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Geographies of friendship and embodiments of radical violence, collective rage, and radical love at the U.S.–Mexico border’s Paso del Norte region

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we develop a praxis to interpret violence against migrants and border communities in the U.S.–Mexico Paso del Norte borderlands, that is applicable to other global border regions in crisis. We reframe the violence that occurs daily on both sides of the border as a form of ‘radical violence’ that cuts across racial, gendered, class, interpersonal, and institutional lines, which is also physical, representational, epistemic, and spiritual. We argue that together, these forms of violence are radical because they strike at the roots of social relationships, families, and communities, as well as the larger collection of rights all human beings deserve. We articulate a notion of ‘radical love’ in contrast to radical violence as a transformational counterweight to the brutality that blankets people, institutions, and the land itself in border regions. We propose a strategy that anchors and transforms our collective rage to confront this violence by people seeking to build friendships, community, and coalitions. We call this framework a *transborder friendship praxis* (TFP), which embodies collective rage and radical love as interventions to violence against migrants and border communities and the embodied violence of militarizing and securitizing border regions, and as a model for building solidarity across international boundaries. Our framework is rooted in the tenets of autoethnography, everyday geographies, and geographies of friendship, and draw upon the scholarship of ‘witnessing’ as a subversive act and relational resistance as a *methodology of witnessing in action*.

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This is her [our] home, this thin edge of barbwire (Anzaldúa 1987, 13)

Introduction

Embodiments of radical violence require collective rage and radical love (hooks 1995) as challenges to the brutality characteristic of the human rights disaster unfolding along the U.S. – Mexico border, where migrants and refugees are suffering and dying as they search for a better life in the United States. As *transfronteriza feministas* (border crosser feminists)- Cynthia in the U.S. and Ma. Eugenia in Mexico- both born and raised in the Paso del Norte borderlands, we have witnessed innumerable forms of violence. This metropolitan region of 2.5 million people living in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, El Paso, Texas and Las Cruces, New Mexico, USA, have seen the expansion of militarization and securitization, state violence, racialized violence, gender-based violence and political and social violence for decades. When these forms of violence converge, we call this radical violence, as its outcomes end in the life-altering, disruptive upheavals of people's realities. Radical violence is pervasive, ubiquitous, and unrelenting, and is normalized as part of the ordinary, routine circumstances of policing people, places, and movement across the 2,000 miles of the U.S.–Mexico border.

We are outraged by the systematic and callous reactions we see to large-scale migration and the cruelty of institutional responses that portray poor and dispossessed migrants as disposable inconveniences to progress, on the one hand, and as threats to the modern nation-state, on the other. We are disheartened by the lack of collective empathy toward migrants throughout civil society, particularly in the U.S., and the meek social responses by a growing middle class on both sides of the border. Vitriolic public opinion and inhumane government approaches are ubiquitous and alarmingly normalized to justify the expulsions from transient and destination countries of asylum seekers and refugees. As the human suffering continues to surge along the border, we, as *transfronteriza feministas*, search for theories to explain the structures of violence permeating our homelands, while we simultaneously craft methodologies and strategies across borders to combat the suffering we see daily.

In one of our creative works titled, *A Feminist Border Manifesto for Unsettling Times* (Sánchez and Bejarano 2022), we write about numerous forms of hate and violence in our region, and our use of *amistad radical* (radical friendship) to work against it. In this article, however, we develop a framework with supporting concepts that suggest a particular strategy—a praxis if you will—to understand and interpret this violence, and to simultaneously confront it, based on our lived experiences in the Paso del Norte Borderlands. First, we want to reframe the violence that occurs daily on both sides of the border as a form of 'radical violence' that cuts across racial, gendered, class, interpersonal, and institutional lines. This violence is physical, representational, epistemic, and even spiritual. We argue that together, these forms of

violence are radical because they strike at the fundamental foundations, the roots of social relationships, families, and communities, as well as our larger sense of the rights all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

In contrast to this radical violence, we offer a second objective, to promote the notion of 'radical love' as a transformational counterweight to the brutality that blankets people, institutions, and the land itself throughout the communities we call home. Third, we propose a strategy that concurrently helps us to anchor and transform our collective rage to confront this violence as activist scholars, that can be cultivated among other people seeking to build friendships, community, and hope across international boundaries. We refer to this framework as a *transborder friendship praxis* (TFP), which embodies collective rage and radical love as interventions to brutal acts against migrants, and by extension, border communities. In short, we see our transborder friendship as an act of relational resistance against the embodied violence of the militarization and securitization of the border itself, and as a model for building solidarity across boundaries, as the radical violence we see around us demands acts of radical love—such as friendship—to bring forth meaningful change.

We offer our praxis that braids together multiple registers of suggested methodologies, analysis, and theorization based on our positionalities and lived experiences, and our deep engagement with borderlands and feminist scholarship, and literature on numerous forms of violence. The discussions presented in this article address the tenets of participant observation and autoethnography, and thus draws upon the scholarship of 'witnessing' as a subversive act and as a strategy of relational resistance to form what we call a *methodology of witnessing in action*. We are guided by the scholarship of feminist geographers who posit that spaces and places emerge from multiple forms of violence yet are well-springs of activism and resistance (Giles and Hyndman 2004; Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burridge 2012).

