

**Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*,
Participants' Essays, and an Introduction**

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Abstract

Crawling with Monsters (CWM) is a documentary stage play that focuses on the harrowing living conditions inside war-torn areas of northeastern Mexico, particularly as they affect children and their families. In this article an excerpt from CWM tells the story of the project's development and includes several testimonials of life in Mexico that were recorded in interviews, transcribed and translated for the show. The CWM project illustrates the sophistication and freedom with which the Mexican diaspora now communicates across what traditionally had been daunting linguistic, economic and socio-cultural barriers.

Keywords

Transnationalism, Mexico, identity, collaboration, drama

Crawling with Monsters (CWM) is a documentary stage play that focuses on the harrowing living conditions inside war-torn areas of northeastern Mexico, particularly as they affect children and their families. With one exception, when it was performed at a high school in New Jersey, productions of CWM have always been reflexive in the sense that many performers play themselves, that is to say, are/play actors from the Texas-Mexico border whose families are trapped in a war zone to the south. This gives a powerful measure of reality — as well, at times, a theatrical playfulness — to the performances of CWM that is reinforced by the anonymity of the actors (a precaution taken out of fear of reprisals). This reflexive interplay between theater and reality is disarming and can induce

overwhelming emotion in both performers and audience. Since its first staging in 2010, the play in performance has gained critical recognition and won top awards at theater festivals in the United States. After receiving an “Overall Excellence Award” at the 2011 New York International Fringe Festival, CWM was cited in *Back Stage East* as one of the memorable ensemble performances of the year in New York theater. This glowing reception is remarkable given that most of the actors were college students and several had never acted before.

The group behind CWM is based at The University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley, known until August 2015 as The University of Texas – Pan-American (UTPA), and most of its cast and crew are students or alumni from the school who are in a position to track the changing conditions in Mexico with the help of their families and friends in the nearby states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. Co-opting their own social connections which are at once intimate and transnational, the Latin@ actor-researchers obtain eye-witness accounts, pictures and videos of the drug war in Mexico. The excerpt from CWM that follows this introduction tells the story of the project’s development and includes several testimonials of life in Mexico that were recorded in interviews, transcribed and translated for the show.

The CWM project illustrates the sophistication and freedom with which the Mexican diaspora now communicates across what traditionally had been daunting linguistic, economic and socio-cultural barriers. Current technology and social media, such as YouTube, Twitter, and cell phones (with cameras), enable Latin@s to bypass the controlled press in their home countries and to expose lies propagated by their government. CWM carries stories from northeastern Mexico to audiences in faraway cities, including San Antonio, Houston, New Orleans, Chicago and New York. An in-progress video documentary and publications on CWM, such as the present one, are expanding the reach of the project even further. CWM is a product of the Mexican diaspora working in conjunction with many other professional and social networks (families, schools, and friends in the home country; American educators and educational organizations (CWM has received support from its university and from the national organization, American Alliance for Theater and Education, among others); theater festival organizers, newspapers and theater critics).

The generous and sometimes courageous contributions of time and effort, personal contacts, inside knowledge and skills have come primarily

from a transnational collaboration between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living on both sides of the United States – Mexico border. The elusive and fluid transnationalism behind the project allows it to function well in multiple contexts. Without the cooperation of trusted contacts in the country of origin, a Texas-based CWM would be unable to document conditions south of the border. Conversely, without the familiarity with the American educational system and the American theater that Mexican-Americans bring to the project, it would be difficult to reach (physically and artistically) the American theater-goers.

In some ways the CWM project follows a standard transnational pattern by which expatriates seek to influence their country of origin; Latin@ transnationalism has succeeded at making an economic impact on the home countries through remittances and aid societies. But expatriates also typically call attention to human rights abuses in their home countries, especially when it would be dangerous for the victims and their families to do so locally. Foreign-based Cubans, Venezuelans, Iranians, Poles, Nicaraguans and Tibetans are some examples of other expatriate communities that have used transnational networks to protest injustices in their home countries.

