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Fronterizas in Resistance: Feminist Demands within Social Movements Organizations¹

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Abstract

Latin America is one of the most unequal continents in the world. This inequality translates into marked limitations in the possibilities of having a decent life for a high percentage of the population. Within the groups that are affected, women are undoubtedly even more so, because, in addition to shared economic and social inequalities with other vulnerable groups, they face discrimination based on gender. In Latin America, political protest has been undertaken by women who wish to denounce and abate the injustices of which they are victims. These struggles have been analyzed by different thinkers. For the most part, feminist theories deal with the struggle of women against the oppressive behavior of patriarchy from the State or society. Others highlight the ability of women to contribute to social changes from socially accepted roles such as mothers, daughters, wives. These approaches ignore the difficulties experienced by female activists within the political mobilization. In this essay then we seek to document, analyze, and theorize about the patriarchal practices suffered by women activists - qua women- within the social organizations in Ciudad Juárez, as well as the forms of resistance they have opposed.

¹ We took the title of an emerging social movement, Fronterizas in Resistance, which began in the spring of 2016 in Ciudad Juarez in rebellion to the machista attitudes of some male and female activists who reviled and / or limited the participation of women in different movements and social organizations.

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Introduction

Ciudad Juárez is the interface between United States of America and Mexico. This geographical site gives rise to a mutual influx of culture and economy of both nations. The strengthening of the exchange was catalyzed by the Border Industrialization Program (*Programa de industrialización frnteriza*, or PIF), which launched in Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana in the mid-1960s. This program was the antecedent of the massive presence of maquiladora industries in the city. With the arrival of these manufacturing plants in Ciudad Juárez there was a rise in the demand for workers. As of consequence, a large number of people from southern Mexico were attracted to Ciudad Juárez, which promised stable job opportunities and better pay than in their communities of origin. This led to the exponential growth of the city.

Clearly, staggering growth creates challenges: Ciudad Juárez's problems were increased because the State had little to no concern about creating conditions for economic development that favored social integration and human development (Sánchez and Ravelo 2010). This led to a weak sense of community within the the city. In addition, the mix of economic inequalities and influx of peddling influences, including weapons, money, and drugs, created a fertile ground for impunity and injustice. This has led to a decrease in the living conditions of the residents. Women in particular have suffered different levels of oppression, because, in addition to their work in the factory, they “must oblige” to their domestic chores when arriving to their homes-to the displacement of the source of work of the maquiladoras (Schutte 1993, 230). Women have also been murdered because of their gender.

The negligence of the State has caused people to create social movement organizations (SMOs), which seek to abate the oppressive conditions that affect the general population and women in particular. This has resulted in protests, such as the strike at the Hermanos Escobar School of Agriculture in 1996, the movement against militarization in Ciudad Juárez from 2008-2012 (Díaz Cepeda 2015), the strikes in the maquiladora industry in 2015, and the Pact for Culture in the decade of the 2000's (Doyle 2011). These are just some examples of the impact of the SMOs, who have continued to work to improve living conditions of the population in Juárez through construction and promotion of community life in public spaces as well as the improvement of working conditions within the maquiladora industry.

In terms of feminist struggle, since 1993 Ciudad Juárez has stood out as a result of the local activists and academic, bringing enlightenment to the ultimate form of violence against women, femicide (Lagarde 2006; J. E. Monárrez Fragoso 2013; Segato 2013).

For obvious reasons, a major concern of the feminist movement lies in the prevention of femicide. Their first important triumph at international level was achieved in 2009 with the ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IHR) in the case of *González and Others vs. Mexico*, a sentence known as the *Campo algodnero*, which references the cotton field where eight women were found mutilated. The IHR ensured that the Mexican State: effectively carried out the criminal procedure of the case at national level; investigated and sanctioned officials accused of irregularities; investigated and sanctioned those responsible for harassment against relatives of the victims; publicized the verdict under the national and local press; acknowledged their international responsibility for the case in a public act; built a monument in memory of the female victims of homicides due because of the number of gender-related crimes in Ciudad Juárez; standardized all protocols and manuals for the investigation of crimes related to disappearances, educated citizens about sexual violence and homicides of women; adapted programs to deal with the cases of disappearances of women; created a website that included information about the missing women since 1993 in Chihuahua; created a database on disappearances and homicides of women; trained officials in the importance of equal rights for both sexes; carried out an education program for the population of Chihuahua to overcome violence against women; provided free medical, psychological, or psychiatric care in public institutions to the relatives of the victims and paid compensation for material and immaterial damages, and reimbursed costs and expenses of the trial. Despite the fact that eight years have passed, the Mexican State has not complied with most of the provisions of the judgment, mainly the measures that involve non-recurrence, which has resulted in a series of violent acts against women and people who are perceived as feminine.

It is important to note that in these struggles the obstacles were always perceived to be outside of social organizations —whether in the form of the State or organized crime— as social organizations were assumed to be safe places that worked for the recognition and practice of women’s rights. However, both in the literature and in our research, we have found that this is not always the case. The book chapter “La calle tiene su propia historia,” that will be published in the independent Mexican publisher Bajo Tierra Ediciones, Sagris (n/d, 169) argues that, from the perspective of social movements in Athens during the social insurrection of December 2008, “the subordination of the body, toward violence and toward the symbols of the ruling class, cannot be maintained with deceptive hierarchies.” Homophobic and sexist slogans as well as the silencing of women still takes place within social organizations. However, there are also parts of the book that argue that social movements do not need a gender perspective since the eradication of the State already contains it:

We are fighting for the power of gays and lesbians when we fight for the elimination of the State. We fight for identity and gender when we fight against exploitation and repression. We fight for the freedom of transsexuals when we fight for our freedom. Maybe we are not transsexuals and maybe in our country a girl can kiss another in her red lips, but in Uganda, Morocco and Saudi Arabia it is illegal and dangerous, and you could end up in jail for a kiss like that. In our country it is not illegal to be homosexual, but in many countries your parents could lock you up for that reason. We fight for the liberation of women and fight against sexism. (Sagris n/d, 180)

