these that are not included in current scholarly conversation but that all construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the representation of the US-Mexico border as a space of violent death and the people that live there as disposable. I focus on these texts and artists because their visual and narrative approaches to death and violence are part of registers that differ from their "factual" establishing shots.

Through a close analysis of these specific films, television shows, graphic novels, and art exhibit, all produced and distributed between 1994 and 2016, we can explore a broad spectrum of cultural productions that are inspired by, have been shaped by, and/or respond to violence and death on the border in the era following the 1994 enactment of NAFTA. This sampling, taken from genre films, cable television show, network television, art, graphic novels, journalism, and academic productions, is necessary to show the three key tropes in border horror. These texts are samples of how border horror points to the absurdity of attempting to encase the lived experiences of people along the US-Mexico border under a single "real" representational banner

(border=death). Further, I chose texts that more closely align with popular conceptions of horror and horror genre because in them, the images are overdetermined.

Beginning in the 1990s, images inspired by or intended to represent the US-Mexico border were imbued with horror motifs, including a hyper-focus on the tortured body and on the search for an unnatural evil force. In this sense, death has become a trope to represent the border, a stand-in for reality that, because it is so sensational, is hard to shake. This trope, this stagnant image, stifles conceptual flexibility and censures representations of different types of deaths and mourning practices. Further, this trope forestalls a discussion about the systemic, longstanding factors that contribute to those deaths by displacing blame onto gender, geography, and race.

NAFTA was one of the key inspirations for the changing aesthetics of death and violence. As a response to the signing of NAFTA, a guerilla rebellion broke out in Chiapas, a state in southern Mexico, by a group called the Zapatista National Liberation Army, which demanded equality for indigenous communities. After Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari left office in 1993, the value of the Mexican peso plummeted following claims of corruption and theft. At the same time, the administration of US President Bill Clinton attempted to tighten border enforcement and stop drug trade through Operation Gatekeeper.[14] The NAFTA accords, along with growing neoliberal plans, caused many demographic shifts along the US-Mexico border. The rise in factories generated new migration patterns for women from Mexico and Central America. The growing population along the US-Mexico border forced people to live in undeveloped communities, many without running water or electricity. Alongside NAFTA, US

[14] Operation Gatekeeper increased the presence of Border Patrol agents along the US-Mexico border. This was a program aimed at deterring immigrant crossing by securing the most common crossing routes. However, rather than deterring people from crossing, Operation Gatekeeper pushed people into more dangerous and less inhabited routes. Scholars have called the rise of immigrant deaths along the border as "death by deterrence."

governmental initiatives like Operation Gatekeeper made crossing the border harder, not just for immigrants looking for better jobs but for illicit activities such as the drug trade. The channels these different communities used to migrate from Central America to Mexico or from southern Mexico to northern Mexico soon began to overlap, causing new violence along the way.

The creation of maquiladoras[15] on the border began with the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in the 1960s.[16] According to the United States government, NAFTA eliminated tariffs "progressively and all duties and quantitative restrictions, with the exception of those on a limited number of agricultural products traded with Canada."[17] For the purpose of this dissertation, I turn to the explanation of NAFTA by Maria Josefina Saldaña Portillo, who writes:

NAFTA is a trinational legal regime of trade and capital investment, one that "opened up" the borders among the three nations by changing the formal legal controls on the entry and exit of goods and capital, although notably not of people. It did so primarily by requiring the dismantling of the prior import and export tariff structures for each country, as well as the structures of domestic subsidies. Thus, under the new legal regime introduced by NAFTA, any and all tariffs and subsidies explicitly used to protect domestic products and markets from the foreign competition of the other two signatories were removed or scheduled for removal.[18]

NAFTA led to a rise in the number of maquiladoras as well as a restructuring of where they were located. Because of the lack of tariffs, the United States flooded the Mexican market with cheap goods, thereby limiting the ability of Mexican farmers and producers to compete.

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[15] A *maquiladora* is a Mexican factory owned by a foreign company whose production is exported back to the company's country of origin.
[16] Segura and Zavella, *Woman and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader*, 12.
[17] https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/north-american-free-trade-agreement-nafta

[18] Saldaña Portillo, Maria Josefina, "In the Shadows of NAFTA: Y Tu Mamá Tambien Revisits the National Allegory of Mexican Sovereignty", 753.

This "regime" created an economy based on exports. Laura Carlsen describes NAFTA as an agreement that privileges "transnational corporations; withdrawal of the state from social programs to promote development; international labor competition and downward pressure on wages and conditions; and the commoditization of natural resources."[19] Increased border policing and loss of farms and jobs in Mexico led to more people crossing the border into the United States and staying there (instead of returning to Mexico after a period of work).[20] On the US side, the impetus behind NAFTA was cheaper labor and enhanced capital mobility.[21]

NAFTA had a swift and lasting effect on Mexico as a whole. By the end of 1995, as a result of NAFTA policies and the devaluation of the peso, more than one million Mexicans were unemployed, and Mexicans in general struggled with inflation and low wages.[22] In relation to the border, the increase in the number of maquiladoras, paired with the unemployment across the country, led to a population surge in border cities that did not have adequate infrastructure for the increase in population. Shanty towns grew on the outskirts of the large cities, such as Juárez. When the number of maquiladora jobs was insufficient, people moved north across the border into the United States. As Saldaña Portillo argues, the new regime opened the borders for products and capital but not necessarily for people. These changes in population necessitated increased policing to prevent these unwanted bodies from invading the States.[23] These measures

[19] Carlsen, Laura, "Armoring NAFTA: The Battleground for Mexico's Future", npg.

[20] Fernández-Kelly, Patricia, and Douglas S. Massey, "Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-US Immigration"

[21] Fernández-Kelly, Patricia, and Douglas S. Massey, "Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-US Immigration"

[22] Cameron, Maxwell "Mexican Meltdown: States, markets, and post-NAFTA Financial Turmoil" (pg 976)

[23] Saldaña Portillo, Maria Josefina, 753.

have led to a rise in border deaths and, more specifically, to changes in the types of deaths experienced on the border. For example, Wayne Cornelius found that between 1995 and 2000, recorded deaths here "were the result of 'environmental causes': hypothermia (freezing to death in the mountains), dehydration, or heatstroke (after days of trudging through the desert)."[24] All of these, he argues, were caused in large part by such measures as "prevention through deterrence."

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the specters of death and violence have become central elements in representations of the border. The northern region was particularly affected, as displaced communities from agricultural lands moved north in search for jobs. At the same time, the growth of maquiladoras necessitated more female employees, whom maquiladora valued for their perceived vulnerability and their suitability for the tasks of assembling components for electronics like televisions, radios, and VCRs. The tensions from transnational economic, political, and social changes resulted in deaths and violence connected to the overlap of the cross-border movement of humans, market commodities, and contraband.[25]

Policy changes post-NAFTA, like El Plan Merida[26] and the merging of the Border Patrol with the Department of Homeland Security, have continued NAFTA's work by further militarizing the border and leading to more violence. NAFTA, border security (in service of the nation-state), and capitalism have worked together to mark the US-Mexico border as a space of violent and excessive death, a space where death and the disposability of brown bodies is necessary in order for the continuing success of the capitalist nation-state. In this dissertation, I show how the changing politics of the governments of both the Unites States and Mexico came

[24] Cornelius, Wayne A "Death at the Border", 670.
[25] Dominguez Rubalcava, for example, defines *necroeconomics* as a mechanism that "produces expendable populations" (12)
[26] Plan Merida or the Merida Initiative is a partnership between the United States and Mexico to work against organized crime. The plan led to increased militarization of the border from both governments.

to shape how people moved to and around the border. More specifically, I argue that neoliberal, racial, and political agendas merged to create a discursive regime, the border-horror genre, which consistently and monolithically represents the US-Mexico border as a space of death and violence in cultural productions on both sides of the border. My dissertation, then, examines works that intentionally or unintentionally use horror tropes and conventions. This genre and framework center geography, genre, and gender as key categories of analysis to better trace the changing representations of the US-Mexico border.

Geography: The Border in Film

The conflation of the border with violence and death is not new; there is a long history of representation of the US-Mexico border as a dangerous and liminal space in cultural productions, particularly films. Here I provide a chronological overview of filmic border representations, particularly as they connect to national identity. In this section, I focus on three key periods to understand how these representations have developed on both sides of the border: first, I look at age of silent film, focusing particularly on the way the Mexican Revolution shaped representations of the border; I turn next to the golden age of Mexican cinema (from roughly 1936 through the 1950s), placing this in conversation with the development of sound and western films in the United States; finally, I turn to *cine fronterizo* proper from the 60s through most of the 90s.

In the early 1900s, the borderlands played important yet distinct roles in US and Mexican films. In the United States, the films were a place to play out questions of race, miscegenation, and the role of the Unites States as it moved into industrialization. The border was a place where the Unites States could mourn the loss of a "natural" state—the rural—as it moved toward modernization. In Mexico, which was heavily influenced by its decade-long revolution (1910–

20), the border in films was a site of conflict, one very much erased in cultural productions that focused on the urban spaces such as Mexico City. Dominique Brégent-Heald's work points to an early history of borderland films. She argues that roughly five hundred borderland films were made during the 1910s in the United States. Brégent-Heald defines borderland films as a "category of narrative motion pictures wherein the border region provides a backdrop against which to view the popular discourses surrounding nationality, race, and gender."[27] In this early period, she argues, natural scenery was important for the marketing of these films. During this early period, US themes in borderland films included the romanticizing of of rural and "Spanish" borderlands. Brégent-Heald argues that borderland films were about race (contact) with different groups, fears of racial mixing and miscegenation, and gendered expectations of certain racial groups. These are all concerns we continue to see in the border-horror genre. The geography in border horror isn't not a space of possibility; it is a murderous space, usually beyond redemption.

On the other side of the border during the same time period, Mexico had most of its films imported from Europe, primarily from France and the United States. While Mexico was trying to create its own cinema, tent shows played an important role in influencing what would become popular in the 1940s and 1950s. However, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the *genero chico* appealed to the general audience but was not considered high art in the same way that theater was. The shows are about the everyday, the absurd, and the "outsiders" of Mexican life. Even though the border doesn't play a role in this early genre, these shows did include themes of immigration and were also popular with Mexican and Mexican American audiences in the United States. Because the audiences for the *genero chico* in Mexico and the United States were usually poor and working class, this genre had a very low status, a reflection of the population it

[27] Brégent, Heald, Dominique, *Borderland Films: American Cinema, Mexico and Canada During the Progressive Era*, 10.

served. Certain genres, such as *carpa* shows, were connected to audiences that were seen as uneducated and working class.[28] Similarly, this is the same assumption made of "mexploitation films" of the 60s and 70s, as well as of border films of the 80s and 90s. These genres are marked as partly reflective of Mexican national identity and partly as outliers, or negative markers, that highlight how low the cultural industries had fallen in the country. Thus, across the decades, there is a through-line that divides film, usually categorized as part of national cinema, from movies, those texts that people want but that we would rather ignore.

The Mexican Revolution was a key event that was documented and fictionalized on screen.[29] In regard to violence and death on the US-Mexico border, much work has been produced about the relationship between Mexico's revolutionary war and photography and documentary filmmaking. Claire Fox writes about the revolution as a turning point in the way the border is imagined (or constructed through imagery) because of staged postcards of the war.[30] Claudio Lomnitz states that Mexico has three totems: the Virgen de Guadalupe, Benito Juárez, and Death. Of death, he writes that it "emerged as a national totem in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. The revolution was a bloodbath, a return to a tradition of revolutions and summary executions that was supposed to have been transcended by the progressive dictator Porfirio Diaz."[31] The violence of the revolution, he argues, shaped Mexico's relationship to death. Particularly, he writes, "proof of death was now mass-mediated. So was proof of power

[28] Mora, Carl J., *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society*, 1896-1980.
[29] The Mexican Revolution began in 1910 as a response to Porfirio Diaz's economic and social policies. One of the main purposes of the revolution was redistribution of land to peasants and indigenous communities.
[30] Fox, Claire, *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border*.
[31] Lomnitz, Claudio, *Death and the Idea of Mexico*, 43.

and military strength. The armies of Pancho Villa and Obregon routinely brought photographers with them."[32]

Many US studios sent newsreel cameramen to Mexico to document the war. Margarita De Orellana explains how coverage of the revolution was present in print media and film. The newspaper coverage, she argues, provided the context for what people then saw on screen in such films such as *Barbarous Mexico* (1913).[33] Further, the image of Pancho Villa as hero-turned-criminal became a consistent trope in representations of Latinos in US films. These early images and films of border life pushed a narrative that marked northern Mexico and the US South as lawless, savage spaces populated by stereotypical *bandidos* like Pancho Villa. During the golden age of Mexican film, the government heavily supported film production as a way to create a national identity through this art form. This was a period of national modernization, during which economic and cultural structures were changing.[34] These films, with their recognizable actors and actresses like Tin Tan, Mario Moreno, Pedro Infante, and Maria Felix, provided a critique of corruption and poor governments (though they rarely offered concrete solutions) and highlighted the need for cultural unity in the post-revolutionary moment.

A cinematic trope born during the golden age of Mexican cinema was inspired in part by the post-revolutionary cultural and governmental moves to create a mestizo nation. Films like *Maria Candelaria* (1944) and *Janitzio* (1935) seemingly centered stories of indigenous communities struggling for happiness in a country that was moving quickly into an industrial age. Thus, the native figure became a symbol of Mexican traditions and the rural environment that could be lost through modernization. A major critique of these films is that

[32] Lomnitz, Claudio, *Death and the Idea of Mexico*, 385.
[33] De Orellana, Margarita, *El cine norteamericano de la Revolución Mexicana, 1911-1917*.
[34] Heredia, Juanita, "From Golden Age Mexican Cinema to Transnational Border Feminism: The Community of Spectators in *Loving Pedro Infante*", 54.

they romanticize native communities and maintain them as static figures who live in a past that who must be replaced by modern mestizos. Although the indigenist/indigenista movement claimed to appreciate Mexico's indigenous culture, they did so only if that culture remained bound by the past; living indigenous communities were not seen in such a positive light. In his article "The Eagle and the Serpent on the Screen: The State as Spectacle in Mexican Cinema," Daniel Chávez argues that images of indigenous communities reproduced "the aesthetic principles supported and promoted by governmental institutions and frequently in tune with the main tenets of the ideological apparatus of the revolutionary state (1920–1940), including a dogmatic deployment of national narratives based on the principles of indigenismo and mestizaje."[35]

Mexican cinema has contested with its native past in cinema. During its golden-age period, this struggle continued and spilled into the horror genre. Beyond dramas and comedies, the image of the native was present in Mexican horror films, particularly beginning in the 1950s, when natives usually played the villains, for example, in films such as *La momia azteca* (1957), *La maldición de la momia azteca* (1957), and *El monstruo de los volcanes* (1962). Doyle Greene explains how the native, usually Aztec, figure in these horror movies was influenced by Mexico's move into modernity. He writes that these monsters represent "an outmoded and dangerously obsolete form of existence. They are the 'living dead' who become a profound threat to a modern, and modernizing, Mexico."[36] These films were in direct conversation with US horror films, particularly within conversations about exploitation films. In this context, Mexican horror films were seen as aesthetically and narratively inferior. As the transnational

[35] Chávez, Daniel, "The Eagle and the Serpent on the Screen: The State as Spectacle in Mexican Cinema", 116.
[36] Greene, Doyle, *Mexploitation Cinema: A Critical History of Mexican Vampire, Wrestler, Ape-man, and Similar Films, 1957-1977*, 22.

genre of exploitation films developed, they influenced the aesthetic of films set on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Colin Gunckel's essay "The Secret History of Aztlán: Speculative Histories, Transnational Exploitation Film, and Unexpected Cultural Flows," is helpful in thinking about the transnational flow of discourse. Here Gunckel shows the transnational aspect of the Aztec monsters and Aztlán by tracing their moves between Mexico, the United States and back again through exploitation films. He writes:

> As films that were transnational in both conception and distribution, their evocations of ancient Mexico in particular sustain an unlikely dialogue with existing representations on both sides of the border. In Mexico, selective imagery of Mesoamerica—from murals to monuments and cinema—composed a keystone of cultural nationalism in the post-revolutionary era. This array of imagery in turn influenced Aztec apparitions in the popular culture of the United States, which was also greatly shaped by the emergence of the discipline of archaeology and the trappings of tourism.[37]

The discursive exchange between countries through popular culture has produced texts imbued with transnational narratives of violence. Borrowing from established genres in both US and Mexican cinema, the border-horror genre pieces together scattered visual representations of the borderlands as pan-indigenous, arguing that this motif incorrectly historicizes violence and death in this space.

On both sides of the border, films during this period focused on bucolic representations of country life. In the United States, the western reflected national desires to revisit the simpler,

[37] Gunckel, Colin, "The Secret History of Aztlán: Speculative Histories, Transnational Exploitation Film, and Unexpected Cultural Flows", 325-326.

pre-urban past; in Mexico, the *comedia ranchera* romanticized an agricultural and indigenous pre-revolutionary past.

The *ranchera* micro-genre, one of the most popular subgenres of the time, began with the successful 1936 film *Allá en el Rancho Grande*, which attenuated "the harsh effects of migration and the pressures of a transnational existence. The genre did so with a narrative that featured tight-knit communities dwelling in picturesque rural settings and through its performance of communal folksongs and dances."[38] Thomas Schatz argues that the western, which was most popular between the 1930s to 1950s, was a reflection of binaries. He writes:

> The Western's essential conflict between civilization and savagery is expressed in a variety of oppositions: East versus West, garden versus desert, American versus Europe, social order versus anarchy, individual versus community, town versus wilderness, cowboy versus Indian, schoolmarm versus dancehall girl, and so on. Its historical period of reference is the years following the Civil War and reaching into the early twentieth century, when the western United States, that pre-civilized locale, was establishing codes of law and order as a basis for contemporary social conditions."[39]

One binary that Schatz misses here—a key one for border horror—is the conflict between North and South. The focus on order and on civilizing the "precivilized locale" in the western heavily influences representations of the US-Mexico border after NAFTA. For example, US films such as *Sicario* and television shows such as *Breaking Bad* borrow these Western tropes, making Mexico the uncivilized space Americans can use to let out their aggression and to show their morality.

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[38] Garcia, Desiree, " 'The Soul of a People': Mexican Spectatorship and the Transnational Comedia Rachera", 73.
[39] Schatz, Thomas, *Hollywood genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, 48.

Westerns play an important role in US national imaginary since they mediate fears of industrialization and the Other. In most westerns, the Other was the Native American. Michelle Raheja writes, "Stemming from an old tradition of staged performances such as the Wild West shows that were themselves informed by American literature's obsession with Native American plots and subplots, film and visual culture have provided the primary representational field on which Native American images have been displayed to dominant culture audiences in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries."[40] The Native American figure in westerns was usually associated with savagery or spirituality. This binary erased the individuality of Native communities and made their homogenization easier. Neva Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, for example, writes, "Native peoples would remain largely unseen, displaced now by the Hollywood Indian, a cinematic creation springing directly from the ubiquitous images of the old bloodthirsty savage and his alter ego, the noble savage."[41] These characters rarely had a history or a story; since their importance was only in relationship to the way they hurt or helped the heteronormative white family, their humanity was obfuscated. In border horror, we see the influence of westerns particularly in the way the borderlands geographies are coded as active participants in the development of national identities.

Further, scholars such as Dominique Brégent-Heald have written about indigenous representation in US films set along the US-Mexico border, particularly in relation to post-revolutionary discourses around nation building and indigenous histories. Using Mary Pat Brady's concept of contact zones, Brégent-Heald describes how borderland films repeatedly used tragic half-breed and mestizo/métis characters as a way to negotiate racial and gender

[40] Raheja, Michelle, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film,* ix.
[41] Kilpatrick, Neva Jacquelyn, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*, 15.

boundaries. The geographic borderlands are a space to work out criminality, importance of law enforcement, porosity and dangers of these regions, and state power. She argues that this genre, borderland films, are texts "wherein the colonizer destroys the culture of the Other and then yearns for what it has vanquished."[42] This dilemma—destruction and desire—plays out in border horror as well. A key character in US films about the border, beyond the racialized Other like the native communities and the Mexican bandido, is the border itself. The border plays a role in how the space is coded as dangerous and uncivilized.

Cine fronterizo

The narrative of border as a liminal, violent space inhabited by bandidos and easy women continued into the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, decades that were also marked by a combination of political and military operations, such as Operation Intercept (1969) and the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. Film scholars such as Norma Iglesias, Adan Avalos, and Charles Ramírez-Berg have written about how the films that emerged during this period constitute a new genre for the United States and Mexico. Furthermore, *cine fronterizo* is the iconic direct-to-VHS and direct-to-DVD genre in Mexico and in the United States for Latina/o audiences.

Cine fronterizo comprises Mexican films set on the US-Mexico border that deal with regional stories and problems. Most studies of the genre focus on its peak during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period during which border films turned to the harsh realities of border life. In these films, drug dealers or people associated with Mexican drug cartels replaced Pancho Villa as the villains (or heroes) of the narrative, and the focus shifted to the ways in which new economic, social, and political forces were actively reshaping the borderlands on both sides of the Rio Grande, from the rise (and fall) of the maquiladora as a structuring space, to the harsh

[42] Brégent-Heald, 42.

realities of the internal migration of Mexicans from rural spaces to border cities, to the spectacular violence associated with the drug trade and increased militarization of the border.

The older border films (from the 1980s) focus on the harsh (albeit exaggerated) consequences of the internal migration of Mexicans from rural spaces to cities. These films also focus on the rise of the drug trade into the United States and the rise and fall of maquiladoras along the border. These major sociopolitical shifts are directly and peripherally addressed in these films by the characters' attempts to make a living, usually succumbing to the temptations of easy money attached to the drug trade. Movies like *Emilio Varela vs. Camelia La Texana* (1980) and *Soy el jefe de jefes* (1998) can be seen as exploitative for their exaggeration and reinforcement of stereotypes of a permanently violent border. However, these films also provide a cathartic outlet for viewers. Both movies borrow their narratives and titles from songs by Los Tigres del Norte, and both feature actor Mario Almada, a straight-to-video staple. Almada's characters, though flawed and violent, are also seen as avenging heroes who, through their strength and courage, are able to survive and thrive while dealing with seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

In her article "El puente colgante sobre el Río Bravo: Bordeando el cine de frontera," Monica Gozalbo traces the roots of the *cine fronterizo* genre to the documentation efforts of the Mexican Revolution by filmmakers, journalists, and community members in Mexico and the United States. Regarding the form of *frontera* films, she writes that fiction borrows from established genres. She argues that *cine fronterizo*—or *cine de frontera*, as she refers to it—can be defined

> en base a uno o varios de los siguientes requisitos: que el argumento se desarrolle principalmente en alguna localidad de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y Mexico o que la

> pelicula haya sido filmada en alguna de esas ciudades; que se refiera a un personaje de frontera; que tenga que ver con la poblacion de origen mexicano viviendo en Estados Unidos, o que lo sustancial de la trama se refiera a lo fronterizo o a cuestiones de identidad nacional [depending on one or various of the following requirements: the plot develops primarily on the border between the United States and Mexico or that the movie be filmed in this region; that it focuses on border characters; that it has something to do with Mexican communities living in the United States, or that essential plot points refer to the border or to issues of national identity].[43]

In discussions of Mexican cinema, *cine fronterizo* is ignored or classified as a genre for the "lower class" and not worthy of discussion—definitely not part of national cinema. For example, Mora writes that in "1985 four films were released that seemed to highlight both the potential of Mexican cinema and the commercialist tradition of profitable churros (low quality potboilers) that showed no sign of going away."[44] He goes on to compare two of these films, *Frida* and *Doña Herlinda*, to the churro *Lola la trailera*. He describes *Lola* as having "wooden acting, atrocious dialogue, amateurish photography, and spotty direction," though he points out that "the film nonetheless was a box-office success in both Mexico and the United States: it made $3.5 million ($2.5 million in the United States and 'only' $1 million in Mexico) profit on an investment of $150,000—a powerful rationale to continue making churros for the Southwest U.S. Spanish-speaking market."[45] Thus, *cine fronterizo* (part of the *churro* camp) was placed on the periphery of discussions of national cinema or were used as a symbol for how far the Mexican film industry had fallen from the masterpieces of its golden age. In relation to border

[43] Gozalbo, Monica, 152; Author translation.
[44] Mora, Carl, 154.
[45] Mora 159.

horror, I am interested in *cine fronterizo* not only as a study of its content but also in the way it has been used to continue marking the borderlands as a foil to the cosmopolitan and civilized cities.

Border cinema's relationship to independent films is noteworthy. Although "indie" films were being made before the late 1980s and early 1990s, they were usually seen as anomalies. *El Mariachi* (1992) and Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) were hailed as marking a shift in filmmaking in the United States toward movies that were produced outside the Hollywood big-picture paradigm. These films had a cool cynicism that borrowed from the established generic conventions but gave them new life, with twists and changes that blurred genres and created a large market that appealed to young white males, the most sought-after audience. Three main characteristics of these films include low budgets, aesthetic and narrative strategies that borrow from and disrupt established conventions, and, in some cases, commentary on social issues.[46] Recent border films market themselves as indie films that comment on issues of inequality and violence against immigrants. By using the indie label, filmmakers and distributors attempt to position themselves in a different lineage, one that garners more respect than *cine fronterizo*.

Current border cinema produced in the United States focuses on different dangers than did earlier films. Two films by director Pablo Véliz—*La Tragedia de Macario* (2006) and *Clemente* (2008)—focus on characters who try to cross the border from Mexico into the United States. These films document the characters' struggles while attempting to cross and then the hardships and discrimination they face when they finally arrive in the United States. Inspired by the 2003 deaths of nineteen men, women, and children in Victoria, Texas, after they were left in

[46] King, Geoff, *American Independent Cinema*, 2.

the back of a trailer truck with the door closed, *La Tragedia de Macario* follows the lead character's journey from rural Mexico into the United States. *Clemente* follows the life of an undocumented Mexican man who is deported from the United States during a raid and leaves his wife and daughter behind. Clemente attempts to re-cross the border to be reunited with his family. Véliz clearly states that his purpose with both of these films is to create a new consciousness in viewers that will force them to act, to push for change.[47] Dramas like these two, which explore the plight of the Mexican and Latin American immigrant, focus on mobilization and consciousness raising. In an interview about *Clemente*, Véliz stated, "When I see people get up and walk out for a minute because the scene is so disturbing, that's good to me…. I grew up in the art world. One of the biggest lessons was that art is meant to disturb, to change, to move."[48]

Clemente and *La Tragedia de Macario* were released at film festivals and on DVD simultaneously, thereby making them in-between texts when it comes to distribution models. Further, Véliz directly addresses his relationship to art and independent cinema, which works outside of the Hollywood system to make political and sociocultural statements, in his case about migration and the Latin American community in the United States.

Through my short exploration of representations of the border, the images that keep popping up—the "horror bursts"—are those of death, violence, and the horrific. Some of the most pervasive establishing shots post NAFTA are horrific. The study of *cine fronterizo* in border studies and media studies shows how representations of such a complex region serve to translate transnational conflicts. However, *cine fronterizo*, even in its many iterations, does not address this issue exclusively. Because of the permanence of violence and horror in

[47] Gil, Billy, "Filming the Journey", n.p.
[48] Gil, Billy, n.p.

representations of the border, we need new generic parameters to understand the complex discursive web that keeps these images alive in the national imaginaries of both the United States and Mexico. With the border-horror genre, I also maintain geographical parameters; however, I extend the focus on forms and micro-genres, looking at genres beyond the *cine fronterizo*. Border horror as a genre encompasses all representations of the US-Mexico border that deal with violence, death, and horror, regardless of form, narrative, or current genre classification. It is through a study of horror, or moments and representations of horror, within cultural productions that we can see the prevalence of death and violence across genres and media.

The border geography has been used consistently in films as a real and symbolic place where issues of national identity are questioned and solidified. Ranging from films such as *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908) all the way to direct-to-video examples such as *Clemente* (2008), we see how representations of the borderlands have evolved and how they continue to address questions of national identity.

Genre-Horror and the Nation

Broadly speaking, genre is a way to organize and categorize texts that share forms, themes, styles, and/or subjects. Borrowing from Rick Altman and Jason Mittell, I define genre as a set of discourses constructed across texts, genres, producers, distributors, and consumers. Perhaps more directly, genres are often composed of other genres. For example, a film like P*sycho* (1960) can be classified as a horror film; within the horror genre, it is a slasher film. However, it can also be classified as a suspense-thriller that could fall under horror but does not necessarily do so, per Noel Carroll's argument that to be considered horrific, a film must include a monster. Carroll writes, "Monsters of horror, however, breach the norms of ontological

propriety presumed by the positive human characters in the story. That is, in examples of horror, it would appear that the monster is an extraordinary character in our ordinary world."[49]

Border horror is itself influenced and formed by numerous genres and serves as a category under which other genres, primarily horror, westerns, *cine fronterizo*, and journalism, come together. To facilitate this conversation (genres within genres), I will use the terms "macro" and "micro" to highlight the relationship between genres. For example, in my dissertation, border horror serves as the macro-genre, the umbrella under which micro-genres coexist and merge together to create a unique discursive language. I do not use macro or micro to suggest degrees of relative importance; rather, I use the terms to facilitate a conversation about the relationship between genres within a specific cultural context.

The visual and narrative cues discussed in this dissertation, if read together and within their political and historical contexts, make up a previously undiscussed genre of cultural production: the border-horror genre. This genre is an amalgamation of governmental and economic policies (such as prevention through deterrence and NAFTA), historical legacies (*colorismo*, colonization), and representational practices (westerns, news reports).

Methodologically, my project takes a syntactic approach to border horror. For Altman, genre is constructed like a language system, coded and decoded by different players. What he calls a syntactic approach to genre, then, uses the components within the text (location, characters, plot, etc.), as well as the components outside the text (producers, distributors, critics, and audience) to define temporary generic parameters.[50] His approach to genre brings together

[49] Carroll, Noel, *The Philosophy of Horror: or Paradoxes of the Heart*, 16.
[50] Altman, Rick, *Film/Genre*. To get to this unstable yet helpful theorization of what genre is, Altman builds on the work of scholars like Andrew Tudor, who argues that genre is historically constructed, and Stephen Neale, who grounded his work on genre in cultural studies, thereby moving it away from literary studies. For Altman, Tudor, and Neale, genre is legible not in the text alone but is dependent on historical and cultural contexts.

the two main approaches to genre: syntactic and semantic. Further, his work argues for a consideration of the audience in how genre is constructed, defined, and redefined. Finally, and most helpful for my work, he argues that genres are not stable and distinct categories but rather systems in constant change because of the multiple players involved in constructing them. Border horror is a genre given meaning and form by multiple discursive registers (including a range of cinematic, literary, artistic, and periodical genres), audiences, producers, distributors, and critics.

