Digital Altars and Migrant Death in Mexico (with Xiomara Cervantes-Gómez)

[opening music]

Dr. Juan Llamas-Rodriguez (JLR): Welcome to the Global Media Cultures Podcast. I am your host, Juan Llamas-Rodriguez. Today, we are discussing public memory, digital media, and the politics of race in Mexico. Our guest is Dr. Xiomara Verenice Cervantes-Gómez. She's an Assistant Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. As a transdisciplinary queer and performance theorist, she researches and writes at the interstice [00:00:30] between Latin American and US Latinx cultural studies, continental philosophy, performance studies, queer theory and contemporary literature.

Dr. Cervantes-Gómez received her PhD in Spanish and Latin American Studies at the University of Southern California. She also holds a Master's in theological studies in religions of the Americas from Harvard Divinity School and a BA from the University of California, Riverside. She currently serves on the editorial board of *Women and Language* and has recently served [00:01:00] as co-chair of the Latin American Studies Association's Sexuality Section. Xiomara, welcome to the Global Media Culture's Podcast.

Dr. Xiomara Cervantes-Gómez (XCG): Thank you so much, Juan, for inviting me and for such a very generous introduction. So, I'm excited to be here.

JLR: Of course. I want to start by asking you, could you tell us more about your research interests? Why do these topics interest you and why are they an important area to study?

XCG: What I study is experience. It is the study of experiences and what I describe as affect of experiences, in my own words. That is the language I use, which is a study of how bodies react, feel, sense, encounter, all the verbs and words. So, that lends itself to so many other disciplines that extend beyond my own specialization in performance studies, queer theory and cultural studies. But when I think about it more broadly, I study experience, that allows my work to be able to be read much more broadly beyond my own respective disciplines.

JLR: Right, right, yeah, for sure. And the article that we're discussing today, "Where Blackness Dies: The Aesthetics of a Massacre and the Violence of Remembering," was published in the

Journal of Visual Culture. Right? So, it's sort of a different audience there as well. So, it's published in the *Journal of Visual Culture* in 2021, so it's fresh off the digital press.

XCG: Yes.

JLR: Could you give us a brief history of this particular essay? So, when you began working on it, how did the ideas originate? How do they change and sort of the process of research and writing?

XCG: Right. That's a very good question. Like you said, this was a different audience. This was a different way of writing for me. I was not expecting to ever write this essay and yet, it just sort of found me. I was working on archival work for my current book, which is titled *Pasivo: Risks of Exposure in Bottom Mexicanness Performance*. That's my shameless plug. And I was trying to put this within the context of death in Mexico and so, looking at larger massacres. And of course, I had heard of the 2010 Tamaulipas Massacre. I remember vaguely hearing about it in the media.

And as I've described in the first paragraph of the article, it began with the photograph. It began with this, I saw several images of that little boy that's in the that you see reprinted in the article. And that just struck me and I clicked it and it was always the same subcaption that he was at his father's funeral. And I just was not expecting to encounter this. And again, I experienced something in that moment.

So while I was looking for information to help me about a book that's going to be about queerness and performance and death in Mexico, here, I had stumbled across something that's stuck with me, that, I hate to use the word "haunt" when we're talking about a massacre, but for lack of a better word right now, haunted me. I just, I kept remembering that little boy. And we, as researchers, sometimes have to just throw up our arms and let our research take us where it wants to take us. And that's how I arrived at this work.

JLR: Right, right. Yeah, so you mentioned the 2010 Tamaulipas massacre and that becomes sort of the flashpoint to then talk about the digital altar that you analyzed in your article. Could you give us a brief sense of the context or what the 2010 Tamaulipas massacre was? Because it seems like it's important as an intersection of a lot of political and social issues in Mexico, including narco warfare, Los Zetas and Central American migration through the country as well.

XCG: Right, I mean, to situate that massacre, we have to think about it alongside the several other massacres that are always happening. And so, we have to situate it in a culture that

already is very familiar with this type of brutality and very familiar with the effects of narcos and narco gangs, such as Los Zetas.

