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¡No Fue Suicidio, Fue Feminicidio!: Ambivalent Facts in the (Un)making of Feminicide in Mexico

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This article examines how feminicide in Mexico emerges as an ambivalent phenomenon, arguing that it materializes not despite but precisely through tensions in forensic, legal, activist, and media practices. Challenging assumptions that feminicide precedes these socio-technical processes, this study highlights how state institutions, forensic evidence, and feminist activism co-constitute feminicide through complex practices of refusal, misclassification, and resistance. Institutional complicity and activist counter-narratives simultaneously obscure and validate feminicide as a sociolegal reality. Drawing on Karen Barad's agential realism and the forensic theories of Corinna Kruse, Thomas Keenan, and Eyal Weizman, this analysis demonstrates how the ambivalence of factuality shapes the visibility, recognition, and epistemic authority surrounding feminicide cases. Ultimately, the article foregrounds how the struggle over what counts as feminicide—expressed through numerical data, forensic classifications, and activist interventions—produces paradoxical conditions of both erasure and hypervisibility, complicating feminist demands for justice and accountability within a state that is simultaneously complicit in and legitimized by gendered violence.

Keywords: feminicide, Mexico, forensics, materialization, facts, ambivalence, complicity

Ambivalent Certainty: "10 Women Are Being Killed in Mexico Every Day"

In 2021, Amnesty International released a report detailing the failures in criminal investigations of feminicides in the State of Mexico, consistently among the country's most violent regions for women (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI], 2021). The report highlighted that across the nation, the federal government reported a total of 3,723 killings of women in 2020, of which only 940 were investigated as feminicides (Centro de Estudios para el Logro de la Igualdad de Género. Cámara de Diputados, 2022). "This means," the report states, "that at least 10 women were killed every day in Mexico throughout 2020" (Amnesty International, 2021, p. 1), an average that first emerged in 2018 (Kánter Coronel, 2020) and has remained steady over the past five years (Rea, Carrión, & Salmerón, 2024). The number of women reported as killed each year has continued to rise since the early 1990s, when activists, scholars, filmmakers, searching mothers, and their families began documenting the systematic forced disappearance of girls and women, followed by the finding of their dead bodies in the northern border city

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of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, drawing local, national, and international media coverage and academic attention (Fregoso, 2023).

Scholars and journalists (Driver, 2015; Monárrez Fragoso, 2000) have shown the impossibility of tracing feminicide in Juárez to an original case or date due to systemic misclassification, lack of specificity in language (Rivera Garza, 2021), and ignored or erased records (Portillo, 2003). Despite advances in legislation, theory, data collection, and forensic protocols, statistics remain unreliable and contested. Therefore, the total number of victims over the past 30 years in Juárez remains unknown. Estimates of the number of victims vary from dozens to thousands, depending on the source, the years considered, fluctuations in crime categorization, and the number of reports that can be located and verified, either independently or institutionally (Cervera Gómez & Monárrez Fragoso, 2013). Even today, despite advancements in language, legislation, theory, data, civic activism, and both citizen-led and state-led institutional and forensic protocols, official statistics and recorded numbers continue to be seen as unreliable, tainted, or fabricated. This results in a continuous struggle for "accuracy" among the various organizations, collectives, families, activists, and authorities involved.

In this context, families, activists, independent journalists, and women's collectives have played a vital role in revealing the scale of feminicide. In Ciudad Juárez, they opposed the authorities' claims that the killings were isolated, resulting from the victims' poor judgment, morals, and marginalized social positions. Authorities in Chihuahua often justified the victims' deaths on these grounds, linking them to criminal activities, sex work, drug abuse, and unnecessary public exposure, whereby "their moral conduct did not respond to the category of a victim" (Subprocuraduría de Justicia del Estado-Zona Norte, 1998, cited by Monárrez Fragoso, 2000, p. 91). The re-victimization tactics were soon contested, and over the years, the number of recorded cases, both officially and independently, increased from dozens to thousands, spreading from Ciudad Juárez to the rest of the country. While the work of scholars like De Alba (2003), Pantaleo (2010), and Weissman (2005) offers important insights into the specific temporal, socioeconomic, and spatial conditions of the 1990s in Ciudad Juárez by linking the systematic murder of women to the widespread proliferation of the *Maquiladoras* along Mexico's border cities, a consequence of the neoliberal trade policies adopted at the time (NAFTA), it overlooks the phenomenon's national evolution over time.

In Juárez in the 1990s, once a "problem" was acknowledged under pressure from the activism of the victims' families, the primary line of investigation became the master narrative of a serial killer murdering women without reason. Despite the convictions of presumed serial killers, members of organized crime, "deviant assassins," criminal gangs, and other alleged perpetrators (Ponce-Cordero, 2016), the killings continued. This narrative, still widely exploited by the media, serves as a strategy for authorities to deflect attention from themselves. As García-del Moral (2011) has thoroughly analyzed, "this narrative is a means to negate societal responsibility for the crimes, as well as for the reproduction of violence through representation" (p. 51). The punitive logic and media theatrics of justice, while once at least performatively potent, have never fundamentally addressed the multilayered complexity of feminicide in Mexico and the complicit role of the authorities, the justice system, and the state apparatus. Conversely, this performance of "justice" carried out by the Mexican state may ultimately justify its increasing gender-policing tactics, indiscriminate criminalization, and legitimacy while obscuring its own investigative failures.