Further, Jason Mittell's work shows the importance of including media specificity in genre theory. His approach to genre is important in my own work because I apply the border-horror genre across media to include texts beyond film. He talks about television genres as cultural categories that cannot be understood simply by looking at the text itself; rather, the text must be examined to determine how it interacts with other texts. To do this, Mittell engages audience responses and industry decisions regarding programming and on-air television scheduling. He argues that the television genres are historically constructed based on the intentions and expectations of producers, distributors, and audiences, as well as the text itself. It is through the interaction of these multiple components that we get a loosely defined meta-genre that extends beyond the narrative and formal conventions of a given text.

Thus, I approach genre not as the study of a text exclusively but rather as a way that producers, distributors, and audiences choose to present and consume a text. Genres are not static; they are rather dynamic forms that morph in response to changing discursive environments. By defining genre in this way, we can also account for the role of the audience, particularly in relation to different distribution practices. Genre must necessarily be a fluid construct to more concretely reflect the changing tastes of audiences. We must avoid thinking of

the genre as a rigidly constructed category produced solely by a corporation or a critic. Rather, genre is formed by a give-and-take relationship among numerous players, including producers, distribution companies, filmmakers, consumers, and academics. Genre, then, is a rubric of classification based on narrative, aesthetics, and format and, per my claim, on distribution as well.

One of the primary genres I engage with is horror. Horror has a long history in cinema; many scholars trace the first horror movie to the 1896 film *The Haunted Castle*, directed by George Méliès. Though at the time of the movie's premier, genre theory did not exist as we know it today, scholars (Stephen Prince, Robin Wood, and Rick Worland among them) have "recovered" certain films as horror. Thus, as we saw in broader film genre studies, the genre is constructed through a positionality of the scholar and critic, as well as through the text itself. This paradigm creates a stringent understanding of horror as a genre that excludes non-canonical films.

In the introduction to *The Horror Film*, editor Stephen Prince writes:

> Like other genre movies any given horror film will convey synchronic association, ideological and social messages that are part of a certain period or historical moment. One can analyze horror films in terms of these periods or moments, just as one can do with westerns or gangster movies. But, unlike those genres, horror also goes deeper, to explore more fundamental questions about the nature of human existence, questions that, in some profound ways, go beyond culture and society as these are organized in any given period or form. Here lies the special significance of horror, the factors that truly

differentiate it from the other genres and that make it conform most deeply with our contemporary sense of the world.[51]

Here, Prince points to the unique aspect of horror, which, unlike other genres, can delve beyond cultural and societal differences. Horror, he argues, goes deeper, connecting the human experience as one. Similarly, Rick Worland, in *The Horror Film: An Introduction*, describes the longevity of the genre, stating that audiences have flocked to horror films for decades and that in these films, audiences recognize "the basic shape and themes of horror narratives in media long preceding motion pictures."[52] Thus, scholars have attempted to validate the study of horror by pointing to its longevity and uniqueness. The academic discipline of horror studies has relied heavily on psychoanalytic theory and includes the work of Robin Wood, who writes that "the formula for horror at its most basic is: normality is threatened by the Monster."[53] Influenced by Freud and Lacan, scholars like Wood, Barry Keith Grant, and Carol Clover analyze horror by focusing on sexuality, gender, and the repressed.

Other scholars have taken different approaches to the horror genre. For example, Stephen Prince looks at new approaches to horror that shift from the psychoanalytic to models drawn from anthropology theory that focuses on the films as social products. He explains that films "are the mass-produced products of popular culture. Unlocking the nature of their appeal entails using theories that preserve the category of the social without reducing it exclusively to the realm of psychology."[54] Alternately, Noel Carroll's article "The Nature of Horror" tries to move away from psychoanalytic theory by using a cognitive approach. However, he too centers on the monster. He argues, "The narrative of horror films is distinct from other film genres: it rouses

[51] Prince, Stephen, *The Horror Film*, 2.
[52] Worland, Rick, 1.
[53] Wood, Robin, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, 117.
[54] Prince, Stephen, 119.

curiosity from the audience in discovering what is deemed impossible and unnatural—the existence of a monster."[55] It is the monster (something that is unnatural and unclean) that creates the horrific. Interestingly, his definition of genre excludes numerous canonical films, including *Psycho*, *Halloween*, and the recent torture porn films *Saw* and *Hostel*.

As a genre, border horror encompasses all texts (including film, television, art, scholarship, and journalism) that present and represent violence and death set along the US-Mexico border. Thus, I am moving from a discussion of genre in media to something that is applicable to a range of texts. Because of the focus in geography (the US-Mexico border) in the border-horror genre, one of the key components in defining the genre and my approach to it is how it engages with concepts of national and transnational cinema. In this section, I address the way border-horror cultural productions are influenced by the concept of "national" cinema and are also part of a transnational discourse of neoliberalism and globalization.

In his book *Rebel Without a Crew: Or How a 23-Year-Old Filmmaker with $7,000 Became a Hollywood Player* (1996), director Robert Rodriguez describes his plan to break into the American film industry. His plan begins with writing and filming a trilogy, beginning with *El Mariachi* (1992), all with the same lead character, filmed on a very low budget, and sold to a direct-to-video Spanish movie market in Mexico. The third film of the trilogy, however, would also serve as a launching pad for entering the "American independent scene," where he could get "financing for a real movie."[56] The first film in the trilogy, *El Mariachi*, did not get a buyer in the direct-to-video market. After talks with major distributors of direct-to-video films and some studios, the film was acquired by Columbia Pictures.[57]

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[55] Carroll, Noel, 37.
[56] Rodriguez, xiv-xv.
[57] As Caetlin Benson-Allot argues, the audience is constructed through the "mechanics of viewing," thus buying and watching a film at home positions and creates a very specific time of audience (2013, 3).

The trajectory of *El Mariachi*, a seemingly by-the-numbers direct-to-video *frontera* movie, maps out the way products created with a specific market and audience in mind can prove to be genre blurring. The product shifted registers from a direct-to-video border movie for a Spanish-speaking audience in Mexico and certain parts of the United States to an independent film distributed at film festivals. *El Mariachi*'s success hinged on turning it into a product that slipped between generic categories because of how it was distributed and consumed. Although the film borrows from narco films, it was not successful with the typical narco-film audience, and it slipped from one genre (one connected specifically to Mexican film and Mexican audiences) to another (one connected to different audience expectations). The transnational and transgeneric mapping of *El Mariachi* highlights the fluidity of genre in representations of the border.

Most helpful to my own definition of horror and specifically the border-horror genre is Adam Lowenstein's exploration of horror as allegory. Lowenstein's framework is based on understanding the "allegorical moment" in which horror texts can be read through the lens of specific national traumas. He defines the allegorical moment "as a shocking collision of film, spectator, and history where registers of bodily space and historical time are disrupted,

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Direct-to-video distribution are films made specifically for sale without theater release. In "Big Names Look for Bright Lights in Videoland," Max J. Alvarez writes: "Twenty years ago they would have been double or triple-billed at a fading Loop movie palace or a Joliet drive-in. Today, these low-budget productions compete for our attention on the New Releases shelf at a neighborhood video store" (1994, n.p.). The direct-to-video market is then coded as a space for alternative films or films that are not expected to be blockbusters. Therefore, there is more freedom in what directors and producers can make. The low cost and high return of these films also render them an ideal forum for Latina/o filmmakers. In film studies, the direct-to-video film market remains relatively unstudied, as a larger focus is placed on the life of films after theater premieres and the revenue sales provided by ancillary sales. One of the initial direct-to-video films, however, was made by Disney, who set up Buena Vista Home Entertainment as their video division in charge of producing and distributing films, primarily sequels to existing Disney properties like *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*. Studies have focused primarily on the industry, technology, and economics of the Hollywood system and very little on video art and other genres like direct-to-video. I trace this gap in scholarship as much to the compelling pull of spectatorship and the prevailing concept of "cinema" as to economic drive, construct of the audience, and technology.

confronted, and intertwined."[58] For example, he discusses Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972), which was created in the shadow of the Vietnam War. While *Last House on the Left* does not engage narratively with the Vietnam War, Lowenstein argues that it is through the shock caused by horror texts (or these allegorical moments) that historical and national traumas are explored in a space where past and present collide. Lowenstein focuses on the relationship between horror and national cinema. I argue that in border horror, however, the allegorical moment extends beyond these two genres, since we are not looking at horror texts exclusively (but rather at and for the horror bursts), and the texts are produced on both sides of the border.

There is something potentially allegorical about the generic hybridity and the use of horror that might be specific to border (an overdetermined liminal space). Thus, in my reading of the border-horror genre, I am interested in how moments of trauma, like NAFTA, have shaped representations of a transnational geography. Texts in border horror borrow imagery not just from Mexican discourses around indigeneity but also from representations of indigenous communities in US cultural productions, particularly the western genre. The discursive exchange between countries through popular culture has produced texts immersed in transnational narratives of violence.

Death and Horror

This project analyzes the border-horror genre and in so doing studies the way filmic and academic productions have painted the US-Mexico borderlands as a static geography of death, a death that marks not only the space but also the bodies that inhabit it. What is death? Death can be defined mythologically, theologically, philosophically, physically, socially, and politically. The definition of death changes across time and in different cultures. The colonization of

[58] Lowenstein, Adam, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*, 2.

communities of death is not exclusive to the US-Mexico border but is a tactic of empire. One key example of colonization of death and the dead is the zombie. In most early horror literature and films, monsters, such as the vampire, the werewolf, and Frankenstein's monster, had roots in European mythology. The zombie stands as an anomaly, with its history based in Haiti, a colonized space that had consistently faced political unrest. In his book *Film, Folklore and Urban Legends*, Mikel J. Koven discusses the relationship between folklore and film, focusing on movie monsters like Dracula. Koven's exclusion of non-Western folklore is most evident in his discussion of the zombies. Here, he brings in Haitian Voodoo traditions, but he categorizes them as ethnographic findings, not part of a larger folklore found in the Caribbean and the Americas as a whole.[59] The marginalization of non-Western folklore relates directly to issues of colonial histories and erasures. The films and the zombies themselves were ways to mediate anxieties over national and racial identities that were shaping the United States. In the 1930s cultural productions (films like *White Zombie* 1932*)*, governmental documents, and policies converged and culminated in the figure and genre of the zombie, a prism through which conflicting ideas of race, religion, gender, and national identity played out. Similarly, the border-horror genre serves as an object that brings together different ideas of race, gender, and geography.

Haiti, which achieved its independence from France in 1803 as the first colonial nation to be formed as a result of a successful slave rebellion, became known as the "Black Republic."[60] During the early stages of the rebellion, which began in 1791, Voodoo was used as a tool to unite the people against the colonizing powers. Not long after its independence, Haiti was once again

[59] Koven, Mikel, *Film, Folklore, and Urban Legends*.
[60] Phillips, Gyllian, "White Zombie and the Creole: William Seabrook's The Magic Island and American Imperialism in Haiti", 37.

invaded, this time by the United States. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the United States was in the process of expansion, seizing regions particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean. Cuba and the Dominican Republic were the first spaces to be invaded by the United States, which did so under the pretense of saving them from the stifling colonial rule of the Spanish and helping democratize the country, so it could stand on their own. This paternalistic endeavor was also driven by fear that these countries would fall under German control, particularly during World War I. Also, these spaces were ripe for establishing industries and plantation systems to augment those in the United States that had grown unprofitable. The focus on Voodoo and zombies in governmental accounts of the occupation and in cultural productions points to national fears of contamination. There was a desire for cheap labor, although the bodies and communities themselves were seen as toxic to US national identity. Similarly, through trade agreements such as BIP and NAFTA, the United States expanded the reach of multinational corporations into Mexico. Low production costs in Mexico helped the maquiladoras extract labor and goods while at the same time keeping Mexicans out of the United States. The criminalization that now turned necrolization (the marking of something as dead) of the borderlands in governmental accounts and cultural productions are a reflection of the attempt to dispose of communities by exploiting their bodies for labor and resources and policing their bodies to the point of death.

Voodooism, similar to other religions in the Caribbean and Latin America, has had to hide itself or mix with Catholicism in order to survive. This survival tactic has created new practices and beliefs that later are appropriated by American marines and filmmakers. Initially, the fear of the zombie was the fear of being enslaved beyond death. For Haitians and Africans who had suffered under slavery, the figure of the zombie became a symbol of permanent

enslavement from which even death did not provide a way out. Zombies become the perfect workers—never resting, eating, or demanding pay and working until their bodies had disintegrated. The dead—or the undead in this case—become less than human, expendable products to be consumed in service to capitalism. I would argue that even though my dissertation does not focus on the zombie, what we do see in border horror is the use of the dead (or dying) bodies of people along the US-Mexico border as cheap or free labor. Border horror is a genre that pertains to texts that respond to the trauma of border violence as well as those that naturalize the border as a space of violence.

In border horror, the images of the dead and/or dying body are influenced by layers of political, historical, social, and cultural contexts. An analysis of this genre reflects how death can never be understood. My work shows how fictive and factual accounts of death on the border should be approached through a border-horror framework to avoid fragmentations of death and the dead. The commodification we see in popular culture of real violence experienced by real people living on the border turns exploitative and dangerous. It is thus essential that scholars name this phenomenon and point to ways in which representations of violence are non-binary—neither black and white nor good or bad—but rather exist on a narrative continuum, where production histories, distribution practices, and audience consumption must be included in conversations about border death. Demarcations between death and life, north and south, civilized and lawless are constantly played out in cultural productions about the US-Mexico border. Equating the border with normalized violent deaths, which is constantly re-inscribed in public discourse, marks the communities living in this space as disposable, destined to die violent deaths, and contributes to the devaluation and commodification of their bodies as cheap labor.

In border horror, the image of death is always present, whether or not it is visible. In the chapters that follow, I show how violence and death permeate cultural productions from both sides of the border. The focus on death in this dissertation is inspired in part by the work of scholar Sharon Patricia Holland, who writes, "Because these societal fears are pervasive, discussions of death, and notions of the dead, have the potential to dissolve barriers between communities. Speaking about death and the dead necessitates that critics move beyond familiar country and into liminal spaces. These liminal spaces are present whenever a scholar moves between the borders separating nations and communities, disciplines and departments."[61] Death, and writing about death, addresses the liminal spaces often ignored and hidden in conversations about the nation and national identity.

My own definition of death, then, borrows from Holland's theorization of how people of color are disposed of and dispossessed of identity through how they die and how they are mourned. The tracing of historical moments and the process by which sociohistorical moments shape our relationship to death and the dead body is key in border horror. I understand death in both its physical sense (pain and dissolution of the body) and its metaphorical/symbolic sense (the collective death of communities along the border, or rather how these communities are read as already dead). Death in this context is overdetermined.

In "Bare Life: Border-Crossing Deaths and Spaces of Moral Alibi," Roxanne Doty applies Giorgio Agamben's biopolitics and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics to explain how communities along the border are "rendered as bare life."[62] She writes, "US border control strategies have turned and continue to turn much of the southwestern border areas into spaces of

[61] Holland, Sharon Patricia, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*, 149.
[62] Doty, Roxanne, 609.

exception, and those who traverse them potentially into bare life."[63] The way immigrants are allowed to die crossing the border, Doty argues, is an example of biopower, whereby life and death are controlled by the state. Most importantly for my work, Doty's work highlights how death on the border is not natural but rather a result of policies meant to dictate who is allowed to live and who must die. In this way, communities that live on the borderlands and/or attempt to cross the border are coded as already dead, and their movement across national borders simply expedites their inevitable demise. In this dissertation, I use border horror as a genre and as a framework to parcel out what representations of death and violence set along the US-Mexico border look like and to analyze how these cultural productions participate in a discursive regime that works hand in hand with border-control strategies and capital to turn communities along the border into bare life.

To define border horror, I turn to Claire Fox's use of "establishing shots," which she borrows directly from cinematic studies. In *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the US-Mexico Border* (1999), Fox argues that the border region is important to the way the Mexican nation-state is constructed, beginning with the Spanish colonization of the Americas. The "establishing shot" of the border, Fox writes:

> is typically a two-to three-second take of a building exterior or landscape that is inserted at the beginning of a scene. Rarely are establishing shots imbued with special meaning; in fact, they are meant to be unobtrusive keys that help the viewer to locate action within a larger space, before the ensuing scene systematically fragments that space into smaller units through medium shots and close-ups.[64]

[63] Doty, 607.
[64] Claire Fox, *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border*, 46.

In this book, Fox looks at different cultural productions, not to create a "real" border but rather to explore how visual and cultural rhetoric have shaped ideas of what the border is. The concept of an "establishing shot" that connects texts across a variety of media and aesthetic forms is very closely tied to how genres are identified. For example, if a scene includes a long shot of the desert and then a medium shot of a cowboy riding a horse, the long shot is the establishing shot in that it tells us where the action is taking place. In this case, it would be easy to assume that the genre of the film is a western. In Fox's work, the establishing shot of the fence and the river is connected to representations of the US-Mexico border. These images are what are queued up for us and what we understand as border, forming an "establishing shot" through which a constellation of ideas about the border as a geopolitical and cultural space are articulated. In these establishing shots, the fence and the river are a form of violence, silently implied. Fox's work, published in 1999, focuses on how the fence and the river have changed across time in cultural productions. She argues that "the changing valence" of these icons "attests to the persistence of nationalism in the contemporary era."[65] Her focus on the "unobtrusive" yet violent fence and river in cultural and artistic productions during the Mexican revolution and in the mid- to late 1990s informs my approach to death and violence as establishing shots.

This dissertation is interested in the last half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. I argue that beginning in 1994, with the official implementation of NAFTA, images of the dead, dying, and violence have become establishing shots of the US-Mexico border, along with the fence and the river. Initially, death and violence might seem like quite the opposite of the "unobtrusive" shots of the fence and the river. However, I argue that through repetition, these usually disconcerting images become normalized and part of the borderlands

[65] Fox, 11.

landscape. Through repetition, death and violence become tame and expected. In her book, Fox says that she focuses "artistic production about the border; the work of political activists on the border; and the writings of U.S. and Mexican intellectuals about the border."[66] The establishing shots or tropes I look at are also unobtrusive in their repetition. Today, as violence and images of violence have escalated, we have different establishing shots—ones that focus on the body, with themes and tropes of the dead that are currently shaping the way we understand the border. As with the "establishing shot" of the fence and the river, the constant repetition of the scene of border death naturalizes what has come to be seen as an inevitability.

Representations of dead and dying on the border present an overdetermined image of liminality. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* Julia Kristeva writes that the undead is the ultimate abject figure. This figure is threatening and terrifying because of the way it defies the clearly established border between life and death, between humanity and inhumanity. In my work, I also look at the relationship between liminal bodies and the border(lands). I draw from Gloria Anzaldúa's work that describes the physical border between the United States and Mexico as "una herida abierta," an open wound. I argue that in this already liminal space, representations of violence, death, and the horrific presents us with an opportunity to understand not only the discursive stigmatization of borders (and the bodies that inhabit them) but how those stereotypes become naturalized.[67] The border-horror genre is born from this site of violence, trauma, and conquest.

The border-horror genre is a strain of texts that is not about positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate border representations. Rather, the border-horror genre is composed of images and texts that develop as a response to the trauma of the borderlands and/or are part of the discursive

[66] Fox, 6.
[67] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 25.

practices that equate the border with a space of normalized violence. The genre is one that pertains to texts that reflect responses to the trauma of border violence as well as those that naturalize the border as a space of violence. Sometimes, these two components appear in the same text. For example, the 2013 documentary *Narco Cultura*, an example of border horror, documents how communities on both sides of the border use music and other cultural productions to feel power over the violent conditions they are surrounded by. At the same time, the documentary solidifies the idea that Mexico is a naturally violent place where laws do not exist.

Even though I use film genre theory to approach my definition of genre, the border-horror genre extends beyond film to include art, journalism, television, and other cultural productions. An analysis of border horror across forms and media is important because it shows how stereotypes of the border as a place of violent death are constructed, appropriated, and incorporated into a rigid image of the borderlands. This analysis is possible by looking at horror bursts (reading them as establishing shots) and showing how they reflect a fixation on death and violence. An analysis of the border-horror genre allows us to see how the problematic discursive strain, which brands the border as a space of violent death, moves between genres, media, and forms that each have different generic roots. Because of this, border horror is a complex, transnational, multimedia genre that must be analyzed through a lens that borrows from multiple disciplines.

In this dissertation, I define horror not as a set of stable narrative conventions or aesthetic forms but as moments that horrify or create discomfort. In his essay "Towards an Aesthetics of Cinematic Horror," Schneider critiques the limiting definition of horror—more specifically, Noel Carroll's definition of art, which hinges on the existence of the monster in film. Schneider claims

that after 1960, there have been very few horror movies that have truly horrified audiences. He argues that scholars must acknowledge the fact that although films no longer horrify, the "horror scenes, sequences, and images of the past forty or so years can lead to new and potentially important insights into the aesthetics of cinematic horror."[68]

Schneider's approach to horror, fragmenting the text to find those images and sequences of horror, is helpful when approaching the border-horror genre. I would argue that these moments that horrify can be present in any text. These moments—these horror bursts—reflect not only a textual approach to genre but one that involves the audience, centering their generic knowledge. If we study these moments closely, they can tell us what is considered horrific and can expose the relationship between the spectator and the text. I disagree with his claim that horror is dead. I would argue that we need new ways of exploring how horror and the horrific exist beyond what we currently consider canonical horror texts. Such moments can exist in all texts, regardless of genre or form, and they are intimately connected to the positionality of the spectator. Thus, my approach to these texts allows me to locate border horror across texts that are not typically associated with the genre.

In order to think beyond these limitations, it is not as important to see horror as a genre as it is to understand how the horrific permeates texts within and beyond the established boundaries of horror. My framing of horror, particularly in relation to death and violence on the border, allows for an understanding of the horrific as it may apply to different audiences, audience of color in particular. I argue that any text can be read as horrific, depending on the positionality of the audience and the specific cultural context in which it is produced, distributed, and consumed. In this definition of horror, then, the content of the text is not sufficient to define the genre. One

[68] Schneider, Steven Jay, "Towards an Aesthetics of Cinematic Horror," 134.

often-cited example of horror outside of the genre is *Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915). bell hooks explains how the release of *Birth of a Nation* coincided with the nation-building project that characterized the reconstruction era. But the film is more than just a propaganda film. It is a text that, when read through the eyes of African American spectators who embody histories of colonization and slavery, can be seen as a horror film.[69]

Chapter Overviews

This dissertation is organized into three body chapters. The first two chapters focus on the three main tropes of border horror: the personification of the border, the conflation of the border with the female body, and the use of indigenous motifs in the genre. Because a genre is more easily defined and becomes identifiable through repetition, these three chapters focus on a set of texts that exemplify each of the three tropes, all produced and initially distributed between 1996 and 2016. This twenty-year period encompasses the effects of NAFTA, Operation Gatekeeper, and the devaluation of the peso in Mexico, among many other historical moments that have shaped the increase policing of space and bodies on the US-Mexico border. Among these text are the films *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996), *From Dusk till Dawn 2: Texas Blood Money* (1999), *From Dusk till Dawn 3: Hangman's Daughter* (2000), and *Ahí va el diablo* (Here Comes the Devil, 2012); the television show *From Dusk till Dawn: The Series* (2014–16); and the graphic novel *Feeding Ground* (2011). Chapter 4 analyzes texts not usually considered horror, including cartoons and art exhibitions, tracing how border horror is a transmedial genre.

Chapter 2, "Border," explores geography as a key component of border horror, as the border space itself becomes coded as deviant, dangerous, and inherently deadly. This can be seen in fictional and factual cultural productions. In the foreword to the graphic novel *Feeding*

[69] hooks, bell, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies*.

Ground[70] (2011), author Luis Alberto Urrea describes the border, particularly the desert in Sonora and Arizona, as a nightmarish place:

> There is something … other about it. There is something from our deep nightmares lurking there. Yes, there is a relentless toll of suffering and death to go with the realistic adventure and thrills and violent action. That is a given—every border book ever written deals with it. However, Border Patrol agents know, DEA agents know, the medicine people of those canyons and dunes know that something … other … lurks.71

As Urrea's quote elucidates, border deaths and violence are connected to geography. This is the first trope of the border-horror genre: the personification of the US-Mexico border as monstrous. Through textual and discourse analysis of the central geographies, the physical habitats, of these productions—the Titty Twister bar where vampires live in the *From Dusk till Dawn*[72] franchise, the Baja California hills in *Here Comes the Devil*,[73] the Arizona desert in *Feeding Ground*, and the city of Juárez in *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*[74]—I show how

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[70] Published by Archaia, this graphic novel follows the lives of the Busqueda family as they struggle to immigrate into the United States. The already difficult situation is aggravated when Flaca, the young daughter, starts turning into a werewolf. Diego, Flaca's father, must struggle against Blackwell, the Spanish American factory owner, to save Flaca's soul and keep her from turning into a beast. Swifty Lang and Chris Mangun create a world full of werewolves and pain along the Sonora/Arizona border. Their graphic novel features Flaca, a young girl turned werewolf by Blackwell, a wealthy descendant of Spanish conquistadores now running Blackwell industries in Arizona.

[71] *Feeding ground*, 2.

[72] The franchise includes three films. *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996) was released in theaters by Dimension films. It was followed by two direct-to-video films released in 1999 and 2000. *From Dusk till Dawn: The Series* (2014–16) has released three seasons on El Rey and Netflix. All of the films and the series feature the biker bar/strip join the Titty Twister.

[73] Distributed by Magnet Releasing, directed by Adrian Garcia Bogliano, and produced by Morbido Films and Salto de Fe Films, this film is set in Tijuana, Baja California. Sol, Felix and their children Sara and Adolfo are enjoying a day out in the hills when the kids go missing. Sol and Felix are relieved when the children return the next day, seemingly safe. However, things go from bad to worse when Sol discovers something demonic came back with the children.

[74] This graphic novel, written by Charles Bowden and illustrated by Alice Leora Briggs, tells the case of "Lalo," a DEA snitch who while working for the DEA also participated in the murder of numerous Mexicans in Ciudad Juárez. The case broke when Lalo and his accomplices tried to kidnap an US citizen.

different types of media, aimed at different audiences, all engage with the border geography in similar ways, creating and reinforcing the trope that equates the physical border with machines and/or bodies of death. The danger in the persistence of this image is that as the political and capitalist forces that have shaped these circumstances are obfuscated, the blame for the violence and death falls on the geography itself. Those who choose to live in these borderlands (brown men and women particularly) are putting themselves in a position of danger where they should expect violent deaths. When these deaths occur, then, only the dead are to blame. As I will show in this chapter, by giving the border a life of its own, the border-horror genre constructs a narrative that naturalizes death.

Chapter 3, "Body," looks at the way the border-horror genre conflates the female body with the border geography. Through discourse analysis of Santanico Pandemonium, the vampireire in the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise;[75] Flaca, the werewolf in *Feeding Ground*;[76] and Sara, the demon in *Ahí va el diablo*,[77] I argue that the gendered body, particularly Mexican women, are constructed as monstrous Others who need to be executed, contained, or deported. I analyze the image of brown women in representations of death and violence set along the US-Mexico border after the implementation of the NAFTA.

Violence on the border must be understood multidimensionally, as comprising multiple registers of violence and death that play out in representations of the brown female body on the border. Images of the female corpse, the grotesque and monstrous female body, appear in

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In this graphic novel, Bowden and Briggs also tell the story of violence in Juárez, connecting it to the maquiladoras, US greed, and Mexican corruption.

[75] Throughout the franchise, Santanico has been a pivotal figure credited as the "queen" or "leader" of the vampires who inhabit the Titty Twister bar.

[76] Flaca's transformation into a werewolf is the heart of the story since it is the fight over her body and her humanity that drives the narrative.

[77] Sol and Felix's young daughter is the most recognizable site of monstrousness; it is through her body that Sol discovers the existence of demons in the Tijuana hills.

multiple forms in border horror. In chapter 3, I show that the monstrous brown body is a nuanced social-construct reflection of post NAFTA borderlands in border horror. Women's bodies are conflated with geography in border horror texts; this leads to construction of border women as monstrous. Their monstrousness is created primarily by their connection to the space. This conflation of body and geography reinforces and excuses the violence women face along the border. Because women, or female bodies, are the irrational entities behind the chaos and violence along the border, their real death and punishment is a necessity to return a sense of order. The scope of this chapter is to allow the reader to understand how the gendering of geography and the female embodiment of geography are key tropes in border horror.

Chapter 4, "Border Horror Beyond Horror," moves beyond genres traditionally associated with images of the horrific. Here I argue that border horror as genre and as framework forces us to think in new ways about representations of death and violence set along the US-Mexico border. I look at representations of death and violence along the US-Mexico border that fall within journalism, academic work, art, and genres such as dramas and cartoons. In this process, I analyze Charles Bowden's graphic novel *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*, illustrated by Alice Leora Briggs. By analyzing this text, I show how this approach functions to erase particularities about the border by using it as a stand-in for a larger discussion of globalization. The second section of chapter 4, "Border-Horror Art," focuses on art exhibitions. Here I focus on art exhibitions that were created in conjunction with an academic publication and an exhibit catalog. By doing this, I show how border horror permeates academic and non-academic spaces alike. By placing in conversation artistic and academic productions, this section argues that border horror exists in a plethora of cultural productions, thereby making the discourse surrounding the border a monolithic discourse of death and violence. The final section, "Border-

Horror Television," focuses on procedural crime dramas and other non-horror genres. Specifically, I analyze the award-winning show *The Bridge* (2013–14),[78] focusing on the content, the production history, and the publicity campaign that emphasized the female body.

[78] *The Bridge* is based on the popular Swedish/Danish series of the same name. The adaptation takes place along the US-Mexico border, particularly Juárez and El Paso. It follows two detectives, Sonya Cross from Texas and Marco Ruiz from Chihuahua as they attempt to solve a the murder of two women whose bodies were found right on the border with half of the body in the U.S. and the other in Mexico.

Chapter 2: Border

Across my spine / the soles of men kindled an ache for flesh / I have stripped sandals and broke bone from boot / smashed wagon wheels and lapped blood from the links of chains / sucked marrow from the threads of tanks and I welcome every offering / yet I am still thirsty.[79]

—Jonathan "Swifty" Lang

The first trope of the border-horror genre is the personification of the US-Mexico border. In this genre, we see how different types of media all engage with the border geography in very similar ways, creating and reinforcing the trope that equates the physical border with machines and/or bodies responsible for causing violence and death. In border horror, geography plays a key component, since the space (the geography of border itself) becomes coded as deviant, dangerous, and inherently deadly. This can be seen in fictional and factual cultural productions. By giving the border a life of its own, texts within the border-horror genre encapsulate the persistent narrative that naturalizes death.