In the case of CWM and in most instances of Latin@ transnationalism, the crisis in the home country is itself a transnational phenomenon: drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, weapons smuggling, law enforcement and political corruption, and other criminal activities that depend on illicit support and the complicity of millions of people and powerful organizations in multiple countries, and especially in the United States. Accordingly, one of the aims of CWM was to reframe the so-called “Mexican crisis” as an international and transnational crisis, to show the suffering in Mexico is being funded by Americans. The project tries not only to counter the whitewashing of the drug war by the Mexican government, and to bypass the news blackout in northeastern Mexico, which is enforced by the drug cartels, but seeks as well to disrupt the American public’s indifference and willful ignorance of the suffering of the general population in large swaths of Mexico. Another goal is to counter the silence from the American government and news media in regard to the war. During the presidential election season of 2012, the situation in Mexico was virtually ignored, even though the federal government itself had been caught facilitating the sale of automatic weapons to the Mexican

drug cartels (the operation, called “Fast and Furious,” was carried out by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives). CWM urges Americans to become more aware of the role that their country plays in the drug wars; it also appeals to the American public on the basis of human sympathy and standards of decency, as well. Audience members were often visibly shaken to learn of the human rights abuses in northeastern Mexico.

CWM helps to test the identities of expatriate Mexicans living in the United States; it offers them a chance to fight against indifference (in themselves and others). In this last respect CWM functions as a form of applied drama, raising the political consciousness of Mexicans living in the transnational Latin@ United States, and bringing together displaced Mexicans, including refugees from the violence, with Mexican-Americans, including non-Spanish speakers with native fluency in English and a knowledge of theater practices in the United States. One of the most moving experiences in doing CWM has been the social solidarity and deep comfort that it has brought to some people. Several short essays from Mexican participants in CWM follow the excerpt from the script, so that CWM project members may convey directly their views on the project and the “situation” in their country.

CWM is the product in large part of transnational Latin@ networks that have become in recent years remarkably savvy in their use of English and Spanish, and in their understanding of legal processes, social media, and the arts. It has been a vehicle for giving at least some people in northeastern Mexico a chance to speak out and be heard. And often when Mexicans from the affected region learn of the project, it brings tears to their eyes to learn that people outside of Mexico do care about their lives and the destruction of their way of life.

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*, pages 9-26 (out of 54).

Note: All characters are students except for the teacher. They are identified by the roles or jobs they have when doing a children’s play about monsters.

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

CHARACTERS:

Student / Narrator

Teacher / Director

Student / Monster #1

Student / Monster #2

Student / Monster #3

Student / Monster #4

Student / Monster #5 / Projectionist

Student / Niño

Student / Niña

Student / Stage Hand #1

Student / Stage Hand #2

(In the dressing room at UTPA ...)

	DIRECTOR
Look. Listen. Listen up.	
	(BEAT.)
We're not going to Mexico.	
	MONSTER #3
What?	
	DIRECTOR
They cancelled all student travel. To Mexico.	
	NINA
Why?	
	MONSTER #4
With everything that's going on over there?	
	NINA
What? ... like what?	
	MONSTER #1
That sucks!	
	(MONSTER #2 re-enters)
	MONSTER #2
What sucks?	

MONSTER #3
We're not going to Mexico!

MONSTER #2
What? *Why not?*

DIRECTOR
They cancelled all student travel, to Mexico.

NINO
Well, actually, I'm kind of relieved. You know?

DIRECTOR
They closed the American consulate. And issued a travel warning, so ...

MONSTER #4
It's really getting bad over there.

NINA
You're talking about the ... situation?

NINO
There've been a lot of shootings.

MONSTER #3
L'inseguridad.

NINO
My parents live over there, and they told me not to come over. They always come over here now. But I haven't seen my grandparents in ... like ... three months.

DIRECTOR
It's too bad because that was sort of the whole point of our show, to tour it north and south of the border. Plus, the festival!

MONSTER #3
It's really bad in Reynosa. My cousin was telling me about it.

NINA
Wait a minute. Are you talking about the drug dealers?

MONSTER #3
The drug dealers, the cops ... (*overlapping ...*) ... the ... the whole ...

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

MONSTER #4

And the government. -- don't forget about the government.

MONSTER #2

No pasa nada.

MONSTER #1

(Making jest)

There's no trouble in Reynosa! -- what are you talking about? -- in Reynosa?
It's just a bunch of rumors! And wives' tales!

NINO

(Explaining to NINA)

That's what the government said.

(Children's dance music is heard, off)

Ah! The music! Let's go.

MONSTER #2

What about ... my ... hey! -- what about my ...

MONSTER #4

We'll do it later.

NINA

We haven't even worked on the dance! And we open in ... what? Three weeks? *Three weeks!*

NINO

Come on! Let's go!

DIRECTOR

I'll be there in a minute!

