Haunting Murders: Feminicide, Ghosts, and Affects in Contemporary Mexico

by

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M.A., Brock University, 2018

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We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Corpses and disappeared bodies have become part of the Mexican landscape. Within the overall increase of violence, feminicide has become an urgent matter. Around ten women are murdered each day and most cases remain unsolved. As a response to this spectacle of violence, feminist protests and organized action are gaining prominence throughout the country. 'Vivas nos queremos' ('We want to stay alive') and 'Ni una menos' ('Not one less') are some of the chants that resonate among massive protests. Despite the growing numbers of feminicide cases and with the spread of activism, there is surprisingly little research that examines the affects and emotions engendered in the current normalization of violence. Much has been said about feminicide in relation to symbolic violence, and patriarchal structures, but not enough focus has been placed on how living bodies affect and are affected by their contact with the dead. Thus, this project utilizes affect theories (Brian Massumi, 2002) and the language of haunting (Avery F. Gordon, 2008) to unpack the complexity of feminicide, collective mourning, and normalization of violence. Through a close reading of literary fiction, I explore the affective forces engendered between living bodies and dead bodies. By thinking with Massumi and Gordon, I posit that theorizing affective forces should not assume a sharp cut between life and death. Then I follow the ghost of La Llorona (The Weeping Woman) as her wails become the voice of grieving mothers and murdered women. Listening to La Llorona's wails as they mingle with activists' chants of resistance makes visible, audible, and palpable a larger haunting that hints towards unequal social structures. Thinking with the concepts of mourning and grief as well as affect and haunting opens new ways of thinking about the unresolved murders and disappearances of women as expressed by literature and artivism.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee ii
Abstract iii
Table of Contents iv
Acknowledgements v
Dedication vi
Introduction 1
Literature Review 6
Theoretical Considerations 12
Methods 15
Interdisciplinary methodology 15
Data Collection 17
Researcher Positionality 20
Chapter 1: The Affectivity of Ghosts 22
Socio-Cultural Interpretation of Death in Mexico 22
Affect and the Language of Haunting 27
Chapter 2: Ghostly Affects, Feminicide, Forms, *Desert Blood*, and *Hurricane Season* 40
Desert Blood, Ghosts, and Affects 43
Hurricane Season, Hauntings, and the Virtual 59
Chapter 3: La Llorona, Wails, and Sounds of Resistance 73
The Weeping Woman: Cries, Haunting, And Forms 76
Affects, Grief, and Sounds of Resistance 78
Conclusion 94
Bibliography 99

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… and to all the women who have been unjustly silenced.

¡Ni una más!

Introduction

"To study social life, one must confront its ghostly aspects"

(Gordon, 2008)

Corpses and disappeared bodies have become part of the Mexican landscape. While violence manifests itself across gender, race, class, age and sexual orientation, violence against women has long been normalized, and its extreme manifestation has led to what Alicia Gaspar de Alba (2010) calls an 'epidemic of gendered violence.' Around ten women are murdered each day, and "their empty spaces constitute the black hole of a nation gone awry" (Rivera Garza, 2020b). This spectacle of violence—characterized by mass graves, mutilated corpses, and missing bodies—dates back to the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez in the early 1990s (Berlanga, 2015). In 1993, corpses of murdered women started sprouting along the Mexico-U.S. border. Over six hundred girls and women have been murdered and disappeared for thirty years.[1] Their remains have been found along the Juárez-El Paso border. Others are still missing. Since then, and without ignoring socio-political and economical changes in the past thirty years, the dimension of gendered violence has mutated into a nation-wide epidemic of feminicide.[2] Thinking with Mexican writer Cristina Rivera Garza (2019), perhaps one must question what feminicide at large and the presence of death in the quotidian say about Mexican society's decay.

[1] This number refers to official murders and disappearances, but there are many which have not been recorded.
[2] Neoliberalism in Mexico was introduced during the de La Madrid administration (1982-1988) and was continued by Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000). The murders of Ciudad Juárez are situated within this context and in parallel to NAFTA. The turning of the twenty-first century was characterized by political instability, unemployment, and crises. The Calderón administration (2006-2012) was also a turning point—in terms of politics and violence—in Mexico with the official declaration of the War on Drugs.

As a response to the ongoing gendered spectacle of violence—that makes evident the sexist, misogynistic, homophobic, racist, and classicist structures of society—murdered women are re-membered and given voices through artworks, literature, protests, and performances, amongst other manifestations.[3] Recent years have also witnessed growing social movements across Mexico and Latin America to denounce feminicide and gendered oppression, such as: online activism (#RopaSucia; #MiPrimerAcoso), mass protests (8M protests and women's national strike on March 9th, 2020), and performances (*Y la culpa no era mía,* 2019; *La Llorona,* Snowapple, 2019).

Despite the growing numbers of feminicide cases in Mexico and with the spread of activism, there is surprisingly little research that examines the affects and emotions engendered in the current normalization of violence. Much has been said about feminicide in relation to symbolic violence, and patriarchal structures (Gaspar de Alba & Guzmán, 2010; Parrini, 2010; Segato, 2019) but not enough focus has been placed on how living bodies affect and are affected by their contact with the dead. What affects are evoked and exchanged along with cries and chants of grief? What affects does the silence of the murdered girls and women evoke? In her most recent book *Dolor y Política* ('Pain and Politics') (2021), Mexican scholar and feminist Marta Lamas explores the way affects and emotions are weaved into the current feminist agenda. She poses questions about contemporary practices, especially massive protests in Mexico and Latin America from 2015 onwards, which have gained recognition partly for being criminalized due to vandalization of historical monuments. Aware that thousands of women storm the streets

[3] See Gaspar de Alba's introduction to Making a Killing (2010) and Nuala Finnegan's Cultural Representations of Feminicidio at the US-Mexico Border (2019) for an overview of cultural production on feminicides.

haunted by years of impotence, pain and rage, Lamas (2021) raises a valid concern about the political effectivity of these women's expressions.

The topic of feminicide deals with death, pain, and mourning, which inevitably relates to the senses. Violence in Mexico is not only seen in the streets and read on the news; it is felt, smelled, and heard. In studying this phenomenon through reason and reducing feminicide to statistics, we are ignoring all the affects—grief, rage, terror, pain, and impotence—that also inform our way of knowing. In her book *Grieving: Dispatched from a Wounded Country* (2020), Cristina Rivera Garza reflects on the ways neoliberalism, corruption, and drug trafficking have shaped the country. She suggests that collective grief is an act of resistance against State violence. Expanding on Lamas (2021) and Rivera Garza (2020) to rethink the complexity of feminicide and contemporary collective action, I posit that we must pay attention to the unseen, the unheard, and the invisible, which is why I turn to affect studies.

In *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), Brian Massumi makes a distinction between affect and emotion. Affect can be equated with intensity, that is, it is unassimilable and asignifying, whereas emotions are already received psychological categories (p.88). In my project, this distinction is important because it will allow me to explore affect at the prelinguistic and preconscious level which then leaks into the actual in somewhat contradictory and paradoxical ways. As Massumi (2002) notes, affect needs socio-cultural language to be expressed, so it is hard to theorize, given that there is not much language that can be used to articulate affects. To bridge this gap, I turn to Avery F. Gordon's language of haunting. In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008), Gordon introduces the concepts of haunting and ghosts which explicitly hint towards affect. In fact, haunting traffics in an affective mode (Gordon, 2008, p.127). Gordon (2008) defines haunting as a social phenomenon in which "abusive

systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life" (xvi). What can be gained by thinking with ghosts and haunting as conceptual tropes is to step beyond the normative, predicative language used to make sense of feminicide and into the seemingly missing but very present affects. Aware of the limitations of thrusting affect (asignifying, unassimilable body responses) into words, the language of haunting offers the possibility to think through affect and death by prioritizing the senses and the yet inarticulable.

In this project, I explore affective encounters between living bodies and corpses and disappeared bodies. Expanding on Lamas (2021) who thinks about the affective energy that moves activists, I reexamine and articulate this affective energy as a haunting force for dead bodies. My theorizing emerges from and engagement with literary fiction and artivism[4] with which I aim to make sense of the affects evoked among corpses of murdered women and living bodies of activists (haunted by ghosts) in their ongoing fights against gendered violence. My purpose in this research is not to theorize cause and effect of feminicide. Instead, I aim to expose the complexity of this phenomenon beyond individual and unrelated "hate crimes" as they are continuously framed in news media, and to theorize what haunts Mexico by paying close attention to the (dis)appearances of bodies.[5] Ultimately, conjuring ghosts, as suggested by Gordon sheds light on larger socio-political issues. Some overarching questions that will guide my research are: 1) what stories are told about feminicide and by whom? 2) What does the phenomenon of feminicide in contemporary Mexico reveal about gendered violence and affect? 3) In what way does the term feminicide make (in)visible gender, race, class, and social inequalities?

[4] Artivism is the intersection of art and activism.

[5] Feminicide, as a crime, was not incorporated into the Mexican legal framework until 2012. Before that, murders of women were considered "passion crimes," usually committed by male partners.

Despite the growing numbers of murders, rapes, and forced disappearances, the López Obrador administration (2018-present) has recently announced budget cutbacks to organizations dedicated to dealing with gendered violence. This decision has generated rage and feelings of impotence among activists and women who demand legal justice and who protest for their right to live: "Vivas nos queremos" ('We want to stay alive') and "Ni una menos" ("Not one less") are slogans repeated across the country and throughout Latin America. These chants are uttered and shaped by inarticulate affects. The importance of this research lies in making visible and audible the affects in the phenomenon of feminicide, which offers insights into structural violence which has long been concealed. What is at stake is to move beyond the normalization of violence and hegemonic narratives of feminicide to explore the potential for change by articulating the inarticulable. In these urgent times, attention must be paid to murdered girls and women. Their stories, and those of all vulnerable bodies, must be heard and re-membered since their absences continue to haunt Mexican society.

Literature Review

The most prominent research on feminicide in Mexico concentrates on the Mexico-US border, where over six hundred girls and women who crossed daily to work at *maquiladora* assembly plants have been murdered and their corpses found since 1993. However, as Nuala Finnegan (2019) notes in her book *Cultural Representations of Feminicidio at the US-Mexico Border*, the murders of Juárez must not be studied as an isolated emergent phenomenon but rather as "a continuum of gender violence that has simply taken a terrifying new turn" (p.23). The Juarez feminicides are situated in the same timeline as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—and as an extension, of women's incorporation into the workforce—which begins to trace a connection between gender and neoliberalism (Krasna & Deva, 2019; Segato, 2019) especially in relation to manifestations of violence (Valencia, 2012) and impunity (González Rodríguez, 2012a). The latter is even more pertinent when considering the bodies upon which violence is inflicted: racialized, poor, female bodies. As usually single, working, poor, disenfranchised, racialized women in the Mexico-US borderlands, these women tend to be framed as socially, racially, sexually, and culturally transgressive. In fact, discourse has often labeled them as "public women"[6]—whose presence (as working bodies and murdered corpses) disrupts the social order and whose removal (by murder) signifies an urban cleansing (Wright, 2011). To comprehend this complex web in the phenomenon of feminicide and contemporary violence in Latin America, many scholars turn to the politics of death, as theorized by Achille Mbembé and Libby Meintjes (2003). Necropolitics has been widely adopted as a critical tool to

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[6] Wright (2011) notes that 'public woman' is a euphemism for prostitute, whereas 'public man' does not have negative sexualized connotations.

think through violence and Mexico. In my theorizing of murder, I adopt Valencia's theoretical use of necropolitics as:

> the management and capitalization of the death processes that are highly tied to sexism and necropatriarchy in the Mexican state. Necropolitical power expands in a metastable way, among classes, races and generations, regularly leading against those who are nonbinary, queer, racialized, poor, renegade, and/or people living in conditions of precarity. (Valencia, 2019, p. 185)

With this definition and thinking with transfeminicide and feminicide, Valencia proposes that necropatriarchy is the privilege offered to men of exercising the techniques of necropolitical violence. "Impunity cemented the deadly contract that kept women in their places—the kitchen or the coffin. Silence sealed the patriarchal pact that kept men on top" (Rivera Garza, 2020, p.52). Following a necropolitical order, these murdered girls and women are perceived as the embodiment of what Judith Butler (2001) coins "ungrievable lives." The textuality and visibility of necropolitical violence in Mexico has become normalized in sensationalizing headlines and social media. Occasionally, however, a specific event will disrupt this quotidian and cause an uproar.[7] In recent years, relatives of victims of feminicide, activists, and artists, along with scholars from all disciplines have begun to break the silence around these gendered murders. Recent feminist online initiatives have opened up a space for women to share their experiences with gendered violence; "the skeletons [are] ready to walk out of the closet" (Rivera Garza, 2020, p.52). Rivera Garza's reflections of skeletons as symbolic figures of death and her writing practice as a form to heal from the ongoing suffering in Mexico reinforce the notion that there is some sort of communication between the living and the dead. My research differs from hers in that I am not interested in the way "hope" is voiced. I am also not interested in exploring the

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[7] Such was the case with the 43 male students from Ayotzinapa who were abducted, murdered, and disappeared in 2014. Most recently, the murder of Ingrid Escamilla by her partner in 2020 caused outrage when images of her mutilated corpse were posted online. These separate events are examples of excessive violence which triggered social uprisings.

formation of "emotional communities." Instead, I am interested in exploring affective forces engendered between corpses and bodies as articulated through art.

Addressing violence in the northern part of the country, Enrique Díaz Alvarez (2020) notes that"[t]he fact of living in such a necropolis has forced many writers and artists to capture the loss, suffering, and horror" (2020, p.98). As such, art functions as a resistance to the ongoing normalization of violence. For him, artists who have experienced direct losses serve to channel the suffering of thousands of victims.[8] This claim raises the question of who speaks for the dead, which will inform my theorizing. As a counter to the spectacle of violence where corpses and dismembered bodies are routinely found on the streets and clandestine graves, anti-violence protests and monuments have emerged. In her field work research in Ciudad Juárez, Elva Orozco (2019) turns to protest objects, such as pink and black crosses painted in light poles, graffiti, murals, and memorial sites to explore what they reveal about violence.[9] "The cross itself is a physical marker of memory! it materializes and personifies the victims of feminicide, giving their deaths a presence" (Orozco, 2019, p. 147).

Some art expressions and mourning practices establish connections between living bodies and dead bodies. In his theorizing of the feminicides of Ciudad Juárez, Parrini (2010) explores ways in which the dead "talk in the absence of words" or talk through the (dead) body before it is turned into words. In the latter way of communicating, the corpse becomes symbolic of violence, that is, it is a message in and of itself. However, the dead not only speak through silence. Several memorial sites in Mexico contain not only names of murdered and disappeared people, but also what Ohlson (2019) in his article "The Political Afterlives of Mexico's

[8] He is referring specifically to Mexican poet Javier Sicilia whose son was murdered by a drug gang in 2011. Since then, Sicilia wrote a final poem announcing he would no longer write because poetry was killed along with his son.
[9] In Ciudad Juárez, *desaparecidas* are commemorated with light poles painted black with pink crosses to mark the place where they were last seen. These crosses are usually painted by mothers of the disappeared.

Desaparecidos" calls 'necrographies,' that is, biographies of the disappeared "that speak in first person as if those who talk were still alive" (p. 672). Ohlson argues that the way relatives memorialize their *desparecidos*, particularly at the monument Estela de Luz in Mexico City, is a form of activism; collective grief and sharing testimonies has political potential, since necrobiography is "an active voice to fight against state-sponsored necropolitics" (p. 676).

> Via these monuments, Mexico's disappeared talk back to the state's necropolitics and wield their own subversive necropower. Instead of being "missing as subjects of mourning" when they are nationalized (Cassia 2006:121), Mexico's disappeared are political subjects who seek to ignite a nationwide wave of indignation by reminding us of the nation's forgotten crimes. (Ohlson, 2019, p. 685)

Thinking with Ohlson and Gordon, in these necrographies, it is the relatives who speak for the *desaparecidos*, but do they speak the language of the dead? From my framework, it seems that communication is established between the living and the dead, and the dead communicate affectively by haunting the living and producing indignation. Thinking with forced disappearances in Mexico, particularly the case of the 43 male students disappeared in 2014, Mark Anderson (2019) makes a similar argument.[10] He posits that dying bodies establish an affective debt with the living through the process of memory-making, and thus, evoke an ethical responsibility. In theorizing feminicide and transfeminicide, Valencia introduces the neologisms *postmortem/transmortem politics* to articulate the political responses to displaying the dead body. For Valencia (2019), the "dignified act of displaying a dead body nullifies its disappearance, its oblivion; it rebels against the indifference toward another death, prohibits mutism, and forces

[10] While the case of Ayotzinapa is outside of this research, it is worth contextualizing it to illustrate the perversity of the Mexican government. These students from a rural college were on their way to Mexico City to commemorate the anniversary of the massacre of students by the government on October 2, 1968. They were abducted, murdered and disappeared before reaching their destiny. Hegemonic narratives criminalize them and attribute their deaths to involvement with drug gangs. To this day, only two bodies have been identified and the rest are still disappeared. The case has not been solved yet.

estrangement" (p.187). These political demonstrations give voice and body to forms of struggle and resistance. In this sense, Valencia argues that alliances are claimed not only between living bodies, but also with murdered and disappeared bodies. Expanding on Parrini, Ohlson, Valencia, and Anderson, I explore encounters between living bodies and dead bodies and argue that ghosts and haunting become affective forces for murdered girls and women.

Thinking with haunting and death gives way to thinking with ghosts. The overlap of life and death in the Mexican socio-cultural imaginary is embodied by the enigmatic legend of La Llorona. In the well-known, colonial version of this legend, it is said La Llorona wanders the earth, wailing, in search of the children she drowned in a river. La Llorona is the epitome of female monstrosity given that she murders her children and renounces motherhood, and she has been haunting Mexican and Mexican American cultural imaginaries for over five-hundred years. However, in recent years, Chicanx feminist retellings of this legend have aimed to give a voice to this ghost by exploring her side of the story—which is rooted in a colonial inheritance of gendered violence and the transgression of traditional femininity (*Woman Hollering Creek*, 1991; *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y la Llorona,* 1995 to name a few). This resignification of the ghost seems to have turned La Llorona into an emblematic symbol of female resistance. La Llorona—known for wailing in search of her murdered children—now mourns for all her Mexican children. She has become the voice of so many murdered and missing girls and women in recent cultural artefacts and social activism such as: murals (*La Llorona's Sacred Waters* 2004); plays (*Braided Sorrow* 2008), and music ('La Llorona-ser mujer,' 2019; 'Llora, llora' 2021).

While there is some debate about using the figure of La Llorona as a symbol of resistance for victims of feminicide (Renee Perez, 2008), this point is outside the scope of this research.

The questions that I am interested in exploring are: Why does this ghost continue to haunt us? What does her resignification from murderer-to-ghost-to- embodiment-of-murdered-women in cultural imaginaries tell us about resistance? Does it suggest that resistance emerges from the dead? Could Gaspar de Alba (2010) be right in questioning why we wait until girls are murdered before listening to them? Is resistance possible or does it pertain to the realm of the imaginary, that is, the virtual? If La Llorona continues to inhabit Mexican society, what does that suggest about Mexico as a space of transgression and impunity?