In the border-horror genre, the motif of border as an empty "no man's land" in need of colonization by civilized nations merges with new images of the border geography now shaped by maquiladoras and drug violence. In *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*, Rosa Linda Fregoso describes the way the US-Mexico border is a constant trope for filmmakers on both sides of the border. The "obsession" with representation began early on, with silent cinema, she argues. Films such as *Bordertown* (1935) and *Touch of Evil* (1958) have created the border as a symbol for "absolute alterity."

[79] Lang, *Feeding Ground*, 49.

She adds that "in both Mexican and U.S. cinemas, the representation of the border as a no-man's land is symptomatic of a colonialist and racist imaginary. The product of an ethnocentric gaze, this representation of frontier territories as abject serves both to define the United States and metropolitan Mexico and to shape their respective national identities."[80] In the case of border horror, the abject border comes to life. It is no longer a geography at the service of US and Mexican interests, but an out-of-control entity that produces and reproduces violence. As a stand-alone villain, the border allows communities on both sides of the border to wash their hands of the violence. Fregoso's reading of pre-NAFTA representations of the border in films serves as a good starting point for this chapter. After the implementation of NAFTA, the borderlands saw demographic and infrastructural changes. These are reflected in the border-horror genre, since the landscape has now morphed into an entity that objectifies, polices, and consumes in order to survive. The anthropomorphized physical border sustains a dangerous myth about the border: that violent death is natural for its inhabitants.

In the post-NAFTA era, the border in border horror is constructed as a machine and/or body.[81] By borrowing from the industrialized architecture of the maquiladoras, the border-as-machine image has become a recurrent discourse, not only in popular culture but also in academic productions. The border as body also borrows heavily from the horror and narco genres to construct an uncaring, serial-killer-like entity that is both sadist and masochist.[82] The

[80] Fregoso, Rosa Linda, 53.
[81] See for example Devon Peña's *The Terror of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology on the U.S.-Mexican Border* for another discussion of the border as machine.
[82] With the rise of VHS and video stores in the late 1970s and early 1980s, cine fronterizo began to grow due to increased accessibility. These modern films focused on the *narcotraficante* (drug trade) violence in northern Mexico. They also emphasized the dangers immigrants faced not only in Northern Mexico but also in the U.S. The crossing itself became a key narrative trope in the genre. Currently, films on the US-Mexico border still highlight the increase in *narco* violence with a heightened focus on the dangers of crossing, harshness of life on the U.S. side and dangers women encounter when on the border. *Cine*

border as acting agent is a prevalent trope across the media landscape, including non-fiction, fiction, television, film, and newspapers.

One of the most common post-NAFTA images used to bring the border to life is a construction of the border as a machine. The border as machine connects the natural geography (river, mountains, desert) with the constructed geography (*maquilas*, houses, border fence, and wall). Together, these elements create what seems to be a perfectly tuned machine that cannot be stopped. In his book *The Femicide Machine*, journalist Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez describes a machine that creates and legalizes the conditions that turn women into disposable bodies that can be killed, mutilated, and used for their labor with impunity. This machine is related to the state and the economic and structural relationship between Mexico and the United States. For Gonzalez Rodriguez, the femicide machine is not just the industrial city but a neo-Fordist, parasitic model.[83] The machine has the power to reproduce itself, so it is at once a creation or entity of the state and a self-reproducing entity with its own agenda. This machine is also connected to other machines (the war machine, the police machine, the criminal machine, and the machine of apolitical conformity).

Femicide Machine serves as a tool to better read the representations of the borderlands in border horror. The complex machines Gonzalez Rodriguez describes are a helpful starting point with which to understand how representations of the US-Mexico border rely on both images of the body and machines to create an apocalyptic geography that turns border communities into producers and products of cheap goods.

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fronterizo, particularly narco films, deal with violence through a hypermasculine figure, usually an antihero, who is part of the drug trade yet was driven to it by reasons outside of his control.

[83] Femicide is murder of women because of their gender.

This relationship is most apparent in border-horror texts in which the mutilation and consumption of the female body are centered. In border horror, the border as machine image marks the physical US-Mexico border as a space of inevitable death created by the geography itself, which has gone feral and is no longer under the control of any single company, nation, or governing body.

The Bar: *From Dusk till Dawn*

In the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise, all the action begins with a visit to the rowdy strip joint, the Titty Twister, or la Tetilla del Diablo. The first entry in the trilogy, *From Dusk till Dawn*, was released in theaters in 1996. Written by Quentin Tarantino as part of a deal with Robert Kurtzman[84] and directed by Robert Rodriguez, *From Dusk till Dawn* was marketed as a "low budget"[85] indie film made by the two most innovative filmmakers of the time. The film follows the adventures of two brothers, Richie and Seth Gecko, as they travel from Texas to Mexico after robbing a bank, breaking Seth out of prison, and killing cops, Texas rangers, and civilians. The brothers are violent criminals; Seth is a thief and murderer and Richie a sex offender and murderer. To cross the border, they kidnap the Fuller family—Jacob, the father, an ex-pastor; daughter Kate; and adopted son, Scott—who have been traveling through Texas in an RV. After

[84] Quentin Tarantino wrote the initial screenplay when he was working in a video store. Special effects artist Robert Kurtzman had written the story and paid Tarantino $1,500 to write the screenplay. Kurtzman also agreed that he and his studio, K.N.B EFX Group, would do the effects for *Reservoir Dogs* in exchange for the screenplay. K.N.B also did the special effects for *From Dusk Till Dawn*. Robert Rodriguez read the script and offered to direct it if Tarantino would let him rewrite some of the script. The changes included a focus on pan-indigenous imagery, an example if which is at the film's end, when a camera pan shows the Titty Twister's full façade to be an Aztec temple.

[85] The movie actually had a large budget for that time, estimated at $19 million. It opened as the number-one film when released in theaters on January 19, 1996. Opening gross was $10,240,805. Total theater gross was $25,728,961. The film was also hugely successful once it was released on video. During the 1990s, budgets for indie films grew along with their increase in popularity. Some indie films had a budget of $5 million; the budgets for movies like *From Dusk Till Dawn* and *Scream* (both genre films) were even larger.

crossing the border into northern Mexico, the hostages and the kidnappers think they have found refuge in the Titty Twister, a biker and trucker bar where Seth and Richie expect to meet their Mexican contact and fellow criminal, Carlos, who will take them to El Ray[86] in exchange for part of their bank take. This temporary stopping point turns into a nightmare when the dancers and bartenders transform into blood-hungry vampires. In the sequel, *Texas Blood Money*, the bar is visited briefly by Duane, one of a group of criminals on their way to Mexico to rob a bank. Duane is turned into a vampire by returning-character Razor Eddie (played by Danny Trejo in all three films). Duane then begins a mission to turn his fellow criminals into vampires. In this sequel, the Titty Twister serves as the site of contact and contamination, where even murderous criminals can be turned into something worse. By the third film, the Titty Twister is transformed into the border brothel La Tetilla del Diablo, run by a vampire named Quixtla.[87] Set during the Mexican revolution, the Tetilla straddles a war-torn space where borders between nations and inhuman entities are blurred. Finally, in the series, the Tetilla once again becomes the Titty Twister, the prison to which demi-goddess Pandemonium lures the Gecko brothers to gain her freedom.[88]

[86] Throughout the franchise, this mythical place to which Seth and Richie are escaping changes names. It is originally called "El Ray," a reference to the 1958 novel *The Getaway*, by Jim Thompson, in which the protagonist, Carter "Doc" McCoy, and his wife are running from the law. The McCoy's escape to Mexico and the temporary haven of El Rey. In the first film, the place is called El Ray; however, in the series, it appears as El Rey. In some reviews it is also called El Wray. I use "El Ray" when talking about the first film and "El Rey" when talking about the series. El Rey is also the name of Robert Rodriguez's new network.

[87] The bar is named La Tetilla del Diablo in *FDTD3*. This translates to the Devil's Teat.

[88] There are numerous versions of the Titty Twister in different cultural productions beyond the films and series. It also exists in franchise tie-ins, including a comic book (1996), a video game (2001), and at Hollywood Universal Studios (2014 Halloween Horror Nights). Non-franchise Titty Twisters also exist on the online virtual world Second Life; even some real bars have modeled themselves after the fictional bar.

Figure 4. The Titty Twister in *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996).

Figure 5. The Titty Twister in *From Dusk till Dawn: The Series* (2015).

Figure 6. The Titty Twister *in From Dusk till Dawn: The Hangman's Daughter* (2000).

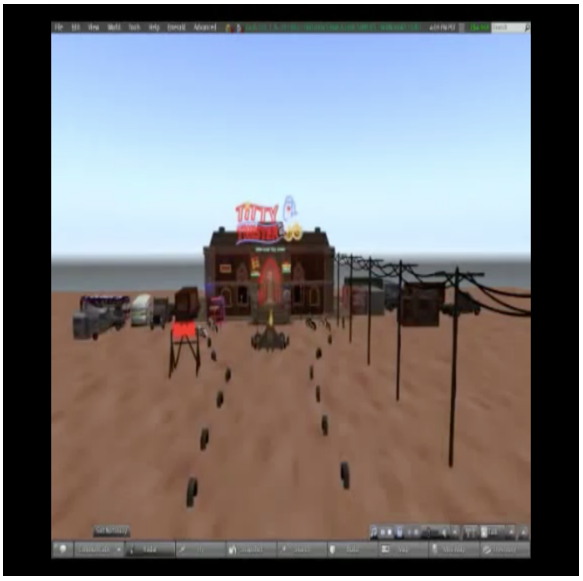

Figure 7 (left). The Titty Twister in *From Dusk till Dawn* third-person shooter video game (2001).
Figure 8 (right). The Titty Twister in Second Life gaming platform.

Figure 9. Images from the Titty Twister, a bar in Paris, France.

Figure 10. Concept art for Lowlands music festival by Perter Bowden.

Figure 11. The Twister at Universal Halloween Horror Nights (2014).

Here I read the Titty Twister as an acting participant in the death and violence experienced along the border. The Titty Twister is an object that consumes and imprisons female bodies through its connection to two pivotal border institutions, the bar and the maquiladora. Borrowing from Gloria Anzaldúa, the Titty Twister can be read as a place where the "third world grates against the first and bleeds," causing a wound that "hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country, a border culture."[89] The constant presence of the bar in the franchise allows it to play a key

[89] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 3.

role in the development of representations of dead and dying in the borderlands. Here, the physical and discursive space between north and south, civilized and uncivilized, modern and pre-modern, Christian and pagan, proper femininity versus monstrous femininity among other dichotomies meet and merge, bleeding into each other and creating a momentary liminal space where these ideas are hypervisible as well as extremely flexible and porous. The bar is also a space where people are at risk of contamination through contact with the Other.

In the case of the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise (hereinafter referred to as *FDTD*), the stripper bar the Titty Twister/La Tetilla del Diablo is inseparable from the border geography, particularly the desert. The bar exists in an otherwise isolated space and becomes the face of the border. Its all-consuming power is tied to the isolated Mexican desert geography on which it is set, and it is a space of struggle for both the vampires and the humans, who are constantly testing and being tested by boundaries of what is socially and morally acceptable. Whether intentional or not, the personification of the border and the framing of the border as a murderous, dangerous space, inherently shifts the focus away from sociopolitical forces that lead to violence and death.

In *FDTD,* the Fuller's RV drives between two rows of power lines toward the bar. With large mountains in the background and a sandy terrain around it, the neon signs on the bar's façade stand out and seem out of place. A large neon sign announcing the name of the bar and proclaiming it open from dusk till dawn takes up most of the screen. Looming large is a bust of a woman with black hair whose nipples are being twisted by a disembodied hand. In this emptiness, the Titty Twister is described as a "mirage," a sanctuary for weary and unsuspecting travelers. However, this space is one of false hope and promises, where travelers are enticed by the strippers/vampires living in these spaces and by the promise of a law-free zone where their pasts will be forgotten.

At the end of the first *From Dusk till Dawn* film, released in 1996, the camera pans out to show the back of the Titty Twister, the strip joint where the vampires live and where they lure their victims. The back façade shows the real face of the border bar. In the back, the vampires have stashed hundreds of trucks, motorcycles, and cars of past victims. Further, the architecture of the bar is revealed to be a multi-story pyramid buried under the sand. This establishing shot, versions of which are repeated in *FDTD*, *FDTD3,* and *FDTD: The Series*, visually grounds the pyramid into the landscape itself. The Titty Twister, home of unthinkable violence and savage parasitic creatures that feed on the unsuspecting, springs from the borderlands. The desert sand merges with the pyramid stones, creating a single murderous body. Where did this pyramid come from? How long has it been there? What indigenous communities inhabit it? These questions are never thoroughly answered; there's no need. This shot of the back of the bar presents the ultimate horror; the vampires are ancient inhabitants of this geography, an ancient evil that existed long before NAFTA and the border itself.

The architecture of the Titty Twister is also a murderous machine. In the first-season episodes "Pandemonium" and "La Conquista," the Gecko brothers, the Fuller family, and Texas Ranger Freddie discover that the Titty Twister has a built-in mechanism that when triggered locks all the doors. Further, as the vampires begin attacking and consuming the bar's clientele, the floor opens up to reveal a trash chute into which the bodies can be disposed after they are drained. Presumably, once the party is over and everyone has eaten, the floor closes back up, and post-massacre clean-up is minimal. The Titty Twister once again returns to its paradisiacal state, luring victims while hiding the feeding machinations. The machine in the *FDTD* franchise borrows

from another industry that has shaped representations of the US-Mexico border: the bar. They mark a local strip joint as the heart of death production. For this franchise, then, the border as machine is linked directly to a bar. The Titty Twister, a bar on the Mexican side of the border, becomes a stand-in for the refuse resulting from transnational economic measures.

In the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise, both Santanico and the Titty Twister are connected to non-descript indigenous roots. The pan-indigenous motifs in the franchise did not appear by accident; they are key contributions made by Robert Rodriguez, who took the initial Quentin Tarantino script and imbued it with his own point of view. The original script did not end with the now famous shot that focuses on the back of the bar showing all the abandoned trucks, motorcycles, and other vehicles, as well as the pyramid-like architecture of the building itself. This is not to comment on the accuracy or lack thereof of the façade of the Titty Twister as a representation of an indigenous community in Mexico. Rather, by using broad pan-indigenous imagery, the franchise creates a landscape where one indigenous culture is interchangeable with the next; the specificity of violence, conquest, and cultural histories are not important. What is important in border horror is that the image of the pan-indigenous Other becomes a stand-in and explanation for violence. Thus, it makes sense that vampires on the border exist, but only when we connect them to violent, pre-conquest "blood cults." In this world, violence on the border is only explicable through an indictment of Mexico's indigenous past. This message is clearly adopted by reviewers and fans of the franchise. For example, Jane Sumner from the *Dallas Morning News* writes that this "isn't Transylvania or even New Orleans, Toto. These are Mexican vampires with a history dating back to Aztec days."[90]

[90] Sumner, Jane, "'From Dusk till Dawn' Tarantino, Rodriguez Take a Bite out of Slime", Dallas Morning News, January 19, 1996:
1C. https://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/0ED3D67423339BE7?p=WORLDNEWS.

The saloon or bar has played an important role in the western genre. The saloon is usually portrayed as the door between the still uncivilized West and the rest of the country. It is here that new moral codes are established as colonization moves westward and displaces communities. Cynthia Miller describes the saloon in westerns as both "a civilizer of the frontier, and the least civilized site in the frontier town."[91] Camilla Fojas describes it as a "homosocial male utopia."[92] Saloons are coded as male spaces, not places where respectable women would venture. Miller describes the salon as a "liminal space" in which "order and chaos, strange and familiar, good and evil collide."[93] The saloon, then, is a liminal doorway between civilized and uncivilized (these extremes defined as US centric), a place where "good" and "evil" meet and where the undead (whose existence violates norms) might momentarily have the "upper hand." In the franchise, the Titty Twister/Tetilla del Diablo appears in every reiteration of the franchise, thereby documenting the changing discourse about the US-Mexico border as an uncivilized and dangerous space.

The saloon—or in the case of the *From Dusk Till Dawn* franchise, the strip joint—becomes a space of struggle for both the vampires and the humans. The Titty Twister, when the border is crossed, devolves from the traditional western saloon into a cheap strip club where bodies are meant to be consumed. The inside of the Titty Twister includes velvet paintings of tigers and Spanish matadors, car rims, fuzzy pink wallpaper, and plenty of indigenous motifs like stone skulls and serpents. The Mexican vampires in the films and the television show inhabit a liminal space between the United States and

[91] Miller, Cynthia, "'So This Zombie Walks into a Bar...' The Living, the Undead and the Western Saloon", 15.
[92] Fojas, Camilla, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*, 51.
[93] Miller, 4.

Mexico. The border region in which these movies take place is portrayed as barren and threatening. In the last shot of the first film, the camera zooms out to show the back of the Titty Twister. The back façade shows the real face of the border bar. In the back, the vampires have stashed hundreds of trucks, motorcycles, and cars of past victims. Further, the architecture of the bar is revealed to be a multi-storied pyramid. This establishing shot, versions of which are repeated in *FDTD3* and *FDTD: The Series*, visually grounds the bar-pyramid into the landscape itself. The Titty Twister, home of unthinkable violence and savage parasitic creatures that feed on the unsuspecting, springs from the borderlands. The desert sand merges with the pyramid stones to create one murderous body.

The architecture of the pyramid/bar owes its appearance in large part to the set designer Cecilia Montiel. In an interview, Montiel, who was previously an architect in Peru, stated that her inspiration for the Titty Twister was pan-indigenous aesthetics. Montiel describes the Titty Twister as resembling "las ruinas mayas de Uxmal" (the Mayan ruins of Uxmal).[94] The interior architecture of the bar "conspira en contra de quienes lo visitan y las fuerzas del inframundo surgen a partir del momento en que se deja caer sobre el suelo la primer gota de sangre" (conspires against those who visit it. The entities from the underworld arise as soon as the first blood drop falls).[95] This description of the architecture, one that conspires and feeds, connects to the first trope of border horror, the personification of the border geography, by making this pan-indigenous pyramid a hungry entity that savagely attacks those who get lost within it. The Titty

[94] Uxmal is a "Maya city located in northwestern Yucatán south of the range of hills known as the Puuc. The site was occupied in the eighth century and reached its maximum florescence between about 850 and 925, shortly after which it, along with many other sites in the Puuc district, was abandoned" (Kowalski, Jeff; *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture.* Ed. Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer. Vol. 6. 2nd ed. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008. p257-258)

[95] *El Sol de Texas*, "From Dusk till Dawn: Película de Robert Rodriguez", 13; volume 30, issue 2645; Feb 1, 1996. (Author translation)

Twister is also architecturally similar to a group of pyramids known as El Tajin found in what is now Veracruz in northern Mexico. Anthropologists don't know who constructed the pyramids but believe the present-day Huastecos peoples are descendants of the indigenous community that built them. Thus, not only is this border region savage, but it is also inherently linked to the indigenous history of Mexico.

The front of the Titty Twister does not look like a pyramid, since most of it is buried under sand. The façade is misleading; it hides the real history of the building. The Titty Twister appears in the first film more than halfway through the movie, as the RV carrying the Gecko brothers with their hostages, the Fullers, pulls up. At the center of the action is a raised platform with a *chacmool*, a "Mesoamerican human figural sculpture in a distinctive semi-reclining position, with legs flexed, chest raised at an incline, head looking toward the viewer, and holding a receptacle on its stomach"[96] dating back to the terminal classic to the early postclassic periods in Mesoamerican history. This figure is repeated in *FDT3, FDTD: The Series*, and even in *FDTD: The maze*. In her article "A Re-Examination of the Mesoamerican Chacmool," Mary Ellen Miller writes, "Set at the entrances to buildings, *chacmools* were probably repositories of human sacrificial offerings."[97] It is unclear whether the set designer knew this. However, the *chacmool* figure at the entrance of the Titty Twister serves as a warming: those who enter will be sacrificed.

[96] *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*. Ed. Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer. Vol. 2. 2nd ed. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008. p272-273.

[97] Miller, Mary Ellen Miller, 15.

Figure 12- Chacmool during the construction of the Titty Twister set for FDTD.

Reviews of the first film expressed an awareness of how danger was embedded in the northern Mexico geography and in the one building that inhabits it in this franchise, the Titty Twister. An online reviewer on Abandon Moviez[98] writes, "La ambientación también destaca en ese 'territorio sin ley' que es la frontera Estados Unidos-México, en donde cada uno hace lo que quiere y puede por sobrevivir" (The setting is also a star in that "lawless territory" that is the US-Mexico border, where everyone does whatever they want to or have to in order to survive).[99] Further, in his article "Noche y Dia/Neo-Vampiros," Sergio Gonzalez describes how the film shows northern Mexico as an "*antro*," a colloquial Mexican term for night club. In this review, the Titty Twister is an insulting stand-in for all of northern Mexico. Gonzalez argues that the film perpetuates the stereotypes of Mexico as dangerous and lawless.[100] In this sense, the Titty is presented as part of the lawless global South, a stark contrast to the first-world "civility" of the United States, right across the border. In both examples, one an online review and the other a critic's review, the landscape is legible as a lawless space where, just like in an unruly night club, violence is expected.

The danger of the bar marks the borderlands. Gelder describes how "Mexico is itself a citation" for "a fantasy space that restages, and literally contains, that country's threatening/seductive/lurid pulp aesthetic. Like the strip joint/bar to which it is synecdochally tied, it opens its doors to Americans, good or bad, and summons them inside."[101] In this analysis of the film, there is a recognition of the phenomenon, and the

[98] Abandon Moviez is a Spanish-language website from Spain that deals with horror and science fiction.
[99] Author translation. This review was posted on July 27, 2015, by user mahotsukai.
[100] Gonzalez, Sergio, *Reforma*, Apr 13, 1996, pp. 13, ProQuest Newsstand, http://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/311216565?accountid=14667.
[101] Gelder, Ken, *New Vampire Cinema*, 100.

geography is a stand-in for a threat. However, I would add that in the franchise, it is not Mexico that is the citation but rather the borderlands. The outer limits of Mexico and the United States are both threatening and seductive; they are the trap that Gelder refers to. This geography is a figurative and literal battleground for national identity. From the United States comes the fear that those who cross into the borderlands will be contaminated and/or killed through contact with the Other. From Mexico comes the fear of the borderlands as the space closest to the United States that will contaminate Mexicans. Elissa J. Rashkin defines mexicanidad as one who "encompasses identity, culture, national sovereignty, and authenticity and is often set against a perceived encroachment by an alien (European or U.S.) value system."[102] In this case, the fear is that the Titty Twister "summons" the US aliens, who will then enter Mexico and ravage it. Thus, anyone who comes in contact with the geography is at risk of dying or being turned into a monster, and those who already live there are always monstrous.

The Titty Twister also serves as a cover for a maquiladora-like machine in which the workers are vampires and the building itself becomes must bleed its victims to survive. In *FDTD*, after the vampires appear, the surviving humans—Kate, Seth, Scott, and Jake—burrow deeper into the bar as they try to escape. There they find a small storage room full of boxes and products, the refuse of the truckers who have stopped at the bar and have been killed by the vampires. Confused by the sudden vampire attack and now the strange array of products, Seth states, "My guess is that this little dive has been feeding on truckers and bikers for a very long time." In the film's attempt to draw from the reality of the NAFTA accords, the hostages unintentionally draw attention to mass production and mass exploitation on the border that had been perpetrated by the maquiladoras. Among the objects they find are mass-produced,

[102] Rashkin, Elissa, *Women Filmmakers in Mexico: The Country of Which we Dream*, 8.

disposable trinkets, including children's plastic sunglasses, toys, tequila, condoms, fireworks, and a crossbow. This scene, which is then referenced or reenacted in the television series, documents how industry, particularly maquiladoras, shape death and violence on the border. These objects are symbols of mass consumption. They are mass produced in maquiladoras along the Mexican border, where young women are employed and exploited. Further, the trinkets, alcohol, condoms, and other objects are mass-produced items that reproduce stereotypical narratives about the border regions. The Titty Twister becomes a horrific stand-in for border maquiladoras in that it also feeds itself with people crossing the border; in this case, however, it is those going north to south who are the victims.

Maquiladoras and the female body go hand in hand in narratives about the US-Mexico border, particularly in relation to Juárez, Mexico. The book *For We are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier*, by María Fernández-Kelly, was one of the first to document the effects of maquiladoras and other forms of industrialization on the border through ethnographies and auto-ethnography. Fernández-Kelly writes, "Rather than being the harbingers of 'post-industrial' society, as some would claim, multinational corporations are a symptom of industrialization revisited under the conditions of late capitalism."[103] The machines, then, have a two-fold connotation. The actual architecture of the bar is a feeding machine that disposes of bodies, cargo, and vehicles; and it is the bar that is profiting from commerce that usually is itself vampiric.

[103] Fernández Kelly, María, 73.

Figure 13. Jacob Fuller walking into a room full of trucker cargo in *FDTD*.

Figure 14. Seth Gecko and Sex Machine exploring the storage space under the Titty Twister in *FDTD: The Series*.

Figure 15. Weapons wall in the *From Dusk till Dawn* maze at Universal Studios.

The border-horror genre is composed of texts that, like what we see in the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise, explain violence and death in relation to the geography and architecture itself. In this franchise, the border geography is merged with images of post-NAFTA machines and machinations. Feeding off the disposable bodies created under this neoliberalist model, the Titty Twister survives and thrives on the border, a place already marked as lawless and dangerous. In the next section, I argue that the inherent evil the border is imbued within border horror is not just a physical/architectural manifestation but also a bodily or spiritual manifestation.

Figure 16-The Titty Twister FDTD.

The Hills: *Ahí va el diablo*

Ahí va el diablo (Here comes the Devil, 2012), a film directed by Adrián García Bogliano, is about a seemingly unremarkable middle-class Mexican family whose vacation is turned into a nightmare when the family's two children, Adolfo and Sara, go missing in the hills overnight. The Tijuana police locate the children the next morning, and after a heartfelt reunion, the family returns to their routine of work, school, and family dinners. Sol, the children's mother, notices that her children are acting strangely—barely talking, holding hands, and screaming for no reason in the middle of the night. Sol slowly uncovers the horrific events that occurred that night in the hills. Here, the Baja California hills are constructed as a living character that entices and possesses those who penetrate it. This image is accomplished through filmic techniques such as close-ups and sound editing, as well as through the dialogue. Reviews of the film have picked up on the border as character and have written extensively about its power to scare and haunt. In the film, the villain is a hungry geography that takes the children and replaces them with demons. Using wide shots, close-ups, and sound, García Bogliano centers the hills as the figures to be feared, since hidden in them is an unexplained evil force.

Director Adrián García Bogliano creates a border in response to the way it is normally represented and connected to drug trafficking. His "establishing shots" of the border include rolling, sandy hills and emptiness—not drug trades. After the children disappear, Sol and Felix, Sol's husband and the children's father, learn from a local gas-station attendant that there is an old evil in the hills that possesses people, changes them, and turns them into something evil. He tells them the story of a serial killer who years earlier killed several people with a machete and cut off the victims' fingers. This murderer, known only as "Hombre," is the first killer we are introduced to in the film. The movie opens with a blurry shot of two young women, Sandra and

Abril, in bed having sex, their moans muffled by loud heavy-metal music. As they are making love at the opening of the movie, Sandra and Abril's conversation revolves around the taboo of their relationship; it's not "normal" for two women to be together. Their spooning is interrupted with a loud knock at the door. Sandra walks downstairs and is brutally attacked by Hombre, who beats her and severs her fingertips with a machete, leaving her hand and face bloody and bruised. Abril runs down the stairs and hits Hombre on the head to stop his brutal attack, though her intervention is too late (that Hombre beats Sandra rather than stabbing her with the machete is significant, an atypical act that will be explored below).

In the dark scene, Sandra's clean gray shirt promoting a paradisiacal Tijuana rings as ominous. Is this a warning to those who inhabit, or wear, this space, or is it a label, marking Sandra's body as belonging to Tijuana, geography and body intertwined in violence and death? Sandra's death at the opening of the film makes the border visible through a remediated representation embedded with a long history of a Tijuana constructed for the benefit of tourists.

Figure 17. Sandra after being attacked by Hombre. Her fingers have been severed.

This is one of the stereotypical images of the US-Mexico border, a paradise for tourists, particularly male tourists. In the early 1900s, during American prohibition, Californians found their way across the border and into Tijuana, where they could access alcohol, gambling, and women. Filmic representations in the United States and Mexico have reinforced the "black legend" of Tijuana, which labeled it as a space of crime and perdition, where everything was for sale. The black legend of Tijuana is an extension of the black legend of Spanish colonization. The black legend began with Bartolomé de Las Casas and his book *A Short Account of the*

Destruction of the Indies, published in 1552, in which he documents the atrocities perpetrated against indigenous communities at the hands of Spaniards. The British and the Americans later utilized this legend to critique the Spanish and Mexican government. After 1848, the black legend was applied to Mexican Mestizos by Anglos, who claimed Mexicans were descendants of the barbaric Spanish and savage indigenous groups of Mexico. Scholar and essayist Humberto Félix Berumen describes how in the 1920s, Tijuana became a "city-symbol, the definition of perversion, of vice, a myth that has a great capacity to renew itself continually."[104] Film played an important role in the representation of Tijuana. The persistent image of Tijuana as a paradise for vice in US films began in part with 1915 newsreels that included racetracks and gambling.[105] In "Border Lives: Prostitute Women in Tijuana," Debra A. Castillo, María Gudelia Rangel Gómez, and Bonnie Delgado write:

> Because of the "Black Legend" of Tijuana's development as an outpost of Mexican culture and a gigantic brothel at the service of the United States, both its population growth and economic development have gone hand in hand with activities that are stigmatized or prohibited in other places, and in Tijuana the tight imbrication of (provincial) identity and (deviant) female sexuality is particularly pronounced. Tijuana's infamous international image as a meat market for the United States—in which U.S. men cross the border to purchase sex from Mexican women, while Mexican men cross the border to sell their labor in the U.S. fields—suggests that in both central Mexico and the United States there is a tendency to feminize Tijuana in a particularly marginalizing and stigmatized manner. One result of this process is a generalized conception of the city as,

[104] Berumen, Humberto Félix, *Tijuana la Horrible: entre la historia y el mito*, 18, 24.
[105] See Stephanie Fuller's article, "'The Most Notorious Sucker-Trap in the Western Hemisphere': The Tijuana Story (Leslie Kardos, 1957) and Mythologies of Tijuana in American Cinema."

