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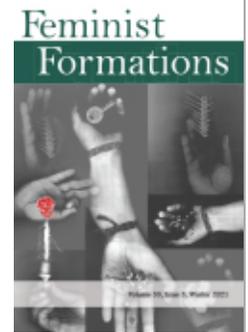
The Borders of #MeToo: A Conversation about Sexual Violence
Against Women in Ciudad Juárez

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Feminist Formations, Volume 33, Issue 3, Winter 2021, pp. 333-350 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2021.0054>



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The Borders of #MeToo: A Conversation about Sexual Violence Against Women in Ciudad Juárez

Gloria González-López and Lydia Cordero Cabrera

This essay is a modest *ofrenda*—an offering—
to the women victims of all forms of violence
to the people who have died (and will die) of Covid-19
and to those who engage in all versions
of Lorena Cabnal's inspirational *feminismo comunitario*
every day and everywhere on earth.

To you, Rosita in Ciudad Juárez, and to all the Rositas of the world.

Before crossing the Paso del Norte international bridge that unites Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, a big black cross with a pink background—and many nails on it to hold pieces of paper with victims' names—reminds the traveling eyes of some the most cruel and grotesque expressions of violence against women in contemporary Mexican society. The painful icon is also a reminder of the priceless presence of inspirational feminists who have been working tirelessly at the community level to eradicate sexual violence against women in the Mexican border city—many years before the #MeToo movement was even imagined. But, has the #MeToo metaphorically crossed from the United States to the Mexican border city? Has the #MeToo movement had an impact on the lives of women in Ciudad Juárez? If so, to what extent, how, and why? The authors engaged in a conversation feeling motivated to explore answers to these questions and this essay offers some of the relevant themes emerging from that dialogue. This conversation is also inspired by at least four of the specific features of Latino/a sociology:

- Latino/a sociology draws from and expands on interdisciplinary feminist standpoint theories;

- Latino/a sociology uses emerging critical methodologies such as personal narratives, auto-ethnography, testimonios, and visual ethnography that seek to incorporate the voices of excluded groups;
- Latino/a sociology is neither neutral nor value free but instead takes a stand against social injustice and promotes activist and political agendas for change;
- Latino/a sociology seeks to produce knowledge for social justice, human rights, and social change (Baca Zinn and Mirandé 2020, 5–6).

Personal and Shared Standpoints

The first author, Gloria González-López, is a Mexican immigrant, a feminist sociologist, and a public intellectual currently living and working in Austin, Texas. The second author, Lydia Cordero Cabrera, is a feminist activist and currently the executive director of Casa Amiga Esther Chávez Cano, A.C., a leading, community-based organization in Ciudad Juárez. The authors offer their reflections from their individual and unique but also shared standpoints, also as cisgender adult women born and raised in Northern Mexico, Nuevo León, and Chihuahua, respectively, who have known each other professionally for about twenty years. They are aware of the multiple ways in which this intellectual exercise could have been explored if, for instance, this conversation had included the voices of additional academics and activists, or professionals with more expertise in this field. González-López and Cordero Cabrera are also aware of the complexities for an in-depth exploration of sexual violence; for example, gender, sexual and racial diversity, national origin, body ability, as well as class may selectively shape the risk of experiencing sexual violence in a complex Mexican border city. However, this article is based on a dialogue about cisgender women with a special focus on those who are socioeconomically marginalized; Ciudad Juárez is one of the cities with the highest rates of perverse gender-violence killing women—*feminicidio*—in the country, and thousands have disappeared and died in the region and the nation as consequence of the “war on drugs” of recent years. Finally, different themes emerged during the conversation between the authors and only three major topics are included in this essay. The authors hope, however, that the reflections they offer in this essay will inform and stimulate future feminist research projects examining sexual violence against women in the “#MeToo era,” and during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unconventionally Feminist: Context + Conversation and Analysis

Conversation has been essential in collaborative action research, and it has been used as well by feminist scholars to explore and construct meaning to

their life experiences, social realities, and theorizing and knowledge production.¹ Co-authored academic publications showcasing two interlocutors, at times one or two well-known scholars in conversation have been published in anthologies and feminist journals. For example, AnaLouise Keating published *Interviews/Entrevistas*, a collection of dialogues between Gloria E. Anzaldúa and different producers of knowledge, within and outside academia and a wide variety of disciplines and fields (2000). And Cathy J. Cohen and Sarah J. Jackson engage in dialogue to examine the Black Lives Matter movement and feminism in contemporary society (2016).

