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COURAGE, RESISTANCE, AND WOMEN IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

Challenges to Militarization

BY KATHLEEN STAUDT AND ZULMA Y. MÉNDEZ



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COURAGE, RESISTANCE, AND WOMEN IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

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In the new "Inter-American" epoch to come, our borderland zones may expand well past the confines of geopolitical lines. Social knowledge of these dynamic interfaces offers rich insights into the pressing and complex issues that affect both the borderlands and beyond. The Inter-America Series comprises a wide interdisciplinary range of cutting-edge books that explicitly or implicitly enlist border issues to discuss larger concepts, perspectives, and theories from the "borderland" vantage and will be appropriate for the classroom, the library, and the wider reading public.

TO MOSI AND ASHA, SON AND DAUGHTER.—KS
PARA LA RESISTENCIA JUARENSE.—ZYM

PARA QUE LAS PERSONAS Y LAS MUERTES NUNCA
MÁS SEAN UN "DAÑO COLATERAL."
SO THAT PEOPLE'S DEATHS ARE NEVER AGAIN
CALLED "COLLATERAL DAMAGE."

PREFACE

OUR JOURNEYS TOWARD completion of this book have been long, but exciting and meaningful. We became friends and colleagues back in the 1990s, and our pathways crossed sporadically at various times when we came into constant contact in the EdD program at the University of Texas at El Paso, each of us from a different disciplinary background—political science and education—yet active researchers in interdisciplinary ways and learning from our transnational border: the place and its people. We are fortunate to live and teach here in El Paso now and to draw inspiration from the borderlands community and its receptivity to academics who have one foot in the scholarly world and the other in the world of action. Kathleen (Kathy) arrived at the border in 1977 as someone who specialized in comparative politics, within the political science discipline, with a focus on women and gender. At the University of Wisconsin, where she received her PhD, she was fortunate to enroll in several classes taught by James Scott before he moved to Yale University. At the border, Kathy's research designs have often used a comparative approach, advancing concepts and theory with insights from border space—this “in-between” place, as it has been termed by various border theorists. However, in recent years, her books have aimed to craft border theory out of the hybridized realities of border places, which expand toward mainstream societies with the spread of the less-visible borders of identity and the enforcement of, for example, immigration laws.

Zulma, a *fronteriza*, grew up in Ciudad Juárez but has been a commuter of the Juárez–El Paso border for most of her life. She has taught both at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez and at the University of Texas at El Paso; currently, she teaches at El Colegio de Chihuahua in Ciudad Juárez. As a scholar in the field of education, her work is concerned with questions of policy and curriculum reform. Employing what are known as the “untutored means” of ethnographic approaches to the study of education that she learned from her professors and mentors Reba Page (at the University of California, Riverside) and Alejandro Lugo (formerly at the University of Texas at El Paso, now at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Zulma analyzes and writes here on the activism that she has witnessed—and prac-

ticed—over the course of her life in various human rights organizations in Ciudad Juárez.

Each of us would like to thank people and organizations that opened doors of insight and participation to us. We also thank the reviewers of this manuscript for their close reading, perceptive insights, and suggestions. Zulma begins.

Subcomandante Marcos of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional once said (paraphrasing Heidegger) that when danger arises, what saves also surfaces. During the last years, filled with adversity and challenges for activists and citizens in Ciudad Juárez, my colleagues in Grupo de Articulación Justicia en Juárez and in Movimiento Pacto por la Cultura have been an everlasting source of wisdom, strength, inspiration, and hope. *Gracias, compañeros y compañeras*. Special recognition goes to my dear friends Willivaldo Delgadillo Fabela, Imelda Marrufo Nava, Kerry Doyle, Emilia González Tercero, and Verónica Corchado. In the moments of despair and difficulty, as well as those of sheer happiness, they are what saves.

Much gratitude to my colleagues and students at UTEP's Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations; the years I shared with them were crucial in my growth and learning. I am indebted to the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies, especially to former director María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba and to Interim Director Sandra Garabano. Their generosity and support facilitated much of my work on this book.

Siempre, in the ups and downs of life, I know I can count on the love and company of my father, Ramón Méndez Chaparro, and the wit and wisdom of my brother, Ramón César Méndez Villanueva. I am forever grateful for their existence. Renato A. Díaz is my best friend and beloved partner. *Gracias por lo compartido*.