Across these theories and methodologies, is our deep investment in articulating a meaningful understanding of both the radical violence embedded in our transborder home, as well as the radical love we have for the people and communities suffering the human rights abuses we see. Considering our positionality and subjectivity as *transfronteriza feministas*, as collaborators, friends, colleagues, and activist scholars, we offer a complex and nuanced assessment of the violence unfolding against migrants and refugees on the border, while also theorizing frameworks and methods to struggle against that same violence. To that end, this work tries to disentangle theory and methodology, praxis and lived experience within the context of extreme and varied violence and upheaval, even as we caution readers to understand that these categories can overlap and blend into one another in ways that mirror the fluidity of life on the border, any border.

Our TFP emerged from our academic relationship, our mutual interest in combating violence, in our similar (yet different backgrounds), and our movement across the border to visit family, friends, and each other to continue our solidarity work. Thus, while we seek to illuminate one mode of thinking, such as theory or methodology, we ask the reader to understand that these modes can meld into each other and emerge organically from the lived experiences of people, as it did for us, and as such, the hybrid, contested, complicated realities of the borderlands, that frames the ways in which we approach this work.

We begin this article with an explanation—a theorization—of two sides of the ‘coin of violence’ by deconstructing what we mean by ‘radical violence’, and then by elaborating upon our definition of ‘radical love’ in contrast to this violence. We draw upon the work of feminist geographers, feminist scholars, ethnographers, and others who consider the intersectionality of race, gender, citizenship status, and place as critical factors shaping violence. Next, we move to a discussion of what we call our *methodology of witnessing in action* the upheavals in the borderlands by drawing from the contours of participant observation, autoethnography, feminist ethnography, and our notion of TFP. We unpack how this praxis reflects a manifestation of our daily life moving across the U.S.–Mexico border, as well as a framework for shaping and interpreting our witnessing and facilitating our advocacy and activism as women of color from the border. We offer these frameworks to others whose friendships and commitments straddle the international border, as well as other conflict zones, whereas residents and refugees alike struggle for basic human rights and dignity. We also feel that TFP can be applied in future work to study relationality among migrants crossing borders who themselves forge friendships during their migratory journeys.

Theorizing and contextualizing radical violence on the border

Certain places and peoples, particularly in border zones, are impacted and often victimized by extreme forms of violence. This intersectional violence (Stephen and Speed 2021) committed upon the people and landscape of the borderlands sits at the root of our article. Human geographer, James Tyner asks, ‘Who, or which group, is granted or denied access to certain places?’ and, ‘What relations of power are maintained when “place” is invoked?’ (2012, 11). In our work, we posit that radical violence includes institutional responses by the security apparatus of both the U.S. and Mexico, triggering a series of cruel realities characterizing the traumas facing migrants and border dwellers alike. As common practice goes, the borderlands communities that migrants pass through, are also perpetually monitored, and assaulted with violent impacts. Feminists’ anthropologist and geographer, Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman argue that as violence is:

perpetuated against one's body, home, community, or country', we must examine the range of conflict that violence presents, since 'to focus on one level of inquiry is to efface or omit connections to others (2004, 12).

Radical violence that is intersectional is embodied on people, space, and place. James Tyner's work on geographies of violence similarly finds that, '...places are disciplined spaces' (2012, 20), and 'violence is a practice of both social and spatial control' (2012, 22), which reinforces our arguments that migrants are socially constructed as deviants in need of control by state apparatus. Border communities, subsequently, also fall subject to punitive practices because of their location—a place in need of disciplining. We argue that these state-sanctioned practices translate to what we call radical violence because they strike at the root and foundation of a place, the social structures created by inhabitants, and even the cultural and gendered identities of families and communities.

Our discussion of radical violence hinges on its use of U.S. and Mexican policies and procedures, and carceral narratives and imaginaries of border and national securities, to openly, and with license, practice interlocking (Razack 1998) forms of violence at the individual and home/community levels. Ideas of carceral geography are also salient here as they tether the 'synergies between carceral and everyday space' (Turner 2014, 322) in what we call scaffolds of violence on the body, on communities, and on nation-state boundaries, where border communities exist. As Miguel Avalos argues, 'The normative life course is essentially unattainable for these communities [migrants and transborder commuters] because they are at the behest of border regimes' decisions and temporal priorities' (2022, 136). These carceral practices of policing and detention '...are the culmination of many histories of struggle over colonialism, the nation-state, and what it means to be human' (Lloyd, Mitchelson, and BurrIDGE 2012, 2). We, therefore, use our TFP as a response to these scaffolds of violence to assess and examine the range and magnitude of violence people and places experience (Giles and Hyndman 2004).

