

“HASTA LA MADRE!”: MEXICAN MOTHERS AGAINST “THE WAR ON DRUGS”¹

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Abstract. The Mexican government’s “war on drugs,” carried out with full support from the United States, has gained a visible media presence in the past few years, particularly because of extremely high levels of violence. This violence, however, has been largely represented in the media as a masculinized battle between cartels and military forces. Official discourses often insist that most victims are men directly involved in narco-trafficking, oversimplifying the nature of the violence (which is often created by military forces) and missing women’s presence among the victims as well in activist circles. This essay problematizes these misconceptions by examining the recent emergence of activism among Mexican women affected by the violence of the “war on drugs.” In particular, I analyze, first, how women who lost family members to this violence became active protestors of government policies and, second, the affective and political relations they forge as part of this activism. Based on fieldwork in Mexico City and the United States, I examine the trajectories and experiences of women involved in the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad) and The Mothers’ Network (La red de las madres). Specifically, I analyze the way that gender roles, kinship ties, and motherhood informs the experience of many activists but also the ways in which some of them make sense of their agency in their roles as sisters, daughters or indeed through their experiences of violence not expressed through an affiliation with kin.

The violence that people in Mexico have been subjected to by the state and narco cartels as a result of the US-backed “war on drugs” is staggering.² Since former Mexican President Felipe Calderón launched his military offensive against the drug cartels after taking office in 2006, over 120,000 people have been killed nationwide. In 2014, Mexico was ranked the country with the third-most civilians killed in internal conflict, after Syria and Iraq, whose internal wars tend to receive more

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attention in the mainstream media. According to the Mexican government 27,638 people have been registered as disappeared or missing since 2006, and nearly half of them disappeared after 2012, the year that the current president, Enrique Peña Nieto, took office. But different organizations and activist groups estimate that the number of people who have disappeared is much higher, since a large number of disappearances are not officially registered by the state.³

Men have been most directly affected by this crushing level of violence. Men are more likely to be lured directly into the narco trade, and the deaths created by narco violence are overwhelmingly those of young men. Indeed, the lifespan of Mexican men has fallen due to the increase in murders since the war on drugs began in December 2006.⁴ However, one largely unexamined result of such violence is that tens of thousands of women have been left widowed or searching for information on missing or murdered children, siblings and spouses. Since the impunity rate for these murders is extremely high and most narco-related deaths are not legally investigated, women who lose family members, especially children, have been increasingly taking a more political stance in demanding justice and protesting the devastating impact of drug-war policies among the Mexican poor and middle class. The growing presence of these women in the political scene complicates and challenges the official masculinization of violence in the media. It also reveals the different ways in which gender and gender positionings are constitutive to drug war opposition.

This essay joins others in this collection in problematizing common assumptions about the relationship between gender and drugs. It analyzes, in particular, the politicization of women in the war on drugs in Mexico and their different attitudes towards violence and the trafficking and use of illicit drugs. It examines, first, how women who lost family members to drug-related violence became active protestors of government policies and, second, the affective and political relations they forged as part of this activism. The analysis is based on research among activists involved in the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity in Mexico City, and in particular, on my participation in a 2012 Caravan for Peace that travelled from Mexico to the United States.

As Herzberg and Campbell emphasize in the introduction to these special issues, there is still a need for the scholarship on gender and drugs to pay close and careful attention to the actual lived experiences of women, rather than resting on assumed or stereotypical roles. Part of this attention to lived experience requires a close analysis of women's own, subjective understandings of their experiences. In the Movement for Peace, as in other activism against drug-related violence in Mexico, women evoking their identity as grieving "mothers" committed to finding their missing children are highly visible. But this public emphasis on their role as "mothers" tends

to silence other kinds of subjectivities mobilized by these activisms. While women who position themselves as mothers have had the most audible voices in activism against drug war policies, other women make sense of their agency in their roles as sisters, daughters, partners, or indeed through their experiences of violence not expressed through an affiliation with kin. While such activists are part of these movements, their voices are less audible. One of the paradoxes of the local and national impact of drug war policies, in this regard, is that the politicization of women both essentializes and potentially redefines traditional gender roles in Mexico, where a patriarchal figure of "the mother" is particularly strong. This essentializing of gender roles becomes particularly evident in a cross-cultural perspective, for the ways that women's voices have emerged in Mexico's drug debate have created challenges for building a bi-national movement between activists in the United States and Mexico.

The rising violence created by the war on drugs in Mexico as well as the high incarceration rates that these official drug policies have created in the United States have generated a rich and ever-growing body of literature. Some of this scholarship has exposed the material and ideological effects of the "war on drugs" by analyzing the skyrocketing profits it provides to the military industrial complex,⁵ the US and Mexican financial sector,⁶ and government agencies and corporations that profit from it.⁷ Other authors also emphasize the important role of the war on drugs in the extension and maintenance of racial hierarchies⁸ and relations of exploitation between the United States and Latin America.⁹ This line of analysis has been important to expose the elite beneficiaries of drug war policies, and to destabilize common-sense notions which too often re-entrench neoliberal ideologies, for instance by blaming the victims of violence for allegedly participating in narco-trafficking. Yet relatively little ethnographic work has been done on women's relation to the trade.¹⁰ As Carey suggests in these special issues, this distorted view of the illicit economy as relating only to men is part of a larger set of assumptions about the war on drugs itself being the purview of men. Carey argues that assumptions about the exclusively masculine nature of drug trafficking extends to the notion that they are the ones who fight drug trafficking, work in it and write about it.

