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Border Gothic: Gregory Nava's *Bordertown* and the dark side of NAFTA

In the past twenty years, hundreds of women have been murdered in the border town of Juárez, Mexico, and thousands more have gone missing.[1] Many of them worked in the mainly foreign-owned factories known as *maquiladoras* that once promised to make Cuidad Juárez a showcase for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and for neoliberalism on the North American continent more generally.[2] Few of these murders have been solved, and most have never been properly investigated. Scholars and activists have shown that Juárez became a killing ground for rapists and murderers preying on women – spawning a new term, 'femicide' – due to a complex convergence of factors, including sexism, racism, state indifference, police corruption, and corporate negligence that made female workers particularly vulnerable to after-hours violence.[3] Neoliberalism and its profit-seeking ethos of placing corporate interests before worker's rights has underwritten and magnified all these factors. According to the cruel logic of the bottom line, it has simply been cheaper to replace women than to protect them. As a result, the murders have continued with impunity as state authorities and corporate interests colluded to keep the murders quiet, fearing that media attention would expose the exploitative working conditions in the hundreds of factories in Juárez (and over 5000 in Mexico as a whole[4]).

Gregory Nava's 2006 film *Bordertown,* a gothic thriller starring Jennifer Lopez and Antonio Banderas, and based on the real circumstances of the murders and their failed investigations, is a relatively high-profile attempt to expose this situation. The film draws heavily on gothic imagery and conventions, such as live burial, forgotten crimes, aristocratic villains, and dismembered bodies, and especially the Female Gothic, with its emphasis on the imprisonment and instrumentalisation of women, in order to suggest that border towns such as Cuidad Juárez are contemporary forms of hell created by neoliberal practices that prey

especially on young female workers. The film echoes a long-standing literary tradition of depicting unsafe working conditions in gothic-inflected terms, such as Herman Melville's 'Tartarus of Maids' (1855) and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), but updates this critique by a pointed engagement with issues raised, for example, by Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Achille Mbembe's 'Necropolitics' (2003) and Henry A. Giroux's notion of the 'biopolitics of disposability' (2006). Thus, the film exposes how the combined forces of neoliberalism, patriarchy, and continuing postcolonial disenfranchisement of native populations produce the Mexican-American border as a gothic space – a permanent state of exception, in Giorgio Agamben's terms – where women workers's bodies are subject to control, exploitation and violence (Agamben, 1989 and Fragoso, 2002: 6). Agamben has famously revived the classical Roman notion of a *homo sacer*, a person who stands outside of both human and divine law, and who is defined by their capacity to be killed. More importantly, as Zygmunt Bauman specifies, the *homo sacer* is someone who can be 'killed without fear of punishment' (Agamben, 1989: 85; Bauman, 2003: 133). This accurately describes the necropolitical situation of indigenous and working women in the area of Juárez since the dawn of the NAFTA era.

The pre-history of the *maquiladoras* begins with the violent and fraught relationship between the United States and Mexico dating back to the nineteenth century. Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, but by the 1850s had lost half its territory to the United States through the Texas Revolution (1836), US-Mexico War (1846-48) and Gadsden Purchase (1854). In the late nineteenth century, according to Monica Muñoz Martinez, 'shifting racial hierarchies, the massive transfer of property from Mexico to Anglo hands, and the industrialization of agriculture—which assigned Mexicans in the American southwest to manual agricultural wage labor—led to a particularly violent period in the US-Mexico border region' lasting through the early twentieth century (Muñoz Martinez, 2014: 665). During this period, thousands of Mexicans were killed with relative impunity by Texas Rangers and other

vigilantes in order to enforce white privilege and propertied interests (662). In the twentieth century, the Bracero Program of 1942 allowed U.S. agricultural companies to legally acquire male laborers from Mexico during the Second World War and the decades after. When it was terminated in 1964, two hundred thousand workers were left jobless and the Mexican government initiated the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) the following year.