Thus, this article was inspired by the power of conversation as a method. The authors believe in the potential of dialogue to make meaning of the social realities and gender inequalities lived in Ciudad Juárez in the #MeToo era, and they expand it by including two additional dimensions: context and analysis. Thus, the structure this article follows—context, and conversation & analysis—is intentionally designed to be unconventional.

Context: Why Ciudad Juárez?

Since the early 1990s, hundreds of women living in the industrialized border city known for housing hundreds of assembly plants—maquiladoras—have been exposed to the most grotesque expressions of violence against women. Extensive research has documented the ways in which these women have been “strangled, mutilated, dismembered, raped, stabbed, torched, disfigured, murdered, and disposed of in the desert of Ciudad Juárez” (Morales and Bejarano 2008, 181). These expressions of violence against women, as well as their patterns and frequency have changed since they started to be documented in 1993. However, the *violencia feminicida* is still high in this location, and it is one of the highest in the country, according to scholars who have continued to this day, to meticulously document the disappearances and murders of women in the border city (A. Limas Hernández and M. Limas Hernández 2019)².

Dr. Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos’s work is essential for understanding gender violence in the border city and the rest of the nation. She introduced *feminicidio* to legal and academic spaces in Mexico and made it possible to classify it as a crime in the Federal Penal Code and state Penal Codes in the rest of the country; she has theorized and published extensively about it in feminist scholarship in the Spanish-speaking world. She coordinated a large scale diagnostic research project on *violencia feminicida* nationally (2006), actively offered her academic and legal expertise in the Cotton Field Case, and in the writing and approval in 2007 of the *Ley General de Acceso de Las Mujeres a Una Vida Libre de Violencia* [The General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence]. In a conversation with the first author in March 2021, Lagarde offered important reasons on why Ciudad Juárez is relevant in the history of feminism in Mexico (this quote is used with permission):

Ciudad Juárez is a reference point because it was in Ciudad Juárez where some of the relatives and human rights defenders realized that the disappearance of women and girls, and adolescent girls in their families was not a coincidence but it arose from the circumstances of the city at that moment. And Ciudad Juárez also represented that disobedience of women and relatives who decided to no longer accept such disappearances as fortuitous but instead to go out, look for and find their daughters, their sisters, their women relatives. Ciudad Juárez has also become that reference point of the solidarity coming from different parts of the world revolving around what was happening to women in that location. And right there, we call it *feminicidio* to identify the violent crimes against women. [. . .] [F]or a long time our expectations have grown, and now we not only want justice but we also want to eradicate violence against women and girls.

Socially and culturally, the border city has become a lively hub of vibrant and creative expressions of feminist organizing, reuniting local, national, and international activists. For instance, the now historical 2004 march co-sponsored by Amnesty International and V-Day, as well as local organizations, including Casa Amiga and its founder Esther Chávez Cano, reunited activists and justice work organizers, scholars, and concerned citizens, as well as celebrities, including Sally Field, Jane Fonda, and Eve Ensler, the creator of *The Vagina Monologues*. These sisters-in-arms' public demonstrations have been part of the local culture in Ciudad Juárez, especially around emblematic days, such as International Women's Day on March 8th and the observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on November 25th. More recently, *El violador en tu camino*—A Rapist in Your Path—a Chilean performance that went viral all over the world in late 2019 and throughout 2020—was performed also in Ciudad Juárez; its contagious lyrics have become the song giving life to recent feminist rallies and other events in the city.

Institutionally, some entities have been established, aiming not only to document but also to eradicate different expressions of violence against women. In 1993, Esther Chávez Cano and other local concerned citizens started to create their own archives of newspapers to keep record of the murders of women. In 1994, a special unit for sexual crimes and a special district attorney's office was established. In 1999, Casa Amiga opened its doors as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) to women seeking answers to their experiences of different forms of gender violence. In 2001, the *Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres* [National Institute for Women] is also established in Mexico City, and the state of Chihuahua creates its own institute in 2002; years later, the *Instituto Municipal de las Mujeres* is officially established in Ciudad Juárez.

In 2012, *feminicidio* was officially established as a crime in the Federal Penal Code; Chihuahua classified it as such in the Penal Code at the state level until the end of 2020, ironically becoming the last state to do it. As of today, *feminicidio*

is not used yet officially to identify women who are victims of this crime in Ciudad Juárez or the rest of the state of Chihuahua. Instead, *homicidio doloso* (or intentional homicide) is used, a concept that highlights the intentionality of causing harm to the victim, regardless of gender. A linguistic transition that may take time seems to be rooted in the long history of institutionalized patriarchy in the legal system, and it highlights the still long way to go in Ciudad Juárez.

