DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOBILISATION IN THE TIME OF 'WAR ON DRUGS' IN MEXICO: THE CASE OF MOVIMIENTO POR LA PAZ CON JUSTICIA Y DIGNIDAD

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ABSTRACT

From 2006, the state's highly securitised and militarised anti-narcotics strategies resulted in an unprecedented level of violence and casualties in Mexico. Furthermore, political and judicial channels have been partially closed to the civil society suffering from the ongoing violence and war on drugs. This study elaborates on the emergence and development of *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (MPJD), which took place in 2011 as a civil society response to the increasing extrajudicial killings. Aiming to analyse how Mexican authorities' policies and strategies of the movement relationally shaped each other and forged the pathway of MPJD, the paper deploys the Discursive Opportunities Structure (DOS) approach. Drawing on the theoretical and conceptual toolkit of DOS and its conceptualisations, the article argues that MPJD has succeeded in achieving many of its goals, most notably making the victims of the war on drugs visible and becoming a considerable political movement in Mexican politics. By analysing the case of MPJD, which emerged and developed during the ongoing war on drugs in Mexico, the study contributes to the social movements studies that aim to understand the drug wars and political opportunities that arise in these environments.

Keywords: *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad, War on Drugs, Social Movements, Discursive Opportunities, Mexico.*

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"UYUŞTURUCUYA KARŞI SAVAŞ" ZAMANLARINDA MEKSİKA'DA MOBİLİZASYON İÇİN SÖYLEMSEL FIRSATLAR: ADALET VE SAYGINLIKLA BARIŞ HAREKETİ ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZ

Meksika'da, devletin 2006'dan itibaren artan güvenlikleştirilmiş ve militarize hâle gelmiş uyuşturucu karşıtı stratejileri, daha önce görülmemiş bir seviyede şiddet ve zaiyatla sonuçlanmıştır. Buna ek olarak, siyasal ve adli kanallar, süregiden şiddet ve uyuşturucuya karşı savaştan zarar gören sivil topluma büyük ölçüde kapanmıştır. Bu çalışma, 2011'de sivil toplum sürekli artan yargısız infaz cinayetlerine karşı bir tepki olarak ortaya çıkan ve gelişen *Adalet ve Saygınlıkla Barış Hareketi*'ni (MPJD) ele almaktadır. Hem Meksikalı mercilerin siyasalarının ve stratejilerinin hem de hareketin ilişkisel biçimde birbirlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve MPJD'nin seyrine yön verdiğine analiz etmeyi amaçlayan çalışma, Siyasal Fırsatlar Yapısı (SFY) yaklaşımını kullanmaktadır. SFY'nin kuramsal ve kavramsal araçlarından faydalanmak suretiyle, çalışma, MPJD'nin en başta uyuşturucuya karşı savaşın kurbanlarını görünür hâle getirmek olmak üzere birçok hedefine ulaştığını ve Meksika siyasetinde önemli bir siyasal harekete dönüştüğünü savunmaktadır. Meksika'da devam eden uyuşturucuya karşı savaş sırasında ortaya çıkan ve büyüyen MPJD örneğini inceleyerek, çalışma, uyuşturucu savaşlarını ve bu şartlarda ortaya çıkan siyasal fırsatlarını anlamayı hedefleyen toplumsal hareketler çalışmalarına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Adalet ve Saygınlıkla Barış Hareketi, Uyuşturucuya Karşı Savaş, Toplumsal Hareketler, Söylemsel Fırsatlar, Meksika.*

INTRODUCTION

The dispatch of more than six thousand federal security forces to the State of Michoácan in 2006 epitomised the militarisation of the fight against organised crime and drug trafficking in Mexico, where the level of violence and death toll had escalated to an extreme threshold (Morton, 2012). The following year, as much as fifty thousand federal security officers, 'almost the entire police force and much of the military', were assigned to six Mexican states –Baja California, Chihuahua, Guerrero, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas– to maintain the 'war on drug cartels' (Boullosa and Wallace, 2015: 89-92). Deploying the army against the drug-trafficking was not the first of its kind in Mexican history. Previous presidents and governments had deployed the military forces in anti-narcotic operations (Mendoza Cortés, 2016). However, President Calderón's new strategy fuelled the soldiers' installation in inner-cities and a prominent securitisation discourse. Consequently, the war on drugs escalated to an egregious level resulting in approximately 80.000 murderings and more than 25.000 forced disappearances between 2006 and 2012 (URL–11; Berents and ten Have, 2018).