Theoretical Considerations

In this project, I make use of Anglo-American theories in a specific Latin American context. It is worth noting that while there are clear advantages of using concepts from the Global North in the Global South, such concepts cannot be neatly employed or adopted, without taking into consideration social, cultural, and political specificities. My first theoretical consideration is that while the term femicide is more widely used in Anglo-American literature, I use the Mexican adaptation of this concept: feminicide (*feminicidio*).[11] Femicide refers to the killing of women by males because of their gender (Russell and Radford, 1992). Mexican scholar Marcela Lagarde translated this term as *feminicidio* and took this concept further by adding the State's complicity in these gendered murders. Feminicide is more than violence perpetrated by men against women. Rooted in unequal social, sexual, political, and economical structures, this phenomenon is propelled by institutional violence which leads to impunity through its discriminatory access to legal justice and specific discrimination against women during the investigations and legal processes (Lagarde, 2006). García-Del Moral (2016) traces the framing of the term femicide to its translation as *femicidio* and *feminicidio* and posits that this latter term also works to shame the State for its complicity in perpetuating the systematic killing of women through impunity (p. 1026). Expanding on the potential of the concept of feminicide to shame, I explore other affects evoked by the language of feminicide and the phenomenon itself. In this project, my overarching objective is to unpack the intricacies of the term feminicide to explore its limitations and its value in articulating the inarticulable.

[11] 'Femicide' is often translated to Spanish as 'femicidio.' However, to further distinguish this concept from homicide, Marcela Lagarde de los Ríos translated it (with Russell's permission) to 'feminicidio.' The word *feminicidio* was then reincorporated into English language as 'feminicide'. See introduction to *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas* (2010) for a discussion of these translations. In this project, I use the English translation 'feminicide' as opposed to the Spanish *feminicidio* simply for practical purposes.

Another theoretical consideration concerns the displacement, adoption and resignification of concepts (Parrini and Golubov, 2019). As Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbmembe shows with his reformulation of Michel Foucault's biopolitics into necropolitics, sometimes concepts are resignified or expanded. Other times, concepts simply do not fit. To expand on the resignification of concepts, Parrini and Golubov (2019) explain that Latin America focuses on the negative pole of biopolitics— understood as the processes of death and the intersection between power, politics, and death. North America, on the other hand, appropriates the positive pole of biopolitics, which focuses on vitality, power, and production of life.

In my theorizing with affect and haunting, I follow a similar line of inquiry by exploring the (dis)continuities of concepts framed by sociohistorical specificities. While Anglo-American affect theory tends to focus on vitality and potentiality—given its study of the living body—it is imperative to address dead bodies and disappeared bodies in a social-cultural theorizing which focuses on the way bodies affect and are affected. In Mexico, life and death overlap, and dead bodies also have the capacity to affect and evoke responses. To put it in other words, contemporary Mexico is a space where the dead and the living overlap and coexist in the virtuality of *el más allá* ('the great beyond') and the materiality of *el acá* ('the here'). Expanding on Rodrigo Parrini and Golubov (2010), who argue that the body—an open field which receives impulses and experiences emotions— is that which connects both realms, my theorizing will encompass not only living bodies, but also dead bodies and disappeared bodies conceptualized as corpses and ghosts.

Thus, reading Massumi (2002) in parallel with Gordon (2008) opens up a new way of thinking about life and death in the context of feminicide. Instead of focusing on symbolic violence and its relation to gendered killings, Gordon's work can potentially expand affect theory

by exploring haunting as an affective force for dead bodies that hints towards the pervasiveness of structural violence. Despite coming from an Anglo-American context, it makes sense to employ Gordon's concepts of ghosts and haunting in the context of Mexico (and Latin America in general) given its conceptual focus on death, but as already noted, my engagement with her work must be critically employed in Mexico's specific context. For this reason, I bring Anglo-American theories in conversation with Latin American and Chicanx concepts, literary fiction, and art. A final note must be made regarding the concept of gendered violence. By thinking with Levine, I aim to reveal the collision of multiple forms that collide to perpetuate this phenomenon in any given epoch.

Methods

Interdisciplinary methodology

Given the interdisciplinary and theoretical nature of this project, it makes sense to explore methods that do not pertain to one specific discipline. Drawing from both Massumi and Gordon, this research examines literary texts and social art as frames to theorize on larger issues. Thus, my method consists of a rigorous and interdisciplinary reading practice. My engagement with sociological concepts, cultural production, and literary criticism aims to bridge the humanities and the social sciences. For this reason, I will employ Caroline Levine's (2015) new formalist method, which brings together literary criticism and cultural studies In *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015), Levine defines forms as "all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference" (3). Borrowing from design theory, Levine posits that *affordance,* that is, potential and latent actions, provides a way of thinking about the capabilities and limits of forms. Her method will be particularly useful in my close readings because it will give some order to the somewhat chaotic and complex phenomenon of feminicide.[12] In other words, following Levine's (2015) approach to theorize affect and haunting will allow me to navigate between the abstract and the material that transcends the notion of forms as containers which include and exclude. My method will consist of close readings that trace bounded wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks as they overlap and collide, thus producing openings. Following Levine (2015), my theoretical approach will also resemble that of Donna Haraway's *thinking with* and *thinking through* North American, Latin American, and Chicanx concepts.

[12] It is important to note that Levine's use of forms is chaotic in a sense that forms are not neatly categorized or traced. Levine's formalist method does not focus on causes, but rather recognizes "different shapes and patterns that constitute political, cultural, and social experience" (2015, p.17).

This project is structured in three chapters. In the first chapter I undertake a close reading of Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (2008) through an affect studies lens (Massumi, 2002). In doing this, I begin to trace a continuity between death, haunting, and bodies, which seeks to articulate the potentiality of affect. By establishing my theoretical framework, I begin to articulate ghosts and haunting as affective forces for dead bodies.

In the second chapter I employ my theoretical framework in Mexico's postcolonial and neoliberal context. By examining two literary texts (Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*, 2005 and Fernanda Melchor's *Hurricane Season,* 2020), I tease out how corpses and the disappeared affect and are affected by bodies.[13] Following Caroline Levine's (2015) new formalist method, I pay close attention to:1) conceptual (dis)continuities of North American affect theory in a Latin American context; 2) ways in which living bodies, dead bodies, and (dis)appeared bodies affect and are affected by each other's forces. In doing this, I theorize about the forms and affordances of death and feminicide as they disrupt hegemonic narratives of the normalization of violence.

Chapter three begins by conjuring the ghost of *La Llorona* who has haunted Mexican socio-cultural imaginary for over five hundred years. Thus, I turn to public grieving practices and recent social activism which aim to give a voice to the murdered women in Mexico through the wails and hollers of *la Llorona.* Building up on the previous chapters, I focus on the affects evoked and exchanged between living bodies and dead bodies. Some questions that will guide this chapter are: Who speaks for murdered women and how do affects enter systems of

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[13] These two novels are representative of Chicanx and Mexican perceptions of feminicide in Mexico. The first one focuses on the Juárez murders and was published at a time when not much was known about these cases. The second novel is inspired by a murder case in the southeast of Mexico. The time-lapse between the publication of each novel will allow me to reflect on specific socio-economic and political periods. *Desert Blood* was originally published in English. *Hurricane Season* is a translation from the original Spanish version.

signification? Echoing Gaspar de Alba's words, why must we wait until these women's deaths to listen to them? What does it take to allow the dead to speak and the living to listen? What paradigms are continuously reinforced regarding murdered girls' and women's sexuality and "deviant" behaviour? How can the intelligible and the unimaginable be conceptualized as forms? What does it mean that *La Llorona* continues to appear in cultural imaginary? And what does this tell us about the emergence of resistance?

This project concludes by addressing the problematic of language in thinking through complex topics such as feminicide. Bringing affect, haunting, and forms together, I reflect on the forms and affordances of the term feminicide, as a bounded whole composed by multiple other forms, and the way the forms of death and life (conceptualized as ghosts, corpses, and bodies) collide and generate new and open-ended messages about gender and violence. Expanding affect theory by including forms of death—and keeping in mind Latin American socio-cultural specificities—in this MA thesis, I aim to theorize on larger issues of violence and gender in contemporary Mexico.

Data Collection

Before starting this project, I was already familiar with some literature and artwork that dealt with feminicide and Mexico. I came up with a list of around fifteen cultural products: fiction novels—mostly by male authors—short stories, and poetry—many by Chicanx and Latinx authors—and some less-known Mexican and American films and documentaries that dealt with this topic.

Due to the time constraints of this project and the diversity of these cultural productions, I decided to narrow down my selection to produce more in-depth analyses instead of tracing common themes among multiple narratives. I followed specific criteria to select the novels

Desert Blood (2005) and *Hurricane Season* (2020). First of all, perhaps informed by my own bias, I looked for novels written by women. Traditionally it has been the male voice who speaks of and for victims of feminicide, which is why I was interested in listening to women's voices. Secondly, since this research is being conducted in a Canadian university, I searched for novels that were either originally published in or translated into English. This language criterion helped me narrow down my list, but it also expanded my geographical horizons to include Mexican American fiction. The third selection criterion had to do with determining the timeframe. I was looking for novels that captured the evolving socio-political context from the initial and well-known murders of Ciudad Juárez in the early 1990s to the spread of the epidemic of violence that has reached all parts of the country, especially since the War on Drugs (2006-present). Finally, I was looking for literary fiction that could potentially be read through affect and haunting.

Following these criteria, I turned to Alicia Gaspar de Alba (1958-present), whose academic research I was already familiar with, although I had not read her fiction before. Gaspar de Alba is an American scholar and writer, whose work centers around gender, sexuality, and Chicano studies. Born in the border town of El Paso, Gaspar de Alba considers herself Chicana and has written extensively about the Juarez murders. While these murders concern both Mexico and the U.S. given their geographical position at the border, it is important to acknowledge that Gaspar de Alba is a Chicana writer and scholar from the United States. As such, the author's positionality must be considered in my theorizing of Mexico. *Desert Blood* (2005) is informed by years of research into the Juarez murders which contributes to its sociological relevance. However, I am particularly interested in the way Gaspar de Alba articulates the Juarez-El Paso border as an urban haunting, which begs to be read through Gordon's language of haunting. I came across Mexican Fernanda Melchor's novel *Hurricane Season* (2020) around the time I was

beginning this project. Melchor is a Mexican writer and journalist from Veracruz—one of the most insecure states in Mexico. Her novel *Hurricane Season* (2020) was originally published in Spanish in 2017 and then translated to English by Sophia Hughes in 2020. While reading her novel, I was simultaneously pulled into the narrative and repelled by the words on the pages that evoked feelings of unease. Inspired by a real murder case in south-east Mexico, this novel deals with overall violence and a sense of insecurity by focusing on the subjective lived experiences of the fictional characters. Melchor is quickly establishing herself as one of the prominent emerging voices in Mexico's literary landscape, and her writing reveals many of the complexities of the phenomenon of feminicide. Both *Desert Blood* and *Hurricane Season* capture and transmit some of the affects that linger in Mexico's co-existence of life and death. As such, the sociological relevance of these novels lies in their potential to contribute to a theorizing that resists hegemonic narratives of gendered violence and prioritizes the senses as a way of knowing.

To select the artivism in chapter 3, I thought through Levine's forms (networks) and placed La Llorona as a thread to guide my thinking process. The reason I follow La Llorona is because in recent years she has resurfaced in anti-violence protests, particularly through songs and performances ('La Llorona-ser mujer' by Snowapple, 2019; 'Llora, Llora' by Vivir Quintana, La Catrina Son System, and Nana Mendoza, 2020). By listening to the wails of La Llorona, I aim to make visible, audible, and articulable what haunts women (race, class, deviance, sexual orientation) and also to make visible, audible, and palpable the affects that are engendered in artivism and mass protests. Thinking with forms (networks) and listening to La Llorona helped me narrow down my selection of artivism to songs and chants heard among protesting bodies. Moreover, tracing the reappearance of this ghost also allows me to narrow down my timeframe (2018-present). By employing my theoretical framework, I aim to explore

the wails, hollers, and music that carry affects and haunting messages before entering systems of signification. Ultimately, thinking with La Llorona, Gordon, and Massumi allows us to make better sense of the demands of activists.

Researcher Positionality

In conducting this research, and as a Mexican middle class, cis-gender *mestiza* woman, I am aware that I have a predilection towards fighting against gendered violence. Without ignoring the violent and socio-political instability which affects both men and women, I believe that feminicide should be distinguished from homicide because it is a specific type of violence inflicted upon the female body. Feminicide is a concrete manifestation of gendered violence that needs to be addressed accordingly. We need to make visible the increasing murder of women by their partners and the impunity with which their cases are treated. For this reason, I decide not to theorize feminicide alongside other cases of homicide and disappearances within the War on Drugs, despite some continuities that might be traced, especially with relation to race and class. It is worth noting that my use of the term feminicide does not assume a universalizing woman subject. For me, feminicide is racialized, and it also embodies unequal social structures of gender, sexual orientation, class, and age, which is why we must also acknowledge transfeminicide and lesbofeminicide. Thus, keeping in mind these specificities, and without ignoring the spread of violence in the country, I posit there is a lot to gain in understanding systematic violence through the concept of feminicide, but keeping in mind an intersectional lens. Acknowledging my own positionality in relation to the topic is imperative because my theorizing and engagement with artivism will be inevitably informed by own affects and experiences. Having said this, when I theorize affects, such as pain, rage, or impotence, I do not speak for those who have lost their loved ones. I cannot feel what the mothers, sisters, friends, or

children of the murdered and disappeared feel because I have not experienced it myself. In this project, I think through these affects as evoked and articulated in specific literature and artivism. As an ending note, coming from a bicultural and interdisciplinary academic formation, my research emerges from an intersection between humanities and social sciences. To echo Gordon's (2008) words, literary fiction may enable sociological information to emerge, which is why we must pay attention to art and what ghostly messages it carries.

Chapter 1: The Affectivity of Ghosts

This chapter establishes the foundation for my theoretical framework in the context of gendered violence in Mexico. Following Levine's new formalist method, I will begin by providing a brief overview of the cultural interpretation of death in Mexico, where I posit that the living and the dead coexist. It is imperative to situate this complex conceptual understanding of what poet Octavio Paz (1950) refers to as the 'cult of death' in Latin America because these particular socio-cultural forms of life and forms of death will continuously inform my engagement with North American theories. Then I will undertake a close reading of Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008) through an affect studies lens as established by Brian Massumi in *Parables for the Virtual* (2002). Massumi (2002) rightly identifies the problematic of not having cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect (p.88). In this chapter, I aim to address Massumi's concern by using Gordon's (2008) language of haunting in a theorizing of affective forces that does not assume a sharp cut between life and death. In the final section of this chapter, I bring Gordon, Massumi, and Levine in conversation to begin to identify the emergence of forms of death and life in Mexico's haunted society, which seek to articulate ghosts and haunting as affective forces for dead bodies.

Socio-Cultural Interpretation of Death in Mexico

In Mexico, death defines everyday life, not just at a personal level, but also at a social, cultural, and political one. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) Mexican poet and intellectual Octavio Paz accurately notes that "[d]eath is present in our fiestas, our games, our loves, and our thoughts" (p.58). In the span of seventy years since the publication of his work—and with the accelerated increase of violence in Mexico—one might add that death is also present in our

streets, in our headlines, and in our politics. If anything, the quotidian of death is more present than ever in what Berlanga (2015) describes as a spectacle of violence.

To illustrate the complexity of Mexico's cultural relation with death, I look at forms of life and death as they interact and collide with other social forms within the current context of contemporary violence. Levine identifies four recurrent forms in literary and cultural theories: whole, rhythm, hierarchy, and network, and in this project, I will seek those forms. Recognizing the multiple organizing principles that shape experience, she invites us to move away from thinking of causes of powerful structuring principles and to focus instead on forms, patterns, and ordering structures which overlap and collide. Levine's new formalist method enables a rethinking of arrangements, relations and (dis)order in a seemingly organized social, cultural, and political experience by focusing on the affordances (latent potentialities) of forms as they generate aleatory effects. Following Levine, I pay particular attention to the logic that reigns throughout wholes and rhythms within the context of necropolitics, collective grieving and public mourning.

Whole

Bounded wholes follow the logic of totality and unity, and as a result, they afford exclusion and inclusion, but also order and containment. Aware of these limitations, Levine (2015) argues that wholes—just as any other form dependent on materiality—afford a valuable way of thinking that connects to the possibility of conceptualization (p.28). On a larger scale, Mexico can be perceived as a whole—a geographical boundary—that follows the logic of death through necropolitics, defined as the administration and regulation of death. Thinking with forms and necropolitics, we must also acknowledge institutions—understood as wholes—that work to propel this necropower: the Mexican government, police, neoliberalism, drug cartels. As has

been noted, these bounded wholes—by colliding and overlapping—produce an excess of violence and afford impunity by dictating whose lives are acknowledged and protected by the law and whose lives are disposable (González Rodríguez, 2012). Resisting the logic of institutions that manage the politics of death, perhaps more evidently, bounded wholes appear in mourning practices.

Keeping in mind Mexico's particular relationship with death, we can identify wholes in public and private places such as cemeteries and home altars. Cemeteries are perceived as bounded wholes that contain the dead within designated spaces, while simultaneously offering a public space for grieving. In addition to cemeteries, placing altars at homes for deceased relatives is a common practice in Mexico, especially around the Day of the Dead—an embodiment of rhythm to which I shall return. Following this logic, public cemeteries and private altars are both examples of wholes that afford containment and closure. Cemeteries and celebrations are designated spaces and times that contain the dead, while simultaneously offering a public space for grieving and mourning. But what happens when the dead are no longer contained in designated areas such as cemeteries? Informed by Mexico's festivities around death which tend to be loud, lively, and colourful, Marcel Reyes-Cortez (2012) explores the blurring of visual mourning practices in the private space (home) and public spaces (cemeteries and mausoleums). He argues that material and commemorative objects placed both within the home and in public spaces assist in a communication between the dead and the living. These objects, such as photographs, reinforce a communication established through the process of memory making and narrative. In short, the dead continue living through remembrance because "something of the dead person has been transferred to the materiality of the object" (Reyes-Cortez, 2012, p. 130).

With the growing number of forced disappearances and feminicides which have become part of the landscape, communication and grieving practices have also changed. As such, while Reyes-Cortez (2012) explores the blurring of mourning practices in private and public spaces, special attention needs to be paid to changes in mourning practices within the public space. How are wholes disrupted by the emergence of mass graves and memorials, which suggest the dead are no longer located in specific places but rather linger among the living and are conjured as ghostly matters?

As Levine (2015) notes, rhythms follow the logic of the lived time of the human body (p.49) and have many affordances, among them, repetition and interruption. In Mexico, death follows different rhythms. Among diverse rituals, Day of the Dead is a consistent rhythmic form, celebrated each November. This celebration follows the logic of remembrance, a paced mourning practice where families come together to commemorate their deceased relatives. This form affords closure but also affords memory-making, through repetition. This rhythmic form, however, collides with a different tempo, that of the exponential increase of murders and disappearances in Mexico. "En México todos los días son días de muertas" ('In Mexico, every day is the Day of the Dead') read one banner held at anti-feminicide protest (Periódico Central, 2020). 8M is another social tempo. International Women's Day has become a day of strikes, not of celebration. However, it would be wrong to ignore other organized protests where families of murdered and disappeared victims march for justice. In this sense, public mourning is no longer limited to an annual celebration, in fact, it now follows an ongoing state of mourning, where each day at least 10 women are reported missing or dead. The rhythm of collective grief—understood more as a lingering sense of the ghostly where the living and the dead coexist—collides with the slower tempo of institutions' resolution of these crimes. A study carried out by

Impunidad Cero, shows that less than 50% of feminicide cases in 2019 were prosecuted. This collision of tempos results in a familiarization with death and impunity that has led to the current *welt* of normalization of violence—which simultaneously slows down the achievement of justice and closure.[14]

Following Levine (2015) I now reflect on collective grieving and public mourning practices as linguistic forms and their affordances. To grieve and to mourn are oftentimes used interchangeably, however, grief is an emotional and physical response to a loss, whereas mourning is the process of adapting to a loss. In other words, mourning is the expression of grief through social norms that vary across cultures and contexts. In my theorizing of grief and mourning, I am not interested in the religious or spiritual connotations, but I do consider Mexico's cultural interpretation of death. In this project, I pay particular attention to the logic that reigns in these contemporary practices and to their affordances, which pose questions about the communication between the living and the dead and the emergence of resistance.

