

CENTRE FOR MEXICAN STUDIES, UCC RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

THE VIOLENT BORDER 15 FEBRUARY 2013

O' RAHILLY BUILDING 1.24

This symposium will examine a range of recent cultural and popular responses to violence and insecurity in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The first session will address questions of violence and cultural production as they are explored in manifestations of literature, photography and music from or about the U.S.-Mexico Border. The second session will analyse a range of popular strategies for justice in a recent case study from Hermosillo.



OPENING ADDRESS
Nuala Finnegan, Centre for Mexican Studies, UCC

2 pm – 4 pm:

Sarah Bowskill, Queen's University Belfast
'Ciudad Juárez, When Reality becomes Fiction'

Notorious in the world's media for femicide, gangs, drug trafficking, police corruption, illegal border crossing and the maquila industry Ciudad Juárez has been the subject of documentaries, art exhibitions and *testimonio* accounts. Much cultural production about the border has been the work of human rights activists and academics working to improve conditions in the city and heighten international awareness with a view to bringing pressure to bear on the Mexican government. Strikingly, however, Ciudad Juárez is increasingly being used as the setting for contemporary popular fiction written in English. Recent examples include: *The Dead Women of Juarez* by Sam Hawken, *Lost in Juarez* by Douglas Lindsay, *The Crossing* by Gary Paulsen, *In the Shadows of Juárez: Victim 213* by Kathleen Smith O'Donnell and *Vampires of Ciudad Juárez* by Clanash Farjeon. This paper analyses fictional representations of events in Ciudad Juárez written in English to try to understand the current fascination with the city and explore how these texts negotiate a line between consciousness-raising and exploitation.

Jennie Galvin, NUI Galway

'El Movimiento Alterado: narrating a world of gender hierarchies, drugs and violence'

Narcocorridos are ballads about the drug trade which originate in a very specific northern Mexican *corrido* tradition, the so-called *corrido norteño*. The narcocorrido chronicles the world of drug dealing within the dispossessed sectors of particular border areas. The lyrics are influenced by various factors: the social relations that constitute gender hierarchies in Mexico, the music

industry itself and the local neighbourhood conditions of the musicians and their fans. The ballads also report the lifestyles of drug traffickers, sometimes justifying them and sometimes condemning them. A new wave of narcocorridos known as the *Movimiento Alterado* (M|A) has been reinventing and rejuvenating the genre with lyrics more explicit and more graphic than ever before. This movement emerged during one of the most violent periods of Mexico's history (2006-2012) and the songs mimic the high levels of brutality, with frequent imagery of torture, killings and dismemberment of bodies. Furthermore, the songs of the MA illuminate a certain kind of cultural valorisation of gender stereotypes in Mexico and it is thus surprising that little research exists on gender relations in the songs. By drawing on data from fieldwork carried out by this researcher in Mexico in 2012, as well as on the theory of hegemonic masculinity as developed by R.W. Connell, this paper will address issues of gender which are present in the music and assess whether they reflect the reality of this world where drug trafficking and gangland violence are the daily norm. It will further explore whether visions of gender only serve to perpetuate existing gender stereotypes of Mexico rather than challenge them.

Emer Clifford, Centre for Mexican Studies, University College Cork
'Twenty Years On: The Global Search for Lost Bodies'

Femicide - "the killing of females by males *because* they are females" (Russell, 1976) - is a term whose origins predate but its usage has dramatically increased since the brutal murders of females began in the Mexican-US border city of Ciudad Juárez. In 1993 - less than a year before the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect - the body of Alma Chavira Farel, deemed to be 'first' victim of these femicides, turned up in the desert outside Juárez. Since then, the liminal space of this borderland has become a dumping ground, for what Amnesty International estimates to be 800 female bodies. This figure however, does not take into consideration the approximated 600 women who have disappeared without a trace. Despite a lapse of twenty years since the body count began, for the most part these crimes remain unpunished. This paper will consider the transnational implications of these hate crimes against women, as reflected through the artistic lens of Yamina del Real's, *En el cuerpo deshabitado... o en busco del cuerpo perdido*. Exhibited in Mexico City in 2011, the work as the name suggests is split into two parts; each juxtaposing the suffering and death of women from two seemingly opposing social strata. In looking at the relationship between gender, class and geopolitics this paper will explore the artist's deconstruction of binaries and borders to reflect the universal theme of female suffering and an implication of global responsibility for the Juárez femicides.

COFFEE

SEATING AREA, HISPANIC STUDIES, FIRST FLOOR, BLOCK B, O'RAHILLY BUILDING

4:30 pm

Professor Wil Pansters, Centre for Mexican Studies, University of Groningen and Utrecht

'Resignation is something we cannot afford': The popular search for justice in violent Mexico

The generalization of violence and insecurity in Mexico, especially in the northern border region, during the last decade means that ever more citizens are involved in coming to terms with the direct consequences. Ten of thousands of people have been killed, many others injured or disappeared, and yet others forced to leave their homes. What becomes clear from accounts of the situation in Ciudad Juárez and other violence torn parts of Mexico is the silencing of grief and the unanswered calls for information and justice. What are the options of ordinary people in search for information and justice in circumstances of violence, impunity and sometimes even fear? This paper will not look at the ways how families of the casualties of drug related violence cope, but at the strategies and practices of those left behind by one of Mexico's most horrifying tragedies: the 2009 fire in a Hermosillo day care centre that killed 49 children and severely injured many more. A group of affected parents has sought and claimed justice, among others, in a series of what were called 'citizen trials'. This paper will examine these innovative legal practices, their main features and objectives and attempt to interpret their search for truth and justice.

SYMPOSIUM CLOSE AND RECEPTION

SEATING AREA, HISPANIC STUDIES, FIRST FLOOR, BLOCK B, O'RAHILLY BUILDING