This was the beginning of the export processing plants known as *maquiladoras,* which aimed to attract foreign investors by offering cheap labor at relaxed safety and health conditions. Advantages included 100% expatriation of revenues, weak toxic dumping regulations, and workers who could be made to work longer hours and much cheaper wages than in the home countries of the firms that set up factories there. This program clearly anticipated the trends linked to contemporary neoliberal policies and had the added side effects of uprooting people from their traditional land and homes and increasing the overpopulation in Mexico's northern states (Gutiérrez, 2004: 65). In fact, as David Harvey has observed, falling prices of agricultural goods due to state-sponsored agribusiness in the U.S. coupled with predatory tax policies in primarily indigenous states like Oaxaca and Chiapas have forced large sections of native peoples off their land and funneled them to the *maquiladora* factories as migrant wage laborers – forming a new class of 'landless proletariat' (Harvey, 2003: 145).[10] The factories in turn preferred to hire women and girls because they were perceived as more docile, compliant and willing to accept longer hours and lower wages, in addition to having smaller and more nimble hands (though they are not paid more for their allegedly greater dexterity). By 1994, when the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed, women outnumbered men in the approximately 300 factories in Juárez. After NAFTA, the number of *maquiladoras* grew rapidly, with women continuing to be hired preferentially, working day and night shifts at the factories, which functioned 24 hours per day. According to Edward A. Avila, 'various forms of social inequity and violent labor practices emerged from a complex social arrangement conditioned largely by the mutually

determining forces of global capital and local racialized and gendered relations of power' (Avila, 2012: 7). These conditions set the scene for the twenty-year murder spree that *Bordertown* addresses.[12] The murder of women in Juárez officially dates back to 1993, when the first victims were found, and involves over 400 bodies and nearly 5000 women still missing (Sadowski-Smith, 2009: 75-94, 90. n. 1).

Amnesty International and other organizations have demonstrated that the murders were largely ignored by local police and the corporations involved, as well as the governments of both Mexico and the United States (in keeping with the trend under neoliberalism of state governments toeing the corporate line instead of protecting workers). In fact, since drawing attention to the murders created negative publicity for the *maquiladoras* and threatened to expose the substandard working conditions, local and national authorities colluded to actively silence efforts to expose the murders. Since most of the women working in the factories come from other parts of Mexico, and many hope to cross the border into the United States eventually, they are regarded as temporary labor by the factory managers, justifying lower wages and a high turnover rate. According to Julia Monárrez Fragoso, 'the practices of the maquiladora industry towards the workers reveal a consume and dispose cycle' (Fragoso, 2002: n.pag). In other words, the women workers of the free trade zone are considered 'disposable', in a logic that Henry A. Giroux has termed a 'biopolitics of disposability', a 'new and dangerous form of biopolitics' in which entire populations are relegated to 'invisibility and disposability' (Giroux, 2006: 181-182). Under these conditions, certain racial and sexual populations – here we speak of indigenous women – are effectively abandoned by the state and find themselves living in a permanent state of exception, as mentioned before, subject to violence and unable to claim state protection or services – *de facto* denationalized.

Gothic spaces, Gothic border

This is the complex nexus of factors that Gregory Nava's film sets out to present. Framed as a gothic thriller, the film is not exactly a murder *mystery* – since the perpetrators of the specific crime depicted in the film are known to the spectator from the start – but a horror-tinged investigation of the social, economic and political system that allows the killers to strike repeatedly and with total impunity. Through its narrative, dialogues and settings, *Bordertown* indicts the factory owners and managers, the governments of Mexico and the US, and specifically names NAFTA as creating the conditions that allow these murders to happen. The plot focuses on two women, a 15-year-old *maquiladora* worker who is raped and strangled and left for dead in a shallow grave, Eva (Maya Zapata), and an American journalist, Lauren Adrian (Jennifer Lopez), investigating the murders for a Chicago newspaper. The film is as much about Lauren as it is about Eva, and involves a gothic sub-plot using dreams and flashbacks in which she slowly recovers her own past of violence and dispossession as a Mexican child adopted by an American family. After Lauren goes into the factory undercover as a worker in order to lure the killers into attacking her, one man is arrested but a sinister second killer remains at large. Eva recognizes this second man at an exclusive reception for local and national elites where she has accompanied Lauren, allowing Lauren to discover his identity. However, the story she writes about Eva and the *maquiladora* industry ends up being censored by her own corporate-owned newspaper, while Eva panics and tries to cross the border into the United States illegally. Nearly dying from suffocation and heat when the smugglers abandon the car with her locked in the trunk (a form of live burial that represents another gothic aspect of the U.S.-Mexican border today), she is found by border police and deported back to Juárez. The two women and the killer converge on Eva's shantytown home where Eva arrives just in time to save Lauren from being killed herself.[16]