(ALL go dancing or marching off, except DIRECTOR, who stares at the travel ban announcement)

Eric Wiley et. al

NARRATOR

In fact, there was a lot going on in Reynosa in those days. It was almost like a war had broken out, but it wasn't in the news. And the government said that "nothing was happening" – "*nada esta pasando*." The Newspapers? -- television news? – the radio? -- had almost nothing on it.

DIRECTOR

That's it!

(Snaps her fingers, then steps forward)

This is when I got the idea to do *Crawling with Monsters*. Except originally I wanted us to go in and interview everybody, like with the Laramie Project -- or the woman who did the one about the L.A. riots --

MONSTER #5

Anna Deavere Smith.

DIRECTOR

Yeah. – where you repeat word-for-word what people say --

MONSTER #5

Can you imagine going into Reynosa to interview the mayor or the chief of police? Or trying to talk to the witnesses or to the victims, and their families? This is *Mexico*. Have you never heard of *Juarez*?

DIRECTOR

But, this isn't ... this isn't ...

MONSTER #5

Reynosa is one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Now, cover your ears.

DIRECTOR

... no, come on ... again? You're serious?

(Enter NINOS)

MONSTER #5

Cover your ears!

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

(DIRECTOR covers her ears)

The professors don't know Mexico, and so they really don't know much about the border region. *Or* about their students.

NINO

They have this incredibly naïve view of things – being a student of theirs, it's like being taught by children.

STAGE HAND #1

(*Who has entered*)

It makes you wonder how much they really do know about Shakespeare and about the Greek tragedies and about life itself.

STAGE HAND #2

They're under the spell of these illusions about truth and justice.

NINA

Truth, justice, and the American way!

NARRATOR

The newspapers were not reporting anything for a reason. In late February, eight reporters were abducted in Reynosa. One was found the next day; he had been tortured and died in a hospital three days later. Two others were released, but refused to reveal what had happened to them and immediately left the city. To date, nothing is known of the remaining five reporters.

**[SLIDE: statement on
Journalism in Reynosa and
Mexico.]**

STAGE HAND #1

Still, maybe we can do something ...

DIRECTOR

(*Uncovering her ears*)

What if we focus on children?

NINO

Kids?

Eric Wiley et. al

DIRECTOR

Yeah. Since we're doing a children's show.

(Enter MONSTERS #1-4)

NINO

Monsters!

MONSTER #1

What's up.

MONSTER #2

Yo.

MONSTER #3

Hey.

DIRECTOR

It feels strange not to go somewhere because it's too dangerous, when you know that it's full of children.

MONSTER #4

What do you want to do? ... hello?

DIRECTOR

I want to go ahead and do the children's play on this side of the border, but while we're rehearsing and performing, and touring, we'll also be *transforming ourselves* into a documentary theater company that will respond

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

theater company that will respond to what's happening in Reynosa. We're going to use our contacts to find out what's going on, at least for the kids who can't see our play. We'll talk to them, and get their stories, and then we're going to go out and tell them to the world. We'll be like a river that flows backwards – and instead of giving them a play, we'll be getting a play, and we're gonna take that play all the way up to New Orleans, to the *Fringe Festival*, and they're gonna love it! I mean -- who else is going to tell the story of the Mexican Border? Nobody can tell this story better than you guys. Right?

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

MONSTER #3

... *Right!*

DIRECTOR

These are *your* stories.

STAGE HAND #1

She's right!

STAGE HAND #2

Yeah!

DIRECTOR

These are your nephews and nieces. Right? (Overlapping ...) Right? Come on!

MONSTERS #1-4,
STAGEHANDS AND NINOS

She's right! Yeah! Wow! (*A few Mexican exclamations of excitement*) Let's do it! I don't know. Maybe. Are you sure about this? Come on!

NINO

It's a long way to get to New Orleans.

MONSTER #2

Andale!

DIRECTOR

And we're not gonna piss anybody off. We're not gonna even get into who's doing what and all that. This is just about the children. And that will protect us.

(*ALL exit, except STAGE HANDS*)

NARRATOR

And that is very roughly how it happened. And everybody was real excited about it. But it was easier said than done.

(*STAGE HANDS hold up a sign:*
ONE MONTH LATER)

Eric Wiley et. al

STAGE HAND #2

Hey, we're not professionals. We're just college kids. You know?

NARRATOR

And they were so close to it. It turned out to be very awkward to interview friends and family.

(ENTER DIRECTOR, MONSTER #3 and NINO)

DIRECTOR

Anything?

NINO

No.

MONSTER #3

Sorry.

