

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Losses of Humanity in Times of War: The Actions of Alternative Subjects of Justice

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This article discusses loss of humanity due to violence in Ciudad Juarez (2008–2014) and the actions of alternative subjects of justice – the organized civil society – seeking to address it. This paper resonates with theoretical currents of feminism and humanism, both of which have created a critical apparatus for thinking about social inequality in the context of life, death, and injustice. The discussion draws on the theoretical concepts of discourse societies, necropolitics, private government and actions. With this theoretical structure, the paper seeks to understand the political actions of eight civil society organizations aiming to recover the right to the body, to space and to be a political subject for a community shattered by violence. The paper argues that, through these actions, they helped to prevent crime, enhance public safety and stabilise a society suffering from continued violence due in large part to the war on drugs.

'The authentic police action appears as a group act. From history to action.'

- Hannah Arendt

The 'war on drugs' in Mexico (2006–2012) resulted in constant military presence in Ciudad Juarez. This has resulted in violence against the Juarez citizenry perpetrated by the State and 'private government' which continues today (Mbembe 2011). This violence has resulted in loss of life, livelihoods, heritage and the displacement of thousands.

The year 2008 was a watershed year for the population of Ciudad Juarez. While many can cite crime statistics and superlatives for the city, much less known are the actions and strategies used by organised civil society there. Through the support they provided residents of their suburbs from 2008

to 2014, they became what Saskia Sassen describes as 'alternative subjects of justice.' Through both their conscious and indirect action, they helped to reverse, for some people, the loss of the right to the body, the loss of the right to space, the loss of the right of citizenship. By doing so, they avoided loss of humanity and 'social death' (Mbembe 2011).

The violence that has occurred in Ciudad Juarez is extremely complex: the forms of victimisation and their victims are multiple and varied. However, there are two key international benchmarks for understanding this violence in this city: femicide and the disappearance of women in the 1990s; and the *Chihuahua Joint Operation*, which began the warlike conflict between the state and organised crime gangs in 2008. The damage that these caused and continue to inflict has not been calculated, neither in physical terms nor psychological, economic, social or political.

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In contrast to the picture painted above, from 2011 onwards the government issued a series of statements confirming that insecurity was declining, especially citing the decline in the number of murders and feminicides in the city. In the words of then Mayor Hector Murguía Lardizabal (2011–2013) this was due to ‘the open fight on crime all levels of government are making... Juarez is alive, we are no longer the most violent city in Mexico. We are in fourth place’ (Camarena 2011). In that same spirit of victory, the governor of Chihuahua, Cesar Duarte Jaquez (2010–2016) stated that Chihuahua was no longer number one for violence, now occupying sixth place, and the trend was continuing downward (Espinoza 2011). Given these affirmations it is necessary to highlight that the rate of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants of the state of Chihuahua, from the years 2006 to 2013, were still: 20, 15, 76, 105, 182, 126, 77 and 51.1 respectively. Despite a decrease from 182 to 126 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011, Chihuahua remained in first place. Then, in 2012, the states of Chihuahua and Guerrero, shared first place with the same rate: 77 (INEGI 2013). In 2013, Guerrero occupied the number one spot, with a rate of 63; Chihuahua followed with 59 (INEGI 2014). Regardless of the decline, the rate is still very high. Internationally, Ciudad Juarez occupied 37th place among 50 cities with a homicide rate of 38 (Ortega 2014).

The declarations of these political leaders are important as they represent ‘discourse societies’ (Foucault 1992: 24) whose function is to circulate communication ‘in a closed space, distributing them under nothing but strict rules and without the illegitimate holders being deprived of their distribution function’ (Foucault 1992). Those who unlawfully control the discourse, make use of exclusion to prohibit or deny the flow of discourse to others, since one cannot say everything, or ‘talk about anything’ (Foucault 1992: 5). What is worrisome about this discursive strategy is that it frames reducing the homicide rate as the goal of ending violence.

It discriminates against some, rendering them invisible despite their having contributed strategies and taken action to claw back violence and, at the same time, denounces unfinished peace:<sup>1</sup> civil society organisations – the alternative subjects of justice – are unheard. In light of these ‘discourse societies,’ this paper considers the following: How is civil society able to help make life liveable in times of violence?