On the other hand, the deteriorating effects of organised crime, drug trafficking, in particular, did not become prominent in Mexico in the 2000s. The roots and the early forms of the organised networks specialised in the trade date back to the 20th century (Astorga, 2003). Furthermore, the initial patterns of the big cartels emerged in the mid-1980s; however, these groups kept low profiles compared to their Colombian counterparts, granted protection from the Mexican authorities, and, most importantly, abstained from resorting to violence and targeting civilians for decades (Astorga, 1999). These regulations were accepted as norms between the authorities and Mexican organised crime groups until the late 1990s (Campbell, 2009: 23). Nonetheless, with the dismantling of the transnational Colombian cartels in 1996, the Mexican groups became the leader of the drug trade in the region, and the competition among these organisations paved the way to unprecedented violence across the country, where cartels and security forces relentlessly fought each other until the present day.[1]

The exercise of heavy-handed policy towards the drug-trafficking and ubiquitous violence in Mexico have led to two consequences. First, the security-oriented state

[1] Within this configuration, two 'big federations of cartels' emerged in 2003. While the Sinaloa Cartel, or the Sinaloa Federation, based in the state of Michoacán, controlled the drug trade and transport routes on the western side of Mexico, the Gulf Cartel, which eventually lost its presence to its splinter group, namely the *Los Zetas* Cartel, controlled the borders to the United States of America in the state of Tamaulipas, the east. Both federations deployed violence primarily to intimidate the smaller groups in regions under their control and invested in buying the communities' loyalty through social aid and charity work. The Mexican authorities were criticised for cooperating with or favouring the Sinaloa Cartel during anti-narcotic operations from the early 2000s. These allegations reached a climax during the trials of Joaquín '*El Chapo*' Guzmán, who was the cartel leader until his capture in 2016. For a more detailed analysis of the cartel wars in Mexico, see Hernández (2010).

policy, prioritising the militarised response to escalating violence, ended with thousands of civilian deaths dubbed as 'collateral damage' (Lajous, Olvera and Vadillo, 2018; Díaz Cepeda, 2020). Second, the hardening of strategies against drug trafficking made it impossible for Mexican civil society to defend peace or participate in peace-building processes as the political and public discourse were thoroughly securitised and the implementation of militarisation strategies. Accordingly, the conflict between the state and drug cartels, depicted as a war, has obstructed the participation of the Mexican society in this process (Anaya Muñoz and Saltalamacchia, 2019: 224).

Regardless of the consequences of the militarised campaign of the state in the face of organised criminal activities and the inaccessibility of traditional channels for political representation to the civilian society, the *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (MPJD) emerged in 2011, following the discovery of seven assassinated people in Morelos. The MPJD has proved to be a pertinent case as the movement has posed distinct characteristics since its offspring and achieved a considerable number of its many goals compared with other coeval social movements in Mexico. While MPJD has established itself as a compelling endeavour to affect Mexican politics, exerting influence on the law regulations, it has reached one of its primary objectives: making the victims of the war on drugs visible before public opinion and facilitating them political access to the institutions.

Many studies have addressed the MPJD deploying different theoretical and conceptual approaches.[2] However, this paper argues that there is a dearth of scholarly interest and focus on how the MPJD emerged and expanded itself and finally impacted Mexican politics. At this juncture, this study aims to understand how the effects of the war on drugs in Mexican politics and contemporary

[2] For instance, Rius (2012), Gräbner (2015), and Muñoz Martínez (2015) take hold of the MPJD through the effects and specification of the spatial relations. According to these authors, the deliberative decisions of the MPJD's leaders to take to the plazas, such as Zócalo, and the routes of the caravans significantly contributed to the visibility and success of the movement. Likewise, Bateson (2012) and Armenta (2012) argue that the MPJD's strategy and actions for making the victims of the drug war more visible were determinant factors that developed the movement and bolstered its prominence in the public agenda. On the other hand, Garza Placencia (2015) and Gordillo García (2015) evaluate the success of the movement by focusing of the political participation and public policies in the Mexican politics. In a similar vein, Carpinteiro (2013), Carrillo et. al. (2014), and Gallardo Gómez (2017) argue how the subjectivity and the effects of the neo-liberal democracy triggered the emergence and development of the MPJD. Jimenéz and Pacheco (2016), and Pacheco (2017) accentuate the contribution of the collective action, human rights mobilisations and international solidarity to the MPJD while Treré and Cargnelutti (2014), and García (2017) stress the role of the social media and its impact on the movement. Linares Ortiz (2012), Villarreal Martínez (2014), Rivera- Hernández (2015), and Guerra (2017) explore the catalysing effects of the violence related to organised crime in Mexico. The authors contend that the consequences of the war on drugs and the increasing numbers of disappeared people have reached to an extreme threshold and triggered the social mobilisation and collective action in the country. Lastly, Barroso and Tirado Segura (2019a) focus on Javier Sicilia's role in the emergence and development of the MPJD while Tirado Segura (2019b) analyses the effects of rituals and myths on the effectiveness of the movement.

history could be understood through the lenses of social movements theories, and relatedly, how the MPJD could be placed in its historical and political place within this composition.

