

Femicide in Latin America: Reimagining Catholic Symbolism in the Pursuit of Justice

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Abstract: Femicide—the killing of a girl or woman based on their gender—is a widespread horror that occurs frequently in Latin American countries. Because these countries are mostly Catholic, a Catholic theological framework that draws attention to these atrocities is crucial. In particular, there is an evident need for a theological framework that provides support for the fight against *machismo* and violence not only for women but also for families who have lost daughters, mothers, sisters, etc. This article argues the need for a feminist theology that breaks down systems of *machismo* and establishes community to combat femicide in Latin America. First, this article will explore the ways in which *marianismo* and certain symbols of women (e.g., the Guadalupe-Malinche binary and Mariana de Jesús) can perpetuate gender-based power dynamics in Latin America, making femicides permissible. Second, this article will highlight the importance of emphasis on family and community in Latin American society in attempting to transform societal structures to achieve justice for Latin American women. Lastly, the article provides a framework that emphasizes women's agency to stand together, grieve, and fight. This feminist theological framework is centered around the symbol of the Virgin Mary, as portrayed in John's Gospel during Jesus's crucifixion. It also focuses on the historical role of Mary as a mother who lost her child. These two aspects of Mary as a symbol provide a way for women in Latin America to hold spaces of solidarity and agency and demand the ending of femicides.

Introduction

It was March 8, 2017. I was attending my first International Women's Day march in Córdoba, Argentina. I was in awe of all the people, chants, movement, and dancing around me. It quickly became clear that we were protesting, mourning, and celebrating all at once. Most people carried signs which read “#NiUnaMenos” (#NotOneWomenLess), “Vivas nos queremos” (We want each other alive), and “Somos el grito de las que [ya] no tienen voz” (We are the scream of those who no longer have their voice). I remember carrying my own bright orange poster with red and pink letters that read “Nos mueve el deseo de no tener miedo” (We are moved by the wish to no longer be afraid). As an *ecuatoriana* (Ecuadorian

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woman), I knew exactly what all these posters meant and to what they referred. The march itself symbolized a desperate scream of protest against femicide. Femicide, the shadow that obscures Latin America—the demon that condemns countless women to death—forces women to live in constant fear and uncertainty.

Every two hours in Latin America, a woman is murdered just for being a woman.² These brutalities are examples of femicides: the killing of a girl or woman on the basis of her gender. While Brazil and Mexico record the most femicides in the region, the countries with the highest rates in Latin America are Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Bolivia.³ However, these atrocities are not confined to a particular area; rather, they are seen throughout Latin America. For example, Chiara Perez, a fourteen-year-old pregnant girl from Argentina was beaten to death by her boyfriend. Maribel, an Ecuadorian thirty-eight-year-old woman, was stabbed by a man one hundred and thirteen times. Gabriela Lima Santana, a twenty-one-year-old woman in Brazil was dismembered and shoved into a suitcase. The list of cases is ever-growing. These examples reveal that femicides are about not only killing but also the underlying exercise of male dominance over women's bodies. It is the ultimate way for men to demonstrate control. In Maribel's case, for example, one hundred and thirteen stab wounds surely were not needed to ensure her death. This case can be extended more broadly to reveal that femicide is like a show, a spectacle, a way for men to prove that they can and will do anything to dominate.

To find justice for the girls and women who have been killed and to prevent more women from dying, it is crucial not only to acknowledge the existence of femicides, but also to deconstruct the systems of dominance and *machismo* that allow such atrocities to occur. Marcela Lagarde, a Mexican anthropologist who first introduced the concept of femicide to the Spanish language said “Lo que no se nombra no existe” (What isn't named doesn't exist). Lagarde's words guide this article and its description of the systems of oppression against women in Latin America, and how they can be challenged through a feminist theology particular to Latin America. More specifically, this article will explain how certain Catholic concepts and symbols have been used to maintain *machismo*, allowing femicides to remain

² Daniela Blandón Ramírez, “Una mujer es asesinada cada dos horas en América Latina por el hecho de ser mujer,” *France 24*, March 3, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/es/20200303-dia-de-la-mujer-feminicidios-latinoamericano-violencia-genero>.