What was striking about this one was the manner in which they found the victims. They were ceremoniously lined up, execution style, all with their hands tied behind their back with the shot to the back of the head and in this barn. I saw the images that were printed, and they print these in Mexican newspapers of how exactly how they found the bodies and there are the bodies. And of course, those images, they circulate, and that caught a lot of media attention of just the way in which they found these victims, all of whom being migrants on their journey to the United States. So, we find them already in a vulnerable situation, entrusting their lives with people to lead them on this journey, or entrusting their lives to whatever environmental factors are that could impact them. So, these are one of the risks, they unfortunately do encounter. And I like said, it's not uncommon.

JLR: No.

XCG: So, for this to strike a chord at a national level, we have to think about, "Okay, what made this different in comparison to the killings that happen every day?" I mean, there have always been activists protesting against this type of violence. But because it struck a chord with the media, of course, that trickles down into academia, so this started striking a chord with academics. And that's where things started getting sticky. Where we start debating about what is a proper reading of how this happened, and it's like these are people's lives or lives that are lost.

But what struck a chord with them is that it almost seemed like they, because they have been, as I argue, we have become so numb to the fact that, again, this violence is not uncommon that for us to be surprised, means we have to stop thinking about all of that. And as I describe and critique the editor for her response of why a digital altar, it was out of shock that this happens in Mexico. So, that was almost like the effect that happened in academia as if we were blind to this. No, we weren't blind to this. But nonetheless, they acted as if they were.

JLR: Right, right. It seems that the exceptionalisation of this moment. They're making it like, "Oh, this struck a chord. This is so significant." In some way, it erases the fact that this happens a lot, right? That there are all these other instances. So, it's in foregrounding or trying to draw attention to what seems like, "important issue," you're also erasing the fact that this is a pervasive issue, as well.

XCG: Exactly.

JLR: So, speaking of academics dealing with these aspects, one of the sort of key terms that you mobilized in your analysis is Sayak Valencia's idea of gore capitalism. Which in some ways, it's about diagnosing this pervasive violence? Could you talk a little more about why that term is helpful for you as you're analyzing through this and then for thinking about these aspects or these issues in visual culture as well?

XCG: So for those listening that are not familiar with gore capitalism is, my paraphrasing and interpretation of at least how I understand Valencia's arguments is that, death has become a profitable business. It is a capitalist structure at this point, precisely for the reasons I have been describing. We have become consumers of gore and consuming in the sense of all things that consumption involves, of the visual encounter with it. We allow ourselves, our bodies, our senses to visually absorb this information, by just passing a newstand. By the mere fact that it's printed on the front page of a newspaper.

The fact that we buy this newspaper. That newspaper now profits off of this image. And so, death has become a business and the main contributors to all of this are those who benefit from this type of economic wealth and power, primarily the state, the police, and narco gangs.

JLR: Right. Right. And there's something about the fact that we become consumers of violence that, to where you're mentioning earlier, it numbs us to it, right? But then it also cheapens or yeah, erases the actual lives, right? It's something that because it's "Oh, it was 40 some killed here and 70 something killed here," people become statistics and people...

XCG: Exactly.

JLR: ... get sort of reduced down to whatever...

XCG: Whatever they are. Yeah, it's all numbers. They get reduced to numbers.

JLR: Yeah, yeah. And all of that is driven sometimes, as you mentioned, purely by profit-making schemes, right? It's about selling the newspaper, selling the latest narconovela or something like that. And it ignores the-

XCG: Right. I mean and again, it trickles into so many other industries. I mean, it is just showing up on the news. Music artists that are creating, there's a sub-genre of cumbia called narco-cumbia and it's like musicians that are somehow connected to the narco gangs. And so, they're rapping into cumbia about like, "Yeah, we did this job on this." They'll brag in the songs

about what their recent killings were. And so, consumers of music, so it does, it trickles down so many other different industries, rather than just the photograph that's printed on the newspaper, of course. But yeah, and we consume it and all these various different ways.