Conversation

The following section consists of three excerpts from an original, longer conversation between the authors. Each section addresses specific dimensions with regard to #MeToo as well as sexual violence against women in the border city. The conversation themes are identified as follows: *La oleada* ~ the wave; Recycling, repurposing, resisting; and, *Feminismo comunitario* ~ feminism in community. The original conversation took place in Spanish, it was translated and typed in English by the first author, and revised and edited for accuracy by both authors. Although the conversation itself offers some analytical reflections, additional analysis is included in a separate section.

La oleada ~ The wave

Gloria: First of all, how did you learn about the #MeToo?

Lydia: I heard about it around the end of 2017, precisely because of the breaking news, national and international, and knowing some of the feminist colleagues in the United States and the larger movement, so those of us who are part of networks in Ciudad Juárez, we learned from the distance about what was happening, and about what was coming. My opinion about how the #MeToo made it to Ciudad Juárez, it has to do with how things make their way over here, ok? They always go through the national territory, there is a national movement, and then these movements make it to the rest of the states. They come like an *oleada*—a wave. So it was an international *oleada* first, it arrives in Mexico City, it is activated in Mexico City by other feminist colleagues who embrace the movement, they become protagonists of it themselves. I became familiar with the processes that these colleagues experienced. Andrea Medina comes to mind; she is an attorney working on these issues and I have known her for a long time. I had the opportunity to attend and participate in a forum in Mexico City in 2018, when they were talking about it, and what women were going through. I had the opportunity to be there precisely because I have attended other activities involving Casa Amiga, and I participated in what was coming. And so those *oleadas* make their way over here, no? With no doubt, they may come with delay but they make it to Ciudad Juárez. And that is how I learned about it. And I also learned through all the interviews that some feminist colleagues, movements, especially I see it much more here in Ciudad Juárez with the college students, young

women, women who were experiencing harassment within a local university. Young women started to expose a lot of experiences of harassment, creating web pages, including a spreadsheet document that circulated via WhatsApp that was shared continuously, and each woman shared her name, and the name of the person she was denouncing, and then what has happened to her. So in and through that document circulated stories of women who shared stories of what has happened when they were children, if an uncle has touched them, or a neighbor has fondled them, and they would put the name of the aggressor. So they were taking the risk to talk about it. And it circulated, and in the document an endless list of names circulated, many, many names circulated, names of teachers and professors, of administrators and officials, of teachers of *preparatorias* (equivalent to high school), teachers of private schools, so they were young women, including teenagers, talking about what has happened to them. So it was like a big boom, it started in early 2019.

Gloria: That is what I was going to ask you, when did it start, when did it finish?

Lydia: It started in 2019, it is when I see the highest or relevant point, because I see it close to March 8th. So we have these national and international movements, and also to expose [the existence of] women's experiences of violence. I saw it in fact with students of *secundaria* (equivalent to middle school, grades seven to eight). I saw young women with signs on construction paper, "I don't want the teacher to touch me" or they would denounce that teachers would exchange grades for some kind of physical contact or a picture, or an image. So you would see these women wearing their uniforms of *secundaria* with their signs. So at Casa Amiga, we as a team would talk to reflect about this and realized that this did not happen in previous years, that the same young women had that kind of initiative to publicly denounce and we noticed some sort of convergence between the #MeToo and all of this, because it had happened the year before, plus this experience of women being fed up socially because of the violence against women and that in Mexico became more obvious with the women who were killed in such a cruel and intense way. [. . .] So you would see these students who would come out of their schools with their signs, and it was covered by local media, something that did not happen before. So even if it did not have the #MeToo sign, or a clear identification with it, I saw it reflected because of the ways it evolved, how this wave has made it over here.

Gloria: Did people react to the spreadsheet? If so, how?

Lydia: There were reactions to the document, strong reactions of censorship that would say "show your face, take legal action, don't just simply use a piece of paper." And there were reactions, similar to what I think has happened

in other parts of the world, discrediting the movement, and discrediting women for speaking out, and to do what we call *escrache público* of men who have exercised violence and who have not been exposed. In fact, in that spreadsheet, there was a column that said whether there was a legal process or not, with lots of comments; for example, you can see comments like “There was no lawsuit” or “It did not go through” or “I did not do it because of fear.”

Gloria: You used this concept, *escrache público*. What does that mean?