### **Epistemological issues and approaches**

It is important to investigate the involvement of civil society organisations – hereafter CSOs – or alternative subjects of justice, who, together with local and global partners, bring claims of injustice to national and international forums on behalf of those who are invisible or go unheard by local governments (Sassen 1998). In Ciudad Juarez, their participation has been fundamental to issues of femicide, disappearances, human trafficking, and in 2010, the call for the federal government to reconsider its military strategy in the city.<sup>2</sup>

Post-colonial theorist Achille Mbembe (2011), in light of Michel Foucault’s term ‘bio politics,’ proposed the term ‘necropolitics’ to explain how sovereign governments have the power to give life or death to their populations. This right becomes a policy of death, ‘a work of death’ (Mbembe 2011: 21), by which the government decides which populations can be easily replaced, which can be wiped out and which can live. This ‘right to kill’ (Mbembe 2011: 21), arises where a state of emergency and ‘private government’ exist.

Giorgio Agamben (2003) states that when ‘the suspension of the rule of law occurs in a specific geographical area, [it] continuously remains outside the law.’ However, it is interesting to recognise that power does not disappear entirely in these cases but replaces or aligns with others that may or may not be state powers, constantly reminding the population that they are in a state of emergency; and legends and myths of an enemy are created (Mbembe 2011: 21). Moreover, Mbembe calls the private government a, ‘new

form of social structuring' that becomes 'a form of government' when populations suffer from the absence of institutions, shortage of supplies, lack of territorial control and violence that expands to the entire population. As a result, this affects social relations between the individual and the community in a 'brutal' way, ranging from the subject's body to the social body, and affects property and taxation systems (Mbembe 2011: 79). In sum, necropolitics, along with the state of emergency and private government, permit necropower to emerge, whose ultimate goal is the annihilation of the greatest number of people possible, creating spaces of death, and giving the population the status of 'living dead' (Höller 2003). In the context of wars against drug trafficking, both in Mexico and abroad, necropower is exercised.

The *Chihuahua Joint Operation* was designed for Ciudad Juárez in 2008 in order to combat organised crime and recover the security of its inhabitants. Paradoxically, it has resulted in murder, forced disappearances, kidnapping, extortion, protection payments, displacement, sexual violence and missing women, collateral victimisation, and harassment. This operation reminds us that 'the pursuit of good, to the extent that it is forgotten that individuals should be its beneficiaries, is confused with the practice of evil. The sufferings of men stem more from the persecution of good than evil' (Todorov 2002: 86). When considering the war on drugs as a policy option, other options should at least be considered in light of these potential consequences (Transforming 2013: 3).

This paper analyses actions undertaken by civil society organisations, conceptualised as 'alternative subjects of justice,' to make life tolerable for citizens in times of great violence. To understand the action taken, eight CSO directors were interviewed. To interpret and situate the information relayed in these interviews, the paper uses Hannah Arendt's understanding of action, Achille Mbembe's ideas on the loss of humanity and Michel Foucault's 'dividing practices' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 2001: 242). Joey Sprague's critical

feminist hermeneutic provides a lens through which to interpret the gender dimension.

The objective of this paper is to understand the strategies and action of these CSOs as serious policy options that should be undertaken by governments in the long-term. These policies aim to prevent crime and promote public safety and social stabilisation in a society suffering from continued violence due in large part to the war on drugs. To demonstrate the importance of these social organizations in times of violence this paper proceeds in four parts. The first discusses the political importance of CSO action in this context. The second further explains the loss of the body, space and public subject in this context. The third discusses the methodology used. The fourth delves deeper into the specific action taken by these CSOs to prevent the rejection of humanity and 'social death' of people.

### **Actions that build and transform the world**

For Hannah Arendt 'action is the political activity par excellence.' In one of her various conceptions of action she explains that this is rooted 'at birth' and has a 'mission,' which is to facilitate the preservation of 'new arrivals' in a world to which they are 'like strangers' (Arendt 2009: 23). Moreover, action as praxis is accompanied by discourse as *lexis* (Arendt 2009: 39). Fina Birulés, a specialist in Arendt-thinking states that 'Action as *initium* is not the start of something, but someone; with words and actions we fit into the human world' (Birulés 2012: 20).