JLR: Right, right. I was even thinking of Hector Amaya's work on, so certain social media platforms will have content moderation, but then they will have no content moderation for the display of particularly Global South subjects and death. [00:15:30] That will just stay on and continuously be shared, because it's very profitable to sort of perpetuate that idea of like, "Well, these killings happen all the time, so why would we be taking out all of these images?"

XCG: And some recent scholars have described that as trauma porn or this thing we've called sensationalism before. And Black Studies has already named this before. We mean pornotroping. This is like we all have a different word for what this is. And what it is, is the body and suffering is a spectacle and we like looking. Just like we like looking at that car accident we passed by on the street.

JLR: Right, right, right. So, the specific project that you looked at in this article is related to the 2010 Tamaulipas massacre. It was called the setenta y dos migrantes, the 72 migrants. It was a digital altar project in response to that. So, can you give us a sense of what this altar project was? Who made it? What was it made for? And how did it come about?

XCG: Yeah. So, as I said, because the massacre had shocked so many people, including journalists. And typically when these massacres happen, like I said, there are so many, we get the print in the newspaper. "Okay, 10 were killed this time. Here are the 10 of them. This is how old they were. This is their town, or this is the country they're from. Here's their headshot." Because this had garnered so much attention that it could happen at this magnitude and then what was perceived as such a gore-ish way, the journalist Alma Guillermoprieto decided, "We needed more than just what we typically see in the ways that we honor or lack thereof, victims of this horrific violence."

And so true to form, an altar. It is, as I say in the article, not foreign whatsoever to Mexican culture. And so, of course, una ofrenda, un altar, but it needs to be visual. Everybody needs to see it. Everybody needs to have access to it. We need to really do justice to these victims. And so, this was done by inviting 72 Mexican writers and journalists to write something for each one of the victims, including those that were never named. And there were 72 photographs that were included, though they were not able to even get access to family photos, except for a very limited few.

And this was a digital altar, and people were able to donate to a fund or purchase a candle that you would normally, like a virtual candle that you would normally put on an altar. And those proceeds, I believe, went to families of the victims.

JLR: As you point out, our specific sort of material practices and broader cultural significance of altars in Mexican culture. But how do you see these and most of these are physical altars, which is as you say. But how do you see the continuities and the differences between those sort of physical altars and the case of digital altars? Especially when we think about it from your respect in terms of the experience of what that altar means and what that does?

XCG: Right. And it's interesting that the digital altar happened at the time that it did because I'm seeing a lot more digital altar projects happening with artists now. And so, I think it is something worth further studying in my own work. I'm trained in Theology, so I had to rethink what an altar meant and what it did signify. Significant things about altars, especially in Latin America and in Mexican theological practices, the materiality of the altar is filled with the divine.

And so, one of the things I'm wrestling with in my own work, and you can see, I feel, I hope, you could see bits of the ways I'm struggling with this in this article of then, "What does that mean when we put it on a digital platform? What is digital material?" And this is way beyond my training, because I am not from the Digital Humanities. But it's forcing me to have to rethink what a candle feels like and, just, there's a difference.

And I just felt like it's, for me, it felt like it cheapened these tributes, even though these were notable journalists have been covering this type of violence and writers. But it just seems like it was more cheapened. And who had access to this? It also assumed a certain class level. Who was going to access this? It's like most of these migrants are migrating to the US for more opportunities, primarily economic opportunities.

Do the families of these victims even have internet or a computer to access this digital altar that is commemorating their loved ones? So, these are the questions that go through my mind of what, if this is the purpose of an altar, can a digital altar truly do this duty of what an altar is supposed to do?

JLR: Right, right. Yeah, it's interesting that you mentioned that now artists are moving into doing different versions of digital altar, right? A lot of the, I would say from a sort of digital media perspective, a lot of the argument would be about certainly, the digital altar won't replicate a lot of the physical materiality, right? Even the weight of the candle and the lighting of

the candle in the altar cannot be replicated and just buying a candle for the digital altar, which could be swapped for any altar token.