Lydia: Over here people use it, it sounds like in “scratch.” Like, for example, they put a picture of the man who exercised violence, and they do it in some sort of public way. In other words, it’s like a public denunciation showing his image and his name. It is like a *descrédito*, a way to discredit him publicly, to bring out the experience of violence to the light, to make violence against women visible, you know, that he has been exercising violence against a woman. And so, if there is not a legal process—for whatever reason—minimally, there is that form of public discredit.

Gloria: Do women still use the spreadsheet as a practice of *escrache público* in Ciudad Juárez?

Lydia: It circulated in 2019, and it continued to make noise in early 2020, and then we have the March 8, 2020 events, and then it was reinvigorated when harassment and violence against women, *quid pro quo* cases, and the images of the students, women workers became part of public conversations and public opinion.

Gloria: As the sheet circulates, women are confronted by people, can you share more about these people who confront them?

Lydia: Mainly men, many of the men whose names were published, as in “Well, I want to clean up my name” or “It was not that way” or “Someone wants to accuse me unfairly.”

Gloria: This reminds me of an article in the New York Times, showing the names and faces of the men who were publicly exposed and then fell off their pedestals, the article came out in 2018. Did something like that happen in Ciudad Juárez?

Lydia: No, I have not seen anything like that in Ciudad Juárez. I know that in Mexico City something similar has happened. Andrea Medina, the attorney, has worked on some of those legal cases, like you said, men who fell off, but I know that these have been very complex cases. I met a young woman who came to Ciudad Juárez to work on a journalistic report, and she was one of the women who followed a legal process. And she told me about how difficult and intense this was, and the social stigma

against her for speaking up, for taking a risk, for exposing it publicly, and now she knows the cost of what it means to be exposed herself, publicly.

Gloria: So, does the spreadsheet stop circulating?

Lydia: Yes, and I think it has to do with these reactions from people, in fact, the *Fiscal de Género* (literally, District Attorney for Gender) in the state of Chihuahua came out and said something like “*Adelante, denuncien*—Go ahead and denounce (legally). Here we have a formal process so you can place your denunciation.” She said something like that, to invite women to follow a formal process because this spreadsheet document received a lot of attention. And that must have been in early 2020. In fact, we were familiar with the spreadsheet document because we (coworkers at Casa Amiga) were on different chats, and the daughter of one of them is a teenager. She is in *secundaria* and she got the spreadsheet document via WhatsApp, and she was able to identify the names of people who were on the document. So, it circulated a lot with young women and adolescents. I do not know how many of these women actually requested a legal process, but that was it, it ended there, in the *escrache público*, with the exception of those made by college students. College students are very active, and I know that some professors support them. I am thinking of a college organization called *Uni Unida*, and it is very vocal and active in many areas of social justice; they have participated in the March 8th rallies and have a space on Facebook. Currently this spreadsheet has shut down and looks like it cannot be recovered.

Gloria: I know that there has been a lot of social activism promoting the elimination of violence against women for many years in Ciudad Juárez. But I wonder, do you see a “before” and “after” the #MeToo in Ciudad Juárez?

Lydia: Yes, yes, I see it. Maybe not as something that is concrete and material, that you can perceive directly, but yes, you can see some sort of awareness raising, some sort of denormalization of violence against women, in other words, it is no longer normal to accept it. So what was kept in silence before now it is made public, so it comes out from the private spaces to the public spaces. And for me, what is so meaningful is to see these adolescent girls attending *secundaria* outside their school. So it was a group of eight or nine adolescents wearing their uniform holding a sign, a sign made with construction paper with their handwriting. So for me that was impactful, because nobody was behind this, nobody told them to do this. So it was this same movement that helps people wake up, to reject what is not natural, what is not normal. So yes, I think there has been a step that was made regarding the denormalization of violence, to expose to the public what has been kept as private and quiet for a long time. You read the written stories of women who are taking the risk to talk about

it, and I am sure many of them are taking the risk to talk about it for the first time and share with other women in *las redes*—social networks. So all of that is definitely meaningful, and shows progress regarding this idea of making violence against women visible.

Gloria: But who are the women who can buy a cell phone so they can have access to a WhatsApp and Facebook in Ciudad Juárez?