Paz asserts that life and death are inseparable in the sense that "Mexican death is the mirror of Mexican life" (p. 58). Reading this claim in the context of feminicide, the ongoing murders of girls and women have a lot to say about Mexican society in terms of sexism, racism, and classism. If Mexico is a haunted space where the living and the dead coexist in the virtuality of *el más allá* ('the great beyond') and the materiality of *el acá* ('the here'), the haunted body—an open field which receives impulses and experiences emotions—is that which connects both realms (Parrini and Golubov 2010). In this sense, the body is simultaneously involved in the vitality of affect and in the seemingly sterile death—a continuum of the same realm. In short, there is a conceptual continuity between life and death in Mexican culture that cannot be ignored.

[14] The conceptual implications of justice are outside the scope of this research. In my theorizing, I take it to mean to legal prosecution as opposed to impunity.

Death, much like affect, is an affirmation—even if it is a negative affirmation (Paz, 1950, p. 58). Thinking with affect and death inevitably leads to thinking with ghosts and haunting, which is why I now begin to trace the resonances between Massumi and Gordon.

Affect and the Language of Haunting

In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008), Gordon builds an interdisciplinary framework influenced partly by Freud's psychoanalytical theory and Raymond Williams' structure of feelings to explore hauntings in two literary works: Luisa Valenzuela's *He Who Searches* (1987) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Gordon's theorizing aims to make visible that which has been rendered ghostly, lost, or invisible in State-sponsored disappearances in Argentina and slavery in the U.S.[15] In her book, she introduces the concepts of haunting and ghosts which explicitly hint towards affect. Gordon (2008) defines haunting as a way of knowing the past and the present (p.8). She writes that, "[b]eing haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (p.8). From this passage it is worth noting that the way of knowing of haunting extends beyond language and exists in the realm of affect and the senses. For Gordon (2008), the ghost is a social figure; it is not just a dead or missing person (p.8). The ghost unsettles what Gordon defines as a zone of activity or knowledge by introducing strangeness into the place it is haunting (p.63). The ghost functions by making people see things that were not there before; it makes an impact on people and changes their relation to what seemed invisible (p. 98). It is worth noting that haunting takes place within "the actually existing social relations in which we live, think, and think up new concepts and

[15] Some parallels may be drawn between the *desaparecidos* in Argentina and the ongoing murders and (dis)appearances in contemporary Mexico; however, socio-cultural and political specificities must be considered.

visions of life" (Gordon, 2008, p.98). Therefore, social change—or what Gordon defines as the 'something to be done'—occurs in one's current *welt.* As seen in the previous passages, Gordon's (2008) theoretical endeavor clearly resonates with affect; The connections between the language of haunting, ghosts, and affect will be further nuanced in this chapter, but first, I provide a brief overview of key concepts in affect theory, which directly relate to this project.

In *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), Brian Massumi makes a distinction between affect and emotion. Affect can be equated with intensity, that is, it is unassimilable and asignifying, whereas emotions are already received psychological categories (p.88). Having equated affect and intensity, Massumi (2002) then goes on to argue that affect is two-sided, that is, it is "the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other" (p. 96). The virtual is a complex concept, which—much like life and death in Mexico—brings opposites together:

> The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained. For out of the pressing crowd an individual action or expression *will* emerge and be registered consciously. One "wills" it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on socio-linguistic meaning, to enter linear action-reaction circuits, to become a content of one's life—by dint of inhibition. (Massumi, 2002, p.91)

Thinking with Massumi and the socio-cultural interpretation of death in Mexico, the virtual may be equated with the realm of *el más allá* ('the great beyond'), that is, the prelinguistic and precognitive lived experiences that emerge from a proximity to death and manifest themselves in the haunted body. Once these expressions are registered consciously in the body, they enter the actual realm of *el acá* ('the here'). While affect and emotion "follow different logics and pertain to different orders" (Massumi, 2002, p.88), in my reading of *Ghostly Matters* (2008), I demonstrate that haunting and affect indeed follow a similar logic. According to this logic,

intensity, affect, and the simultaneous participation in the virtual and the actual pertain to the same realm, which not only allows us to think haunting and ghosts in relation to affect, but also death as affective, virtual, and actual.

Having established an initial outline of Gordon's and Massumi's key concepts, it is worth recalling the theoretical and conceptual context from which this project emerges. For Massumi, the affective escape is framed by words that connote aliveness, positivity, and changeability (p.97). Situating Massumi's theorizing in the context of Mexico and echoing Gordon's language of haunting, I will trace a conceptual connection between the aliveness of affective escape and the negative affirmation of death and haunting. Keeping in mind that affect can be extended to other levels, "providing that the uniqueness of its functioning on that level is taken into account" (Massumi, 2002, p. 99), I now turn to my close reading of *Ghostly Matters* (2008). In my parallel reading of Gordon and Massumi, I identify three main themes: haunting times, ghostly effects, and the haunting potential of ghosts.

Haunting Times

Haunting and affect pertain to the same realm, thus, the logic—albeit a nonlinear logic—of time is similar. Being haunted is a state beyond one of cognitive doubt or of the unknown (Gordon, 2008, p.31); it is about reliving [past and present] events in all their vividness, originality, and violence, with the objective of overcoming their lingering effects (Gordon, 2008, p.134). This reliving is not merely a repetition of the past. In fact, although Gordon (2008) writes of past and present, she problematizes the notion of time. In haunted societies, the oppressed past is neither linear nor an autonomous alternative past (p. 65). In fact, the oppressed past can be regarded as an alive and accessible history, which was formed in the past due to its repression by organized violence while continuing to have an effect in the present. The effect of the oppressed

past—formed in the past—does not arrive to haunt the present in a linear way. In fact, it seems past and present converge and simultaneously inform each other. Through Massumi's concept of the virtual—where opposites merge—I begin to trace an overlap between the haunting logic of the oppressed past and affect, which exists in the realm of the virtual.

Haunting can be read as a virtual lived paradox, where one is affectively forced to (re)live past and present, while simultaneously entering the dimension of potentiality, which connects to the future. This potential will be explored later in the chapter. For now, let us recall that, the "virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect" (Massumi, 2008, p.91). However, the oppressed past, which emerges as a haunting, does not follow a linear logic; it is not a repetition of the past. In other words, simultaneously reliving past and present, that is, being haunted involves a process where "memories are remembered and forgotten, desires are forged and reforged" (Gordon, 2008, 42-43). In short, haunting is as much affected by the past and by the present, as by the living and by the dead, and by the known and the unknown.

Following ghosts, as Gordon suggests, further problematizes haunting times. A ghost arrives to a place and time which is produced within the memoryscape that their haunting interrupted (Gordon, 2008, p.184). If ghosts arrive to the virtual, then ghosts can be signifiers of "the unassimilable, the never-yet felt, the felt for less than a second" (Massumi, 2002, p.94), which is aligned with Gordon's claim that the ghost unsettles, and it is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar (unassimilable). So far, we have established that ghosts emerge in a time (merging of past and present in the virtual), but we are yet to unpack the place to which ghosts arrive from *el más allá* ('the great beyond'). Gordon notes that ghosts arrive at a particular memoryscape, but the space of this arrival remains broad. Recalling Parrini and Golubov (2010),

the body is that which connects both realms. Thus, reading Gordon with Parrini and Golubov, it could be suggested that ghosts arrive to haunt and interrupt a body at a certain memoryscape[16]. Adding Massumi to our reading, "the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker that they can be perceived" (p.89). Before reaching the consciousness of words, qualification and intensity are embodied (Massumi 2002, p.85). Thus, haunting brought by ghosts from *el más allá* ('the great beyond') is also embodied, although at a prelinguistic level. Taking this thought further *el más allá* can be equated with the virtual given that it manifests through the body and is willed into a socio-cognitive logic through mourning.

Up to this point, my close reading of *Ghostly Matters* (2008) has established that haunting and affect pertain to the same nonlinear realm of the virtual. The unassimilable trait of affect before it is made conscious may be equated with ghosts which make themselves felt by unsettling the body being haunted at a particular time and space—shaped by a particular *welt*. The state of being haunted and following ghosts does not follow an action-reaction logic. Both haunting and affect remain inarticulable until they are made conscious and thrust into a linear action-reaction logic. Haunting and affect exist in the virtual/*el más allá*—where opposites such as past and present and life and death—coexist, coalesce and connect. In effect, a sensation or ghostly matter can also produce a haunting, thus, the chaotic forms collide and coexist. The lingering effects of haunting will be further explored in the following section.

Ghostly Effects

Thinking social theory with literary studies and language opens up a conversation about the ways in which ghosts communicate with the living. To be haunted is to be in a story, scared and unwillingly, but not having anywhere else to go, that is, "to be haunted is to be tied to

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[16] The concept of memoryscape seems to encompass a physical, historical, and personal dimension which must be considered in a theorizing of the body.

historical and social effects" (Gordon, 2008, p.190). Ghostly effects relate to historical events and the oppressed past which suddenly appears to haunt the present. Therefore, following ghosts through literature and art may lead us back to a discovery of the past which continues to hold an effect on the present. What seems to be lost or non-present is, in fact, very much alive. These social and material effects that ghosts produce depend on what Massumi refers to as the quality and intensity of an image.

For Massumi (2002), the content of an image is formed by a socio-linguistic qualification, which fixes the *quality* of the image. The *intensity* of an image depends on the strength or duration in the effect that a given image produces (p.84). It is worth noting that, according to Massumi's theorizing, content and effect are not necessarily correlated. Intensity is "associated with nonlinear processes: resonation and feedback which momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future" (Massumi, 2002, p. 86). This non-correlation brings us back to the nonlinear process and the non-action-reaction logic of affect and haunting. In fact, the *primacy of the affective* may occur in the gap between content and effect. Likewise, form/content and intensity/effect are disconnected (Massumi 2002, p.85). This argument could be extended to the language of haunting and ghosts, where ghost appears in these seemingly contradictory gaps. Certain images, memories, and ghostly matters produce an effect; some linger, and others are momentaneous.

An appearance of a ghost does not necessarily relate to the present and following it will not necessarily lead us to the oppressed past and guide us through a haunting, unless a haunting recognition is attained. The ghost is a form by which something seemingly not present or invisible makes itself known (p.8). In other words, the ghost is the carrier of the message (p.98). Some messages are harder to discern and depend on an affective recognition of the haunted

body. As a messenger, the ghost may be understood as a symptom of something that is missing (Gordon, 2008, p.63). Therefore, ghosts are signifiers of a larger haunting, which can no longer be ignored or excluded, which is why we must learn to listen to ghosts as they bring strangeness into a familiar zone of activity (Gordon, 2008, p. 63). In my reading of these theories, the levels of intensity, as described by Massumi, could translate to how strongly or weakly the ghost conveys a message. Alternatively, the effect a ghost produces would depend on what Massumi (2002) identifies as a relationship of resonation or interference, amplification or dampening (p.86). Drawing from Raymond Williams' structure of feeling, Gordon (2008) aims to articulate a *sense* of the ghostly—or that which modern history has rendered ghostly—to describe and analyze its social and political effects (p.18). The theme of ghostly effects discussed in this section shows that ghosts produce actual social, political, and cultural effects even though they emerge from the virtual. In fact, Massumi reminds us that "affect is itself a real condition" (p.106) and "it is everywhere, in effect" (p.107). Ghosts are carriers of messages and their effect depend on levels of intensity. Both haunting and intensity can be read as "a state of suspense, potentially of disruption" (Massumi, 2008, p.86). It is perhaps in this moment of suspense where ghosts emerge, and affective recognition—distinctive to haunting—is attained when one's relationship to what seemed invisible suddenly changes.

The Haunting Potential of Ghosts

So far, my reading of *Ghostly Matters* (2008) has established a merging of past and present, but futurity must also be added to the equation of time. Gordon theorizes about change and refers to it as the "something to be done" (p.194), which seems to be the message carried by the ghost. For Gordon, the ghost represents a future possibility or hope (p. 64). This future possibility is dependent on the affective recognition which occurs when a ghost unsettles

someone's *welt* (zone of activity) and that person is able to address the ghost and be affectively haunted instead of attempting to banish it. In my project, I move away from hope and instead focus on what Gordon refers to as future possibility and how that connects to the potentiality of affect.

Massumi's theorizing resonates with Gordon when he writes about the emergent quality of movement (p.8). Haunting, like movement, has an emergent quality. Massumi (2002) writes that, "[i]n motion, a body is an immediate unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary" (p.4). This potential to vary is addressed with the bodies' simultaneous presence in the virtual and the actual:

> For out of the pressing crowd, an individual action or expression *will* emerge and be registered consciously. One "wills" it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on socio-linguistic meaning, to enter linear action-reaction circuits, to become a content of one's life. (Massumi, 2002, p. 91).

The emergent quality of haunting not only sets limits, but also evokes solutions (Gordon, 2008, p. 201). We have previously established that Massumi equates intensity with affect and we have equated affect with haunting. Intensity is already in and of itself connected to the new because it is the unassimilable in a structure that leads to the new (Massumi, 2002, p.87-88). As a result, affect and haunting are also mingled with the new or the emergent. Moreover, in my framework, I have traced a continuity between life and death, where a body's potential to vary might be dependent on corpses or ghosts.

Massumi not only invites us to rethink the body in motion but he also makes a distinction between possibility and potentiality; that which is possible and that which is potential are not synonyms. "In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness" (Massumi, 2002, p. 91). Potential is located in the edge where the virtual leaks into the actual (p.105). Let us recall Massumi's words: "out of the pressing crowd, an individual action or expression *will* emerge and

be registered consciously" (p.91). One action will leak from the virtual into the actual. One action will lead to haunting recognition. The distinction between the possible and the potential, then, lies in the conditions of emergence and re-conditionings of the emerged (Massumi, 2002, p.10). In my reading of Massumi's work, if potential is not prescribed, then its emergence comes from outside one's *welt*; it is affective and unassimilable. Possibility, on the other hand, exists within the parameters of one's *welt* and functions by rearranging what has already emerged. Potential is weaved with the virtual, which is something that happens too quickly to have actually happened. The fleeting virtual is the realm of *potential* (Massumi, 2002, p.91). This distinction is aligned with haunting which arrives within one's own zone of activity or *welt:* where memories are remembered and forgotten and where desires are forged and reforged (Gordon, 2008, p.42-43). If we equate Gordon's theory with affect, then ghosts are not only a possibility to effect change (within preestablished parameters). In fact, haunting recognition—like affect—has the potential to allow the new to emerge from beyond the parameters of one's *welt*. Gordon also refers to this transformative recognition as haunting recognition, a way of knowing where a ghost makes itself visible and pulls us affectively into a [linear] way of knowing what has happened or continues to happen (p.63). Gordon equates haunting with affective recognition yet affect and haunting are more nuanced (p.102). My reading of Gordon's theory is that haunting is the initial and larger step—beyond our control—and then affective recognition takes place when that which was lost makes an unexpected appearance. This section has begun to tease out the haunting potential of ghosts, which will be further nuanced in chapter 3 by looking at artivism.

Before moving on to the second chapter, it is worth clarifying what the conceptual categories of the dead, ghosts, and corpses mean. Thinking with State-sponsored violence in

Argentina, Gordon writes that the dead and the *desaparecidos* ('disappeared') both return to the world of the living (*el acá*) as ghostly matters, that is, they are conjured and "alive with the force that has prompted their return" (Gordon, 2008, p.112). However, Gordon distinguishes between the dead and the *desaparecidos.* For her, death and disappearance are different realms because the *desaparecidos* exist and live with the living: Mothers felt it, smelled it, and sensed it.[17] Gordon even goes far enough to claim that Mothers were also taken into the world of the *desaparecidos.* With the spectacle of violence and the sprouting of corpses in Mexico, and keeping in mind the culture of death, I posit that the dead and the living coexist in Mexico. Thus, death does not exist in the past tense; it exists in the present tense just like (dis)appearance (Gordon, 2008, p.113).[18] This project situates Massumi's theoretical framework in the context of Mexico's cultural interpretation of death.[19] If the body is in passage or in process (Massumi, 2002, p.5) and death and life are a cycle in Mexico (Paz 1950), then we could say that the body is in passage between the materiality of life and incorporeality of death too. Therefore, in my theorizing, I take ghosts, (no)bodies, and (dis)appeared to be conceptually aligned. (No)body refers to the disappeared (no bodies found) while simultaneously reinforcing the notion of unidentified corpses and precarious bodies which are often the ones upon which violence is inflicted. (Dis)appeared shares connotations with (no)bodies, but it emphasizes the phenomenon of disappearance of living bodies and reappearance or sprouting of corpses. Both the (no)body

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[17] Mothers most likely refers to the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo) who protest the forced disappearance of their children and demand they be brought back alive.

[18] It is outside the scope of this research, but we must acknowledge that there must be a conceptual difference between the recognized *desaparecidos* in Argentina and the unidentified (dis)appeared corpses in Mexico.

[19] Gordon posits that the ghost is a living force (p.179), and bodies are characterized by their vitality. By thinking the body with motion, one must accept the real-material-but incorporeal dimension of the body (Massumi, 2002, p. 5). Massumi's theorizing focuses on the living, thus he speaks only of the body and not of the corpse, however, he makes use of the conceptual categories of the living and the nonliving (p.97). He then addresses the differences between the dead, the living, and the human. For him, these differences depend on a question of degree, not of properties possessed by specific forms or structures (p. 99). Keeping in mind the distinction in degrees between living bodies and nonliving bodies, the question that arises is: can corpses also be considered living forces?

and the (dis)appeared return to the realm of the living as ghosts. Corpses and nonliving bodies both pertain to the realm of death, but death is understood as a continuity of life.

Forms of Life and Death

Having read Gordon and Massumi together, I now bring Levine into the discussion to make some final theoretical considerations. Aligned with Levine, within the overarching structuring principles of life and death in Mexico, and following Gordon and Massumi, it is possible to discern some forms and their affordances. Levine proposes that wholes might address forms shaped by domestic walls and national boundaries. Expanding on this notion, families and cities might also be read as forms. With regard to hierarchical forms, Levine suggests that the gender binary, race, and class are some forms that overlap and collide with others. These social forms such as gender, race, and sexual orientation "feed back and transform the reality they describe" (Massumi, 2002, p.12), while also transforming themselves. Networks might be useful conceptual categories too, since they illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon of feminicide in Mexico. Feminicide, feminism, impunity, and activism can all be read as forms.

In her proposed new formalist method, Levine poses two questions to explore social and political experiences: What does each form afford, and what happens when forms meet? (p.16). Levine (2015) notes that forms matter "because they shape what it is possible to think, say, and do in a given context" (p.5). Therefore, forms come after affect has been willed to enter into a linear action-reaction logic within one's *welt.* Even though forms come after affect, forms are mingled with potential. Levine (2015) borrows the concept of *affordance* from design theory and uses it to think with forms. Affordance refers to potential uses or actions latent in materials (p.6). Thinking affordance with potential and haunting allows us to look at the latent and invisible potential of ghostly matters. Moreover, while one form contains limited affordances, a

combination of forms can lead to infinite affordances. Thus, the recondition of the emerged can be attained by thinking with the affordances of emerged forms. A limited number of affordances is not necessarily something negative. In fact, identifying forms and their affordances gives way to the possibility of identifying sociopolitical power and how forms overlap and collide—occasionally producing contradictory and aleatory effects (p.7).