³ Blandón Ramírez, “Una mujer.”

an acceptable form of violence. Despite this potential harmful manipulation of Catholicism, religious symbols may still provide a path to relief, justice, and ultimately an end to femicide in Latin America. This article will explain how, through relying on the symbol of the Virgin Mary as a grieving mother, and through Jesus's words to Mary at the time of his crucifixion, Latinas can stand in solidarity and challenge femicides together.

Before embarking on this quest, it is important to note that *mujerista* theology is central to this article. As described by Ada María Isasi-Díaz, the goals of *mujerista* theology are “to provide a platform for the voices of Latina grassroots women; to develop a theological method that takes seriously the religious understandings and practices of Latinas as a source for theology; to challenge theological understandings, church teachings, and religious practices that oppress Latina women, that are not life-giving, and, therefore, cannot be theologically correct.”⁴ The proposed feminist theological framework described herein promotes these goals by using examples of symbols and initiatives specific to Latinas that uplift the voices of grassroots projects. It is of the utmost importance to base any potential theological framework on the concrete and tangible lives of women around the world.

Social and Catholic Symbols of Oppression

Certain aspects of Latin American culture have worked to establish the dominance of men over women, forming continued space for brutal forms of violence such as femicides. The predominant religion in Latin America is Christianity, with a majority of people identifying as Roman Catholic.⁵ This is one of the cultural aspects of Latin America that reinforces female inferiority and has preserved *machismo*. Hierarchies of male dominance cannot be separated from religious life and interpretations of Christian doctrine, texts, and symbols. For example, religion in Latin America emphasizes “the idealization of the dominant male hero” and the positive portrayal of strong masculine pride.⁶ Due to this pervasively held idea, women are expected to be passive, and to give their bodies as a reward to men. One Catholic concept that upholds such domination is *marianismo*, the veneration

⁴ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Orbis Book, 1996), 10.

⁵ Yubeira Zerpa de Kirby, “Un acercamiento al fenómeno religioso en América Latina a la luz de la crítica cultural,” *Sapienza Organizacional* 5, no. 9 (2018).

⁶ Teresa Delgado, “This Is My Body... Given For You: Theological Anthropology *Latina/Mente*,” in *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder*, ed. Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 35.

of the Virgin Mary, which “encourages women to follow the ‘example’ set by Mary. That is, to model ‘self-sacrifice, self-effacement, and self-subordination’ and by so doing become ‘spiritually superior.’”⁷ The veneration of the Virgin Mary emphasizes “the role of [the] woman as one who sacrifices herself for the good of others...[and] has served the domination and commodification of women’s physical bodies.”⁸ These beliefs have served *machismo* and have led to the idea that some kinds of violence are permissible—devastating, yes, but nonetheless permissible.

In *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, Nancy Pineda-Madrid discusses the creation of social imaginaries and the making of evil. Specifically, she explains how Emilie Townes “examines in-depth the way particular images of [B]lack women (for example, Aunt Jemima, the Tragic Mulatta, Topsy, and others) have been used and continue to be used as ‘conductors and seeresses.’”⁹ These images sustain the stereotypes of Black women that perpetuate the evils committed against them. Pineda-Madrid relates Townes’s work to femicide: “[she] recommends that stereotypes of Latina femaleness are likewise used to legitimize socially the furtherance of evil and, consequently, to inform the active ways we envisage suffering in our social and personal imaginations.”¹⁰ This is so because structural evil does not simply come from “rational mechanisms but is also ‘maintained by more heuristic forces that emerge from the imagination as emotion, intuition, and yearning.’”¹¹ It is necessary to realize that the stereotypes and symbols of Latina femaleness do not stand alone; rather, they are part of historical and sociocultural narratives that “serve the interests of the most powerful and, accordingly, willfully exclude the interests of subjugated peoples.”¹² These stereotypes and symbols are prevalent across Latin America and can lead to femicide when manipulated to justify violence against women. A few examples of such symbols can be found in Mexico and Ecuador, in the Guadalupe-Malinche binary, and in the symbol of Mariana de Jesús.

In her book, Nancy Pineda-Madrid discusses the way the Guadalupe-Malinche binary perpetuates patriarchal views in Mexico. Malintzín (or La Malinche) is known for

⁷ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 49.