The research that has focused on women's involvement with drugs more generally has largely been interested in the dynamics of women as drug users. Conventional research on women's drug use, however, does not address the legal, economic, and social factors that shape the lives of women who use illegal drugs or the importance of their own subjective experiences.¹¹ More recently, feminist accounts of women's substance use offer new empirical material that illuminates how social interactions work within the lived realities that structure the lives of these women.¹² These studies have

challenged conventional research on women who use illegal drugs,¹³ which tends to portray them as “criminals” and “addicts,” seeing illegal drug use as “evidence” of their deviancy. This was particularly the case of public discourses that painted drug-using pregnant women as *de facto* criminal perpetrators often demonized as “bad mothers.”¹⁴

Trysh Travis’s article in these special issues analyzes how different social movements make some roles for women more visible by arguing that the movements associated with the New Left allowed the American “woman substance abuser” to come into view. The present article provides a complementary case in that it presents a scenario where women become hyper-visible through their role as grieving mothers as a result of the convergence of social movements originating in different cultural contexts. The experience of the mothers on the 2012 Caravan for Peace is also a reminder of the dangers of homogenizing terms like “women” or “mothers,” which obscure women’s roles and constrain their options, even if they also enable gender-specific opportunities.

The effects of drug prohibition policies on women who are not identified as users have been a blind spot in the literature in several respects. First, the participation of women in the drug trade has only recently been documented historically, and even less so ethnographically.¹⁵ Women who are activists against drug war violence have also received scant attention.¹⁶ In *When I Wear My Alligator Boots*, I analyzed the participation of some women as mules transporting drugs, based on my previous research in and around the former delta of the Colorado River, close to the US-Mexican border. But it was in 2012 that I met for the first time Mexican women who had been affected by the “war on drugs” in a different way, by disrupting their families and turning them into activists.¹⁷

In August of that year, I travelled to San Diego, California, to join a caravan organized by Mexican activists to protest drug war policies in the United States. Right at the border, where they had organized a press conference officially launching their caravan, I met María Herrera, a woman from Michoacán who had lost four sons. Two of them had disappeared on a business trip in 2008. She and her family searched for them with no help from the authorities and without success. In 2010, another two sons went missing. María and her remaining sons are still searching for them, though the chances that they are alive are very slim.

María is a member of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD), which is a loosely organized group of female and male activists that demands an end to the “war on drugs.” The movement is gaining a growing following through marches, rallies, and caravans and has protested both drug war policies and the government’s response to the violence and impunity created in part by such policies. The 2012 caravan that MPJD organized to several cities in the United States was particularly signifi-

cant, for it targeted the main actor supporting and encouraging the “war on drugs” in Mexico: the government of the United States.

The primary ethnographic methods I used in this research consisted of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Through participant observation, I took part in the daily life of women activists. On the caravan through the United States this consisted of accompanying them in their daily routine, riding with them on the bus, eating with them, and spending time with them between formal events. In Mexico City, my participant observation included attending meetings and accompanying activists to protests and planning events. Through semi-structured interviews, I also gathered accounts of how violence has affected women’s lives and changed their perceptions of drug war policies, with specific emphasis on how they interpret the changing political climate in the wake of the dramatic rise of drug-associated violence over the last decade.

I found that ethnographic research was particularly important to trace a process of politicization over time because it provided a strategic vantage point from which to analyze a shift in the subjectivities of some activists. With this goal in mind, in 2013, a year after the Caravan for Peace concluded its journey in the United States, I did fieldwork in Mexico City to conduct follow-up interviews with the people I had met in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Chicago. The following section examines what my participation in the US caravan journey revealed about the different ways in which this activism was gendered.

“THEY STARTED OFF AS A BUSLOAD OF VICTIMS...”

On 12 August 2012, a bus full of Mexican men and women who had been personally affected by the violence of the war on drugs crossed the border at Tijuana to start a month-long caravan across the United States.¹⁸ Many of them had lost loved ones. Others had fled from bloodshed or been forced out of their communities. These people said that they were bringing with them across the border “a message of pain” to the American people. There, beneath the tall, double-fenced border wall with a view of Tijuana beyond, members of the press and supporters gathered on both sides to welcome the caravan. The main instigator and the main public figure of the tour was the famed poet Javier Sicilia, who told the press about the purpose of their journey: “We will travel across the United States to raise awareness of the unbearable pain and loss caused by the drug war, and of the enormous shared responsibility for protecting families and communities in both our countries.”

Sicilia became an activist in 2011 after his twenty-four-year-old son, Juan Francisco Sicilia, was found dead with six others in a car outside the city of Cuernavaca. This incident fortified growing public criticism of the Mexican government’s discourse and of the impunity it created by con-

stantly dismissing murders like those involving Sicilia's son as "cartel violence" involving "narco-traffickers." Javier Sicilia has since insisted that his son "had nothing to do with the cartels." His activism has drawn attention to the fact that the US and Mexican war on drugs is not just targeting drug dealers and cartel members but also ordinary, law-abiding, middle-class citizens.

At the border fence, I joined the bus with the other activists I had just met. The people on the bus were men and women who had lost their sons and daughters and grandchildren, and women who had lost their husbands. They were mostly middle-class Mexicans; some identified as indigenous. Twenty cars and another bus full of scholars and supporters followed along behind the bus carrying the core group of activists.

It quickly became apparent through my conversations with the passengers that many of them were there because of their personal experiences and recent trauma and loss, rather than because of a political or ideological positioning regarding drugs and the war on drugs. In fact, most of them had not spent much time thinking about how the loss of their loved ones was related to decades of foreign policy around the drug trade. Rather than being actively recruited for the caravan, most of these women had sought out the principal organizers and activists because they had seen them on their local television channels and learned through their own networks that participants had experienced similar violence and frustration with the lack of police response. The caravan offered them a community with which to mourn as much as a platform from which to protest.

The process of politicization for many of the people who joined the movement was long and sometimes difficult, both emotionally and intellectually. On the Caravan for Peace this process emerged through the emotional intensity of the relations people created with each other and with members of the media. Many people joined the Caravan to share their personal stories, not to offer policy recommendations. But because of the nature of the events and interactions they generated with journalists and the public on the tour, they were often called upon to bring a "message."

When the bus arrived in San Diego at the border fence and the members of the caravan stepped off, for instance, they were quickly surrounded by crowds of people, including journalists, television crews, and local NGOs and support groups. The members of the Caravan later told me that they initially found that experience overwhelming, for many of them were visiting the United States for the first time and most of them spoke very little English. When journalists asked them "why are you here in America?" and "what is your message?" most people said something about bringing a message of "pain." This was also the part of Javier Sicilia's speech that seemed to resonate most strongly with the activists. But journalists kept asking questions such as, "What can the United States do for you? What is

it that you want us to know?" Many people on the bus at this point did not have well-rehearsed answers or clear talking points to work with.