We contend that radical violence like the migrant industrial complex and the carceral state's militarization and securitization, in part, function because they are widely accepted and justified by large segments of society, and therefore, enacted against marginalized people living in complex spaces at the periphery of two-nation states. Migrants and brown border citizens/residents from Mexico and the U.S. are often treated similarly. Both are too foreign to feel familiar, and as such, are marked for social or institutional scrutiny by U.S. and Mexican policing agents, and at times, by fellow citizens/residents that scapegoat migrants for societies' woes. Our intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, and nationality interlocks (Crenshaw 1991; Razack 1998) with the geopolitics of space and place at the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, to critique the migrant industrial complex. Kimberlé Crenshaw's

seminal work on intersectionality serves as a guiding post for understanding the layered and complex lives of people living and passing through borders, and ‘the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color’ (1991, 1244). We draw from Crenshaw’s framework and extend it to expose the interlocking forms of radical violence levied on poor, racialized, gendered, and institutionalized/non-institutionalized brown bodies at the geopoliticized U.S.–Mexico border.

We use the word ‘radical’ in our discussion of violence because of the disarming and legitimized ways that violence is enacted and the mundane yet injurious actions (Jackman 2002) that come from institutional violence. We therefore, describe radical violence as: 1) the racialized, gendered, and social violence enacted on migrant and border bodies in the name of security protocols; 2) the residual effects of racialized, gendered, and social violence on disparate migrant and brown border people whose homes and communities are routinely policed and monitored; and 3) the political, institutional violence imposed on migrants and brown border communities demonized for the increase in border inspections, border walls, and the militarization and securitization of the border. Radical violence is normalized to such an extent that it becomes standard practice causing bodily and spirit injury in landscapes construed as spaces acceptable to perform violence by amply funded patriarchal and hegemonic nation-state power holders.

Scaffolds of violence at the U.S.–Mexico border and beyond

The radical violence we observe and encounter on the border has analogues in other spaces and places disrupted by social upheaval, economic transformation, militarization, and war. We acknowledge scaffolds of violence that characterize the carceral state’s response to migration, that reveal forms of radical violence reproduced within everyday geographies (Askins 2015). These scaffolds of violence that together form radical violence have implications across other border areas regionally, nationally, and even globally.

We see radical violence manifested in other ways that extend beyond the scope of this work, like the thousands of feminicides committed in the Paso del Norte region. The work of Mexican sociologist, Julia Monárrez Frago (2009) is paramount to these discussions as she defines the systemic sexual killing of women and girls. Also important is the scholarship of U.S. feminist geographer, Melissa Wright’s (2011) feminist analysis of the anti-femicide movement and her discussions of necropolitics as it relates to drug-related murders and femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Frago and Bejarano (2010) book, *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas*, also offers a comprehensive analysis of *femicidio/femicide/feminicidio/femicide* by families of

murdered and missing women and girls, scholars, human rights defenders, lawyers, and legal scholars.

The focus of this article, however, articulates other forms of radical violence that have plagued this region consistently for decades: the rise of the carceral state via the military industrial apparatus and arguments for more border security; punitive measures to deter migrants from entering the U.S.; and the increasing border inspection brutalities that separate and detain or deport migrant or immigrant families that creates, '... an emotional nexus between the self and a prohibited place' (Boğaç 2020, 7). These scaffolds of violence- individually and amassed-harness a framework that sustains radical violence impacting people at the individual, home, and community levels (Giles and Hyndman 2004), which stirs our collective rage, and impels us toward spaces of resistance that we locate within a TFP.

Our discussion of radical violence, collective rage, radical love and TFP help to reveal what border societies, wedged between the Global North and South experience, while living within interstitial, racialized, gendered, and marginalized spaces. Border societies between Global South countries also witness variants of radical violence as people move across numerous borders through the Northern Triangle (Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala), and across these countries' borders into Mexico. Marginalized groups migrate while experiencing carceral states' draconian migration policies, narco violence, and racialized and gender discrimination (Bejarano and Sánchez 2021; Díaz and Blancas 2019; Wright 2011). Poor people, indigenous people, queer people, and others from beyond Latin America that flee violence, ironically, experience as much if not more radical violence as they move across countries. Some people are disappeared or used as commodities for sexual exploits or the drug trade or other illicit economies. The same is true globally for high traffic border regions, where migrants attempt to move across heavily surveilled borders via the Mediterranean Sea like Spain/Morocco and Greece/Turkey and countless others.

People work across all borders to mitigate this radical violence through their collective rage and radical love, including efforts like in the Mediterranean Sea where the Spanish organization, Open Arms (<https://www.openarms.es/en>), rescues migrants from treacherous waters, as well as the Greek organization, Refugee Rescue from Lesbos (<https://www.refugeerescue.org/>). In the Paso del Norte region, the migrant advocacy organizations in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, El Paso, Texas, and southern New Mexico's cities of Las Cruces and Deming in the U.S. provide numerous forms of land-based aid. Organizations like Casa del Migrante, YMCA in Ciudad Juárez and others; the Annunciation House, Las Americas, Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services, and HOPE Border Institute in El Paso; and Colores United, New Mexico Welcome Center, Lutheran Refugee Services, Border Servant Corps, and Save the Children in New Mexico work tirelessly

to provide aid to migrants. Their/our collective efforts, our 'radical solidarity' (París Pombo and Montes 2021) drive our efforts toward a 'radical geography' that 'seeks to understand social and spatial problems and to advocate solutions'.