More recently, broadcast and digital media platforms have played a critical role in enabling public oversight, demanding transparency, and exposing inconsistencies in reports and misleading information. Historically, investigative lines have been biased and laden with misogynistic assumptions. Today, the few forensic reports that have been made public are often flawed and contradictory, while many case files remain incomplete, inaccessible, or never even initiated despite repeated requests from victims' families.

The case of Frida Sofia exemplifies this enduring systemic failure. After her feminicide in 2015, authorities failed to investigate the killing, despite persistent pressure from family and friends. It was not until 2022—eight years after the victim was first reported missing—and after six other cases of unresolved feminicides occurred in the area that Iztacalco's Persecutor's Office admitted to losing Frida Sofia's file, attempting to justify their failure to investigate the case despite a well-established connection and photographic evidence linking the perpetrator to the victim (Flores Hernandez, 2024). A subsequent home search revealed human remains and objects believed to belong to victims dating back to 2012 (Zayago, 2024). To date, no official report has confirmed or denied the investigation's findings, and more victims continue to be linked—without forensic confirmation or documentation—to the individual now known as *El feminicida de Iztacalco.*

On February 24, 2025, Frida Sofia's mother and two other mothers of presumed victims of Miguel "N" gathered in front of the General Attorney's Office, demanding an audience with the authorities. They have not received their daughters' remains, nor have they been allowed access to the investigation files. Meanwhile, *El feminicida de Iztacalco* spent a year in prison,[1] but no DNA tests, autopsy reports, or other forensic examinations were conducted or made public. To this day, there is no official confirmation that the remains belong to either Frida Sofia or any of the other victims attributed to Miguel "N" (Mares, 2025).

Frida Sofia's case represents countless others in which feminicide investigations have faced delays and neglect and would ultimately have been forgotten without the relentless digital, media, and street activism that resists the erasure of victims' names, faces, and stories. While official files and forensic reports continue to "disappear" with alarming efficiency and protocols are routinely ignored, activist digital archives are thriving, documenting and denouncing not only the increasing toll of victims but also the decades-long complicity of the Mexican state. The activism of families fosters collective awareness across the nation as more relatives of victims increasingly demand that prosecution offices recognize, address, and treat cases with specificity. The role of activist families has not been passive. Their efforts expose the irregularities in forensic reports, miscategorization of crimes, institutional violence, and media sensationalism that they are forced to endure, following and expanding the strategies that originated in Juárez over 30 years ago (Fregoso, 2023).

It is important to recognize how the Mexican state and authorities investigating feminicide sustain this phenomenon and its resulting impunity. The assumption of complicity presupposes intent, strategic

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[1] Miguel "N" died in prison on May 13, 2025. National and International journals reported that according to the information provided, he fell in his cell while asleep. He presumably died from intoxication and subsequent cardiac failure. Miguel Cortés was undergoing "medical treatment" and was isolated from the rest of the inmates (See Varela, 2025).

actions, and awareness of participation for a desired outcome. While this analysis extends beyond this project, a deeper examination of state complicity in feminicide urgently needs attention. I do not imply that the authorities or the Mexican state are innocent in these crimes; rather, I aim to emphasize complicity's multiplicity (Mol, 2002) and multivalence. Complicity in feminicide manifests intentionally and unintentionally, driven by ignorance, neglect, resource shortages, poor infrastructure, power dynamics, threats, or inadequate training. As an analytical focus, complicity transcends institutions, including authorities, experts, activists, and allies. Agnotology—the study of ignorance (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008) and its epistemologies (Martín Alcoff, 2007)—provides new inquiry avenues for Latin American feminist scholars studying feminicide, facilitating engagement with the implications of state and institutional complicity. In this article, complicity is understood in its multiplicity and ambivalence as both passive and active, highlighting its connection to forms of ignorance. This approach does not minimize the responsibility of institutions and authorities in perpetuating feminicide but suggests that complicity's multiplicity and ambivalence are productive forces crucial for sustaining feminicide through the non-production of knowledge (Cruz-Santiago, 2020; Wright, 2017).