You are someone when you do something. That something can be projects on behalf of those considered *the other*. While action always has a beginning, it is unclear what its end will be; it is unpredictable (Birulés 2012). One cannot make predictions because the course of action is like that of the birth, the circumstances have not been chosen. It is the subject who makes use of their political freedom in a public space and through their actions motivates and expects the community to endorse the action (Vargas 2009) in order

to preserve human plurality in what is like and unlike (Arendt 2009). Actions are unique to the group or the community who makes them. Actions must take place in a public and free space (Vargas 2009). Freedom in times of war is constrained, not only in terms of the citizenry but also CSO activity.

### **The Three Losses: Body, Space and Citizenship**

For Foucault, the body is the result of the objectification of the subject in the 'divided practices' (Dreyfus 2001: 241). Whether the subject divides itself or is divided by others, the divisions always occur in a dichotomy: good versus bad, brave versus cowardly, rich versus poor, honest versus dishonest. For wars on drugs, dichotomies are also employed. There are killers and thugs versus the victims, and narco-states versus democratic states.

We also find divided practices in race, ethnicity and gender. Joey Sprague says the dichotomies hide privileged relationships for some and domination for others. While these dichotomies may truly exist in reality, they're use represents a dominant relationship. The gender structure is divided into unequal and discriminatory dichotomies for women: the sexual division of labour, the sexual division of emotions, the role and position of women in private and public spaces (Sprague 2005). The divided practices also apply when defining drugs as a social problem of public safety versus one of health. Similarly, the geographical limits of these wars denote responsibility as belonging to the producer, consumer and transit countries, or a combination of all these elements (Transforming 2013).

Fifty years after commencing the international war on drugs strategy, the gains are little. We can, however, identify seven losses caused by this strategy in weak states and their communities:

[The war on drugs] undermines international development and security, and promotes conflict; threatens

public health, spreads diseases and causes death; it undermines human rights; promotes stigma and discrimination; creates crime and enriches criminals; it causes deforestation and pollution; billions are wasted on ineffective law enforcement (Transforming 2013: 1).

In the places where the war on drugs was intended to combat organised crime and restore safety, instead 'violence, deception, oppression and rapine' are rampant. In the confusion of acts of political violence and the struggle of forces it is difficult to understand what governs the economic process (Harvey 2004: 112).

David Grossman insists 'life is extinguished where the effort exists to erase differences and peculiarities by means of violence' (Grossman 2013: 12). Plurality among the different and the same, as discussed by Hannah Arendt, is based on the 'uniqueness of each individual' (Vargas 2009: 87). That is, each person is unique in his or her gender and kind. That otherness allows, in a space of freedom, a number of interpersonal relationships, where a series of perspectives converge that influences people either actively or passively (Vargas 2009).

Injustice makes us unequal and breaks the social contract. The conditions of individual equality and the protection of property by law are broken (Rousseau 1983). Violence exposes the public subject to a lack of citizenry, a denial of their rights.

Agamben (2006) cautions that discrimination against victims accompanies injustice. 'Killable subjects' are defined by the sovereign power as responsible for having disappeared or been tortured, extorted, trafficked, sexually violated and may be killed by anyone. Their murder, according to Giorgio Agamben, even has no legal consequences because it is not reported as a homicide (Agamben 2006: 244). This is why it is important to use words like feminicide, youthcide, enforced disappearances, and extra-judicial executions, rather than calling them collateral damage,

innocent victims, or claiming they are simply killing each other.

### Methodology

From 27 February to 7 May 2014, nine interviews with seven women and two men were conducted. Eight of those interviewed were directors and one was the documentation coordinator of her organisation. On 18 February 2014, all interviewees were sent an email informing them of the author's intention to understand the actions they took during times of war in order to ensure the survival of their organisations and continued support of those people who use their services from 2008 through 2014.

The interviews consisted of 20 questions and lasted from one and a half hours to two hours and 45 minutes.<sup>3</sup> This article only retells a portion of the stories told.<sup>4</sup> The interviewees built a community with their work and commitment. They worked to record the injustices suffered by the population during that time.

Dr. María Teresa Almada, founder and director of *Casa y Promoción Juvenil, A.C. (CASA)* ('Home and Youth Promotion') explained that several of the city's organisations form a 'matrix' of ecclesial communities, whose missions stem from the Theology of Liberation of 1985–1987. These organisations were born at a time of ecclesial opening and Dr. Almada said 'there is a common core that is very interesting to investigate.'<sup>5</sup> These organizations include *Las Hormigas Comunidad en Desarrollo, A.C. (2000)* (*Ants Community Development*) founded and directed by teachers Elvia Villescás and Linabel Sarlat; the *Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte A.C. (2001)* ('The Northern Pass Centre for Human Rights') founded and directed by the priest Oscar Enriquez; *Organización Popular Independiente (1988)* ('Independent Popular Organization') currently directed by Catalina Castillo; and *CASA (1985)* which was 'more a community youth movement than a civil organisation,' (Almada May 2014).