This ambiguity is problematic and detrimental to feminist struggles for a city like Ciudad Juárez that aims to demonstrate that the State—or for that matter any external enemy—does not guarantee immunity from oppression within the SMO's they are part of. This claim is made on the basis of the movement against militarization in addition to the demands pertaining to the disappearance and genocide of women and girls in the municipality of Juárez. Female activists have protested the violence exercised against them through social movements. These protests have only increased since then. This awareness process had its last chapter in 2016 with the so-called “Violet Spring” where women activists, not only from Ciudad Juárez, but also at the national level, specifically denounced gender-based violence and sexual harassment suffered within social organizations. Opposite to Sagris’ claim that women’s demands were already included in the struggle against the State, those women who expressed their dissatisfaction with the repeated harassment were labeled as frivolous and separatist; since, for the patriarchal discourse, other demands —specifically those emanating from the class struggle—are of higher importance. The feminist philosopher Silvia Federici, identifies this issue as a pending one in left-wing struggles as old as those waged by the working class:

Whenever the feminist movement has taken an autonomous position, the left has felt betrayed. The left realizes that this perspective has implications that go beyond the “question of women” and that represents a break with its past and present politics, both with respect to women and the rest of the working class [...] In the name of the “class struggle” and the “unitary interest of the working class”, the left has always selected certain sections of the working class as revolutionary subjects, and has condemned others to a role that is purely in solidarity with the struggles these sectors were carrying out. Thus the left has reproduced within its organizational and strategic objectives the same class divisions that characterize the capitalist division of labor. (Federici 2103, 52)

It is imperative to address this situation since the phenomenon of violence against wom-

en exercised by their peers in the aforementioned context lacks thorough documentation and study both by the academy and by the participants of social movements. We believe that this theoretical reflection can provide various tools in favor of the emancipation of women.

In this essay we then seek to document, analyze and theorize about the forms of oppression, as well as the forms of resistance, that have been experienced in the social movements in Ciudad Juárez from 2008 to 2016. We do this study with the intention of providing information that may be useful for a larger discussion at the national, binational, and international levels. With this aim in mind, the first section explains the methodology and theoretical framework used. In the second, we give historical context by analyzing the forms of oppression suffered by women activists—sexual harassment, non-parity, and glass ceiling. In the third part, we document and reflect on the forms of resistance, including more active participation and creation of personal spaces, that female militants have presented. Finally, we present our theoretical conclusions, with respect for voices of women activists who have come before us.

Literature Review

In order to understand the internal structures of social movements and how they affect women's participation we first ask ourselves: What causes people to participate in social movements? Part of the academic literature from sociology calls this question "differential participation." Oliver (1984) divides participants into non-members, symbolic members and active members; McCarthy and Zald (1977) distinguish between beneficiaries and conscience constituents; Wiltfang and McAdam (1991) point out the difference between low risk and low cost participation; and high risk and high cost participation and Passy and Giugni (2001) work on the role of personal networks have in differential participation. Although the concept is presented in different ways, these theories share the conclusion that participation in social movements is explained by microstructural factors: social networks and affective interaction, expectations of the participation of other people, and structural and biographical availability.

As important as they are, these approaches preclude the role played by structured beliefs in the behavior of those who participate. However, beliefs are important because "actions depend in part on the meanings attached to our objects of orientation, differences in imputed meanings can yield differences in action, *ceteris paribus*" (Snow 2004, 404). Snow's approach is a necessary first step because it explains the collective construction of meaning, but it is not enough because it leaves the individual cognitive level intact. In order to overcome these two dimensions, Gillan proposes the "orientational frame," which

he describes as “an analytical abstraction of several individual beliefs” (Gillan 2008, 253). Essentially an orientational frame identifies a worldview that is used by individual members of a social movement to create an understanding of events, to justify their response, and to formulate alternative social arrangements.

Although Snow and his colleagues use the terms “ideology” and “frame” almost as synonyms, there are key differences between the two. Let us explain them by first defining ideology and then comparing this definition with the concept of orientational frame. At times, ideologies are viewed pejoratively, as if they hold no epistemic content (Railton 1995, 392–93). Other times they are recognized as sets of ideas that the participants of social movements have and that lead them to support or challenge specific political arrangements (Freeden 1996). Both positions take ideology as given; and, consequently, they do not explain how it is formed. We consider that Freeden moves in the right direction by describing ideologies as “ubiquitous forms of political thinking that are produced by, directed at, and consumed by groups serving functions of legitimation, integration, socialization, ordering, simplification and action-orientation” (1996, 22–23).

By now it is possible to see that, in spite of the fact that both ideology and orientational frames refer to a structure of beliefs and have similar definitions, they should not be mistaken for one another, as they differ in degree. Orientational frameworks refer to particular types of action orientation, while ideology motivates broader strategic planning. Furthermore, in the face of ideology, which can be thought of as an elite activity (Oliver and Johnston 2000), orientation frameworks work at a grassroots level. Finally, ideologies tend to create meaning, which is adopted by many people, while the orientation framework approach focuses on the analysis of the belief structures of individuals. In short, ideologies are strong beliefs shared by a collectivity, while a framework of orientation refers to the structured beliefs held by an individual. This explains why there is no perfect match between individual and collective identity and why members of the same SMOs—who share an ideology—may behave in different way when faced with specific issues.

In this essay, these theories of social movements will be in a dialogue with gender studies and with the women’s liberation movement of the second half of the 20th century. At that time, women’s struggles were concentrated on the suffrage movement and furthered expanded with those who were fighting for their right to enjoy their sexuality, the use of contraceptives, and free love. By doing so, they dismantled other paradigms such as gender roles, motherhood, heteronormativity, and friendship between women (Gargallo 2014). This discussion has evolved into the demand for a life free of violence against women and girls.