Despite their lack of credibility, forensic reports, open files, numerous frozen cases, and the few that are investigated and communicated, along with case classifications and the convictions reached, all contribute to a general sense of the scope of the phenomenon. Despite discrepancies among statistics, scientific reports, and judicial rulings, the numerical representation of feminicides in Mexico has been central to activist discourse, media reports, and authorities' accountability performances, as well as responses at local, national, and international levels. Official and independent maps, charts, projects, and graphics circulate continuously, illustrating how many women were killed, sometimes categorized by age, location, month, year, ethnicity, or comparison with previous administrations. The combined variables used in each dataset vary greatly, so the reported numbers rarely align and are historically higher than those from the federal government (Castellanos, 2024). The discrepancies between the reported numbers, their methodologies, and their sources remain in constant tension. As scholar Catherine D'Ignazio (2024) highlighted in her recent work *Counting Feminicide*, the practices and efforts put forth by data activists and counterdata production, along with the methodologies and distribution strategies employed across Latin American countries, provide a model for developing counterexpertise and alternative epistemologies of data science in the service of justice.

Nonetheless, in cases of feminicide, activists' battle for factualization has evolved significantly, aiming to stabilize public discourse and perceptions about the speed and spread of this phenomenon in Mexico. As Lenoir (1998) argues, science constructs its objects through "differential making" and stabilizes them through public forms that produce and circulate meaning. In this view, technologies of communication and representation become fundamental to how objects are made knowable and enduring (p. 12). In this context, numbers emerged as a pioneering representational technology: a way to gain institutional recognition and counter the invisibility of victims. The independent production of victim lists was, in Cruz-Santiago's (2020) words, "one of the first tools of a form of citizen-led technology: it challenged local authorities' expertise, opened up the issue of missing women to be publicly discussed and…brought to an end the state's monopoly on criminal data" (p. 367).

The complexity of quantification across activist and institutional fronts produced an average that stabilized the phenomenon. The statement "Ten women are killed across México every day" gained significant traction. Using averages to communicate the phenomenon provided strength and authority to the claims for justice, driving the contemporary Mexican feminist movement, including legal recognition and visibility. However, the frequent use of this claim requires deeper analysis, as it has political, social, and gendered implications. Shedding light on how the number is constructed, who is counted, which sources are accepted without scrutiny, and the impact on living women when they hear they are at risk daily is crucial.

Latin American scholars have theorized the material, social, symbolic, and political implications of feminicides in Juárez. Notably, Julia Estela Monárrez-Fragoso (2000, 2010), Rita-Laura Segato (2010), Rosa-Linda Fregoso (2023), Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cinthia Bejarano (2010), and Sergio González Rodríguez (2012) analyze the institutional forces that shape and reproduce the phenomenon, the political and social implications of the killings, and the collective efforts triggered by those who resist, represent, count, and memorialize the victims. *The Routledge International Handbook on Femicide and Feminicide* (Dawson & Vega, 2023) provides critical comparative perspectives on legislation, data gathering, and international law addressing feminicide. Contributions from scholars and activists have advanced the understanding of this complex phenomenon, offering new inquiry routes and critical approaches to gender-based violence from multidisciplinary, intersectional, and feminist perspectives.

However, feminicide is often treated as a given in these contributions, with Ciudad Juárez recognized as the birthplace from which feminicide emerged. The assumption that feminicide is a form of violence separated from its institutional, legal, and sociocultural production underlies much of the cause-and-effect reasoning used by interdisciplinary experts. Scholars have attributed its persistence to various factors: patriarchal structures (Radford & Russell, 1992), the disposability of women's lives (Segato, 2010), institutional corruption, and organized crime (González Rodríguez, 2012). These efforts seek to identify feminicide's "source/s"—a framing that raises significant concerns. Positioning feminicide as a problem the state must "solve" or "eradicate" suggests it exists separate from and outside the state itself. This framing enables and legitimizes official discourses surrounding feminicide as both a means to enhance state power and gendered surveillance and as a way to sanitize its image, obscuring how institutions are complicit in the materialization and endurance of this phenomenon.

Far less attention has been paid to how feminicide materializes through the co-constitution of forensic, legal, and public discourses. This includes the role of forensic evidence and criminal investigations in the (un)making of feminicide cases, the construction of statistics and averages, and the support or refusal of a legal framework that triggers activist, media, and public responses. This project emphasizes how activist and public participation shape and challenge expert rulings and the (re)articulation of facts, evidence, and narratives. By examining how feminicide is objectified—how it takes shape across social, legal, and material realms—it becomes clear that efforts to reveal its complexity often reinforce state power. Forensic experts are seen to "show" the facts, which then enter the legal sphere where justice is selectively allocated. When it fails, activists respond, resisting impunity. This article proposes that these processes, rather than operating in opposition, intra-act (Barad, 2007) to materialize and perpetuate feminicide.

Thus, this project asks: How does feminicide come to—and into—matter? The following sections interrogate the complex negotiations over matter, meaning, and representation that emerge through forensic evidence, public discourse, the victim's body, and the porous legal and political context in which feminicide is negotiated, articulated, quantified, resisted, and ultimately materialized. This work contributes to the fields of Communication and Critical Media Studies by enhancing the understanding of state power, violence, and justice. It centers ambivalence as an operative concept to illuminate the paradoxes, tensions, and contradictions necessary for feminicide to emerge as a phenomenon in the world. Etymologically, ambivalence stems from the Latin *ambi*—both, and *valere*—"to be strong, effective, have worth" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Here, ambivalence marks the opposing yet coexisting forces that both sustain and resist feminicide, without which it could not come to and into matter.