We argue that people's *witnessing in action* can lead to TFP that manifests as social networks in other geographic locations. There are similarities across comparably complex, dangerously politicized, and volatile global border regions like Palestine and Israel, India, and Pakistan (Jammu and Kashmir), Russia and Ukraine, Venezuela and Brazil, China and Tibet, China and Taiwan, and Morocco and Western Sahara, to name a few (Conant 2014). We argue that organic and even politically charged acts of solidarity and relationships across borders, including friendships, can spring forth from highly contested border spaces and places, like these world regions, that see burgeoning military and security forces impacting their societies.

Our goal is not to flatten all global borders, especially the U.S.–Mexico borderlands communities we describe here, as having one singular experience, or as sharing one border imaginary. We recognize that border spaces and places anywhere are shaped by hegemonic state or nation-state processes. Geopolitical regions like U.S.–Mexico border 'sister-cities': Laredo/Nuevo Laredo, Nogales, AZ/Nogales, Sonora, San Diego/Tijuana are distinct from each other, yet they have been exploited, politicized, militarized, securitized, and industrialized, since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. What we wish to express here is that most U.S.–Mexico border communities have common experiences as people living across large swaths of contested, policed, and surveilled lands, that are overwhelmingly poor, subjugated, patriarchal, militarized, and industrialized spaces. We argue that our analysis of radical violence and radical love, paired with *methodology of witnessing in action* and TFP can aid scholars and advocates to grapple with the pain and suffering in border zones like the Paso del Norte region at the U.S.–Mexico border and the unexpected forms of solidarity that materialize.

Witnessing in action and TFP as relational resistance to radical violence

We first met in 2009 at the El Paso International Airport and travelled together to Morocco for a seminar on comparative borders, migration, and violence. While on this journey, we immediately connected based on our individual backgrounds, academic interests, and advocacy concerning gender-based violence, feminicides, and the refugee/migrant crisis that has defined the border region for decades. We were raised in the same region, but on opposite sides of the border's Rio Bravo/Rio Grande natural boundary. Despite carrying different passports, our upbringing as children and adolescents is steeped in brown, working-class border communities. As activist

scholars, our feminist work and research on migration and borders have brought us closer together. We imagine that if national borders were non-existent, we could have attended the same schools and shared the same friends. Instead, we learned of our commonalities during our transatlantic journey and border crossing modalities.

Since first meeting, our TFP emerged from our migrant rights advocacy and our deep love for the borderlands. Our TFP is an intervention to the scaffolds of violence discussed in the previous section, born from our anger concerning the acts of violence perpetuated and justified by state actors, neoliberal elites, and others causing so much injury at their instruction. As we have moved across the international boundary for conferences, meetings, educational seminars, activism, and to visit each other's family as activist scholars and friends, we began to devise a more systematic framework that could help us analyze radical violence that we witnessed daily, a *methodology of witnessing in action*. As we discuss radical violence, radical love, and collective rage, we draw from emotional geographies to understand relational spaces and emotions that transcend public/private binaries (Pribram and Harding 2002) and underscore the 'spatialities of emotion' (Rose 1993 as cited in Thien 2005) we experience in the borderlands. We join our voices, our collective rage with others working in this advocacy, as we form, 'trans-local and transnational connections characterized by profound affective implications for those involved' (París Pombo and Montes 2021, 8) to promote radical love for humanity.

Our bridging of TFP and our *methodology of witnessing in action* has its base in our positionality, lived experiences and the tenets of autoethnography. As transborder residents, we have crossed borders for nearly half a century. We recognize that border crossings are embedded in our every fiber, which is why we draw from the teachings of autoethnography to explore our sense of self, our emotions, and our border rootedness (Bejarano 2010) to space and place. Miguel Avalos argues that 'Autoethnography is an effective and affective method for describing and analyzing the US-Mexico border(lands') fluidity, ambiguity, and social complexity' (2022, 127). We assert that our *methodology of witnessing in action* is guided by 1) our emotions of rage, solidarity, and love that evoke both visceral and physical movements toward action based on our historical and lived experiences; 2) our risk-taking in crossing international borders that are 'prohibited places' (Boğaç 2020), 'complex and securitized' and 'Otherly/foreign' spaces, which leads to transborder friendship praxis and coalitional building across manmade boundaries; and 3) our bearing witness and working in solidarity for strangers (migrant, border resident, human) that leads to transborder social networks of relational resistance. As we explain how our TFP relates to the scaffolds of violence we articulate, we also work to disrupt this violence by arguing for more radical love. Our praxis epitomizes a stubborn resistance not to

surrender before border walls and multiple forms of social, cultural, political, interpersonal, and state violence. Since we straddle the Paso del Norte region at the U.S.–Mexico border—Ma. Eugenia on one side and Cynthia on the other—we rage against egregious border nation-state practices that dictate our transborder movement and our intimate relationships. We acknowledge as part of our TFP, the contradictions we embody for having a privileged education, for being bilingual and bicultural, and having documents that allow us to cross international borders. Despite these privileges though, as women of color from working class communities, we too are relegated to state scrutiny and constant interrogations when crossing to meet people who cannot cross borders as we do. Our TFP sounds an alarm to eradicate radical violence through our collective rage that, with others, we transform into radical love steeped in dialogue, action, solidarity, and healing. Collective rage and radical love serve as a catalyst inspiring our *methodology of witnessing in action*.