Kathy continues, with thanks to Irasema Coronado for her friendship, coauthorships (especially in *Fronteras No Más: Toward Social Justice at the U.S.-Mexico Border* [2002], the first book to focus on cross-border organizing), and leadership in the binational Coalition against Violence toward Women and Families at the U.S.-Mexico Border, in which we both participated. I also appreciate the friendship and scholarly collaboration of Mexican politics specialist Tony Payan, social work academic-activist Mark Lusk, and Gregory Rocha, whose expertise in local politics surpasses all.

I value the experience and training I received from people in the real world of politics, from feminist mentor and President Carter political

appointee Arvonne Fraser, augmenting and enriching my political science PhD and introducing me into a coworker relationship with pioneering feminist political scientist Jane Jaquette in the late 1970s, to the various organizers and leaders in the local affiliates of the Industrial Areas Foundation, with its lengthy track record of community organizing and relational work. Thank you Kevin Courtney, Tara Pérez, Arturo Aguila, and Rabbi Larry Bach! Other faith-based leaders “practice what they preach” in social-justice work, besides Rabbi Bach. Among them, I thank the Reverend John Nelsen, Father Pablo Matta, Rubén García, Monsignor/Father Arturo Bañuelas, the Reverend Katie Houts, and Pastor Wayne Kendrick. I was amazed at the El Paso City Council’s leadership on the border exercised in 2009 and 2010 and was honored to work with some of its representatives as well as UTEP scholar-leaders in the huge Global Public Policy Forum on the War on Drugs conference in 2009 (<http://warondrugsconference.utep.edu>); I value the opportunity I had to work with Linda Corchado and the follow-up leadership that historian Oscar Martínez provided to these efforts.

For their journalistic efforts that go above and beyond covering Juárez as a place of doom, I thank Sito Negrón for his coverage of the U.S. drug war and Kent Paterson, of Frontera North-South News, Laura Carlsen, Mexico City–based editor of the Center for International Programs’ Americas Program, and even some distant mainstream journalists who kept the tragedy of women’s murders alive and visible despite their eclipse by the huge increase in homicide in Ciudad Juárez.

Finally, though, I am grateful for the opportunity for friendship and coauthorship with Zulma Méndez. Zulma brings the nuanced, deep understanding and broker capabilities that so fully enrich this book and its contents. We complement one another in this border space: the largest metropolitan region through which a territorial borderline runs, the epicenter of violence during what many in both countries call the “absurd” drug wars, and now, importantly, the new epicenter of grassroots organizing that inspires mainstream Mexico, transnational activists, and civil-society counterparts on the U.S. side of the border.

As a humble gesture of our gratitude and solidarity for the work that Juarenses human rights activists undertake with great risk to their lives, we are donating the royalties that this volume might generate to the Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte, A.C. Led by Father Oscar Enríquez, and sustained with the unrelenting efforts of nuns and other women who mostly volunteer their time and work, this human rights advocacy center offers its services, free of charge, to those who knock

on its door. Illegally raided by federal police officers, who broke in and caused damage to its facilities and computer systems, the center has continued to denounce human rights abuses and took the first documented case of forced disappearance during the presidency of Felipe Calderón (who is now a fellow at Harvard University) to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

COURAGE, RESISTANCE, AND WOMEN IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

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INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALIZING COURAGE AND RESISTANCE IN A MIRED HUMAN RIGHTS CONTEXT

*It is important to document and keep records of violations.
We commend you. Also, we invite you to document ways
you have resisted . . .*

NORA CORTIÑAS, JUROR, PERMANENT PEOPLES' TRIBUNAL,
MAY 2012, CIUDAD JUÁREZ

THE MEXICAN AND U.S. drug wars have wreaked havoc on Mexico, where at least 60,000 and as many as 120,000 people have been murdered since 2006 at the hands of organized criminals, drug traffickers, and law enforcement officials in the context of the so-called war on drugs.¹ Both governments have responded with policies that militarize the conflict: Mexico since President Felipe Calderón (2006–2012), with its *guerra contra el narcotráfico*, also known as the *guerra contra las drogas*, and the United States, with its forty-year-old drug war, immigration control, and antiterrorism efforts. Such solutions have aggravated violence in various parts of Mexico, but pressure has been building for social investment, with new casts of political characters and courageous resistance among civil-society activists to militarization despite an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