As there has been little attention to the emergence of the MPJD and also its strategies that paved the way to its effectiveness, this study draws on the Discursive Opportunities Structure (DOS) approach, introduced by Koopmans et al. (1999, 2004) and Ferree et al. (2002, 2003), to accentuate the priority of the political dimension and explore the development of the movement. Drawing on the DOS, the study argues that the MPJD occurred and developed compellingly due to its efficient strategies, which posited the victims of the war on drugs to the fore and claimed their rights. Followingly, the article evaluates the achievements and shortcomings of the MPJD by focusing on its advancement process. To this end, the first section undertakes DOS and its main assumptions. The following section recounts the emergence and development of the MPJD, while the third section posits a detailed analysis of the movement and Mexican politics.

The study advances the drug trafficking violence literature by exploring how social movements effect and contribute to the mainstream policies and states' tightly securitised strategies in countries where the consequences of these implementations and discourses are neglected, and most victims are criminalised. By focusing on the political side and successful discursive strategies of the MPJD, which is mainly a product of the war on drugs, the study provides insights into the social movements literature as it tests a relatively outdated theoretical approach and its corollary concept of discursive opportunities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The method applied in this study rests on a content analysis of several prominent Mexican and international newspapers, such as *Animal Político*, BBC, *El País*, *La Jornada*, and *Proceso*, along with a comprehensive review of the articles that appeared in academic journals both in Spanish and English between 2011 and 2018. *Proceso* is the primary source of the analysis since the weekly magazine had been regularly publishing Javier Sicilia's writings before the emergence of MPJD and paid more attention to the movement than has done alternative sources. Descriptive statistics presented in this paper were comparatively drawn from diverse resources, including Human Rights Watch, and from several studies of scholars focused on the subject of this study.

FROM POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES THEORY TO DISCURSIVE OPPORTUNITIES STRUCTURE

First and foremost, this study tackles the question of how the MPJD emerged and seized an opportunity for becoming an efficient collective action in an environment relatively close to civil society due to the war on drugs. To unravel the 'political' inherent within the MPJD and conditions that paved the way for the emergence and development of the movement, the study draws on the Discursive Opportunities Structure (DOS) approach framework. Consistent with the main assumptions of DOS, relational interactions of political institutions and the emergence and strategies of MPJD will be analysed as discursive opportunities that paved the way to the effectiveness of the movement. To this end, this section presents the main features and mindset of the DOS.

'Political Opportunity Structures' (POS) was introduced by Eisinger (1973) and further developed in McAdam's (1982), and Tarrow's (1994 [2011]) works. Defined broadly, the concept refers to the responsiveness and openness of a political system to the demands of civil society and the environment that allows and empowers the mobilisation of a specific group to reach their goals. McAdam (1996) noted that elite allies' presence or absence, the capacity of the state, and its propensity for and exertion of repression are complementary aspects of political opportunities. On the other hand, from the early 1980s, the approach was divided into two reception lines. In comparison, the first group of scholars have followed and emphasised the more temperamental and volatile aspects of political opportunities, such as the changes and conditions of a political environment that encourage or deter actors from joining a collective action, the second body of scholarship traced and developed a more 'static' aspect of the political opportunities by focusing on the 'more stable aspects of political opportunities and tried to account for differences in the forms, levels, and outcomes of social movements and protest activities, above all across countries' (Giugni, 2011: 272).

As the POS theory grew more popular and dominant in social movement studies, the main conceptualisations and arguments of the approach became highly contestable (Koopmans, 1999: 96). 'Identified as a sponge that soaks up everything' and criticised for having an all-encompassing character (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 275) the concept of the political opportunity and its characteristics have been considered as 'overly structural' by some scholars (Rohlinger and Gentile, 2017: 14). At this juncture, a significant line of criticism targeted the neglect of POS on cultural and symbolic elements which constrain and empower practical collective actions (Giugni, 2011: 274; McCammon, 2013: 211). According to this stance, while the explanatory power of the institutional approach is undebated, the discursive side and cultural context of a movement matter as much as the openness of a political system to the grievances, demands and claims of these actors (Koopmans and Statham, 1999; Ferree, 2003; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; Koopmans et al., 2005: 19).