As *transfronteriza feministas*, we demonstrate how women's experiences are diverse and specific, yet we recognize a horizontal axis that brings us together: radical love as a commitment to unveil systems of oppression (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017) derived from our local, gendered, historical and spatial position/s. The idea that, 'Geography... is important in the making, maintenance, and dissolution of friendships, as well as in the types of friends that are important within particular space-time settings', (Bunnell et al. 2012, 491) resonates with us, as we interrogate how hate and violence in our borderlands' region is confronted by friendship, love, and resistance.

This article is as much about joining our efforts with countless others who embody a collective rage toward radical violence, as it is about our friendship and radical love to work to undo this systemic violence. The groundswell of support and the collective rage from the Paso del Norte region to support migrants, despite limited resources and poverty, are what we call radical love. Our friendship, forged out of our anger at the often-inhumane responses by authorities to the human rights emergency that migration represents, responds to the violence we see around us. We witness radical love by community volunteers in the late hours of caring for ill and hungry migrants in tent cities and welcome centers, and our own advocacy, like several others, sorting through donated clothing, often sifting through mismatched socks and shoes or individual sized toiletry products; or arranging for migrants' travel to their final destinations with sponsors or loved ones. The collaboration of volunteer teams of medical and legal professionals, and volunteers to locate families for asylum hearings, transportation, financial donations, and numerous other ways—point to a network of radical love and *witnessing in action* that is important here.

Complete strangers offer love and attention to migrants. Collective rage and radical love serve as interventions to the radical violence that works to

obstruct passage of migrants into the U.S. and even to and within Mexico by authorities that is later discussed. Migrant advocates demonstrate their collective rage against these nation-state practices by showing radical love for migrants to address migration humanely at borders. We see how migrant advocates draw on radical love to form intimacies of solidarity, of 'radical solidarity' (París Pombo and Montes 2021) with migrants.

The work of African American feminists and their theoretical contributions on radical love (Dotson 2013) are pivotal to challenging existing approaches on what constitutes knowledge, as we explain the radical violence that we witness and work to upend. hooks (1995) established the relation between love (more specifically self-love), responsibility and work. For hooks, 'Communities sustain life... There is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community' (2000, 161). The deep philosophical implications of how one 'learns' to see one's community is developed by Dotson (2013) insisting on how radical love relies on the connection between commitment, trust, and the willingness to unveil a system that occludes people of color as cogent contributors of world views steeped in their specific lived experiences.

Our discussion of radical love establishes the relational connection between oneself and the commitment to interrogate one's own historical subjectivity in relation to self, to others, and to community, and for our analysis-to geographies of friendship (Bunnell et al. 2012) when aiding migrants. We draw from love to argue how friendship becomes one of the most stabilizing tools to confront oppression by using our location with one foot in Mexico and the other in the U.S. to question, challenge, and disrupt the radical violence we see around us forging our relational resistance, our friendship, and social networks across borders.

Cachola et al.'s argument that, '... maintain[ing] connections over vast geographical distances and variations of culture, language, and history, [where] strong heart-connections would be necessary, beyond simply coming together around a list of issues' (2010, 164), is what our TFP personifies. Friendship, subsequently, manifests from one's self-love (hooks 1995), which radiates out to community as radical love for migrants- complete strangers- that one has no direct relational ties to.

Within the borderlands' context, fear creates fractures within our transnational border culture as it naturalizes human-made political differences among us (us v. them) that highlight national, linguistic, cultural and identity differences, as interlocking forms of radical violence. We argue that the terrain of friendship is a social location and methodology through witnessing and engaging in action, to challenge hegemonic narratives of belonging and forms of social violence that dictate who does and does not belong. To challenge current naturalizations of violence, we borrow from Zembylas (2015, 1-2), the following question:

Would it be possible to think of friendship outside of traditional understandings that define the friend in terms of proximity and reciprocity, while considering the emotional implications of trauma in these societies?' We add to Zembylas' query our own, 'How does a critical friendship in transnational militarized and securitized spaces resignify belonging, rupture, and relational resistance?

The carceral state's migrant industrial complex as machinery of radical violence

For migrants and border people, violence, in all its manifestations, is ubiquitous. It defines daily life in public and private spaces, and its institutional and individual forms become normalized. The scaffolds of radical violence that drive our collective rage, and our desire for fundamental change through our TFP include the carceral state via the increasing militarization and securitization of the border; and the migrant industrial complex that separates, detains, and deports families including its impacts for people living along the U.S.–Mexico border. These scaffolds of violence impact border dwellers daily, as U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers interrogate border crossers, as refugees remain trapped in camps at bridges connecting our nation-states, and as women and girls are targeted in acts of gender-based violence (Bejarano and Sánchez 2021). These examples comprise the personal/individual, familial/home and communal/border narratives tinged with institutional violence repeated each day across several generations, and signify what the carceral state, as the migrant industrial complex, looks and feels like, and what radical violence exemplifies. To inhabit this space of border crossings includes the uncertainty that personifies the encounter between a border crosser and the border control apparatus (Bejarano 2010; Avalos 2022).