As can be seen from this description, the film is on the face of it a social problem drama. It integrates several large social issues into a narrative focusing on two women, and

can be seen as heir to the tradition of literary Naturalism. Recalling that Naturalism originally emerged to narrate tensions of social class and capitalism at the turn of the century, one can see that *Bordertown* shares many of its thematic preoccupations and political tendencies. It is also a Gothic thriller, with a sadistic aristocratic villain, a young female victim-heroine, claustrophobic and confining spaces, a character haunted by a violent and repressed past, a stifling climate of constant fear, and a visual repertoire of graves, body parts, and charred corpses. Scholars have recently begun to explore the many hybrid texts that combine these two modes.[17] Charles Crow has suggested that 'Gothicism and naturalism are both devoted to shaking bourgeois complacency, revealing unsettling truths that society tries to conceal from itself' and confronting us with 'a universe of vast forces that can overwhelm and terrify the individual' (Crow, 2009: 103). In addition, he says, a key image common to both modes is 'the cage in which … we are trapped' (103). However, while Naturalism was effective in exposing the machinery of exploitation under industrial capitalism, the gothic genre has emerged as better suited to addressing the unique monstrosity of neoliberalism and its spectral financial transactions, irrational market worship and predatory spirit. As Henry A. Giroux terms it, the age of neoliberalism is an age of 'dark times' and 'zombie politics' (Giroux, 2011: back cover).

An early example of Gothic Naturalism, and one which establishes many of its key tropes – a cage-like work space, the factory as a kind of hell, reified workers resembling dead things – was Melville's 'The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids' (1855), which also happens to be one of the first literary critiques of globalization and the disparities that it creates. The piece is more of a sketch than a story, contrasting a cozy London club for bachelor lawyers, featuring sumptuous dinners and much drinking, with a freezing cold paper mill in a remote mountain location in New England, where pale girls perform rote assembly-line tasks to produce paper. The narrator dwells on the deathly pallor of the girls – showing how they come to resemble the dead paper that they produce – and depicts the factory, though

chilly and well-lit, as a kind of modern hell, a 'tartarus'. What links the two worlds are the invisible networks of a modern communication society, which in the nineteenth century depended on paper produced by working women and used in all manner of legal and other documents by men such as the lawyers. Though separated by continents, gender and class, the bachelors and the maids are inextricably linked by the same global economy, though the relationship is starkly uneven. While the men drink and eat in their warm club dining room, the girls work and waste away at their machines in the snow-bound mill. Like a concentration camp, the remoteness and design of the site are intended to enhance absolute control over the bodies of the workers. Anticipating a trope that would become a regular feature of critiques of alienated industrialized labor, Melville's narrator observes that the girls seemed to the 'machinery as mere cogs to the wheels' (Melville, 1997: 328). The entire mill is a terrifying place, linked to death, not only in the pun of the 'unbudging fatality' that governs the machines, but also by the deadly dust particles and mind-numbing repetitiveness that it involves. Finally, the narrator imagines he sees the 'pallid faces of all the pallid girls' themselves 'passing in slow procession along the wheeling cylinders' to some inexorable fate (333-334).