Lydia: You know, it is so interesting to see how this theme of WhatsApp and Facebook has made it to all socioeconomic strata. We identify, in fact, in the *colonias del suroriente*—sectors, suburbs in the southeast part of the city—or the periphery where we work, that it is common to have Facebook and WhatsApp. It is a very powerful way of communicating among young women, adolescents through these two, because they may not have a lot of space or memory for much data, but there are some plans for people who have cell phones. So, you don't have the app to have access to the Internet but WhatsApp and Facebook are free and unlimited. In fact, now with the pandemic and classes online, it has been easier for teachers to send materials to students via WhatsApp and Facebook. So if students don't have Internet at home, at least they have that WhatsApp contact, then they can get information. So, these young women I told you about protesting outside their schools, they were from a *secundaria* in the *suroriente*, so they live in a *colonia* that is marginalized. So that is what really moved me.

Recycling, Repurposing, Resisting

Gloria: So, this is so interesting, because you are telling me that people who live in marginalized communities may buy a cell phone and have access to WhatsApp and Facebook. How do they do it?!

Lydia: Yes, not all people who live in marginalized areas are able to buy a cell phone but it is not unusual to see that people own one, a very modest one. Some people buy it on small installments at Coppel or Elektra, you know, the retail stores; they make small payments for a long time and paying interest, and get a very basic, the cheapest phone with free access to WhatsApp and Facebook. Also, youth and adolescents socialize through both, a lot. So, they don't have access to high speed Internet, they may not have a tablet or a computer, but WhatsApp and Facebook helps them to socialize. I am sharing this also because we see this with the women we serve at Casa Amiga. Now with the pandemic, we use it to look for them, and all of them have access to a cell phone and may not have FaceTime but most of them have WhatsApp. And they are working class people, poor people, lower strata, *maquiladora* workers who live in the *suroriente* of the city. And these young adolescent women are the daughters of these women, who live in these zones of the city.

Gloria: So, besides buying a modest cell phone on installments, what has facilitated this process, you know, people having access to a cell phone?

Lydia: Here in Juárez, we receive all the trash coming from the United States, so this is tech junk! [sarcastic laughter] There are many, many places where they repair used cell phones and then they sell them to you as second hand cell phones, phones that come from the United States. So people sell them used to you, after reconstructing them and they sell them for a low price.

Gloria: How big are these businesses?

Lydia: They are small shops, small islands. Over here, people have a small business at home, that is very, very common and they sell cell phones. Also, on Facebook, you have no idea of the number of people who sell used, second hand cell phones here in Ciudad Juárez.

Gloria: So, Ciudad Juárez is a place where there's this recycling of tech junk, and they sell it in person and via Facebook . . .

Lydia: Aha, and those who sell the cell phone to you, reconstructed, repaired, sell it for real, real cheap; maybe it is going to work for a year or less, but it is really cheap. And on top of that, add the fact of Carlos Slim, this Mexican magnate who owns this huge telecom business who sells you a package that could be, for example, one hundred pesos (equivalent to five US dollars), and you recharge your phone and they give you unlimited WhatsApp and Facebook. So people just keep charging and recharging and recharging their phones that way, at grocery stores, all the small stores have that service, so you can recharge with twenty pesos (equivalent to one US dollar), thirty pesos, like that . . . and now you see that everybody has a cell phone . . . I have seen that, maybe since the last five years or so.

Gloria: So, it is common then to see the average working class person waiting for the bus at the corner while looking at the small screen of a cell phone . . .

Lydia: Yes, that is very common, especially with the younger generation. I think older women may feel challenged by this, because I think we have had some sort of high-tech shock with older women who are not used to using any of this new technology, and who does not know how to use it, no? But girls, adolescent young women, that is so common . . . and girls who are in *secundaria*, older than 12-years-old you see them with a cell phone in hand. So it is not a "first class" cell phone, it is really modest and basic, but with unlimited access to WhatsApp and Facebook. They socialize with other women, close friends, and that has been a challenge for us while working in the *secundarias* because of the sexting. What happens when they share images, and also the theme of when they

share pornography, which they may share among themselves, videos, this especially among young men.

Feminismo comunitario ~ *Feminism in community*

Gloria: You told me some time ago that the expressions of violence against women are more intense now, during the pandemic . . .

Lydia: Yes, that is what we have observed. The colleagues who offer psychological services reported that pattern: those who were getting services and who have had some de-escalating of violence, now it came back with more aggression, more intense, more harsh, more severe, more intense physical violence and many in fact look for a shelter, which was one of the reasons why the shelter went up in numbers. It got to the point where we had no space over here, and we would look for a space in the city of Chihuahua or another place where to place them. In Ciudad Juárez, there are two shelters, and they can accommodate up to twenty-eight women and their children, and they can stay for three months, but with the pandemic some stayed longer because they could not go out, they needed money to pay rent, get a job, etc. So, some stayed longer.