The carceral state is also represented in increased efforts to further militarize and securitize the border, through several punitive policies targeting refugees primarily from Central American countries torn by war and violence. One such policy dubbed Remain in Mexico (officially called Migrant Protection Protocol) (Ortiz Uribe 2019) increased the militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border by sending U.S. National Guard troops to different ports of entry across major U.S. sister cities with Mexico. This policy also called for Mexico to:

send 6,000 members of its newly formed National Guard to the Mexico-Guatemala border to prevent further migration to the US... [and allow the US to] expand the Remain in Mexico program across its entire southern border (Hope Border Institute 2019, on-line)

The northern and southern Mexican borders are increasingly militarized as the composition of its people adjusts to absorb the asylum seekers expelled from the U.S. including those who were never allowed to enter. All

the while, Mexico also works to accommodate the constant stream of people deported from the U.S. after years of living there.

The separation, detention, and deportation of people creates immense bodily and spirit injury and devastation to migrant and immigrant families. Our collective rage has grown in response to these human rights violations and mistreatment of migrants that travel from and through Latin America and beyond and into the U.S. Although historically, migration to the U.S. is a daily phenomenon, in 2014, women and children from the Northern Triangle (Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador) arrived at the U.S. border fleeing gang violence, domestic violence, extreme poverty, food insecurities and severe drought (Isacson 2019). That same year, unaccompanied children and family units traveling together peaked at 27,000 in June, although, numbers dropped below 5,000 three months later (Rosenblum and Ball 2016), after public outcries and moral panics of migrants flooding borders, drove U.S. federal directives to reinforce borders with U.S. National Guard troops. Increased funding was also given to U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Border Patrol agents to stop migrants' movements northbound. Under pressure from the U.S., Mexico also launched *Programa Frontera Sur* to, 'curtail rising numbers of Central American minors reaching the U.S.–Mexico border' (Berke Galemba 2017, 11).

Migrants who reached the northern Mexican border had to wait in large urban centers in cities like Ciudad Juárez, where they languished for months after surviving malnutrition, extreme weather conditions, and threats to their lives from gangs and other violent forces. We argue that the governmental responses to these human rights calamities is a form of political/institutional violence, and hence, radical violence, that instigates social violence toward migrants as unjust scrutiny, scapegoating, and hateful rhetoric, materialized as carceral narratives. From 2014 through 2019, families and women and children arrived at unprecedented levels to international ports of entry, as immediate and precarious migratory movements across the world proliferated, and as migrants were caught in limbo during the 2020–2022 years of COVID. The U.S.–Mexico border is not alone in seeing massive upheaval, or the movement of people crossing borders worldwide, as thousands flee precarious circumstances as we witnessed in Syria in 2018 and Ukraine in 2022.

U.S. immigration and migration policies have routinely separated families at the U.S.–Mexico border, but in 2018, the Trump administration intentionally separated thousands of families in a violent policy that resulted in the imprisonment of thousands of refugees. In this inhumane policy, U.S. authorities pulled children from their parents, and in the process, lost track of hundreds of minors (Romero et al. 2019). As U.S. Customs and Border Protection prohibited refugees' entrance into the U.S., they warehoused people in makeshift detention tents erected in places near the international

border, like in El Paso's outskirts in Clint, Texas (Ortiz Uribe 2019). As further evidence of state violence, the Trump administration prohibited asylum seekers from entering the U.S. and forced them to wait for their asylum court hearings in Mexico making it nearly impossible for them to consult with their U.S. based attorneys (Isacson 2019).

Because of the Remain in Mexico policy, families erected tent settlements in border cities like Ciudad Juárez, in efforts not to lose their place in line as they awaited their summons by the U.S. government through a process called metering (Isacson 2019; Bejarano and Sánchez 2021). Although some migrants lived in tent cities, Mexican shelters simultaneously swelled with migrants seeking entrance into the U.S. (Ortiz Uribe 2019). The practice of metering emerged when U.S. and Mexican authorities regulated asylum seekers' places in line as they waited out their asylum court hearing (Isacson 2019). U.S. authorities used this metering practice at international ports of entry, screening migrants based on their documents and nationalities (Bejarano and Sánchez 2021). We consider policies such as these forms of radical violence.

While media outlets curate these images as sanitized soundbites, as *trans-fronterizas*, we witness them first-hand. We have often witnessed migrants turned away by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents during the screening process at international bridges, or while we stood in line to cross the bridge ourselves. In July 2019:

More than 20,000 migrants [had] been returned to Mexico... according to Mexico's Interior Ministry. Juárez alone [had] taken back more than 10,200 migrants under the program [Remain in Mexico], according to Chihuahua officials' (Montes and Villagran 2019, 2)

These numbers fluctuated, however, throughout its implementation. These numbers do not reflect those deported from the U.S. to Mexico, which compounds the escalation of people forcefully made to move south of the U.S. border. In December of 2019, Mexico reported receiving over 60,000 non-Mexican migrants under the Remain in Mexico policy; nearly 18,000 people were sent to Ciudad Juárez to await their asylum hearing (Isacson 2019).