María Elena Ramos, founder and current director of *Grupo Compañeros, A.C.* ('Partners

Group') explained that her organization began working with people suffering from AIDS in 1986 with the support, for six years, of a group from El Paso, Texas: *Asociación Fronteriza Mexicana Estadounidense de Salud* ('Mexican American Border Association for Health'). They became an independent association in 1992 (Ramos 2014).

*Casa Amiga Esther Chavez Cano* ('Esther Chavez Cano Friendly House') emerged in 1999 as the first centre assisting women suffering from domestic violence. Irma Casas (2014), its current director, began working there the same year as a volunteer. This centre was founded due to the concern over continuing violence against women and the domestic and international attention brought to the city by the issue of femicide and disappearances of girls and young women.

The last two organisations: *Red Mesa de Mujeres, A.C.* ('Women of Juarez Panel Network') and the *Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Ciudad Juárez* ('Network for the Rights of Children in Ciudad Juárez') were united by a local motivation. For Cecilia Espinoza the birth of the 'Network' was motivated by the first CSO Summit in 2000 that raised an advocacy agenda at election time, and another summit in 2003 which organised thematic panels (Espinoza 2014). Similarly, Jose Luis Flores explained that in those years, these organisations had a 'great discussion' about the social challenges facing the city and how to address them. The consensus was that 'the city [was] shaped by specific social subjects.' The panels focusing on women, children, persons with disabilities, and aging persons united. It was from this realisation that the first Network of Organisations emerged, dedicated to discuss the city through the lens of childhood (Flores 2014).

### Actions that aim to recover the right to the body, to space and to be a political subject

This section first considers the role of CSOs' work on issues of childhood and youth, those who work on the issue of violence against

women, those who care for people affected by HIV/AIDS and injectable drug addictions, and finally those who work on behalf of victims of enforced disappearance.

### **Children and neighbourhood youth**

The organisation *Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en Ciudad Juárez, A.C.* ('Network for the Rights of Children in Ciudad Juárez') focuses its energies on three types of action: 1) 'coordination with civil society organisations that serve children,' 2) 'education and generation of knowledge on the subject of childhood,' and 3) 'influence on public policy, to achieve visible and more care for children.' Jose Luis Flores Cervantes, Executive Secretary and Coordinator of this association, explains that the team consists of three people and they coordinate with 27 local civil society organisations that directly or indirectly deal with the subject of children. The organisation's objective is to 'achieve visibility of girls and boys, and then achieve the expansion of opportunities for them.' The children in our city are devoid of 'social support.' But, he cautions, 'as civil society we cannot do it alone; the government must spearhead this because they are mandated to broaden these opportunities, provide all services.'<sup>6</sup> Jose says '...we strive for every actor to have a human rights perspective...the whole society must move towards a city of rights for children, that's what we're trying to do.' With this, they move from *lexis* to *praxis*. However, when the current violence hit, Jose says:

We became social welfare because families were without financial resources. They had been extorted, robbed, affronted; not just by organised crime gangs but also by the authorities. And so, you had to give them basic necessities. After that came containment. We couldn't do anything but contain, contain the suffering of our communities.

Grief and pain caused many organisations to change, opening spaces for training to address the widespread suffering. It was 'half

containment and half expanding their expectations for life' (Flores 2014). In this regard Amelia Valcárcel states we know 'the fear a violent society gives us' that does not protect life or the property of its citizens (Valcárcel 2013). The lack of justice in people's lives diminishes the quality of life itself.

However, José Luis was aware that their efforts to contain the suffering were not enough. He compared the devastation of the population to that of those in New York following 9/11: 'In New York, there are witnesses who are still receiving specialised counselling, here nobody is Julia, nobody' (Flores 2014). Judith Butler (2010) explains that the violence suffered is violence inflicted by the State; it is from the State that they must protect themselves.

The mission of *Las Hormigas Comunidad en Desarrollo, A.C.* ('Ants Community Development') is to facilitate 'growth and transformation processes' Linabel Sarlat says. The organisation has two key programs. The first is *Sonrisas en el desierto* ('Smiles in the Desert'), an educational program for children with learning and speech disabilities. The other is a 'psychotherapeutic program.' Individual and group therapies are offered that are open to the public. This is, however, primarily for the parents and children who are part of Smiles in the Desert.