Levine's method is valuable in thinking with Gordon and Massumi given its resonances. Both Gordon's and Massumi's theorizing resonates with Levine's new formalist method and all focus on structural change. Levine (2015) writes that the "overlap [of forms] opens up unfamiliar opportunities for political action" (p. 18). Reading Levine with Gordon, social and political effects produced by a sense of the ghostly can also be understood as forms. Likewise, it is possible to read feelings as forms because "feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action, often unpredictably" (Massumi, 2002, p. 1). Moreover, "[i]ntensity is asocial, but not presocial—it *includes* social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logics" (Massumi, 2002, p. 91). Massumi's theorizing, especially concerning possibilities once affect has entered into an action-reaction logic resonates with Levine's theorizing of forms.

In this chapter, I have weaved the theoretical concepts that will inform my research on feminicide in Mexico. My parallel reading of *Ghostly Matters* (2008) and *Parables for the Virtual* (2002) shows that haunting resonates with affect in multiple ways: 1) they both follow a nonlinear logic; 2) emerging from the virtuality of *el más allá,* ghosts and affect produce material effects; 3) haunting recognition and affect are mingled with potential. Thinking together with Gordon and Massumi leads us to an affect theory that does not assume a sharp cut between life

and death. Moreover, haunting and ghosts may be understood as affective forces for dead bodies. This theorizing is important in the context of Latin America, where scholars have previously traced discontinuities in the appropriation of concepts and theories from the Global North. In order to further nuance my theorizing, especially with the bridging of literary fiction and social theory, Levine's new formalist method is useful. In this chapter, some forms of life and death in the context of public mourning and necropolitics have begun to emerge. What other forms these ghostly matters take is yet to be determined. In my reading of literary fiction and engagement with theory, new wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks will emerge and allow me to problematize our understanding of feminicide as it relates to forms of gender, class, race, and politics. In the next chapter, I will engage with this interdisciplinary theoretical framework to tease out how the concepts of haunting, ghosts, intensity, and affect resignify, change, expand, and limit their meanings in a context where normalization of gendered violence prevails.

Chapter 2: Ghostly Affects, Feminicide, Forms, *Desert Blood,* and *Hurricane Season*

In this chapter I bring into conversation Anglo-American, Latin American and Chicanx scholars and writers to think through my theoretical framework in the context of feminicide. To do this, I engage with two novels that deal with the phenomenon of feminicide: *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders* (2005) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and *Hurricane Season* (2020) by Fernanda Melchor. To narrow down my scope, I select specific literary passages where living bodies affect and are affected by encounters with the dead—which I call affective passages—and adopt a close reading practice that focuses on the affordances of words and linguistic wholes, and on the affordances of what is unarticulated yet speaks. Employing my theoretical framework, I aim to articulate (in)visible ghostly matters and bring forward what is seemingly missed in thinking about the phenomenon of feminicide. Thus, I follow ghosts conjured by Gaspar de Alba and Melchor and step into the haunting realm of the virtual to explore the normalization of gendered violence at the level of affect. Following Levine's new formalist method, my objectives in thinking through feminicide with these authors are 1) to revise the phenomenon of feminicide by unpacking (un)articulated affects in encounters with the dead; 2) to critically explore the displacement, adoption, and resignification of concepts from the Global North in the Global South; and 3) to begin to delineate ghosts and haunting as affective forces for murdered women by disentangling specific threads and affordances of forms in each of the selected affective passages. The central question that will guide my practice of reading in this chapter is: What do emergent ghostly affects evoke in terms of normalization of violence, gender, and life and death in Mexico?

Having established the outline of this chapter, it is worth explaining the relevance of the two selected novels. *Desert Blood* is of particular importance because it hints towards haunting

and ghosts and articulates affective encounters between living bodies and dead bodies in Ciudad Juárez. This author explores the (dis)appearances and murders of *maquiladora* workers in the Mexico-U.S. border in the early 1990s. Thinking with Gaspar de Alba, I will be able to explore how the concepts from my framework are reshaped and informed by a Chicana take on feminicide in the Mexico-U.S. border. Let us recall that the term feminicide had not yet been coined when the murders of Ciudad Juárez came into light. As such, my reading of *Desert Blood* looks at the way Gaspar de Alba articulates certain horrors, which had not yet become engrained in our daily life or thrust into language, and at the way silences can be heard in what Ocegueda (2008) identifies as 'urban hauntings.' Thinking through feminicide, affect and haunting with this novel will allow me to peek back into a *welt* where expressions of violence were barely visible (although very present) and where corpses had not yet been incorporated into the Mexican landscape.

With the fifteen-year- time-lapse between one novel and the other, my reading of *Hurricane Season* emerges within the current *welt* which has normalized horror and culminated in the current spectacle of violence. It is worth noting that, while the year 2006 marked a turning point in the naturalization of horror in Mexico, former president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) merely "lifted the veil of the gruesome, inescapable violence that had been integral to the lives of many in the poorer parts of the country" (Rivera Garza, 2020, p.4). In officially declaring the War on Drugs, Calderón dragged the criminality of the drug trade into the visible legitimacy of the law by declaring war against it. This violence which has led to the phenomenon of feminicide as we now experience it, had long lingered in the margins, in the unarticulated, in the invisible. It is from within this *welt* that Melchor's novel emerges and where diverse forms of life and death collide into unassimilable yet effective affects. With its translation to English and German,

Melchor's novel has been internationally acclaimed. In a review for The Guardian, Harrison (2020) describes *Hurricane Season* as "an uncompromisingly savage piece of work: difficult to escape from, built to shock." Expanding on the affects articulated in *Desert Blood,* my reading of *Hurricane Season* will explore the shocking (un)articulated affects that continue to haunt Mexico.

Aware of the limitations of studying only two works of fiction out of a plethora of narratives of feminicide, in my engagement with these novels, I do not aim to trace linear connections in the phenomenon of feminicide, but to raise questions and make visible the invisible by following the ghosts conjured by Gaspar de Alba and Melchor. In addition, thinking with social theory and literary fiction will allow me to explore some limits of my theoretical framework and identify how it expands and resignifies in the context of feminicide.

Following Levine (2015), the word feminicide is, in and of itself, a linguistic form that follows a predicative logic that includes and excludes. Aware of the potential limitations of using this term to capture the complex structural violence that permeates Mexican society, it also affords the potential to articulate the inarticulable and to make visible the racist, sexist, misogynistic, and classicist structures that shape society. As Levine (2015) notes, forms are not just necessary containers that shape and organize experiences, but placed alongside other forms, they have the potential to disrupt and disorganize hegemonic narratives and ideologies. Thus, I propose thinking through feminicide as a collision of diverse social and political forms that provide insights into what haunts Mexico. Given the nature of this topic, it seems logical to begin unpacking feminicide by identifying life and death as two distinct whole forms. Doing this, however, does not mean they are opposites, but rather that they interact and shape each other. Following Levine, my close reading of these novels reveals that life as a form is composed of

multiple socio-political forms, such as neoliberalism, race, gender, class, sexuality, among others. Life, as a bounded whole, affords vitality and thus potential. On the other hand, forms of death seemingly oppose vitality and follow a necropolitical order. These forms, such as ghostly matters, (no)bodies and corpses, also emerge from the virtual and produce effects in the actual. Thus, thinking with Massumi and Gordon, I suggest that forms of death also afford vitality as affective forces.

Desert Blood, Ghosts, and Affects

The novel *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders* (2005) is a work of fiction grounded on Gaspar de Alba's own research and on initial investigations regarding the killings of maquiladora workers and the sprouting of bodies along the Juárez-El Paso border. This mystery thriller takes place in 1998 and is set against the backdrop of NAFTA and political corruption in the late twentieth century. It tells the story of Mexican American PhD candidate Ivon Villa who travels from L.A. to her hometown in El Paso with the purpose of adopting a baby with her wife. On her way there, she learns of the unsolved murders in Ciudad Juárez for the first time and is inevitably wrapped in these crimes once Cecilia, the mother of the child she was going to adopt with her American wife, is brutally murdered along with her unborn baby. A few days later, Ivon's sister, Irene, is kidnapped after attending the Juarez Fair. As Ivon searches for her sister, she begins to learn more about the murdered girls and women of Juarez and about the complex entanglement between these crimes, the government, corruption, and a network of sex trafficking. Inspired by true events, Gaspar de Alba's writing does not replicate sensationalist headlines surrounding the murders of girls and women, but she does not diminish its brutality either. In fact, her raw descriptions of women being murdered and of violated corpses found in state of decay evoke visceral reactions which pull the reader affectively until the end. The author invites us into the

lives of these women, and we accompany them in their proximity to death. The reader, as well as the characters in the novel, are haunted by a complicated web of shock, silence, terror, and anger, which changes their relationship to their hometown in the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. Recalling Gordon and Massumi, it is these unassimilable and asignifying affects that enter the actual via haunting. Ultimately, Gaspar de Alba's novel can be read as a re-membering of the dismembered bodies of girls and women by providing them a life beyond their deaths. Following Levine's new formalist method, I employ my theoretical framework to explore some (dis)continuities and displacements in the themes I previously identified as (1) haunting times, (2) ghostly effects, and (3) the haunting potential of ghosts.

Haunting Times: Ghostly Matters, Space, Wholes, and Hierarchies

> THE ROPE TIGHTENED AROUND HER NECK, and she felt her belly drag over sand and rocks, the wound on her breast pricked by sagebrush. She was numb below the waist, and her face ached from the beating. One of them had given her an injection, but she could still move her arms and wedge the tips of her fingers under the noose. They'd stuffed her bra into her mouth, and the hooks in it hurt her tongue. When the car stopped, her head slammed into something hard. The pain stunned her, and she was crying again, but suddenly, she felt nothing in her arms. The numbness spread quickly up her spine. Her jaw, her belly — everything felt dead. (Gaspar de Alba, 2005, location 52)

This opening passage of *Desert Blood* sets the tone for the rest of the novel; it anticipates an experience that catches the reader off-guard and knocks the air out of them. This affective passage is representative of a body being affected by an encounter with death itself, which is why I have decided to select it as a starting point. This passage also hints towards the language of haunting, and it is evocative of a merging of life and death—which is characteristic of Mexican culture as has been previously established. This girl is in the threshold between life and death; she is a body-in-becoming-a-corpse, since "everything felt dead" (location 52). Through Gaspar's reconstruction of the unsolved murders of Juarez, she does not evoke sensationalist

depictions of murdered corpses in a morbid way but rather articulates that which remains unacknowledged in headlines: victims' pain and terror, followed by a sudden numbness. This passage, however, also hints towards the hegemonic narratives that dehumanize the human body: "[s]he tried to scream, but someone hit her on the mouth again, and someone else stabbed into the bag of water and bones" (Gaspar, 2005, location 65). As already noted, sensationalist newspapers in Mexico are filled with graphic images of dismembered and violated bodies; human bodies are objectified in a way that dehumanizes them. What is missing from these headlines is the affective recognition that these corpses were once living bodies. Gaspar sparks this conversation by allowing us to peek into the final moments of a victim—not in a rationalized way of knowing—but through the senses. The girl "was crying again, but suddenly, she felt nothing in her arms" (location 52) and later "[s]he tried to scream, but someone hit her on the mouth again" (location 65). In this opening passage, Gaspar de Alba makes audible the girl's cries and screams, whose messages do not enter a socio-linguistic order. Instead, thinking through this affective passage with Massumi, unarticulated affects emerge from this dying body as noises that are promptly silenced by the sudden numbness and the beating before taking on socio-linguistic meaning. And thus, Gaspar de Alba pulls us affectively and shakes the seemingly naturalized violence of Mexico's current *welt*.

As the girl comes closer to death, past and present merge in her experience. Let us recall that haunting times combine past and present in a nonlinear way when the repressed past makes itself felt. "The stars looked like the city lights, and for a moment she felt like she was hanging upside - down, all the blood rushing to her ears, making her face hot. She remembered the ride at the fair. (Gaspar de Alba, 2005, location 58). Suddenly, the memory of the fair comes to mind—a reforged memory seemingly emerges out of nowhere to haunt the present. Later in the novel, we

return to the moment when this memory emerged—a memory that is suggestive of some type of warning: a woman at the Juarez fair is urged by her friends not to go on a ride. With this new thread, the above passage can be read as a non-linear haunting that is evocative of risk, thrill, and defiance which connect in the virtual paradox where opposites come together. Gaspar de Alba invites us to relive this chaotic and nonlinear affective experience with this unidentified yet very real woman. Echoing Gordon, one cannot help but wonder, is the city itself haunting the girl? Thinking with Gordon and Gaspar de Alba, the times of haunting transcend temporality; they are also dependent on space, that is, bounded wholes where ghostly matters emerge. Gaspar de Alba traces a nonlinear connection between defiance and punishment, as she begins to conjure ghostly matters which haunt the borderspace. From the reading of this passage, two theoretical considerations emerge. First, haunting times do not necessarily trace back to a long-repressed past. In this scenario, the past is most likely a matter of hours, but this past which hints towards deviance and punishment has a longer trajectory, which must be understood as a continuum of violence (Finnegan 2019). The second theoretical consideration transcends temporality and hints towards space: The city haunts. Thus, the times of haunting can be expanded to spatio-temporal hauntings. Following Levine, the identified form in this passage is the city as a geographical bounded whole that follows a necropolitical logic. As we shall see in the following passages, geographical borderlands afford inclusion and exclusion as well as visibility and invisibility.

This spatio-temporal haunting is also evident in smaller bounded wholes embodied by specific neighborhoods in the city. While driving through the streets of Juarez in search of her sister, Ivon finds herself in an "idyllic community, constructed over the gasoline pipeline" (location 4512). A stench emanates from the ground despite the nice appearance of the area, and Ivon rightly notes that it "made sense that this place was called the Elysian Fields, the name in

Greek mythology for heaven, which was just another place for the dead" (location 4516). As a seemingly bounded whole, this upper-class neighbourhood follows the logic of order and structure and affords a sense of security and comfort. The hierarchy of class rooted in a colonial inheritance not only subordinates lower classes but also attempts to conceal them. Taking a closer look at this passage reveals that other forms are at stake and make themselves present through a discomforting sense of the ghostly. Forms of death—embodied by a foul stench—emerge as ghostly matters and collide with hierarchical social forms, thus making themselves felt. This passage further situates the border as a place where the living and the dead coexist, even if there is an artificial construction that attempts to obscure the dead. Just like the reconstruction of the City could not hide away the stench of gasoline, Ciudad Juárez can no longer conceal the deaths of hundreds of murdered women. That is why in this excess of death, a ghost emerges to haunt Ivon: "[o]ut of nowhere, the little boy's voice popped into her head: Mapi, I thought you were gonna supervise me in the kid's section" (location 4516). This ghost embodies a collision of past, present, and future that hints towards a larger haunting that affectively leaks from the virtual to the city. "Especially in Texas. Shit comes back to haunt you" (location 4650).[20]

As already noted, in *Desert Blood,* the borderland follows the logic of necropolitics where death is simultaneously regulated and concealed. Through my framework, the deaths of hundreds of maquiladora workers emerge as evidence of the violence inflicted upon disenfranchised, racialized bodies, which makes evident hierarchical social forms. The invisibility of these murders is no coincidence since it follows a necropolitical logic, which Valencia (2019) notes is most evidently directed towards minorities that are racialized, nonbinary, queer, or living in

[20] In the novel, 'mapi' is a combination of 'mami' and 'papi' ('mommy and daddy').

precarity. These social forms which afford injustices and inequalities are simultaneously shaped by the increasing social rhythm of death (murder). At the turn of the century, murders and disappearances became so excessive that they could no longer be concealed. Thus, ghostly matters emerged from this collision of forms: human remains sprouting along the desert, light poles painted with pink and black crosses reminiscent of murdered women,-and even the rumbling and screeching of a Southern Pacific train, which reminded Ivon of a woman screaming (location 2448). In Gaspar's novel, the city is full of ghosts, "a stream of black smoke issued from the chimney of the morgue. The hot morning air stank of turpentine and cinder" (location 775). Throughout the pages, Gaspar conjures these ghostly matters, which materialize through the senses, but who are these ghosts? As the story unravels, a sense of the ghostly—which according to Gordon, defamiliarizes a familiar zone of activity—emerges from the collision of forms of life and death.

Ghostly Effects: Race, Rhythms, Affects, and (No)Bodies

Ghostly effects that emerge from the virtual into the actual are dependent on what Massumi calls levels of intensity that "suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future." (p.86). Thinking with Massumi, Gaspar de Alba's writing reveals that this intensity is dependent on mediation, but it is also informed by one's positionality. Without ignoring the ambivalence and complexity of Ivon's identity as Donohue (2020) illustrates in his reading of the novel, Ivon's affective encounters with death since the beginning of her trip back to the Mexico-U.S. border are mediated by her position as a bilingual Mexican American lesbian scholar. On the airplane, Ivon read a magazine article about the Juarez murders and "stared at the picture: a close-up of a woman's legs half-buried in the sand, skin the color of bruises, white sandals still on her feet" (location 73). In this affective passage, hierarchies of gender and class

overlap with rhythms of death and repetition of news, which engender unarticulated affordances. As a middle-class, Mexican American scholar living in L.A., Ivon was not aware of these murders. While the murder cases were increasing in an accelerated rhythm of death, they had just begun to receive international attention in the media (slower paced rhythm of awareness). Moreover, this initial encounter with the image of a corpse is mediated by the newspaper—a bounded whole that follows the logic of dominant narratives, which nonetheless produces an effect on Ivon. As already noted, from my theoretical framework, this mediation of the dead can be read as a level of intensity, that is, ghostly effects, which affect Ivon at the noncognitive level. "She couldn't figure out what upset her most: the crimes themselves or the fact that, as a native of that very border, she didn't know a thing about them until just now" (location 73). El Paso—a bounded whole that affords familiarity and memories—is no longer just Ivon's hometown, but, borrowing from Gordon's language of haunting, there is an unfamiliar and unarticulated sense of the ghostly which unsettles her in this borderspace.

In this mediated approximation to a corpse, the image of the dead woman's body produces visceral reactions which are initially unarticulated: "Her stomach muscles tightened" (location 78). Recalling haunting times which merge past and present, this bodily reaction is mingled with Ivon's own concerns that haunt her: "The nausea had gripped her hard. Maybe it wasn't the article" (location 78). In addition to learning of the murders of Juarez, Ivon is haunted by pre-established, traditional hierarchies which situate her as an outsider. As a lesbian who wants to adopt a child with her wife, Ivon worries that her mother will not approve of her new plan. In this uncertainty, Gaspar begins to conjure a ghost which looms deep inside Ivon and that re-emerges from the past and future; a ghostly matter that carries a message about gender and

deviance. This ghostly matter, Gaspar shows us, haunts Ivon's body and its ghostly effects are shaped by hierarchical forms, such nationality, sexuality, and gender—hierarchical forms.

Levine's contribution to thinking hierarchies as forms resonates with Judith Butler's theorizing on grievable lives and precarity. For Butler, "grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters" (2009, p. 14). As such, "[w]ithout grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life" (p.14). This theorizing leads to the concepts of precariousness and precarity. According to Butler, while all life is precarious in and of itself, precarity is the politically induced condition of precariousness, embodied by poverty, starvation, underemployment, among others. As already noted, research on feminicide shows that murdered women in Ciudad Juárez shared similar characteristics. They were racialized, poor, disenfranchised bodies who often worked at maquiladora assembly plants—further accentuating their position as cheap labor. Also known as *chicas del sur* ('girls from the south'), these girls and women often migrated to the northern part of the country in search for work at maquiladoras.