Bordertown also depicts the modern *maquiladora* as a kind of cage-like hell. This is shown when Lauren Adrian goes undercover and spends a day drilling screws into electronic components and we see how claustrophobic her work-space is. In addition to the loud din of the factory there is a voice over the loudspeaker constantly exhorting the women to work faster and scolding the workers in specific lines for falling under the quota, creating an impression of relentless surveillance and discipline, keeping the women working at a dizzying pace throughout their shift. According to Arturo Aldama, women at these factories often work 'fourteen hour days, with two strictly enforced bathroom breaks of ten minutes each' (Aldama, 2003: 26). When Lauren's shift is over, a loud buzzer sounds and the women are told to leave quickly because the next shift begins in ten minutes. At several points throughout

the sequence the camera pans up and above the factory floor to reveal an enormous mechanized space of hundreds of work stations – uncanny and infernal in its density and repetitiveness. From the camera's elevated perspective, workers no longer resemble cogs in a machine so much as ghosts in an infinite circuit-board. Nearly invisible in their electronic cages, the women seem to disappear into their workstations at the factory – before disappearing for good on their way home. If one of the causes of the uncanny is a blurring of boundaries between the quick and the dead, one can see a form of the uncanny at the *maquiladora* – giving way to the abject when the women workers are found dismembered in the desert nearby.

If the *maquiladora* is a kind of contemporary 'Tartarus of maids', the city just outside it is no less a gothic space for women. Instead of bright white light, the city glows with the red neon lights of strip joints, bars and brothels, where women's bodies are bought and sold and controlled in other ways. Instead of tight schedules and assembly line discipline, women wear tight-fitting clothes and johns follow girls into semi-private back rooms where they couple standing up. If one space looks highly controlled and the other chaotic and lawless, the logic of instrumentalization, the consuming and disposing of women, is the same on the streets as in the factories. Here too women are mere objects, mere bodies, used and discarded. The film follows Lauren into this cacophonous space when Eva runs away from her hotel room. Nava films the scene with rapid cuts, garish light and loud background noise to emphasize the violence and dehumanization of the border sex trade, which reduces Mexican women's bodies into commodities in an infernal marketplace – a space of constant traffic and despair.

A third Gothic space in the film is the shantytown outside of Juárez where migrant indigenous people like Eva and her mother live. Unable to afford housing in the city, internal economic refugees like the indigenous populations of Oaxaca are forced to construct homes from debris and to steal electricity, at a high risk of electrocution, from the power lines that

pass through their make-shift camp. This shantytown serves as a visual shorthand in the film for the marginalized position of indigenous people within Mexico itself, an internal colony of sorts, dispossessed of its traditional lands, forced to migrate towards the factory areas along the border, ignored by police, unprotected by normal legal institutions, considered primitive and superstitious even by the most well-meaning Mexicans. The Mexican indigenous population often lives in a permanent state of exception, a life marked by precariousness and uncertainty, and the film's treatment of the shantytown scenes underscores this. For instance, when an accidental fire starts the flimsy structures quickly go up in flames and serve as a hellish backdrop to the film's climactic scene, when Lauren is herself nearly killed. Red lights, shaky camera, flashbacks to their earlier attack, rapid editing and the roar of the fire all contribute to make the squatter's camp a kind of inferno as the villain strangles her.

In addition to these three specific gothic locations, the border itself is explored as a gothic space in this film, as it has been in critical literature in recent years. In *An Intellectual History of Terror*, Mikkel Thorup identifies the 'frontierland' as a space of terror as well as a 'specter which haunts statist order' and therefore a place of permanent violence and exception to the rule of law (Thorup, 2010: 64). This definition is partly true for the Mexican-American border, insofar as it is a place where normal laws – including labor and safety laws – often do not apply or are not enforced, but it fails to recognize the regimes of discipline that are also present in order to ensure the proper functioning of the factories that constitute the main legal revenue along the border (drug trafficking being the principle illegal economy in this area). A more complex term that scholars have applied to the specific nexus of violence and control that characterizes the free trade zones of the Mexican-American border is 'necropolitics'. According to Achille Mbembe, necropolitics involves 'contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death' (Mbembe, 2003: 39). In other words, contemporary biopolitics in a postcolonial or neocolonial context assume an aspect characterized by a state of exception (in Agamben's sense) where power is exercised mainly outside the law and racialized subjects

are defined as 'disposable' (Mbembe, 2003: 23, 27).[24] In the film we see this dynamic at work in the way state sovereignty has ceded its power to corporations, and subordinated its institutions – including law-enforcement – to the imperative of corporate profit. As a consequence, workers' deaths are silenced rather than investigated, women are tightly disciplined on the factory floor but left unprotected once they finish their shift, and indigenous migrants are left to live or die in their squatters camps along the border after being dispossessed of their land and forced into wage labour.