XCG: Right. I mean, I freaked out enough when the Catholic Church switched to ecofriendly candles where you just deposit a coin and push a switch. So, I mean, that change in technology disrupted by soul.

JLR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's like maybe we could, even we could argue some of the meaning is transposed into that. But as you pointed out, there's a lot of meaning attached to the very physicality of holding the object and lighting the object, right? So, all of that might not be replicated sufficiently in any way.

XCG: Exactly.

JLR: But the fact that it is a digital altar living on the internet, broadly, also brings up the question, as you pointed out, of the public, right?

XCG: Right.

JLR: So, who is this altar for if we think of historically, altars being done for, perhaps say for like a member of a family, and it's done in the living room. And so, people who knew that person are the ones bringing the things to it. Here, it's opened up to the broad public, who may have no connection to the people being memorialized.

XCG: Exactly.

JLR: And the people being memorialized, may have no connection to that altar, too, right? So, what is it doing is kind of an important critical question to us.

XCG: Right. And, I mean, and again, still stems from this concept for capitalist of, "Who's going to this website to consume this?"

JLR: Yeah, it's a very different relationship to the dead. When it is bringing the candle to the altar of someone you know versus the like, "I just want to go see the digital altar of these people that I had no literal connection with and just consuming their death." And the grief of those around, yeah, yeah.

So, one of the key aspects — and you point us from the beginning of the article by talking about the picture of this young kid. It's not only that it was this project and because it was coming from a massacre, the question of death surrounds it. But it's particularly the question of Black death that very much embeds all of this. So, could we begin generally by talking about how do you in the article or how do we generally talk about blackness in Mexico, in Mexican culture? Either historically or contemporarily?

XCG: Well, it depends who we're asking. If we're asking academics, it's been discussed anthropologically. These communities exist and these are their practices and beliefs and customs and whatnot. That lends itself to being studied from a historical perspective. What are the stories about their past that we're going to pass on and from whose perspective and what not? But that predominantly has been the academic take on blackness in Mexico. We've always known that Afro-Mexicans exist, but I mean, it was just something in the back of our mind. Rather, it was colorism that we had to worry about less so.

And so if a person was darker skinned, and this is colloquially throughout Mexico and US Mexican cultures, they would call them Indio at times. Or a person would defend themselves for having dark skin by saying that they are more Indio. They have more Indian blood in them, because it was much more preferable to at least associate yourself with indigeneity than blackness. There is a long history of racism between, well, I mean, racism and colorism in both Mexico and the United States. So, there has to be a way of getting out of this identity of blackness.

JLR: Right. Yeah, and it's a series of problematics tied into each other, right?

XCG: Right.

JLR: I think one of the sort of the legacy of mestizaje and this idea of a mixture between the white Europeans and the indigenous populations and how now everyone is "just mixed" has done a lot to paper over the literal existence of Afro-Mexicans, for example, right? And then the question of race more explicitly versus talking about colorism, right?

XCG: Right. And one of the debates that is starting to spark among Mexican cultural studies and Latin American cultural studies is whether or not this clinging to mestizaje if it's an avoidance of an aspiration to claim whiteness. Has this just become a stand-in for your whiteness that you feel too guilty about identifying with whiteness that mestizaje allows you to benefit in the same ways that white privilege extends itself.

JLR: Right, right. It could be mobilized in some way as having your cake and eating it, too. Right?

XCG: Exactly.

JLR: It's a way to say, "No, we're not white." But at the same time it's an aspirational gesture towards that, right.

XCG: Right. We're not white, but we're also not way too Indian.

JLR: Yeah, yeah. And a lot of that what it does similarly to this spectacularization of death is in this case it erases the presence of black people in Mexico and it erases the not having to contend with that at all.

XCG: Exactly.

JLR: I think, so you even mentioned this at the beginning because the title of the article is "Where Blackness Dies." So, even at a discursive level, blackness dies upon just like trying to talk about it in Spanish, when it moves into Hispanic tongue. Could you talk a little bit more about that? You mentioned that you're using the translation "lo negro" as a sort of stand in, but still have reservations about how much that captures what in English blackness sort of captures and alludes to.