For about a decade in Ciudad Juárez there have been studies that seek to document, analyze, and theorize about the various efforts to reverse or at least alleviate the precarious conditions of life. This research have been conducted by various people and local social organizations from different social and cultural strata. Among them is Julia Monárrez, who was one of the first scholars to investigate and systematize knowledge about femicides (2009). There is also Susana Báez (2006), who highlights the value of literature to maintain the memory of femicides. In *Courage, Resistance and Women in Ciudad Juárez: Challenges to Militarization in Ciudad Juárez*, Staudt and Méndez (2015), who are both academics and feminist activists from this borderland, analyze from a feminist perspective the paradigmatic cases of the cotton field, of Luz María Dávila, who was the mother of one of the students murdered in Salvárcar, and of the arrival in Ciudad Juárez of the Caravan for Peace with Justice and Dignity Javier Sicilia. Through this analysis, they find that “women initially made the hidden public and joined with other men and women who challenged militarization with principles like peace, justice, and a changed culture” (Staudt and Méndez 2015, 160).

All of this research is necessary to understand the struggles of women have gone through in order to defend their rights before society and the State; entities that have commonly been taken as the opponent. However, as we already mentioned, our approach is different. We research the internal structure of SMOs looking for forms of oppression toward women and their ways of resisting in such a way that they contribute to the formation of an ethical subjectivity that promotes the participation of women as equals within social mobilization. We will do this from the perspectives of two disciplines. First, from sociology, which will give us elements for the second philosophical reflection.

Methodology

The information presented in this essay results from a case study carried out diachronically in Ciudad Juárez. It formally began in 2011 and came to a halt in 2012, when the administration of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012) came to an end. This also ended to the Joint Operation Chihuahua, which had given rise to the militarization of the city (*Operación Conjunta Chihuahua*). It resumed in 2016 with the emergence of the Violet Spring, and ended in 2017 with the completion of a second wave of interviews. The rationality for carrying out the case study in a diachronic manner is that only the individuals with remarkable commitment toward social change would participate not only in direct response to a situation in which they are directly affected, but would continue beyond those specific circumstances. We call core-activists (Díaz Cepeda and Castañeda 2018) to this group of highly committed people, and differentiate them from those who occasionally participate in social mobilization, but leave after a few days or months.

These authors were able to access privileged research spaces, due to their previous and continuous participation in social organizations. In the case of Ramírez-Vázquez, since 2002 and in the case of Díaz Cepeda, since 2009.

Our data was collected through the use of two techniques: participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Participant observation: These authors attended public and private meetings of social organizations as participants and as researchers in an informal way—during the previous and intermediate year of the formal stage—as well as during the formal stages (2012 and 2017). During the formal stage we always had the permission of leaders or assemblies of the SMOs. Participant observation, or when the researcher participates actively in the researched community and can even establish bonds of affectivity with the members of the community (Denzin 1989), was carried out to better understand the internal circumstances of the SMOs, their context, as well as to cross check the information provided by the activists interviewed.

In-depth interviews: Preliminary research was conducted from November 2011 to February 2012. At this stage we selected social activists who participated in the social movement against militarization during the period 2008-2012. The first group of informants was identified through participant observation, social networks and media reports. Once the first contacts were made, we asked these initial informants to take us to other people that may be relevant to our study using the snowball sampling method.

Based on the census taken in the preliminary investigation it was estimated that the population of activists who met the militant profile was eighty, and we were unable to detect a notable discrepancy between the number of female or male activists. Twenty-two people were chosen from this group to uniformly represent all of the militants. Gender, age and socioeconomic status were considered in the selection process. In the second stage (2017), activists who had been part of the movement against militarization and remained part of the social movement were interviewed.

The first interviews were conducted from March to June 2012. The second wave were conducted from February to April 2017. The interviews were carried out in Ciudad Juárez separately by the authors in places where the confidentiality of the interviewees was protected. The interviews lasted an average of two hours, and they were scheduled in two parts if necessary.

It is important to note that we privilege the voices of women activists because, as Cath-

erine Walsh argues when she refers to indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and poor mestizos “are an example of this feeling, because after more than 500 years, it continues to think with ‘its own head,’ trying to crystallize a ‘*pensamiento propio*’—a thought of one’s own—that definitely helps our liberation” (2007, 230). In the same sense, we consider that the division between the researchers who create theory from the “raw” knowledge entrusted to them by the “subjects of study” that is normally done in ethnographic research, reproduces patterns of colonialism where there is an episteme that self-proclaims as superior to another, which prevents the liberation of the latter. Also, as will be seen during the development of this essay, one of the demands of women activists is that their voice should be respected and listened to. The authors could not help but comply with this demand and consequently privileged the voices of women activists.

Awareness

Social Movement against Militarization

As we explained in the beginning of this paper, the implementation of neoliberal policies that privileged the private to the detriment of the common and that also created great socioeconomic differences facilitated the emergence of extreme violence that has been experienced in Ciudad Juárez since 2006. This situation would only worsen with the arrival of federal forces in the city in 2008. The inhabitants of the city responded in different ways to this context of extreme violence. Answers varied depending on the level of political awareness and differential access to resources. The first reaction was to leave the city, the second was to stay but not act collectively to protect the city from violence, and the third to coherently organize the alleviation of violence. For the purposes of this paper we will focus on this last reaction, or social movements against militarization.