As the story unravels, other mediated encounters with death make visible this collision of hierarchies. For example, Father Francis, who was to help Ivon in the adoption process, recalls that some children found a human skull among trash (location 669). This collision of a form of death (corpses) and form of life (albeit a waste or discharge) seems to situate women and garbage or unwanted objects at the same level—which further emphasizes the notion of maquiladora workers as disposable. As has been previously studied, neoliberal practices, such as the introduction of NAFTA coincide with the increase of women working in maquiladora assembly plants—bounded wholes and hierarchies ruled by the logic of markets and inequalities. This insertion into the logic of neoliberalism—a chaotic form ruled by uncertainty and exclusions—affords an objectification of maquiladora workers as cheap labour and serves to

further dehumanize them. This position is exacerbated by their gender, race, and class (Krásná and Deva, 2019). Moreover, del Sarto (2012) notes that, as brown, poor, disenfranchised female bodies, maquiladora workers are excluded from the traditional heterosexual norm (as independent women who usually migrate from the South to live on their own) and positioned in a low socio-economic status (whose income is not enough to live, but to survive). All of this combined reinforces the discourse that women's bodies in Ciudad Juárez can be equated to waste or an excess, which has severe ethical implications regarding the rationalization of these murders (Schmidt Camacho 2004). Schmidt Camacho (2004) further notes that these women's bodies are more prone to experience violence; their bodies become *desaparecibles* and *descuartizables* (p.62)—words that have no direct translation in English but that have entered Spanish vocabulary out of necessity to articulate bodies that are more disposed to being disappeared and dismembered. Bodies that, as Gaspar de Alba shows us, are dehumanized to the extent that they sprout alongside garbage. To expand on Gordon's conceptual trope of the ghost by thinking with Gaspar de Alba and Butler, I propose the (no)body, which reinforces the notion of a disappeared body that comes back as a ghost but also highlights the unequal hierarchies of race and class which traditionally silence, hide, and ignore some bodies over others. Let us recall that hundreds of women were abducted and killed before their (dis)appearances began to produce discomfort. Irene's kidnapping, unlike many others, was quickly investigated by the police given her Mexican American nationality. This raises questions about which lives are grievable and liveable in Mexico.

Having discussed some mediated affective encounters with the dead, thinking with Massumi, Gordon, and Gaspar de Alba also opens up the discussion about the distinct affects that the *desaparecidas* and the dead evoke—which are not necessarily equated to each other.

While encountering a corpse produces certain affects that can emanate from a stench of death, Gaspar de Alba also hints towards other ghostly matters as affective forces of the disappeared. One of the detectives running the investigation surrounding Irene's kidnapping comes baring news. He provides a pair of jeans that were found where Irene was last seen. When Irene's mother recognized the lace ribbon that she had personally stitched in her daughter's trousers, she immediately wailed. This affective passage begs to be heard—in making thinkable the unthinkable—to explore the affective forces of the dead and the no(bodies). What is it about this 'moment of recognition' that hints towards closure? What happens when the clothing or human remain does not belong to the expected person? What happens when (no)bodies leave no visible marks? At what point are the disappeared taken for dead? These questions linger as unarticulated affects in the virtual and enter the actual by producing ghostly effects.

Ghostly Potential of Ghosts: Networks and Multi-Sensorial Intensity

In addition to news media, Ivon learns about the Juarez murders through others' first-hand experiences. For example, Father Francis, who organized *rastreos* ('search parties') for missing persons, describes the mutilated bodies that had been found in earlier searches, and Ivon promptly cuts him off: "I get the picture, okay?" (location 724).[21] This sharp response should not be unnoticed because it is in this gap—or unwritten words—that Gaspar invites us to ponder upon the unarticulated affects which nonetheless resonate between Father Francis' descriptions and Ivon's sharp response. Let us recall that Gaspar's novel was written at a time when the phenomenon of feminicide in Mexico—as we know it today— had just started receiving national and international attention. As such, Gaspar articulates the initial horrors of sporadic encounters

[21] In Mexico, *rastreos* are led by relatives of the *desaparecidos* ('disappeared'). They gained prominence in the northern part of Mexico where networks of relatives look for human remains along the deserts. They work without support from the government.

with death, which had not yet been incorporated into the recurrent tempo of murders in a *welt* that normalizes violence. This unarticulated affect in Ivon's response "I get the picture, okay?" (location 724) must not be equated with indifference or an absence of affect. Instead, in not willing an affect into an actual emotion, Gaspar de Alba reveals the limitation of language in articulating lived experiences of horror that resist symbolic and cognitive categorization. In not assigning an emotion, however, Gaspar de Alba also opens up the space to reflect on the individual potential of intensity and its lingering effects, which can be articulated in infinite potential action.

Through the characters' unmediated encounters with the dead, Gaspar de Alba once again invites the reader to experience death, not in a rational way, but through what Gordon calls a sense of the ghostly: the fetor of death, a smell that became familiar to Ivon (location 4976). After Ivon discovers that Cecilia (the mother of the baby she was going to adopt) was brutally murdered, she attends the autopsy. "As long as she didn't let herself smell anything, as long as she didn't dwell on the fact of the baby, she could stand it" (location 902). Ivon attempts to conceal her emotions and to disconnect herself from Cecilia's pain. This affective passage poses questions about what occurs when living bodies give in to pain or when they let themselves feel the ghostly effects of death. Theorizing this passage from an affective lens also hints towards the value of paying attention to the senses as a mode of inquiry as opposed to rationalizing experiences. The shared language of pain and suffering is important, "for where suffering lies, so, too, does grieving" (Rivera Garza, 2020, p. 6), which hints towards the ghostly potential of ghosts. Gaspar shows that, despite this apparent strong façade, Ivon's visceral reactions emerge, and she faints during the autopsy. Following Gordon who notes that ghosts make an impact on people, the foul odor articulated as a ghostly matter, changes Ivon's relation to what seemed

invisible. As she loses consciousness, the voice: "I'm starting to feel kinda lonely, Mapi" that Ivon attributes to her would-be-child once again comes back to haunt her. Recalling Massumi and Gordon, this haunting that emerges from the virtual does not follow an action-reaction logic. Instead, a merging of opposites and the unassimilable in the virtual is willed into an actual socio-linguistic logic. Thinking with Rivera Garza and Gaspar de Alba makes visible and palpable affects of pain, smell, and haunting as potential disruptors of the normalization of violence, and, thus, the ghost that haunts Ivon is not banished in the attempt to ignore an unarticulated, yet intense, affect. Instead, this fetor of death becomes an affective force that hints towards a haunting.

After attending Cecilia's autopsy, images of the semi decomposed and mutilated corpse are not the only things that haunt Ivon; in fact, the corpse produces material ghostly effects: she "realized the odor of the dead body was in her shirt" (location 946). As Massumi reminds us, "affect is itself a real condition" (p.106) and "it is everywhere, in effect" (p.107) In the shower, the stench of death reminisces images of Cecilia's mutilated body, which haunt Ivon despite how much she scrubs her skin. Following Gordon's claim that ghosts make themselves felt through our senses, this stench is a ghostly matter that emanates from the dead and pulls the haunted body into an affective recognition: the murders of hundreds of women are no longer invisible; in fact, they produce real effects—and translate into Gordon's "something to be done" in that they move Ivon into taking action instead of attempting to banish the ghostly matters. In my close reading of this passage, Gaspar de Alba reveals that while ghosts may linger unheard, a proximity to death—accentuated by a multi-sensorial intensity—may lead to what Gordon calls 'haunting recognition': the stench of death does not qualify as cold knowledge, but it unsettles Ivon and makes an impact by changing Ivon's relation to what seemed invisible. Unlike

mediated headlines about murdered women that tend to contribute to an overall disinterest by decreasing the level of intensity through strategies of victim-blaming, Gaspar's novel sparks a conversation about what might emerge if people experienced this unfiltered fetor of death. What ghostly effects will be produced? And what might that do to the normalization of violence? How close do we need to be to death in order to attain an affective recognition? Thinking with my framework offers an opportunity to engage with these questions. The stench of death, that is, of corpses that have been incorporated into the *welt,* is representative of what Massumi describes as "a state of suspense, potentially of disruption" (2008, p.86)—in this case, odor—that disrupts our *welt* and allows us to recognize a haunting beyond a cognitive and rational way. Once again, the ghostly potential lies between the inarticulate and the articulate, between the virtual affect and the actual emotion which manifests itself through a multisensorial intensity.

After Ivon's sister Irene is kidnapped, Ivon accompanies a group of people led by Father Francis to conduct a search for their missing relatives. Thinking through Levine's methodology, *rastreos* ('searches') may be read as forms of networks that follow the logic of collective grief and distress. Unaided by the government, this *rastreos* rely on other forms of networks: relatives of *desaparecidos* invest their own time and resources to search for signs of their disappeared. These moments of organized action seek closure and justice, but in effect bring complex and often contradictory affordances. The search portrayed in the novel is another unmediated affective encounter with death that takes place at the desert (space) where the *desaparecible* and *descuartizable* body of a maquiladora worker is found. According to Parrini (2010), an unidentified cadaver "leaves us with only flesh (the prelinguistic substance) or bones" (p.75). Following this claim, I enter into the realm of the virtual, that is, the realm of the prelinguistic elements, to explore affects in a close encounter between living bodies and corpses. In the

virtual, multiple temporalities collide, thus Ivon's experience merges her sister's disappearance with Cecilia's body, and this new encounter with a corpse. A corpse, a piece of clothing, or scattered bones along the dessert might afford closure with the knowledge of someone's death, but unidentified bodies also afford a fear inscribed in the body. In her writing practice as a means to grieve and heal from horror, Rivera Garza (2020) writes, "[m]ouths gaping, hairs standing on end, cold as statues, truly paralyzed, we have done the only thing we could do in the face of such horror: part our lips and mouth wordlessly" (p.6). When the search was over, Ivon—as if paralyzed by horror—could not pull herself away from the body they had found. Beyond this written assertion, one ponders on what force stops Ivon from pulling herself away.

From my theoretical framework, this passage illustrates what I mean by affective forces of the dead: invisible, yet very real, forces that have the capacity to pull someone through a haunting that changes their relation to what seemed familiar. Perhaps the state of decay, and the image of organs spilling out of a body resists a linear understanding of this phenomenon of violence, which leads to a paralyzing state as Rivera Garza writes. Nonetheless, this image has the capacity to unsettle, which leaks in the actual as a ghostly effect. This paralyzing and unsettling moment leading to a haunting recognition in Ivon is interrupted when "the movement of the maggots turned her stomach, and she lost the coffee and pan dulce ['sweet bread'] she'd had for breakfast" (location 4285). Echoing Adriana Cavarero, Rivera Garza (2020) writes that "horror is intrinsically linked to repugnance" (p.2). And once again Gaspar de Alba articulates nauseous visceral reactions but does not qualify these affects into cognitive emotions. In these unmediated encounters with corpses, ghosts, and (no)bodies, Gaspar shows us that their absences and silence—perhaps belonging to the realm of virtual and the unseen—leak into the actual and communicate through multi-sensorial affects carried by ghosts and ghostly matters.

Transtemporal Hauntings: Networks, Fears, and What-Ifs

By employing Gordon's language of haunting in my close reading of *Desert Blood* I have shown that haunting in the context of Ciudad Juárez must also consider the space where ghosts emerge. As such, the concept of haunting times, where past and present merge in the virtual and emerge as ghostly matters in the actual, is rearticulated as a spatio-temporal haunting. Space and time intersect in nonlinear ways and open up another dimension of time that exists outside the past-present-future continuum. At the meeting point for the *rastreo* in the desert, Ivon suddenly "remembered Cecilia's body. The wounds, the gallstones, the gaping cavity of her entrails where her baby had nested. And then it was Irene on the autopsy table, wearing filthy wet white jeans" (Gaspar de Alba, 2005, location 3989). The desert (a geographical space) is haunted by ghostly matters embodied by re-forged memories of Cecilia's body (past) and evokes images of Irene's body (alternative present). I call this intersection of space and temporalities 'transtemporal hauntings,' where the desert, or rather being surrounded by death in a specific landscape haunts Ivon through a nonlinear association between Cecilia's body, and Irene's disappearance. But what willed this affect to enter a linear logic as embodied by anxiety? How can Ivon feel that her sister is alive, yet imagine the worse, and what does this say about Mexican and Mexican American women's affective experiences of horror and fear in the context of feminicide?

To expand on the conceptualization of transtemporal hauntings, let us reflect on the way Gaspar de Alba articulates affects inscribed in the body. Gaspar's novel poses the question of what it means to be the mother or the sister of a *desaparecida*. Ivon realizes that having children means worrying all the time and fearing that something could happen (location 2860). This unsettling fear is inscribed in the body as a haunting which originates in the past, makes itself felt in the (alternative) present but also merges with the future: a haunting warning that the

following day, you or your relative might be the disappeared. Ivon hears her mother's sobs and feels like "part of her own body has been wounded" (location 2861). Once again sobs—an affective bodily response to pain, fear, and impotence—are made audible and make themselves felt.

In these transtemporal hauntings, Ivon is constantly faced with the *what-ifs,* what if she had gone to the Juarez Fair with Irene as she had promised? What if she had called to say she would not make it? What if Irene had not felt compelled to go by herself? This haunting, that traffics in an affective mode, manifests through guilt. Like the paradox of the virtual, it is not only a collision of past, present, and future, but it also opens another linguistic dimension that does not exist in the actual: a subjunctive mood. This utterance cannot leak into the actual in a linear sense, but it nonetheless produces a ghostly effect in Ivon; it haunts her: "Mapi, I thought you were gonna supervise me in the kid's section" (location 4516). After Ivon attains a haunting recognition by refusing to banish the ghosts, we finally learn that this utterance came from a remembered memory of Ivon saying goodbye to Irene before making her way to L.A., merged with Ivon's desire to adopt a child. This haunting is about reliving [past and present] events in all their vividness, originality, and violence, with the objective of overcoming their lingering effects (Gordon, 2008, p.134). While it was formed in the past, this memory is new because it entails recognition. It is a haunting that emerges from the virtual to the actual city. Ivon feels guilt for leaving her sister Irene and moving away from home, as we learn from the remembered memory. She is also haunted by her mother's constant reproach of her deviance from pre-established heteronormative femininity. Thus, Ivon's ghosts carry a message about deviance, punishment, and gender—such message, I will argue in the following chapter, can be heard in the wails of La Llorona.

As a way of summarizing the threads I have pulled so far, thinking through forms and the phenomenon of feminicide with *Desert Blood* makes visible a sense of the ghostly. Gaspar conjures some ghostly matters: the city, corpses, a stench of death, and the voice inside Ivon. If one follows these ghosts, as Ivon did, one reaches a haunting that poses questions about gender and deviance and the value of some lives above others (hierarchical forms of race, gender, and class). As already noted, Ivon's haunting emerges from the rupture of heteronormative, androcentric hierarchical forms that reign the logic of Mexican society as a bounded whole. Ivon is constantly haunted, not only by her sister's disappearance, but also by a child's voice, which is engendered from the collision of hierarchical forms of gender and sexual orientation. Ivon reaches affective recognition because she allows herself to be unsettled instead of banishing the ghosts. Ivon's ghosts have an impact on her and change her relation towards what seemed invisible: the murders occurring in her hometown. Regarding affect, as has been noted, Gaspar resists the urge to bring responses to death into a socio-linguistic meaning, but in these silences and invisibilities are where affects emerge as ghostly matters and disrupt a normalization of violence. While my reading of *Desert Blood,* through Gordon's and Massumi's concepts, has begun to show that haunting and ghosts are affective forces for murdered women, there are still many questions that remain unanswered. Now, I turn to *Hurricane Season* where Melchor pulls us into the lives of the perpetrators and what haunts them.

***Hurricane Season*, Hauntings, and the Virtual**

Fernanda Melchor's *Hurricane Season* (2020) is a novel inspired by the murder of a woman whose body was found in a canal in Veracruz—currently one of the most dangerous states in Mexico and where the author was born. Unlike Gaspar de Alba's novel that appeared when not much was known about the murders of women in the Mexico-U.S. border, Melchor's

novel emerges from a more visible articulation of feminicide and from the increase of insecurity produced by the Mexican War on drugs, which was officially declared with the Calderón administration (2006-2012). From the opening lines of *Hurricane Season*, we are pulled into a tumultuous narrative and anticipate an unsettling experience that rips through our core, much like a hurricane. The novel begins with the discovery of a semi-decomposed corpse, later identified as the Witch, in the fictional town of La Matosa. Each of the following chapters adopts the perspective of different characters intertwined with each other and whose connection with the Witch eventually leads to her murder by Luismi, the Witch's ex-lover, and Brando, Luismi's friend—to put it in simple terms. Melchor recreates these characters' stories through a fragmented narrative and hints towards layers of violent, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic social structures that haunt Mexico. Unlike Gaspar de Alba's novel, Melchor's narrative is nonlinear, and her long passages and fast pace, do not invite us, but rather pull us into the characters' deepest torments and desires. In my close reading of this novel, I am particularly interested in exploring Massumi's paradoxical concept of the virtual—as embodied by the Witch—and the affects evoked between certain characters' encounters with the Witch. Thinking with Gordon, I am also interested in what the ghosts conjured by Melchor suggest about a larger haunting. Similar to my engagement with *Desert Blood,* I pay attention to the linguistic forms and affordances that shape select affective encounters and aim to listen to silences, make visible the invisible, and feel through the senses.

The Witch Hauntings: Wholes, Hierarchies, and a Sense of the Ghostly

Hurricane Season begins with what seems like a group of soldiers making their way through a field and eventually reaching a canal. The reader promptly realizes that the troop is actually a group of children playing. And thus, a sense of the ghostly begins to emerge through

the process of (de)familiarization. As they make their way along the cattle field, they face "a terrible smell that hit them harder than a fistful of sand in the face" (p.3). The children push forward despite the stench until they:

> Finally recognized what was peeping out from the yellow foam on the water's surface: the rotten face of a corpse floating among the rushes and the plastic bags swept in from the road on the breeze, the dark mask seething under the myriad of black snakes, smiling. (Melchor, 2020, p.5)

Following my practice of reading, I turn to the unarticulated affects and the silences. This affective passage poses two questions: Does the stench of the rotten corpse pull the children affectively? Do they feel the urge to discover its cause? Berlanga (2015) writes that with the appearance of mass graves and the (dis)appearance of bodies—which I read as forms of death—citizens are not only made to co-exist with death, but they are obliged to co-exist with horror. This coexistence with death does not only occur in a cognitive manner—the rational acknowledgement that corpses are part of the landscape—but rather it manifests itself through the sensorial. Once again, the horror of a corpse in state of decay evokes repugnance. The children encounter "a stench that made them want to hawk it up before it reached their guts, that made them want to stop and turn around" (p.3). Nonetheless, they push forward; they are compelled to continue—perhaps by an unarticulated affective force from the dead—until they find the source: a racialized rotting corpse, described as a 'dark mask.' In addition to the visibility of corpses, the stench of death has also become part of the landscape. Melchor does not articulate the children's response when actually encountering the corpse, but these omissions or invisibilities that resonate between the boys' nauseous feelings and the visibly rotten corpse raise several questions: Surrounded by gruesome murders, have we learnt to distance ourselves from death, to banish the ghosts, to ignore the problem? What does this discovery do? What type of lingering effect, if any, will it have on these children? An analysis of this passage by thinking

with Levine offers an opportunity to engage with these questions. The imagery of the plastic bags mingled with the corpse described as a 'dark mask' afford a visibility of a colonial inheritance of hierarchical structures of class and race. These hierarchies intersect and afford inequalities that hint towards the current *welt* that normalizes violence, especially when it is directed towards racialized and poor bodies.[22]

Melchor presents fragments that tell a story, and one cannot help but wonder what escapes the reader when turning from one page to another. What forms emerge in the unarticulated spaces in between fragments? Chapter one ends with this raw description of a racialized smiling corpse, and chapter 2 begins with "they called her the Witch, the same as her mother" (Melchor, 2020, p.5). In this transition, there is a sudden jolt from death to life, from corpse to body, from anonymity to identification. Moreover, there is an unclear distinction between the Witch and the Young Witch. They seemingly merge into one—a state which speaks to a larger haunting inscribed in the racialized female body.