XCG: We've heard "la négritude." Okay, that literally translates to negritude, which is an entirely different theoretical genealogy. And mostly leading to French blackness. And the French Caribbean. So, that's one aspect of why I feel that that word has been insufficient in my own work.

And lo negro, like I say, in the article, is a cop out. And lo negro, the use of "lo" and what everything else we use afterwards is the equivalent of the ways we would say in English, I guess, blackness or THE concept of like they said, "lo normal," so like the normal. So that operates sort of on that level in the English language. And I just recently read an article, I think it was a couple weeks ago that used negrismo. And I may be onto something with that one, but I haven't quite decided yet. I just still need to figure out what the implications of "-ismo" would mean and what that does.

But that being said, yes, of course, it dies the second we try to speak about it in Spanish. That being said, it also reveals something that the English language can do that Spanish cannot. And

that is, English allows us to keep coming up with jargon and concepts in a way that becomes untranslatable. And so, that's where we're finding these tensions. And I think that relates to the question you just asked right before this is, "How do we talk about blackness?" Well, I don't know, we can't agree to a term in Spanish.

JLR: Yeah. I mean, yes, on a practical level, it's a translational problem. And that we don't know how to translate that or have the word to say the things that we want to say, as let's say, academics trained in English language scholarship, right?

XCG: Right.

JLR: But I guess the flip side of that or the productive generative aspect of translation is that it reveals those gaps, right? So, we make something of the fact that we don't have a word and from there, start to think about, "Well, why don't we?" And one of the answers, where you pointed out earlier, is because we haven't talked about this, right? Because anthropologists have a sense of talking specifically about blackness from the colonial period, where it was like slaves, black slaves were very much different from indigenous communities. And historians may have that, too.

But when we think about it, now, we think about it, say from a critical theory perspective, and trying to theorize the contemporary. We're lacking the vocabulary, and part of it might just be because we haven't started doing that work of coming up with that critical vocabulary.

XCG: And then for me, it becomes less of a question of, "Do I really need to translate it?" Or "Do I really need that word?" Or "What I need to translate are experiences and feelings?" That's the project for me. Yes, we'll come up with a word eventually, and maybe we won't. But at the end of the day, what needs to be translated are the experiences associated with this concept that doesn't have a name, but that we will call blackness.

I run into this as a queer theorist. Where we're still, and those of us who are bilingual are still arguing over the accurate translation of queer. It's like, do we need a word? Absolutely. But there's so as, when we talk about discourse as academics, there's so much more that emerges discursively by the fact that we don't have a word.

JLR: Right, right. Yeah, the gaps become so generative in them themselves.

XCG: Precisely.

JLR: Yeah. And I mean, to your point about, "Do we need the word that is translated?" I think the analysis that you do in this article shows us that perhaps sometimes we don't. And that's because you are drawing on theorists and writers who have theorized blackness in, let's say, the North America, the US context, Anglo context. And a lot of their insights and a lot of their terms are helpful for how you think about the 72 migrants project, right?

XCG: Right.

JLR: So, two of them that stuck out to me and if you could talk a little bit more about how you borrowed these concepts from, from the writers is “pornotroping,” which you mentioned earlier from Hortense Spillers. And “the hold,” which you draw from Christina Sharpe. So, how do these help you? How do these theorizations of blackness from the sort of US-Anglo perspective also help you make sense of what the 72 migrants project is doing?

XCG: What resonated with my analysis was Afro-pessimism and thinkers within Afro-pessimism. And just to summarize what Afro-pessimism is, it is a school of thought within Black Studies that links blackness to slavery to slave-ness, precisely because there was never this prior meta moment for blackness.

So I benefited from language from Spillers, from Sharpe, and in my broader work from Wilderson and so many others. And Fanon, which all of this leads back to. They were looking at, overall, a spectacularization of black violence.