In this book, we examine civil-society activism in the borderlands—what some have called *la Resistencia Juareense* (the Juareense Resistance)—in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Ciudad Juárez, its population once hovering at 2 million people and now counted as 1.3 million, according to Mexico's census (INEGI 2010), is part of a transnational metropolitan community that includes El Paso, Texas, with its population of nearly 800,000 people, thereby creating a space historically known as the Paso del Norte region of more than 2 million people. Ciudad Juárez has been the border center point and ground zero for the

violence of the drug war, with annual, always-contested murder rates that rose from over 400 in 2007 to approximately 1,600 in 2008, 2,600 in 2009, 3,100 in 2010, and back down to below the 2008 rate in 2011 until murders spread elsewhere, especially to northeastern Mexico, and sloped downward in Ciudad Juárez through 2013 (see chapter 3 for figures).² Although there is a long history of mobilization in Ciudad Juárez, the gender-based violence—specifically what in Mexico is called the *feminicidio* (“femicide,” a contested term)³—that began in the 1990s instigated a vigorous activism that previewed and alerted people to the huge growth in violence that ultimately occurred when officials failed to cleanse law enforcement institutions, which operate with almost-total impunity.

Ciudad Juárez is also Mexico’s ground zero center point for organizing and activism against the militarization. The second stage of anti-femicide activism—about which we provide analysis in the following chapter—joined anti-militarization forces to provide a gendered counternarrative to the official narratives during the Calderón administration. Like Juarense activists, we frequently use the term “gender,” which highlights the social construction of and visibility of women and men, rather than the burial of women in overall figures or analyses of reality—an analytic burial ground so common for centuries. Javier Sicilia, of the national *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity), organized a caravan to the central border region twice, including on his trip from West to East Coast in the United States (as we analyze in chapter 6). Thus, the Paso del Norte region has also become a center space for activism, and increasingly cross-border civil-society activism, with its triumphs and its challenges.

This introductory chapter is divided into several parts. First we propose a reframing of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands with analyses of social movements during this era of personal and electronic networking. Then we provide the focus of the book: everyday organizing at the border as it connects with transnational organizing. After that, we take some time and space to elaborate on our research methods and then on the theoretical impulses that we hope to advance in the book. To close, we provide an outline of chapters.

REFRAMING THE U.S.–MEXICO BORDERLANDS

Historically, the borderlands have been framed in state-centric ways, focusing on the relative ease of trade and/or immigration controls (see

Payan 2006 for periodization). Yet others treat the two sides of the borderline—the borderlands—as interdependent regions (Martínez 1994; Staudt, Fuentes, and Monárrez Fragoso 2010) of hybridity (Anzaldúa 1987; García-Canclini 1995), including hybridized educational practices (Rippberger and Staudt 2003) in a regional zone of “inspection” and control (Lugo 2008), drug wars (Campbell 2009), and cross-border activism (Staudt and Coronado 2002). Some border theorists, increasingly utilizing interdisciplinary and anthropological approaches, ask whether the border region is a hybrid region (Heyman 2012) or a polarized one, with each side treating the “other” side in distancing ways (Vila 2000, 2005; on “othering,” see Bhabha 1994). In this book, we consider that theoretical question—hybridized or polarized?—with regard to civil-society activism in the central, iconic border region of Ciudad Juárez–El Paso, the largest transnational metropolitan region in the world. Gloria Anzaldúa and others have written that the border zone of 14 million people in counties and *municipios*, according to the censuses of both countries (Staudt and Coronado 2002: chap. 1), represents a special, hybrid place of both conflicting and blending tendencies, what Susan Rippberger and Staudt call morphing (2003) in the complex political socialization that not only constructs public schools and nationalist identities imposed upon students but also reflects the interdependence of the region (see Heyman 2012 on the theoretical overview).

More recently, journalists and essayists have framed and represented the border as a place of chaos, violence, and mayhem, implying a future of hopelessness (for examples, see, among many, Bowden 1998, 2010; Poppa 2010; Rodríguez 2012; Vulliamy 2010; Washington Valdez 2005) in a “failed state” (Grayson 2009). Gendered social constructions overlay some of the framing. In particular, Rosa-Linda Fregoso uses the word “voyeur” for Charles Bowden, with his “racist and colonialist gaze.”⁴ Nevertheless, economic boosters, such as the organizers of events like Juárez Competitiva 2011 with transnational business-oriented groups, as we develop in the next chapter, continue to tout the size and competitiveness of the border area for secure global manufacturing investments (but see Lugo 2008 and selections in Staudt, Fuentes, and Monárrez Fragoso 2010). The global neoliberal economic agenda shrouds the transnational border region, as does an increasingly militarized war-on-drugs approach that wreaks havoc on the borderlands (see selections in Payan, Staudt, and Kruszewski 2013).