Shortly after being sworn in as President of Mexico in 2007, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa launched a war against drug trafficking. The Comprehensive Strategy for the Prevention of Crime and Actions against Delinquency (*Estrategia Integral para la Prevención del Delito y Combate a la Delincuencia*), but instead of diminishing crime, it resulted in an increase of violence in Mexico. This was especially true on the border, where it reached surreal levels. In 2008, the murder rate increased from 25.5 murdered men per 100,000 inhabitants to 215 and from 2.8 to 16 murdered women per 100,000 inhabitants (INEGI 1994-2008). An average of 8.3 murders per day occurred during the climax of the violence in 2011. As a result, since 2008 Ciudad Juárez has been called “the national tomb of the dead” (Turati 2009, 11). I wasn’t known at that point that the violence would continue to get worse; according to Monárrez Fragozo (2013, 214) 6000 people were murdered in only two years of the Joint Operation Chihuahua (*Operación Conjunta Chihuahua*). In

addition to the number people killed, between 2007 and 2011 hundreds of thousands of people emigrated from the city. Obviously this increased the scarcity of public space and made it difficult to build a sense of community.

In 2007 before violence escalated and the army arrived in the city, people protested in various areas to advocate for different causes. Labor was the highest priority of protesters. The presence of the military favored the economically privileged when violence began to increase to secure the safety of the city. However, the arrival of the military forces on March 31, 2008 was immediately repudiated by some leftist groups. They organized as the National Front against Repression, who protested in a coherent manner, with a clearly defined leftist political agenda. They demanded that the army leave the city because its presence was unconstitutional. They warned citizens and other groups of the imminent risks of militarization. These risks included the increase in human rights violations as well as the rise in violence and the systematic repression of social activists. Since the presence of the army did not diminish violence, but instead increased it exponentially, more groups joined the movement against militarization. Those who joined with the National Front against Repression had two different ideologies. The first group was in favor of peace. The bulk of the memberships of these SMOs, although not exclusively, were people close to religious groups. The second group consisted of relatives of detainees and/or disappeared persons. They demanded the departure of the army because the latter had directly wronged them. As the violence continued to increase, a part of the non-organized civil society joined the protests. By 2010 virtually all social organizations focused on the fight against militarization and the demands on security issues rose until they were practically the only issue on the agenda of collective actions in the city.

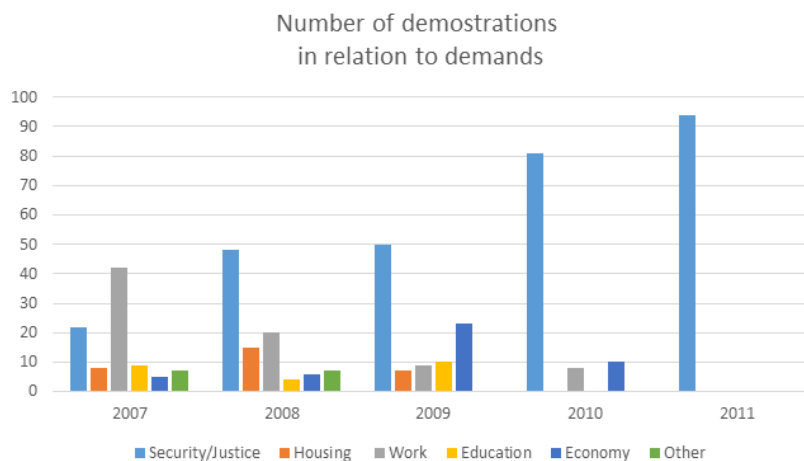


Figure 1

The movement against militarization forced the Mexican State to make some changes. The strategy of the war on drugs, which was originally completely militarized and nationalized, became one where the reconstruction of the common and the participation of some citizens in the decision-making were elements. The new program was called We all are Juárez (*Todos somos Juárez*).

In terms of vindicating the demands of women activists within the participating SMOs, this program helped people become aware of unfavorable conditions in which their participation was detrimental to their own liberation. That is to say, faced with a momentous crisis, women's participation increased. However, their participation was against militarization, not in favor of their own demands. There was no time to analyze the forms of oppression they were suffering within the SMOs. However, there was a rise in the level awareness that they suffered from patriarchal practices inside some of the organizations.

Forms of oppression toward women

Our research showed that female activists underwent a process of reflection, awareness, and enumeration of the oppressive practices that they have suffered during their participation in social organizations. Based on their testimonies, we divided these forms of oppression in three categories: sexual harassment, intellectual machismo that does not allow parity, and glass ceiling within social movements.

Sexual harassment

In Ciudad Juárez there is an irrevocable fact: feminist and feminist social movements are beginning to build their own agenda. One of the issues that has emerged is that there is the need for female activists to have their own spaces. Inspired by Virginia Woolf, they look for their own rooms in the sense of spaces where they can meet and discuss their problem. Sexual harassment from their male counterparts is a central issue either as accusers or as sorority supporters from inside and outside social movements. Caroline¹ points out:

Another of my privileges is my body, and it is another conclusion that came to me a little time ago. Those guys know with whom, they study their victims, I do not know if they do it consciously or unconsciously, but even I for being bigger [taller] than them, they never dare to do things that they have done with other

¹ In order to protect the privacy of our interviewee, as well as the privacy of the people mentioned by them, all names have been changed.

women. I saw it more from the outside. Since these issues were not discussed and women did not share these bad experiences, I always stayed as a spectator. And for example with regard to the sexual harassment accusation made against Jules, I always knew about his behavior because long before everything he had done to our girls was made public, a friend of mine privately disclosed that Jules had attacked her. But some years ago, I thought this dude was just drunk. And we kept going. In consequence, he was never accused. It is until last year that things came to light.

We can observe in Caroline's testimony that the female body, by a biological determination, is an element to analyze in gender violence. It is not the same to be an activist woman as it is to be an activist man because when you have a woman's body or a woman-like body, you must be cautious when you commute through the city at certain times. Caroline adds:

I have a big body, so I have not been so harassed, I have not been raped, because what I told you. Those bastards ... I walk, and ..., I have been teased because I look like a man, they say that I am a male gay. Other times men have tried to fight me, because they mistake me with a man. I have some privileges but I [do not] have others. I say shit! because you get scared, when a guy wants to fight you as if you were a man too, that is when you think "I am a woman."