*Las Hormigas Comunidad en Desarrollo* catered to people who had lost a relative, those that had suffered from extortion, and orphaned infants that needed care. The organisation worked with a school to facilitate the healing processes. For example, they worked with a group that had seen a woman and her baby taken right in front of them. Linabel explained:

...the children were very affected, so we went to work first at school and then we brought them to the farm.<sup>7</sup> We did an exercise with them for therapy; [there was a] moment when the children could let go of what they had seen and they said: 'I am going to do something different.'

Another case involved a girl who witnessed a man murdered in front of her. They described how the girl ‘...got to say: “I forgive you. I forgive what you did because I do not know your story.”’ Linabel explained that it is important that the children learn from when they are young ‘to let go of traumatic scenes and verbalise them.’

But, forgiveness and letting go are personal actions. How do you explain to a child, that murder is unforgivable, breaks the social order, and family members suffer the absence of those whose life is taken? How do I let go of the suffering of others that is different to mine? (Todorov 2002)? *Las Hormigas Comunidad en Desarrollo* worked closely with children who had witnessed acts of violence, often partnering with schools. Elvia explained:

The focus of our workshops at the time had a lot to do with the issue of violence. We needed to work from the bottom up, so that children didn’t see violence as natural. We worked on that with children and their parents. We started to create a series of workshops with fathers and sons, so as to work on the entire line of *machismo* violence. We asked: “Why is it normal that Dad yells at Mum?” After all, where does this violence come from? It is learned in the family.

The civilising process, where we learn respect, tenderness, security and love begins in the family.

The *Organización Popular Independiente* (OPI) (‘Independent Popular Organisation’) saw its work from ‘the perspective of child development: the child rights approach.’ They serve approximately 600 infants and children whose mothers are the head of the family and work mainly in *maquiladoras* (factories). These families are provided with childcare services, education, food and healthcare. They provide the following services: *crèche* for infants from 45 days to four years of age and home day care for children

from four to eight years old. Once the youngest come out of the *crèche*, OPI is responsible for taking them to kindergarten, first and second grade. The *crèche* cycle is completed with ‘successful transition to school.’ Their *Centros de convivencia y aprendizaje* (‘Co-existence and learning centres’) are for children aged four to 13 years of age.

Catalina Castillo recalls that between 2009 and 2010, OPI co-existence centres began to fill with young people aged between 13 and 23 years. Kids from the community began to take workshops and get involved. OPI also recruited 125 young people to help with their campaign to protect infancy called *Escúchame*<sup>8</sup> (‘Listen to Me’). This massive recruitment resulted in changes in the area. Those selling drugs in the suburb sought out youth within OPI facilities ‘because they heated up the square.’<sup>9</sup> As a result, the Co-existence Centres innovated themselves into *Espacios Protectores de Adolescentes* (‘Protective Spaces for Adolescents’) and OPI generated a series of workshops on photography, film, music, and technology. OPI’s strategy was to simply ask the youths what they wanted to do and provide it.

In each of the ‘small centres’ there were computers which were used by young people to study, do homework or research. The others, those who did not study, started to appropriate these tools to download music, use social media, etc. OPI also took them to the Central Park or the *Chamizal*. Many of them had never left the community they grew up in.

Young women did not attend OPI as much as young men did since they were not allowed to go out (the project involved walking on the street) due to their families’ fears about disappearance of women and femicide. The few who did come ‘were girls who were already part of a group of guys and were at home very little.’ For OPI, ‘most of the guys who were with us have a job today, because most of them have come to OPI to ask for letters of recommendation.’

*Protective Spaces for Adolescents* provided social support in times of extreme

vulnerability and deprivation of these young lives. Being able to have access to technology also helped them to escape their situation. Still it is worth highlighting the importance of knowing the city in which you live. Pierre Bourdieu noted that those who are more prone to suffering from violence are those who lack social, economic and cultural capital. OPI helped the youths to transcend the boundaries of the oppressive neighbourhoods and feel like citizens with rights to the city (Harvey 2013).