That when black violence happens, black bodies are dying. They keep dying, and it's become a spectacle precisely through that consumption to the point of a fetish, even. And to the point that these objects are just reduced on the bare flesh. And so, that reduction is sexualized. Again, because there is no prior meta moment for blackness, this is able to happen.

And so, what does that mean when we have the corpse, the victim, the body that is always already associated with slave-ness? Then what does it mean to remember this body to have them and to be in the wake with these themes as Christina Sharpe talks about. In other words, what does it mean to tend to our dead?

And one of the things for Sharpe is, is underlining that within these larger themes, there is this concept of the hold that she theorizes of this moment in the ship. In the belly of the ship, in the mid-Atlantic transport of this waiting space. Of just waiting for this impending violence that was always already promised to black-ness. And so, when we think about the prison timeline that is often associated with black youth, because of this type of black violence and the depth that

surrounds blackness, the concept of a black child doesn't exist, because it's never afforded, a future is ever afforded to those children. So, the language I gathered from those types of thinkers in Black Studies is what I found most useful in my work.

JLR: Right, right. And even though, yeah, I think it's powerful that you start with that picture of Junior Alexander, right? As a way to then come back to it, to think through these concepts and the way that for the black child, in this case, there's no future other than it was a picture of him at his father's funeral. Which already sort of presages the fact that the feature that was promised for him was to be killed early in life, which he does, right?

XCG: Right.

JLR: Because that's why he was one of the people massacred in Tamaulipas and therefore, that's when the image comes up to memorialize them. So, that image sort of is holding that. I don't know if it's circular logic, but that sort of timeline in and of itself already.

XCG: Right. I mean, it's as I kept thinking about that photo. I was like, "This photo has a huge burden." We are expecting this photo to do so much. And one of the things is precisely as what you described, this circulation of the context. And then, yeah. This photo just has way too much.

And it's like, "At what point is it no longer about this? Is it about the subject of the photo? What pressures are we putting on this child to represent?" And the things that he is representing, and that this photo is representing its core and it's not. It is negativity at the end. It is a future where blackness dies.

JLR: Yeah, yeah. Well, and as you point out, there's the other picture, which, so this one is about Junior Alexander, and it's asked to represent so much by the creators of the digital altar. Then there's the picture that is not assigned to, it's assigned to one of the migrants, but it's not of them. But it is of a black man, just meant to signify black migrants, right?

That one's doing the opposite, which is sort of assuming the indistinguishability or the fact that, "Well, this was someone who died, so we can just flop in that picture." And then write something about it or reminisce or I don't know, poeticize about that experience.

XCG: Right. I mean, and I wonder, because this is not answered by Alma Guillermoprieto in anything that I have found is that they did want 72 photos. So, they did ask a limited number of photographers, who document these migrations of Central American migrants making their journey to the US. So, photo journalists and whatnot to contribute to the project. But I wonder,

is it because we didn't want, because of the dearth of family photos, did we not want there to only be so many with a family photo and a lot without? And what like you said, these are just placeholders.

JLR: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, you pointed two crucial issues about why, at least, as you're arguing, the digital altar just falls short, so much. And that one is so many of the decisions, we could say, were purely aesthetic decisions, right? We want to have 72 photographs, even if they're not photographs of the 72 people. We just want 72 to match the number does a disservice to what do you want those pictures to do, right? It can be just swapped in any picture of a train track.

And the other one, I think it's implicit, but it's the Mexicanness of it all, right? The fact that it was created by Mexican journalists and writers. And yes, it was a massacre in Mexico, but one of the crucial issues to think about this is a lot of, I don't know, I don't remember if all of them. But a lot of the people who died were migrants crossing through Mexico, right? They were coming from Central American countries on their way to the US.

So, it reinforces in some way what is already the mediating function that Mexico does in terms of thinking the rest of the continent in relation to the US, right? Why is it that it is Mexican writers in general who get to tell the stories of the death of Central American migrants?

XCG: Right. And disservice is definitely the right word, especially when you just keep following the domino effect of everything that all of this represents. And it's like even if this is sort of "On behalf of Mexicans, we are sorry. And here are families of the victims, who may or may not be able to access this website. We are sorry." I mean, it's imperialistic. It's class based. It's a problem.