However, the most important and influential theorist of the border is Gloria Anzaldúa, whose 1987 book *Borderland/La Frontera* changed the way scholars and activists thought about this concept, and inaugurated 'border theory' as a mode of critical inquiry. In a book that was as unconventional and border-crossing formally as its author was politically and personally, Anzaldúa mapped out the Mexican-American border as an endemically violent space, '*una hiera abierta*' where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds' (Anzaldúa, 1987: 39). An 'open wound', the border is a site of particular danger for women and especially Indian women, who are preyed upon by both 'Anglo' and Mexican men.[26] It is a space of uncertainty and ambiguity, ambivalence and paradox. As such, it is also, for Anzaldúa, also a productive space where a new kind of consciousness, one which is more open to ambivalence and ambiguity, less committed to maintaining traditional categories and binaries, can emerge. Anzaldúa writes of a new 'mestiza consciousness' that can be produced by the encounter of two 'incompatible frames of reference', or world views, and we see that happening in the film through the character of Lauren, who undergoes important changes, and most notably, a political awakening, through her experiences on the border (78).

Gothic heroines, Gothic villains

Lauren's narrative arc is in fact a classic gothic one of growth through an encounter with a hidden world and a personal descent into darkness. For two centuries, gothic narratives

have offered stories of terror as female *bildungsroman*, and *Bordertown* is clearly heir to this tradition. The first interesting thing about the two female characters is that they are initially presented as opposites: the privileged American woman, blond, educated, with a career, and the young Indian girl, working in a factory at fifteen, vulnerable and powerless to defend herself. Yet, as the film progresses, the Gothic trope of the double is increasingly present, as Eva's story stirs Lauren's repressed memories of her own childhood in Mexico. Her parents, it slowly emerges, were also migrant workers, and both were killed, her father before her eyes. These memories are initially stimulated by Lauren's encounters with Eva, but later in the film Lauren begins to have flashbacks in which her memories are intermingled with Eva's. When she dyes her hair back to its naturally dark color and dresses in Eva's factory clothes, the two women look like twins. Finally, when Lauren is alone on the bus with the bus driver she is trying to catch, she finds herself living out Eva's story exactly as it was told to her, in every detail. In this way, the film uses the double motif to show that two people who seem to come from very different worlds and have incommensurable identities can find themselves reduced to the same vulnerability as women, especially women of colour.

On a more empowering level, Eva and Lauren are two variants of the classic gothic heroine, the socially disenfranchised victim who survives and tells her story, and the middle class sleuth who enters the gothic space in order to solve a mystery and finds herself. Eva is initially the paradigmatic gothic victim, the socially marginal person whose testimony about her injury carries no social capital and is dismissed as untrue or delusional. Because she is indigenous, everyone, including the concerned newspaperman and the wealthy patroness, Teresa (Sonia Braga), who takes her into her home, believe that she cannot distinguish fact from imagination. Thus, when she insists there was a second man attacking her, no one believes her. The fact that she refers to this second attacker as the devil, 'el Diablo', only makes her story seem more fantastic, the product of her primitive culture and Indian superstitions. Lauren is the Ann Radcliffean heroine, the middle class woman of privilege

who enters into a dark and labyrinthine world on an investigative quest only to discover that this world is far darker than she suspected and that she herself is implicated in it. Lauren's character thus experiences an important evolution in the film, as she discovers her own connections to the border culture she comes to investigate, and recovers her repressed childhood memories of trauma and dispossession. She learns that she is not so different from Eva at all, and that she could easily be one of the women in a grave outside Juárez. The film ends with a device from the horror film, that of the 'final girl', as Eva fights the mysterious killer in the last scene, knocking him out and into the fire.