For the first few days of the Caravan, in fact, it was obvious that the women did not quite know what to do with this particular platform of activism. For many, their recent loss and trauma was still too raw for them to be able to articulate anything in public without breaking down incoherently in tears. This was the case with María Herrera during her first few days on the tour. Her two remaining sons were with her and often spoke "on her behalf" in those moments. For example, Juan, María's thirty-year-old son, took the podium in Los Angeles on behalf of his mother and told the story of his four brothers' disappearances. To conclude, he said into the microphone: "So my message is that drugs are bad. They are bad for you guys in one way. And they are bad for us in another way. So stop doing drugs." I was immediately intrigued by his reproduction of the hegemonic idea that "drugs are bad," which is permanently evoked by officials to justify waging "war" against the people who use, produce, traffic and sell them. So I talked to Juan about this speech a few days later and asked him to expand on his message. He said that by highlighting that drugs "are bad" for Americans he meant that, as the largest consumers of drugs, Americans have experienced many negative effects of drug abuse and addiction as well as drug-related deaths. When he said that drugs are "bad" for Mexicans "in another way," he meant, he told me, that the drug trade is taking the lives of thousands of people a year in Mexico through corruption, shootouts and violent criminal activity associated with the production, distribution and sale of drugs.

But Juan's concluding remarks in his speech days earlier, that Americans should therefore "stop doing drugs," did not resonate with the Caravan's public statements, which were very much codified within "harm reduction" approaches to drug use and were explicitly for the legalization of drugs currently treated as illegal. The main organizers of the caravan, in this regard, had a fairly developed and explicit set of recommendations that they made to officials and the media. Their primary demand was the creation of alternatives to drug prohibition such as legalization or decriminalization; an open discussion of drug policy reform that replaces the current criminal justice approach with a public health focus; a halt to the illegal smuggling of weapons across the American border; and concrete steps to combat money laundering, including holding powerful financial institutions accountable. They also called on the US government to immediately suspend its military and intelligence assistance to Mexican armed forces, and their voices thereby also targeted the neo-colonial influence of US presidents in dictating anti-drug policies in Mexico.

In the first several days, the academics and organizers, including poet Javier Sicilia, voiced these points publicly, including the demand that the

government explore the option of legalization. However, back in the privacy of the bus, many of the women I talked with expressed some discomfort with legalization. Ruth, a woman in her fifties from Veracruz whose son had gone missing in 2010, confided her reticence to me and some other women on the bus. “Really?” she said, “they think that drugs should be legalized?” She said she understood this on the one hand, but added that drugs are “so bad” for communities that it made her a little bit uncomfortable. She said she saw a lot of people with drug problems back home in Mexico and that the thought of drugs being legal scared her. The other women we were sitting with agreed that they could not imagine that legalization could be good for their own neighborhoods either.

Ruth, along with many of the women on the tour, had been a housewife before her sons disappeared. She spent her days working from home, cooking, taking care of her grandchildren and family. These women were aware of the local effects of drugs in the form of criminal networks and addiction, but they had spent little time thinking about how state violence and the US foreign policy were implicated in these most immediate and local experiences.

Over the next few weeks, the 120-person caravan travelled 5,700 miles. They held events in twenty-six cities in the United States and generated extensive coverage in most of the major media outlets in the US and Mexico. Through media events, marches, rallies, and interviews that were planned in advance, women such as María and Ruth gradually began to close the gap between their own experiences of trauma and loss and the kinds of policy discussions that were taking place as the caravan moved along. Through conversations between these women and law-enforcement officers who favored legalization, and through talks with organizations like LEAP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition), it became clearer for many of them how prohibition policies, not drug addiction, were what directly fueled the violence that had robbed them of their children and that engulfed the regions from which they came. The kinds of interactions among this heterogeneous assortment of people allowed for meaningful and politically generative connections. The women learned to see “drugs” in a new light from agents of the US government who knew that the “war on drugs” was not just a failure but also the main cause of the violence.

But as I explain below, the most decisively politicizing event for many mothers on the caravan was their contact with female American activists against the war on drugs, who were also mothers and mostly black.

“THEY ENDED UP AS A BUSLOAD OF ACTIVISTS”

While the tour was a grass-roots mobilization, the majority of the caravan leaders were men, and the tour was motivated through the efforts of the poet Javier Sicilia. During subsequent research in 2013 it became clear

that this was not a general feature of mothers’ activism more generally, but there was a striking lack of leadership among the mothers on this particular caravan.¹⁹ In part, this was because the mothers on this tour were at an early stage of politicization, many having quite recently lost loved ones.

The funding and organizing for the caravan were generated by a notably grassroots initiative. The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity partnered with a broad range of coalition groups. On the US side, the human rights organization Global Exchange ran much of the funding and logistics of the 2012 tour through crowdsourcing from individual donors and over one hundred US and Mexican organizations.²⁰ Food and shelter throughout the caravan’s journey was often provided by supporting organizations in the local points of travel: churches, community centers, and NGOs all played a role. Nonetheless, many of the women on the tour suffered significant economic hardship as a result of leaving their families and sometimes their jobs. This was something that many of the participants remarked on during my follow-up interviews in Mexico City in 2013.

The individuals on the tour who first saw opportunities in the politicization process were not the victims themselves but the organizers and academics participating in the caravan. For example, in a 2013 follow-up I interviewed Marco, who was one of the main organizers of the caravan. I was interested in talking to him about the process of politicization I had witnessed among the activists during my participant observation the year before. I was curious about how he perceived it as an organizer. Marco put it bluntly: “When they started off on the caravan in San Diego, they were a busload of victims,” he said; “they ended up a busload of activists.”