DIRECTOR

But you didn't have anything last week, either. That's three weeks now.

NINO

Sorry.

DIRECTOR

And where's everybody else?

NINO

Oh, they told me to tell you, they had to work, and they've been really busy.

DIRECTOR

They didn't get anything ... for the secret project?

NINO

No.

MONSTER #3

... it's hard. I don't know.

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

DIRECTOR

I know. Don't worry about it. Maybe it wasn't a good idea.

(Exit MONSTER #3 AND NINO)

It seems like people don't really talk about the violence except in trusted circles.

(Enter NINA, nervously)

(BEAT)

NINA

Here.

(SHE hands DIRECTOR a USB drive. THEY look at each other. NINA is frightened)

NARRATOR

One day one of the actors turned something in.

(DIRECTOR looks at the drive)

It wasn't a lot, but it was good. It was genuine. It had the words of people living in Reynosa -- who had agreed to speak on tape about what was going on. Of course they didn't want us to use their real names. One of them was a nine year old girl.

(NINA steps forward)

NARRATOR

She was asked to tell us a bad memory and then a good memory.

SLIDE:

Fernanda, Age 9

NINA

Well, I was in my classroom -- we were working on an assignment that our teacher gave us -- and then a teacher came in screaming for us *to get on the floor, to hide under the desks*. We started to cry: *what happened?* Then we all got very quiet and we heard the shooting and everyone screaming and crying -- a lot of mothers came into the classroom and left with their kids.

A lot couldn't come to get their kids, but others could. They started telling me to calm down, that nothing would happen – and I did calm down -- I did, but I couldn't calm down completely. Then a friend started to play with me, and after that, I wasn't so scared. And we were just sitting there, looking at all of our classmates screaming and crying.

(*SHE exits*)

NARRATOR

The shooting described by Fernanda could have been any one of a number of such shootings -- because if gunmen were outnumbered they could save themselves by hiding inside a school full of children. Parents often panicked and pulled their kids out of school as word spread of a shooting. For weeks, as many as 60% of school children stopped attending school.

These first recordings meant one thing: there was no going back. Not after one actor had done her part, and not after those whom she had interviewed had done theirs.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

But that didn't mean that there were more interviews coming in. Weeks went by with nothing new. And, again, it looked like the project was sputtering out. The people in the show who were from Reynosa were now living on this side of the river, reflecting a pattern: those who could leave Reynosa, were doing so.

People followed what was happening by Twitter, cell phone, and blogs. Rumors swirled around the city and region.

DIRECTOR

And meanwhile, we had rehearsals ...

3 SLIDES – RHEARSAL IMAGES (1-3) ...

And I began to research what was happening in **Mexico**. People were putting pictures and videos online – of burned out buildings and **cars** destroyed by bullets, and military checkpoints – it was a war zone. **And** the drug dealers were posting their videos and sending *their* messages.

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

Here is a banner hung from an overpass in Reynosa, informing everyone to stay calm:

DIRECTOR

SLIDE – BANNER (A) – 1

... a help wanted ad.

SLIDE – BANNER (B) - 1

And this is when I began to see that the play we were doing for children was like the situation on the border.

There had always been drug dealers. But now they were running around out in the open, terrifying everyone.

SLIDE – RHEARSAL (4)

Even they were hoping that things would get back to normal.

SLIDE – BANNER (C)

You still wouldn't have a free press or a government you could trust.

SLIDE – RHEARSAL (5)

And the crushing poverty wouldn't be alleviated, but at least you wouldn't have to worry about being gunned down or carjacked day in and day out. And your kids would be relatively safe again. That was the hope. One day, I got an email

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

One day, I got an email from a former student of mine. I had written asking for his help.

SLIDE – E-MAIL

I'll be glad to help you, and it's very very very significant that's you're dealing with this subject, which has become a big Taboo (in the media) in this side of the border. No one says ANYTHING because they're afraid. LEt mw know and we can arrange a phone call or a meeting.

Suddenly I had a promising new source. He was very nervous, which I thought was good and bad: he had new material to give me, but maybe this project was more dangerous than I had thought ...

Meanwhile, we started doing shows ...

SLIDES – PERFORMANCE IMAGES (1-3)

And my research led to graphic content that had a disturbing effect on me, and on the people helping me. We saw pools of blood, and brains on car seats, dead bodies, and parts of bodies: torsos without limbs, pieces of bodies strewn around like broken dolls. And there were movies – of men staring into the camera while being ... killed.