We also observe that when a woman enters social movements she is more prone to sexual harassment than if she were a male. In Diane's words:

... It is weird, because Caroline and Pedro are a couple. Pedro is an old guy and Caroline is my age [30's], I noticed a few times that Pedro's friends approached me with the intention of flirting. I guess they think it is ok to run their chances. First they approach me in a causal manner, as if they were measuring the waters, so I am not sure if they are flirting. But when I see their intentions, I reject them with a strong no f...way.

We note in Diane's testimony a deep reflection about the power relations that men assume within social movements. This question is subject to constant debate because relationships between older men and younger women are still socially accepted and tolerated by a macho culture.

In addition, the high cost of social lynching suffered by women who decide to denounce their aggressor and activist partner makes most women stop raising their voices, as Sandy shares:

...the price tag of denouncing your male activist partners is terrible high. I myself, and I share this to you, was touched by a bastard about 10 years ago. He is very powerful and claim to have a leftist ideology. That bastard literally put his hand in my behind, and when I started sharing this assault, people were like, “Do not cry, he did you a favor” They told me, “Excuse him, he is a cool guy, I like him a lot.” I, for example, admire the courage of the girls who denounce, because I myself did not have enough courage to expose the situation, to speak it and to say it because I knew that the lynching will be for me. It was a f... up situation. So what can I do? To trust women whom have the courage to denounce, to believe them. What else can you do? Because at that moment you realize that if you do not support them, who would run the risk to denounce? I feel that I am a mentally strong person, I assume a feminist identity, I have always done as I wish, yet, emotionally I do not think I can bear that, imagine the derision, it is a f... up.

We close this section by concluding the participation of women in social movement in Ciudad Juárez, has begun to be meaningful and relevant. By reflecting and denouncing sexual harassment, they are setting the guidelines for changing and modifying structures of violence and inequality in the participation of women within social movements. We elaborate on them later in the following section.

Disparity

During the period of militarization in Ciudad Juárez, some activists pointed out the misogynistic attitude on the part of male activists, who reproduce the practices of the macho hegemony which include the submissive role of women and sexist division of labor. Even though these male activists declare themselves to be feminists, they discriminate against women by acting based on the premise that women lack political experience. This attitude creates a vicious cycle within the social movements that limits and discourages the participation of women. When the participation of women is hindered, they cannot acquire the experience requested for the military in a relevant way. Alas, the required experience is not obtained, restricting them from full participation.

Based on the argument mentioned above one may ask, who then can participate? People with experience already, of course. And, who has this experience? Males do. According to these activists, this answer is not based on gender bias, but on experience. What they fail to see is that if only males are allowed to lead social movements, only males will continue to accumulate more experience. Having this symbolic capital would allow them to continue dominating the meetings, which obviously relegates women to a secondary and operational role.

The situation is observable in the development of organized meetings of the social movements. For this purpose, we present a brief analysis of a public assembly of a social organization. Due to time and resource limitations, the systematization of the times for the participation of a greater number of assemblies was not carried out. However, based on the participant observation and interviews conducted, we can affirm that the results presented here are not atypical.