Marco described how the organizers initially did not plan to “educate” the participants or pressure them into aligning their public comments to the Caravan’s public recommendations. There were no official training sessions held for the participants of the tour. But the caravan did put them in contact with mothers in the United States who were experiencing the same policies but from a different perspective. According to Marco, what affected the participants most was meeting American mothers who had organized as “Mothers Against Police Brutality.” This is an advocacy group whose mission is “to unite mothers and families nationally who have had their children suffer injustice at the hands of their local Police Department. We will hold law enforcement accountable. Our mission is to have an integral role in the changes and dialogues that will protect and save lives.”²¹ However, Marco clarified that when the Mexican women first met members of this group, they did not feel an immediate sense of solidarity with them.

In many of the larger cities visited by the caravan, such as Chicago and New York, there were events organized and marches planned strategically to go from predominantly Hispanic to predominantly African American

neighborhoods in order to, as Marco put it, “build links between the two communities.” The organizers, including Marco, believed that these communities would be “natural allies” for the movement and that the caravan could integrate many of their demands and positions. But the organizers did not anticipate the cultural obstacles that would emerge. In retrospect, Marco regretted that they did not have an introductory or preparatory discussion early on about interracial relationships in the United States, on international relations, or on US politics in general. Marco admitted that a large problem was, as he described it, “Many of the survivors on the caravan were very racist in their comments at the beginning of the caravan.” He said it quickly became clear that some Mexican women could not identify with black people in the United States. They saw themselves and the violence they experienced back home as fundamentally different. For one thing, it was hard for many of the women from Mexico, whose message up until then was that their children “had nothing to do with drugs,” to sympathize with “mothers of drug addicts.”

Marco explained that it was only after engaging with black mothers repeatedly in different cities that the women and men on the tour began to think about how their own experiences were related. And according to Marco, all the black mothers they met (and perceived stereotypically) talked about police brutality. This was a big shift in perspective for many of the women on the caravan, who as apolitical housewives had a more moralizing view of drugs. As Marco explained drawing attention to the predominantly Catholic upbringing many Mexicans, “We are much more religious thinking, more moral about the good and the bad. ‘You get in trouble because you are bad.’ Therefore, their sons were victims because it was unfair because ‘My son was not bad, didn’t do drugs but was taken by the bad guys and something bad happened.’”

As noted earlier, the ideological discourse that has justified the Mexican government’s unwillingness to investigate the majority of these murders has been that the deaths simply consist of “criminals killing each other off.” As Gibler notes, “If you are found dead, chopped up, wrapped in a soiled blanket left on some desolate roadside, you are somehow to blame... The very fact of your execution is the judgment against you, the determination of your guilt.”²² Almost all the people I have met over the years who have lost a loved one in Mexico, whether disappeared or found murdered and mutilated, have received the same response from the police and the government: “They must have been involved.” But the reality is that with human rights groups estimating that the number of disappeared people in Mexico since 2006 at the very least 27,638, as mentioned above, authorities hesitate to register the missing to avoid negative publicity of government inaction, which means that the judiciary is rarely involved and the disappearances are rarely investigated. The widespread disappearance of people

in Mexico and the impunity associated with it is central to the demands of women activists. In 2008, Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) estimated that the impunity rate for murder – that is, the rate at which murders are not investigated by the police or prosecuted – is as high as 99 percent.²³ In 2010, another Mexican research institute calculated that in fourteen of Mexico’s thirty-one states, the chance of a murder leading to trial and sentencing was less than one percent.²⁴ Since then, attempts at reform have stalled as crime and impunity have become even more rampant. This is why many activists in Mexico openly criticize the Mexican government’s justification for its unwillingness to investigate: that the victims must have been “involved” in narco-trafficking.

There have been several key events in the history of drug war activism in Mexico that have challenged government “discourses of impunity,” as Wright calls them.²⁵ But the most recent and impactful was certainly the disappearance and suspected massacre of forty-three left wing youths in Iguala, state of Guerrero, in September 2014. The affective impact this massacre had in the country as a whole was significant because it was soon revealed that the kidnappers and murderers were not “narcos,” as the government first claimed, but police officers following orders from local elected officials who, in turn, were part of a powerful cartel. This revelation challenged one of the myths promoted by the Mexican government: that the war on drugs is a duel between a well-defined state and well-marked criminal organizations. In Iguala, the very distinction dissolved when it became clear that those who kidnapped and killed the youths were agents of the state *and* narcos at the same time. The fact that the same officers and officials who were supposed to fight the trafficking of drugs profited from it further undermined the official argument blaming those drugs, and their alleged intrinsic negativity, as the cause of the violence.²⁶

As I mentioned earlier, some women on the Caravan for Peace initially shared the assumption that those “involved” could be clearly distinguished from those “not involved” in the first place. Even more problematically, they assumed that if victims were drug dealers or drug addicts, then their lives were somehow less valuable and their deaths less worthy of investigation. More notably, many of the women I interviewed implied that the accusation that their missing or murdered children were “involved” was particularly distressing because it became an indictment of their poor parenting skills and their failure to be “good mothers.” But this common-sense perception about their gender and kinship roles was shaken when these women met mothers in the United States who talked openly about their children’s involvement with drugs and petty trafficking. For example, after listening to one of the mothers involved in the Mothers Against Police Brutality at a rally in Chicago, Antonia, who had lost a son two years earlier in Mexico, said what surprised her the most about the woman was

that “she wasn’t ashamed” to admit that her son, now in prison, had been a drug addict. At the time, I was struck by the implication in Antonia’s remark that she would have expected the woman to be ashamed. This is why, when I met Antonia again during my follow-up fieldwork in Mexico City in 2013, I asked her about this again. Antonia admitted that her opinions had changed since that day in Chicago. She said “You see all these mothers that seem like you and have stories like you. But then they have this narrative that ‘My son was bad, but he was bad because the system was bad.’ They say ‘I was a good mother but we received bad educations, lived in a bad economy and my son was depressed – he didn’t have any choice but this.’” Antonia said that at first, she was taken aback by these kinds of stories about drugs. But ultimately she thought “it was good that this mother didn’t blame herself.”