Gloria: How about sexual violence? Has the incidence gone up during the pandemic?

Lydia: I would not be able to tell you, we don't have them well identified yet, because we think this kind of information will not be disclosed until we come out of this isolation. So, we have been thinking about this, and we think this is relevant especially for girls and boys. But the type of violence they are reporting now, women, is intrafamilial violence, women being beaten up; our shelters have been at full capacity, so women have been looking for shelter because their lives are in danger . . . and *feminicidio* has gone up during the pandemic.

Gloria: By the way, have you had any feminist rallies or feminist public events during the pandemic?

Lydia: Yes, we had two for November 25, 2020. We had a rally in cars, like a caravan, like a rally driving our cars through Riveras del Bravo which is a *colonia* with a high incidence of violence in the city, the one with highest rates of intrafamilial and sexual violence in the city, and *feminicidio*, in *suroriente*, the one where we have been working with these women's groups. This activity was organized in collaboration with our colleagues from feminist organizations, *Red Mesa de Mujeres* and *Programa Compañeros*. So, we had the caravan, we painted our cars, we decorated them, we used banners, we used signs with our organizations' telephone numbers, with information, we gave away flyers, we gave them masks now for the pandemic, we gave them whistles with this idea for women to blow the

whistle in case of danger, the way it used to work in the past. And it was our *marcha*, in a different way. And we drove through all the streets of the Riveras del Bravo neighborhood; it was Saturday November 28, and we distributed the information. It was on the news, to make it visible, you know, that November 25 is not forgotten. And at the The Cotton Field Memorial—*Memorial del Campo Algodonero*—we had a special event for media and we had to make sure we did not have a lot of people because of the Covid restrictions now with red light, but we wanted to make it visible. We have images of that event.

Gloria: How do people react after these events?

Lydia: In Riveras del Bravo, yes, women reacted, because it is a smaller community, so we already had our own networks of women who joined us. So, we have those networks of women, and those networks are right there, at the community level. And we are going to continue working with them. And yes, we see that women talk more about it, they are more aware. So, women have these community networks and we call them *defensoras comunitarias*—women defending their communities. We train them; they decide to participate and many of them are women who are leaders in their communities. They organize people. So, we train them so they could learn about gender inequality, violence against women, where and how to seek help, how to offer support to a woman, all of that. We trained sixteen community leaders at Riveras del Bravo, and then each one of them has a group. Each group is fifteen women or so. We have been working in that part of town for about two years.

Analysis

La oleada ~ *The wave*. The feminist *oleada* or wave that women in Ciudad Juárez have been part of is one among the many *oleadas* some Mexican feminists have identified to explain women's active participation in contemporary social movements, from the last part of the nineteenth century to present, nationally and internationally (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2020, 28–29, 85). The oleada includes the women professors at the local public university, the UACJ, who have supported the students' reports of their own experiences of sexual violence at the hands of classmates, professors, and officials; some feminist professors offered their reflections about the consequences of the international movement, including insights about the tensions between the emerging US-based movement and French feminists that were published in academic spaces (Báez Ayala 2018). The professionals at Casa Amiga are keenly aware of these processes as well.

The second author, Cordero Cabrera, does not remember if the spreadsheet document had an official name nor who prepared and organized it. This practice of *escrache público*, however, mirrors the #MeToo movement and it seems to have

its origins in the post-dictatorial periods that goes decades back in some South American nations. It is a mechanism people have embraced to confront and expose the inefficiency of the police and other institutions; in recent years, the feminist *escraches* have emerged as a mechanism for women to similarly publicly expose and denounce sexual predators and other assailants online, and as a way to organize and resist collectively (Bonavitta et al. 2020).

Many of the women who have actively given life to the digital cultures of collective exchange of information through a group chat on WhatsApp and Facebook belong to a disadvantaged socioeconomic strata. Their social realities are reflected in a special report called *Informe: Pobreza en Juárez 2020*, which identifies three levels of pobreza or poverty in the city (poverty, moderate poverty, and extreme poverty), represented—all together—by more than half of the population as of 2015 (Plan Estratégico de Juárez, 2019a, 7). Ciudad Juárez is the most populated city in the state of Chihuahua, with a population, as of 2019, that is close to a million and a half; women represent more than half of the population (Plan Estratégico de Juárez 2019b, 8).