*Casa y Promoción Juvenil* ('Home and Youth Promotion') (CASA), another organisation, takes a 'community youth perspective' taking into account youth poverty. Their mission is to promote 'youth as actors in community and citizenry development' and to influence other actors, institutions and society to change the way they relate to youth. They also strive to reclaim the term 'neighbourhood youth' so that rather than neighbourhood being a 'place of drugs and violence' it can be the 'site of community building, co-existence, socialisation.' They work with mixed groups of men and women to do this.

CASA serves young people between 10 and 20 years, focusing on three issues: 'youth, education and community.' Projects developed by the young people themselves have been encouraged like 'Youth Centres,' a radio program. Teresa explains:

During the years of violence we have had many boys whose parents were killed. Some have come here saying 'I want to record rap' and they start recording. Rap is autobiographical; so they are telling their stories. They are constructing and interpreting reality through rap. For example, when many kids arrive their songs are about killing everyone. Over time we see how the words change. In the end, some write songs where they begin to talk of forgiveness rather than killing everyone: the neighbourhood enemies, the police.

Teresa argues however 'it is still better that they kill in the song than in reality, [...] so much aggression has to be released somewhere.' This provides an example of a deconstruction of the objectification of the subject. The youths cease to see themselves as avengers of criminals.

They also work on gender relations in a similar way through rap. Teresa explained:

We have held workshops with them where we say "Let's write a song for a woman. What would you say to a woman? First criteria: you can't talk shit. Secondly, you cannot attack; there can be no violence against women." We have spent two hours where they can't think of a thing, because all they know how to do is exercise violence.'

In 2009 Teresa received a proposal to take charge of *La Almendrita*, a centre located on 16 September Street and whose director had died. Three groups of youths arrived and she decided to take it on when one said, 'Truly, we do not want to be killers and they are pressuring us a lot. Our only option is to connect with you.' So CASA began a project with them with a 'very fine micro policy' which meant 'weaving the neighbourhood'<sup>10</sup> with the same guys' in order to understand the plight.

With the government program *Todos Somos Juarez Reconstruyamos la Ciudad* ('We are all Juarez, Let's Rebuild the City') they designed and created content on violence for the Department of Education to work on with students. This linkage with the government allowed CASA to establish a dialogue with new partners.<sup>11</sup> Teresa explained 'In one of the panels we were asked for the data on how many children in primary school were not pre-enrolled in secondary school.' It was from this that the program for primary-secondary school transition was created.

Teresa recaps the *micro policy* actions CASA took: they served many young people



likely preventing them from joining criminal groups. Over time CASA increased the number of victims it served and the diversity of services that it provided; the CASA team also grew. They served young girls whose parents were murdered. They supported the therapy process of six families whose children had been killed. They opened a debate between CASA youth and the others on issues of drug trafficking and assassination. Teresa believes that they saved the lives of many young people; being with CASA protected them, and at the same time created strong bonds between them and the CSO. CASA helped to make life liveable for those they worked with and who, due to the violent death of a family member, were stigmatised or rejected. Teresa explains that often ‘...people did not want to associate with them for fear that something would happen to them.’ Teresa feels that even though their support has helped these people ‘the consequences of the violence are terrible and deep; and it will take many years...’

### ***Violence against women***

The *Red Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez* (‘Women of Juarez Panel Network’) is composed of twelve people, nine women and three men, who operate the network, and eleven civil society organizations who serve as their counsellors. The network’s objective is ‘to influence public policies in favour of women’s rights.’ Cecilia Espinoza, Documentation Coordinator of the Network, explains that they:

...monitor, investigate and evaluate on a state and municipal level the Interagency Program for the Right of Women to a Life Free from Violence, the Municipal Social Development Plan and the execution of the new Criminal Justice System.

They are also ‘training and weaving a Network of Women Community Defenders’ in several suburbs in the west and southeast of the city. They form part of the core of the National

Network of Human Rights Defenders which forms part of the Mesoamerican Initiative for Human Rights Defenders. They accompany, advise and defend cases of missing girls and women. Some of these women have been found dead so they also advocate for the ‘femicide file.’

Gender is another area in which pain and suffering may be observed in a differential manner in the bodies, both in the victims and in their families (Pincikwski 2002). To address this suffering, the mothers of those who suffered violence are provided with legal and psychosocial support. In addition ‘health paperwork, economic substitution services, and [...] therapeutic care is provided...’ These mothers are also provided physical therapy including ‘massage and neuromuscular exercises for realignment of the body.’