SLIDES – PERFORMANCE (4-5)

I met my new source at a restaurant near the border, and it felt like a scene from a spy film – the “clandestine meeting” -- I was picking up audio files of interviews with children, teachers, and parents. We lowered our voices whenever the waiter came by.

SLIDE – PERFORMANCE (6)

Perhaps it was overblown. But during our lunch, after I had described all the ideas I had for putting together the show, he said to me: “You’re not afraid?” And the way he said that, looking into my eyes, made me feel afraid. Physically.

And that night, I had a nightmare about going into Reynosa and not being able to get back.

I began to think about my children. About my house and how vulnerable it would be. I began to see the images of desecrated bodies throughout the day, unwanted.

SLIDE – PERFORMANCE (7)

I thought about how easily people cross the river. There’s no physical protection for me or the students from the people who had done these terrible things. The prisons in Mexico are useless. Fewer than two percent of murders lead to an arrest. And the police on our side of the river are always caught working for the dealers. The place is crawling with monsters.

It’s like in our play, when the monsters go into the audience: suddenly there’s no barrier separating you from them.

SLIDE – PERFORMANCE (8)

I thought of leaving the border and going far away from Mexico. This seemed to be the advice of the children:

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

SLIDE – “I recommend them to be as far away from here as possible.”

-- BOY (15)

But this is not ultimately about me or about us, the cast and crew.

(Enter all the actors, who form a tableau)

The goal was to be a vehicle for the children of Reynosa, who didn't get to see our play, and to give them, and their teachers, and their parents, a chance to speak to you, to someone, to anyone.

*(DIRECTOR joins the other actors.
An actor rises and steps forward,
into an illuminated area)*

**END OF PART ONE /
BEGINNING OF PART TWO**

SLIDE: At School ...

SLIDE: GIRL, nine years old

GIRL, NINE YEARS OLD

All of a sudden, a soldier walked in, with a weapon that was almost as tall as he was, it looked that way because it was *very big*, the gun, and I got *very* scared, but since he didn't do anything to us, I figured he was one of the good guys, and I wasn't so scared. He came in to see how we were doing but the truth is that we were fine. Then my dad came to pick me up and the truth is that I didn't know what happened to my classmates. But we missed a lot of days and then we came back. My classmates were scared a bit that we could go through that again, but thanks to god, no, and yes, thanks to god, nothing like this has happened in my school again.

SLIDE: BOY, fifteen years old

BOY, FIFTEEN YEARS OLD

The toughest thing that I've had to live through has been ... has been being in school and hearing the shootings ... having to hear a shooting in front of your school. People crying ... people praying ... we have to ... try to keep calm ... it's very difficult and I hope you never have to go through something like that.

SLIDE: BOY, fourteen years old

SUBTITLES:

Here, in this situation, you live through very extreme things. One time, in junior high, the boys in the morning experienced a shooting nearby, and were told to lay face down and unfortunately one of them received a stray bullet and died.

It was a boy from the morning. He got a stray bullet, I didn't know him -- but it was on the news, too.

BOY, FOURTEEN YEARS OLD
(SPANISH)

aquí, en esta situación se viven cosas muy...muy extremas. En una ocasión... como estar en... en una ocasión... en la secundaria, a los chavos de la mañana les tocó vivir una balacera muy cerca y a ellos les dijeron que se pusieran boca abajo y todo eso y, uno de ellos desgraciadamente recibió una bala perdida y se murió.

... fue un... un chavo de la mañana. Yo no lo conocía. Fue un estudiante de mi secundaria del turno de la mañana. Le toco una bala perdida, yo no lo conocía, pero salió en las noticias también.

SLIDE: Kindergarten Teacher in Reynosa

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

[middle section elided]

When the first shooting happened in Reynosa at a shopping mall, the parents would come in running, during class time, crying, screaming. They would get into the school running, take their kids out in the middle of the shooting, and it was horrible. There were two weeks that there were no classes. ... And after the children were back in school, the only topic of discussion among the kids was the shooting, that they had witnessed a shooting, that they were hiding under their bed, that they had spent hours locked in their bathrooms with their parents, the sound of the bullets, all of that. All the children, from three years and on, were talking about it all the time.

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

SLIDE: Elementary School Teacher in Reynosa

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TEACHER

[*minor elision at end of first part*]

... they told me at the school where I work in the afternoon that the kids were in class when a confrontation started right behind the school. The kids say that they were all scared, they were told to get on the floor, some teachers were hysterical; there was one teacher who got out of the classroom and left the students alone, she just left because she was so afraid! The students just stayed there sitting down and they didn't hear from the teacher again [that day] ...