Recycling, Repurposing, Resisting. The second author's reflection about the increasing visibility of women and people in general having access to a cell phone in recent years is confirmed by the article "Juárez has more cell phones than habitants," released in 2018 by the *Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones*, a major organization overseeing the development of telecommunications in Mexico. And a 2012 report on electronic waste in Mexico identified both Ciudad Juárez as well as Tijuana, as the two cities with the largest regions producing high electronic waste rates, higher than the national average (IDET 2018). In this capitalist synchronicity, as of 2009, "approximately 130 million waste mobile phones were generated annually in the U.S." (Xu et al. 2016, 343).

"It can be easily said that the production of waste is not only a side effect of capitalism, it is central to its functioning" asserts feminist activist H. Bradford in her article, "Trashy Women: What Does Garbage Have to Do with Feminism?" (2017). Paradoxically, this is part of the same mechanism that allows working class women in the border city to recycle, give a new purpose to an outdated cell phone, become part of information networks that circulate among women (locally, nationally, and internationally), reimagine new ways of existence as women in a context of cruel gender inequality, explore ways to cope with sexual violence, and become active agents of creative human resilience and resistance—individually and collectively.

Many of the women who have actively created the complex mosaic of recycling, repurposing, and resistance have used their modest phones to call Casa Amiga since April 2020—in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic—seeking professional help. Women have not waited long after learning about the NGO's violence prevention campaign called *Aislamiento sin violencia, no estás sola*—Isolation without violence, you are not alone.

Feminismo comunitario ~ *Feminism in community*. Like many cities in Mexico and the rest of the world, Ciudad Juárez has witnessed an increase in the rates of the expressions of violence against women during the pandemic, including feminicidio, a concept that is now part of popular culture. The campaign that started in April 2020 and is still in effect, locally and nationally, is an effort to support women who are seeking help during the pandemic; Casa Amiga has been promoting it through a small poster that circulates via Facebook, on television, or as a hard copy that is placed at grocery stores. Professionals offer their services via WhatsApp and Zoom to the countless women seeking support through Facebook or their phone lines, and in-person services are offered while following local orders and restrictions established to control the spread of the coronavirus. Casa Amiga's statistics indicate, for instance, an increase of 27% in the number of calls received on the emergency and crisis hotline when they compared the March–October 2019 and March–October 2020 periods. But violence against women has not only increased in numbers, its forms and shapes, cruelty, and intensity, have been reinvented as well.

The *defensoras comunitarias* echo the inspirational theorizing of Lorena Cabnal, a Mayan intellectual and activist. In *Feminismos diversos: El feminismo comunitario*, Cabnal establishes a deep connection between women's bodies and their territories, the *cuerpo-tierra* paradigm, in community with others sharing a common history of injustice and survival. This perspective “invites us to reclaim the body to promote a life in dignity, from a place in concrete, to recognize its historic resistance and its dimensionality of transgressive, transformative, and creative potency” (2010, 22).

The poor, working class women in Ciudad Juárez who buy a modest cell phone on installments, or a second-hand phone—one that was made (very likely) in China, disposed in the United States as part of the so called “e-waste,” and then ended up being repaired and sold for very low cost in Ciudad Juárez (and may not last long)—expose revealing processes and contradictions in contrasting contexts of socioeconomic and gender inequalities. These are the same women who are *defensoras comunitarias*, who have a close connection with the Casa Amiga team, and who are actively engaged in experiential feminism that is rooted in their communities.

Like many women in the border city, the *defensoras comunitarias* neither use Twitter nor use the expression #MeToo (or its equivalent in Spanish) to talk about sexual harassment, yet they have been actively reinventing ways to empower themselves and to be there and to advocate for other women in the suburb imprinted with the highest rates of violence against women in Ciudad Juárez. During the Covid-19 pandemic, they have joined other feminists, locally and nationally, to figure out the best way to intervene, given the skyrocketing statistics of *feminicidio*. In Ciudad Juárez, the percent of women killed rose 31% from 2019 to 2020, for the same January to November period.³ Feminist scholars have identified a similarly alarming pattern for other locations in the country, such as Mexico City and the State of Mexico (Lagarde y de los Ríos 2020, 35).