Coupled with these actions, mothers, to a lesser extent fathers, and families of victims of disappearance and feminicide are encouraged to ‘create their own space, a space of articulation, self-organisation, action, and activities...’ The Red is also involved in political action, working with some local, state, national and international authorities handling social issues facing women, including abuse.

In 2012 the *Red Mesa de Mujeres* participated in the Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in conjunction with the *Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos* (‘Mexican Academy of Human Rights’), UNESCO Human Rights Chair, UNAM and the *Federación Mexicana de Universitarias* (‘Mexican Federation of College Women’). In 2013, they also contributed, along with Women’s Link Worldwide, in the Amicus Curiae for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH). Through this they documented violence against women and disappearances in Ciudad Juárez as well as generated dialogue on feminicide. *Red Mesa de Mujeres* continued the pioneering work of others seeking to bring the issue of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez before the CIDH. which resulted in the Mexican State being

found guilty of transgressing human rights of women (*Campo Algodonero vs. Mexico*). Supporting victims with comprehensive human rights action, allows the victim citizen solidarity at the local level.

*Casa Amiga*, another organisation, strives 'to provide psychological, legal, medical and social work support, mainly to women and children victims of violence.' Irma Casas explains that 'with all the violence [they] had to open the programs up a little more. But the most common violence is family violence followed by sexual violence.' *Casa Amiga* has two key prongs of programming: intervention and prevention. Their key intervention actions are psychological therapy, including individual and group therapy, talks, workshops, legal advice and medical care. Their prevention work aims to '[carry] the message of prevention to schools, *maquiladoras*, community centres, universities, etc.' They accomplish this using lectures, workshops, and theatre dynamics (Casas 2014). This program focuses on preventing dating violence, adolescent pregnancy, child labour, and domestic related child abuse.

While the Crisis Centre focuses on these familial cases, Irma recalls that in times of heightened armed confrontation, '[they] had to open bereavement groups' and high volumes of sexual violence with victims as young as six months. They also attended to a significant number of women raped by military personnel and federal and municipal police. Those who abused the most were federal police. They also treated cases of adolescents who had been sexually abused by the federal police. These people 'had to flee because the authorities did nothing. [They] reported, told them the name, the charges, and they did nothing. There was tremendous protection, especially with the federal police.'

*Casa Amiga* sought to work holistically; on the psychosocial, not just psychological. They aimed to give more complete support to victims of gender-based violence perpetrated by members of private government.

However, the volume of cases proved challenging. According to Irma:

It is impossible to take on all cases, all complaints, when we have two lawyers, and four psychologists. We are serving to between 300 and 400 first time cases per month. In psychology we have served roughly 600 people in therapy; roughly 350 in legal.

The state of emergency subverted the practices and activities of *Casa Amiga*. The number of people served because of violence (women and infants) increase. Many women and adolescents suffered abuse by federal police and, to a lesser extent, by soldiers. The allegations that they filed with the directors of the federal and municipal police were not addressed. *Casa Amiga* moved some of the women to other cities for their protection. The full extent of sexual violence in the city is unknown.

#### ***Populations at risk, disappeared populations***

María Elena Ramos explained that the mission of the *Programa Compañeros* (Partners Program) is to restore best practice in health through evidence-based models and apply them to the community, focusing on three areas: AIDS, addiction and violence. The latter comprises a wide range of violent acts and spaces in which they are committed.

*Compañeros* pursues four lines of action starting with social and applied research in connection with the AIDS program in Mexico, addictions program at the National Institute of Public Health, University of Texas in El Paso, and University of California in San Diego. The second is community promotion and development. The third is education and support for parents. *Compañeros* has a unique model:

...more than half of the *Compañeros* program team are former drug users, people with HIV. They are youth,

women and people that were users of our services who then stayed on as volunteers, trained and are now part of our team.

The remainder of the team is made up of social workers, psychologists, sociologists, an anthropologist and other people from different disciplines in the field of health. The last action is continuous training to strengthen the team. They are also a source of training for national and international level agencies; for example on harm reduction in Brazil and Argentina.

*Compañeros'* work is done in the drug dens and places of sex work, and some of its promoters are former drug users. Paradoxically, these places became risky to attend. They are inhabited by men and women who use drugs; and it is for them, presumably, for whom wars against drugs are waged, to keep them away from vices. That being the case, how can we address these target populations, so that they are not excluded from humanity?