This killer is also a classic gothic villain in the sense that he is a wealthy man from an old and well-connected family. An heir to the aristocratic tyrants of the classic gothic novel, the man is virtually untouchable despite the fact that he is a serial rapist and murderer. When Eva survives his attack and comes forward with her story, it becomes apparent that the police are working in collusion with him to find and silence her. Although he appears on many occasions throughout the film, he never utters a word, rendering him distinctly uncanny and almost supernatural. As a sadist and psychopath – he strikes Eva even after she is unconscious and bites her viciously on the breast – he is literally a monster. Moreover, these bites not only identify him as a serial killer responsible for the many other women's bodies found with identical bite marks, but they also evoke comparisons to the gothic figure of the vampire. Like the classic gothic monster, Eva's rapist strikes female victims under the cover of both night and his aristocratic privilege, destroying them as he takes his pleasure, and seems able to materialize and disappear with supernatural stealth as he stalks her throughout the film. By representing the wealthy villain as a vampiric figure, the film also makes him into a personification of the predatory effects of the neoliberal political economy that keeps women like Eva living in precarity: unsafe at work, unsafe on the streets, and unsafe in her shantytown home.

Thus, the real villain in the film is the North American Free Trade Agreement itself, and the neoliberal policies that shaped it, especially as these exploit and exacerbate the existing power structures along racial and gender lines. The results of the NAFTA agreement that came into effect in 1994 – linking Mexico, Canada and the United States in a 'free trade' arrangement – have been typical of neoliberal policies elsewhere in the world. Trade has indeed increased but the beneficiaries have mainly been corporations and wealthy elites. In Mexico, many new billionaires were produced in the first decade of NAFTA while workers on either side of the border saw no benefits at all. In fact, many U.S. jobs migrated south of the border while Mexican workers' wages have remained pitifully low – around $6 or $7 a day – since 1994. These results are not surprising, given that low wages and maximum corporate profit are the whole point of the *maquila* industry, not job security or a living wage. NAFTA also tied the US and Mexican economies more closely, so that when the US suffered its recession in 2008, many people in Mexico lost their jobs as well. The result has been a large influx of immigrants crossing illegally into the United States in order to survive, much larger than the pre-NAFTA annual numbers.

In short, one of the main results of NAFTA has been a wholesale disruption of populations, a variation of what David Harvey calls one of the key dynamics of neoliberalism, 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2003: 137-182). The tendencies of neoliberalism to push populations away from their traditional homes to areas of industrialized zones like the free trade parks intersects with pre-existing Mexican policies in recent decades that have worked to dispossess indigenous populations of their lands, long protected under collective ownership by the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI). In 1992 the Salinas government began to prepare for NAFTA by privatizing land, a trend which continued after 1994, when NAFTA came into effect at the same time as the peso was undergoing serious devaluation. Salinas' successor, Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), was a pro-NAFTA economist

who continued the privatizing policies already underway, including selling the state railway company.

The film presents these policies through Eva's backstory, which involves being forced off their family land in Oaxaca because of an inability to pay land taxes. Eva's family is told to go to the *maquiladoras* to work to have money for the taxes, but she tells Lauren that she simply does not earn enough, that it is impossible to earn a living wage, much less to save money for a larger payment like a property tax. Her father has left to work in the United States several years ago, and they have not seen him since. *Bordertown* shows that the real consequences of NAFTA on ordinary people include the break-up of families, the dispossession of people from their homes and land, precarious working and living conditions along the border towns, and a culture of death, crime and predation on the most vulnerable. As indigenous women, Eva and her mother have become what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'human waste', internal refugees, suffering the plight of 'redundant' populations across the globe' (Bauman, 2007: 28-45). They have been forced off their native lands, but are refused entry into any other; Bauman argues that such refugees do not change their dwelling place so much as '*lose* their place on earth' and are 'catapulted into a nowhere' (45). Achille Mbembe uses the even more Gothic term 'necropolitics' to refer to the state of 'permanent class and racial exception' that confers on certain populations the status and living conditions of the 'living dead' (2003: 40). Although Mbembe writes about South Africa under apartheid and about Palestinians, his remarks apply in full measure to the situation of indigenous people, especially women, working and living around the free trade zones in Mexico, and have been used as a framework to theorize their conditions by several scholars (Avila, 2012, Aldama, 2003, Fragoso, 2002).