The co-constitution of forensic evidence, official data, public debate, and activist counterdata shapes not only the *corpus delicti* (the criminal body) but also the discursive-material body of the victims. This project argues that it is not the victim's material body that defines feminicide; instead, feminicide emerges through social, political, expert, legal, digital, activist, and material tensions over how that body is inscribed. This struggle shapes the victim's life and death precisely because it initially denies recognition as feminicide. It emerges not as a given but as a contested object shaped through refusals, misclassifications, and evidentiary struggles.

Following Karen Barad's (2007) theory of "agential realism," which posits no separation between the material and sociocultural realms, I analyze how forensic practices, state power, victim-counting, and evidentiary discourses intra-act to materialize feminicide. This article focuses on epistemology, arguing that feminicide is neither inherent nor simply the outcome of misogyny or state impunity. Instead, feminicide is produced and productive, materialized through discourses, expert practices, institutions, public responses, and activism that both authorize and resist it. The struggle for recognition, inclusion in statistics, and higher conviction rates by victims' families reflects not only the state's impunity but also its refusal and even the incompetence of Mexican authorities. I argue that it illustrates the rather ambivalent and dynamic nature of feminicide as a phenomenon, crime, and socially constructed fact with profound political implications. Building on Corinna Kruse's (2010) work at the intersection of forensic evidence and materiality—particularly her view of materiality as "an activity rather than an intrinsic quality" involving technoscientific and cultural practices (p. 2)—this project examines forensics as a materialization apparatus. It both enables and constrains feminicide's visibility. Through a focus on material-discursive entanglements and (dis)articulation, I explore how forensics is produced, categorized, and mediated in ways that ambivalently facilitate and obstruct the recognition, materialization, and representation of feminicide.

Ambivalent Concepts and Ambivalent Facts: Criminalizing, Proving, and Countercounting Feminicide

Criminalizing and Proving

The Mexican Criminal Code at the federal level criminalizes feminicide in Article 325 since June 2012, defining it as any murder committed for gender-based reasons. For a murder of a woman to be investigated as feminicide, one of the following criteria is considered a gender-based reason: 1) the victim exhibits signs

of sexual assault of any kind before or after the murder; 2) the victim has been inflicted degrading injuries or mutilations before or after the deprivation of her life, or acts of necrophilia; 3) there is evidence of any form of violence in the family, work, or school environment, perpetrated by the offender against the victim; 4) there has been a sentimental, affective, or trustworthy relationship between the perpetrator and the victim; 5) there is information that can establish a history of harassment, threats, or injuries related to the crime, between the victim and the perpetrator; 6) victims have been placed in solitary confinement, abducted, or restrained; and 7) the victim's body has been exposed and displayed in public space.

The criminalization of feminicide demands, first and foremost, the presence of a biological female body and assumes its ability to convey the perpetrator's intent transparently—that is, as a fact. The classification of feminicide as a crime has significantly increased its public visibility, advanced the efforts of independent organizations and activists, and enabled them to establish Civic Observatories of Feminicide and counterdata collectives, among other initiatives. In theory, any of the criteria mentioned should be sufficient for a case to be investigated as feminicide until proven otherwise; however, this is often not the reality. In practice, discovering a female body does not serve as proof or evidence of crime and victimhood; instead, it must be produced as such. Kruse (2010) reflects on the relationship between crimes and victims by noting that

> an action cannot be called a crime before a conviction; and without a crime, there cannot be a victim […] Thus, a crime is materialized alongside a criminal body through an apparatus of technology, technoscientific and legal practices as well as other sociocultural practices of creating meaning. (p. 10)

Thus, the criminalization of feminicide necessitates the body to be produced first as a *body*—specific to the crime of feminicide, not as just any body. This ruling ultimately transcends laboratory testing practices, forensic examinations, and the physicality of the body itself. As Singh and Moore (2020) clarify, "Although declaring cause of death falls squarely on the shoulders of the forensic pathologist, it is rarely an outcome of pure medical science or developed through the sole observation of the corpse" (p. 290). In this context, examining various cases within the Mexican framework reveals the evident—and necessary—resistance, refusal, or, at the very least, neglect or ignorance from authorities to acknowledge these as feminicides. It is in their refusal that the body emerges not merely as a body but as a victim of feminicide. In her theorization, Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde (2006; 2010) introduced the term *feminicidio*, asserting that feminicide, unlike femicide (Radford & Russell, 1992), emphasizes the complicity of the state (Lagarde, 2006, p. 223). This implies that the killing of a woman cannot be discursively and materially recognized as feminicide without first being refused by state apparatus. As Barad (2007) points out, "Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said" (Ch. 4, para. 2). The rulings of scientific and forensic experts play a crucial role in determining how evidence gathered at the crime scene transforms into facts related to the killing and how these are articulated in relation to the body, the crime, the victim, the law, the public, and the surrounding discourse on the murder. As Daston (2005) emphasizes, facts "must painstakingly stabilize evanescent effects or ingeniously combine several strands of evidence into a strong, weight-bearing cord. […] facts are not given, but made, artifacts in the best sense of the word" (p. 680).