⁸ Delgado, “This Is My Body,” 33.

⁹ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 45.

¹⁰ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 45.

¹¹ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 45.

¹² Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 45-46.

contributing to the Spanish conquest of the Aztec nation, as well as other indigenous tribes, by acting as a translator for the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. She is also known as Cortés's mistress and is therefore labelled as treacherous. As Pineda-Madrid says, "tagged as the ultimate traitor of Mexico, [La Malinche] comes to symbolize the 'total negative essence of the Mexican woman.'"¹³ On the other hand, the Guadalupean Mary (or the Lady of Guadalupe) "is said to have appeared to an indigenous, middle-aged man, Juan Diego, and through him assured the people of her enduring love and care for them."¹⁴ These two women present a binary: a woman is either a "Guadalupe" (good) or a "Malinche," (bad). This construct perpetuates male dominance and female submission, denying women their full humanity. Women are not recognized for who they are; instead, they are placed in these two reductive categories. Such a binary justifies certain kinds of violence, such as femicides: if a woman is killed, she must have been bad and unfaithful.

Despite extensive literature on Guadalupe and on other Marian images, very little scholarship has "addressed the ways these images have been used to limit and reduce Latinas' humanity."¹⁵ In order for us to reveal the liberative meaning of these images, "we must address transparently and directly how this symbol and others are manipulated to influence how Latinas are seen and how Latinas see themselves."¹⁶ It is not enough to call for liberation using religious symbols if we do not acknowledge the ways in which the same symbols continue to be used to reinforce oppression. Liberation first requires an understanding of the specific harm caused by such symbols. The need for a contextual understanding also emphasizes the importance of grounding theological work in the actual lives of Latine women.

Another symbol is Mariana de Jesús, the first Ecuadorian saint, canonized in 1950. Mariana was a very pious Catholic who is said to have performed various miracles. Mariana became a saint for offering her life in exchange for an end to both the earthquake and the epidemics devastating the city of Quito in 1645. She died sometime after the earthquake.¹⁷ Mariana de Jesús is widely revered throughout Ecuador and, despite having lived hundreds

¹³ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 48.

¹⁴ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 49.

¹⁵ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 47.

¹⁶ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 47.

¹⁷ "Mariana de Jesús, La Primera Santa Del Ecuador," *El Comercio*, August 9, 2011, <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/quito/mariana-de-jesus-primera-santa.html>.

of years ago, she is still hailed as an exemplary woman. Mariana's willingness to sacrifice her life for the city supports Delgado's view "that women's humanity is actualized when the will of another is made a priority."¹⁸ Due to this focus on sacrificial women, many women have felt the need to be complacent and submissive in the face of injustice. This idea reinforces the belief that women only deserve rights and love when they sacrifice themselves for others, many times by giving up their bodies, like Mariana did. This expectation for women in Ecuadorian society renders femicide permissible by suggesting that women who do not meet this ideal are somehow less important and ultimately less human. Moreover, it can inform the notion that men are allowed to use and take women's bodies because the body is supposedly meant to be sacrificed for others. Though Mariana's example can be twisted to justify femicide, this manipulation in no way undermines her legacy. It is, however, essential to acknowledge how such constructs are capitalized on to generate *machismo*.

Symbols such as the Guadalupe-Malinche binary and Mariana de Jesús exist in every country in Latin America. These examples illustrate the role of symbols in promoting a portrayal of women that enables the justification and even the acceptance of violence against women. While the scope of this article does not follow further exploration of the ways these particular symbols have been used by various groups, it would be worthwhile to deconstruct them to consider other roles they've had in society. Nevertheless, in the following sections, our focus will primarily be on finding alternative ways of interpreting the memory and the life of the Virgin Mary.

The importance of *Familia* and *Comunidad*

Familia (family) and *comunidad* (community) truly matter—they are the pillars of Latin American society. Challenging and changing the symbols of oppression and *machismo* that persist in Latin American society requires a feminist theology grounded in *comunidad* and *familia*. For Latinas, it may not be fulfilling enough to reject the imposed narratives of oppression individually, which is why it is essential to stand together as a *comunidad* to protest femicides.