> variously, a generous lady who allows a better standard of living for her inhabitants; a frivolous young woman who attracts men only to cause them to lose their souls; and, finally, a decadent and grotesque prostitute who abuses the unfortunate souls who pass through in their direction.[106]

In chapter 3, I will expand on the way the border-horror genre depends on a visual relationship between the personification of the border and the way the border is gendered. These two tropes build on each other, and this image of Sandra, our first victim in the movie, provides a perfect visual for their relationship.

The first kill in García Bogliano's *Ahí va el diablo* establishes the generic tropes that connect female body with geography, aligning border and body. Sandra's violent death can be read as a punishment for her deviant sexuality; the murder of young adults during or after sex is nothing new in the horror genre. However, Hombre's inability or unwillingness to stab her with his machete, a more traditional approach in horror, particularly slasher films, brings up a number of questions.[107] In the case of slasher horror films, Carol Clover writes that "all phallic symbols are not equal, and a hands-on knifing answers a hands-on rape in a way that a shooting, even a shooting preceded by a humiliation, does not."[108] The act of stabbing mimics the penetration act; as such, it is a visual representation of rape. These slashers penetrate their victims to establish power; the fact that the most vicious stabbings in these films are of young women further

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[106] Castillo, Rangel Gomez, and Delgado, 398.

[107] Slasher films are a subgenre of horror that came to prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The earliest traditional slasher is *Halloween* (1978), but many scholars and fans have traced the subgenre further back, to *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*, both from 1960. These films were heavily critiqued for connecting death scenes, usually through stabbing by an unknown monster, with sex, and most of the victims died during sex or shortly after their promiscuity became evident. In this subgenre, it is only the most "virginal" or non-sexualized young woman who survives until the end to temporarily defeat the monster.

[108] Clover, Carol, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, 79.

solidifies this interpretation. Sandra is not stabbed by Hombre's large machete: instead, she is beaten, and the tips of her fingers are severed. Sandra's unpenetrated body is important because it is through it that the geography-gender connection is first established. Her clean gray shirt and her body as landscape are left undisturbed by Hombre, who perhaps sees them as pale substitutes for the real landscape.

Further, the image of Sandra in *Ahí va el diablo* is reminiscent of older visualizations of the Mexican landscape in art and literature that are usually connected to mythical and real women, such as La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche. La Virgen de Guadalupe is one of the most iconic representations of both the Mexican and Chicano culture and has come to represent the "good" and virginal mother whom all women should aspire to be. This impossible standard is a part of the virgin/whore dichotomy that limits women's roles in society. If women failed to be pure and chaste—that is, if they were not (or could not) be like La Virgen, then they were automatically considered the Other, a whore. In the case of La Malinche, she has come to represent the ultimate traitor, since, as the legend goes, she betrayed the indigenous people by aiding the Spaniard conquistador Hernán Cortés in the conquest of the Aztecs.[109] According to this reading of La Malinche, the Aztecs were defeated because she translated for the Spaniards and opened the door for them to form alliances with other indigenous groups against the Aztecs. Her ultimate betrayal, though, was her giving birth to a mestizo, by which she gave up not only her culture but her body as well. For this, she has been punished in the Mexican and Mexican American consciousness by becoming the symbol of ultimate betrayal. For many,

[109] La Malinche (or Malinalli) is a historical figure in the conquest of Mexico. She was given to Cortés in 1519, and served as his interpreter for years. Though name has become synonymous with national trader, she is a figure representative of the indigenous roots of the Mexican people.

including the Mexican author Octavio Paz, La Malinche is considered "La Chingada," the fucked one, who allowed herself to be used by a man.

In his book-length essay *El laberinto de la soledad* (*The Labyrinth of Solitude*), Octavio Paz theorizes and tries to explain why and how the Mexican identity was constructed. His in-depth analysis of the Mexican psyche, however, excludes women from the identity-construction process, except in subtractive ways. In his book, Paz traces this history of conquest and colonization and explains how these events still have an effect on the Mexican consciousness. The Mexican identity, explains Paz, is intrinsically linked to this history of colonization, and most importantly, to the relationship between Hernán Cortés and Malinalli/la Malinche. Women are, in fact, relegated to being one of the three Mexican mothers—la Llorona, la Virgen, or la Malinche—a position from which they exist only as colonized bodies and are used only to explain—and be blamed for—the development of the Mexican male identity.

The "feminine," in this construction, has no additive qualities; it exists only to subtract from the "masculine." In his book, Paz explains,

> En suma, chingar es hacer violencia sobre otro … lo chingado es lo pasivo, lo inerte, y abierto, por oposición a lo que chinga, que es activo, agresivo y cerrado. El chingón es el macho, el que abre. La chingada, la hembra, la pasividad pura, inerme ante el exterior" (Thus, to fuck is to enact violence on the other … the fucked is the passive, inert, and open in contrast to the fucker who is active, aggressive, and closed. The fucker is the macho, the one who opens. The fucked is the female, pure passivity, defenseless to the exterior).[110]

[110] Paz, Octavio, 100. (Author translation)

Here, the feminine is always *la chingada*, the fucked, and to be male is to be powerful. Paz explains how la Malinche is also known as la Chingada, since through her body and her voice, she enabled the destruction of the Aztecs. She is literally and metaphorically considered "the fucked one" who allowed for the rape of her body and her culture. In Paz, there is a strong connection between la Llorona and la Malinche. Legends explain how after Hernán Cortés threatened to leave her and take their children with him, la Llorona/Malinche decided to drown her children to prevent their being taken. The merging of these two legends allows for la Malinche and la Llorona to be seen by writers like Octavio Paz as the ultimate cultural traitors. His discourse keeps these icons of femininity locked in a space and place where they cannot defend themselves against these accusations and where they are constantly "chingadas" who do not own their body and do not have agency. The constant assaults on these icons, along with the veneration of the Virgin Mary, maintain strict gender norms that permit, and sometimes encourage, the objectification, displacement, and disposability of women and their bodies. Cultural productions, primarily in Mexico, have used the image of prone, passive women to represent Mexico as fucked, Mexico as the colonized feminine.

At first glance, the image of Sandra brings to mind Antonio Ruiz's 1939 painting *El sueño de la Malinche*, in which la Malinche is portrayed laying on a bed, asleep, while a city is built on her body. Even though a sheet covers her, her feet and shoulders are visible, with an implication that she is nude under the sheet. The wall behind her is composed of brick yet painted a dark blue that is reminiscent of a dark, stormy sky. The way her body curves, particularly her hip where a church sits, serves to create hills and mountains on which the city is built. In this painting, la Malinche is passive and docile;

asleep an unaware of what is being built on her body. However, if she were to move, the Mexican nation that is built on her body would shake and crumble.

Figure 18. *El Sueño de la Malinche*, Antonio M. Ruíz (1939).

This painting rehearses the misogynist tropes of female passivity and the collapsing of land with the female body. Further, it utilizes the mestizo mythology used during and after the Mexican revolution as a banner that attempted to unite all Mexicans, arguing that all were mestizos, products of indigenous and Spanish blood. la Malinche became a symbol of the ultimate Mexican mother, the figure of the raped and conquered that gave birth to illegitimate children, Mexicans.[111] la Malinche in this painting is passive and docile; asleep and unaware of

[111] Paz famously writes, "Si la Chingada es una representación de la Madre violada, no me parece forzado asociarla a la Conquista, que fue también una violación, no solamente en el sentido histórico, sino en la carne misma de las indias. El símbolo de la entrega es doña Malinche, la amante de Cortés. Es verdad que ella se da voluntariamente al Conquistador, pero éste, apenas deja de serle útil la olvida. Doña Marina se ha convertido en una figura que representa a las indias, fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles. Y del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche. Ella encarna lo abierto, lo chingado, frente a nuestros indios, estoicos, impasibles y cerrados."

what is being built on her body, she is a passive figure. The painting participates in the Mexican mythology of la Malinche as mother through a merging of geography and body. Sandra's stillness, however, unlike that of la Malinche, is permanent, awaiting only the decomposition of the body/border that was brutally killed.

Figure 19. "W" from *El Abecedario de Juárez* collection by Alice Leora Briggs (2010)

Perhaps more visually similar to Sandra is the lithograph of the letter "W" from Alice Leora Briggs's *El Abecedario de Juárez* series that also echoes the body/geography/violence connection. Alice Leora Briggs is an artist who has been inspired by the Juárez feminicides. Further, she worked alongside Charles Bowden to illustrate the graphic novel *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*. Her *Abecedario* series is

(If the fucked is a representation of the raped Mother, it doesn't seem forced to associate it with the Conquest which was also a violation, not only in a historical sense but in the flesh of the indies. The symbol of the defeat is doña Malinche, Cortés's lover. Truth is she gives herself willingly to the conqueror, who, as soon as she stops being useful, forgets her. Doña Marina has become a figure that represents the indies, fascinated, violated, or seduced by the Spaniards. And the same way a child doesn't forgive his mother who abandons him to look for a father so too has the Mexican not been able to forgive Malinche's betrayal. She embodies the open, the fucked, opposite of our stoic and closed indigenous communities-author translation)

inspired by Hans Holbein's work, and she describes it as a "compilation of the 100+ drawings [that] will be paired with a new vocabulary rising out of Juárez, and will fix aspects of an ever evolving language that is secretive by nature. It will inevitably be a history book. Many words and meanings will have fallen out of use before the pages are bound."[112]

The "W" she creates is a stand-in for a feminized space that has been mutilated and for the violence and war that have been played out on or through female bodies. Thus, the mutilated bodies are background for drug wars and state power. The shape of the letter "W" over the fragmented female body also frames her breast and nipple. The thick black line over her eyes serves in some ways to hide her identity; thus, her body can become a stand-in for other women found dead in Juárez. However, the "W" also blinds her. The gender/geography blurring create bodies only representable and definable through their passivity.

In *Ahí va el diablo*, Sandra's shirt serves as a signpost. Sandra is the victim, but the "Tijuana" emblem across her chest foreshadows the introduction of the real villain of the film, the geogrpahy itself. After attacking Sandra and Abril, Hombre disappears. In the next scene, he is seen running up the Tijuana hills as the sun slowly begins to rise. He frantically climbs the hill, tearing off his clothes, until he finally falls to the ground, naked, and drops next to him a brown paper bag filled with fingers. Hombre begins to thrust violently into the ground, redirecting his sexual urgency from the female body to the geography itself, thereby complicating the way the female body is a stand-in for Mexico. The objectification and brutal abuse of women is evident in the film; however, through this border horror reading, we complicate hypermasculine roots of violence. Instead, Sandra as border and Hombre as unwilling attacker present a strange relationship where in the end, it is the border itself that has control over life and death.

[112] Leora Briggs, Alice, "Abecedario de Juárez," alice leora briggs, July 1, 2018.

Figure 20. Hombre fucking the hills after killing Sandra

The Tijuana of this film, then, is a combination of industrial parks, houses, and natural landscapes. As character, the voice and evil come from the natural landscape, the hills.

Meanwhile, as Sol and Felix begin to investigate what happened to their children, their first assumption, since Sara's panties were missing, was that they had been sexually assaulted. Their prime suspect is Lucio, a local man whom Felix saw driving around the hills the same day that the children disappeared. Sol and Felix find, question, and ultimately brutally murder Lucio as vengeance for what they presume he has done to their children. They return home hoping that this murder has somehow cleansed their family and that everything will return to normal. As the days go by, Felix wants to forget everything that happened. Sol, however, realizes that something is still very wrong with the children, and she concludes that they are not the real Adolfo and Sara, that the hills have taken her real children and replaced them with cold, unfeeling substitutes, à la *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. In the last act of the film, Sol decides to go to the hills in an attempt to understand what happened there to her children. She drugs the counterfeit Adolfo and Sara, ties them up, and leaves to find her real, human children in the hills.

As Sol searches the hills looking for her human children, the hills seem to come to life, sensing in Sol a threat. García Bogliano mixes rapid camera movements, flashing lights, and jarring sounds that seem to physically attack Sol. She groans in pain and clutches her head and abdomen as she stumbles around after each atmospheric blow. Alternating between close-ups, mid-shots, and extreme close-ups of the hills and Sol, García Bogliano places these two in battle with each other. In the end, Sol pushes through and finds the cave where Sara and Adolfo had disappeared weeks earlier. Once inside, she discovers the bodies of her children at the bottom of a hole. It seems that the hills have consumed these bodies and replaced them with two demons

created to cause chaos and to destroy the family.

Figure 21. Sol searching the hills for clues.

Figure 22. Sol exiting the cave after discovering her children's bodies.

Bogliano's casting of the border as a character has garnered high praise. In a review for *Cinefantastique Online*, Steve Biodrowski writes:

> Landscapes are scary. Their enormity makes us feel small. Their longevity mocks the brevity of our existence, reminding us that they were around before our birth and will continue after our death. They represent natural forces beyond our control, that shape our lives in ways we can barely understand, and if you stare at them long enough, you might start to imagine that these forces are not merely natural but supernatural—possibly incomprehensible and potentially malevolent…. Bogliano's inability or refusal to formulate the disparate elements into a rational whole leaves the film itself feeling a bit like an incomprehensible artifact—a metaphoric crevasse in the intimidating landscape the film depicts so unnervingly.[113]

Bogliano's decision to set this horror film on the US-Mexico border without referencing the recurring tropes around the dangers of migration, immigration, and drug cartels responds directly to the typecasting of the US-Mexico border in cultural productions that has for so long maintained the static equation "border = violent death." Here the theoretical work of Mary Pat Brady can help us understand the recasting of Tijuana and the gendering/genre-ing of space. For Brady, the production of space is about the physical and societal infrastructure as well as the "processes that shape how these places are understood, envisioned, defined, and variously experienced."[114] In *Ahí va el diablo*, the landscape is performing not as a static geography of death but as an active agent.

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[113] "Here Comes the Devil Review", January 30, 2014. npg.
[114] Brady, Mary Pat, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space*, 7.

Figure 23. One of the opening shots featuring shadows over the hills.

The geography—in this case Tijuana, Baja California—is a key character; García Bogliano turns her/him/it into the killer, the lead role in any horror film, as a way to respond to the constant recasting of the space as a *narco* tomb. Death, or murder by border, is not tied to drug trade but to something older. The sexualized bodies of the borderland inhabitants become one with the landscapes; the mixing of sand, rock, and flesh is what produces the most fear, because through this union, the boundaries between normative sexualities are blurred. Characters like Hombre and his victim Sandra are strangely bound by their love/passion/lust for the villainous landscape.

Another generic trope of films or representations of the border rely on long shots of the empty desert and hills, a space devoid of humans and humanity. Chris Alexander describes the Tijuana hills in the film as adding "much to the fabric of the film, with simple, organic, natural imagery like the stoney [*sic*] cavernous hills that hide the

movie's wrenching secret, terrifying in their bleakness."[115] In their essay "Beyond Surveillance and Moonscapes: An Alternative Imaginary of the US-Mexico Border Wall," anthropologists Margaret E. Dorsey and Miguel Diaz-Barriga critique the repetitive images used in the media to represent the US-Mexico border, which often exclude everyday life and normal interactions of border inhabitants. They write, "Media attention on the US-Mexico border wall primarily focuses on the border as a desolate site of federal surveillance and often neglects the ways that border residents conceptualize and live its meanings and possibilities."[116] The trope of the border as desolate and dead has continued for decades, and these repetitive images used in the media to represent the border often exclude everyday life and normal interactions of border inhabitants. When people are included, the narrative revolves around their death.

[115] Alexander, Chris, "Here Comes the Devil Movie Review", npg.
[116] Dorsey, Margaret, and Miguel Diaz-Barriga, 130.

Figure 24. Different angles of the geography. Top, a phallic hill; Bottom, the other a vaginal entrance to the cave.

Framing the hills with the same shots and accompanying music that are usually reserved for horror-movie villains who hunt their prey, García Bogliano directly signals the way the geography itself is deadly and, if we stick to horror-movie conventions, invincible. In border horror cultural productions, the borderlands geography—its deserts, hills, caves, and cities—is an active participant. As political and cultural attention has turned toward new immigrant crossing areas such as Arizona, this extends to areas beyond Texas and California, as we will see in the next section.

The Desert: *Feeding Ground*

The graphic novel *Feeding Ground* uses the deaths caused by the US Border Patrol's Prevention through Deterrence strategy as a launching pad from which to create a border landscape not too dissimilar from the real one, except for the addition of werewolves. Written by Jonathan "Swifty" Lang, Michael Lapinski, and Chris Mangun, *Feeding Ground* is set on the Arizona-Sonora border. The border is cast as a violent, blood-hungry geography, one that literally bleeds those who try to cross it. In this case, the violence of border crossing and immigrant deaths are layered with a werewolf mythology, one in which the border is a key factor in propagating monstrousness. The novel follows the lives of the Busqueda family, who struggle to survive in Sonora after the famine that was created in their town by the agribusiness giant Blackwell. Diego, the patriarch of the family, is forced to become a coyote (one who helps immigrants cross the border into the United States) to support his wife, Bea, his son, Miguel, his daughter, Flaca, and his father.

The title and cover art for this graphic novel provide a helpful synopsis of the story before we even open the book. Though the graphic novel clearly attempts to address the causes of deaths on the border, particularly those caused by Prevention through Deterrence, border militarization, and neoliberalism, it also reinforces the trope that violence on the US-Mexico border is intrinsically linked to the landscape itself. With the title, *Feeding Ground*, the novel frames this conversation on institutional violence within one of nature and biology, taking the meaning of "feeding ground" as "a place where animals feed naturally."[117] Thus, whoever dies on or because of the border is part of a natural feeding cycle, not a victim. In the end, this

[117] Park, Chris, and Michael Allaby. "feeding ground." In *A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation*.: Oxford University Press.

graphic novel, when read within a border-horror genre, falls short and does not push beyond the problematic image that places death at the hands of the geography itself.

The cover of the first issue in the six-issue series foments this narrative and further pushes it into dangerous territory. On the cover, the ground itself, the desert and hills, turn into a wolf, its upturned jaws wide as though to feed as three immigrants cross its open maw.[118] In this stark landscape, it is the Other that Luis Alberto Urrea describes in the foreword to the graphic novel that is threatening and undefeatable.

Figure 25. Cover illustrations for issues 1, 2, and 3. Cover for issue 1 also serves as the cover for hardcopy compilation.

[118] Covers for the series and hardcover were illustrated by Michael Lapinski, a graphic designer, art director, animation designer, and comic book artist who has worked on *Sesame Street* and *Sponge Bob Square Pants*.

Figure 26. Cover illustrations for *Feeding Ground* issues 4, 5, and 6.

The geography is then merged with the built landscape to maximize the killing and suffering. Similar to the Titty Twister in the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise, *Feeding Ground* also incorporates a maquiladora as a site where certain bodies are produced. In this case, the Blackwell industries produce werewolves rather than vampire bodies that work at the strip club, feeding off bikers and truckers. On the US side of the border stands Blackwell's house. While Diego is gone, Bea, Miguel, and Flaca are attacked by a local narco, who attempts to rape Bea. To stop this attack, Miguel shoots and kills the narco, forcing the family to flee. Before the family crosses the border, Flaca is bitten by a stray dog. During their border crossing, Flaca becomes increasingly erratic, sickly, and violent; Flaca has "desert sick."[119] Adding to the natural dangers of the border, such as the heat and lack of water, the border in the graphic novel is filled

[119] *Feeding Ground*, 78.

with immigrants-turned-werewolves who work for Blackwell's multinational corporation, which also fronts as a werewolf breeding ground.

Blackwell's werewolves consume freely along the border, a top predator in this feeding ground. Most interestingly, these werewolves are all undocumented men who attempted to cross the border and were intercepted by Blackwell's army. In this sense, then, the immigrant falls within two categories: the werewolf, a vicious animal unable to control his drive to feed on his own people; and a nuisance for the Border Patrol, which labels them simply "crossers." Through the narrative, we learn that Blackwell preys on immigrants crossing the border, particularly those who are lost and in need of help. His security team finds these dying men and takes them to Blackwell's factory, where they are either turned into werewolves or fed to these monsters. In her discussion of Prevention through Deterrence and bare life on the border, Roxanne Doty explains how "the raw physicality of some natural environments have an inherent power which can be put to use and can function to mask the workings of social and political power."[120] In this fictional account of border violence we see the geography used by both Blackwell (a multinational corporation) and the government (Border Patrol) to control who dies and where.

In an early scene of the graphic novel, undocumented immigrants crossing the border with the help of Diego Busqueda are lost and without water. They are stopped by men in full tactical gear who offer to help them and provide water if they go with them to Blackwell's factory. Busqueda warns the immigrants against it, but the men don't see any other choice, since their options are limited to dying on the border or being arrested by

[120] Doty, Roxanne, 607.

Border Patrol. These immigrants are then turned into werewolves. This encounter highlights the tension between these two men, Blackwell and Busqueda. Busqueda is described as a good man who would do anything to help his family and who struggles with the guilt of knowing he cannot save everyone who crosses the desert with him. Blackwell is a wealthy descendant of Spaniards who has built a corporation that feeds off human life and desperation. Busqueda says Blackwell is not *digno* (worthy), and Blackwell critiques Busqueda for being old-fashioned and not working to leave poverty behind. Caught between these two figures is Flaca, Busqueda's young daughter, whose body is slowly changing into something monstrous. She is, we learn, becoming a werewolf.

As the family continues their journey across the desert, Blackwell's men intercept them and take Flaca. Her body is unique; she is the only woman who can physically turn into a werewolf without dying. Flaca, then, becomes the key to the future of the werewolf population. In the novel, we learn that for decades, Blackwell has picked up border crossers to turn them into werewolves or into food for his creations. The US Border Patrol knows that he is doing this but don't stop him because of his wealth and because they see him as aiding in the fight against undocumented immigration. One of them states, "Blackwell pickin' up a couple of crossers now and then certainly didn't hurt our stats too much, either."[121] Here we see a maquiladora on the US side of the border, in Arizona. This machine thrives off people of color who have been forced to relocate because of the economic conditions in Mexico, Central, and South America. The relationship between policing (Border Patrol) and labor (Blackwell) grows toxic as Blackwell's werewolves declare war on the police and attack a local police station. The theory behind prevention through deterrence is that if certain highly used crossing points along the border were

[121] *Feeding Ground*, 76.

more heavily policed, then immigrants would not try to cross. However, by cutting access to safer and more well-known paths, the US government pushed immigrants to cross using unsafe routes, leading to a rise in deaths. Colibrí Center for Human Rights reports that between 1998 and 2013, an estimated 6,330 people died while attempting to cross the border.[122]

Figure 27. Diego and other border crossers discussing joining Blackwell's group.

[122] Colibrí Center for Human Rights, "Fact Sheet," 2015.

Figure 28. Soldiers prepare to attack Blackwell's compound.

Death and victimization are not the exclusive fates awaiting those who come under the control of the factory in *Feeding Ground*. Although the werewolves, particularly young Flaca, are changed by the border machine, they are not killed by it. In this sense, the factory provides a more nuanced representation of the border than do similar portrayals in other border horror texts, such as *From Dusk till Dawn*.

Figure 29. Diego looking for water.

The border, personified, speaks: "Across my spine, the soles of men kindled an ache for flesh / I have stripped sandals and broke bone from boot / smashed wagon wheels and lapped blood from the links of chains / sucked marrow from the threads of tanks and I welcome every offering / yet I am still thirsty."[123] There is no guilt or regret, just an acknowledgment of a never-ending hunger, one that feeds on anyone caught there.

[123] 49.

The border takes indiscriminately, and the desert become a great equalizer. We must note, however, that in this equation, the victims are men; women who are forced to cross the border do not seem to be a part of the landscape's menu. This can be read in multiple ways. Perhaps the authors mean men as the universal all-inclusive men, perhaps they didn't think of the growing number of women who cross the border, or perhaps they are influenced by Luis Alberto Urrea's *Devil's Highway and other real-life stories*. However, I want to propose another reading.

As the graphic novel progresses, we learn that only men can turn into werewolves, since the transformation would kill women. However, Flaca's youth and innocence—and her mestiza identity—make her unique, strong enough to survive the transformation and to become Blackwell's heir. At the end of the graphic novel, Busqueda, Flaca's human father, finds himself battling Blackwell, Flaca's progenitor, over Flaca's soul. Diego wants her to remain "human," his "little girl." Blackwell wants her to set him free from the werewolf curse that has kept him alive since his participation in the Spanish colonization of Mexico. Flaca, as werewolf, kills them both, emerging from the Blackwell compound reborn.

Here I want to highlight the clear relationship between the female body and the geography. In the last page of the graphic novel, the speech bubbles for the border (black squares) merge with Flaca's round and white bubble. One finishes the other's sentences, merging into a single voice, both wolf and human. Just as in the cover of the first comic, the last page of the series centers the voice and violence of the geography itself. Once turned into a werewolf, Flaca becomes part of the natural environment, part of the feeding ground where consumption of bodies is normal. Thereby, the border patrol and Blackwell industries along the border can come and go while the violence remains.

Figure 30. Flaca walking away from the impending war between Blackwell and the US military.

Conclusion

Geography plays a key role in representations of death and violence set along the US-Mexico border since the space (the geography of the border itself) becomes coded as deviant, dangerous,

and inherently deadly. In *From Dusk till Dawn*, the Titty Twister is a reflection of the maquiladora-like predation of labor along the border. The Baja California hills in *Ahí va el diablo* is a breeding ground for demons, serial killers, and other dark entities. Finally, in *Feeding Ground*, the border is a space where animals feed off each other, the largest predator being the geography, which kills and consumes the blood of those who inhabit it. These examples show how the border in cultural productions is coded as a living agent capable of murder. The legal, economic, and governmental causes for death and violence along the US-Mexico border are rarely addressed, thereby creating a discourse that places the cause of death exclusively on the geography itself. Thus, there is no one to blame and nothing that needs to be changed to stop these deaths.

Chapter 3-Body

The only cheap thing in Mexico is flesh, human bodies you can fornicate with or work to death.[124]

—Charles Bowden

This chapter looks at the way the border-horror genre conflates the female body with the border geography. Through textual analysis of the vampireire Santanico Pandemonium in the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise[125] and the demon Sara in *Ahí va el diablo*,[126] I argue that the gendered body, particularly Mexican women, are constructed as monstrous Others that need to be executed, contained, or deported. I analyze the image of brown women in representation of death and violence set along to US-Mexico border after the implementation of NAFTA. Here I will expand on the ways the border-horror genre depends on a visual relationship between the personification of the border and the way the border is gendered. Finally, this chapter analyzes how representations of familial structures in border horror are constantly shown as troubled or in danger from unruly or monstrous women.

The monstrous brown body is a nuanced social-construct reflection of post NAFTA borderlands in border horror. In chapter 2, I showed one of the key tropes of border horror, the personification of the border geography. In this chapter, I argue that this personification is usually connected to the gendered body. Thus, in border horror,

[124] Bowden, Charles, "While you were sleeping", 48.
[125] Throughout the franchise, Santanico has been a pivotal figure, credited as the "queen" or "leader" of the vampires who inhabit the Titty Twister bar.
[126] Sol and Felix's young daughter is the most recognizable site of monstrousness since it is through her body that Sol discovers the existence of demons in the Tijuana hills.

violence and death aren't blamed on a neutral border but on a feminine border, one whose violent tendencies are connected to her gender and must therefore be punished. Women's bodies are conflated with geography in border horror texts. This leads to construction of border women as monstrous. Their monstrousness is created primarily by their connection to the monstrous space.

The female body in border horror is a complex reflection of gender and sexuality on the borderlands post NAFTA. As such, monstrousness must not be read in a simplistically binary way, as either positive or negative. Arguing for a positive representation of the US-Mexico border and analyzing texts in search of such a one-dimensional characterization only adds to the violence perpetuated on the space and the people who live there. Such efforts flatten reality and erase the complex nuances of life. Rather, we must acknowledge that violence and death do occur in this space. This does not negate the fact that the US-Mexico border is a social construct created through repetitions of the same tropes, narratives, and aesthetics. The conflation of body and geography reinforces and excuses the violence that women face along the border. Because women, or female bodies, are the irrational entities behind the chaos and violence along the border, their real death and punishment is a necessity to return a sense of order.

The scope of this chapter allows the reader to understand how the gendering of geography and the female embodiment of geography are key tropes in border horror. In this analysis, I hope to push beyond positive/negative, accurate/inaccurate representations of women along the US-Mexico border to representations inspired by real violence. And in a twisted discursive cycle, these representations, particularly those that conflate the female body with the border geography, are used to rationalize violence against women. In these representations, women are coded as the cause for familial disruptions and thus must be punished and retrained

so that socially acceptable familial structures can be restored. I write about the aesthetics of the dead or victimized female body in the border-horror genre and how this trope is used to explain away real violence against women.

Images of the abused female body are used in journalistic coverage of the US-Mexico border to show political relations between the United States and Mexico. These bodies in border horror are the symbols used to explain the decay of NAFTA and globalization more broadly. For example, in his article "While you Were Sleeping," journalist Charles Bowden writes, "The photographs of people who are (still) alive are in many ways more haunting than those of corpses; images of living people are images of people who are not yet dead."[127] Here Bowden blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead by making the living less important and almost shadows of the dead; we don't really think about them except to acknowledge their imminent death. However, these images are also "haunting." They are specters not of what has passed but of what will pass. In this space, the (still) living cannot prevent their own deaths. Bowden showcases Juárez and, in some ways, the entire border as death itself, bound to always be violent and "lawless," with corpses and future corpses littering the streets. His caveat that these are representations of people who are "(still) alive" makes it even worse, because the implication is that these are victims of future violence and deaths. In his article, Bowden equates the photographs of the living and the dead with reality. They are, according to Bowden, documents of what is really going on in the border space.

Rosa Linda Fregoso defines feminicide, the murder of women and girls, as an act based on "gender power structure," stating that it is "gender-based violence that is both public and private, implicating both the state (directly or indirectly) and individual perpetrators (private

[127] Bowden, Charles, 424.

or state actors); it thus encompasses systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence."[128] Feminicides, then, are a form of violence enacted on gendered bodies. Through violence, the state tries to cripple people's capacity to resist. Specifically, violence against women is a form of state-sanctioned terrorism and a tool of political repression.

For scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba the plethora of cultural productions about gendered violence along the border means that living women are invisible and can be seen only through their deaths, adding that they are known "because they are dead, because they are parts of this sensational, unresolved heinous crime wave that has taken the public by storm and has suddenly put this border on the radar of every human rights organization in the known universe."[129] Thus, if the general public knows about the women of Juárez, or about the border, only through these sensational images and stories, then it makes sense that violence and death are the key words used to describe it. Violent death and corpses become the establishing shots of the border. Women are simultaneously hyper-visible (as corpses) and invisible, disappearing under a cloud of violence and gore.