The state's refusal to recognize feminicide makes it complicit in it. However, only then can feminicide be embodied, claimed, suspected, and factualized. The state's resistance undermines its legibility across various institutions: forensic, statistical, legal, media, and political. Paradoxically, it also serves as the initial condition of possibility for feminicide to come (in)to matter. This highlights the ambivalent fulcrum organizing feminicide and the discursive-material practices that, from an agential realist perspective, are specific reconfigurations of the world shaping boundaries, properties, and meanings of phenomena (Barad, 2007).

At the federal level, Mexico has a protocol for feminicide cases to guide experts and authorities in investigations while prioritizing the victim's dignity and treating it as gender-based violence. This includes proper crime scene handling, conducting necessary examinations, and ensuring transparency for victims' families. However, the state-level situation is more complex. Some states, like Tamaulipas, Durango, and Baja California, lack developed protocols for investigating feminicide. Most existing protocols are alarmingly outdated, especially in Michoacán, Jalisco, Oaxaca, and San Luis Potosí, with no updates since their introduction over a decade ago between 2011 and 2015 (Jiménez Ríos, 2023). In Michoacán, a notably violent state, prosecution offices often neglect feminicide investigation protocols (Juárez Navarro, 2023). By the end of 2024, the *Centro Nacional de Información* (National Information Center) reported 145 violent murders of women (García, 2024), while the *Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública* (Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System) stated that Michoacán recorded 167 for the same period (Cortés Eslava, 2025). Only 14 cases were classified as feminicide, representing 9.6% of the first agency's figures, and 8.3% of the second. In July 2024, Sayda Yadira Blanco Morfín, head of the *Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres* (National Commission to Prevent and Erradicate Violence against Women), praised Michoacán's government, claiming that "the statistics [were] being reverted with a greater impact on prevention […] from January to May 2023, eleven femicides were recorded, and this year [2024], eight, 27 percent less" (Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 2024, para. 3). Despite official data, the figures remain unclear and inconsistent. Meanwhile, the government continues its theatrics of "facts," congratulating itself on women's safety "progress."

After the 2009 ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case of González et al. (*Campo Algodonero) vs. Mexico*, which held the Mexican state responsible for the murders of Claudia Ivette González, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal, and Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez, specialized prosecution offices for feminicide were to be established nationwide to develop standardized criteria and a gender perspective for investigating murdered women, as well as to provide training for properly assisting victims and their families (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2009). Today, however, more than a decade later, five of the country's 30 states still lack specialized prosecution offices for feminicide. Only one or two offices exist statewide in 18 others, including Michoacán, with one (Vázquez Correa, 2024). This indicates that although protocols and legislative changes are being developed, the authorities responsible for investigating feminicide cases are not monitored, receive little to no training, lack resources, and are not held accountable for how they handle these cases.

The paradox between refusal and recognition brought about by the criminalization of feminicide has granted the state apparatus—legal, judicial, media, and forensic—the authority to define the conditions, facts, geographical locations, and demographics under which it can appear and be inscribed.

Its institutional recognition has enabled the state to determine what constitutes feminicide, first as a possibility and ultimately as a reality. This informs the scientific practices investigating it, enforcing norms around torture, sexual assault, and other gender-based violence indicative of feminicide, including their visibility, legibility, circumstances, and the material traces it should leave behind to be deemed legitimate. The criminalization of feminicide may ultimately be vulnerable to judgment, prejudice, pressure, ignorance, disparities in resource access, and differences in epistemic authority and power dynamics among investigators, activists, and experts.

Central to the issue of criminalization is the various ways the killing of a woman can be inscribed and taken into or out of the feminicide statistics. According to Martinez (2024), out of the 7,005 violent killings of women that presented a legal basis for them to be investigated as feminicide from 2015 to 2021, 1,280 were classified as either *Homicidio Doloso or Homicidio Culposo* (intentional or accidental homicides). Martinez reveals that among the 2,180 misclassified cases, 65 victims were beaten, 28 were sexually abused before being murdered, 42 were forcibly disappeared, 5 suffered institutional abuse when reporting, and 94 were killed by their partners, 177 by a relative, 86 by a caretaker, and 32 by a co-worker. Additionally, 35 of the cases were labeled accidental deaths despite showing signs of torture, injury, and sexual abuse. This pattern of misclassification exemplifies how the complicity of the authorities in its multiple forms is enacted, recorded, and transformed into facts and oblivion. The ambivalent forces and actors at play here both obscure and illuminate, communicate and silence, factualize and fictionalize, and refuse and materialize feminicide.