For most Latinas, the individual person does not exist without the group: "the human person is fully actualized in communion with others; in fact, 'the community is the birthplace

¹⁸ Delgado, "This Is My Body," 33.

of self.”¹⁹ This notion of community, of being in relationship with others, extends beyond the nuclear family. As Ada María Isasi-Díaz says, “we do not conceptualize ourselves as individuals but as persons in relationship with our families and friends. [Latine] self-identity is not at all individualistic but rather is tied to our families, to the members of our extended families.”²⁰ Here, it is important to note that *familia* and *comunidad* do not overshadow the individual. Rather, it is a relationship based on interdependence where one realizes “that the members of our families enable us to be who we are. *Familia* provides the security needed to extend ourselves into the community and form the kind of personal relationships that are vital to us without losing sense of self.”²¹

In addition, the *familia* is a place where the self finds support and a space for expression: The goal of *familia* in [Latine] culture is to be a true home—*hogar*—where one belongs and is safe to be and become fully oneself. *Familia* for [Latines] ‘is the central and most important institution in life...’ *Familia* is a duty but also, for most of us, it is a never-failing support system. From a very young age, Latinas begin to understand that because of our families we do not have to face the world alone ... It is in the midst of *familia* and because of *familia* that at a very young age we are introduced to the ethical world of responsibilities and obligations, a world where one *is* because one is in relationship to others.²²

This is not to insinuate that the institution of family is not *machista* and oppressive. In reality, it often furthers oppression by enforcing imbalanced gender roles and embedding male-dominated power dynamics. However, it is important to recognize that the communitarian nature of Latin American society is an imperative factor to consider when finding tangible solutions to deeply-ingrained practices. The idea of *familia* as a support system in facing life’s challenges may prove a remedy for the horrors of femicide. The next section explores how to resist femicide by working together as a community, as a *familia*.

La Resistencia y la Memoria de la Virgen Maria

¹⁹ Delgado, “This Is My Body,” 31.

²⁰ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Kin-Dom of God: A Mujerista Proposal,” in *In Our Own Voices: Latino/a Renditions of Theology*, ed. Benjamín Valentín (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 181

²¹ Isasi-Díaz, “Kin-Dom of God,” 181.

²² Isasi-Díaz, “Kin-Dom of God,” 181.

In John 19:25-19:27, Mary is said to have witnessed Jesus's crucifixion: " ... standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."

As Elizabeth A. Johnson has written, it is unlikely that Mary was actually present at her son's crucifixion. Additionally, since the Gospels explain that Jesus's male disciples fled, it is unlikely that the one mentioned in John's Gospel was one of the Twelve.²³ While both are historical-factual figures, Johnson argues that neither the mother of Jesus nor the disciple are named in these lines "because they are functioning as symbols of discipleship. Standing by the cross they are turned toward each other by Jesus's words and given into each other's care."²⁴ The use of the word 'Behold' in these verses shows "that a revelation is to follow ... Beholding each other in a new relationship, the mother of Jesus and the beloved disciple mark the birth of a new family of faith founded on the following of Jesus and his gracious God."²⁵ This creation of a new relationship and community is crucial and must be acknowledged in the context of Latin America.

In her work, Johnson expands further on Mary's role in the crucifixion scene: "Even if she did not stand at the foot of the cross... news would have reached her. Then she joined the desolate cadre of women through the centuries who experience the terrible human condition of outliving one's child. There is no speaking this racking sorrow. It is out of the natural order of things. Worse yet, this death itself did not occur in the natural order of things but was violently inflicted, preceded by excruciating torment and carried out with public shame. One never really gets over the pain when someone you love is a victim of violence."²⁶

With this in mind, Mary stands in a much broader historical and political context where women have lost their children to state violence. Mary was a "suffering Jewish mother" in the context of "Jewish suffering and death at the hand of the Romans."²⁷ As a mother who lost her son, Mary also stands "in solidarity with mothers of children dead by

²³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Dangerous Memories: A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 154.

²⁴ Johnson, "Dangerous Memories," 154.

²⁵ Johnson, "Dangerous Memories," 154.

²⁶ Johnson, "Dangerous Memories," 155.