By telling Eva's story in a gothic frame, *Bordertown* is able to critique contemporary neoliberal policies along the U.S.-Mexican border in an accessible and popular form and thereby situate itself in a long tradition of gothic literary activism dating back to the

eighteenth century. As one recent study of gothic activism puts it, the gothic mode is 'particularly suited' to the task of 'influencing social change' (Ledoux, 2013: 7). Heir to this tradition, *Bordertown* borrows from the Female Gothic to create sympathy with vulnerable but intrepid heroines and from Naturalist Gothic to expose the social and economic forces that condemn women workers to precarious lives. Recycling conventions such as the powerful aristocratic villain – a kind of vampire –who manipulates social institutions to his own selfish ends and preys on disempowered female victims abandoned by these institutions, the film shows the results of NAFTA on the U.S. Mexican border: consolidation of moneyed elites and predatory corporate practices on the one hand and wholesale displacement and dispossession of the most vulnerable on the other. The gothic lends itself particularly well to the representation of such effects, not only because of its extensive toolbox of rhetorical devices to represent violence and dehumanization, but also because of its skill at giving a visible form and face to what normally remains invisible – whether it is the predatory logic of neoliberalism or its many forgotten victims.

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[1] The first wave of murders began the 1990s but a second even larger wave has been unfolding in the last five years, according to the *New York Times* ('Wave of Violence Swallows More Women in Juárez', June 24, 2012). http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/world/americas/wave-of-violence-swallows-more-women-in-juarez-mexico.html

[2] Signed by Mexico, Canada and the United States, and entering into effect on January 1st, 1994, NAFTA created a trilateral 'free trade block' in which tariffs and barriers were to be reduced or eliminated entirely.

[3] See Wright, 2011 and Pantaleo, 2006.

[4] Source: http://www.borderplexalliance.org/regional-data/ciudad-juarez/twin-plant/maquiladora-faq

[10] See also http://www.truth-out.org/archive/item/79013-oaxacas-government-land-grab. Accessed November 2, 2014.

[12] The murders in Juárez have not stopped; in fact, they have multiplied, from two to three hundred a year (both men and women) to nearly three hundred a month in 2009, but the causes since the late 2000s include the violent drug war which has caused murders all over the country, making it even harder to identify and solve murders targeting specifically female victims. Figures cited in Bowden, 2010: 246.

[16] Although the film is fictional in its specific details, it is closely based on the actual circumstances of several Juárez murders. For example, although several serial killers have operated in the area, and some women were probably killed by boyfriends or husbands, at least some of the murders are thought to be the work of members of wealthy families, who

prey on poor women for sport. Also, in 1999, a 14-year-old maquiladora worker was raped and left for dead by a bus driver in a scenario resembling that of the film, where the driver tells the girl, who is the last passenger on the bus, that he needs to go to a service station before driving her to a remote location and strangling her. 'Teenager survives vicious attack on bus,' *Amarillo Globe News*, March 20, 1999. http://amarillo.com/stories/1999/03/20/tex_155-3670.002.shtml. Accessed October 28, 2014.

[17] See Elbert and Ryden, 2016.

[24] Susan George makes a similar point in a talk entitled 'A Short History of Neoliberalism', where she argues that 'the great new central question of politics is … "Who has a right to live and who does not"' (Talk presented in Bangkok on March 24-26, 1999, at the Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalizing World, available online at: http://www.globalexchange.org/resources/econ101/neoliberalismhist and accessed on November 2, 2014).

[26] When paraphrasing Anzaldúa I retain her own terms, i.e. Indian, Anglo, Mexican, and Chicano (used for Mexican Americans).