Number of Speaking Turns

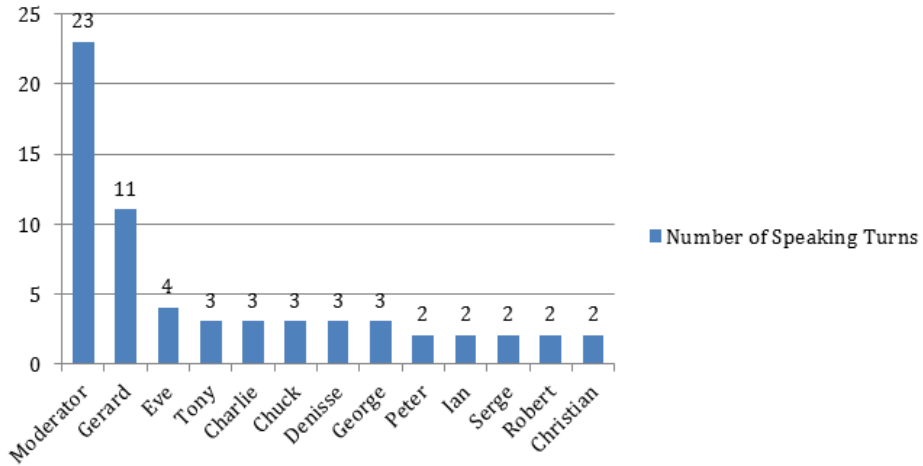


Figure 2

Percentage of Participation Time by Member

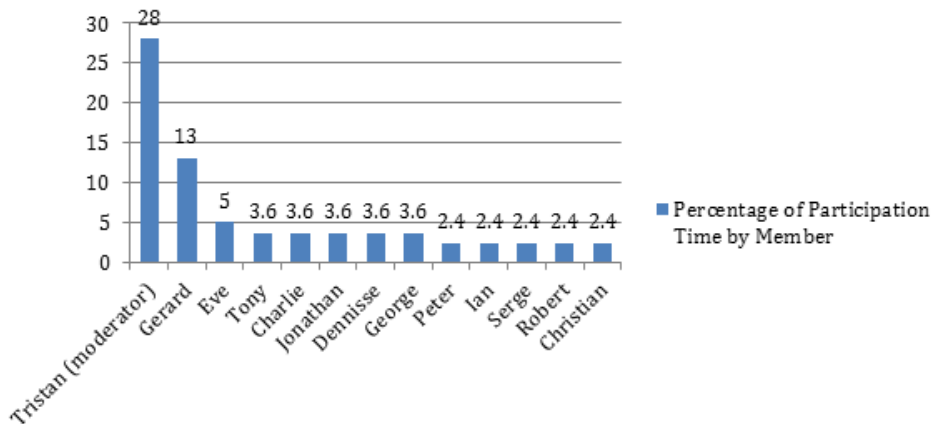


Figure 3

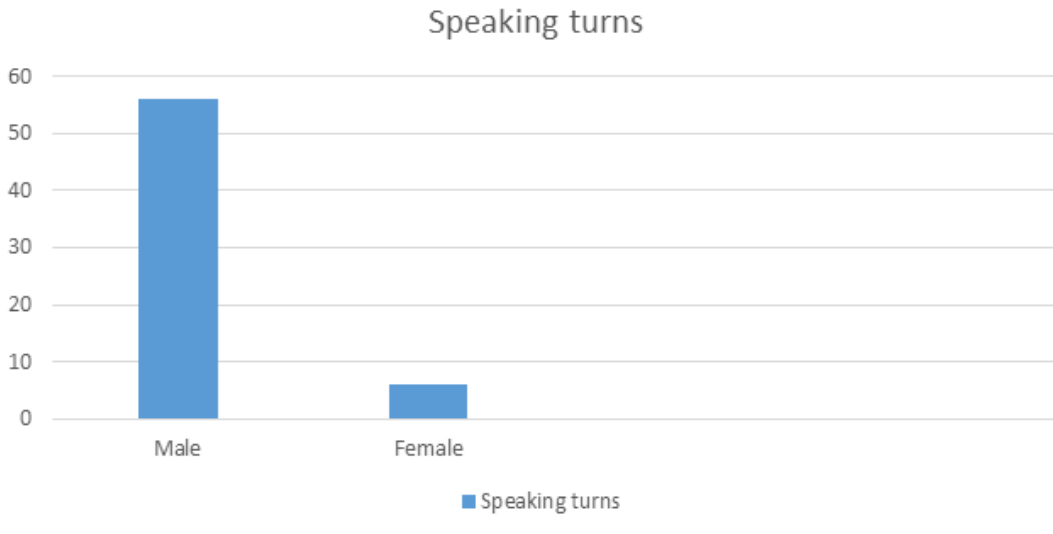


Figure 4

In an assembly of approximate equal ratio of men to women, it is observed that the number of turns to speak for male members is noticeably higher. Of seventy-three total speaking turns, only six were by women activists. When analyzing the graph it is possible to notice that the moderator (a male) is the person who expresses himself most of the time; he uses the word twenty-three times or 28% of the total number of speaking turns. The second person who uses most of the turns is Rodrigo, a well-known activist, who speaks eleven times, or 13% of the total. This is followed by members who ask for a speaking turn on a few occasions. The table also reveals that Rodrigo spoke almost triple the amount than Ana. In short, the moderator and Rodrigo spoke 44 of 73 times someone spoke, or more than 50%.

In addition to the time spent and the speaking shifts, it is also important to take note of what was said. For example, when Ana, one of the two women speakers, participated, she did so to provide information about the commission she was working on and did not promote an agenda. On the contrary, when Rodrigo spoke, he gave his ideological position on each topic that was being discussed on the agenda.

Rodrigo's positions were not followed blindly, but it was clear that he had a great influence on the attitude of the other participants. The same can be inferred when listening to six other people who refer to Rodrigo's position when they began their participation with phrases such as: "I agree with Rodrigo," or, "as Comrade Rodrigo said," and so on. In addition to this, four of the seven disagreements were resolved in the direction that

Rodrigo favored. More importantly, these decisions pertained to the strategic course to be followed by the organization studied and with the establishment of commissions to promote the chosen course. Positions in which people with experience were chosen, as we argued at the beginning of this section, were male. These figures clearly portray the decantation by male activists, in this case represented by Rodrigo, in the rest of the organization. It is important to note that this behavior of following, to a certain degree, the positions of a predominant activist man, was not an isolated case.

In our investigation, we observed that male voices of militant activists caused some people to feel uncomfortable, underrepresented, and unheard. Some of them withdrew themselves from the movement, while others expressed their perception of the situation. After the issue was discussed in the assembly, they decided to continue participating in the movement. To illustrate this we present two situations in which members of the assembly complained about the dominance of certain militant activists who, according to them, controlled the movement excessively. In the first situation, the person who complained abandoned the movement. In the second, the person stayed and became a relevant member of the movement.

In the first case, a woman in her twenties felt that she was being treated unfairly by the moderator. She felt that she was not being given the same opportunity to speak as others closer to the moderator. During the meeting, it was easy to see that she was dissatisfied with the way the male militant activist directed the assembly. In fact, she expressed to a friend her disagreement toward the moderator's favoritism at the time of assigning speaking turns. The woman claimed that the moderator was quick to approve motions from people with similar ideology to his and blocked those who he did not agree with.

To be fair, it is necessary to say that the attitude of the moderator did not improve the situation, since he used his prerogatives as head of the meeting to block certain people. After that meeting and in the midst of visible frustration the woman was not satisfied with the behavior of that activist and she stopped attending the meetings. A few years later, Jules the moderator was accused twice of sexual harassment. As a result he was vetoed by women activists and not allowed to participate in any of their activist organizations.

In summary, in this section we find that although social organizations declared themselves anti-capitalist, feminist, and anti-patriarchal, in reality they did not have mechanisms of decision that would allow, much less encourage, direct female participation. Female activists were relegated from making and/or executing strategic decisions due to their, alleged, lack of knowledge, and experience of political work. Moreover, we were able to detect political activists who declared themselves feminists, but in fact minimized

women or conditioned their participation, supporting in favor the agenda of male activists. These activists were able to do so thanks to the accumulated intellectual and social capital and due to the segregation of women, which gave them a high prestige and influence in social movements.