In their edited collection on maternalist movements, Koven and Mitchel point out that maternalism takes specific forms when linked to conservative Catholic ideologies.²⁷ The mothers on the caravan did not make explicit reference to Catholic ideologies or religious imagery, but as Marco also pointed out in our interview above, their notions of respectability and of being a good mother were very much embedded in a Catholic discourse.

However, after Antonia repeatedly encountered arguments that recognized the structural causes of peoples’ suffering, she along with other mother-activists started to discuss among themselves the greater complexities of their individual cases. Many of them began recognizing or admitting that maybe their sons were “not as good” as they initially described them, and that – for instance – they consumed drugs. They also began to become aware that “involvement” with drugs did not make what happened to their children less of a human rights violation.

As Marco had told me when I met him in Mexico City, in Mexico there is more pressure to “clean” (*limpiar*) the cases of those who are killed or go missing, by denying any connection, however circumstantial, with drugs and crime. When I asked Marco why that was the case, he said: “In Mexico there is a strong moral perspective and conservative culture influenced by Catholicism that clearly distinguishes between good and bad. Mothers from Mexico say that their children’s suffering isn’t fair because they are not bad, because they don’t do drugs. Mothers in the US say that the system is bad, so their kids do drugs and then go to jail.” But, as we have seen, conversations between both groups made the Mexican mothers engage with these structural factors in their public speeches and interviews.

INNOCENCE AND BECOMING GRIEVABLE

What does it take to mobilize political opposition when lives are lost to violence? Judith Butler argues that this question is ultimately one about how affect is produced by the frame of “grievability.”²⁸ She argues that specific

lives cannot be apprehended as lost if they are not first apprehended as living, and that this apprehension is presupposed by certain norms of recognition. We can see this struggle for recognition at work here in the way the figures of the mourning mother and the killed child push at the limits of the kinds of deaths available for public mourning in the context of the war on drugs. In this case, "innocence" broadly and vaguely defined is the crucial category within which mothers must place their sons in order to have their deaths register as grievable in the public sphere. The ways that a subject's death is circumscribed as grievable, then, places significant limitations on maternal activism.

There is a growing literature on conflict over rights and criminality in Latin America that helps put these activists' responses to drug war violence into a wider context.²⁹ This literature has explored the various ways that "innocence" has become the measure of authenticating "victims" of human rights abuses and the condition for gaining political and social recognition, a dynamic that exists throughout the Americas. For example, in Columbia, the conflation of criminal networks with insurgent politics rendered human right issues less sympathetic and created friction among activists against Plan Colombia in the early 2000s.³⁰ In Peru, ongoing and extensive controversy has emerged over the importance of innocence in defending victims of abuse among the human rights community.³¹ Human rights cases were refused for individuals who were wrongly imprisoned but who were members of the Shining Path.³² In urban Brazil, critics of police brutality have been undermined by accusations that they care only for criminals.³³ In Argentina, government discourses during the military dictatorship (1976-83) claimed that all of the 30,000 people massacred and disappeared during military raids were associated with guerilla insurgents.³⁴

These conflicts over rights and criminality have also had profound effects on the degree to which human rights campaigns and activism have been mobilized and the extent to which such efforts have been able to form broader social movements. Winnifred Tate describes how the movement in protest of Plan Columbia was hindered by friction between activist camps from the US and from Columbia. In Columbia, the co-existence of criminal networks with insurgent politics created suspicion among American activists who were used to more black-and-white scenarios. Furthermore, the Colombian state's official construal of populations as "criminals," created concern that activism was tolerant of illegal drug trafficking. This limited affective affinity between activists and weakened solidarity. Tate argues that for all these reasons, a broad social movement in opposition of Plan Colombia never coalesced.³⁵

In the attempt to forge a transnational activist movement during the Caravan for Peace, one of the primary challenges emerged from the imperative that women from Mexico felt to maintain the innocence of their children.

As I argue below, this pressure to foreground innocence was partially generated by the constraints of an activists platform highlighting women and mothers in particular.

“THEY DON’T CRY ANYMORE. NOW, THEY FIGHT!”

Journalists often asked women and members of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity why it is so disproportionately made up of women. And specifically, why it is the mothers and not the fathers who devote themselves to seeking out information on victims and protesting the governments’ obfuscations. The representation of these “mothers” as the primary voice of the movement was evident not just in the media coverage, which always highlights the image of the grieving mother, but also in the dynamics and politics of activists’ activities and events.

For example, at a press conference in Mexico City I attended in 2013, a group of activists came with large photos of their missing family members. After a panel where a local celebrity, government officials, and three mothers of victims spoke about “the disappeared” in Mexico, the event transitioned into a more informal gathering where journalists paced the room to approach people carrying photos and ask them the stories of their children’s disappearances. Of the women there, eight were accompanied by male kin (sons or fathers), five came with another woman, and one came alone. In all of the cases in which women were accompanied by men, the journalists addressed the women in the group. This was the case even where it was the men who held the photos of the missing person.

I approached the woman who came alone, Elyssa. She was hanging back from the crowds of journalists. I asked her about the man in the sign she held. She said it was her nephew and that she was there “on behalf of my nephew’s mother,” who was her sister. She did offer the base details of her story, but repeated that she was here on her sister’s behalf. Later, she explained that her sister and brother-in-law lived too far outside of the city to attend any of the events and protests organized for families of missing people. Elyssa’s behavior was indicative of the norms assumed by relatives of missing people who were not mothers. When approached, such participants would usually introduce themselves by defining their relationship to the victim. But when asked “why” they were there – which was the routine follow-up question for most journalists – they would say that they were there to support their mother or their wife, whoever the mother of the disappeared or deceased person was. Mothers, in short, tended to become the center of attention.

A noteworthy and regular exception was when the mothers became “too emotional” to speak. As we have seen, this was in fact the case with María during the first days of the caravan, when her sons Juan and Rafael would speak “on her behalf.” But her presence as a mother grieving beside them,

sometimes beginning to speak but then breaking down, was powerful in itself.