²⁷ Johnson, "Dangerous Memories," 156.

state violence everywhere ... Calling on her memory, grieving mothers, wives, and daughters find strength in their bitter struggle against state repression and personal despair.”²⁸ No matter where they are, women everywhere who have lost their loved ones can relate to the suffering and anguish Mary went through, and to the powerlessness she felt when unable to save her son. This shared experience includes all those who have lost their daughters, sisters, and other loved ones to femicide.

Though femicide is not necessarily committed by members of the state, the state cannot be absolved of blame. States often remain silent at the horrors of femicide and actively perpetuate *machismo*. A Chilean group called Las Tesis highlighted the culpability of the state in a song first performed in November 2019 in the streets of Valparaiso, Chile. “Un violador en tu camino” (“A Rapist in Your Path”) condemns male violence and abuse, holding the state, judges, bystanders, etc. responsible for enforcing systems of oppression:

El patriarcado es un juez (The patriarchy is a judge)
que nos juzga por nacer (that judges us for being born)
y nuestro castigo (and our punishment)
es la violencia que ya ves. (is the violence you can now see)

Es femicidio. (It’s femicide)
Impunidad para mi asesino. (Impunity for the killer)
Es la desaparición. (It’s the disappearance)
Es la violación. (It’s the rape)...

El violador eras tú. (The rapist was you)
El violador eres tú. (The rapist is you)
Son los pacos, (It’s the cops)
los jueces, (The judges)
el Estado, (The State)
el Presidente. (The President)

El Estado opresor es un macho violador. (The oppressive State is a rapist)
El Estado opresor es un macho violador. (The oppressive State is a rapist).

The performers sang the line “El violador eres tú” (the rapist is you), as they pointed their fingers at the audience.²⁹

²⁸ Johnson, “Dangerous Memories,” 156.

²⁹ “Performance colectivo Las Tesis ‘Un violador en tu camino,’” Colectivo Registro Callejero, November 26, 2019, 3:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB7r6hdo3W4&ab_channel=ColectivoRegistroCallejero.

Even though the performance was not religious in nature and did not use religious symbols, it goes hand in hand with the memory of Mary in Christian imagination. As Johnson points out: “The fact that Christian imagination can picture Mary standing with desolated people under all the crosses set up in the world is due to the history of her own very real grief. This memory finds its liberating effectiveness when it empowers the church’s women and men to say, STOP IT.”³⁰ The pointing of the finger in “Un violador en tu camino,” is exactly that: a call for justice and liberation. What this connection reveals is that Mary does not only function as a symbol of grief; she brings people together in their anguish and lament, embodying agency and *resistencia* (resistance). Through the shared memory of Mary, we may find the strength and hope to fight for a world where our children and loved ones are no longer murdered and tortured—a world where women are no longer killed for being women.

This cry for justice is echoed in Karen Baker-Fletcher’s “More than Suffering: The Healing and Resurrecting Spirit of God,” which discusses how Mamie Till-Mobley, mother of Emmett Till, mimics the Virgin Mary paradigm. Till-Mobley publicly grieved the death of her son in 1955. When Emmett Till died, Mamie Till-Mobley decided to have an open casket funeral and let the body of her son be photographed and displayed in magazines. In doing so, Mamie called for the world to face and to repent for their blatant evil, racism and violence. As Baker-Fletcher quotes Mamie Till-Mobley, “I’M NOT TAKING THIS! LOOK! Look world, don’t you see?”³¹ With these words, Mamie called on the memory of Mary as a grieving mother who lost her son not only to her direct killers, but ultimately to institutional and systemic racism.

These various representations of Mary lead us to question who she was and what she ought to represent. Drawing on Diana Hayes, Baker-Fletcher points out that for many Catholic women, “Mary is a ‘role model, not for passivity, but for strong, righteous ‘womanish’ women who spend their lives giving birth to the future...’”³² From Hayes’ proposition, “one gathers that Mary is a symbol of what it means to intimately bear the power

³⁰ Johnson, “Dangerous Memories,” 156.

³¹ Karen Baker-Fletcher, “More than Suffering: The Healing and Resurrecting Spirit of God,” in *Womanist Theological Ethics*, ed. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Torres, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 159.