In this nonlinear movement from one chapter to the next, Melchor steps from the realm of the dead to the realm of the living to introduce the Witch. For some reason, "the sight of her left everyone speechless, whether out of disgust or amusement it was impossible to say" (Melchor, 2020, p.17). This statement can be better understood by recalling Massumi's theorizing of the virtual, "where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt" (p. 91). The Witch evoked fascination and excitement "because she existed in real life, a real flesh-and-blood person" (p.20). Yet in the virtual, this excitement collides with anger, desire, and terror and are inscribed

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[22] Thinking with race and space (Veracruz) needs to be further problematized. Race not only alludes to mestizos and Indigenous people but to Afro-Mexicans. The state of Veracruz is known for its Afro-Mexican population, which has systematically been concealed and ignored. Efforts to acknowledge Afro-Mexican descendancy has gained prominence in the past decades. See Mexican scholar Marisol Alcocer Perulero's work on feminicide and afro-descendants.

in the Witch who produces an incomprehensible and unassimilable effect on others, much like affect in the virtual.

Following Gordon who posits that the ghost is the sign that a haunting is taking place, with the initial chapters of *Hurricane Season*, the readers get a sense that the Witch is the haunted (murdered) but also the one doing the haunting (carrier of a message). In fact, the author explicitly describes the Witch as "that black-clad specter who spent her time haunting the remotest parts of town" (p.18). Thinking with Melchor and Gordon, if one follows this ghost, one may discover that the Witch merely signifies a larger haunting that takes place; a haunting buried within remorse and shame, but that manifests itself—occasionally bringing its destructive powers with it. As the narrative unfolds, Melchor articulates the presence of other ghosts: "malign spirits that swarmed around the place looking for people to let them in" (p.150). This "sociality of living with ghosts" (Gordon, 2008) situates La Matosa as a space where a haunting takes place. Unlike the borderlands in *Desert Blood* that negotiate an ambivalence of making visible and concealing, La Matosa is a geographical whole completely submerged in visible darkness and violence. "See that light shining in the distance? The little light that looks like a star? That's where you're headed, he told them [the dead], that's the way out of this hole" (Melchor, 2020, p. 210). This (w)hole follows a necropolitical logic, much like the borderlands, but its concave shape also affords a looming sense of being stuck, with no way out. As such, Melchor conjures ghosts and pulls the reader against their will into the lives of people who are haunted. Melchor makes visible that feminicide is carried out by perpetrators who are complex human beings; they are not a form of pure evil, but rather familiar faces in any given social circle. However, analyzing cause-and-effect of feminicide is outside the scope of this research. Instead, in addition to following visible ghosts in the novel, I explore how Melchor conjures an

unsettling sense of the ghostly that leaks from the virtual into the actual and emerges from an excess of violence.

As already noted, the Witch unsettles: "just looking her in the eyes sent a chill through you because it was clear she'd gone mad" (Melchor, 2020, p. 8). There is something about the Witch that frightens the locals, but what's more, she haunts them:

> Out of nowhere, the image of the Witch naked flashed through their minds; the Witch straddling the devil and sinking down onto his grotesque cock, all the way down the shaft, his semen running down her thighs, red like lava, or green and oozing like the strange brews that bubbled away in a cauldron on her stovetop and that the old sorceress would give them to sip from a spoon, to cure them of their ills. (Melchor, 2020, p.9).

These images of the Witch emerge to haunt the locals. Thinking with words as linguistic wholes, this passage affords the visibility of other hierarchical forms, such as gender and sex, and this collision with the unknown (reinforced by superstition) is what produces an unassimilable, yet very present fear. Thus, while the Witch is being haunted (literally), she is also the one doing the haunting. In the nonlinear action-reaction logic that merges fear and amusement, the Witch can be read as a ghost, whose articulation in the actual evokes other ghostly matters that haunt two of the characters involved in her murder. In following these ghostly matters, I aim to make visible and thinkable the way haunting and ghosts can become affective forces for murdered girls and women.

The Silent Specter: Gendered Encounters with Ghosts

By peeking into the life of each character, the author invites us to rethink silence as an affective force. Munra, one of the male characters involved in the murder of the Witch, lies in bed waiting for his wife to return. Having taken his daughter-in-law to the hospital after the Witch aided her in having an abortion, Munra cannot help but feel haunted by the silence surrounding him. "A shadow plunged in deafening silence, the silence Munra has always found

more disturbing than any shouting or screaming, which is why, there and then, he began telling her [the specter] what had happened the previous night" (Melchor, 2020, p.59). Moments later he realized that he was merely talking to himself. This passage invites us to rethink the force of silence as haunting. Silence, much like words, also affords communication, albeit through affect. It pertains to the prelinguistic virtual and enters the actual by its capacity to produce ghostly effects that changes one's relation to what seemed invisible and inaudible.

Following this seemingly silent specter, the author pulls us to the realm of dreams—which like the virtual—is a place where opposites collide and what seems unreal suddenly emerges. In dreams—or perhaps nightmare is a more appropriate term— the dead can speak, albeit the language of the dead. One must attempt to listen to ghosts, a practice that requires an affective recognition. Ghosts speak through haunting, which may manifest through the lingering effects of a dream. In the actual, Munra observes his stepson, Luismi, burying the ashes of his wife's stillborn. Suddenly a childhood memory of witchcraft, death, and disease leaks from the virtual into the actual and paralyzes him. This passage is representative of haunting times that can be read as a virtual lived paradox, where one is affectively forced to relive past and present. Interestingly, in this dream, Munra is dead and realizes he cannot communicate. As such, the author equates Munra's dream with being dead. By bringing these forms (predicative language and intelligible dreams) into conversation, Melchor's novel poses questions about the limits of language and the potential of sensorial or the affective in establishing communication between living and dead bodies. Read through Massumi's concept of intensity, this passage also raises question about one's proximity to death and the potential to listen affectively to ghosts.

As the story unravels, Munra continues to be haunted by a silent specter, which emerges in his most vulnerable moments. As an accomplice to the murder of the Witch, Munra drives

Luismi and Brando to the river where they dump her corpse. Sitting behind the wheel of his van, Munra wanted to see what the boys were doing, but:

> something stopped him from turning around, something rooted him to the spot, as if paralyzed, to the extent that he didn't even dare look in the mirror, and that he sensed that he wasn't alone, that there was someone there with him in the van, someone creeping forward from the back. (Melchor, 2020, p.85)

While Munra—perhaps unexpectedly—conjures a ghost as he witnesses that moment, he is unable to reach haunting recognition, that is, a way of knowing where a ghost makes itself felt and pulls us affectively into a [linear] way of knowing what has happened or continues to happen (Gordon, 2008, p.63). Munra is unable to acknowledge his own complicity and refuses to be pulled by a ghost to know what has happened. Thus, he fails to discover what truly haunts him beyond his own guilt. Alternatively, Brando, whose ghosts we now follow, comes closer to an affective recognition.

The Virtual: Desires, Repression, Hierarchy

Unlike Munra, who is haunted by guilt, the ghost that haunts Brando, one of the other male characters who murdered the Witch, carries an entangled message about desire, shame and fear. This character is representative of the complexity of the virtual—a lived paradox where desire, repression, and fears coexist—where affects are *willed* into the actual and enter an action-reaction logic. Brando is haunted by the raw image of a pornographic video where a dog chases a young, almost child-like girl until it pushes her to the ground, thus making evident an unequal power dynamic. In his head, he kept replaying this imaginary scene where he was the dog, which attributed him with sexual power over another. This haunting image had a high level of intensity, which emerged at inconvenient times although Brando tried to repress it. At the level of affect, Brando's zoophilic sexual fantasy is entangled with desire and shame in the virtual. Unable to ignore this thought, eventually, Brando would seek to conjure ghostly matters: "muffled barks,

muted yelps—that would lead him to wherever that primitive, cyclical ritual was taking place" (Melchor, 2020, p. 155). Having taken this detour, and thinking with Gordon and Massumi, Brando can be read as a living body haunted by a repressed and violent sexual fantasy, but what does this reveal about a larger haunting? How does this haunting connect to the murder of the Witch? To unpack this question, I return to the Witch and aim to articulate through my framework the fear she evokes in both Munra and Brando.

Following Levine's method in thinking through hierarchies, fear of the Witch is made explicit, especially in the male characters, but it is a fear that does not follow a linear action-reaction logic. It is fear that collides—irrationally—with other forms of life, such as gender and sexuality. To unpack this interpretation, one cannot ignore the latent homophobia and transphobia in this story, which the author addresses at the level of affect. In Munra's one and only encounter with the Witch, whom we learn was in fact a man, "the very thought of that homo's hands on him creeped him out" (p.83). The murder of the Witch by Luismi disrupts the definition of feminicide because it is a man who murders another man, but this manifestation of violence is still controlled by a gender hierarchy that places masculinity in a higher position of power and subordinates femininity. By presenting the Witch as a woman, Melchor makes visible male violence inflicted upon feminized bodies, which problematizes the definition of feminicide. However, thinking with forms to reflect on this term reveals that binary gender hierarchies are still at play despite the inclusion of other categories such as sexual orientation. Similar to Munra's experience, the Witch "made Brando's hair stand on end with some fucked-up shit that had nothing to do with all the fumbling, but with something he'd heard as a kid" (p. 166). Thinking with haunting times, this passage can be read as a fear that Brando attempted to conceal but that "would resurface every time he had to go along with his friends to a party at that

piece-of-shit faggot's house" (p.167). In relation to homosexuality as aforementioned, Melchor brings us back to the affective level. "It was hard to pinpoint exactly why it repulsed Brando so much to watch them [the Witch and Luismi]" (p.170). Thinking through the affects that resonate between Brando's and Munra's encounters with the Witch provides insights into the complexity of Mexican masculinity and its explicit ties to homophobia. Resisting the urge to think in a linear way, desire and shame merge in the virtual and become qualified as repulsion towards homophobia. Thinking with Massumi and Melchor reveals an instance where the body simultaneously participates in the virtual (prelinguistic assignifying bodily repsonses) and the actual (strict gender codes imposed by society). In short, much like the virtual, desire follows an irrational, repressed logic that is shaped by socio-cultural forms that aim to delineate what masculinity should be.

Haunting Recognition

Once again, Melchor drags us through the murder of the Witch, yet this time the reader experiences it from Brando's perspective. As Luismi and Brando make their way through the Witch's house, they were hit by "the foul, unearthly smell of dead old woman" (191). Once again, smell emerges as a ghostly matter that has the potential to disrupt a familiar zone of activity. After murdering the Witch and dumping her body in the canal, Brando returns to the Witch's house, only to encounter a cat ghost. Yet this is not the ghost that carried a message. After that fright, Brando returned home to shower, "but he almost screamed when he looked up at the steamy mirror and saw his own reflection" (p. 195). Recalling Parrini and Golubov (2010) who suggest that the haunted body—an open field which receives impulses and experiences emotions—is that which connects the realm of the living and the dead, Brando's character could be read as being possessed by a ghost—not in a demonic sense—but by being forced to feel the

ghosts that reveal a haunting takes place. Thus, hauntings and ghosts become affective forces. After the Witch's murder, Brando attempted to escape La Matosa. As he made his way through the streets, "Brando grew angrier and angrier, and sadder and sadder, and before he'd even reached the highway he turned around and headed back in the direction of his house" (p.198). To recall Gordon (2008) to be haunted is to be in a story, scared and unwillingly, but not having anywhere else to go. Being stuck in the (w)hole of La Matosa, Brando has nowhere to escape. As the novel comes to an end with Brando, Luismi, and Munra severely beaten by the police and thrown into a cell, there is no sense of closure. In fact, ghosts conjured by Melchor loom over La Matosa, reminiscent of the ongoing violence in Mexico's *welt* and make themselves felt since their excess can no longer be concealed.

Contemporary Hauntings: Gender, Deviance, Forms

Hurricane Season drags the reader across a tumultuous ride, where ghosts are conjured to haunt the characters and the town itself. Thinking with Gordon, Massumi, and Melchor reveals that the Witch, and her consequent murder, haunt La Matosa and point towards a larger haunting that takes place in our current *welt* where normalization of horror prevails, and murders have become part of our landscape. Through a non-linear and fragmented narrative, Melchor evokes a sense of the ghostly and unsettles the reader by unveiling some of the characters' deepest affects which enter a cognitive logic as shame, anger, and desire. While the novel does not provide a voice to the Witch, the author invites us to listen to silences and to listen to ghosts even if they speak the language of the dead. This, of course, is attained through haunting recognition:

> They say she never really died, because witches don't go without a fight. They say that at the last minute, just before those kids stabbed her, she transformed into something else: a lizard or a rabbit, which scurried away and took cover in the heart of the bush. Or into a giant raptor that appeared in the sky in the days following the murder: a great beast that swept in circles above the crops and then

> perched on the branches of the trees to peer at the people below with its red eyes, as if wanting to open its beak and speak to them. (Melchor, 2020, p.203)

While neither Munra nor Brando achieve an affective recognition because they refuse to let themselves be unsettled and to see differently, the author exemplifies what may be read as haunting recognition through the townswomen of La Matosa. It occurs when the town is silent, "the time of evening when the women sit around telling stories with one eye on the sky, looking out for that strange white bird" (p.206). By accepting to listen to ghosts, instead of banishing them, one is able to write ghost stories, that is, stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities which nonetheless produce material effects (Gordon, 2008, p.17):

> To respect the dead silence of that house, the pain of the miserable souls who once lived there. That's what the women in the town say: there is no treasure in there, no gold or silver or diamonds or anything more than a searing pain that refuses to go away. (Melchor, 2020, p. 206)

Thinking with Massumi, Gordon, and Melchor, pain in the above passage can be read as and unarticulated affect that makes itself felt in the present. The Witch haunts through "a searing pain that refuses to go away" (p.206), and this pain carries a message that must be felt. This searing pain haunts a wounded nation that is unable to heal. Pain becomes collective through the embodiment of the Witch in the virtual. The Witch can be read as an articulated and cognitive specter that produces an incomprehensible and intelligible horror, but in the inarticulable virtual, she carries the historical weight of Mexican woman. Unaware of the Witch's identity yet frightened by her, young boys in La Matosa:

> Attributed to her, to the Girl, all those bloodcurdling stories that the townswomen used to tell them when they were kids: stories about La Llorona, the weeping woman who drowned all her offspring in a vile killing spree and was condemned for the rest of eternity to roam the earth as a ghastly apparition with the face of an angry mule and hairy spider legs, lamenting and bewailing her foul sin. (Melchor, 2020, p.20)

Hurricane Season hints towards a larger haunting that makes itself felt through pain and heard through cries. Reading the characters through the concepts of the virtual articulates some of the tensions between the affects—willed into linear cognitive logic as repressed sexual instincts and desires—and socio-cultural hierarchical forms such as femininity and masculinity, class, and race. In making articulable the inarticulable, this novel also hints towards the limits of the concept of feminicide and asks us to make visible and audible what this linguistic form excludes. The murder of the Witch, who in fact is a man, opens up the conversation about other manifestations of violence that must be named, such as transfeminicide and lesbofeminicide and the necessity to articulate the unseen and will it into taking socio-linguistic meaning. Finally, thinking with Melchor's fragmented and evocative writing captures the importance of the language of haunting and affect in making sense of the complex co-existence of living bodies and dead bodies in the phenomenon of feminicide and violence at large.

Bringing theories from the Global North in critical conversation with writers from the Global South shows the value of thinking with haunting and affect. This engagement also reveals how concepts and theories can help us make sense of seemingly intelligible phenomenon, while also expanding its usage and resignifing in specific contexts. For example, employing Gordon's language of haunting in relation to Mexico's contemporary violence reveals that haunting is not only about a repressed past that makes itself felt in the present; it is also a spatio-temporal and transtemporal haunting. Likewise, Massumi's concept of intensity is useful in thinking through the normalization of violence and the potential for disruption through the senses, but this concept is expanded by acknowledging that intensity and its capacity to produce discomfort is dependent of race, class, and gender. Revising the phenomenon of feminicide in thinking with these scholars and through Levine's method gives way to thinking about bounded wholes, hierarchies,

and rhythms that shape affective encounters between living bodies and dead bodies. Continuing with this line of inquiry, in the following chapter I follow the ghost of La Llorona, who speaks the language of the dead to explore the affects and forms at play in affective encounters and sounds of resistance.