Final Reflections

Although #MeToo and Twitter are not used much in Ciudad Juárez, the #MeToo movement has received special attention in the capital of the country.⁴ In Mexico City, the #MeToo has also mirrored the women and context that triggered the US-based, social media movement in October 2017: famous and conventionally attractive women working in the entertainment industry. In other words, the women who received attention in Mexico City were “the perfect victim.” That is, “When sex crimes occur, often it is the upper-middle class, educated, and attractive who receive the most focus” (Uy 2011, 204). Well-known journalist Carmen Aristegui, for instance, hosted four famous women (three actresses and a stand-up comedian) on Spanish CNN in February 2018 to share their experiences of sexual harassment. This event received a lot of attention online and has been analyzed by scholars studying #MeToo and social media in Mexico (Nicolás-Gavilán et al. 2019). Interestingly, by the time #MeToo emerged in the United States, cyberfeminism had already had some revealing expressions in Mexico and other Latin American countries. The hashtag #MiPrimerAcoso (literally, “My first harassment”) was propelled in April 2016 by Catalina Ruiz-Navarro and Estefanía Vela, and it invited women to share their first experience of sexual harassment via Twitter—thousands shared their experiences.⁵

The authors engaged in the conversation that gave life to this essay on December 31, 2020, as a devastating year came to an end. As they revisited this text to produce a final version in March 2021, they realized that in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic and the “shadow pandemic” (violence against women during Covid-19), the feminist wave that sparked the dialogue has not crashed yet in the city. If anything, *la oleada* has only become reinvigorated and reinvented. In August 2020, the Instituto Municipal de las Mujeres (IMM) launched a public campaign with a clear message for women to help them reject street harassment as part of self-care during the Covid-19 pandemic: “Rechazar el acoso callejero es también sana distancia—Rejecting street harassment is also healthy social distancing.” The campaign included the distribution of face masks that read: “Rechazar los piropos también es sana distancia—Rejecting catcalling is also healthy social distancing” and a bottle of hand sanitizer that read: “No tocar a una mujer sin consentimiento—Do not touch a woman without consent.” On March 8, 2021, many women engaged in *escrache social* by creating a *tendedero* (literally, clothesline) and placing anonymous testimonies of sexual harassment, rape, among other experiences of sexual violence, next to the pictures of the men who assaulted them or raped them, by the Benito Juárez monument in downtown. And after twenty years of intense, hard work, *Red Mesa de Mujeres* is now embracing fourteen NGOs in the city while exploring ways to nurture a critical space that promotes gender equality and the human rights of women.

In sum, women in Ciudad Juárez continue to be creative and unstoppable while keeping alive the crest of *la oleada*, one that the authors hope will have a long life. Interestingly, the campaign to eradicate street harassment launched by

the IMM in Ciudad Juárez was translated to English in February 2021, crossing to El Paso in more than one way. And that itself became a special moment, offering a moving revelation: #MeToo might not automatically cross all borders in its quintessential expression, but feminism always finds its way to be borderless, to cross *fronteras*.

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Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude to Chaitanya Lakkimsetti and Vanita Reddy for their generous recommendations and support as they worked on this article. Our gratitude goes as well to Sharmila Rudrappa for kindly listening to the first author, as she shared some of her preliminary ideas about this article. Gracias de corazón por su apoyo: Susana Báez Ayala, Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, Alfredo Limas Hernández, Gina Núñez-Mchiri y Patricia Ravelo Blancas.

Notes

1. See Feldman, Allan. 1999. "The Role of Conversation in Collaborative Action Research." *Educational Action Research* 7(1): 125–147.
2. Due to space constraints, we are not including recommended readings in the References section. Besides the authors cited in this article, relevant scholars in this field also include Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano (*Terrorizing Women*, book), see book chapters by Julia E. Monárrez Fragoso (*The Victims of the Ciudad Juárez Femicide*), and Rita Segato (*Territory, Sovereignty, and Crimes of the Second State*); see also Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, Patricia Ravelo Blancas and Georgia Kromrei (*Literature about Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*, book chapter).
3. Source: Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez, January 18, 2021. <http://www.mesademujeresjuarez.org/observatorio-especializado-en-genero/>.
4. Only 6.1% of participants in a large sample of informants use Twitter in Ciudad Juárez. Plan Estratégico de Juárez released this information, showing Internet access and use in Ciudad Juárez as of 2013. Source: "Así estamos Juárez en: Internet y Redes Sociales" [This is how we are doing, Juárez: Internet and Social Networks.], January 18, 2021. <https://planjuarez.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/aejinternet.pdf>. See page 5.
5. "#MiPrimerAcoso: La etiqueta que destapó la cloaca de las agresiones sexuales." [#MyFirstHarassment: The label that took the lid off the sewers of sexual aggressions]. *Distintas Latitudes*, May 24, 2016. <https://distintaslatitudes.net/historias/reportaje/miprimeracoso-la-etiqueta-que-destapo-la-cloaca-de-las-agresiones-sexuales>.

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