Increased Mexican military created fear amongst the migrants trapped in border cities due to Remain in Mexico, in part because of refugees' traumatic experiences with the military in the places from which they fled. In 2019, approximately 3,000 people from Mexican interior states like Guerrero, Michoacán, and Zacatecas arrived in Ciudad Juárez seeking refuge from drug violence (Isacson 2019). Mexican citizens were fleeing their hometowns for the northern Mexican border in hopes of seeking asylum due to violence between drug cartels and the military. They arrived in militarized border cities that were already ravaged by the drug trade. Migrants forcefully removed from the U.S. arrived to Ciudad Juárez, a beloved city plagued with

cartel violence and femicide, while residents of Ciudad Juárez were displaced to several regions of the U.S. and Mexico due to armed groups, the army, cartels, and mercenaries (Díaz and Blancas 2019).

The expanded presence of Mexican security forces created more violence and instability for people. Thousands of people were made vulnerable from detention, deportations, migration, and narco violence, and women and children were especially made vulnerable for gender-based violence including femicides (Wright 2011). Iconic feminist geographer, Linda McDowell's words radiate truth here, when she writes, '...nations are usually defined in terms of the links between a particular space or territory and its peoples to the exclusion of "others"' (1999, 170).

State violence played a central role in the refugee crisis we witness in the borderlands where we call home. We argue that carceral state practices are also forms of radical violence, which offer an optic to understanding the urgent crises taking place across borders, and what drives our TFP to respond. This violence impacts all of us, especially the families moving through borders. The horror of detention is evident with the deaths of six children (five Guatemalans and one Salvadoran) in U.S. custody from September 2018 through May 2019 (Hennessy-Fiske 2019). It is difficult not to draw a correlation between overcrowding conditions within U.S. detention, the freezing detention cages that migrants and advocates call *hieleras* (ice boxes) where detainees are warehoused, and the children's illnesses which led to their deaths.

This radical violence worsened as the global pandemic made the lives of refugees even more precarious. In early 2020, U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement deported an average of 20,881 people per month; and at the height of the pandemic, thousands were deported despite testing positive for COVID-19 (Sieff and Miroff 2020). In response, the U.S. barred refugees from entering the country, citing U.S. Title 42 of the Public Health Service Act of 1944. This law made it legal to quarantine anyone as grounds for keeping migrants from entering the U.S. due to COVID-19 scares; an argument that migrant advocates critique as xenophobic (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/08/qa-us-title-42-policy-expel-migrants-border>). People return to their homelands, persecuted, detained, and deported, sick and defeated, and often marked for death, or they live in limbo at the northern Mexican border or settle in a transient country. In sum, our collective rage is targeted at policies derived from punitive deterrence, and militarized, and securitized tactics, rather than humanitarian necessities.

Mapping geographies of radical love with a TFP intervention

Our border experiences are not unique. They represent thousands of people's border crossings and lived experiences between Mexico and the U.S. and

across the globe who engage in each other's everyday activities. The tensions and juxtapositions of sharing space and place across nation-states and man-made boundaries reveal the disparate and often violent manifestations of living on the edge of nation-states-any set of imposed world borders- that demand urgent responses.

Our TFP describes how ordinary people are impacted by nation-states' violent actions, and subsequently, how they 'talk back' to the State (hooks 1995). As *transfronteriza feminista* activists, we 'talk back' to oppressive power through our TFP as an interruption and intervention to radical violence. We join our voices and collective rage with other activists, activist scholars, community members and legal and medical experts to address migration humanely at borders. According to Boğaç, 'Emotions contain a complex pattern of reactions toward a place that involves feelings, which may also act as the mental aspect of an experience' Boğaç (2020, 2). We, therefore, evoke our emotive rage and love to counter the hate and abuse occurring in our border region as both an interruption and an intervention. Giles and Hyndman remind us that:

Politics of globalization, nationalism, and geopolitics create and connect sites of violence beyond the borders of specific communities and countries. These sites are highly gendered, often racialized, and always spatialized (2004, 301).

The scaffolds of radical violence in our everyday geographies (Askins 2015) expose the interconnectedness of each scale of violence (the carceral state via the migrant industrial complex and militarization and securitization strategies), as well as the ways in which they lean into each other and gain momentum. The official rhetoric of nation-states emphasizes national and border security and migration management, but to those individuals working on the ground, this rhetoric is false. What we see as *transfronterizas*, is a common carceral narrative of containment, detention, and deportation, a countering discourse depicting the everyday reality of our border region. Together, these forms of violence galvanize into interlocking forms of radical violence: state-sanctioned, racialized, gendered, politicized and social violence, which leads to senseless hardships, the mistreatment of thousands, and even death. This critique, based on an intersectional analysis, demonstrates the ability of nation-states to police along the lines of borders, color, gender, and class. We use our strategies of radical love and collective rage through our TFP, as tools to contest the terrain of state surveillance to argue for creating our own spaces of safety, peace, friendship, and justice where refugees are welcome and border communities flourish (Figure 1).

Our TFP is a personal, collective act of resistance, as we protest and mobilize to expose radical violence enacted on our communities and upon the migrants seeking refuge in the region. Our TFP and witnessing in action act as counter-hegemonic narratives to the carceral policies of nation-states



Figure 1. Cynthia and Ma. Eugenia attend the Child Detention Protest at Clyde Park, El Paso, Texas (2018), Photo by Cynthia Bejarano.

because it rejects radical violence with radical love, our collective rage, and our relational resistance. As this map demonstrates, our TFP is both a reflection of our migrant advocacy and our collaboration with others who share a radical love for borderlands' communities (Figure 2).