JLR: Yeah, yeah, for sure. And increasingly becoming a problem, too, in that, now, all the focus on the Mexican southern border as being militarized and transformed into that first sort of threshold. Just replicating everything that Mexican academics, Mexican activists and writers have been critiquing about the US southern border and the dangers of that has now been transported to the southern US, the southern Mexican border. So, how do we contend with that? And beyond just, that's to say that sort of apology through a digital altar, right?

XCG: Right.

JLR: All of those questions are not really answered in that format. So, one of the sort of broader I would say interventions that you point at, speaking about that we don't have the

language, that we are contending still we had to address blackness from a Mexican perspective. You mentioned that you want to sort of resituate this Mexican case within a hemispheric framework as a way to sort of think collectively, both in Latin America, US about Black Studies. So, what are some of the potential that you see or the possibilities in doing this sort of continental move? Of thinking critically about blackness interhemispheric framework or comparatively across these different histories or different frameworks as well?

XCG: Yes. I mean, hemispheric studies is primarily about decentralizing the United States as the anchor of how we study the northern hemisphere to decentralize US and European thinking and/or the Western Hemisphere, and to account for the global south.

But it is about decentralizing US imperialism in terms of what thought looks like. And so, that being said, if the project is not about my dependency to find an accurate translation of this work, but to do the translation of experience of feelings of how this work travels, of how this work is surrounded by other material worlds, then once we decentralize this work, we're able to borrow from other languages. Not in a way that just simply takes something and just applies it or something that we could just use at our own will and when it's not ours to be using. But rather that. "No, these are larger conversations that have already been happening, and we just have not made the link between them."

And so, myself, and I feel this on a personal level as a scholar that has dual citizenship to Mexico and the United States. My experiences with these themes in Mexico are different or not so different than the way I experience them in the US. For some, they are, but so for some they're not but, or vice versa. But the language I use comes from both sides. And so, in some ways it is decolonizing that border way of thinking.

JLR: Right, right. Yeah. And because I think as you point out the move towards hemispheric thinking, allows those connections to be made and allows that borrowing is not the right word. But the bringing in of terms that have already been thought through in particular contexts and how those rub up or help us make sense of experiences in other places, right?

XCG: Right.

JLR: Which is very different than the sort of standard way that we think of academic imperialism of, "Oh, there's all this Western theory, and we're just applying it elsewhere." But I think as you point out with thinking about pornotroping, for example, is that there is something there about these similar ways of thinking and consuming black death in these two different

national contexts that maybe should point us to maybe not thinking in those national context. But thinking more broadly about how these trends and ideologies are replicated...

XCG: Exactly.

JLR: ... across the continent. Yeah, right. So, how have you built or expanded on this work since its publication?

XCG: Yes, so I just kept letting my research lead me where it was going to take me. So, I was following these threads of, How do I interpret blackness? And how does that relate to my larger interests within performance studies in queer theory" So, I found myself drawn to black artists in Latin America and Afro-Latin artists, and relationships between hemispheric Latinx people and black people in terms of how they share space.

This has led to what will be a second book project on black music in a Latinx context, so I'm excited to pursue that. And then and that is going to be very much a hemispheric project. I'm thinking through artists in Brazil, Mexico, and the United States, and the Caribbean. So yeah, so I'm just excited to see where this work is taking me. And I remain interested in these themes of death and blackness. And so, I have found artists or rather these artists, in some sense, found me. Their work has found me that, I think, presents itself as generous case studies for me to think through these questions.

JLR: Xiomara, thank you so much for joining us.

XCG: Thank you for having me as a guest.

[closing credits music]

JLR: This episode of the Global Media Cultures podcast was produced by me and edited by Alan Yu, and closing credits music by Cloud Mouth. This project is supported in part by the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas. Global Media Cultures podcast introduces media scholarship about the world, to the world. I'm Juan Llamas-Rodriguez. Thank you for listening.