(*Beat*)

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER (CONT'D)

... I already put in my classroom about ten drawings where is shown what to do, where to be... The classroom has to be closed, doors and windows. If they hear a shooting outside the classroom, they all know they have to get face down on the floor, they already know where inside the classroom they have to go but like snakes, like worms, crawling on the floor to that place.

(*Beat*)

... you say "*balacera*" -- "shooting" -- and they know where to go ...

MONSTER #2

Balacera!

MONSTER #4

Balacera!

MONSTER #1-5

BALACERA!!!

INTERLUDE: 2.75 minutes: video of Reynosa and music

SLIDE: Becoming Normal ...

NARRATOR

Almost everyone we spoke to agreed that children in Reynosa had begun to see the violence as something normal. This was one of their biggest concerns.

SLIDE: Kindergarten Teacher in Reynosa

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

[We have] “To try to stop children from taking all this violence as if it were something normal. To stop the parents from having these conversations in front of them. Because the children only talk about what they hear from their parents. Try to explain to them what is happening and try to help them take care of themselves, but explain that it is not something normal so they don’t think it is good, and that they realize that violence only causes more violence.

SLIDE: BOY, seventeen years old

SUBTITLES: _____

well [the violence] makes a very strong impact because the children learn things that they didn’t know before and now should know about ... for their safety, they are being taught things that are not good for them to know ...

or things it’s not their time to know yet. And, well, all of that is wrong because the children are losing part of their childhood.

BOY, SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD

Pues si, osea, que está muy fuerte porque pues también los niños están aprendiendo pues ya cosas que pues antes no sabían y ahora deben de saber por todo lo que se está viviendo por seguridad ya les están enseñando cosas pues que no es bueno que sepan o no les toca todavía saber eso entonces pues está mal todo eso porque pues también están perdiendo parte de su niñez

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

SLIDE: **GIRL, eight years old**

NARRATOR

How old are you and in what grade are you?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

I'm eight years old and I'm in second.

NARRATOR

How have things changed in these past months, now that there is so much violence, that you hear everywhere about the shootings?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Well, mmm ... to us, nothing bad has happened to us.

NARRATOR

Nothing bad has happened to you? You haven't had to live through anything ... bad?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

No.

NARRATOR

At your school?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

No, just when there was the shooting. Just that.

NARRATOR

Just the shooting?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Yes.

NARRATOR

And how was that?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Well I did get scared.

Eric Wiley et. al

(SHE laughs.)

NARRATOR

What happened?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Well, mmm ... uh ... I don't know how to tell you. A soldier came into my classroom. Well he passed through there ... by the window, and then my uncle showed up and we left. Running.

NARRATOR

Ah, OK. And were you scared?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Yes.

NARRATOR

OK, do you think that you and your family are worried about what is going to happen to the city?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Well, I'm not that worried, but it seems like my mom is, she has ... a lot of worries. To me ... no, I'm not worried. (Deep breath.) Nothing's going to worry me.

NARRATOR

Nothing?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

No.

NARRATOR

What would you like to tell the kids or adults that live far away and want to know what is going on here in Reynosa?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Well, I don't know ... that a lot of bad things happen here, and ... I don't know! (*Nervous laugh*)

Excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*

NARRATOR

What bad things?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Well, that there's shooting, and violence, the violence.

NARRATOR

And what else?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Robberies, assaults. When they assaulted my uncle ... and ... when they called my mom ... on the phone.

NARRATOR

What did they call your mom on the phone for?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Well, they told her that, if she didn't give them ... I don't know what ... mmm ... Money, they were going to ... uh ... kill us. Us all ... (Deep breath.) ... and they were ... I don't know, that they were gonna cut us – I don't know what – to us.

NARRATOR

And were you scared?

GIRL, EIGHT YEARS OLD

Yes, my mom even cried a lot, and we went to sleep at grandmas.

End of excerpt from *Crawling with Monsters*.

UTPA Student and Alumni Statements from *Crawling with Monsters* Participants

Karla Caridad Gómez Pérez

Cuando uno se pregunta cómo pasó, parece muy claro, pero en cuanto se empieza a contar la historia todo se va volviendo borroso y turbio. Una mañana con una balacera frente a una escuela parece iniciar todo, pero no es sino meses después cuando ruidosas madrugadas nos confirman el verdadero terror que se desdoblaba.