Chapter 3: La Llorona, Wails, and Sounds of Resistance

"Ser mujer es un delito, Llorona, con sanción bien definida.
Te agarran cuatro canallas, Llorona,
y te arrebatan la vida"
(Snowapple 2019)[23]

The ghost of La Llorona has been haunting the Mexican socio-cultural imaginary for over 500 years. In March 2019, La Llorona resurfaced amidst anti-feminicide protests in a new version of the Mexican popular 'La Llorona' song, performed by Snowapple in collaboration with writer Pedro Miguel and animation studio La Furia.[24] In this video, we observe a woman as she wanders through the streets of Mexico. After being murdered, she makes her way into a forest, where we can see faces of women—presumably more victims of feminicide—reflected on the tree trunks. Along with the lyrics, which are cries against impunity and silence, through the music we can hear La Llorona's laments for her murdered daughters. In November 2020, a group of women placed an altar in memory of murdered women in the city of Puebla (Periódico Central 2020). These women sang in unison: "Todos me dicen feminazi, Llorona, feminazi porque yo lucho" ("Everyone calls me feminazi, Llorona, feminazi because I fight").[25] Through an act of public mourning, these activists conjured La Llorona and raised their voices together: "ayer tomaste mi mano, Llorona, y ahora marchamos juntas" ("yesterday you held my hand, Llorona, and now we march together"). In 2021, La Llorona resurfaced once again during the 8M protests through the voices of Vivir Quintana, La Catrina Son System, and Nana Mendoza

[23] "To be a woman is a crime, Llorona, with a well-defined sanction. You are caught by four villains, Llorona—and they take your life."
[24] The folklore song 'La Llorona' has been interpreted by multiple artists, among them, Chavela Vargas and Lila Downs. The song La Llorona-Ser Mujer is part of an interdisciplinary art project.
[25] Pejorative term (feminist + nazi) that originated in the United States but has been widely used in Mexico to refer to feminists. Marta Lamas discusses this concept to explore how until recently young women from two higher education institutions in Mexico City refused to call themselves feminists—while embodying certain feminist traits—given the association with negative traits. See *Dolor y Política* (2021).

with the song "Llora, llora."[26] These songs are not the first to draw a connection between La Llorona and the voices of grieving mothers and activists who mourn their murdered children and raise awareness of the ongoing violence in Mexico. Drawing from Derrida and Mbembe, Gloria Godinez (2016) traces a connection between La Llorona, grieving, and State crimes. Echoing the precolonial version of the legend and *neobarroco* art—rearticulated as *necrobarroco*—she explores La Llorona as a grieving mother whose *duelo* ('grief') is embodied as the search for her missing children to properly mourn them.[27] She argues that *madres dolientes* ('grieving mothers') who manifest in the streets and public squares, cry for their disappeared children and thus make visible their ghosts (p.152). Listening to these songs and thinking with Godinez, Gordon, and Massumi, I posit that La Llorona is a ghost who not only reveals a haunting is taking place, but her active wails simultaneously carry messages of pained, grieving mothers and serve to make visible and audible the affects that resonate among grieving mothers and murdered women. In other words, organized grieving or public mourning is what brings La Llorona to our current haunted society (Godinez, 2016, p.134), while also engendering ghostly matters and evoking affects. But what does it mean to conjure La Llorona now in the context of feminicide? [28]

In this chapter I begin by following the ghost of La Llorona because understanding haunting and ghosts "is essential to grasping the nature of our society and for changing it" (Gordon 2008, p. 27). As Domino Renee Perez (2019) notes, the dynamism of the legend of La Llorona allows it to transcend generations and to reflect current concerns, which I aim to explore

[26] Vivir Quintana is a Mexican singer, composer, and activist, notably known for the 2020 song 'Canción sin miedo' ('Song without fear') which has become a feminist anthem.
[27] *Duelo* is Spanish for grief. While both words are similar in meaning, the word *duelo* is more closely connected with pain (*doler*), which equates grief with a bodily experience and affords a sense of pain and injury.
[28] I use the term conjuring as understood by Gordon (2008), that is, as a form of calling up and calling out the invisible forces that make things [or society] what they are with the intent of fixing and transforming (p.20).

in this chapter. First, I trace her wails as they become hollers of resistance through feminist revisions of the legend. While La Llorona's wails and hollers do not exist within discursive language and syntax, these sounds carry haunting messages that—explored through my theoretical framework—have the capacity to change one's relation to what seemed invisible. Thus, thinking with Massumi and Gordon, I explore the ghostly effects evoked by La Llorona. Following Levine (2015), I explore what forms overlap and collide to make her wails and hollers audible. I listen to this ghost to explore Mexico's larger haunting. Then, expanding on Godinez and feminist resignifications of the tale of La Llorona, I listen to La Llorona's wails and hollers as they mingle with other voices and chants of resistance. I employ the concepts of spatio-temporal and transtemporal haunting times and multi-sensorial intensity to make sense of the affects and ghostly matters engendered in recent massive protests (2018-present), particularly through the voices of Snowapple, Vivir Quintana, mothers of victims of feminicide, and activists. [29] La Llorona will serve as a thread to think through affects of mourning, grief, and resistance. Gordon's and Massumi's theories will inform my analysis of artivism by allowing me to 1) identify the affects evoked by these sounds that resonate among living bodies' encounters with dead bodies 2) articulate the invisible forces that shape these protests and Mexican society. Ultimately following La Llorona and thinking with this ghost will serve to make sense of the current phenomenon of resistance and awareness of gendered violence.[30]

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[29] While anti-gendered violence protests and activism have a long trajectory in Mexico, especially with the collective efforts of mothers of *desaparecidas* and murdered women, feminist protests began to gain more attention from 2015 onwards. In part, this occurred when feminists began painting over historical monuments and when they threw purple glitter on the head of police in 2019. These acts of resistance are often categorized as vandalism and were spread widely across news media, which caught people's attention. See Marta Lamas' discussion in *Dolor y Política* (2021).
[30] I want to acknowledge that feminist movements in Mexico, as elsewhere, are not homogeneous. Aware of these differences in strategies and ideologies, for the purpose of this project, I will refer to some anti-feminicide protests in general.

The Weeping Woman: Cries, Haunting, And Forms

The legend of La Llorona (the Weeping Woman) holds an important weight in Mexican and Mexican American socio-cultural imaginaries. The most popular Christian version of this legend tells the story of a poor, beautiful, mestiza woman who was abandoned by her upper-class, white husband. Consumed by anger, she drowned their children in a river. Soon after, she died of pain and is condemned to wander along the rivers, crying, in search of her lost children. La Llorona has been historically framed as a bad mother for having abandoned her children. Feminist scholars, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, have traced La Llorona back to the pre-Hispanic period of the Nahuas and the Aztecs. It is said that Cihuacoatl*,* the Goddess of life and death, turned her children, the Nahuas, into fish in order to save them from the Aztec invasion (Clark 2014). After the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, the legend of La Llorona evolved to the colonial version of the monstrous mother who murdered her children. As Carbonell (1999) notes, many folklorists have drawn parallels between Cihuacoatl—goddess of death and creation—and the figure of La Llorona. This seemingly contradictory connection between destruction and creation serves to position La Llorona as a contemporary symbol of life and death, which brings her closer to the phenomenon of feminicide and activism.

While the wails of La Llorona have often been associated with pain and grieving—like the current *madres dolientes* ('grieving mothers')—in literary fiction, her cries have also been resignified as hollers—such is the case with Chicano writer Sandra Cisneros' short story "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991). Regarding her own revision of this legend *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y la Llorona* (1995), Gloria Anzaldúa writes "I've recuperated la Llorona to trace how we go from victimhood to active resistance, from the wailing of suffering and grief to the grito ['scream'] of resistance, and on to the grito ['scream'] of celebration and joy"

(Anzaldúa cited in Rebolledo, 2006, p. 280). Thus, feminist retellings of La Llorona have recuperated the precolonial roots of this legend, and with it, the wailing woman can be heard beyond her attributed grief and sins. Carbonell (1999) adds that "La Llorona's ancient weeping may testify to women's pain, but in these tales of maternal resistance this pain-filled wail also embodies a battle cry-a holler prompted by the continuing presence of Coatlicue who demands confrontation and resistance" (p. 71)[31]. In a more recent example of this cry resignified as a scream, a Mexican documentary, titled 'La/mentada de la Llorona' (2016) captures this duality between a wail and a holler: "del llanto a la denuncia, las mujeres ya no se lamentan, la mientan" ('from crying to denouncing, women no longer weep, they holler')[32]. The wordplay in the title refers to the Spanish *lamentar* ('lament') and the Mexican slang *mentar la madre* ('to curse violently'). As seen with this brief overview, previous scholarship and artivism has already established a connection between the wailing Llorona and the hollering Llorona, so it is no surprise that La Llorona has been recuperated in art of resistance and protests to denounce the phenomenon of feminicide.

These wails and hollers undoubtedly carry affective messages, but they have not yet entered a system of signification. As the symbolical grieving mother of her Mexican children, the ghost of La Llorona denounces the concerns of her era, but her affects of grief and rage carried by wails mingled with hollers of resistance are not articulated through words.[33] Thus, the wails of La Llorona and *madres dolientes* ('grieving mothers') follow the nonlinear logic of grief, a logic that forms in the virtual haunting times and leaks into the actual through public mourning. Before moving on with my analysis, it is worth clarifying some concepts. To grieve and to

[31] Coatlicue and Cihuacoatl are two aspects of the same Aztec Goddess.
[32] Unfortunately, part of the meaning and wordplay is lost in my translation from Spanish to English.
[33] To be more precise, the only words that La Llorona is allowed to articulate in well-known versions of the legend are "Ay mis hijos" ('Oh, my children').

mourn are oftentimes used interchangeably, however, grief is an emotional and physical response to a loss, whereas mourning is the process of adapting to a loss. In other words, mourning is the expression of grief through social norms that vary across cultures and contexts. In my theorizing of grief and mourning, I am not interested in the religious or spiritual connotations, but I do consider Mexico's cultural interpretation of death. Following Levine (2015), I pay particular attention to the logic that reigns in contemporary practices of collective grief and public mourning and to their affordances, which pose questions about the communication between the living and the dead and the emergence of resistance. Having taken this detour, it seems that "[j]ust as La Llorona's complaint is heard as a wail, the demands of mothers for the truth and justice for their missing daughters have fallen outside the grammar of normative political speech" (Schmidt Camacho, 2004, p.31). Expanding on this argument by thinking through grief and mourning and by thinking with Massumi and Gordon, I follow the wailing woman into the realm of the virtual where affect emerges. Drawing form my theoretical framework, I aim to make sense of these ghostly sounds and their affects.

Affects, Grief, and Sounds of Resistance

Following Levine's new formalist method, the legend La Llorona embodies the collision of multiple hierarchical forms. As Levine (2015) notes, "hierarchies arrange bodies, things, and ideas according to levels of power or importance. Hierarchies rank—organizing experience into asymmetrical, discriminatory, often deeply unjust arrangements" (p.83). Aligned with this thought, this well-known tale is rooted in a colonial inheritance of social structures, which are not only dichotomous but also hierarchical. La Llorona is first and foremost a mother—albeit a murderous one—often portrayed as a poor racialized *mestiza* woman who fell for a white, upper-class man. In this portrayal, hierarchical forms, such as gender, race, and class collide and afford

a triple layer of oppression. The logic of these hierarchies resonates with the vulnerability of bodies in the context of feminicide, where oppression is also informed by age, marital status, and education level (Berlanga Gayón, 2014). Drawing from her fieldwork at the Mexico-U.S. border in the early 21st century, Schmidt Camacho (2004) traces the resurfacing of the legend of La Llorona as a cautionary tale within the contexts of maquiladoras, NAFTA, and capitalism at large. According to Schmidt Camacho (2004):

> La Llorona's legend exacts a double punishment: she loses both her children and her partner. The story chillingly prefigures the dominant discourse about the victims of the feminicidio, the Mexican government's cynical claim that the murdered girls and women courted their own deaths as sexual deviates and prostitutes. (p. 29).

Similar to La Llorona, victims of feminicide are often framed in headlines as sexually, socially and culturally deviant. In this framing, hierarchies collide with wholes, that is, institutions that replicate the discourse around feminicide victims in Ciudad Juárez: As working, single, independent women, maquiladora workers are often perceived as deviant (from the heteronormative, patriarchal *machismo* that forms the current *welt*) and thus punishable. Thinking with Levine and Gordon, the ghost of La Llorona makes felt the social structures of gender, race and class that shape this legend and feminicide. As some feminist revisions of this legend show, these hierarchies are also what propel La Llorona—often portrayed as a victim of domestic violence—to commit her crimes. Hierarchies afford inequalities, but what do the wails of La Llorona afford in the urgent times of feminicide? What logic does her grief follow? What do her wails and hollers afford? Traditionally, La Llorona's side of the story has been silenced and her communication is outweighed by speechless wails. Yet, echoing Gordon's language of haunting, La Llorona's wails make themselves felt and heard in Mexican and Mexican American cultural imaginaries; her reappropriation and resignification in feminist retellings have the

capacity to bring forward seemingly invisible forces, such as domestic violence and oppression, that shape society and haunt by defamiliarizing the well-known version of the legend. La Llorona's wails evoke affects of pain and impotence, which make audible an ongoing state of grief that resonates among *madres dolientes* who search for their disappeared children to properly mourn them (Godínez, 2016). La Llorona's haunting during the past five centuries not only hints towards a repressed past of injustices against racialized women since colonial times, but, through her resurfacing, she also denounces the present patriarchal society and necropolitical order.

In the current haunting times of feminicide, social hierarchies embodied by La Llorona, rooted in a colonial inheritance, continue to haunt Mexican society, although not in a linear way. Contemporary violence in Latin America is often understood "as an effect of persisting legacies of past violence, which have not been properly confronted and overcome" (Santos, 2020, p. 20). These unequal hierarchies reign in the logic of institutions that manage the politics of death and have material effects: precarity, which presupposes that some lives matter more than others. Thinking with Butler's concept of precarity and victims of violence during the Mexican war on drugs (2006-present), Díaz Alvarez (2020) goes as far as to write that the victims' "life expectancies are low in every possible way, this is why their deaths ultimately become numbers, and, as such, are not mourned at all" (p.96). This claim could very well be read in the context of feminicide, where murdered women and (no)bodies reappear as statistics. However, my framework allows for a more nuanced interpretation. Alluding to Gordon's language of haunting, La Llorona, condemned to roam the earth for her sins, and victims of feminicide, whose murders are usually unresolved, linger among the living. Their silences (as *desaparecidas*) and their wails engender ghostly matters—not in an action-reaction logic—but by evoking a sense of the

ghostly. Their presence among living bodies makes the social structures of classism, misogyny, racism, and sexism felt in everyday life, as such, haunting becomes an affective force for murdered women.

However, amidst the normalization of violence, some deaths seem to cause more uproar than others, that is, the affects of collective grief are dependent on levels of intensity, which in turn, are filtered by gender, race, and class. Recalling the lyrics from the traditional 'La Llorona' song "hay muertos que no hacen ruido" ('some dead don't make noise'). Why are some deaths heard while others are ignored? What does it take for deaths to sound and make themselves felt? Thinking with Levine and Butler in this context reveals the tensions between hierarchies in which some lives appear to be more grievable than others. Why is it that some deaths are able to spark collective indignation within the normalization of violence and others do not? How loud do voices need to sound to reshape the current *welt?* It is important to pay attention to these social forms to remind us that feminicide is racialized and, as Berlanga Gayón (2014) reminds us, in Latin America, poverty has a colour (p.40). As such, some voices from the dead sound louder than others that are drowned by double and triple systems of oppression. Following this train of thought, I now turn to contemporary affects and sounds that resonate among protesting bodies to seek their haunting potential as they enter a system of signification through lyrics, chants, and protests.

Ghostly Potentials: Songs of Resistance, Affects, And Forms

Thinking with networks as proposed by Levine (2015) serves two purposes in my theorizing. First, it allows me to organize and make sense of the select artivism through which I explore the affects that resonate among living bodies of activists in recent mass protests in Mexico. I do not follow a linear temporality, but the networks created by thinking with La

Llorona as the thread that connects my theorizing does allow me to narrow down the timeframe from 2018 onwards. Second, thinking with networks allows me to explore the forms that shape these collective practices that evoke affects. As has been noted, organized strikes on International Women's Day are growing in numbers. "¡Vivas nos queremos!" ('We want to stay alive!') and "¡Ni una más, ni una menos!" ('Not one more, not one less!') are some of the chants that carry affects of grief and rage among activists who march through the streets of Mexico to voice their demands for justice. While in recent 8M protests hollers and cries resounded in the streets, March 8th, 2020 was followed by a National strike of absence. Living bodies joined dead bodies through silence. This initiative started with the collective group Brujas del mar who urged women, through social media, to be absent from work. Others joined by not making appearances on social media, by not doing their usual domestic chores, or by not consuming anything that day. The purpose of this strike was to show citizens what a day without women (assuming we were all murdered) would provoke in the country. Whether these strikes are effective or not is beyond this research. However, I am interested in unpacking the potential of silence and sounds, of absence and presence in collective actions such as these ones. When does silence turn from passive to active? What affects do sounds evoke?

My select network of artivism begins with Snowapple's song La Llorona. Snowapple is a Mexican-Deutsch musical ensemble. They have done work on women's rights and awareness of gendered violence, such as the 2019 La Llorona-Ser mujer (being a woman). Thinking with networks and following the thread of La Llorona as conjured by Snowapple leads to Mexican singer, composer, and activist Vivir Quintana, who collaborated with Snowapple in the song Alerta: Llamada de Emergencia (2021). Expanding this network, Vivir Quintana also has ties to La Llorona through the 2021 song 'Llora, Llora,' but she is most-well-known for the 2020 song

'Cancion sin miedo' ('Song without Fear'). This song was composed as a commission for Chilean singer Mon Lafarte. They performed it together at the Zocalo in Mexico City in 2020. Since then, 'Canción sin miedo' has become a feminist anthem. It can be heard in protests, inaugurations of anti-feminicide monuments, and across platforms such as Spotify and Youtube. In fact, after the 8M protests in 2021, this song became #1 on Spotify in Mexico and Uruguay. Through her music, Vivir Quintana has created a network of sounds, chants, and activism that make felt and articulate the affects that linger among activists. In a recent interview, Vivir Quintana discussed her experience singing 'Canción sin miedo' with collective voices in protests:

> El día de la marcha, el 8M, me pasó que cuando la cantamos todas juntas, con las compas que llegaban de marchar con el sol y sus playeras moradas, sí lo sentí como un conjuro. Como un canto grande de esperanza porque somos muchísimas las que nos reunimos, las que nos preocupamos por que haya un cambio y una visibilización de los problemas.
> ['The day of the 8M protest, when we all sang together, with the folks who were marching under the sun wearing purple shirts, I felt it like a conjuring. Like a massive hymn of hope because there were a lot of us assembled, worrying about making a change and making problems visible']. (Quintana, 2021).

Vivir Quintana's experience which alludes to a conjuring of something (perhaps ghostly matters) and making visible problems begs to be read through the language of haunting and the potential of affect. Thus, thinking with Gordon and Massumi, I explore the potential of songs and protests in making visible the forces that make society and in evoking affects that make themselves felt. By listening to Snowapple, Vivir Quintana and collective voices, I articulate the ghostly matters engendered through sound which then enter a linear action-reaction logic as they become articulated through lyrics and chants. It is worth noting that neither Snowapple nor Vivir Quintana speak for the victims of feminicide or for their relatives. Instead, their music provides a medium for voices to be heard. This can be felt in the juxtaposition of voices of activists and

mothers of murdered daughters along with the artists' voices and a plethora of sounds. Drawing from my framework and following Levine's method, my theorizing of these songs not only considers the lyrics or the music, but rather a multisensorial practice.

Snowapple's 'La Llorona-ser mujer' (2019) is an interdisciplinary and collective Project that produces a multi-sensorial experience with its evocative lyrics and animation. Conjuring the ghost of La Llorona, who is said to appear near rivers, the short film begins with sounds and visuals of running water, which evokes a multi-sensorial intensity by adding textuality. A humming—reminiscent of wind, a *llanto* (cry) and a bell chime sounds to create an eerie haunting mood. The colours are tones of blue with evoke a sense of unease. We watch a woman walk forward, from the left side of the screen to right, and through an empty, dark street, with what seem like factories in the background. These visuals—read as ghostly matters borrowing from Gordon—allude to Ciudad Juárez and the maquiladoras. Now, the camera observes the woman from behind as if anticipating a danger. She comes to a halt and turns to look back over her shoulders. At the level of affect, this gesture evokes an anticipated fear inscribed in the body: "te agarran cuatro canallas, Llorona" ('you are caught by four villains, Llorona'). The screen turns black for a second, and the next shot reveals the same woman as she walks, head down, across a desert: "y te arrebatan la vida" ('and they take your life'). Now, presumably murdered, she walks, from the right side of the screen to the left, while the lyrics sound: "desde la frontera norte, Llorona, hasta la frontera sur. Hay un reguero de huesos, Llorona, que alguna vez fueron tú" ('From the north border, Llorona, to the south, there is a trail of bones, Llorona, who were once you'). From Levine's framework, a geographical bounded whole makes visible the spread of the epidemic of feminicide all over the country. This change in direction—later reinforced with a clock in the background—poses questions about the temporality of life and death, and the

nonlinearity of haunting times. Feminicide links back to a repressed past that connects back to the unjust framing of La Llorona, but it makes itself felt in the present. The woman reaches a forest seemingly submerged in water, and then we watch her as she drowns, becoming smaller in the screen. Suddenly, the figure of the woman disappears, and the screen is replaced by an explosion of shapeless colours that momentarily form as pink crosses—once again ghostly matters reminiscent of murdered women in Ciudad Juárez—and then rearrange themselves as what might be perceived as flowers, only to reshape again, thus resisting signification. The image zooms out, and another female figure sits motionless, while a clock's hands move forward. This moving image creates a dissonance between the passing of time (as embodied by the clock) and the suspension of time (as embodied by the woman sitting down while shaping the shapeless colours with her hands). Like the virtual, these colours and shapeless forms leak in the actual as ghostly matters (crosses and flowers) that make themselves felt, not in a rational way, but by evoking the lingering presence of ghosts. Later on, a third female figure dressed in black—who we might assume is La Llorona—appears in the forest. We recognize La Llorona's face as that of the woman who was murdered in the beginning. This (re)appearance traces a speechless connection between La Llorona and victims of feminicide. Following Levine, La Llorona and victims of feminicide are connected by unequal hierarchical forms.