Our relational resistance vis-à-vis our friendship may seem mundane or inconsequential, but when situated against a litany of radical violence and when crossing heavily engineered militarized border spaces, then one can see ordinary experiences, our everyday geographies (Askins 2015) transform into acts of resistance and interventions that reject the intended ruptures of transborder social networks and our geographies of friendship (Bunnell et al. 2012). Our friendship, as a site of relational resistance and collective rage, has worked for the benefit of migrants and immigrants through advocacy, volunteerism, fundraising, protesting, grant-writing, educating students and community members, and our bearing witness to human rights violations, and ultimately, the radical love we feel and give during times of healing and grieving. As París Pombo and Montes state, '...[as] volunteers share the values of compassion and empathy towards the migrant community, ... the collective action of solidarity gives cohesion to the activities of caring' (2021, 18).

Our resistance is reflected in our *witnessing in action* through activist and teaching efforts leading workshops for unaccompanied minors, and



Figure 2. Mapping our Relational Resistance, TFP, Radical love and Collective Rage across the Paso del Norte region, Map by Zaira Martin and Ma. Eugenia Hernández Sánchez.

collaborations with university students to gather supplies for migrant shelters, unaccompanied minors, and migrant families, and to interact with unaccompanied minors for cultural events. We have participated in child detention and family separation protests at the Santa Fe bridge in Ciudad Juárez, in downtown El Paso, and outside of detention centers including Ft. Bliss and Clint, Texas. We have fundraised to help migrants and have volunteered in the Paso del Norte region at shelters and welcome centers packing meals for migrants and other duties and have worked to promote a better understanding of migration for public consumption. We have met people from across the world as they move for their safety, waiting for their fate to be dictated by authorities in nation-state capitals thousands of miles away. Our friendship serves as a sanctuary, a think tank, and a praxis, where we can critique the actions of governments and laws, and the relentless policing of peoples' passages from one geopolitical location

to another. Our collective rage with others who dedicate themselves daily to work for migrants and even border communities, drives our work.

Conclusion and reflecting on the future

The geographies of radical love and collective rage that we present here speak to relationships that reject, reimagine, and recreate the existing spaces of oppression and regime-building that exist at the border through the nations'-built environment (McDowell 1999). The geographies of radical love and collective rage, a righteous rage, that our TFP embodies, uses our energies to build bridges across heavily militarized, industrialized, and securitized liminal and temporal spatial realities. Our enduring friendship reflects the intersection of our positionalities in both geographic and affective locations, and our mutual contestations of militarized state power. We offer our TFP and witnessing in action as a framework to understand relational resistance shaped by borders, as people living at or near borders worldwide engage similar practices.

Engaging a TFP has pushed us to deconstruct ideas of 'the other (side)' as foreign and 'prohibitive places' (Boğaç 2020) as off-limits, to identify with those on either side in demonstrations of solidarity and coalition-building and claiming both sides of the border as our own. We allow our emotions to guide us, as feminist geographer Deborah Thien accentuates, 'affect is used to describe (in both the communicative and literal sense) the motion of emotion' (2005, 451). Thus, by crossing the physical border despite the vigilance exerted by Mexico and the U.S., we also cross our own mental imaginary to (un)learn belonging as restricted to a singular national territory. Our TFP and *witnessing in action* engages in radical love to re-center alternative worldviews based relationally across time, space, place, and looking beyond passport colors.

Can we respond to radical violence with radical love? Rage and our use of radical love anchors our insistence to recognize humanity across borderlines. Although we are writing about our own friendship and relationality with others working toward more humane solutions to migration at the U.S.–Mexico border, we feel that the arguments made in this article apply to borders around the world. We believe the utility of transborder friendship praxis is promising for future work to explore relationality among migrants who themselves forge friendships during their migratory journeys.

We fall in with feminists' Kathryn Louise Northworthy and Ellyn Kaschak's who state:

Even those of us working for feminist and humanitarian change must first engage with the world as we find it. And we find it domestically and internationally divided into geographical and psychological boundaries and borders that unify while separate (2013, 5)

Our praxis within militarized spaces transcends borders and boundaries. The border represents obstacles and barriers, but our solidarity building and radical love seeps through these manmade obstructions. Transnational feminist work represents, 'both respecting and defying borders and making alliances in defiance of patriarchal attempts to keep us apart' (Norsworthy and Kaschak 2013, 5). J. Turner asks, 'How may we consider further the imagination of carceral space upon everyday imaginations-both within that space and outside of it?' (2014, 323). Transcending borders and boundaries in acts of radical love and 'radical solidarity' (París Pombo and Montes 2021) can disrupt the carceral geographies intended to discipline us.

We grew up in each other's backyard with similar lived experiences, but on opposite sides of the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande River. We imagine that before meeting, we had crossed paths at the international bridge/s that connect our region. As activist scholars committed to addressing forms of radical violence manifested in issues surrounding migration, we use our TFP and *witnessing in action* to guide this work as we remain inspired by the courageous efforts of countless borderlanders who righteously labor to address this violence.

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No foreseen conflict of interest to be reported.

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