Empiezan las balas a llenar los días y secretamente los testimonios a llenar las bocas; se crean leyendas urbanas, se crean héroes y villanos, nos paseamos entre muertes, secuestros y torturas, mientras el pánico nos amordaza, nos inmoviliza, nos viola... Pareciera detenerse la ciudad en el tiempo. Nadie quiere arriesgarse, nadie se asoma y un silencio mortal abusa del ambiente... pero la vida tiene que seguir y la estúpida capacidad del ser humano de adaptarse brota inapropiadamente para, descaradamente, hacernos de la vista gorda, llenarnos de falsas precauciones y perdernos en un irreal "seguir con nuestras vidas..." Prisioneros dentro de un país hermoso, enfrentamos una realidad mas que difícil, terrorífica, donde nuestras peores pesadillas no solo se han cumplido, sino se volvieron comunes, cotidianas, literales.

Ya no hay marcha atrás. Hemos hecho historia y sin darnos cuenta, reinventamos nuestra tierra dejándola bajo la dictadura de tal vileza. Se han menguado nuestras expectativas y nuestra vida ahora gira en torno a los placeres de unos cuantos, que se vuelven más y peores conforme el reloj avanza, mientras la frustración crece y la indiferencia lucha por poseernos.

...

[When the question of how it happened emerges, it all seems so clear, but as soon as you start telling the story, the tale becomes blurry and murky. One morning, a shooting outside a school seems to launch everything, but it isn't until months later when noisy midnights confirm for us the true terror that is unfolding.

Bullets start to fill the days and testimonies secretly fill the mouths; urban legends are created, heroes and villains are invented. We walk among deaths, kidnappings, tortures while the panic gags us, paralyzes us, rapes us ... It'd appear as if the city were suspended in time. No one wants to risk it, no one takes a peek and a rancid silence fills the streets ... But life has to go on and the stupid adaptation ability of the human being nonsensically comes out, to blatantly make us turn a blind eye, take false precautions and get lost in an unreal "moving on ..." Prisoners inside a beautiful country, we face a more than difficult, terrifying reality, where our worst nightmares have not only become real but common ... raw.

There's no going back. We've made history and without even realizing it, we've reinvented our homeland, leaving it under the tyranny of such sordidness. Our expectations have been diminished and now our lives revolve around the pleasures of a few, who are becoming more and

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worse as the clock ticks, while frustration grows and indifference struggles to possess us.

Jessica Peña

After three years working in this project, CWM has taught me not only about the war in Mexico, my home country, but also about my own reaction to this unfortunate situation. I started working with Dr. Wiley as a researcher in the summer of '09. I would gather interviews, translate and transcribe. After a year or so, I joined the cast and since then, I have traveled around the country to tell the story of my community, the story of the children of Reynosa. In spite of the success and the impact of our project, it is hard to realize that we are continually a message of awareness of a terrible situation –it's hard to feel happy or a want to celebrate. I am thankful and yet sad with the outcomes of this project; while the response of the audience reminds me of the power of compassion, the message of the play evokes the memories of the children, of my family and the people I love. It evokes a sense of impotence... of standing fragile before the monsters of corruption, avarice, and malice. We do what we can in hope of better days to come for my Mexico.

Silvia Vera

I would say that life changed for everyone in México in a number of ways. I lost two good friends because of the violence. One was killed outside of a bar, because he talked back to a bad guy. The other one was caught in the crossfire during a shooting at a bus stop. Both cases occurred in Veracruz, my hometown.

Stories like this are heard everywhere. First, back in 2009, you would hear that a neighbor's uncle's friend got kidnapped, or that he was shot. But then things started to happen so often that anyone could talk about so many things that had happened close to her, to her beloved people, or even to herself.

Now everything is different. You are afraid to change your car: you do not want to have a fancy one anymore. You don't want to live in a nice home, not anymore, because you automatically become a target. You are afraid to open a business. You are afraid to have a ranch.

The mafia people are kidnapping ranch owners and making them sign away the deeds of their ranches. I know this because of my family. People close to us have experienced this very situation. They have lost everything.

The situation hasn't got any better. On any given day, if you look, you will find that something has happened. They hijacked my roommate's bus on the road a few weeks ago. This time, after stealing everything, they decided to add sexual assault to their crimes. The government doesn't do a lot. But how could they? They call the bad guys in México "*crimen organizado*" (organized crime) because they are very well organized. They know what they are doing and they are getting stronger.