³² Baker-Fletcher, “More than Suffering,” 158. To clarify, by ‘womanish’ women, Hayes refers to the expression of Black feminist women.

of liberation, which is the hope for the future.”³³ Coupled with Mamie Till-Mobley’s public grief, this view of the Virgin Mary becomes crucial in considering ways in which women in Latin America can pursue justice. Just like Mamie Till-Mobley, women in Latin America must come together and let Latin American society and the world witness their desperation and frustration. By lamenting publicly, Mamie Till-Mobley pointed her finger and did not shy away from attributing blame. Likewise, women and others fighting against femicides—those who have lost their daughters, mothers, sisters, friends—have the power to express that enough is enough. Through public outcry, people can stop perpetrators of violence and prevent society from turning a blind eye to femicides.

Johnson acknowledges this need for solidarity in her interpretation of John 19:25-27, calling all to embrace each other in their anguish in the face of death. Women and people in general must create space or *comunidades* of agency and strength. This need for unity becomes especially relevant in the Latin American context where those affected by femicide, as well as their allies, must not only embrace the support of their already established *familias* and *comunidades* but also invite others into them. *Comunidades* can be created for those who grieve, protect, and work to dismantle the systems of oppression that enable femicides. Mary serves as the necessary guide in achieving this solidarity: “the memory of Mary near the cross abides, galvanizing nonviolent action to stop the violence as the only appropriate expression of faith.”³⁴

A primary example of this unifying theology is apparent in Ciudad Juárez. Women use the symbol of the cross to claim space, to claim justice, and to confront their pain together. In March 2002, the *Ni Una Más* coalition and *Mujeres de Negro* (“Women in Black”) led a march from Chihuahua City to the Paso del Norte International Bridge in Ciudad Juárez. The two-hundred-and-thirty-mile trek began on March 8: International Women’s Day. The women who marched (mothers, *campesinas*, professionals, etc.), “wore long black dresses and pink hats, the symbol of women in a perpetual state of mourning for Juárez’s daughters.”³⁵ Diana Washington describes the arrival of the marchers at the Paso del Norte Bridge in downtown Ciudad Juárez:

³³ Baker-Fletcher, “More than Suffering,” 158.

³⁴ Johnson, “Dangerous Memories,” 156.

³⁵ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 102.

‘When the protesters arrived . . . several of them climbed off a truck that had transported a large and impressive cross from Chihuahua City. They hooked up power tools and began to install it at the foot of the international bridge. The wooden cross was attached to a large metal panel, about twelve feet high, and which glistened with metal spikes. A sign at the top of the cross proclaimed “*Ni Una Más*” (Not one more). Other ornaments, including a plastic torso of a woman at the bottom of the cross, gave the new border fixture an eerily abstract quality. Tags with the names of victims, some labeled “unknown,” were affixed to the metal spikes.’³⁶

Since then, “this cross installation has become a shrine for grieving family, friends, and others who demand that the violence end. It serves as a public symbol of protest against the violence that as of this writing has still not ended.”³⁷ After the march, people continued to raise crosses where the bodies of women were found. The crosses were pink and bore the names of the victims on the crossbars. This practice continues to serve as a way for women and other protesters to reclaim Ciudad Juárez, to transform it into a place of love and support where violence is no longer permitted. Acknowledging the women who have been killed and proclaiming their names restores their humanity. By painting the crosses pink, protestors do not let anyone forget that these victims were women. The pink paint serves as an essential visual reminder that women have been and continue to be killed simply because they are women. Like Mamie Till-Mobley and the performers of “Un violador en tu camino,” the crosses hold society accountable for femicide. Protestors join as a suffering *comunidad*, demanding an end to the oppression, violence, and *machismo* that still clouds Latin America.

Looking back on the march in Córdoba, Argentina, I realize that we were just that—a *comunidad* of people, especially women, who were tired of having to prove their worth and humanity. “Vivas nos queremos” (We want each other alive) is not a cry for help; it is a demand for justice for those we have lost and for the women who have been lucky enough to survive. We want to live in a world where we do not have to be afraid, and where little girls can grow up knowing that their humanity will be respected and protected by society. It will take time and work to dismantle the systems and symbols of oppression—including religiously informed constructs—that have been forced upon people. However, through *comunidad* and *familia*, and guided by the memory of the Virgin Mary, we can strive for a better tomorrow.

³⁶ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 102.

³⁷ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 103.

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