In our book, we reframe the border and while acknowledging its complexities in the militarization of both Mexican and U.S. govern-

ment policies, focus on civil-society activists who resist this militarization and tenuously (though at times uneasily) weave together anti-femicide and anti-militarization social forces toward a conglomeration of peace and justice movements. Activists have fostered not only close cross-border solidarity in faith-based action and even an electoral campaign, but also distant transnational activism in the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, in which moral authorities from around the world held the Mexican government to account, deliberately launched in Ciudad Juárez. Civil-society activists do their work through interlocking relationships augmented with Facebook and Twitter in social and electronic networks with multiple names. Egregious cases of violence—whether those responsible are officials or organized criminals—have triggered game-changing shifts in perception about state militarization. By “game changing,” we mean dramatic shifts in organizational strategy that emerge from the public delegitimization of official discourses (further elaborated in chapter 3).⁵ Local Juarenses network with activists elsewhere, especially in Mexico City, Latin America, and Europe, but also with activists on the U.S. side of the border, some of whom work in solidarity with colleagues and others of whom disseminate the doom and gloom of mainstream media-framed messages. Anti-militarization as well as anti-femicide activists maneuver courageously in a country dubbed the most dangerous place for journalists and activists. In fact, UNESCO urged Mexico to approve legislation that would provide protective mechanisms for journalists and human rights activists (UNESCO 2012; also see CPJ 2010). Within the media, however, one finds both courage and complicity with government and/or organized crime, whether from threats or rewards. One sometimes hears that parts of the media can be “extortionists” in their decisions about what to publish and how to frame the stories, as media owners are always careful of maintaining their highly lucrative contracts for publicity from local, state, and federal agencies. Our focus in this book, however, is on local to transnational civil-society organizing activities.

EVERYDAY ORGANIZING AS IT CONNECTS WITH TRANSNATIONAL FORCES

We begin the book with conceptualizations of civil-society activism. We view civil society, at its most basic level, as independent of the state and of the private sphere of familial relationships. Yet we recognize that conceptions of civil society vary in many nations and even in border-

lands where the state and nation may merge in muddled ways. European border theorists Liam O'Dowd and Bohdana Dimitrova (2011) note the different Eastern and Western conceptions of civil society that, while viewed in relation to the state, mean different things in states with more or less attention to the "rule of law" and with higher or lower levels of distrust in society and in connection with the state. One thread in our book involves consideration of whether U.S. and Mexican conceptions of civil society at the border are similar or not, given different state structures. Moreover, we consider the tensions that exist when the idealized independence of civil society becomes, in practice, less autonomous, with registration, tax-exempt legal status, and subsidies from government, whether observed in the U.S. women's movement of the 1970s (Staudt 2008: chap. 5), international nongovernmental organizations (Korten 1990; Alvarez 1998), or organizations struggling to decide whether to apply for government grants in the violence of Ciudad Juárez during the Calderón administration (Doyle 2011a).

Our analysis of resistance draws on political anthropologist James Scott's writings about everyday forms of resistance, including artful resistance, and the "hidden and official transcripts" that shape people's lives (1990). By "resistance," we mean conscious actions that challenge, reject, or strategically ignore official discourse and its legitimization discourse. Guided also by Sidney Tarrow's analysis of political opportunity structures (1998), we consider the ever-dynamic and ever-changing opportunities in the contexts of national governments in the borderlands and in the shifting contexts where once-marginalized mothers, feminists, and human rights activists began to interface with anti-militarization activists toward a more gender-balanced struggle to reclaim civil-society space amid an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

Peace and justice activists do their work using social technology, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and listservs, in addition to traditional face-to-face organizing, activism, marches, and rallies. Strong activist ties, we expect, require *personal* relationships of trust. Long before journalists coined the phrase "Arab Spring," Juarese activists used similar techniques to open up, challenge, and create counternarratives, albeit in a country that calls itself a democracy, unlike the dictatorships that fell during the Arab Spring. We draw also on human rights theorists in international studies (particularly Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink 1999) who posit the ways that local activists draw on transnational activists and that institutions and the media bring leverage and alliances with media, international institutions, and