In the rest of the chapter, I will explore how the female body merges with the border geography, thereby creating an entity that is constantly villainized and victimized in cultural productions about the border. To further highlight the way horror tropes are used and adapted in border-horror genre texts, I divide this discussion into two main sections. First, I look at the way overly sexualized brown bodies are used as cultural bridges through a close reading of the vampire Santanico Pandemonium. Then I focus on discourses of home and family in demonic figures through a closer look at Sara. In this chapter, I look at the gendered monster and how

[128] Fregoso, Rosa Linda, and Cynthia L. Bejarano, 5.
[129] Gaspar de Alba, Alicia, and Georgina Guzmán, 4.

puberty and miscegenation destroy normative familial structures and temporarily create new homes.

Defining Monstrousness

Monstrousness in border horror is a way to speak of dangerous feminine desires that threaten familial structures. Understanding the construction of this monstrous feminine can lead to a more fluid way to consider horror, both on film and off, while not forgetting its cultural, national, and historical contexts.

In a patriarchal society, sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is one of the greatest and most feared taboos. Sex and death are integral to the horror film genre because "sexual behavior and its ultimate purpose, children, are quite clearly the antithesis of death. If one is to examine death, then one must examine sex."[130] They are linked through the female body because women, through childbirth, are able to create life, while the monstrous female, or the uncontrollable female sexuality, is the killer of masculinity. Horror, then, is constantly concerned with a fear of women's bodies and sexuality that can "castrate" and threaten patriarchal structures. Worland writes that the monster, like the vampire, is "a liminal figure, an uncertain amalgam or transitional form between living and dead; human and animal; male and female."[131] The vampires in the films, as well as the space itself, are monstrous, liminal bodies that threaten social order. The Mexican vampires in the films inhabit a liminal space between the United States and Mexico. Santanico is not a traditional horror-film vampire; her mythology is a combination of traditional horror tropes and with pan-indigenous history. For the

[130] Hogan, Godfrey, *Dark Romance: Sexuality in the Horror Film*, xii.
[131] Worland, Rick, 9.

narrative, Santanico serves as a both a bridge and a prisoner. Her body, regardless of the powers assigned to it, is bound permanently to the border.

If we change the way the monstrous is read, we can change the paradigm so the monstrous can speak to feminine desires and diverse definitions of home. To understand this distinction further, we must focus on how the monstrous feminine and female sexuality have been theorized by horror studies scholar Barbara Creed and border studies scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. Creed defines the monstrous as a framework with which to understand cultural productions and to speak to the positioning of women within society. In her article "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" (1986) and her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), Barbara Creed explores the theory of the monstrous-feminine and its applicability for an understanding of images of women in horror films. In the article, Creed explains that "all human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject."[132] Creed describes three mothers: the archaic mother, the phallic woman, and the castrated body, which in their different forms in horror films add to the definition of the monstrous-feminine. She adds that "the feminine is not per se a monstrous sign; rather, it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse which reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific."[133] Thus, Creed claims, women are monstrous only as constructed by patriarchy and that an exploration of their monstrousness tells us more about masculinity and male identity than it does about women and their sexuality. The monstrous figures in *FDTD*, *Ahí va el diablo*, and *Feeding Ground* can reflect the patriarchal fear of brown women by the nation-state. In border horror, this gendered monstrousness is represented by

[132] Creed, Barbara, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 251.
[133] Creed, Barbara, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", 70.

highlighting how women are connected to or in control of the geography. Thus, the women must be punished or killed so the landscape can once again be a blank canvas, a resource available for men to mold to their choosing.

Of course, there is another side to the way the monstrous figure in border horror can be understood. The complexity of the monstrous figure in border horror creates a dystopic space where non-normative sexuality can exist. A Woman's constructed monstrosity is related to her sexuality, especially when that sexuality steps outside the borders of acceptable gender roles. Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "To be monstrous is to be inhuman, not-human. A woman becomes monstrous when her lover/husband rejects her…. If a Chicana accepts and takes up her assigned gender role she is normal and good, if she does not she is abnormal and evil, i.e. monstrous."[134] Chicanas are constructed as monstrous only when they step outside of their role as daughter, wife, or mother. Once these boundaries are broken, she is now the abject, too dangerous to the established societal boundaries. She must then be excluded or re-trained to once again fit the role assigned to her. The monstrous figure in border horror, then, is dangerous but also empowering, since it is through this monstrosity that brown women can claim agency.

Representations of Latinas are outside whiteness and also outside normative views of femininity for white women. In regard to representations of Latinas in US popular culture, Isabel Molina-Guzmán argues that they are coded both as desirable and consumable. To fall within normative standards, they must police themselves and discipline their body. Molina-Guzman adds, "Latinas embody the twenty-first-century project of discipline, productivity, and docility through the ways in which class, race,

[134] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 19.

ethnicity, and gender intersect in media discourses about them."[135] Thus, the representation of Latinas must fit within a specific standard in order to be consumable by the American audience. This privileges an approach to gender and sexuality that is heteronormative and universal. The monstrous Latina we see in border horror exists as a marker of unwanted femininity in need of control. As a liminal figure, she is a danger to familial structures and to the nation itself.

In this chapter, I explore how the image of the vampire and the demon are used to explain and justify violence against women of color on the borderlands. In the texts analyzed here, Santanico, the vampire, and Sara, the demon, are monstrous brown women who threaten patriarchal heteronormative familial structures simply by existing on the border. The presence of these monstrous figures on the already liminal border presents a stage on which bodies and geographies become one, together the enemy of the nation-state.

Santanico Pandemonium, The Vampire

Salma shows some leg, which is good. Very good. But it's tough to get wood over that when her head transforms into something akin to Roseanne sans make-up.[136]

—Chris Perry

The second trope in border horror, the conflation of the female body with the geography, is represented in the franchise by turning Santanico Pandemonium into a monstrous figure whose powers are bound to the Titty Twister and the borderlands space. She is presented as the matriarch, ruler of the vampires, yet she is unable to leave the Titty Twister. Thus, her abilities are limited and constrained. In chapter 1, we saw the horror of the border geography in the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise by focusing on the Titty Twister and its relationship to machines,

[135] Molina-Guzmán, Isabel, *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media*, 13.
[136] efilmcritic.com; by Chris Parry; posted 8/11/99

particularly the maquiladora. In this section, I extend that analysis to the body of Santanico, who serves as a bridge between genres (westerns and horror) and geographies (United States and Mexico). Thus, the brown female body is coded as the physical connection between cultures. As such, she poses a threat that by connecting civilized (United States/human) with savage (Mexico/vampires) must be contained or terminated to maintain a civil society.

One of the reasons I focus on the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise is that it creates a new monster, one that suffuses the classic horror monster, the vampire, with Mexican mythology and indigenous motifs. The monster here is embodied by Mexican women rather than white males. Through the conflation of the female body with the US-Mexico border geography, Santanico provides a new way of understanding the monstrous, and she displays how this conflation leads to representational violence. In the *FDTD* franchise, the character of Santanico Pandemonium (played first by Salma Hayek, then by Ara Celi, and finally by Eiza Gonzalez) plays the crucial role, the bridge between reality and mayhem, human monsters, and supernatural monsters. Her body becomes the site of beauty and ultimate temptation while also being the source of fear and death. Here I am reading these films and television show as border horror texts that negotiate the representation of a monstrous sexuality through the establishment of a matriarchy linked to a pan-indigenous, pre-conquest history.

Santanico Pandemonium is first introduced halfway through *FDTD*. In an interview for the documentary *Full Tilt Boogie*, Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino stated that their intent in dividing the movie in two—the first half an action/crime film and the second a vampire story—was to allow the characters to be fully developed.

Rodriguez states that because in horror films there is insufficient time for viewers to identify with the characters, when the killing begins, the audience remains disconnected. However, through this hybrid format, the murderous brothers and the traveling family whom they kidnap are fully developed characters that elicit a real response from the audience when the vampires attack and kill them.

What does it mean that they have to cross the physical border to enter this "savage" space, where all things are allowed and where the indigenous identity, embodied by Santanico and the pyramid, are threatening? Critics picked up on this genre divide in the film, and one article in particular describes the movie is "a western Reservoir Dogs/Pulp Fiction and maintains a level of wonderfully disgusting nasty humor until it crosses the border and becomes just another monster mash."[137] Thus, once the borders (physical and generic) are crossed, the plot becomes confusing and the movie becomes a mash up of ideas and violence. Another reviewer writes, "Pero el cruce de la frontera es el cruce entre dos peliculas diferentes, con el brevisimo papel de Salma Hayek, como la bailarina Santanico Pandemonium, vuelta el puente entre ambos mundos" (But the border crossing is a crossing between two different films with Salma Hayek's brief role as the dancer Santanico Pandemonium, as the bridge between both worlds).[138] In this review, Santanico is the bridge between these two genres; through her body, the western becomes a dangerous, horrific film, since she is the first to transform. The seductive dance with which she first announces herself in the film devolves into a monstrous attack on the group. If Rodriguez is correct in his assumption that horror films don't allow for identification because of their rushed story line, then the introduction of Santanico Pandemonium so late in the film *From*

[137] Johnson, Malcolm, "Tarantino, Hollywood's Mr.Cool, Seeing Dark Days in 'Dusk till Dawn'", Hartford Courant. January 19, 1996.
[138] Arias Avaca, Carlos, "Juego Doble 'Del Crepusculo al Amanecer'", *Reforma*. June 14, 1996. 2. (author translation).

Dusk till Dawn disconnects the audience from any possible connection with this Mexican character. Santanico, then, serves not only as a generic and physical bridge for the franchise but also as a character that, regardless of how much backstory is provided in the franchise, is constantly connected to the dangers and vices in the Titty Twister.

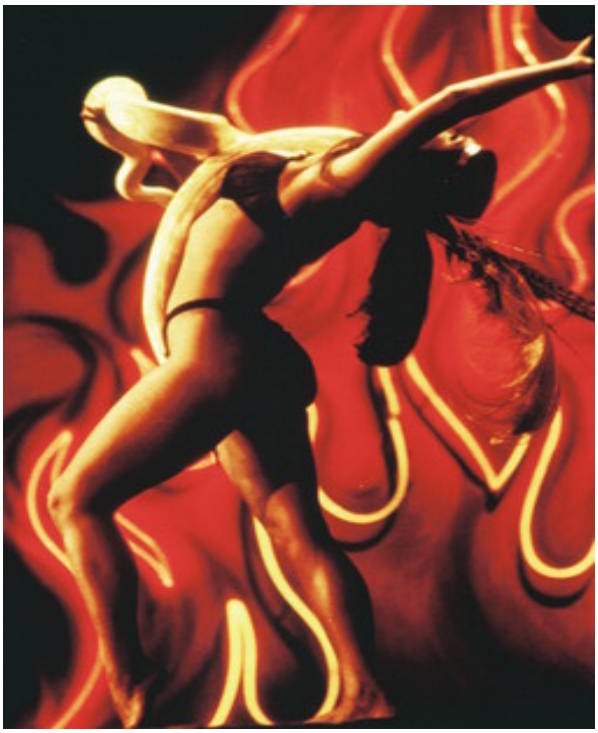

Figure 31. Salma Hayek as Santanico Pandemonium in *From Dusk till Dawn* (1996).

The history of Santanico Pandemonium is influenced by numerous texts. The term "pandemonium" itself was coined by John Milton in his *Paradise Lost* as the name for the capital of hell, where all the demons and chaos live. If Pandemonium is where all demons reside, does that mean that Santanico herself is hell? The mexicana body is hell, dangerous and unpredictable, a threat to the existing social boundaries that progress and industrialization so desperately need. Santanico's name marks her as forever connected to an evil space, in this case the US-Mexico borderlands. The name Santanico is borrowed from the 1975 Mexican nunsploitation movie

Satanico Pandemonium-La Sexorcista.[139] This film, directed by Gilberto Martínez Solares and starring Enrique Rocha and Cecilia Pezet, is about young Sor Maria (Pezet), the purest of the nuns living in the convent, who after encountering Beelzebub (Rocha) slowly succumbs to the temptations he sets in front of her. Nunsploitation films like *Satanico Pandemonium-La Sexorcista* are usually set in isolated, fortress-like convents where the usually all-female cast turns to lesbianism and other forms of "perversity." These films are very much about sexual suppression and oppression within the Catholic church. The films are mostly set during the inquisition, and most are Italian. By connecting Satanico in the nunsploitation genre to Santanico in border horror, we can begin to trace the layered histories of imperial and religious colonizations as they play out on the bodies of Mexican and Mexican American women.

Satanico's journey across the border is fraught with interesting and perplexing checkpoints that allow us the opportunity to talk about the way women's bodies and sexual identities are used to express these national fears of invasion, impurity, and the Other. In his book *Mexploitation Cinema: A Critical History Of Mexican Vampire, Wrestler, Ape-man and Similar Films, 1957-1977*, Doyle Greene describes the film industry in Mexico during this time as one that fomented the national political ideal of "ahistorical nationalism" that "viewed the past as an obsolete liability and envisioned the future through the vague and idealized possibilities of modern progress."[140] This debate—or rather this push for progress at the expense of national history—was played out, Greene argues, in the numerous exploitation films that were released during this period. These movies placed science in conversation with religion (particularly

[139] *Satanico* was one of the first and only nunsploitation movies during the late 60s to mid-70s Mexico (along with the more well-received and well-known movie *Alucarda*). *Satanico* has received very little academic or critical attention, but it has inspired contemporary filmmakers, musicians, and artists like Tarantino and Rodriguez and their film *FDTD.*
[140] Greene, Doyle, 5.

Catholicism, the predominant religion in the country) and indigenous mythologies as a way to deal with the social, cultura,l and ideological changes that modernization and industrialization were presenting.

Satanico Pandemonium-La Sexorcista ends with Sor Maria ultimately dying of the plague; the perversions, death, and sex she had experienced were just hallucinations caused by her high fever. However, there is another twist. After her death, Beelzebub walks out of the convent, thereby leaving the audience to assume that Sor Maria's soul is now in hell. This ambiguous ending is foreshadowed earlier in the film when, after being confronted by the mother superior of the convent, Sor Maria claims that it is impossible for her to repent for her actions and her soul cannot be saved from its hellish future. "For me inferno does not exist because I am the inferno," she says, adding, "I will torture those that have been blessed and throw them with me to the shadows of hell."

Sor Maria and Satanico Pandemonium are simultaneously bodies and places. The conflation of the female body with a hellish inferno is repeated in *From Dusk till Dawn*, where Santanico Pandemonium is now a vampire, descendant of a long line of vampires, trapped in the Titty Twister. The impurities that exist in these women, tearing to get out, to be exorcised, threaten a patriarchal society that, in the case of Mexico, has attempted to bury yet glorify its indigenous past as well as distance itself from the Spanish through an adoption of a "modern" identity no longer solely tied to Catholicism. As Satanico crosses the border, the hell she embodies no longer is just situated in a Catholic belief of god and the devil but is also centered around the pan-indigenous mythologies in the film. Tamao Nakahara writes, "Nunsploitation films display the nuns as the primitive within our modern culture. They are represented as caged tribeswomen who follow own rules, power structures, and rituals, power structures, and rituals that are not

always comprehensible to 'logical Western man.'"[141] The same is true for the pan-indigenous Other that Rodriguez created in his movie. The character of Santanico could be read as a stand-in for an indigenous Eve, a serpent-like temptress who turns people into monsters. Her body and the border (particularly the Titty Twister where she is imprisoned) become one all-consuming hell .

Figure 32. Lobby card for *Satanico Pandemonium: La Sexorcista* (1975).

I wanted to end with this image of Sor Maria whose hands previously covered in the blood of her victims are now burning, as if consumed by an acid. Her pain reinforcing the representation of the impure female body we see in both films. Her sexual desire and desperate need for a way to express her sexual and sensual identity is denied, punished not only by the structures that surround her (the convent, the state, the appropriation of indigenous narratives in B movies) but it has become internalized, she is burning from the inside out, consumed by narratives of "the bad woman" that have taught her to fear and hate her desires. Consumed by

[141] Nakahara, Tamao, "Barred Nuns: Italian Nunsploitation Films", 133.

these dual fires Satanico (the nun and the Aztec vampire we see in *From Dusk till Dawn*) must be killed to restore a semblance of societal normalcy in both films.

Santanico Pandemonium as bridge is a repetitive reference in reviews of the film. For example, Roger Ebert writes, "For about an hour, we've been following the story of two mad-dog killers and their victims, and then suddenly a stripper in a Mexican bar turns into a vampire, and off we go."[142] Here, Santanico is an unnamed "stripper" who serves as the match strike for the narrative. In his review, Ebert describes the first half of the film as cohesive and captivating and the second half—the one introduced by the stripper vampire—as a pastiche of B-movie tropes. In his review for the Mexican newspaper *Reforma*, Carlos Arias Avaca writes,

> Pero el cruce de la frontera es el cruce entre dos peliculas diferentes, con el brevisimo papel de Salma Hayek, como la bailarina Satanico Pandemonium, vuelta el puente entre ambos mundos (The border crossing is the junction between two different movies with the brief roll of Salma Hayek as the dancer Santanico Pandemonium as the bridge between two worlds).[143]

Again, Santanico serves as the bridge between genres, but here Arias Avaca labels her as a bridge "entre ambos mundos" or "between both worlds." In these reviews, we see a critique of the generic shifts of the film, from Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* aesthetics to Robert Rodriguez's B-movie tropes. It is not just Santanico who merges these two genres, it is also the Titty Twister itself. When they first arrive, the Fuller family and the Gecko brothers are greeted by loud music, rowdy fights, and a large neon sign of a topless woman. Welcoming them in the first film is

[142] Ebert, Roger, "It's gore galore in strange action/vampire flick 'Dusk'", *Denver Post*, January 19, 1996, 4G.
[143] Arias Avaca,, Carlos, "Juega doble 'del crepusculo al amanecer'", npg. (Author translation)

Cheech Marin, who plays Chet Pussy, the doorman of the Titty Twister, who assails them with a colorful description of the menu items available for cheap consumption:

Figure 33. Chet Pussy (Cheech Marin) inviting people into the Titty Twister (1996).

> Pussy, pussy, pussy! All pussy must go. At the Titty Twister we're slashing pussy in half! This is a pussy blow out! Make us an offer on our vast selection of pussy! We got white pussy, black pussy, Spanish pussy, yellow pussy, hot pussy, cold pussy, wet pussy, tight pussy, big pussy, bloody pussy, fat pussy, hairy pussy, smelly pussy, velvet pussy, silk pussy, Naugahyde pussy, snappin' pussy, horse pussy, dog pussy, mule pussy, fake pussy! If we don't have it, you don't want it! Attention, pussy shoppers! Take advantage of our penny pussy sale. If you buy one piece of pussy at the regular price … you'll get

another piece of pussy of equal or lesser value for only a penny. Try and beat pussy for a penny! If you can find cheaper pussy anywhere, fuck it!

In his analysis of the film, Frederick Luis Aldama describes how Cheech Marin's pussy performance fits in with "the Titty Twister's own baroque interior architecture that is appealing yet at the same time not exactly beautiful; the slithering half-naked beautiful bodies of the women are set against a sea of brutish, macho-animalistic males—of course, even this is done with great playfulness."[144] The "playfulness" Aldama points to is a complexity fraught with sexism and a troubling consumption (visual) of the female body. The exaggerated and "comedic" performance by Marin can be read as an extension of Rodriguez's and Tarantino's aesthetics, borrowed from exploitation films. The women's "slithering" performances as strippers is foreshadowing the transformation to come, when they will turn into reptilian vampires. The men's brutishness, exemplified by Chet Pussy's encyclopedic listing, is expected and encouraged in this geography. Further, once the women turn into vampires, violence is the only possible response for the men's survival. However, this simple reading of the scene and of the franchise erases the fact that this film is part of the discourse that frames the borderlands and the women who inhabit it as open to abuse and consumption, particularly by American men. In this setting, the women, who are portrayed simply as objects available for consumption, just more refuse of the NAFTA accords, are blamed for the violence enacted upon them, even before their transformation into vampires. When the women become vampires, the violence that men enact on their bodies is framed as comedic and deserving.

[144] Aldama, Frederick Luis, *The Cinema of Robert Rodriguez*, 59.

The big twist of the film—the genre switch—comes once the exotic dancers, some of whom dance in *nichos*[145] built into the temple, almost like rotisserie chicken on display, turn into vampires and feed on the patrons of the bar. The women of the Titty Twister are the bait that attracts bikers and truckers crossing the empty landscape. In *FDTD* and *FDTD: The Series*, the Gecko brothers and the Fuller family exit the RV and are greeted by bikers eating donuts and a few truckers already in the parking lot. The neon signs on the façade of the bar scream "Girls, Girls, Girls" and "Hot Carnitas, Chicas Calientes." The latter sign conflates two types of "carnitas," where women become a piece of meat heated up for the consumption of the truckers and bikers who stop here, most of whom are Americans traveling between Mexico and the United States transporting mass produced goods.[146] Even though Santanico and the other vampires in the film turn the tables on the people who attempt to consume them, in the end they are still punished, killed, or contained by the men they attempted to eat.

One review of *FDTD: The Series* pointed to the problematic use of brown bodies in the show. Sonia Saraiya explains how the supernatural elements in the series along with the "inevitable appearance of Satanico Pandemonium, the vampireire dancer played in the original film by a mostly naked Salma Hayek—serve as a front to objectify and brutalize women. And in the slow storytelling of the series, each woman's blank terror is hard to avoid."[147] Thus, women are still used by the men crossing the border and stopping at this strip club. The men, if they make it through the night, are allowed to leave; the women, however, are bound to the temple. Again, their bodies are used as lures for communal feedings; in this way, they are forced to

[145] Niches, a recess in a wall usually with arched frame. Usually they are used to display a religious figure.
[146] The image of the borderlands as a space where cheap products and bodies can be found is repeated in international re-imaginings of the bar. See for example Figure 9 and Figure 10.
[147] Saraiya, Sonia, "The TV remake of 1996's *From Dusk till Dawn* Perplexes", *The A.V. Club*, March 11, 2014. https://tv.avclub.com/the-tv-remake-of-1996-s-from-dusk-till-dawn-perplexes-1798179746

perform constantly in order to survive. The discomfort Saraiya expresses in her review is not just a response to the representational violence enacted against women in the film and the series, but also a response to the real violence women face on the border.

These representations, whether intentionally or not, echo public discourse that explains violence against women on the border by blaming women. If we read the Titty Twister in relation to the maquiladora, or a stand-in for maquiladoras on the border, then what does that make the vampires? Melissa Wright explains that the mythology in maquiladoras is that women are the body, but the brain is controlled by the supervisors (men). This hierarchy makes it easier to dismiss women, usually after only two years, since they are not "smart enough" to be trained or are unwilling to learn. According to this logic, only men are able to learn and to have positions of power. This setup, however, still privileges the foreign maquiladora owner, who ranks above the supervisor. Wright notes that "the prosthetic body of supervision both preserves the disposability of female labor force, by denying the development of any unique skill within that group, as well as reinforces the discourse of a lesser developed, third world, masculine subject who justifies the notion that 'social development' begins in Europe and the United States and extends via capitalist progress to the lesser developed third world."[148] The women of *From Dusk till Dawn* are similarly disposable. Further, even the "queen," as described by Rodriguez, is actually a prisoner, controlled by a group of men, most of whom are descendants of Spanish colonizers. After they had arrived in the New World and discovered the demi-goddess Santanico, they created a cult to worship and use her for their own unlimited power. In the series, they use this power to create a multinational drug business.

[148] Wright, Melissa, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, 48.

Figure 34. A shot of the interior of the Titty Twister in *FDTD*.

Figure 35. Dancers in *nichos* (*FDTD2: Texas Blood Money*).

In his interview with Charles Ramírez-Berg, Robert Rodriguez describes the prequel, *From Dusk Till Dawn III: The Hangman's Daughter*, as showing how "she [Santanico] was born in that temple, but her father takes her away from it, but she returns and she meets her mother there, and her mother's mother. And she becomes Santanico and the keeper of the temple."[149] The attempt to provide a backstory for Santanico and to establish a matriarchy never fully materializes in the film, however. The third film in the trilogy, penned by Robert Rodriguez and Alvaro Rodriguez, follows a similar format, in which the first half of the movie feels like a western. The movie begins with the attempted execution of Johnny Madrid, an outlaw. His life is saved by the young Reece, a girl who after killing her own family wants to be an outlaw and legend like Madrid. Before this rescue, however, both Madrid and the hangman see a young woman in the crowd. Esmeralda, the hangman's daughter, refuses to leave this public space and is forced onto the gallows with Madrid, where her father rips open the back of her dress and whips her, the visible scars on her back signifying that this is a regular pattern of paternal abuse. When Madrid escapes, he takes a willing Esmeralda with him.

The film progresses as did the first one in the series, turning into a bloodbath as vampires attack the unsuspecting travelers. In the first film, it is clear that the travelers must cross the physical border in order to arrive to this "lawless" Mexican border where they can be free from their pasts. What is clear, however, is that the temple where they attempt to find relief is actually run by a strong vampire who, along with her clan of vampires, has been feeding on others' blood.

This movie, like the first, does not fully develop Santanico/Esmeralda's character,

[149] Ramirez Berg, Charles, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance*, 250.

since her voice is mediated through the two domineering men in her life, her father, Mauricio, and the fugitive, Johnny. Esmeralda is a tragic figure, punished consistently by her father for being a mestiza, half vampire and half human. Because her roots are hidden from her, Mauricio never tells her she is a vampire and even tried to kill her when she was a child. It is only through the physical and emotional abuse that she experiences at the hand of her own father that she understands herself as Other, someone who shames her family simply by existing. Johnny, who takes her away from this abusive relationship, also proves to be a threatening figure, offering to take her to Tierra Negra where she can get a job, "the kind girls do," claiming that "sooner or later all girls are that kind of girl." The paths these two men provide for Esmeralda can be read as the expected "traditional" roles mexicanas can perform. Gloria Anzaldúa writes that there are three roles for Mexican and Mexican American women. They could turn "to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother."[150] Mauricio wants to "protect" her by keeping her locked in the domestic space, away from the monstrous maternal figure. Here, Esmeralda must be the virginal woman. Johnny offers to take her to a brothel where she, like all the other "girls" can become a whore, a sexualized figure.

Throughout the movie, Esmeralda is confused and lost, asking "Who am I?" when she realizes that the vampires, particularly Quixtla, want her. The film, like the first, punishes women who threaten patriarchal structures. In the end of both films, the male heroes, Seth and Johnny, survive while the vampires remain trapped in the temple. It is only in the last few minutes of the film that Esmeralda is able to explore her monstrous-vampire side. She embraces her vampire identity yet still calls out for Johnny, who runs away looking back at Santanico with a look of disgust. Her screeches are heard as her father closes the pyramid doors, shutting her in.

[150] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, 17.

La Tetilla del Diablo, where Esmeralda becomes Santanico when she meets her mother and grandmother, can be read as a *nepantla* space. Gloria Anzaldúa describes *nepantla* as "a site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict."[151] She adds, "Nepantla is the Nahuatl word for an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity."[152] The Titty Twister could be a possible *nepantla* space, where these vampires are free to live in-between identities. However, much like in the first film, *nepantla* is never truly used by the characters to develop a new identity, to mediate conflicts. For Esmeralda, this space becomes her tomb, where she is still controlled by the father she tried to run away from. In both films, the possibility of a matriarchy is destroyed.

[151] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader,* 548.
[152] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader,* 180.

Figure 36. Esmeralda before her mother, Quixtla, bites her.

Figure 37. Esmeralda (now Santanico) locked in the Titty Twister by her father.

Sara, the Demon

You don't need to be Freud to figure out the significance of this crevasse.

Figure 38. Still from *Ahí va el diablo* with caption from a review by Steve Biodrowski.

Unlike *FDTD*, in *Ahí va el diablo* (Here Comes the Devil), the monstrous entities haunt the hills and caves of Baja California. These entities have the ability to contaminate (or possess) all bodies. To review, the film, directed by Adrián Garcia Bogliano, is about a family of four—parents Felix and Sol and their two children, Sara and Adolfo. The children go missing overnight in the hills, and on their return, they act strangely. Sol and Adolfo suspect something sinister and sexual had happened to them during their absence. Their change is somehow tied to the vaginal-like cave they entered at the beginning of the movie. Shots of the vaginal cave in which the children disappear and die are cut with shots of Sol and Felix having sex. Figure 38 is an image and caption from a review of the film by Steve Biodrowski in which Biodrowski references the role of sex and sexuality in the film. I include the caption to highlight how prevalent the reference to the caves as vaginal was in reviews of the film. In *Ahí va el diablo*, it is the heteronormative family that is ultimately devoured and destroyed by the geography through the possession of the

female body. Sol, the mother (and Bogliano's heroine), is an in-between figure who is seemingly punished for her sexual pleasure, particularly because the kids go missing in the hills while she and Felix have sex in the car.[153] Once the children return, their erratic behavior arouses suspicion; however, it is only through Sara's "abnormal" biology that the parents decide something is very wrong.

Early in the movie, before the children enter the hills, Sol has to comfort Sara in the bathroom of a gas station after Sara gets her period. This coming of age is coded throughout the film as traumatic and dangerous. The fact that Sara's first period happens the same day that the children disappear is played as an ominous foretelling of bad things to come. For those familiar with horror tropes, menstruation plays a key role in the monstrousness of female characters. Their powers, or dangerous abilities, begin soon after menstruation. As I will show later Sara presents a rare case in that her period is a false symbol. It is not her period that symbolizes danger and monstrousness but rather her sudden stop of menstruation. Through his use of montage, Garcia Bogliano links the possession of the children to her mother's pleasure. In the film, the mother climaxes at the same time her two children hold hands and enter the cave inhabited by demons. In his review, Biodrowski writes, "While Sara and Adolfo explore a crevasse in the rocks, Felix explores Sol's crevasse in the car."[154] Women's monstrosity is related to female sexuality, especially when that sexuality steps outside the borders of acceptable gender roles. Chicanas are constructed as monstrous only when they step outside of their roles as daughter, wife, or mother. Once these boundaries are broken, she is now the abject one, too

[153] This is according to Bogliano, in an interview with David Sole published March 11, 2013. http://www.klownsasesinos.com/entrevistas-a-famosos/entrevista-a-adrian-garcia-bogliano-ahi-va-el-diablo/
[154] Biodrowski, Steve, npg.

dangerous to the established societal boundaries. She must then be excluded or re-trained to once again fit the role assigned to her.

