

# Authors' Note

THE PEOPLE OF CIUDAD JUÁREZ WHO TELL their stories in these pages are neither composite nor fictional characters. A few gave permission to publish their first and last names. Others are identified by nicknames known only among their friends and families. A small number wanted to remain nameless. They all share memories of their experiences from 2006 through 2012, years when the streets of their city exploded with violence, years when President Felipe Calderón sent ten thousand federal forces into Ciudad Juárez.

A new lexicon that rose out of Ciudad Juárez during this six-year period is the core of our project, an investigation of the language and framework of a primary growth industry in this border city: crime. The following pages reveal that the Mexican State sponsors much of this crime. When not committed by the State, the government's policy of near impunity condones the crimes of others.

As with any attempt to capture slang, our efforts became history before these pages were bound. Some years after the drug trade's parallel economy rode into town, it was followed by thousands of soldiers and federal police. President Felipe Calderón implied that the resulting deaths of Juárez citizens were equivalent to an extermination of cockroaches. If ever there was an occasion for speechlessness, this was it. But in this city where Spanish and English collide, the streets exploded with words invented and adjusted to describe a world Juarenses had never seen.

Narratives based on Julián Cardona's interviews introduce individuals who speak a new dialect and provide firsthand accounts of the staggering collateral damage of "business as usual" in Juárez. Alice Leora Briggs's drawings reveal this environment as

unique but parallel to many instances of greed, torture, murder, and other abuses that decorate darker corners of human behavior.

Between 2008 and 2010, Briggs created her first renderings of *Abecedario de Juárez*, a mutable theater of tortures and executions, a pictorial Spanish alphabet in thirty-two panels. This homage to Juárez and Hans Holbein's *Alphabet of Death* sharpened her interest in the new vocabulary rising out of Juárez. She started to gather and study *narcotraficante*, gang, and street slang, as well as to create a visual record of the city. Her work is grounded by time spent in Juárez beginning in 2008.

Cardona, a resident of Ciudad Juárez since early childhood, conducted his initial interview in 2008 with crime victim Pastor Socorro García. She was present when masked gunmen entered a drug treatment clinic, opened fire on a religious service, and killed eight men. Cardona continued to conduct interviews to record the experiences of victims and perpetrators of Juárez crime. He also collected slang terms from the citizens of Juárez, including drug dealers and traffickers, professional killers, kidnappers, crime victims, government officials, reporters, human rights workers, and former police agents.

Examples include an elementary-school boy from a poor barrio who understands the liabilities and assets of his dream career as a professional killer; a preteen who divides and packages drugs for retail sales; a woman who wakes to the news of the day: her dinner guest from the night before is a decapitated corpse displayed on an overpass in the center of Juárez.

Briggs and Cardona worked independently of each other until late 2012, when writer Charles

Bowden pointed out that they had been conducting research on different facets of the same project. In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that it took a third party to point this out. An unusually open collaboration grew out of a Las Cruces meeting with Bowden. Cardona shared a number of photographs that Briggs used as reference material for drawings. Briggs and Cardona wrote and rewrote a burgeoning catalog of slang terms and Cardona's interview-based narratives over a period of ten years.

In 2020 there are some changes in the facade. Procuraduría Federal de la República (Federal

Attorney's Office) is now called Fiscalía General de la República (Attorney General's Office). The Policía Federal (federal police) was disbanded at midnight on December 31, 2019, and on February 28, 2019, Mexico's congress approved creation of the Guardia Nacional (National Guard). There are now 100,000 members of the Guardia Nacional deployed throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the first commander of this force, Luis Rodríguez Bucio, and all other commanders of the Guardia Nacional are former members of the armed forces.<sup>2</sup>

# Abecedario de Juárez