Glass ceiling

Mabel Burin (2007) defines “glass ceiling” as all those conditions that allow women not to climb higher in hierarchical jobs the same way as their male counterparts. That is to say that women possess access to education and have the tools to improve their position in the job market, yet they are unable to do so. The question is, why? And the answer is because they are still in a position of subordination in the social and economic structure. On average, women with the same credentials as men receive lower pay and are employed in subordinate positions.

By using an analogous argument we can apply this concept to sexual division of labor within our research topic and ask ourselves, “Do women in Ciudad Juárez participate in social movements to the same extent as men? Why are there only a few women leading social movements? Why do most female activists stay in the saga of male voices?” These questions are important because SMOs are spaces where participants become aware and politically active. This is to say, female activists are fully aware of their rights and their need to fight oppressive practices, yet, with the exception of those protesting femicides, they do not lead any social movements. We argue that the glass ceiling is the answer to these questions. Diane, an artist and border activist, says:

I feel at the same level as my male partners in this type of context. I have never had a confrontation with any of them, because most of the times I have participated in marches, I have gone with my females friends and that has somehow prevented me of being in close contact with male activists. [However] in other spaces I have noticed that they consider that we, or I, are not at their level.

In Diane’s testimony we observe that, even when both genders share the same awareness and vision of the problems, male voices have been dominant and preside over the narrative and the decision-making process. However, about five years ago these young women raised their voice in some circumstances and provoked a significant dialogical break. Diane continues:

I am going to talk about an example: now that we are meeting in the study group

of social movements [...], I have felt more the machismo. I think I had been in other spaces and perhaps I was not so clear, but in this space I have noticed that attitude by colleagues like Gerardo, for example, and on some occasion by Ernesto, who was present in a couple of meetings, no ? And the dynamics were more or less the following: We always had a couple of readings to do at home before the meeting, and then will discuss them by taking turns. Regularly, or all the time, [...] whenever we [female participants] gave our opinion or we talked about something, they always, -Gerardo always does it—but on that occasion also Ernesto, and he did it several times, ... open their Facebook, and on one occasion I saw Ernesto watching a soccer match while we were writing some things on a flipchart paper. I do not know if it has to do with an intellectual question or something like that. What is clear is that they saw us as a sort of apprentices, you know? In the case of Ernesto and Gerardo they always bring an attitude and at some point I told Gerardo that he should come with an attitude of learning, not of teaching. It seems to me that if they were in a relationship with other men, for example, their attitude would be completely different.

Caroline adds:

They [male activists] always told me that I was stupid, and at that moment it was like that: they are right. I believed it myself, I considered myself stupid. But a couple of years ago I said to myself: ‘this dude, why is he calling me a fool?’ It was like I had it, you know? The comrades on the contrary, they should give their reasons, say look... instead of saying ‘you are so stupid, [they should say] let’s see what we can do. In any case, right?’

Going back Mabel Burin’s work, we can see that once young girls begin to take off, they find limits set by this patriarchal, macho, sexist, misogynistic environments, where men have more value than women. Fortunately, women do not consider their knowledge less valuable and they show it with their respective academic credentials. In the words of the feminist professor, Susana Báez Ayala:

For example, there was a protest taking place at the university [University of Ciudad Juárez], where students took the President’s office, an unprecedented fact in Ciudad Juárez, and some of them were feminist women, young students of the university at undergraduate level, but above all graduate students, who were already taking a stance by themselves. What we see here is this possibility of breaking the glass ceiling, those invisible elements that society puts on women and that do not allow them to take a qualitative leaps. We are still influenced by

the narrative that men are the ones with better vision, who have the contextual knowledge and the XVIII century conception of reason, and so on.

Through the research we conducted we can see that activists are not necessarily aware of their macho attitudes and practices and are constantly deconstructing their masculinity. They even denounce the macho violence exerted on female bodies. This circumstance is important because, in the words of Olivia Tena Guerrero:

Masculinity, in fact, has been considered as a useful analysis tool to address both material and symbolic aspects related to the attributes that define it as a hegemonic model in relation to the life of the males. That is to say, the studies of masculinity conceived as the study of the male body -but also of its meaning,—approaching the structures and to men (and women) of flesh and bone. This is to say masculinity research is directed toward the individual and structural conditions linked to the meaning of being male in different spaces and times. (2012, 272)

Thus, activists interested in gender issues question their inner subjectivities and recognize their masculine privileges. As a result some veer toward the path that historically builds them within a violent hegemonic masculinity, whose maximum expression could be femicide. Activist's denunciations, to a great extent, state that in the majority of cases it is men who murder, rape, and maim women and girls—and even other men—and are protected by a system that covers them up. In other words, in all cases, gender violence is the consequence of actions that disrupt public and private spheres, where marginalized communities are especially marked by the blood of all their murdered and disappeared women. However, there are other less visible forms of violence, such as sexual harassment, which can be confused with flattery toward women. Patriarchy, which is understood not as the behavior of a specific man, but as a structure of power, is introjected in all spaces. It has taken different forms, but keeps the same nucleus: hatred toward the feminine. Despite the powerful presence of patriarchy, it can be stopped. For that reason, we consider that acting within SMOs can bring male activist to question their gender privilege causing them to deconstruct their macho subjectivity.

In summary, our attention is drawn to the accusation made by the interviewees about male comrades who claim to be in favor of democratization, respect for human rights, citizens' rights and female's rights, but who take advantage—perhaps without being aware—of the circumstances to maintain the privileges of hegemonic masculinity. This situation makes clear that there is a need to begin a way of doing politics that makes it possible for activists to be aware of the existence of sexist practices, as well as to denounce

those who deliberately persist in such matters. In this sense, the fact that women activists are actively fighting, within SMOs, the symbolic violence and intellectual machismo that undermines their subjectivities, is an indicator of the beginning of a process of liberation. Some female activists are no longer looking for a subordinated participation but to have their voices heard, either in common spaces or with the creation of their own spaces where patriarchy is resisted and female leadership is encouraged.