The criminal prosecution of feminicide, as it stands today, reinforces both the binary construction of gender based on sex differences and the colonial standards of beauty and worth. These reinforcements create categories that render some bodies more valuable than others, making them more publicly visible and countable. In this context, factors such as race, ethnicity, age, reproductive capacity, size, legal status, and ableness—among others—play a role in determining how to (dis)articulate the evidence related to feminicide. Cases against elderly women illustrate particularly severe patterns of underreporting and neglect. For example, the 2021 feminicide of Agustina Martínez Rojo in Azcapotzalco, State of Mexico (Bustamante Sánchez, Méndez Castellanos, & Santiago, 2024); the sexual abuse and killing of an unnamed 80-year-old woman in Xalapa, Veracruz (Salazar, 2021); the case of a 67-year-old woman in Atlixco, Puebla (Ramírez, 2021), and the sexual abuse and murder of Melisa "N," a 72-year-old in Milpa Alta, Mexico City (Fuentes, 2021), all demonstrate this trend. Typically, victims' names are omitted from media coverage, feminicide is not categorized as such, and investigations often remain incomplete if initiated at all. Collectives advocating for elderly women reported that, of the 60 feminicides recorded in Mexico City from 2012 to 2023, no information was publicly available for 38 cases (Andrade, 2024). Similarly, trans-feminicides, institutionally recognized only in Mexico City and Nayarit, exemplify further forms of erasure and underreporting. Moreover, feminicides involving sex workers and migrants in transit are often misclassified; between 2019 and 2021, 92% of female migrant murders were attributed to organized crime without further investigation (Lemus, 2021).

I argue that the criminalization of feminicide has significantly shaped expert judgments about which bodies qualify as victims. Monárrez Fragoso (2000) asserts that "the message of sexual terrorism is for all [...] post-mortem women are scrutinized in their conduct to justify, one way or the other, they were

deserving of such death, according to the patriarchal construction of the feminine conduct" (p. 91). Although criminalization intended to subvert such assumptions and hold authorities accountable, I contend that it has paradoxically provided them with seemingly "factual" grounds to mask masculinist biases, weaponizing their epistemic authority against victims and the phenomenon of feminicide. Thus, its criminal persecution embodies ambivalence: It marks crucial progress for Mexico's contemporary women's movement while simultaneously enabling authorities to dismiss cases individually through claims of insufficient evidence, procedural neglect, lack of investigation lines, or mismanagement. This active production of ignorance reinforces the Mexican state's complicity yet also provides the very conditions of possibility for feminicide to be articulated. Drawing from agential realism, I assert that feminicide is not a fixed and stable category preexisting the bodies it produces and the practices and objects that investigate it. Feminicide is not simply a term attached to an already present reality; it is materially and discursively produced by—and simultaneously productive of—the ambivalent facts that shape it.

Counting and Countercounting Feminicide

Over the decades, a growing number of activists, organizations, independent journalists, and women's collectives that pushed for the recognition of feminicide focused their efforts on mapping, counting, reporting, documenting, and charting cases. This was long before feminicide was commonly known and institutionally recognized. The collective effort to count feminicide critically contributed to the general awareness of the phenomenon, mobilizing others to do the same. The data activists quickly understood that it was not until the victims' bodies were counted that they became too numerous to ignore and too significant to be deemed merely symptomatic of a larger issue. In the 90s, feminicide needed to be expressed in a language of power; a language that conveyed measurements, reports, charts, maps, averages, and numbers, which was regarded as intelligible and impartial. A language of facts. Howlett and Morgan (2011) assert that "facts are 'independent' of their explanations—a quality that goes back to their legal sense discussed by Shapiro (1994), where 'matters of fact'—deeds or actions—are established independently of their motivations" (p. 9). However, in the killing of women, motivation, interpretation, and explanation are precisely what is at stake in defining feminicide and what the struggle over the authority and legitimacy of the reported numbers entails.

On their own, the killings might not have accounted for anything but uncategorized deaths, accidents, tragedies, crimes of passion, presumed suicides, or homicides at the hands of deviant individuals. However, when articulated together—the cases and the treatment they receive—reveal institutional omissions, corruption, impunity, and a system of organized ignorance and complicity embedded across all levels of power. Discrepancies between official and activist numbers initially proved generative, illuminating the lack of institutional attention given to most cases. The practice of counterdata science—"data production, analysis, visualization and circulation […] outside of—and often in opposition to–mainstream counting institutions like governments and corporations" (D'Ignazio, 2024, p. 48)—is not unique to Mexico. Other regional initiatives have also developed their counting mechanisms and counterdata science strategies, circulating new forms of women's resistance, protests, and performances. The synergy across borders and the affordances of the digital space facilitated the drawing of parallels across and beyond Latin America. Activists also realized that numerically representing feminicide helped build bridges, strengthening solidarity

networks through performances, chants, and other shared protest forms, while developing intellectual contributions and alternative feminist epistemologies of knowledge production.

