

# Kingdom of Debt

By Erika L. Sánchez

*According to a report from the University of San Diego's Justice in Mexico project, 138,000 people have been murdered in Mexico since 2006.*

They call it the corner of heaven:  
a laboratory, a foot at the throat  
of an empire. Before the holy  
dirt, the woman with the feline gait  
waits with tangled hair, mouth  
agape — the letter X marked  
on what's left of her breasts  
and face. *Nuestra Belleza  
Mexicana*. A roped mule  
watches a man place a crown  
on her severed head. Tomorrow  
the queen will be picked clean  
by the kindness of the sea.  
Shuttered shops and empty  
restaurants. Stray dogs couple  
in a courtyard. Under a swaying  
palm tree, a cluster of men  
finger golden pistols, whisper,  
*aquí ni se paran las moscas*.  
Two boys, transfixed, watch  
a pixelated video: a family fed  
to a swarm of insatiable pigs.  
A butcher sweeps blood  
from an empty street. *Death  
is my godmother*, he repeats.  
*Death is a burnt mirror*.  
When the crackling stereo  
dithers between stations — *amor  
de mis amores, sangre de mi alma* —  
a gaggle of silent children  
gather before a sputtering  
trash bin. Together they watch  
the terror hover like flies.

Source: *Poetry* (December 2015)