

BOOK REVIEW

Kathleen Staudt (2008): *Violence and Activism at the Border – Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez*, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 184

In her book *Violence and Activism at the Border – Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez*, published in 2008, Kathleen Staudt investigates the relationships between women and men in regards to violence in the borderland territory of the United States of America and Mexico. The investigation mainly focuses on the two cities close to the US-Mexico border: El Paso, Texas and Ciudad de Juárez, Chihuahua. Staudt's book was published as part of the Inter-American series, which consists of numerous books that explore different approaches towards various subjects of the border discourse. Due to Staudt's personal experience of living at the U.S.-Mexico border and her extensive knowledge based on her teaching and research on border topics linked to gender and politics, she became involved in and collaborated with different departments, associations and foundations determined to fight against male violence and abuse targeting the women working and/or living in the borderland.

Staudt's dedication to raising awareness and taking action is reflected in the structure of the book and the leading questions of her analysis. In the six chapters, which are partly extended by appendices that show additional material such as posters, photographs, and flyers, Staudt examines the circumstances and reasons for both physical and mental violence towards women leading to femicide on the one hand and the different reactions and actions (yet to be) taken by the U.S. and the Mexican government on the other. Furthermore, the examination illustrates the responses by both the U.S. American and Mexican law enforcement institutions, and reflects upon whether people in the two regions are able to develop successful strategies to prevent future killings and solve the crimes that have already been committed.

In addition to the presence of domestic violence in both cultures and territories, Staudt lists more reasons that cause violent behavior in men directed towards women such as male members of drug-cartels going after young women in order to rape them as a celebratory act after a successful drug deal. These acts eventually result in murder and contribute to the femicide issue. In these cases, the use of physical violence serves to

establish and constitute one's masculinity. Moreover, the economic situation plays a significant role in terms of violence being omnipresent in the women's everyday life in the border territory. Numerous women depend on their male partner financially, which prevents them from leaving the partner and the violence and abuse.

Staudt also gives an overview of how Ciudad Juárez is perceived, as well as how it is represented in the media and in literature by referring to other academics and writers of fiction like Pablo Vila, for example. As Staudt points out, the growing attention for the region and its problematic situation is necessary to move towards change. The depiction of violence against women manifested in popular culture and the dwelling on stories of murder and death lead to global interest and thus, increase the chances for more activism at the border. Staudt argues that the required changes are only possible if civil society and the people involved in the different categories of popular culture participate together actively. However, the differences in economics and politics make it difficult to overcome the abuse and violence directed towards women in Mexico and other parts of the world.

As explored above, *Violence and Activism at the Border – Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez* by Kathleen Staudt depicts what the title promises. It gives an insight into the situation at the border territory. The investigation of the subject is clearly structured, and Staudt repeatedly explains her approach to the topic and its several aspects. Due to the subdivisions based on selected aspects in each chapter, the book is well suited for anyone who is interested in learning more about the subject, embedded in a social and political context, especially students in high school. College or university students might also find this book helpful in order to deepen their knowledge after having been introduced to the situation at the border via the (new) media. All in all, Staudt's book is a valuable contribution to a field of study, which definitely needs to be investigated continuously in order to raise more awareness and cause a change.

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