Many women I interviewed, including María, described their process of politicization as one of "hardening" or becoming more "tough" (*dura*) through the emotionally intense experience of the caravan. By the time the caravan reached Chicago, two weeks after its beginning in San Diego, María would take to the podium with confidence, indeed often with anger. In fact, this affective hardening is part of the public narrative of the mother in the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity, clear in its slogan "*Las madres ya no lloran, ahora luchan!*" (The mothers no longer cry, they fight!). Nonetheless, the emotions the women expressed were circumscribed by a set of deeply cultural narratives and dispositions. In the past decade, a growing body of literature on affect theory, influenced by Spinoza and Deleuze, has insisted that political struggles cannot be reduced to conscious and discursive articulations, and that many protests have profound emotional dimensions that cannot be articulated linguistically or ideologically.³⁶

The role of affect and affective economies in social movements, and in women's activism in particular, is critical here. The way that activist mothers are narrated through descriptions of their emotional expressions in this case bears similarities to the role of affect in the constructions of Mamie Till Bradley's role as a mother after the murder of her fourteen-year-old African American son Emmett Till in the summer of 1955. In Feldstein's analysis of the social and political turmoil that surrounded this murder, she argues that Mamie Till Bradley's feminine authenticity played out through a markedly emotionalized discourse. Media reports vividly described Bradley as sobbing and at near collapse. Feldstein argues that Bradley's emotionalism and her consequent dependence on men or male dominated institutions were crucial in establishing her respectability and motherhood. Feldstein proposes that Mamie Till Bradley's "weakness" was therefore valuable politically as she was part of an active political community around her seeking power.³⁷

This literature on the affective dimensions of politics is important for understanding the experiences of the women I met because their lives have been marked and politicized by very painful and traumatizing experiences. But the emotionally intense experiences I have described are narrated and articulated discursively by the women who have become activists through culturally and historically situated experiences of gender, which in the case of Mexico give clear prominence to the figure of "mother." And it was especially the affective experience of meeting mothers in the United States who framed their motherhood and their relationship with "drugs" differently that allowed these women to toughen up for "*la lucha*."

HISTORIES OF MATERNAL ACTIVISM

The women's protests against the "war on drugs" in Mexico are certainly part of a long legacy of mother- and women-led movements against state terror in Latin America. As a political strategy, maternalism is based on the belief that women are different from men in ways that explain their distinct social roles. Historically, women's association with caregiving has been used to justify their political engagement on behalf of particular issues.³⁸ Many scholars who have examined these struggles in Latin America have argued that when women enter the political arena they often do so as an extension of their roles in the household.³⁹ This is why they often become activists through their roles as "mothers," legitimizing their struggle and political activity as an outgrowth of a woman's love for her children and family.⁴⁰ And in doing so, traditional and more patriarchal notions of gender and motherhood are both politicized and redefined.

Maternal activism in Latin America is perhaps most famously exemplified by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and by Nobel Prize-winner Rigoberta Menchú in Guatemala. The case of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina is particularly illustrative. These women became some of the most visible opponents of the military regime that ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1983 when they held weekly and largely silent rallies in the main square of Buenos Aires demanding information on their children who had been "disappeared" by the regime.⁴¹ Marysa Navarro's analysis of the gendered nature of this movement suggests that the image of grieving mothers was deployed strategically, as men who would seek information on missing people would also "vanish" (be taken and probably killed by the authorities). In this context, older and matronly women could more safely navigate the city, playing on the image that as mothers they were not acting on political grounds or even out of a concern for human rights violations, but rather out of the love that any good mother would feel for their children. As Navarro writes: "Their refusal to acquiesce in the loss of their children was not an act out of character, but a coherent expression of their socialization, of their acceptance of the dominant sexual division of labor and of their own subordination within it."⁴²

This observation is relevant to understanding the force of dominant gender ideologies in shaping the experience of many female activists in Mexico. Like the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, for Mexican activists their identities as "mothers" are both enabling of their political actions and constraining of their roles more generally, because they reinscribe the gendered forms of subordination that exist in Mexican society. But the case of mothers' activism in Mexico is also distinct in the way that motherhood may morally circumscribe their roles as activists, preventing a deeper critique of gender and kinship ideologies and the war on drugs. Specifically, the stigma associated with both the figure of the "drug addict"

and the "drug dealer" obscures the fact that if people in Mexico die or disappear because of their "involvement" with drugs, this should be neither a rationalization of their death nor a consolation.

The maternal frame is regularly criticized for its emphasis on domesticity and care giving and for its reification of traditional gender hierarchies.⁴³ Maternalism also highlights a more fundamental problem with organizing collective action around the frame of women, which is that it takes for granted that "woman" is stable category. A primary challenge to mobilizing women into collective action stems from the fact that they constitute a large and diverse group. While mothers have had the most audible voices in the activism against drug war policies in Mexico, other women articulate their agency in their roles as sisters, daughters or indeed through their experiences of violence not expressed through an affiliation with male kin. And the experience of Juan and Rafael (the sons of María) show that while some men are also actively involved in protesting official policies, these gender ideologies and assumptions tend to force them to adopt a "supporting role," that is, supporting their mother from the margins. Such activists are incorporated into these movements but their voices are usually less audible.

In addition to the experiences obscured by mother-led activist discourses, the political demands of Mexican mother activists are also constrained by dominant images about how "good mothers" are supposed to raise their children, such as "keeping them away from drugs." As Marco observed and as both Ruth and Antonia suggested to me, the potency of these morally charged attitudes toward motherhood initially made alliance-building with activist women in the United States more difficult. The activism of black women, in particular, draws from the legacy of the civil rights movements in the United States, which have long framed problems such as drug-related violence as a matter of social justice and institutional racism rather than "drugs."