Unlike Snowapple's version of La Llorona which combines visuals and sounds, 'Canción sin miedo' is not attached to one specific visual, which allows us to explore it through other senses. 'Canción sin miedo' was initially performed in Mexico City's Zocalo in 2020 with Vivir Quintana, Mon Laferte and the chorus El Palomar. In addition to the in-person audience, the performance was broadcasted in national television, and now there is a video posted on Youtube. The song—as portrayed in the video—begins with the speechless singing voices of the choir El

Palomar—reminiscent of cries and wails, which occasionally articulate affects through lyrics. The Zocalo was filled with a large audience, so the song is mingled with arhythmic claps and screams from the audience. Multiple affects resonate between the scenario and the audience. An inarticulable energy emerges. Collective voices make audible the demands for legal justice.: "Que retiembe fuerte, ¡nos queremos vivas!": ('Let it tremble, we want to stay alive!). The rhythm of these voices is magnified with the geographical space—a bounded whole traversed by history, where bodies traditionally assemble in demonstrations. The Zocalo is not only a space that affords a sense of pride or patriotism as embodied in 'El Grito de Independencia' ('The Independence Scream') that is celebrated each year; the Zocalo is also a space that affords disruption and resistance. The historical and cultural dimension of this song is further emphasized with the final verse which is a rewriting of the Mexican anthem. Through repetition and wholes, the 'Canción sin miedo' alludes to a (feminist) revolution and evokes what Gordon calls a 'something to be done.' It is a collision of cries—voiced by El Palomar's chorus—and wails of resistance, articulated through chants—uttered by Vivir Quintana and Mon Laferte. While the song was first played in a specific location, it now resonates all across Mexico. It is through repetition that this song and demands for justice have entered Mexico's collective imaginary. As already noted, Snowapple's La Llorona-Ser mujer seems to be contained in a specific form: a musical video or short film located online. Contrary to this song, 'Canción sin miedo' travels through mediums and emerges across the country: through the inauguration of an *anti-monumenta* ('gendered form of anti-monument') in San Luis Potosí (2021), to the credits in the documentary *The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo* (2020) on Netflix; from the Zocalo in Mexico City to other town squares throughout the country. This song sounds beyond a visual and whole form; it travels across mediums and space. My analysis of the nationwide reach of this

song is aligned with what I call spatio-temporal hauntings, where ghostly matters are engendered in specific spaces and times to announce a haunting rooted in past, present, and future. It is a call for action that functions by making visible the invisible. In sum, while this song exceeds one location, it is nonetheless connected to wholes (spaces such as town squares), rhythms (tempos such as 8M) and networks (massive protests).

My theorizing of these songs—thinking with Massumi and Gordon—makes audible and palpable some affects that resonate among protesting bodies: fear, rage, and hope before they enter cognitive and socio-linguistic modes of communication. The ghost of La Llorona undoubtedly carries a message of haunting, but should her wails be heard as cries of grief or signs of public mourning mingled with resistance? Could it be that La Llorona continues to haunt Mexico because she is in a constant state of painful grieving that does not give way to mourning because of the unresolved nature of the murders? Murdered girls and women are conjured in the cities through collective practices of mourning and their unresolved murders are made visible and audible through artivism in the streets. But what ghostly effects emerge from the collision of wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks?

"Ay mis hijos" ('Oh, my children') has been the only articulation that legends of La Llorona allow her to speak. By equating La Llorona with *madres dolientes* ('grieving mothers'), pain-filled wails resonate across living bodies and enter a system of signification through the repetition of articulate chants. Rhythms, as Levine suggests, afford interruption and the potential for change. Expanding Levine's argument, the current rhythm of normalization of violence and silence is interrupted by the numerous chants which can also be perceived as forms of rhythm: 'Vivas nos queremos' ('We want us alive') and Ni una menos ('Not one less') can be heard throughout Mexico and spread across Latin America. These chants, understood as rhythms, not

only afford a consolidation of feminist movements through repetition (of the chants themselves and of repetition across social movements), but these *gritos* ('hollers') also afford interruption of the normalization of violence and demands for justice. Behind these chants of grief and demands of justice, there are years of violence and impunity, of embodied fear, of past and present, of life and death—produced in the virtual—that are willed into the actual socio-linguistic order and thus make themselves felt. Haunted by ghosts of murdered and disappeared women, these rhythms sound the voices that have been silenced, but they also make palpable a transtemporal haunting embodied by a lingering threat and ongoing sense of fear. As Sheridan describes in the Washington Post, in the 2020 demonstrations against gendered violence, banners read "We are the voice of those who are no longer with us." A participant noted, "If we don't raise our voices, when will they hear us?" (Itzel Zurita quoted in Sheridan). These rhythms collide with the resurfacing of La Llorona, who has continuously haunted Mexico for centuries, but whose presence in socio-cultural imaginary and activism seems to be more recurrent in the past years.

Let us now reflect on massive protests that have been gaining prominence throughout the country. Borrowing from Levine's methodology, anti-feminicide protests and practices of collective grieving and public mourning can be conceptualized as networks. They follow the logic of collectivity and organization, but what do they afford? As has been noted already, social movements such as "Ni una menos" ('Not one less') have been consolidated along Latin America. This chant of resistance, along with many others, affords collectivity and belonging. Through my framework protests are also connected to space (streets and town squares) and rhythms (music and chants). With the collision of these forms, protests engender ghostly matters and reveal the potential of haunting recognition, that is, of letting ourselves be dragged through a structure of feeling. Drawing from Butler, the assemblage of bodies in anti-feminicide protests

expose and fight against precarity. This network as form can also be understood through the Latin American concept of *sororidad,* adapted from the English 'sisterhood' by Mexican feminist scholar Marcela Lagarde. *Sororidad* is an ethical, political and practical dimension to contemporary feminism, which seeks to establish networks among bodies—without erasing the material effects of intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality—who seek to dismantle misogyny. An example of *sororidad* is made visible on a slogan held during the organized 8M protests in 2021: "There will never be walls high enough that can stop organized women from tearing them down." As such, collective grief and *sororidad* are networks that hint towards potential through collective action.

Recalling Díaz-Álvarez argument about precarious bodies turning into numbers, in the song 'No estás sola: Llamada de emergencia' ('You're not alone: emergency call') Vivir Quintana and Snowapple sing that 'si no les responden pronto, serán las cifras de la mañana' ('If they [the police] do not answer their calls, they [women] will be the numbers of the following day'). Activists and artists in Mexico are aware of the dangers of reducing the urgency of feminicide to numbers, however high they might be, which is why they opt to remember the victims by repeating their names—an interruption to the numerical tracking of murders which erases their individuality. During anti-feminicide protests on March 8th, 2021, president López Obrador ordered that a fence be placed surrounding Mexico's National Palace and the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. This barrier makes visible the perimeter of the Mexican government as a bounded whole: and edge that clearly includes that which must be preserved (historical buildings representative of the masculine Mexican State) and excludes that which is not accountable by the law (women's bodies). The president defended his decision to prevent vandalism of historical buildings—an act of resistance which has gained importance in the past

years—and activists responded by turning the barrier into a memorial, with the names of hundreds of victims of feminicide. This act of collective grieving shows how networks—understood as *sororidad*—collide with bounded wholes and allow for transformation from barrier to memorial. The metal fence guarded by police, a familiar symbol of order and imposition, is defamiliarized by making visible and audible the lives that have been silenced. Thinking with Gordon, the reiteration of women's names reinforces a sense of the ghostly where women's unresolved murders haunt the public realm and make themselves felt.

Along with the lingering presence of names, portraits of victims of feminicide are also carried in protests and posted online because "[b]ringing the faces of the murdered and disappeared women back to the city is a form of rehumanizing them" (Orozco, 2017, p. 151). But what ghostly effects do these images produce? What nonlinear affects do they engender? In February 2020, 25-year-old Ingrid Escamilla was murdered and then skinned by her male partner. During the investigation, photographs of this brutal and gruesome murder were leaked online and in sensationalist newspapers. In search engines, the name Ingrid Escamilla bombarded viewers with images of her mutilated body. Ingrid's death became her sole signifier. The circulation of photographs such as these speak towards a growing consumerism of violence and morbid fascination with death. This in itself raises the question of what affects these images produce at large. Among activists, images of Ingrid Escamilla's mutilated body ignited indignation and fury at the way feminicide investigations are handled. As a response, an online campaign began where people posted drawings of Ingrid Escamilla and pictures of flowers and landscapes with the hashtag #Ingrid Escamilla. In a matter of days, Ingrid Escamilla's ghost reemerged, not as a mutilated corpse, but as a rehumanized woman, who's re-membering and public mourning hints towards the haunting potential of ghosts and social change.

Thinking through songs, sounds, and forms gives way to the conceptualization of resistance. From my framework, murdered girls and women—despite their bodies being found or not—reappear as ghosts because they are conjured by their loved ones. In this conjuring by activists and relatives who mourn, murdered girls and women are not revictimized. Their names, their portraits, and their stories emerge as ghostly matters that have the potential to evoke what Gordon calls a 'something to be done.' These actions and ways of making visible feminicide are key differences from news media that tend towards victim blaming and an aesthetic visibility of violence. These forms of activism allow for the dead bodies to speak, to tell their stories, to show their faces. Ghosts have the capacity to change one's relationship to what seemed invisible by making themselves felt. Their deaths and ongoing impunity against perpetrators make visible the sexist, racist, misogynistic structures that haunt society since colonial times. But where does this resistance emerge? There are two theoretical considerations. The first one is that resistance emerges from the virtuality of *el más allá* ('the great beyond'). The murdered women who reemerge as ghosts and La Llorona's ghostly potential lies in making visible the invisible forces that shape politics and structure society. The racialized and gendered precarity of murdered women resonates with forms that are attuned to the rhythmic wails of La Llorona. Let us recall the opening lyrics of Snowapple's 2020 version of 'La Llorona' song: "To be a Woman is a crime, Llorona, with a well-defined sanction. You are caught by four villains, Llorona, and they take your life." Hierarchical forms that afford inequalities and injustices make themselves present in these words. La Llorona carries the weight of both murdered women and grieving mothers and makes visible dominant gendered narratives in Mexico: Women are deviant, and thus deserve to be punished.

The second theoretical consideration that emerges from this analysis of wails and hollers comes from thinking with forms, particularly hierarchies. Dominant narratives suggest that it is poor, racialized, young, single, uneducated female bodies that are key targets of feminicide. The spread of feminicide in Mexico shows that manifestations of gendered violence transcend class, race, and education level. In a highly racist and classist society, this widespread intensifies the outrage towards feminicide and gendered oppression. Thinking through forms adds another layer to this discussion around victimization and resistance. Undoubtedly, unequal hierarchies of race, age, gender, and class have made possible so many feminicides, but these same hierarchies also have the potential for disruption. In many cases, it is racialized, poor, female bodies (mothers and sisters of victims of feminicide) who raise their voices and demand justice. However, there are also international icons, such as Snowapple, that voice these injustices and hint towards the potential of networks, assemblages of bodies and collective action to destabilize hierarchies. How these networks form and whether they are successful is outside the scope of this research, but what La Llorona's resurfacing suggests is that "del llanto a la denuncia, las mujeres ya no se lamentan, la mientan" ('from crying to denouncing, women no longer lament, they curse') (Cinetiquetas:La/mentada de La Llorona, 2016). Rhythms embodied by wails of collective grief and chants of resistance have the capacity to interrupt and denounce inequalities. La Llorona, along with the *madres dolientes* grieves for all their murdered daughters. They conjure their ghosts, and thus make all lives grievable.

In this chapter, I have shown how certain forms overlap and collide in the phenomenon of feminicide, ultimately hinting towards a rupture of the normalization of violence through sounds and multi-sensorial intensity. I have listened to the affective wails of La Llorona as they collide with pain and fear in the virtual and enter the actual through articulation. In fact, La Llorona's

wails carry the pain of *madres dolientes* and of frightened and enraged bodies of activists who 'scream for every *desaparecida*' (Vivir Quintana, 2020, 'Canción sin miedo'). My theoretical framework informed my theorizing of select artivism by allowing me to articulate the affects and haunting forces that resonate among practices of collective grief and resistance. Through this analysis, it was possible to unpack some of the affects that haunt activists—paradoxical affects that hint towards a transtemporal haunting of fear and rage inscribed in the body—before they enter systems of signification and sound their demands for social justice. This approach is important because it allows us to think beyond the words written and repeated, to understand the demands of activists, and to feel differently about what we think we know about the phenomenon of feminicide and the rupture of normalization of violence. As revealed by thinking with affect, haunting, and music, Mexico is in state of pain, an ongoing grief that has yet to be mourned. Until then, it is unable to heal. Songs and sounds are manifestations of this pain.

Conclusion

As violence finds different ways of manifesting itself, language is formed to name it. Let us recall the conceptual evolution of the term feminicide. Before the term 'femicide' was coined, the murders of women were made intelligible through the concept 'homicide' which ignored the specificities of these gendered crimes. In Ciudad Juárez, murdered girls and women were often referred to as *las muertas de Juárez* ('the dead girls of Juárez'), which made visible a gender distinction with the term 'muertas' but afforded a sense of passivity and encouraged impunity by not placing emphasis on the perpetrators. In the Global North, the term femicide was already used to name the killing of women by men because of their gender. When this word was adopted in Mexico, its meaning expanded. It was no longer just about the killing of women, but rather about the State's complicity in these murders. Thus, the term 'feminicide' was born. These two additional letters 'n+i,' made possible an expansion of ways of knowing to make sense of the complexity of femi(ni)cide. It opened up the conversation about impunity and the unequal structures of society that define which lives are liveable and which are disposable. Feminicide has been key to tracing connections between gendered killings and the State, but also to making visible this phenomenon which had long been unheard and invisible. As structural violence mutates into the epidemic that haunts Mexico, it is necessary to find other ways of articulating the invisible forces which shape society and make themselves felt. Revising the term 'feminicide' as a linguistic form composed by multiple social and political forms that collide and overlap to produce its meaning has shown the complexities of this concept, its accuracies in naming, but also its limitations. As linguistic wholes, language inevitably includes and excludes.

Thinking with North American, Chicanx, and Latin American scholars, writers, and artists has revealed some of the linguistic tensions, potentials, and limitations of articulating the

complex phenomenon of feminicide and its affects. Following Levine, bounded wholes appear first and foremost in my conceptualization of life=*el acá* ('the here') and death=*el más allá* ('the great beyond') which are connected by the body that receives impulses, conceptualized as haunting. These bounded wholes are shaped by other forms. For example, wholes are embodied as geographical spaces (nations, cities, and neighbourhoods) that follow necropolitical orders. Wholes are also embodied by institutions and by the public and the private spheres. These spaces afford visibility and invisibility by excluding and including, but the disruption of the public space through the conjuring of ghostly matters (anti-monuments, portraits, names, corpses) also afford visibility and noise and ignites awareness. These wholes are shaped by hierarchical structures of race, class, and gender, which are made visible through dead bodies and (no)bodies.

Thinking through feminicide in Mexico with my theoretical framework enables a rethinking of affect and death. Living bodies in Mexico are constantly affected by their dead (through festivities, but also as reminders of injustices). Thus, taking into account Mexico's cultural interpretation of death where living bodies maintain a close communication with the dead, affect is longer about life and vitality but also about death and remembrance. However, with disappeared bodies and the unresolved cases of feminicide, there is no closure that gives way from grieving to mourning. With impunity, there is also no sense of closure but a lingering demand for justice.

While feminicide as a linguistic whole includes many intersections, which articulate structural violence inflicted upon the female body, it also excludes other considerations, such as sexual orientation. Thinking with Melchor, who interestingly does not make use of the word feminicide in her novel, introduces sexual orientation as hierarchical form—hierarchical in the particular context of Mexico which privileges the white, abled, cisgendered, male body. This

collision of forms opens up the space for transfeminicide and lesbofeminicide, which was outside the scope of this project but must be addressed. Thinking with affect and the language of haunting in an analysis of literature and artivism has also expanded the concept of femi(ni)cide. Affects and invisibilities are articulated and made visible/audible, thus revealing the contours of feminicide that include and exclude. How can the (ni) in femi(ni)cide be expanded and resignified? Berlanga Gayón (2014) proposes tracing conceptual connections (through aesthetics) between feminicide and genocide and between feminicide and more generalized violence in Mexico (2006-present). In doing this, she questions whether bodies subjected to general violence are feminized. Expanding this thinking through networks of concepts could be fruitful for expanding a theorizing of violence in Mexico's necropolitical context.

The purpose of this research was to rethink the complexity of the phenomenon of feminicide in Mexico by making visible and audible the affects engendered in this context. I engaged with Massumi's (2002) affect theory and Gordon's (2008) language of haunting to explore affective encounters between living bodies and dead bodies. By analyzing literary fiction and artivism I argued that ghosts and haunting become affective forces for dead bodies. The overall contributions of this research are to make visible, heard, and palpable the affects engendered within Mexico's current *welt* that normalizes violence.

In chapter 1, I read Massumi and Gordon in parallel with the purpose of expanding an affect theory that does not assume a sharp cut between life and death. In doing this, I also proposed that the language of haunting can contribute to the lexicon of a socio-cultural theorizing of affect. In chapter 2, I brought in conversation theories from the Global North with theories from the Global South by employing my theoretical framework in a close reading of Mexican and Mexican American literary fiction. My critical engagement with scholars and

writers revealed the way some concepts are displaced and resignified when adapted to specific socio-cultural contexts. This chapter also began to articulate some affective encounters between living bodies and dead bodies. In chapter 3, I followed the ghost of La Llorona (who has historically been framed as the epitome of bad Latin American mothers, and thus a punishable woman) through contemporary artivism that reimagines this ghost as the symbolic grieving mother and the voice of murdered women. Drawing from affect and haunting enables a rethinking of the wails of La Llorona and contemporary chants of resistance that make unequal structures of society felt in everyday life. To end, this project offers a reflection on language and the concept of feminicide by thinking with forms. This MA thesis contributes to the larger scholarship on art of resistance and activism that seeks to make visible injustice by generating discomfort. Structural violence can be felt, seen, and heard by the keen observer, and conversations about gendered violence, the State and indifference must take place in order to disrupt the normalization of violence.

Since I began doing this research, the urgent situation of feminicide in Mexico has gained prominence. Protests continue to spread across the country, women are raising their voices against oppression and harassment, and social media has enabled awareness of the pervasiveness of gendered violence. Narratives of murdered girls and women have evolved from victim-blaming headlines to first-person narratives posted online. Due to the scope of this research and time constraints, my theorizing of affects engendered among dead bodies and living bodies is by no means extensive. Also, while my analysis of artivism suggests that feminicide is racialized and molded by unequal structures of society, there are still many theoretical considerations that must be carried out. Critical inquiries into the intersections between sexual orientation and feminicide must continue. In addition, my selection of artivism is more representative of larger

urban cities (Ciudad Juárez and Mexico City), but the specificities of feminicide among Indigenous peoples and other minorities must be made visible. Related to this limitation, given my positionality, in this project I reflected on language as a means of articulating experiences. When I thought of language, however, I referred specifically to Spanish and English. To move away from dominant narratives, it is imperative to consider the multiple languages spoken in Mexico. In many cases, language becomes a barrier in legal proceedings and in articulating experiences among dominant voices. Finally, my project was largely framed around women's affective experiences as articulated by literature and artivism, but within the current conversations, we must also allow for male voices (fathers and sons of victims of feminicide) and non-binary voices to be heard. As already noted, the number of victims of feminicide is growing, and impunity continues to be the norm. However, voices are raised, and organized action continues to denounce injustices. Only time will reveal the potential disruption of the current feminist movements.

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