While it is true that data activists have made significant efforts to convey the numerical representation of the phenomenon alongside the personal stories of the victims, addressing power while caring for victims and families, there are limits to what numbers and statistics can do to subvert power structures that sustain and actively participate in the violence being denounced. With the proliferation of organized databases, maps, charts, and infographics, new challenges have emerged for families, activists, and authorities. Mexico moved from a lack of data about the women killed in Juárez to an excess of data about feminicide across the country. In its lack, as it is in its excess, the phenomenon has remained overwhelming and difficult to grasp. It is increasingly difficult to know what the numbers communicate and what is achieved when feminicide is spoken of in numbers. I want to highlight the tension between the factuality and assumed transparency of the numerical representations of feminicide and the complexity of what those numbers signify. Poovey (1998) connects the numerical representation of facts to the systems of knowledge production, noting

> On the one hand, as signs of (what looks like or passes as) counting, numbers seem to be simple descriptors of phenomenal particulars […] numbers seem to resist the biases that many people associate with conjecture or theory. On the other hand, […] to assign numbers to observed particulars is to make them amenable to the kind of knowledge system that privileges quantity over quality and equivalence over difference. (p. 4)

Quantifying feminicide and the killing of women presupposes oversimplification, risking the erasure of those whom the numbers represent and reducing their purpose to tallying, as many activists and scholars have noted. Yet, precisely this translation into numbers has given the movement, at least in part, the authority, attention, and increasingly more resources to resist the necropolitical gendered dynamics of the state. Data are both used and refused by activists and authorities. This tension—between communicating feminicides in numbers to affirm the factuality of women's claims and simultaneously refusing the official data—proves the ambivalence of facts and the complex position numbers occupy in materializing feminicide. I argue that attention needs to be paid to this dynamic whereby the contemporary women's movement in Mexico claims that there is a systematic refusal of the state to count and, thus, to acknowledge the systemic occurrence of this phenomenon, while simultaneously using data as proof of the factuality of this phenomenon.

Forensic Evidence and the (Dis)articulation of the Crime of Feminicide

The "scientization of factual inquiry" (Damaska, 1997, cited by Murphy, 2007, p. 722) increasingly legitimizes scientific discourses of evidence in criminal cases through technologies such as DNA retrieval, laboratory testing, and data mining. The technologization and digitalization of forensic techniques further establish their factuality and epistemic authority by claiming to produce proof of the crime and the perpetrator's culpability—seemingly without human bias. As Keenan and Weizman (2012) note,

> Forensics is …not simply about science but also about the presentation of scientific findings, about science as an art of persuasion. Derived from the Latin *forensis*, the word's root refers to the "forum," and thus to the practice and skill of making an argument before a professional, political, or legal gathering. (p. 28)

The scientization of factual inquiry promotes the notion that forensic apparatus allows us to see "objectively." However, in feminicide cases preceded by the victim's disappearance, I argue that the phenomenon is denied by the very mechanisms designed to validate and detect it. Cases of human disappearances imply the absence of the victims and their traces, making it impossible to restore the "matter of fact" that leads to a crime. Similarly, in cases of feminicide, scientific validation falls short in objectively asserting intent without interpretation; How, then, does the forensic apparatus trace the untraceable, allowing the disappeared women to be acknowledged and the crime of feminicide to come (in)to matter?

Forensics and its experts play a significant role in reconstructing the women's whereabouts and the causes of their deaths. They retrieve, process, and interpret the fragmented information inscribed on the body, the scene, and the environment. Like data, forensic evidence does not speak for itself but in relation to the system that articulates it. Toxicology reports and anthropological analyses may reinforce revictimization by questioning the victim's credibility, even as they expose institutional bias. As Keenan and Weizman (2012) write

> The forum provides the technology with which such claims and counterclaims on behalf of objects can be presented and contested. […] the arena, the protocols of appearance and evaluation, and the experts. The forum is not a given space but produced through a series of entangled performances. (p. 29)

In feminicide cases, the forensic apparatus assumes the body is an epistemic object capable of speaking. Forensic anthropologist William D. Haglund once said, "The dead speak to us. The dead tell us the same story that the living told the investigators" (Keenan, 2014, p. 35). However, this view overlooks the fact that forensic knowledge is not prosopopoeia but requires human interpretation, which is inherently partial, temporally, spatially, culturally situated, and technologically constrained. Interpretation is not limited to humans but is shaped by and shapes technologies, classification systems, techniques, and discourses. As Kruse (2010) highlights,

> forensic evidence […] points to society's precedence to matter over meaning [….] it neglects and underestimates its discursive dimension and with it the mutability of meaning. Regarding forensic evidence as solidly rooted in matter leads to overconfidence in its immutability and its ability to provide impartial and certain knowledge. (p. 11)