This, of course, is the problem that intersectionality theorists have hoped to address by emphasizing that women do not experience gender in isolation from other identities, such as class, race, disability, or sexual orientation. Intersectionality theory challenges universalist women's collective action frames, such as maternalism, for precisely these reasons. This is also why focus has shifted to how race, class, and gender interact in women's lives to produce and transform relations of power.⁴⁴

Goss and Heaney argue that, for these reasons, in the United States in recent years many of the largest and most influential women's interest organizations and social movement organizations have struggled to maintain critical mass.⁴⁵ As an example, they compare the histories of the Million Mom March which pushed for gun control, and Code Pink which focused on foreign policy, especially the war in Iraq. These are organizations that

have mobilized women as women at a time when other women's groups had difficulty keeping a critical mass. They argue that the success of these movements lay in the extent to which they were able to forge a collective consciousness amidst concerns about the intersectional marginalization of women.⁴⁶

CONCLUSIONS

An important lesson to take from the difficulties that the Caravan for Peace had in forming alliances with activists from the United States was the uneven ways in which mother-led politics has affected the political rhetoric of "drug panics." Whereas black women activists shifted the debate away from drugs and toward the conditions of structural poverty and violence that disrupt the life of black families, Mexican activists initially had a hard time trying to appear as respectable good mothers with good sons who "didn't do drugs" while, at the same time, directly combating the structural underpinnings of drug war violence in Mexico. In this way, this case indicates that maternalism is not just shaped by religious identity and practices as Koven and Mitchel have emphasized. Maternalism is also shaped by race, and maternal authority is available to black, Latino and indigenous mothers in different ways and constrained by specific political and cultural dynamics.

This case also brings to light a gendered dimension of the suffering produced by the war on drugs that is often overlooked in the literature. The ethnographic literature on the drug war has shown the incredible violence and grief created by drug policy in Mexico and the United States: the rampant addiction, the deaths and disappearances, and the outrageous inequalities and pervasiveness of very high incarceration rates disproportionately affecting black men in the United States for minor drug offences. What the experiences of mothers in the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity reveal, however, is that prohibition policies in Mexico have created more than simply violence, death, and grief. Their stories highlight that these experiences have been generative of new perceptions about gender relations and of new affective dispositions: confusion and shame, yes, but also an emotional hardening that results, finally, in anger. This is the righteous anger that makes many of these women say that they decided to organize because "*estamos hasta la madre*" with the impunity and the violence encouraged by the state: that is, "We aren't going to take it anymore."

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ENDNOTES

1. I would like to thank the women involved in *La Red De Las Madres* for sharing their time and stories with me. I am grateful to the editors of this special issue, Nancy Campbell and David Herzberg, for encouraging me to write this piece and for providing excellent feedback along the way. I would also like to thank Gastón Gordillo, Hilary Agro, Kendra Jewell and Kirsten Bell for suggestions as well as the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript. This research was supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Peter Wall Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia.

2. The "war on drugs" will henceforth appear without scare quotes.

3. Dawn Paley, "A growing grass-roots movement in Mexico is resisting the US backed drug war," *The Nation* 26 September 2016. <https://www.thenation.com/article/a-growing-grassroots-movement-in-mexico-is-resisting-the-us-backed-drug-war/>, accessed 17 October 2017.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Dean Becker, *To End The War On Drugs: A Guide For Politicians, the Press and Public* (Houston: DTN Media, 2014).

6. John Gibler, *To Die in Mexico: Dispatches from inside the Drug War* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2011).

7. Dawn Paley, *Drug War Capitalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2015).

8. Juanita Diaz-Cotto, "Latinas and the war on drugs in the United States, Latin America, and Europe," in J. Sudbury, ed., *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 137-53.

9. Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juárez* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Luis A. Astorga Almanza, *El siglo de las drogas: El narcotráfico, del Porfiriato al nuevo milenio* (Mexico City: Plaza y Janés, 2005); Luis A. Astorga Almanza, *Drogas sin fronteras* (Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico: Grjalbo, 2003); Eva Bertram, Morris Blachman, Kenneth Sharpe, and Peter Andreas, *Drug War Politics: The Price of Denial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

10. For an exception, see Elaine Carey, *Women Drug Traffickers: Mules, Bosses, and Organized Crime* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

11. Susan C. Boyd, *Mothers and Illicit Drugs: Transcending the Myths* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

12. Elizabeth Ettorre, *Women and Substance Use* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

13. Kelly Knight, Marsha Rosenbaum, Margaret S. Kelley, Jeanette Irwin, Allyson Washburn, and Lynn Wenger, "Defunding the poor: The impact of lost access to subsidized methadone maintenance treatment on women injection drug users," *Journal of Drug Issues* 26, no. 4 (1996): 923-42; Margaret H. Kearney, Sheigla Murphy, and Marsha Rosenbaum, "Leading by losing: Sex and fertility on crack cocaine," *Qualitative Health Research* 4, no. 2 (1994): 142-62; Avril Taylor, *Women Drug Users* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

14. Nancy D. Campbell and Elizabeth Ettorre, *Gendering addiction: The politics of drug treatment in a neurochemical world* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Nancy D. Campbell, "The construction of pregnant drug-using women as criminal perpetrators," *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 33 (2005): 101-22; Boyd, *Mothers and Illicit Drugs*.

15. For an exception, see Howard Campbell, "Female drug smugglers on the US-Mexico border: Gender, crime, and empowerment," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2008): 233-67.

16. Melissa W. Wright, "Gentrification, assassination and forgetting in Mexico: A feminist Marxist tale," *Gender, Place & Culture* 21, no. 1 (2014): 1-16.

17. Shayli Muehlmann, *When I Wear My Alligator Boots: Narco-Culture in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). The femicide that since 2000 has claimed the lives of more than 3,800 women and girls particularly in and around

Ciudad Juarez (with another 3,000 still reported missing) is a resounding backdrop to the violence, which is often called “drug violence.” Since the 1990s many of the women who have been found dead, tortured and raped in the desert outskirts of the city of Ciudad Juarez were eventually identified to have been working in the export factories; see Wright, “Gentrification, assassination and forgetting in Mexico.”

18. The people on the caravan who had lost family members to drug related violence referred to themselves as “victims” or sometimes “survivors.” Both of these terms are problematic and are part of a more complicated cluster of affects which I discuss later in the essay. In order to distinguish this group of activists from those who were on the tour in support roles or as organizers, academics, or activists more generally, I retained these terms throughout the essay.