Under the façade of a happy family, Sol and Felix have a strained relationship; Felix argues that after taking care of the children, Sol is too tired for sex. When the children go missing, Sol and Felix spend the night yelling at each other. Felix, in a shift, blames Sol's promiscuity for distracting them; after all, the children are lost when he fingers her. Sol's sexuality toward Felix is either too little or too much, uncontrollable by him. Once Sol discovers the that their children have been murdered and replaced by demons, she attempts to convince Felix of their new reality. She takes Felix to the cave and points to the bodies of the children. She tells Felix that the children never came back, that they have been dead the entire time, and that the Sara and Adolfo who left the cave were in reality demons in the form of their children. Felix, however, believing Sol has gone crazy and has murdered the children in her hysteria, shoots her in the head. The bang of the gun echoes as we see a shot of the hills. In the next scene, Sol and Felix get into their car. As the camera pans out we see their red car driving haltingly away from the hill, the erratic driving telling us that now Sol and Felix are demons and are going back home. The movie thus concludes with a return to the traditional heteronormative family—mom, dad, daughter, son—albeit one whose members are demons. Bogliano responds to criticism of Felix and Sol's sex scene by stating that the reading of this scene as borrowing from the postmodern horror trope that links terror, or the birth of terror, to guilt (the parents' guilt that the kids are lost during their sexual encounter) is just one avenue—one possible interpretation—but not his intended purpose.[155] However, he does argue that this scene

[155] Film critics and audiences have critiqued this scene specifically because of the simplistic association of female sexual pleasure with negative consequences.

begins to set a parallelism in which the stories diverge and come back together, one following the family drama, another exploring incest and sexual abuse, a third engaging the supernatural and demonic possession.

In interviews, Bogliano has explained the movie's focus on sex by arguing that it is not about women's deviant sexuality but rather about how guilt leads to chaos. Sol and Felix felt guilt for not spending more time with the children and for having sex instead of watching over them. In the case of Abril and Sandra, it was the guilt they felt because of their relationship that led to Sandra's murder, not the lesbian relationship itself. In an interview with Dorri Olds, Garcia Bogliano stated, "I want the audience to get the message that if you repress sexual feelings, bad things will happen to you."[156] Thus, women are punished for not being comfortable with their own sexuality. Guilt over her choices, he argues, are what opened the door for the demons. Even though Adrian Garcia Bogliano's lesson in the film is that feeling guilt for your sexual pleasure is bad and leads to chaos what he really shows is that new familial structures are necessary to subvert the way female sexuality is policed.

All of these strands, whether Bogliano intended it or not, are tied to sex, particularly women's enjoyment of it, coded as deviant and horrible. In the end, the children disappear into a cave, a dark and mysterious landform often associated with the vagina. Felix enters Sol just as the children enter the cave.

[156] Olds, Dorri, "Here comes the devil is a horror movie about demons, a family, death and sex", New York Examiner, December 6, 2013.

Figure 39. The family before the appearance of demons (and Sara's period).

Figure 40. The sullen demon kids at dinner.

Let me rewind and return to Sara's demonic possession. After the kids return from the hills, Sol believes that there is something very wrong with her children, something unnatural, perhaps something supernatural. She doesn't know what it is yet, but the sudden stopping of Sara's menstruation is one of the key symptoms that brings about suspicions. In this case, unlike horror scholar Barbara Creed's and Gloria Anzaldúa's focus on the monstrousness of menstruation and the female body, it is the lack of menses that is disconcerting. Sara's erratic behavior and changing physiology worries Sol so much that she takes Sara to a doctor. The gynecologist tells Sol that Sara "no tiene himen" and that some "lo pierden en su infancia de cualquier manera accidental, eso es perfectamente normal. No es un indicador que haya tenido relaciones sexuales o que haya sufrido abuso" ("doesn't have a hymen" and that some "lose it in their childhood by accident, that is perfectly normal. It is not an indication that she has had sexual intercourse or has been abused").[157] Not only is Sara's shift into "womanhood" stunted by the lack of bleeding, but the narrative implies she is also not a virgin. Sara is feared because she does not fit into the "natural" cycle that women experience; she is not a creator but rather an empty vessel possessed, or marked, by its inability to reproduce. Anzaldúa states, "The female, by virtue of creating entities of flesh and blood in her stomach (she bleeds every month but does not die), by being in tune with nature's cycles, is feared."[158] In the film, Sara's non-normative body and her inability to properly menstruate marks her as different but also moves her outside of the societal boundaries. Her demon-possessed body cannot be regulated by standard codes of conduct; her body then is both cursed and afforded different opportunities.

[157] Author translation
[158] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 39.

Figure 41. Sara before her period and before being replaced by the demon.

Figure 42. Demon Sara outside of the gynecologist's office.

The link between menstruation and monstrousness is not new to the horror genre; the trope is present in many horror films, such as *Carrie* (1976), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), and *Tonight She Comes* (2016), that focus on menstruation and coming of age

narratives. In her discussion of the differences between male and female monsters in horror films, Aviva Briefel argues that the male monster is monstrous through his masochism while the female monster is a monstrous victim of her body, betrayed by menses.[159] On the other hand, in Shelley Stamp Lindsey's reading of *Carrie* (1976), she argues that the film highlights the dangers in repressed female sexuality. The ending of that particular film is about society's inability to contain monstrous female sexuality. The right type of bleeding is necessary, a symbol of normative femininity. When the blood is missing or not "normal," as in the case of Carrie, then the female figure becomes monstrous, and her ability to reproduce and participate in societal expectations are threatened.[160] The lack of menstrual blood is so monstrous in the narrative of *Ahí va el diablo* that it must be replaced by a different bloodletting. This new blood, an attempt to reestablish heteronormativity, is created by Sol and Felix, who in a fit of vengeance murder Lucio, Sara's presumed attacker.

Sol and Felix's murder of Lucio, the man they assume has sexually assaulted Sara and maybe Adolfo, is necessary to regain familial balance, the antidote to Sara's deviant body. Lucio's murder, a cacophony of metal music, metallic screeching, and shaky camera movements, is precipitated when Sol finds Sara's missing underwear, the blood-stained yellow panties, in Lucio's home. Lucio proclaims his innocence, stating that he is not the real monster, but he is too terrified to explain what really happened to the kids. Sol and Felix brutally murder Lucio, ripping out his insides. Garcia Bogliano ends this horrific murder by cutting to Sol and Felix taking a shower together at a hotel, sensually washing the blood off each other. Familial bonds, or the relationship between Sol and Felix, is seemingly recuperated through blood.

[159] Briefel, Aviva, "Monster Pain: Masochism, Menstruation, and Identification in the Horror Film".
[160] Stamp Lindsey, Shelley, "Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty."

Figure 43. Sol and Felix rekindling their relationship after murdering Lucio.

After the murder, there is a shift in familial structure when Sol becomes the heroine of the story in her attempt to restore sanity and her children's souls. Felix, however, sees their literal and figurative bloodbath as a restoration of his patriarchy and familial normalcy. Thus, the closer Sol gets to the truth, the more Felix sees her as a threat. Stamp Lindsey argues, "Non-human and non-male are confused as equivalent threats to human identity; bodily difference becomes, in both cases, the locus of the non-human."[161] It is also this change, this non-normative bleeding, that makes these demons' monstrousness a threat to patriarchal power structures, thus giving them power through deviance and death. Women's constructed monstrosity is related to female sexuality, especially when that sexuality steps outside the borders of acceptable gender roles. When Sara's natural progression from girl to woman is halted, heteronormative identification is

[161] Lindsey, Shelley Stamp, 36.

never achieved. In this regard, Gloria Anzaldúa provides a valuable perspective. She writes, "To be monstrous is to be inhuman, not-human. A woman becomes monstrous when her lover/husband rejects her…. If a Chicana accepts and takes up her assigned gender role she is normal and good, if she does not she is abnormal and evil, i.e. monstrous."[162] In parallel ways the film punishes and attempts to retrain Sara and Sol who both must re-learn how to be proper women after the temporary demonic infection (in the case of Sara) and hysteria (in the case of Sol).

Figure 44. Demons Sara and Adolfo.

[162] Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 19.

Figure 45. Demon Sara and Adolfo attacking Sol.

Figure 46. The real Sara and Adolfo at the bottom of a hole in the cave.

The focus on Sara eclipses the fact that her brother, Adolfo, is also acting strangely. Adolfo's transformation is revealed in two ways. First, thinking that Adolfo is feeling left out now that his sister is a "woman," Felix decides to teach Adolfo to drive. This rite of passage for a young boy should be a moment of joy, but in Adolfo's strange new state, his driving is erratic, with constant breaking. During and after the drive, he continues to be sullen, unwilling to talk to his dad. Second, Sol suspects that there is an unhealthy relationship between Sara and Adolfo. They seem to be holding hands, and they talk only to each other. Her suspicions of an incestuous relationship is confirmed after Lucio's murder. They ask a family friend, Marcia, to babysit the children while they hunt for Lucio. When they return, Marcia is gone, and the children are alone. When Sol is finally able to talk to Marcia, Marcia relates that she saw the children together in the bedroom, moaning. Adolfo and Sara's incestuous relationship, or the possibility of one, are the final push Sol needed to recognize that the children living in her house are not her own but are deviant monsters that must be destroyed so that the family can be restored. In the end, however, it is Sol and Felix who die, and whose death completes the transformation of the entire family into one of demons.

Conclusion-Redefining Monstrousness:

One of the most severe critiques of the franchise, next to its use of cheap B-movie aesthetics, is the misogynistic representation of women. In an interview with Charles Ramirez Berg, Robert Rodriguez explains:

> So that the one who was running the whole show, the queen bee, was a woman. And I based Salma's character Santanico Pandemonium on a figure out of Aztec mythology, a goddess with a skull head and snakes. There was a vampire cult that believed that they

> had to kill to keep the sun shining. We found, you could say, vampires in Mexican history, this blood cult. And that's where I got the image of the snake woman. I added the snake dance because the image of that goddess was full of snakes and she was the queen of the cult. So I wanted to make like that bar was actually a temple where they would do this.[163]

Thus, while the pyramid in the first film is inspired by "las ruinas mayas de Uxmal" according to Cecilia Montiel, the vampires are inspired by Aztec imagery. The deity he describes could reference Coatlicue of Cihuacoatl. Coatlicue is an Aztec deity symbol of both creator and destroyer, described as wearing a skirt made of serpents and a necklace made of human hearts and hands. Her face is either represented by a skull or is completely missing, replaced by two intertwined snakes. Cihuacoatl is described as having the ability to change her appearance from horrific to that of a young woman. In her horrific form, she is dressed in white and has a wide mouth with sharp teeth and long dark hair.

As we have seen in chapter 2, the border-horror genre texts code the US-Mexico border as devious and dangerous, but this is then conflated with the brown female body. Santanico is dangerous not just because she is a brown woman but also because she is connected to Mexico's indigenous past. In *From Dusk till Dawn: The Series*, for example, Santanico's history is expanded. She is no longer a mestiza born in the early 1900s after an unnatural relationship between a human man and a vampire woman. Santanico's curse goes further back; she is a demigoddess worshipped by Aztecs and fed blood sacrifices. As the franchise evolves, the vampires become more snake like, again cementing this connection with

[163] Ramirez Berg, Charles, *Latino Images in Film*, 250.

Rodriguez's image of Coatlicue. The snake serves as a connection between the gendered body (Santanico) and the geography (the Titty Twister).

Figure 47- Santanico in FDTD, FDTD 3, and FDTD: The Series.

The character of Santanico could be read as Cihuacoatl, a fertility and motherhood goddess in the Nahua pantheon. She is described as wearing a "white skirt, her white shift,

completely white."[164] Cihuacoatl is also said to have created humans along with the gods. She is usually associated with the serpent, a symbol of male and female sexuality. The relationship between the serpent and female sexuality once again meet in the figure of Santanico, who, after her transformation, resembles a serpent. When she transforms into a vampire, Santanico's face and neck are covered in brown scales, her eyes turn yellow, and long fangs appear. Santanico "se convierte repentinamente en vampiro-reptil."[165] Her fangs become more visible as she attacks Richie. Driven by her hunger for blood, a hunger that silences everything else around her, Santanico attacks Richie and Seth.

Anzaldúa sees Cihuacoatl as follows: "Serpent woman, known as Cihuacoatl, the goddess of origins, whom you think of as La Llorona and sketch as a half-coiled snake with the head of a woman, represents not the root of all evil, but instinctual knowledge and other alternative ways of knowing that fuel transformation."[166]

Thus, Cihuacoatl is monstrous through her connection with the serpent. Here, Anzaldúa shifts the symbol of the serpent from masculine (phallic) to feminine. The serpent is a common image in many Aztec and other pre-conquest imagery, particularly that associated with Coatlicue and Quetzalcoatl.[167] In Anzaldúa's work, the serpent helps connect the ancient images of Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue with the present day Lloronas,

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[164] Aguilera, Carmen, "Cihuacoatl: Celestial or Terrestrial", 96.
[165] Arias Avaca, Carlos, "Juega Doble 'Del crepusculo al amanecer'", 2.
[166] *This Bridge we Call Home,* 543.
[167] Quetzalcoatl is a Mesoamerican deity whose names literally means quetzal feather and snake. "The icon that symbolized the god consisted of a rattlesnake with scales covered by the long green feathers of the quetzal bird. The usual interpretation of this fusion of avian and reptilian features is a contrastive dualism signifying the union of sky and earth, embodying a creative concept" H. B. Nicholson *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture.* Ed. Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer. Vol. 5. 2nd ed.Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008. p439-440.

who "fuel transformations" through their monstrous identities, monstrous because they push against normative ideas of femininity and female sexuality. This serpent side, Anzaldúa contends, is part of an identity construction process.

> She did not have a language nor a vocabulary to talk about the body, about making love. The clit, her serpent's tongue, her sexual tongue had been silenced. Or because of disuse, she had forgotten to speak its language, how to move its tongue. She was not allowed, nor had she allowed herself to express who she was sexually. She had abnegated the responsibility to be who she was, to act out who she really was.[168]

In this reading, the serpent is central to the recuperation of feminine sexuality. The serpent is hidden under layered centuries of conquest and colonization, both internal and external, that made feminine sexuality a monstrous thing.

Thus, if read through Anzaldúa's framing of Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue as monstrous figures, Santanico's story could be read as one of empowerment. If allowed more time and a different ending, her story could be one of a powerful monstrous identity. Her relationship with Cihuacoatl, however, is not fully developed beyond her physical aesthetic and the set design of the temple. In *FDTD*, after killing Richie, Santanico attacks Seth and tells him she will not kill him but instead turn him into a slave who, unlike her, will be unworthy of human blood or equality but will instead be her pet. Santanico exclaims, "Welcome to slavery," to which Seth replies, "No thanks. I've already been married," before shooting and killing Santanico. Thus, in the end, her hunger is punished. Seth's joke, an improvised line by actor George Clooney, reaffirms the stereotype that women attempt to control men through marriage and that any

[168] *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader,* 71.

powerful woman can be coded as monstrous as her strength is automatically read as a threat to masculinity and the patriarchal order. What does this say about the imagined audience of this film, those who are encouraged to identify with Seth, a violent murderer, and Richie, a murder and rapist? In the film, Richie rapes and brutally kills a hostage; if given the opportunity, he would do the same to the Jacobs' underage daughter, Kate. Thus, Santanico's possible relationship with Cihuacoatl, beyond the aesthetic and superficial, could create a character that is not part of a binary but rather lives in a liminal space where her power and sexuality are not flat, one-dimensional representations of Mexicana sexuality but are complex relationships. However, this connection is severed when Santanico is killed.

Santanico the demigoddess bestows the gift of immortality on the men who worship her (and it always seems to be just men). The series begins with an image of an Aztec calendar with a voice-over of Santanico (played here by Eiza Gonzalez) proclaiming the rise of an unknown "we." The scene then cuts to Santanico, a young woman in a white dress, running through a forest followed by two men. After being captured, she is thrown into a pit filled with snakes. She screams as they bite her all over her body. The scene ends when a snake slithers into her mouth, muffling her screams.[169] Santanico as a product of an Aztec sacrifice that turns her into a "demi-goddess," like Esmeralda in *FDTD3*, who is trapped in the Titty Twister. It is in the temple/bar that men worship and use her as a way to have eternal life. Santanico, then, is permanently linked

[169] This is not the only horror text in which possession (or transformation, in the case of the vampire) is caused through similar penetration. In *The Evil Dead* (1981), the character Cheryl is raped by a branch that leads to her possession by one of the demons. In the 2013 remake of the film, this scene is included but the rape becomes more vicious. In the remake, the character Mia is not believed by her friends and brother because of her drug addiction. The 1976 film *Burnt Offering* also includes a scene in which the character Marion Rolf (played by Karen Black) is raped and then possessed by a ghost.

to the Titty Twister/La Tetilla del Diablo in these multiple reiterations of her creation story. Unfortunately, she is part of the geography of the borderlands; across the franchise, Santanico merges the female body with physical place. Through Santanico, both the body and the geography are coded as dangerous and enticing, a mirage that lures people in, promising fun and vice but only bringing death and slavery.

The documentary *Full Tilt Boogie* describes how many of the crew members and actors were uncomfortable when they saw this monster. Tarantino himself was unable to watch the filming of the deleted scene in which the vampire grabs a male victim and instead of biting his neck opens her belly to reveal a row of sharp, jagged teeth. She then puts the screaming man's head into her belly and decapitates him with her stomach. The film features many bloody, gory deaths, yet there was something about this particular monster and this particular decapitation that pushed the boundary too far. Though people are ripped apart and vamps are decapitated, burned, are impaled on table legs, this particular monster pushes the limits.

But her monstrous features can no longer be read as a representation of the vagina dentata, a figure that has been used by numerous scholars, particularly to read the figure of the vampire's fangs as representation of the fear that women's genitals are lined with a row of teeth that will castrate men. This vamp, however, is now a more dangerous monster, a pre-archaic mother, the all-consuming womb that threatens to devour the men, literally and figuratively. Her belly represents birth and death, the nightmarish mouth from which we all come and, in an attempt to create individual identities, are separated from this archaic mother. This monstrous figure, unlike Santanico and Esmeralda, has a complete transformation from sexualized body to monstrous Other and thus is beyond recognition as feminine. Yet her belly, that gaping wound, cannot be ignored. Her monstrousness is that all-consuming womb.

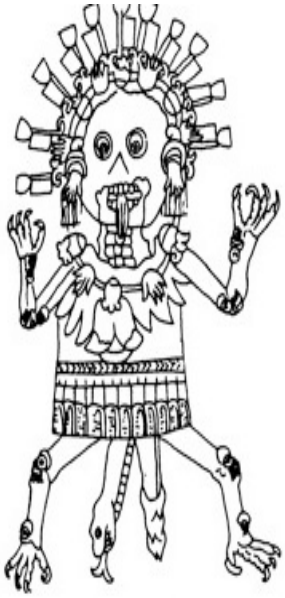

Figure 48. Left, the vamp with womb teeth; Right, an image of Cihuacoatl.

Figure 49. Four women (vampires) impaled on table legs in *FDTD*.

She, a male actor dressed like a female vampire, is completely nude, with tangled, unkempt hair. This final vamp serves as an example of how in border horror, the image of the savage Indian is connected to the female body and to the geography. In this case, however, her monstrosity, the reason why she must be destroyed or imprisoned, is also empowering in its ability to disturb narrative conventions and push back against these attempts to contain. This monster offers a transgressive and non-normative vision of femininity. Further, Tarantino's discomfort with the womb teeth means that she couldn't be completely contained by or within the text.

In border horror, the borderlands are connected to the female body, forcing a parasitic relationship between the two. The women, in this case Sara, Sol, and Santanico, become part of the geography and are forever painfully tied to a site of pain and violence. In the *From Dusk till Dawn* franchise and *Ahí va el diablo*, the weight of creating new families and new homes falls on the Latina bodies Sara and Santanico, who, through their demonic and vampire monstrousness, change the normative familial structure, violent thought that change might be. This process is full of pain. Anzaldúa describes the transformation into a new consciousness as one lined with pain, loss, and change. However, this pain is necessary since it is in stagnation and immobility that we die. The ideology of the perfect family fails to acknowledge the complexity of sentiments, sexuality, and female desire and monstrousness. Through the usurpation of the traditional familial structure by these monstrous ones (Sara and Santanico), abjection becomes the norm, opening doors to dystopic homes whose residents are not complacent subjects waiting for violent deaths but are active participants in these strange, dangerous borderlands, for whom there are other paths besides victimhood. Monstrosity and the pain of transformation are constantly used as tools to bring about change and create new familial structures. Through Sara and Santanico as

monsters and the personification of the border, these texts create a dystopic new home for border dwellers, where though safety is not guaranteed, violent death and victimhood are not the only option

Chapter 4-Border Horror Beyond Horror

if the photograph then becomes horrible, it is because it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing. For the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live
—Roland Barthes[170]

In this chapter, we move beyond genres that are traditionally associated with images of the horrific. Here I argue that border horror as genre and as framework forces us to think in new ways about representations of death and violence set along the US-Mexico border. The chapter is divided into three main sections, each analyzing a different type of text and micro-genre using texts not usually associated with horror, such as journalistic and academic texts. In each section, I show how these examples use the tropes of border horror—the personification of the border, the conflation of the female body with the geography, and stereotypes of native "savages"—to explain and excuse violence. By doing this I show the insidious ways in which the border-horror genre spreads across discursive and visual registers and normalizes violence and death on the border.

In the first section, "Border-Horror Journalism," I give examples of border horror journalistic productions. Specifically, I focus on the graphic novel *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*, written by Charles Bowden and illustrated by Alice Leora Briggs. This graphic novel is a great example of how journalistic accounts of the border use images and stories of graphic violence to "educate" and bring awareness to issues of the border. By analyzing this text, I show

[170] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 79.

how this approach ends up erasing particularities about the border by using it as a stand-in or symbol for a larger discussion of globalization. Thus, the real deaths and violence perpetrated against communities living along the border are blurred and turned into symbols for the dangers of globalization. The second section, "Border-Horror Art," focuses on art exhibitions. Particularly, I focus on art exhibitions that were created in conjunction with an academic publication and an exhibit catalog. By doing this, I show how border horror permeates academic and non-academic spaces alike. By placing in conversation artistic and academic productions, this section argues that border horror exists in a plethora of cultural productions, thereby making the discourse surrounding the border into a monolithic discourse of death and violence. The final section, "Border-Horror Television," focuses on procedural crime dramas and other non-horror genres. Specifically, I analyze the award-winning show *The Bridge* (2013–14), focusing not solely on the content but also on the production history and the publicity campaign that emphasized the female body.

What does border horror look like beyond the traditionally defined constraints of the horror genre? I would like to begin with an unlikely example: a makeup collection and runway show. The 2010 high-fashion show, a collaboration between Rodarte[171] and MAC,[172] sparked controversy with their Juárez-inspired line that included products like the lipstick "Ghost Town" (a sheer-white color). The controversy led MAC and Rodarte

[171] Rodarte is a brand of clothing and accessories founded in 2005 by Kate and Laura Mulleavy. "Rodarte" is of Spanish origin, taken from Kate and Laura's mother's maiden name. Their mother is Mexican (http://www.rodarte.net/#bio).

[172] MAC was launched in 1984 in Toronto, Ontario, by Frank Toskan and Frank Angelo and is owned by the Estée Lauder Companies.

to change the names of the products and to donate large sums of money to local organizations that work with the victims of femicides in Juárez. In a statement, the representatives of Rodarte affirmed:

> Our makeup collaboration with M·A·C developed from inspirations on a road trip that we took in Texas last year, from El Paso to Marfa. The ethereal nature of this landscape influenced the creative development and desert palette of the collection. We are truly saddened about injustice in Juárez and it is a very important issue to us. The M·A·C collaboration was intended as a celebration of the beauty of the landscape and people in the areas that we traveled.[173]

Thus, this "ethereal" landscape inspired them to create a line that, rather than focusing on the Marfa lights[174] (or any other aspect of that landscape), centered on the Juárez femicides and the maquiladora workers. The images of the walking dead that were produced by the collaboration rightfully angered many.

[173] Hing, Julianne, "MAC, Rodarte Say Sorry for Juarez-Inspired Makeup", Colorlines, July 16, 2010. https://www.colorlines.com/articles/mac-rodarte-say-sorry-juarez-inspired-makeup

[174] No one knows the origin or causes of the lights that appear randomly in Marfa, Texas, in the middle of the night.

Figure 50. Model for the 2010 Rodarte/MAC collaboration (Image from Julianne Hing)

Initial responses to the fashion show praised the "dark" and "ethereal" qualities of the clothes and styling. In an interview after showing their collection at New York Fashion week 2010, Rodarte designers Laura and Karen Mulleavy were asked, "Bad things happen to women in the border towns where you were at so these women, are they ghosts of the women bad things happened to?" These unnamed border towns and unnamed "bad things" could be referring to the feminicides in Juárez. The lack of specificity, though, shows how easy it is to ignore the facts and to create blanket statements about border violence. The sisters differed in their responses. Laura responded, "I didn't think of it ever that way, but I mean, but you can." Karen responded, "I do. It's interesting to do things that express things that you know aren't the things that people necessarily want to talk about but for me personally I think what's interesting about that culture is exactly what you're saying." This vague answer perfectly suits the vague question. Karen Mulleavy is interested in and influenced by the "culture" of "border towns" where women experience "bad things." The fashion line and collaboration with MAC reflects this vague understanding of life and death on the borderlands. Further, through this

example we see how the tropes of border horror are a shorthand that has become commonplace and familiar, so much so that it barely requires explanation. The images and products they created assumed that women dying on the border was natural and part of the landscape.

Figure 51. Three models walking out at the end of the show.

Figure 52. Shoes designed by Rodarte and Nicholas Kirkwood.

Backlash toward the clothing and makeup collection slowly grew online as bloggers pointed out the offensive way experiences of murdered and exploited women were romanticized and presented as opportunities to make a profit. In this way, once again, the women of Juárez

became part of an economic system that used and abused their bodies and disposed of them. To wash their hands of the incident, Rodarte and MAC pulled the line and donated money to local organizations in Juárez.

In this example, we see how the geography is coded as naturally violent. As Tim Blanks, the editor-at-large of Style.com, said of the show, "The clothes were light and ethereal, but the inspiration was partially Mexican border towns, pretty dark places."[175] Why the Mexican border towns are "dark places" once again is not explained; in this context and within the border-horror genre, it does not need to be explained. This Rodarte and MAC collaboration serves as a brief example of the ubiquity of border-horror conventions and most importantly is a reminder of the broad and overwhelming representational mark the US-Mexico border has been branded with.

Border-Horror Journalism

This section focuses on the work of award-winning journalist and writer Charles Bowden, who built his career writing about violence along the US-Mexico border and about the US Southwest. In 1996, Bowden published "While You Were sleeping"[176] in *Harper's Magazine*.[177] This article was one of the first accounts of the femicides in Juárez published in the United States for a mainstream audience. In Bowden's article, we can see the tropes of border horror play out as he

[175] Blanks, Tim, editor at large style.com

[176] Notes from his notebook from 1995-Rafael Coto (La Pantera) had a TV show or segment called "while you were sleeping" The panther says no one else in Mexico has a show like his, Ciudad Chihuahua tried but Bowden writes people complained it was too "gory" (nada que ver mientras usted dormia?)

[177] According to their website, Harper's is "the oldest general-interest monthly in America, explores the issues that drive our national conversation, through long-form narrative journalism and essays, and such celebrated features as the iconic Harper's Index." Their 2018 media kit states one in three subscribers are women and the average household income is $122,700.

describes how Juárez is a case study of what neoliberalism will do to the world; this is, he says, our new "city on a hill." The headline for the article reads, "In Juárez, Mexico, photographers expose the violent realities of free trade," which signals a recognition of the causes of poverty and violence in the city.[178] However, in the first paragraph, while describing his time with photographer Jaime Bailleres, he writes, "Bailleres was nuzzling his thirteen-month-old child and walking around in the calm of his apartment. His wife, Graciela, puttered in the kitchen, and soft words and laughter floated through the serenity of their home. A copy of a work on semiotics lay on the coffee table, and the rooms whispered of culture and civility and the joy of ideas. Outside, the city of Juárez, Mexico, waited with sharp teeth and bloody hungers."[179] The border, then, just as we saw in *Feeding Ground* and *Ahí va el diablo*, is once again turned into a villainous character that feeds and consumes.

The personification of the borderlands as a murderous entity is present in his notes for the article. Part of the Wittliff collection at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, the Charles Bowden papers include drafts, published articles, source material, notes, and emails. In notes for "While You Were Sleeping," Bowden writes, "The city [Juárez] ceases to be a phenomena and becomes a body with contours, scars, heart and warm flesh. There it is laying the tray under the red light as the solution slowly etches out the play of light and shadow."[180] The city, Juárez, is a body to be studied in a photograph, just like the bodies of the women who have been murdered. It is also a photograph, a representation that can be studied under a microscope much like an autopsied body. Bowden's conflation of the border with the female body continues with references to prostitution. His description of the violence perpetrated against women revolves

[178] Bowden, Charles, "While you were sleeping", 44.
[179] Bowden, Charles, 44.
[180] Notebook 3, nd. Box 12, Folder 1, The Charles Bowden Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

around discussions of the female body as consumable in relation to sex or work. He writes, "The whores are out, sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds. There is no way to tell if they are full-time prostitutes or factory workers making an extra buck."[181] The women become part of the landscape, just like the maquiladoras and the dirt roads. They are a symbol of the decay in Juárez, and perhaps most painfully, they, like the city, are destined to live and die in a constant state of violence.

Bowden showcases Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and in some ways the entire border/borderlands as death itself, bound to always be violent and "lawless," with corpses and future corpses littering the streets. His caveat that these are representations of people who are "(still) alive" makes it even worse, especially since in his article he equates the photographs of the living and the dead with reality. According to Bowden, they are documents of what is really going on in the border space. In this canonical border text, one that was made for a broad US audience, we see two of the main tropes of border horror. The female body and the border geography are both coded as already dead, remnants of violent encounters between US capitalism and Mexican poverty.

Bowden's fascination with Juárez is partly motivated by an urge to educate and to make sense of the city. In numerous interviews, Bowden explains his desire to leave Juárez and write about other less horrific things; but the reality of Juárez keeps dragging him back. He believes that if people are faced with the death and violence of Juárez, they would be forced to do something. This impulse to educate extended to books, articles, and even a graphic novel. I use the graphic novel *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*, written by Bowden and illustrated by Alice Leora Briggs, to discuss the establishment of tropes

[181] Bowden, Charles, 46.

in representations of the US-Mexico border. Further, in this text we see the blurring of real and representational deaths that is key for understanding how the US-Mexico border is represented. The complexity inherent within representations of death is key in this text. Generically, this book is part ethnography, part journalistic account, part autobiography. I was initially drawn to this graphic novel because of the way it mixed real and representational violence.