Forms of Resistance

Violet Spring

“Violet Spring” (la Primavera Violeta) was a social movement of women claiming their right to a life free of violence. It is a landmark thanks to social networks because there was the possibility for women to establish contact with their peers. And women, especially young ones, had the opportunity to do some research, to ask, and to position their own agendas, instead of just emulating the feminist agenda of the 1990’s and of the first decade of this millennium.

On April 24, 2016 a large number of women around the world took to the streets to participate in the so-called National Mobilization against Male Violence in Mexico. All of them physically took the public space of their communities and virtually the cybernetic space through the hashtags #24A, #Wewantourselvesalive (#vivasnosqueremos) and #Myfirstsexualharassment (#miprimeracoso). In Mexico, the latter detonated a global citizen action promoted by the women who revealed their stories of sexual abuse. Based on these data, Adrian Santuario, a physicist of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México, UNAM), documented that in Mexico, the majority of sexual assaults occur to girls between 6 and 10 years of age (Mulato 2016). This chilling finding could explain why the movement Violent Spring increased its members so fast.

It was in this context that many women from the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso borderland, feminists or not, activists or not, empathized with the demands of the Spring Violet. Even non-politicized women felt the pain of the activists in their female bodies since almost all of them had been physically or symbolically violated from childhood. The consciousness of being oppressed was latent, not only as subjects determined by a social class, a capacity or disability, a genotypic condition, a status of citizenship, an age, or a gender identity or orientation, but also as cis, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and intersex women, who in everyday life suffer violence and harassment, even within social movements, as the academy has been made visible (Barbara Biglia 2003; Barbara

Biglia 2005; Barbara Biglia and Luna González 2012, 62). The Violet Spring permitted young people to identify themselves with the issue of women's rights and to position themselves within feminism. As the border activist, Caroline, tells us:

Well, I started [to be involve in activism] in 2011 at the Monu [Benito Juárez Square], and all these things of machismo, feminism ..., I had never thought of them. It was in the Monu when I started to realize that it was a macho thing. Even in simple actions like when you are organizing, you go and talk to people and they do not pay attention to you because you are a woman. I mean, I lasted about two years doing f... drama, screaming and fighting, and wondering why. Until suddenly, as a f... epiphany, it was like “wait a moment, they do not listen to me because I am a woman!”

Caroline's testimony exhibits that many women often consider the rights they have now as a given. They believe that they have already been won or conquered in some way. They do not reflect on where these benefits come from or under what terms they can be enjoyed. They do not realize that what they think is natural it is fact based on women's rights, human rights, civil rights, and so on. Because of this lack of knowledge, they claim “I do not need feminism.” From this perspective, the asset of Violet Spring on the northern border of Mexico, was offering young women information about the feminist movement, which does not subtract but adds to other feminist social movements. Dr. Susana Báez Ayala, Professor, activist, founder and coordinator of the Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez, warns:

There is a different agenda, but it does not mean that these young feminists ignore the problem of femicide, I would say that they begin to get involved with the issue, attend the marches, demonstrations, the pictures of the crosses and share with the victim families of femicide, that is where they become aware of their situation as women and the risk context in which they move.

In *Apuntes para una política de la ubicación* (1999), Adriane Rich argues that in order to build a space of denunciation and explore the potential for creativity, it is important to write from the perspective of the body of women. This can happen from several spaces: in art, in dialogue, in the search of their own concerns, in the desire to be informed, to be trained in feminist thought, in social thought, organizing study circles, to convene meetings, even managing playful spaces of encounter, or dialogue for the enjoyment of life.

Conclusions

The feminist struggle in Latin America dates back several decades. It has been posed as a struggle to the outside, the State, society, obviating the difficulties that women face within social organizations. In this brief essay we have sought to investigate, visualize and reflect on these. We found that when participating in social organizations women face: sexual harassment, non-parity in participation and a glass ceiling that prevents them from taking leadership positions in the social struggle. From sociology we find that this phenomenon can be explained by the difference between ideology and orientation framework. An ideology is a shared belief by a collectivity and a framework of orientation refers to the sum of beliefs, which may or may not come from different ideologies, held by an individual and that orient their social and political actions. This subtle but important difference between ideology and orientation framework allows us to explain how it is that social activists who, perhaps sincerely, declare and defend ideologies in favor of gender equality while they repeat and reproduce behaviors discriminatory or violent against women. In other words “Women often experience their negative position not only with respect to a foreign culture or an exploiting class, but within their own culture and class” (Schutte 1993, 207). Male activists reproduce sexist patterns, which results in gender violence. And this, in turn, leads to limit the political participation. Obviously this situation of undermining the dignity of women using the excuse that their struggles are minor and that class struggle should be privileged is to disregard the ethical duty that should guide the behavior of social activists. In short, when activists ignore the discomfort of women within social organizations, or worse yet provoke them for the sake of what they call a greater struggle, they are really missing the ethical duty to protect the Other and are not promoting a true democracy capable of offering alternatives of political organization that defend a dignified life in gender equity.

In addition to recognizing that the situation of women is subordinate, we need to recognize that for women who participate in social movements, there is another implication that will jeopardize their participation in activism: neither the State nor the social movements organizations are prepared to offer them an equality that reflects the recognition of the demands that directly challenge them, as SMOs tend to keep women occupied with domestic work. The incorporation of women in social mobilization, a sphere that has historically been dominated by men and their patterns of behavior, which include machista practices, created a conflict. This conflict is among the new emancipated identity that the women developed and the identity assigned by mixed and masculine activism, which, despite claiming a progressive agenda, is not prepared to recognize women as peers. However, female activists continued to build their own agendas in the interests of equality, parity, and the exercise of a life free of violence.

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