I argue that feminicide, in its specificity, does not appear on the body—it is enacted. Expanding Keenan and Weizman's (2012) assertion that "forensics is not about the single object in isolation, but rather about … the flexible network between people and things, humans and non-humans, be they documents, images, weapons, skulls, or ruins" (p. 65), I contend that evidence does not reflect a preexisting reality but is articulated through refusal and absences. What is absent and cannot be validated––the erased traces,

missing bodies, and lack of material evidence––constitutes the basis on which families fight for recognition. As Rosenblatt (2015) states, "Forensic work requires gender-conscious analysis" (p. 176), but I further argue that it also demands the development of a gender-conscious ethics––one that considers, rather than disregards, what is absent, what is not legible to scientific testing, and what official science cannot make visible. The sociocultural biases embedded in forensic apparatuses must be acknowledged, as they shape how feminicide materializes. As Kruse (2010) writes:

> The materialization of bodies is widely connected to the very different parts of society. […] a body does not become so by virtue of a laboratory result alone, but by the meanings intertwined with it […] materializations bring about repercussions for the respective bodies' inhabitants, mandating, instigating, inhabiting, and prohibiting actions, and with them, particular subject positions. (p. 11)

In this context, forensic misclassification can be productive for both the victims' families and the authorities involved. On the one hand, the case can be easily overlooked, reducing numbers and allowing authorities to claim that they are fulfilling their duty to lower the incidence of crime, directly responding to activists' demands. On the other hand, when misclassification is exposed by the media, the public, and the victims' families, it can generate momentum of public visibility, often increasing indignation, multiplying resources, and enhancing the possibility of re-inscription. Cases first ruled as suicides and later reclassified as feminicides reveal how the phenomenon comes (in)to matter. These instances clearly demonstrate how the phenomenon comes (into) matter while also shedding light on the limitations of the material-discursive factualization of the phenomenon, the fragile material-discursive stability of facts and evidence, and the ambivalent and always-at-stake position of experts' epistemic authority.

Conclusion: *¡No Fue Suicidio, Fue Feminicidio!*

The recurrent misclassification of feminicides as suicides exemplifies the systemic mechanisms through which the phenomenon is obscured, contested, and, at times, reinscribed as a social, scientific, and institutional fact. Among the most emblematic is the case of Human Rights lawyer Digna Ochoa. Despite the omissions in the ballistic examinations, the manipulation of the crime scene, and a documented history of the threats and violence she endured, the suicide ruling was upheld for decades (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos México [CNDH], n.d.). Fernanda Sánchez Velarde's feminicide in 2014 also reveals stark forensic failures. Initially reported as suicide by her husband in 2013, inconsistencies in forensic findings, procedural irregularities, and public scrutiny led to a reevaluation of the case. Although experts at the scene claimed Fernanda had hanged herself and slit her wrists, it was later determined her wrists were cut post-mortem and that she had suffered severe physical injuries (Cadena, 2023; Chavarría, 2021). Her family and feminist activists exposed flaws in the autopsy, mishandling of evidence, and a broader refusal to treat the case as gender-based violence. These rulings are not oversights—they are artifacts of institutional denial, masquerading as objective forensic determinations.

Other cases include Lesvy Berlin Osorio's murder in 2017; Yolanda Martinez, who was killed in 2022 and whose case is still considered suicide today; Edna Reyes, who was killed in 2021; and Mariana Lima, who was killed in 2010. All these cases underscore that such misclassifications are not isolated errors but

part of an epistemic, juridical, and public structure that resists feminicide as a distinct phenomenon while paradoxically enabling its materialization.

By tracing the forums and practices through which feminicide comes (in)to matter, this project has shown that the authority of facts is neither neutral nor fixed. Facts are made, contested, and negotiated through refusals, activism, and political pressure. The delayed recognition of feminicide exposes a central paradox of legal, statistical, and forensic regimes: While they claim to produce objective truth, they operate within frameworks of gendered erasure that actively deny the material reality of feminicidal violence. This contradiction lays bare the stakes of scientific and political authority: whose knowledge counts, whose death is investigated, and whose reality is recognized by the state.

Ultimately, the arduous battles waged by victims' families and feminist activists illuminate the extent to which justice for feminicide is neither immediate nor guaranteed—it is instead negotiated over decades, fought in courts, contested in the media, and relentlessly pursued through activism. The slogan carried by Irinea Buendía next to her daughter's picture in her struggle to reclassify Mariana Lima's case—*¡Yo no me suicidé, tú me mataste!* (I did not commit suicide, you killed me)—encapsulates the core argument of this study: the misclassification of feminicides is not a neutral forensic or factual determination but a political act and enactment from which the possibility of feminicide both appears and is refused. It is through refusal that feminicide becomes visible, conditioned by what the state disavows. This raises urgent questions about how justice might be reimagined outside a carceral logic that ultimately reinforces and legitimizes the gendered necropolitical power of the Mexican state.

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