Dreamland: Way out of Juárez is based on the real-life case in which a Mexican informant for the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) was actually killing people in Mexico. The DEA had knowledge of the murders but because they were more focused on a larger case, they took no action to investigate them. It was later learned that the crimes were part of a murder-house scenario. The term "murder house" has become more common in journalistic reporting about the escalating drug violence in Mexico. These are houses specifically owned to conduct illicit activities, primarily murder and disposal of bodies. Lalo was a DEA informant who was caught with pot and then put to work for ICE to help break a cigarette-smuggling ring. Lalo was also part of a drug cartel in Juárez, where he continued to traffic drugs and commit other crimes while working for the DEA. When the Mexican police finally busted the cartel and discovered bodies at the murder house, it was unclear what Lalo's involvement was. However, it is clear that he continued to work for the cartel and could possibly have committed the murders while working for the DEA. Things crumbled when a cartel snitch accidentally sent cartel people to kill a DEA agent and his family. The family was unharmed, but the possibility of American casualties brought the house and activities there to light.

The novel is a mix of journalism, creative non-fiction, and art. The project was born around 2005 after artist Alice Leora Briggs reached out to Charles Bowden, praising his writing and asking if he would share his stories with her so she could use them as inspiration for her

artwork. Bowden initially sent Briggs a story about a young girl murdered in Juárez. However, when he decided to publish it elsewhere, he sent her a story about the case of Lalo and the death house in 2007. In email correspondence between Bowden and Briggs from early February 2007, Bowden asks Briggs if Claudia is in the original story he sent her. He writes, "If I've fucking up and there is an overlap with Claudia [a story about a murdered woman] well I may have a solution. I've gotten or fifteen thousand words on the house of death in Juárez that I know I've never used for anything."[182] When Briggs tells him Claudia is part of the story, he replies "Well, we can cut her sections out. I'll send you the house of death in a few days. Murder is murder and Juárez has lots of them."[183] The interchangeability of stories is important, since Briggs was already creating illustrations for the graphic novel in 2005 and 2006 without having a set story. Thus, the images we see were partially inspired by the feminicides.

Originally, the plan was to include a filmic component to the graphic novel, in collaboration with Scott Carrier. In a description of the collaboration, Carrier writes:

> The book and DVD will constitute visual collisions. Trompe l'oeil depictions of garbage will spill over reconstituted fragments of Western European art, photojournalism, advertising depictions of Juárez and her inhabitants, living and dead. Codex Mendoza's pictorial extortion of 'tribute lists' of leopard skins and macaw feathers will be reinvented

[182] Email Bowden to Briggs, 6 February 2007, Box 92, Folder 4, The Charles Bowden Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.
[183] Email Bowden to Briggs, 7 February 2007, Box 92 Folder 4, The Charles Bowden Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

with bodies of young Juárez women, bullet proof vests and other commodities of the current war.[184]

Even though the DVD/graphic novel collection never came to fruition, this blurb presents a telling account of how the project was imagined. The femicides in Juárez are somehow linked to the Codex Mendoza, a document purportedly made for Charles V by the Spanish conquistadores that documented the life of the Aztecs, including their relationship to other native communities, and the women were sacrificed as tributes in an imagined conquest.

The personification of the US-Mexico border, a key trope of border horror, is evident in this graphic novel. In *Dreamland*, Juárez is cast as a murderous machine. First, Bowden writes about the maquiladoras in Juárez and their ability to produce objects on a massive scale. He adds that these cheap objects aren't the only product of the maquilas. Rather, the "real production line" in Juárez is one "slamming out human beings."[185] Bowden observes how the Juárez machine creates "the new human beings [who] topple off the loading dock and then stagger off with blinking eyes into the city. God only knows who buys this product."[186] The Alice Leora Briggs illustrations of this Juárez-turned-machine takes a human form. In her image, she centers a large male body slowly being drained of its life. Juárez as body, then, is part of an exploitative mechanical system that strips it of its resources through the maquiladoras. Cheap labor isn't the only drain; the corporations that set up shop in Juárez have serious impacts on the natural environment of the border. Research has shown, for example, that populations along the border, particularly those from low-income communities, are more likely to face high environmental

[184] Email Briggs to Mary Martha, 18 February 2008, Box 2063, Folder 9, The Charles Bowden Papers, The Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.
[185] Bodwen, Charles, and Alice Leora Briggs, *Dreamland: The Way out of Juárez*, 25.
[186] *Dreamland*, 25.

risks from the lack of city planning that might have mediated the quick growth and sprawl of border cities.[187]

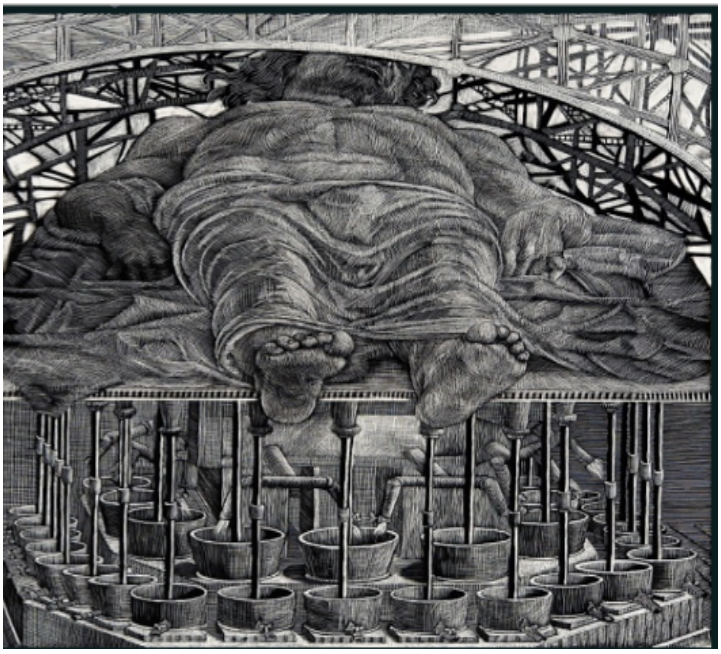

Figure 53. Image by Alice Leora Briggs for *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*.

[187] Lara Valencia, Francisco, Siobán D. Harlow, Maria Carmen Lemos, and Catalina A. Denman, "Equity dimensions of hazardous waste generation in rapidly industrializing cities along the United States-Mexico border", 197

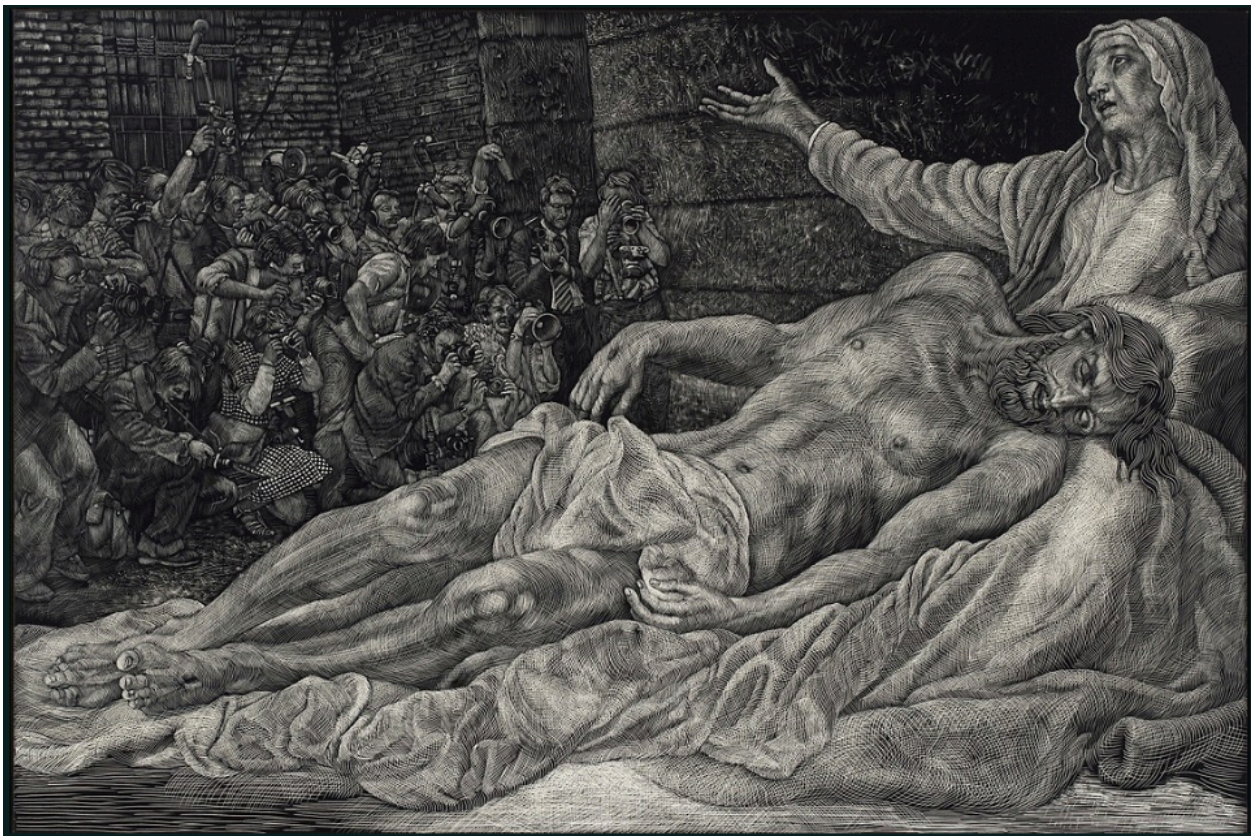

Figure 54. Image by Alice Leora Briggs for *Dreamland: Way out of Juárez*.

The narrative within the graphic novel is a strange mix of fiction and non-fiction and is echoed throughout Bowden's work and interviews. In one such interview, when asked about his stay in Juárez, Bowden replies, "I was there off and on during 2008. I abandoned the visits several times—once in June, again in late August—because I was growing numb from the killings," adding, "I was at two death houses where kidnap victims had been killed and buried, among other things, and I never ran into an American reporter…. So I lingered against my will because I thought even with my limited skills attention must be paid to such a slaughter of human beings."[188] Thus, here we see his initial reaction to these crimes, where Juárez is so overwhelming and dense with death that he must walk away in order to "refresh" and remain

[188] Shea, Mike, "Charles Bowden-Interview", 58.

human, returning with the ability to once again feel. This quote brings to mind my initial Bowden reference regarding the (still) alive border dwellers. If Bowden is unable to stay in this space for more than a year, then the people who are unable to leave must themselves be completely "numb." Furthermore, in the second quote, Bowden establishes his sense of responsibility when dealing with the femicides. He unwillingly documents these tragedies because no one else (no Americans) are willing to do it. As an example of border horror, the creative non-fiction work of Charles Bowden shows how the personification of the borderlands and the framing of the border as inherently deadly exists in what would be considered "factual" genres and journalistic accounts.

Border-Horror Art

This section looks at three artistic responses to violence and death along the US-Mexico border. Primarily, I focus on collaborations between artists and academics or in work by academic/artists. By doing this, I highlight how the border-horror genre is part of academic discourse.

State of Exception: Migrant Deaths

Anthropologist Jason de León's introduction to his 2015 book *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* begins with multiple references to critiques he has received for using certain types of images, particularly those of people dead on the trail. However, he argues that including images and narratives is necessary to document or make visible the "largely undocumented stories" of immigrants crossing the border.[189] His work avoids "sanitizing" the

[189] De León, Jason, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*.

violence caused by neoliberalism, particularly legislation that created Prevention through Deterrence programs that have not deterred deaths but caused more of them. Narratives and numbers are not enough for De León, who writes, "From the start of this project I knew that words alone could never capture the complexity, emotion, or realities of violence, suffering, and victories that people experience during the migration process. You have to hear the voices *and* see their faces to appreciate them as human beings."[190] If we "see" these faces, he argues, then perhaps we will be more likely to understand the process that leads people to cross the border. What will be gained by such empathy is not clear in his book. Perhaps creating outrage will lead to an understanding that will mobilize people to work against the policing of the US-Mexico border. The expected result of showing us this "reality" is never fully explained.

Jason De León has shared his project in multiple venues. Not only has he published a book, but he was also part of an art exhibition.[191] *State of Exception: An Exhibition of the Undocumented Migration Project* documents and collects the artifacts— backpacks, water jugs, shoes, and notes—the bodies, and the memories left behind by people crossing the US-Mexico border, specifically in Arizona. This exhibition, a collaborative project that included curator Amanda Krugliac, filmmaker Richard Barnes, and de León, was created under the auspices of the Undocumented Migrations Project (UMP), which began in 2009.[192] Directed by De León, the

[190] De León , *The Land,* 18.
[191] The fact that most of these authors—Bowden, Gaspar de Alba, and De León—are connected to art exhibitions about violence on the border…The strange overlap between art and "real" representations of death and violence might be productively discussed alongside a discussion of documentary filmmaking and ethnographic practices in border studies.
[192] I attended the exhibit and opening panel in January of 2014. This link includes a short walk through of the exhibit-https://www.artprize.org/richard-barnes-amanda-krugliak-jason-de-leon/2015/state-of-exception

UMP "is a long-term anthropological analysis of clandestine border crossings between Northern Mexico and Southern Arizona".[193]

Figure 55. Image from exhibit.

Jason De León describes that one of the major goals of this project was to "offer nuanced, yet perpetually fragmented (literally and figuratively), insights into the realities and complexities of undocumented migration."[194] It is these fragmented parts, or these fragmentations, of stories and bodies that are legible not only in the exhibit and accompanying booklet, presentations, and book but also in the larger "catalog" of cultural productions about the border and border deaths. One of the responses to these

[193] Undocumented Migration Project, "About," 2010. www.undocumentedmigration.com/home/about
[194] De León, Jason, "State of Exception/ Estado de Excepción", University of Michigan.

fragmentations in some subdisciplines of border studies, such as anthropology, has been to quantify and catalog these deaths.

Figure 56. Wall of backpacks, a small portion of those collected.

In the catalog and the opening panel for the exhibit, De León recounts the story of "Marisol," a woman found dead in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. Accompanying this story is an image of her hand, the same image he presented in the panel, and an image that was part of a video installation at the University of Michigan. De León begins, "We find her at N31*44′55″ W111*12′24″. Her name is Marisol."[195] Marisol is a pseudonym. De León's description of this event is important because the discomfort and uncertainty that finding her body caused for him and his team framed how death is photographed and displayed in the context of the exhibit. After

[195] De León, Jason, "State of Exception/ Estado de Excepción", University of Michigan.

finding the body, it was hard for them to decide if the body should be photographed and if so, how. They choose to further "fragment" her body and death by only taking a picture of her hand, or at least only including that image in the work.

His narrative of the body is further fragmented in the exhibit catalog, where he writes, "While parts of her are starting to transform into unfamiliar shapes and colors, her striking jet-black hair and the pony tail holder wrapped around her right wrist hint at the person she once was."[196] He continues this narrative in his recent book.

Figure 57. Exhibit space at the University of Michigan.

After finding the body of "Marisol" during their hike in Lobo Peak Arizona, De León must decide what to do, whether to photograph the body or not. He writes, "I start taking photos of her because it feels imperative to record what this type of death looks like up close. The objective is to document this moment for those who are not here."[197]

[196] De León, Jason, "State of Exception/ Estado de Excepción", University of Michigan.
[197] De León , *The Land* 210.

He references Susan Sontag and the concern that these images might be read as exploitative. However, he displaces the possible "readings" of the photos onto the viewer. For him, the photographs "can stand as undeniable material evidence that a woman died at N31*44′55″ W111*12′24″ and that witnesses saw her corpse in 'flesh and blood.'"[198] De León includes two images of Marisol in the book, one in close up and one long shot, and he also goes into great detail about her appearance: "I focus on her hair. It is smooth; the color of smoky obsidian. It's possibly the darkest hair I have ever seen, and its texture gives the impression that she is still alive. I think about reaching down to touch her, but I can't. She has been out here too long and I know that her skin will not feel human."[199]

Much like Charles Bowden, De León echoes the need to document and show these atrocities. The body of "Marisol" and the artifacts left behind by undocumented border crossers become morbid artifacts of state-sanctioned violence. However, these artifacts also erase life. In this example of border horror, the artifacts left behind are framed as if those who abandoned them are already dead. Without ownership, the objects become symbols of death and loss. This assumption erases the possibility that those items were left behind by people who are still living, either in the United States after successfully crossing the border or in Latin American after having been deported.

The individual components of the exhibit—the publicity material, the academic book, and the exhibit itself—each serve as a distinct register of the discourses within the border-horror genre. Just like Bowden's creative non-fiction and journalistic accounts, this example exists as a "factual" anthropological account of violence and death along the US-Mexico border. If studied

[198] De León, *The Land*, 210.
[199] De León, *The Land*, 212.

under the border-horror umbrella (or through the border-horror framework), alongside texts such as *From Dusk till Dawn* and *Ahí va el diablo*, we see how they are all part of transnational discourse that frames the borderlands as a space of death. I am not arguing that this art exhibit and academic book have the same audience or purpose as the films. Nor does Jason De León's work have the same intention as the films: one is framed as an educational tool necessary to document and inform, while the other two are meant as pure entertainment. However, in this example, we see that they all traffic in the same representational language, a language that makes it hard to see beyond death and violence.

Juárez Femicides

De León's *State of Exception* exhibit was not the only one of its kind. The exhibition *The Women of Juárez Demand Justice*, organized by Arnulfo Aquino and Xavier Bermudez to coincide with International Women's Day, was part of a transnational initiative. Posters from that exhibit, now archived at the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, coincided with the 2003 conference "The Maquiladora Murders, Or, Who Is Killing The Women Of Juárez?" that was held during the celebration of the Day of the Dead. Hosted by UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and Amnesty International, the international conference was about "the unsolved, ten-year crime wave of kidnappings and murders of over 300 women.… The purpose of the conference is to facilitate more scholarly inquiry into the crimes, but also to examine the social, political, economic, and cultural infrastructure in which those crimes continue unabated."[200] Though the posters included an array of artistic styles, it was the image of the female body—murdered,

[200] Latino LA!, "The Maquiladora Murders," 29 Oct. 2003, http://latinola.com/story.php?story=1365

fractured, and victimized—that was prevalent and that ultimately served to invite charges of potential desensitization to the very issues the exhibit intended to expose. In the introduction to the anthology *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americás*, Fregoso and Bejarano write, "The emphasis on gender-based violence as 'political' or 'public' does not necessarily do away with the public-private boundaries; it often has the unintended consequences of subordinating the less 'spectacular' forms of gender based violence."[201] Do these images, then, re-create the sensationalized images of dead and dying they are trying to critique?

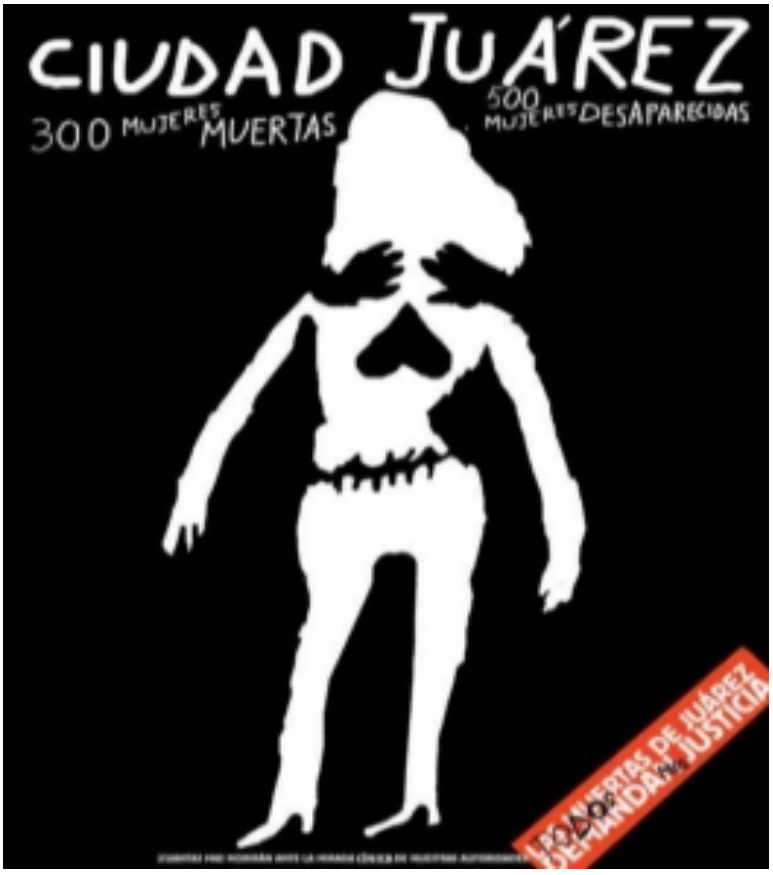

Figure 58. Poster by Alejandro Magallanes for the exhibit *The Women of Juárez Demand Justice*.

[201] Fregoso, Rosa Linda and Cynthia L. Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*, 10.

The images included mostly faceless bodies. In her book *Over Her Dead Body: Configurations of Femininity, Death and the Aesthetic*, Elisabeth Bronfen argues that the idea that representations of death and the dying is not violence is rooted in voyeurism and the distance that art and the media create between the viewer and the dead or dying. Through this process, the literal and figurative fragmentation of the female body allows for further distancing, thus creating the illusion that there is no violence inflicted on the dead and dying through visual representations of their experiences. The image by Alejandro Magallanes in figure 53 is the image most commonly associated with the exhibition *The Women of Juárez Demand Justice*. By playing with light and dark, Magallanes shows a woman cut in half by a jagged line. At the same time, the optical illusion makes the viewer see a skull. Thus, the female body becomes not only a marker of death, she becomes death itself.

Figure 59. Poster image by El Fisgon for the exhibit *The Women of Juárez Demand Justice*.

In the image in figure 54 by El Fisgon, it is Lady Justice herself who faces death, stabbed by her own sword. Her breasts exposed and eyes hidden, Lady Justice, another stand-in for the women of Juárez, cannot stop or prevent the horrible crimes being committed. In Juárez, then, justice is dead. This image by El Fisgon is a visualization of Belausteguigoitia and Melgar's

proposal that the in violence against women in Juárez, Justice itself is mutilated and discarded along with the women and the social contract. [202]

Figure 60. Poster image by Angel Lagunes for the exhibit *The Women of Juárez Demand Justice*.

The image by Angel Lagunes in figure 55 shows a decapitated, mutilated female body, similar to the poster by Alma Lopez in figure 56. Both pieces reflect the Coyolxauhqui myth.

[202] Belausteguigoitia, Marisa, and Lucía Belgar, *Fronteras, violencia, justicia: nuevo discursos*, 86.

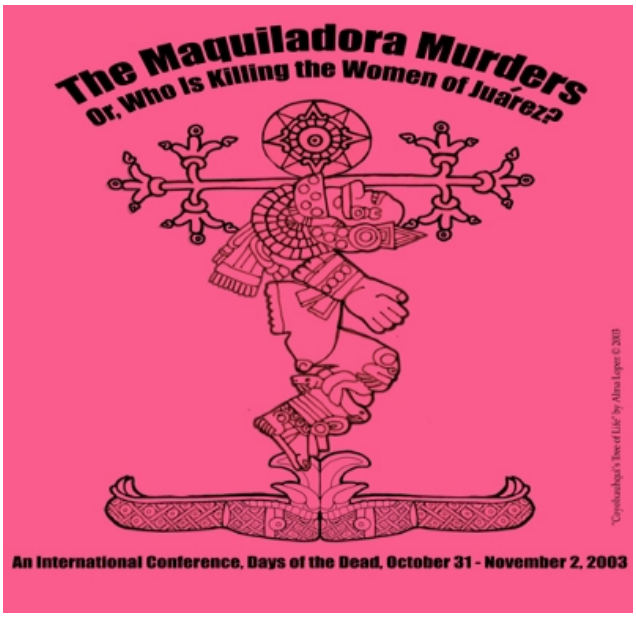

Figure 61. "Coyolxauhqui's Tree of Life," by Alma Lopez (2003). Poster for the conference "The Maquiladora Murders, Or, Who Is Killing The Women Of Juárez?"

Coyolxauhqui, in Aztec mythology, was the daughter of Coatlicue and, as the legend goes, she was mutilated by her brother Huitzilopochtli, the god of war and her brother, and thrown into the sky to create the moon. Coyolxauhqui has been used as a symbol that reflects gendered violence and the way society constructs itself through the destruction of the female body.

Figure 62. Coyolxauhqui stone found at the Templo Mayor Museum in Mexico City. Image found on Wikipedia entry "Templo Mayor".

In all the posters discussed here, the female body is the focus of violence. The women in Magallanes' and El Fisgon's pieces can be read as a stand-in for Juárez. In one, the geography is coded as death itself; in the other, the geography is equated with the inability to follow the rule of law. Juárez, and the women of Juárez, are both shown mutilated and destroyed. Finally, in the pieces by Lagunes and Lopez, the native histories of Mexico are incorporated to understand the long history of violence in Mexico.

Juárez Femicides: Take Two

Phoebe Glockner, award winning artist and author, is known widely for her 2002 graphic novel *Diary of a Teenage Girl: An Account in Words and Pictures*, which was adapted in 2015 for the movie *Diary of a Teenage Girl*. Since 2003, Glockner, now a professor at the University of Michigan, has been working on art work inspired by the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez. Specifically, she participated in the collection *I Live Here* and on diagram reenactments of murder scenes from real Juárez cases. With her work having been funded by a Guggenheim Fellowship, we see once again the intersection of academia and art in representations of the US-Mexico border.

Her graphic story "La Tristeza: Has Anyone Supposed It Lucky to be Born?" is part of the *I Live Here* project started by Mia Krishner. Funded in part by Amnesty International, the project includes a set of books and a website that tell "the stories of victims and survivors in four global hotspots: refugees in Chechnya, child soldiers and prostitutes in Burma, families of the disappeared in Mexico, and AIDS victims in Malawi."[203] Glockner's story includes ten "real" cases from Juárez. Of the ten cases she includes in this novel, five include rape or sexual

[203] Wong, Nichole, "Can a Graphic Scrapbook Explain Mexican Murders", Mother Jones, April 27, 2009. https://www.motherjones.com/media/2009/04/books-i-live-here/

violence. All include graphic detail of how the crimes were committed. Some of the cases include the testimonies of the perpetrators—all men—who blame the women for their crimes, claiming that the women and children were cheating, mocking them, not being present wives, or seducing them. None of the victims have names, although some do have faces. To create more realistic images, Glockner superimposed pictures of victims, perpetrators, and community members in the photographs of cloth dolls she made by hand. These dolls were positioned in a way that recreated the crime. In an interview, Glockner stated that she chose to work with dolls because she "could pose them and rape them and pose them, and the next day I could clean them up and they would be alive again. Drawing that was harder."[204]

The photographs and dioramas she produces are an example of border horror because of the way they position women and young girls as actual objects to be staged, consumed, and tortured. The experience of violence in Juárez is converted to images of toys that can be posed, destroyed, and re-arranged by an artist and by academic images that are then used to tell their story. The voices of the victims and their families are lost in translation, literally, when the text included in this brief graphic story include google translations of newspaper articles. The convergence of massacred bodies and fragmented narratives is a form of discursive violence that is amplified as she frames these murders and violence as the result of domestic violence rather than neoliberalism, globalization, and the state, as if these things were mutually exclusive.

[204] Joiner, Whitney, "The Rumpus Interview with Phoebe Gloeckner", The Rumpus. Aug 8, 2015, http://therumpus.net/2015/08/the-saturday-rumpus-interview-phoebe-gloeckner/?src=longreads

Border-Horror Television

The final example of border horror beyond horror is from television. In the summer of 2013, Fox Entertainment's FX channel premiered *The Bridge*, inspired by the 2011 Swedish/Danish television series *Broen/Bron*. Ultimately running for two seasons, *The Bridge* addresses the lived realities of the El Paso/Ciudad Juárez corridor. In an interview, show creators Elwood Reid and Meredith Stiehm talked about how the show was originally supposed to be set on the US-Canadian border, a geography more similar to the original Swedish/Danish series. However, Reid and Stiehm insisted in the value and "uniqueness" of the El Paso-Juárez border as a substitute. Reid, admittedly influenced by Cormac McCarthy and "narco war" books, as well as articles from the *El Paso Times*, thought that "[t]here's something down there." In an interview, Reid added, "From a story standpoint, we couldn't get away from the obvious."[205]

But what is so "obvious" about the border? Is the use of the female form to represent the landscape part of the "obvious" choice? Perhaps this "something" that, according to Reid and Stiehm, mark the US-Mexico border as uniquely perfect for a drama series about murder, intrigue, and extramarital affairs is perhaps the one thing chosen to promote and sell the first season of the show: the feminicides in Juárez. The conflation of the female body with the landscape prevails in representations of the US-Mexico border, especially in relation to Juárez's "femicide machine." FX's multi-platform promotion of *The Bridge*—an art competition, an iBook to accompany the show, a user-friendly website, TV spots, HULU, and merchandising collateral—utilize these same representational tropes that gender the border as female/feminine

[205] Pullen, Doug, "Cast, crew hope to do right by El Paso area in FX's new drama 'The Bridge'", El Paso Times, July 7, 2013. https://archive.li/XSm0Z#selection-1385.17-1389.35

and that mutilate this female form in order to "bridge" two spaces. But to what effect? What do these images evoke?

The most prevalent image in the promotion of Season 1 created by FX Creative and Ignition Creative shows a woman lying on her left side, an image reproduced in black and white as well as brown and cream. Her right arm reaches over her head, her fingers reaching out into the United States. Even though she is naked, her left arm covers her breasts, and her right leg is turned so we can't see her vagina. However, her spinal-cord-turned-bridge is the "obvious" draw, occupying the very center of the image. Tied by her waist and hair, which streams down the side of her head to create the Rio Grande River itself, this female form is "bound" figuratively and literally to this geography.

Figure 63. Publicity image for *The Bridge*

Perhaps the expectation is that these images will draw in an audience that is "obviously" familiar with the violence along the US-Mexico border. This engraving of the earth with violence and blood distances us from really understanding what causes the violence and the large role the United States plays in it. In the anthology *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*, at least three essays, including the introduction, deal with the way cultural productions, the news, and media in general have responded to and utilized the femicides. For editor Alicia Gaspar de Alba, this means that living women are invisible and can be seen only through their deaths, and that they are known "because they are dead, because they are parts of this sensational, unresolved heinous crime wave that has taken the public by storm and has suddenly put this border on the radar of every human rights organization in the known universe."[206] Thus, in the show's promotional material, the Juárez feminicides have become equated with the border itself, and through this conflation, the mutilated female form must be the "obvious" stand-in for the bridge itself. If the general public knows about the women of Juárez or about the border only through these "sensational" images and stories, then it makes sense that violence and death are the "establishing shots" used to represent it.