My mom is happy to know that I am here in the United States, studying for my master's degree. My family is hoping for me not to go back there. "It's not safe anymore" However, I love my country. There are good people in México. We are hard, dedicated workers and loving, passionate people and we are going to get through this. Sooner or later, the calm will come to my true home. And I will be able to live there in peace.

For now, I have found a surrogate family in the "CWM" group. The project, the experience, and the people have been a true catharsis for me. I feel like I am doing something. I am letting people know what's going on in my country and I am giving voice to those that can't speak for themselves, those who have been silenced by fear, and much worse. I am very happy with this project, as it has given me the opportunity to work with people with such heart like Professor Eric Wiley. He doesn't have anyone in México. He doesn't know México. But he has lived the situation through us, and he truly cares. He is our "Gringo with a Mexican Soul." I am very proud of this project and I really hope it gets stronger, as we need to let everybody know. Together we can make a change, to make this a better world.

Augusto Contreras (Excerpt from his Master's Thesis)

I have a disclosure to make: My work is touched by the atrocious reality that, as a Mexican-American, I have had to face during these last six years. My country is in a civil war between the government and the drug cartels. My life was affected: I could not face my reality. My life was going

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to waste. I was desperate, anxious, sick of “everything,” sick of nothing. I was clinically diagnosed with anxiety and depression, but in the middle of my own mental revolution something happened: theater.

I do believe in the power of theater to generate social change. I trust that through theater I can do something about the terrible reality that my country is facing nowadays. While I’m writing these lines, my family is in the living room watching the breaking news about how fifty-two people got burned inside a casino by one of the criminal groups that are having a war in my hometown city of Monterrey, Nuevo León, México. The Mexican drug cartels are taking control over most of my country, they are struggling for “la plaza,” the markets that they control to distribute the drugs. It’s a fierce fight between different cartels, the Mexican army, the police forces, and criminal mercenaries; today Mexico lives under warlike conditions. While I’m writing this confession, one of the main lines of *Crawling with Monsters*, the play with which I have been working for the last couple of years, constantly resonates in my head: “It’s not about us, it’s not about us ...” Is it really not about us? Is it really not about me? Those questions have to be answered through this work. That is my hope.

What I know so far is that theater is the way in which I finally feel that I’m doing something about this entire crisis, a way in which I can explore my deeper fears, anxieties, search my inner self and fulfill my desires of doing something about the Mexican drug war; at least speak for the people in distress; at least convey a message of urgency, a cry for help. Mexico has been under civil war for the last five years and nobody seems to care much about it. Not the international media, nor the international organizations, governmental or nongovernmental (UN, International Amnesty, Human rights, etc.), and surprisingly even the American government shows more interest in its “War on terror” and how they are going to end it, than in the war on their border. The US government has placed Mexico’s drug war as a secondary issue on its agenda and it doesn’t seem that the American population is aware of what is really going on south the border.

Maria Alvarado

I moved to the United States about eight years ago, which is right before the drug war started in Mexico, so I didn’t feel very affected by the situation for a long time. Although I have family members who live in

Mexico, the war did not concern me because the major problem was in the border region and not in the center of Mexico where my family lives. I would hear my high school friends talking about how they couldn't go to Mexico anymore because they were scared of being victims of the violence, but we would not go into detail. The first time I ever felt affected by the problem was when I was talking to my advisor about my idea of going to college in my home-town of Guanajuato, Mexico. I was confident that it was a safe environment since the drug cartel issues were not in that state. Unfortunately, I was wrong. My advisor told me that she had family in the city of Guanajuato and that members of a drug cartel had taken away their family business. When she told me that I felt so scared and worried for my grandparents and my plans completely changed. I decided that I was going to pursue my college education here in the United States. After that I was more aware of the problem. I mean, I didn't like or approve of the horrible situation that my country was going through, but I didn't really pay attention to it until I joined *Crawling with Monsters*. It's like as if a veil was taken off my eyes; I couldn't ignore the problem anymore. Reading and listening to real interviews from people who have been victims of shootings, kidnappings, assaults and other inhumane acts caused by the drug cartels made a big impact on me. I realized that everything that my country was suffering did affect me. The Mexico that I knew where I was free to play with my friends in the street and parks was no longer there. How could I be so indifferent when children can't even go to school because they might be victims of a shooting? All the information that I started to read was so overwhelming and it made me feel powerless; I wanted to help the people in Mexico somehow. Thanks to the project *Crawling with Monsters* I was able to do something. We raised awareness about the problem and most important I was able to be the voice that was taken away from the victims.