19. During my follow-up field work it became apparent that many of the actions in Mexico are organized by mothers. *La Red de las Madres* (the mothers’ network), which provides practical and logistical support for mothers searching information on missing children, is a prime example.

20. Some of the many collaborating initiatives were with the Atlanta ACLU, Atlanta Friends Service, the Georgia Peace and Justice Coalition, Georgia WAND, Latin American Association, Southern Center for Human Rights, National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), National Latino Congress, Drug Policy Alliance (DPA), Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP), Latin America Working Group (LAWG), Border Angels / Angeles de la Frontera, and CIP-Americas Program.

21. Mothers Against Police Brutality. “Our Quest for Justice.” *Revolution Newspaper*, 5 May 2014, <http://revcom.us/a/338/interview-with-collette-flanagan-en.html>, accessed 5 October 2017.

22. Gibler, *To Die in Mexico*, 41.

23. Human Rights Watch, “Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission: A critical assessment,” *Human Rights Watch* 20, no. 1 (2008), www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/mexico0208_1.pdf, accessed 5 October 2017.

24. Damien Cave, “In Mexico, a kidnapping ignored as crime worsens,” *New York Times*, 17 March 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/world/americas/in-mexico-a-kidnapping-ignored-as-gang-crimes-go-unpunished.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed 5 October 2017.

25. Wright, “Gentrification, assassination and forgetting in Mexico.”

26. The collective outrage that followed the revelation that these narcos were actually the state triggered huge protests at the national level, with thousands taking to the street to demand the end of the war on drugs because of its terror-inducing effects. Their main slogan is revealing: *Fue el estado*, “it was the state.”

27. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a new world: Maternalist politics and the origins of welfare states* (Routledge, 2013), 12.

28. Judith Butler, *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* (New York: Verso Books, 2016).

29. This is a dynamic which is not limited to Latin America although I limit my discussion of the problematic here for space consideration. There is literature that has explored the importance of the construction of innocence, and other political subjectivities, in political asylum claims. See J. Freedman, “Protecting women asylum seekers and refugees: From international norms to national protection?” *International Migration* 48, no. 1 (2010): 175-98; S.B. Coutin, *Nations of emigrants: shifting boundaries of citizenship in El Salvador and the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2007); M.E. Keck and K. Sikkink, “Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics,” *International Social Science Journal* 51, no. 159 (1999): 89-101.

30. Winifred Tate, *Drugs, thugs, and diplomats: US policymaking in Colombia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

31. K. Theidon, "Histories of Innocence," in *Localizing Transitional Justice: Interventions and Priorities after Mass Violence*, ed. Rosalind Shaw and Lars Waldorf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 92; L.J. LaPlante, "From theory to practice: Implementing reparations in post-truth commission Peru," in *Waging War, Making Peace: Reparations and Human Rights*, ed. Barbara Rose Johnston and Susan Slyomovics (New York: Routledge, 2009): 75-84.

32. In the Peruvian case, during the debate over the reach of the truth and reparations committee legal advisors discussed what is known as the "clean hands doctrine," a legal principle that established eligibility for reparations depending on the degree of criminal involvement. This debate focused on whether to provide reparations to families whose Shining Path relatives had been killed while in government custody (LaPlante, "From theory to practice").

33. Caldeira, Teresa, and James Holston. "Democracy and violence in Brazil." *Comparative studies in society and history* 41 (1999): 691-729.

34. Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

35. Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 179.

36. Gastón R. Gordillo, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Brian Masumi, "Fear (the spectrum said)," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13, no. 1 (2005): 31-48; Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988): 122-30; Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982 [1667]): 103-12.

37. Ruth Feldstein, "'I Wanted the Whole World to See': Race, Gender, and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America* ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994): 263-303.

38. Koven and Michel, *Mothers of a New World*.

39. Tate, *Drugs, Thugs and Diplomats*; Joann Martin, "Motherhood and power: The production of a women's culture of politics in a Mexican community," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 3 (1990): 470-90; Teresita de Barbieri and Orlandina de Oliveira, "Nuevos sujetos sociales: La presencia política de las mujeres en América Latina," *Nueva Antropología* 30 (1986): 5-29; Rosemary Brana-Shute, "Lower-class creole women, clubs and politics in Surinam," in *Women and Politics in Twentieth-Century Latin America: Studies in Third World Society*, ed. Sandra F. McGee (Williamsburg, VA: Department of Anthropology, College of William and Mary, 1980): 33-56.

40. Lynn Stephen, "Gender, citizenship, and the politics of identity," *Latin American Perspectives* (2001): 54-69.

41. Sara Eleanor Howe, "The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo: Asserting motherhood; rejecting feminism?" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 7, no. 3 (2006): 43-50.

42. Marysa Navarro, "The personal is political: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo," in *Power and popular protest: Latin American social movements* ed. Susan Eckstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 256-57.

43. Kristin A. Goss and Michael T. Heaney. "Organizing women as women: Hybridity and grassroots collective action in the 21st century." *Perspectives on Politics* 8.1 (2010): 27-52.

44. N. Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 3 (2006): 193-210; N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias, "Contextualizing feminism: Gender, ethnic and class divisions," *Feminist Review* 15 (1983): 62-75.

45. Goss and Heaney. "Organizing women as women."

46. David Herzberg has analyzed a contrasting case in American women's organizing around drug activism. He shows how during the Valium scare in the US in the 1980s, white feminists were able to shift the political rhetoric of drug panics to their own agendas, transforming the drug war into a kind of civil rights campaign. He analyzes how their staunchly middle-class focus helped these activists reach culturally privileged women, who were of

course a powerful political constituency. However, this focus came at the expense of obscuring other kinds of women's issues and ultimately defining feminism as concerned with the white-collar classes. See David Herzberg, "'The Pill You Love Can Turn on You': Feminism, tranquilizers, and the Valium panic of the 1970s," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2006): 79-103.