The use of the dead female body as symbol for precarity is present across cultures. In her book *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*, Elisabeth Bronfen writes:

> Any theoretical insistence on a direct, unambiguous and stable analogy between cultural images and experienced reality defuses both the real violence of political domination and the power of representations. For it seems as necessary to stress the fundamental difference between real violence done to a physical body and any "imagined" one (which represents this dangerous fantasy on paper or canvas without any concretely violated

[206] Gaspar de Alba, Alicia, *Making a killing*, 4.

> body as its ultimate signified), as it is necessary to explore the way in which these two registers come to be conflated and confused.[207]

In thinking about the body (dead and dying), it is important to allow the numerous political, historical, social, and cultural contexts to be shown. What happens when the body, or rather the dead body, is constantly repeated, re-inscribed, and co-opted in projects and cultural productions like these that imagine the border space?

Here I would like to bring in a second image used repeatedly in the promotional material for Season 1. This image (figure 62), created by FX Creative and the advertising company Iconisus L&Y Visual Communication Systems, is a sepia picture of a woman face down in water (the river), her arms stretched out to her sides reaching for the riverbanks. On the horizon, we can see city lights and a mountain range, probably El Paso. Thanks to the magic of Photoshop, her left arm looks deformed, broken at the elbow. Again, as we saw in the image in figure 61, her body becomes the bridge. One other similarity between these two images is the unrecognizability or masking of the face. In the sepia image, her face is completely submerged in the water, the only thing visible being a small part of her jaw leading up to her ear, which is decorated with a pearl earring. In the black and white image of figure 61, her face is visible but inhuman, a mix of José Guadalupe Posada's well-known etching *La Calavera Catrina* and an alien. Her face is turned so we only see one of her hollow, black eye sockets with a tear rolling down. Here, these female forms are faceless (or unrecognizable), attempting to become a stand-in for "every woman." Their blank-canvas faces make them and their death more

[207] Bronfen, Elisabeth, 59.

easily consumable for an audience who "obviously" knows that the "something" that makes the US-Mexico border "unique" is the wholesale disposability of life in Mexico.

Figure 64. Publicity image for *The Bridge*.

The last piece I would like to talk is titled *La Señora de la Muerte*, a mural painted on the side of a J&J Grocery and Liquor store in Los Angeles by LA-based artist and muralist Miles "Mac" MacGregor, better know as El Mac (figure 63). Although it was not commonly used in

the marketing of Season 1, it is an image I find particularly compelling in its visual contrast with the two images previously discussed. El Mac writes that the piece was "my interpretation of Mictecacihuatl, or la Señora de La Muerte." He adds:

> The show is set in El Paso/Juárez and deals with some of the border issues and violence there, which is an important subject for me. I lived near there for a little while when I was younger and have some very good friends from there, so the region has always been close to my heart. This mural project had a lot of significance for me, and I'm honored to be a part of what looks to be a very interesting and unique series.[208]

In *Dioses Prehispánicos de México*, Adela Fernandez writes that Mictecacihuatl and Mictantecuhtli are the feminine-masculine exteriorizations of Ometeotl (creator and destructor) who reign in Mictlan. According to Fernandez, after death, people go to paradise or the underworld, depending on how they died. If the person died of natural causes, then in death they must face new and bigger obstacles to finally rest in the underworld.[209] This obstacle course is made up of nine stages, each designed to *descarnar* and *desmaterializar* (to remove the flesh from and to detmaterialize), leaving only the pure *tonnali* (soul). Mictecacihuatl and Mictantecuhtli oversee the ninth and final stage.

[208] El Mac, "'La Señora de la Muerte'- New Mural in LA for FX's The Bridge" 17 July 2013; http://mac-arte.blogspot.com/2013/07/la-senora-de-la-muerte-new-mural-in-la.html
[209] Fernandez, Adela, *Dioses Prehispánicos de México*.

Figure 65. Mural by Miles "Mac" MacGregor.

Modeled by Carol Dequeche, the señora's face is clearly visible, her eyes open and looking up at the sky. She is not lying down but rather stands, her arms stretched to her sides, reclining on el Puente de las Americas. Her body is large, like in the previous two images, but she is not passively dead. Rather, what she is "bridging" is not just the United States and Mexico but the line between life and death. She is a *nepantlera* figure, transitional and transformative. In this red and black representation of Mictecacihuatl, la señora de la muerte, we see not a dead body but death itself embodied by an in-between figure that still "bridges" bodies but perhaps not at the expense of her own.

Narratively, the first season of the show focuses on Juárez detective Marco Ruiz and El Paso detective Sonya Cross, who must work together to solve the murder and mutulation of an American judge whose body was found right in the middle of the Bridge of the Americas. Together, they search for the serial killer responsible for this death and that of nine immigrants who perished while crossing the border. The series points the investigation in numerous directions, the primary one focusing on the possible connection between the Juárez feminicides and this serial killer. Perhaps the murderer sees in Juárez the opportunity to kill freely, without fear of being caught by the corrupt police system. In the end, however, there is no political agenda in the killings. Rather, the killer is David Tate, a former FBI agent who lost his wife and son in a car accident on the Bridge of the Americas. The real target in his crimes is none other than detetctive Marco Ruiz, who was having an affair with Tate's wife.

This plot twist is meant to shock, of course. Bu it also functions to erase the focus on the feminicides and gendered violence in Juárez. The focus quickly shifts from justice for these women to a competition between Tate and Ruiz. Because the identity of the killer is a mystery for most of the series, the publicity material focuses on the murder of women, not infidelity or marital strife. As an example of border horror, this series highlights how gendered violence is an easy and believable narrative trope. On the border, Mexican violence seems more acceptable than the shocking image of an American seeking vengeance.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the border-horror genre is an ever-present phenomena in representations of the US-Mexico border. Visual and narrative choices about death and violence

along the border in popular culture rely heavily on the intersection between gender, genre, and geography. These texts are not "bad" or "good," "positive" or "negative," and the examples in the chapter—and in the dissertation as a whole—are neither "accurate" nor "inaccurate." Rather, all contribute in their own ways to the complex historical process of dealing with and understanding death. An interdisciplinary study of the border-horror genre is necessary to understand how representations shape the way audiences understand and respond to the sociopolitical events that have worked to shape representational practices about the US-Mexico border.

Conclusion- Day of the Dead

Perhaps the most revolutionary intervention into conversations at the margins of race, gender, and sexuality is to let the dead—those already denied a sustainable subjectivity— speak from the place that is familiar to them.

—Patricia Holland[210]

Of all the images of death associated with Mexico, Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead (DOD), may be the most emblematic. A mix of pre-Hispanic and Catholic traditions, DOD has been celebrated for centuries as a way of commemorating the dearly departed. In current practice, DOD is most commonly celebrated by cleaning the graves of loved ones and decorating them with flowers and candles or by putting up an altar, a small offering in memory of the deceased. Whether adapted as a Chicana/o cultural celebration or available on shelves at Target, the holiday is now a multifaceted cultural phenomenon in both the United States and Mexico.[211]

So what relationship, if any, does Day of the Dead have in representations of violence set along the US-Mexico border in the late twentieth and early twentieth-first century? I would like to conclude by taking a look at the recent Pixar/Disney film, *Coco*.

On May 1, 2013, the Walt Disney Company submitted an application to trademark "Día de los Muertos" or "Day of the Dead" as a way to monopolize products and themed merchandise across various platforms as they prepared to launch a Day of the Dead themed movie. Almost

[210] Holland, Patricia. *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*. 4.
[211] For more information of Day of the Dead in the U.S. see Regina Marchi's *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon*, 2009.

immediately after this became public, Disney faced such strong criticism and backlash that they withdrew their petition. A few years later, in November 2015, *Spectre*, the twenty-fourth James Bond film, premiered in Mexico City. Mexico City was chosen for the premier in part because of the tie-in with the film's monumental opening scene, which features Bond searching for a criminal during a Day of the Dead parade down the streets of Mexico City, culminating in the main plaza, El Zocalo. Two years later, in October of 2017, Walt Disney Pictures released the 3-D animated movie *Coco*, produced by Pixar Animation Studios.

Coco is a story about self-identity and family acceptance. The narrative follows twelve-year-old Miguel, who wants to be a musician, against the wishes of his family, all shoemakers who hate music and musicians. Believing that a famous singer and actor, Ernesto de la Cruz, is his great-great-grandfather, Miguel decides to steal de la Cruz's guitar from his mausoleum. This theft transports Miguel into the land of the dead, where he searches for de la Cruz to receive his blessing and through it the ability to return to the world of the living. Communities in Latin America and Latina/o communities in the United States have praised the film's accurate and authentic representation of the celebration of Day of the Dead in Mexico. Such was the success of the film on both sides of the border that *Coco* became the highest-grossing film in Mexican history.

Although there is nothing immediately recognizable as being horrific in the film, *Coco* is a great—if unlikely—example of how the border-horror genre functions within a text and through marketing and distribution. The film, its merchandise, and the cultural events it has inspired exemplify the role of the nation-state (in this case, the United States and Mexico) in constructing and maintaining state-sanctioned discourses of death. The images of death that are acknowledged and celebrated reflect specific ideas about how the nation constructs itself. For

example, through an analysis of Mexico City's Day of the Dead parade and the materials produced and distributed by the national and state government, Mexican death and mourning is tied to *indigenismo*, the Mexican Revolution, and modernization. These state-sanctioned deaths are constructed alongside the United States, which participates in this narrative of "proper" Mexican death and mourning through cultural productions (such as *Coco*) and trade (NAFTA). By analyzing *Coco*, we can see what is omitted from this official discourse of death and what, in turn, inhabits the borderlands of these two nations.

In *Coco*, we see a different border, the border between the land of the living and the land of the dead. The most horrific element of the film, the horror burst, is the way it creates and maintains borders while attempting to highlight their absurdity. One of the main conflicts in the film is that Hector, a young musician, wants to cross the border between the dead and the living to visit his daughter. Hector has been dead for many years and has never been able to leave the world of the dead because no one in the world of the living has put his picture on the altar. Thus, he doesn't have the proper documentation to cross the border on Día de los Muertos. He enlists the help of Miguel and promises to take him to meet Ernesto de la Cruz if Miguel will then take Hector's picture to the world of the living and put it on an altar. In a heartbreaking scene played for laughs, Hector dresses up like Frida Kahlo and attempts to cross the border. He is stopped and told to return to the world of the dead. However, sensing that this is to be his last year in the spirit world, Hector makes a run for it and attempts to cross the bridge and enter the world of the living. But the bridge, made of golden cempasúchil flowers (marigolds), liquifies; Hector's attempt to escape is stopped by the border itself. The bridge is not available to him. Rather, he is met by the dangerous, quicksand river that pulls him in. Each step is more difficult than the previous one, until he is almost drowned in flowers. Two border agents pull him out and drag

him back to his place in the spirit world. Hector is told to give up, that he is forgettable, unworthy of being remembered, and thus must accept death. This scene is a horror burst where once again the geography is used to punish crossers and to prevent law breakers. The cempasúchil, the flower used by indigenous communities to remember the dead and to facilitate their crossing, is turned into the perpetrator. The moment Hector begins to sink into the flowers and is unable to leave the world of the dead, he is destined to perish, trapped by savage borders. This horrific and painful moment shows how the perpetual conflation of the US-Mexico border with death and violence infects how we see all borders.

We soon learn that not only do the dead need proper documentation to cross into the world of the living, but they also disappear—truly die—if there is no one left in the world of the living to remember them. In the world of the dead, then, there is another border, one between the remembered and the forgotten. In this binary, it is the poor who are the forgotten and the upper class—celebrities, artists, and the wealthy—are remembered. Even in death, class lines are reaffirmed and solidified. Real death—permanent death—seems to befall only the disposable bodies of the shanty towns. This idea is picked up by Disney's marketing campaign. Disney California Adventure created a "Plaza de la Familia" in Paradise Gardens. The "offering," which ran from September 15 through November 2, 2017, included mariachi music, traditional food like tamales, and an interactive Tree of Life. The Plaza de la Familia also has a place reserved for the art of *Coco*, including an altar. This altar includes a description of Land of the Dead, a place where you are "gone forever" if no one in the living world remembers you. In this coming of age story, Miguel must temporarily die and become a voyeur of death and suffering to find his roots. The solidification of borders between appropriate and inappropriate deaths and ways of

mourning create unnecessary and harmful binaries in how people are remembered and who is allowed to die the final death.

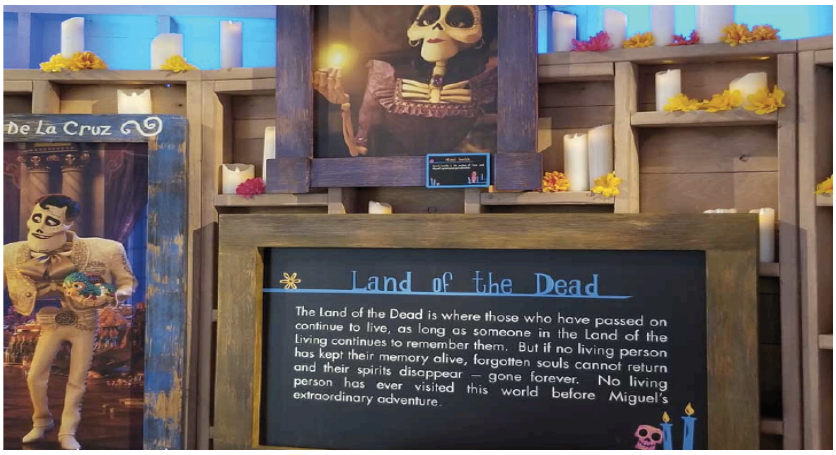

Figure 66. Part of the Plaza de la Familia at Disneyland.

The last horrific border I would like to talk about is one we see in the marketing and distribution of *Coco*: the border between authentic and inauthentic. Because there are so few representations of Latina/os, *Coco* takes on the burden of representing or claiming to represent a large, heterogeneous group. In reality, this film is very much connected to Mexican and Mexican American culture; one only has to consider the cultural consultants, among whom was cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz. In 2013, Alcaraz was an outspoken critic of Disney's attempt to trademark Day of the Dead.

Figure 67- On the left the cartoon "Muerto Mouse" by Alzaraz and on the right his twitter announcement of his collaboration with Pixar/Disney.

We see a call for (and claim of) authenticity in multiple layers of the production, distribution, and consumption of *Coco*. For example, Alcaraz, who had previously criticized and satirized Disney's cultural appropriation, was now a consultant for the film, brought in at different stages of production to make sure that *Coco* was done right. In an interview, Adrian Molina, co-director of the film, is asked, "How important was it to keep those Day of the Dead traditions as authentic as possible?" He answers:

> It was very important. From the very earliest stages, we knew that this was a real place, a real tradition, a real culture, and we had a responsibility to present that truthfully, and have this film transmit the meaning of those traditions. That meant doing the research, experiencing the traditions first-hand spending time with families and asking, Why is this important, and what do you hope to transmit to future generations about these traditions and what they mean?[212]

[212] Goodykoontz, Bill, "'Coco' director on making Pixar's latest authentic (and entertaining)", 26 Nov 2017. Azcentral.com

These demands for inclusivity and accurate portrayals of Latina/os in mainstream media are understandable. However, authenticity can come with a heavy price. In the case of media representations of Day of the Dead, such as those produced by *Coco*, the audience is asked to participate in manners in which death, dying, and mourning practices are coded as acceptable or unacceptable. We are asked to participate in the creation and policing of borders between authentic and inauthentic mourning practices and deaths. This dichotomy is tied to histories of national identity, land, gender, and race on both sides of the US-Mexico border. It is at the core of border horror in that the dichotomy forestalls a discussion about the systemic, longstanding factors that contribute to those deaths by shifting the focus onto questions of which deaths are worthy of our consideration and which are forgettable.

The systemic nature of this erasure, the real horror, is clearly visible in the marketing of *Coco*. The opening of the film was paired with two art exhibits at the Cineteca Nacional, "Mexico y Walt Disney: Un Encuentro Magico" and "El Arte de Coco." "Mexico y Walt Disney" was a collection in memory of Disney's relationship with Mexico and included photographs of his visit to Mexico in 1942 as a good neighbor ambassador.[213] The "Arte de Coco" side of the exhibit included storyboard and concept art for the new film. In an interview, Arturo Lopez Gavito, vice president of marketing for Disney Mexico, stated that the US government's push against NAFTA would not affect their involvement in Mexico. He stated, "Disney tiene presencia en Mexico, como empresa consolidada, desde hace 20 años. Y no somos una compañia politica, ni esta vinculada con nada que tenga que ver con tratados" (Disney has

https://www.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/movies/billgoodykoontz/2017/11/24/coco-director-making-pixars-latest-authentic-and-entertaining/892211001/

[213] The exhibit included toys, images, and statues from the 1944 film *The Three Caballeros*.

been a presence in Mexico as an established company for the past twenty years. We are not a political company and have nothing to do with trade agreements).[214]

However, the truth us that Disney is very much in the trade business and very much political. The proof of this was all around them in the images of *Coco* and in the display of the 1944 animated live-action film *The Three Caballeros*. One of my primary inquiries in this dissertation had been exploring how death and dying fit in to constructs of *Latinidad* and the nation. The side-by-side art exhibits showcase the way Mexico and Mexican have been used as stand-ins for Latina/o in US cultural productions. Further, even though these cultural productions and the companies that produce them attempt to distance themselves from discussions of politics, they are unable to do so. After all, *Coco* was a product of harsh push back by Latina/o communities. The premiere of the film in Mexico with the art exhibits was a calculated way to erase Disney's earlier attempt to trademark Day of the Dead and to give the film a tone of authenticity. *Coco* is a reminder of the way capitalism, neoliberalism, and trade have played a crucial role in the demarcation of citizenship, race, and consumerism through images of death and violence on the borderlands.

Epitaph

At some point or other in most horror studies books and articles, authors situate themselves in relation to the genre. They explain their love for the genre or their recent discovery of it, and they relate how it has shaped their approach to different categories of analysis, including race and gender. In keeping with that tradition, I would like to share how my love for horror and all things death started.

[214] Gavito, Arturo Lopez, "Walt Disney y 'Coco', la hermandad de México y EE.UU. a través del celuloide",La Estrella de Panamá, Panama City, October 24, 2017. (author translation)

Born in Reynosa, Mexico, in 1984, and raised in Mission, Texas, I have experienced the economic, geographic, and sociopolitical changes of the border. I have witnessed the way communities along the border, including my own family, have had to change their everyday lives to deal with growing militarization on both sides of the bridge. Growing up, I consumed a large number of horror films, most of them dubbed in Spanish. I watched classics like *Dr. Giggles* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* at my aunt's house while she babysat me so that my mom and dad could work. We were so lucky; she lived right next to a video store, and we would rent movies—usually horror—every day. The myth of Mexico as a dangerous place seemed like just that—a myth. The real horror, I thought, was on the screen.

But things have slowly changed from the days of my childhood. As drug violence intensified in the late 90s and early 2000s, I heard more and more stories of kidnappings, disappearances, murders, and robberies. Reynosa, the city to which my mom commuted every day from our home in Mission, Texas, became a dangerous place, a dead city, and my mother's daily border crossings were fraught with tension and challenge. As the years went by, the Border Patrol began to harass her, threatening to revoke her residency, despite her Green-Card status. "If you live in the US, why would you want to work in Mexico where you make no money?"

In recent years, crossing has become even harder because of the increased policing on both sides of the border. In Reynosa, tanks and armed soldiers, most of them very young and natives of Tamaulipas, greet you as soon as you cross the checkpoint. This *fronterizo* space, neither American nor Mexican yet both, has grown more visibly militarized; you can hear the helicopters, see the Border Patrol and the white van driving from the United States to Mexico, and watch the undocumented people walking across the bridge with only a small bag holding their belongings after being deported.

My focus on this geography is partially personal, driven by my own visceral response to representations that mark my home as dangerous, violent, and dead. I proposed this project not only as a cathartic tool for myself but also as a way to begin a decolonization process of the borderlands that starts with narratives of death and dying that have been used to mark these spaces as Other and have facilitated the continuing marginalization and militarization. My work proposes not just inserting the border into horror studies but also using horror studies, particularly these undead figures, to help read and understand cultural productions about death, violence, and the undead along the US-Mexico border. Figures of death have been mobilized to represent and understand the multiple types of violence along the US-Mexico border post-1994 as NAFTA institutionalized an open border for trade but more forcefully policed how and when people could cross.

The intent of this project was not to argue for specific qualifications—positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate—of representations of death; after all, this dissertation is also part of the border-horror genre. Rather, I argue that representations of death and violence inspired by the border all exist within a wide spectrum, and they must be read together so we can fully grasp the discursive power that these images have on the communities that live on the border. Recent events show the increased dehumanization of Latina/o and Latin American communities. The battles being fought along the US-Mexico border (here I am thinking of the long line of asylum seekers who had to spend days in the Texas heat on the US-Mexico bridge waiting for the US Border Patrol to let them in) are also re-enacted and fought on the borderlands of discourse and cultural productions. Death is not only descriptive of this region but is becoming more and more prescriptive as policies by the US government continue to mark the

borderlands as a space of necessary death, a place where people must die so the borders of national imaginaries survive

Appendix: Credits and Plot Synopses

From Dusk till Dawn

Director: Robert Rodriguez
Year: 1996
Production Company: Dimension Films, A Band Apart, Los Hooligans Productions, Miramax
Writer(s): Robert Kurtzman and Quentin Tarantino

Plot Synopsis
This first movie in what would become a series of three films, is a low-budget indie film that follows the adventures of the brothers Gecko as they travel from Texas to Mexico to evade the police, who are trying to arrest them for a series of violent murders and after Seth's escape from prison, which was accomplished with the help of his younger brother, Richie. Though they are violent criminals—Seth a thief and murderer and Richie a sex offender and murder—the audience sympathizes with them and expects them to succeed. To cross the border, the brothers kidnap the Fuller family—Jacob, the father, an ex-pastor; daughter Kate; and adopted son Scott—who had been traveling in an RV After crossing the border into northern Mexico, the hostages and their kidnappers believe they have found refuge in a biker and trucker bar called the Titty Twister, where Seth and Richie are meant to meet their Mexican contact and fellow criminal, Carlos, who will take them to El Rey in exchange for part of their bank take. This temporary stopping point proves deadly when the dancers and bartenders reveal themselves as blood-hungry vampireires.

Full Tilt Boogie

Director: Sara Kelly
Year: 1997
Production Company: Dimension Films, A Band Apart, Los Hooligans Productions, Miramax
Writer(s): Robert Kurtzman and Quentin Tarantino

Plot Synopsis
A behind-the-scenes look at the making of *From Dusk till Dawn*. Includes cast and crew interviews. Billed as an opportunity to see how two Indie filmmakers, Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino, work.

From Dusk till Dawn 2: Texas Blood Money

Director: Scott Spiegel
Year: 1999
Production Company: Dimension Films, A Band Apart, Los Hooligans Productions
Writer(s): Scott Spiegel, Boaz Yakin, Duane Whitaker

Plot Synopsis
This is a story of five criminals as they attempt to rob a bank in Mexico. Luther, who just broke out of prison, calls his friend and fellow criminal, Buck, to get the gang back together for this heist. On their way to the rendezvous point in Mexico, Luther accidentally runs over and shoots a bat. His car breaks down, forcing him to find help at the closest establishment, the Titty Twister bar. Once the bartender, Razor Eddie, realizes that Luther killed a fellow vampireire, he attacks Luther, turning him into a vampireire as well. From there, the film devolves as Luther arrives at the hotel and turns his friends into vampireires. In the end, Buck must work alongside Sheriff Otis to survive the night and stop his friends from robbing the bank and turning everyone into vampireires.

From Dusk till Dawn 3: The Hangman's Daughter

Director: P. J. Pesce
Year: 1999
Production Company: Dimension Films, A Band Apart, Los Hooligans Productions
Writer(s): Alvaro Rodriguez, Robert Rodriguez

Plot Synopsis
From Dusk till Dawn 3: The Hangman's Daughter serves as a prequel, focusing on the history of Santanico Pandemonium, and attempts to provide a pan-indigenous history for the bar the Titty Twister and the queen vampireire, Esmeralda. The movie begins with the botched hanging of outlaw Johnny Madrid. When Madrid escapes, he takes Esmeralda, the eponymous hangman's daughter, with him. The story revolves around Esmeralda, who after years of abuse at the hands of her father runs away with Johnny Madrid. Set in the 1900s, the physical national borders are much blurrier than in the other two films in the franchise. What is clear, however, is that Esmeralda falls for Madrid, and they must keep running to stay away from her father, who is willing to kill her to save her from becoming a vampire like her mother. Madrid, Esmeralda, and a strange group of people, including a young married religious couple, end up at a bordello run by Quixtla, Esmeralda's mother. This temple where they attempt to find relief turns out to be La Tetilla del Diablo, a place run by a strong vampire who, along with her clan of vampires, has been feeding on humans for centuries.

From Dusk till Dawn: The Series

Creator: Robert Rodriguez
Year: 2014–16
Production Company: Factory Made Ventures, Miramax, Rodriguez International Pictures
Distribution: El Rey Network and Netflix

Plot Synopsis
The series was developed by Robert Rodriguez to serve as the first scripted series for his new network, El Rey, and premiered in 2014. Rodriguez saw it as an opportunity to expand the story from the first film in the franchise and to focus specifically on the indigenous roots of the border vampires who inhabit the Titty Twister. Like the first film in the film trilogy, the first season of the series follows the Gecko brothers as they rob a bank and are pursued by the FBI and Texas Rangers. After kidnapping the Fuller family and taking their RV, the brothers end up at the Titty Twister, where they are introduced to Santanico Pandemonium. The following two seasons see the Gecko brothers fighting against vampires and inner demons as they attempt to survive the nightmare world of Culebras that they have unleashed into the world.

Directors for the series included Rodriguez himself, Joe Menendez (*East Los High*, *Queen of the South*), Eduardo Sanchez (*The Blair Witch Project*), Alejandro Brugues (*Juan of the Muertos*), and Fede Alvarez (*Don't Breathe*). Writers for the series included Robert Rodriguez, Robert Kurtzman, Quentin Tarantino, Alvaro Rodriguez (*Machete*), and Fernanda Coppel (*The Bridge*).

Ahí va el diablo/Here Comes the Devil

Director: Adrián García Bogliano
Year: 2012
Production Company: Morbido Films, Salto de Fe Films, MPI Media Group
Writer(s): Adrián García Bogliano

Plot Synopsis
Ahí va el diablo is about Sol, a seemingly unremarkable middle-class Mexican family mom, Felix, her husband, and their two kids, Sara and Adolfo. Their vacation is turned into a nightmare when Adolfo and Sara go missing in the hills overnight. Although the children are found the next morning by the Tijuana police, Sol begins to notice that her children are acting strangely—barely talking, holding hands, and screaming for no reason in the middle of the night. Felix and Sol attribute their behavioral change to the trauma of being lost overnight in the hills. However, after discovering that Sara has abruptly stopped menstruating and that her stained yellow panties are missing, Sol and Felix begin to suspect that the kids were sexually assaulted while missing. Trying to find a scapegoat, they assume that the crime was committed by a man who lives in a van and was seen around the hills on the day of the children's disappearance, whom they torture and kill. Sol and Felix return home after their cathartic murder, thinking that everything will return to normal. But Sol uncovers the horrific truth behind the events that occurred that night in the hills: that the children with them now are actually demons who took possession of the children after murdering them in a remote cave.

The Bridge

Creator: Elwood Reid, Björn Stein, Meredith Stiehm
Year: 2013–14
Production Company: FX Productions, Shine America
Distribution: FX Network

Plot Synopsis
The first season of this two-season television series focuses on Juárez detective Marco Ruiz and El Paso detective Sonya Cross, who must work together to solve the murder and mutilation of an American judge whose body was found in the middle of the Bridge of the Americas. Together they search for the serial killer responsible for this death and that of nine immigrants who were killed crossing the border. The series points the investigation in numerous directions, the primary one focusing on the possible connection between the Juárez feminicides and this serial killer. Perhaps the murderer sees in Juárez the opportunity to kill freely, without fear of being caught by the corrupt police system. In the end, however, there is no political agenda in the killings. Rather, the killer is revealed to be David Tate, a former FBI agent who lost his wife and son in a car accident on the Bridge of the Americas and whose real target is none other than detective Marco Ruiz, who was having an affair with Tate's wife.

Feeding Ground

Writer: Jonathan "Swifty" Lang
Illustrator: Michael Lapinski
Letterer: Chris Magnun
Publisher: Archaia Entertainment
Year: 2011

Plot Synopsis
Feeding Ground is a graphic novel first released in 2010 in a six-part monthly series. The graphic novel I looked at for this presentation is the 2011 hardcover collection that includes a foreword by award-winning Mexican (Mexican American) author Luís Alberto Urrea, who wrote *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* in 2004. This creative non-fiction piece narrates the case of twenty-six Mexican men who attempted to cross the border from Sonora into Arizona, fourteen of whom died from heat exposure and other factors. The graphic novel tells the story of the Busqueda family, living in a border town in Sonora, Mexico, and Blackwell Industries, an extractive multinational conglomerate that houses a pack of werewolves and is owned by Alejandro Blackwell, the werewolf in chief. A famine caused by Blackwell forces Diego Busqueda to be a coyote to support his family by helping undocumented immigrants cross the "Devil's Highway," an unforgiving desert where many people have disappeared or died trying to cross. While Diego is away, his family—wife, Bea; teenage son, Miguel; and young daughter, Flaca—are attacked by a local narco who attempts to rape Bea. To stop this attack, Miguel shoots and kills the narco, forcing the family to flee. Before the family crosses, Flaca is bitten by

what appears to be a stray dog and is transformed into a vampire, eventually coming under the spell of Alejandro.

Dreamland: Way out of Juárez

Author: Charles Bowden
Illustrator: Alice Leora Briggs
Publisher: UT Press
Year: 2010

Plot Synopsis
A 174-page graphic novel about a DEA investigation gone wrong in Juárez. Lalo was a DEA informant who was caught with pot and then put to work for the DEA to help break up a cigarette-smuggling ring. Lalo was a narco and a snitch for the DEA in Juárez and had knowledge of and participated in one of the so-called "dead houses" used by the cartel to murder those who opposed it. The US government knew about the dead house but did nothing, since they didn't want to jeopardize their cigarette-smuggling case. Things crumbled when a cartel snitch accidentally sent cartel people to kill a DEA agent and his family. The family was unharmed, but the possibility of American casualties brought the house and activities there to light.

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