To protect people who use drugs in the drug dens, *Compañeros* decided to place a kind of plaque with following legend: *This Place is a Place of Health*. And users – says Maria Elena – were happy because ‘there [was] a space, sometimes with broken glass, but it was their space.’

The *Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte* (‘The Northern Pass Centre for Human Rights’), from its foundation has been committed to serving victims of human rights violations. However, in May of 2011 during a strategic planning workshop, advised by the *Centro Ecuménico de Promoción y Acción Social*, (CEDEPAS) (‘Ecumenical Centre for Promotion and Social Action’) and the organisation decided to focus on ‘support for victims, but giving priority to cases of torture and enforced disappearance; and also the issue of political advocacy.’ They sought to serve victims and their families by providing legal, psychological and educational support. The Centre accompanies, visits and supports

them. The Centre’s director Father Oscar Enriquez (Enriquez 2014) explained that they offer support and therapy to families who have lost someone. They

[travel] everyday to the suburbs [...] to family groups but also in their community environment, to remove stigmas *to help understand what is happening*.

They have also had workshops aiming to help victims understand and process what has happened. Enriquez says:

People sometimes are only concerned about the legal issue [of victims] but they don’t think about anything else that affects them. They need help, support, that starts *within the suburb, with your family members*.

In this regard, the Centre’s action restores to the victims the order between the private and the public world, and between individuals, their families and their communities. To the extent possible, they recuperate the tortured body, the missing body and their families, to integrate them into a social body that is the community to which they belong.

Mexico is a place of suffering. It is a country whose leaders persist in ignoring the human suffering caused by the war on drugs: homicides and feminicides, disappearances and torture, to name just a few. In 2012, the Washington Post published a list from the Attorney General’s Office, which reported that 25,000 people had disappeared in Mexico since the beginning of the war on drugs. In Chihuahua, citizen Juan Carlos Solis applied to the transparency system to find out the number of disappeared persons from 1993 to 2014 and ‘according to official information from the Attorney General’s Office (FGE), a total 1,248 people are reported missing, of which 1,084 are men and 164 are women’; 90 of them are from Ciudad Juárez. Significantly, 88 per cent of cases are recorded from 2008 (Sosa 2014).

## Conclusion

The war on drugs in Mexico causes pain and suffering. Faced with these atrocities, alternative subjects of justice – CSOs – appear. These alternative subjects of justice make demands on the governments regarding human rights, democratic discourse, and public action on behalf of the diverse citizenry: a citizenry whose bodies, spaces and material conditions have been violated.

Victims of violence are many, but the perpetrators are not brought to justice. Perpetrators repeat themselves with new scenes of cruelty and pain, while governments shirk their responsibility. While indicators such as homicide measure violence, it is necessary to recognise and address the different levels of violence, other losses, and other reparations that have appeared in this text.

Reparation aims to bring about, as far as possible, the recovery of the body, geographical space and the citizenry. The experience of war-like violence is not just homicide rates. The reparation of justice from alternative subjects of justice serves the physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and moral-ethical suffering of abused subjects.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I call this 'discursive practice of false peace.'
- <sup>2</sup> The federal government responded with the 'We are all Juárez Program: Let's rebuild the City.'
- <sup>3</sup> I wish to acknowledge the support of Carmen Saraí Martínez Márquez, Fellow of *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*, and Philippa Ross for her excellent translation work. All errors are my own responsibility.
- <sup>4</sup> I have omitted some of their actions in public and political spaces such as marches, demonstrations, etc.
- <sup>5</sup> Several CSOs refer to the importance of research on this subject.
- <sup>6</sup> Approximately 240,000 children are between the ages of zero to eight years. The Network and other organizations

serve approximately 2,000 people according to Jose Luis Flores.

- <sup>7</sup> This refers to a farm with animals, vegetables and plants which served to introduce children to nature and the love of animals, plants and the earth.
- <sup>8</sup> This program has been coordinated by OPI together with the Network for Children, since 2010. In general terms they make early childhood problems visible and assist in the creation of public policies for early childhood care by local governments.
- <sup>9</sup> 'To heat the square' means to make bad business visible and/or draw the authorities' attention to illegal activities.
- <sup>10</sup> 'Weaving the neighbourhood' means to know the neighborhood's social, economic, political and criminal dimensions.
- <sup>11</sup> Lower rank officials were more willing partners in efforts to reverse the structural causes of violence in the city.

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