Defined as 'the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere' (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004: 202), the concept of discursive opportunities acknowledge that opportunities that are available to social movements are related to both institutional regulations and also to identities and the perceptions of society and elite allies towards the legitimacy of the claims made by collective action in a given country (Koopmans et al., 2005: 19-26). As Ferree (2003: 308) notes in her influential work, demands and claims of a social movement emerge and develop as a part of a specific historical and cultural background encompassing 'a dynamic model of interaction between challengers and power holders' over 'codes (repertoires), core values, identities, and interpretation of material interests of social groups (ideologies)'. In this respect, while discursive hegemony partially constrains the demands and strategies of a social movement, it also moulds and translates these ideas, expectations and repertoire into a sound, realistic, and legitimate sense (Koopmans and Statham, 1999: 228; Koopmans et al., 2005: 234). On the other hand, even though the new claims, actions and 'collective identity' (Koopmans et al., 2005: 35) of the mobilisation are framed[3] by the existing order, they are not utterly and directly dictated by the institutions. Within this domain, social movements and their representatives contest and re-interpret the existing codes, values, identities and ideologies (Ferree, 2003: 309-310).

Existing legal texts, socio-cultural discourses and the structuration of mass media could be regarded as the main components of DOS (Ferree, 2003). While contesting actors, whether institutional, formal or civil, might apply discursive strategies, their relationships and capacities differ in accordance with their types, given the DOS is 'embedded in asymmetrical power relations' (Motta, 2014). On these 'complex playing fields', which dynamically provide advantages and disadvantages to the contestants, as Ferree et al. (2002: 12-13) term, the access to the public sphere is more open to the more hegemonic actors, particularly the state and its institutions. For instance, in their influential work, Koopmans and Statham (1999) deploys DOS and analyse how the cultural discourses embedded in national identities constrained and contributed to the success of extreme-right movements in Germany and Italy. According to the authors' findings, the most influential actor that deployed and resonated effective discursive strategies were the nation-states, given their authoritarian characters and eminent control over the 'public sphere' in both countries.

The 'mass-media, parliaments, courts, party conventions, townhall assemblies, scientific congresses, streets'along with the social media are the components of 'sets' that provide for conveying discourses to the public sphere, mass media being the most significant site among the others (Ferree et al., 2002: 10). Each contestant actor observes the effects of their discursive strategies and actions on

[3] For a detailed review and analysis of the conceptualisation and use of 'frames' within POT and DOS see Koopmans and Duyvendak (1995), and Ferree (2003: 308).

their challengers and potential allies, and further formulates new strategies and goals within reach through the public sphere (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004: 202).

The main components of discursive opportunities that stem from a specific socio-cultural context that lead a social movement to success are specified as (1) *visibility*, (2) *resonance*, and (3) *legitimacy* (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; Koopmans et al., 2005). According to this stance, *visibility* refers to the appearance and recurrence of a message or collective identity conveyed in the public sphere. This mechanism constitutes a fundamental step since a social movement cannot develop and progress without attracting interest and influencing the public. On the other hand, resonance does not necessarily suggest a positive reception: A discursive message or an acclaimed identity might provoke both negative (*dissonance*) and also supportive reactions (*consonance*) in the public sphere (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004: 204-205). *Legitimacy* is regarded 'as the degree to which, on average, reactions by third actors in the public sphere support an actor's claims more than they reject them' (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004: 205). Consequently, legitimacy does not imperatively reflect a linear relationship with resonance. At this juncture, exceedingly legitimate grievances, acknowledgement and collective identities might cause poorer *resonance* among the public; however, contentious messages can evoke strong *resonance* even if their legitimacy is polemical (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004: 205; Motta, 2014). For instance, in a recent study deploying the DOS approach, Ushiyama (2019) presents how the case of Aum Shinrikyō and its terrorist acts paved the way for its members and defenders of brainwashing and mind control theories to propagate their messages in Japan until recently. According to the author, even though Aum's deeds were considered abhorrent crimes, its techniques and indoctrinations widely resonated in the mass media and academic field.

In general terms, in most cases, actors and repertoires of collective action and the authorities' choices are deemed as sense and rational in social movements scholarship (Opp, 2013). As this assumption translates into DOS, within the dynamic surrounding structures and the advantages and constraints they create, actors formulate and deploy discursive strategies to reach their goals and make claims when they perceive opportunities. Accordingly, aware of institutional and cultural structures of the political environment, actors observe the contestants' actions, evaluate their options and possible outcomes of their strategies. At this juncture, as the DOS approach suggests, cultural aspects, such as values, images, belief systems are applied to shape creative discourses along with exercising charismatic leadership and, forging alliances and solidarity, and engaging with associate groups or institutions (Ferree et al., 2002: 62-63; Ushiyama, 2019). The effectiveness and responsiveness of these features characteristically facilitate the movement's advancement. More specifically, the charisma and popularity of a social movement leader could significantly contribute to the prominence and

visibility of the movement's message in the public sphere. At the same time, the *legitimacy* of the identities of the same collective action plays a decisive role in the success of mobilisation. On the other hand, as specific exemplary cases demonstrate, the dynamics of DOS and actors' strategies might prove these rationales inaccurate given the 'contours of the playing field can change suddenly' as the political environment is a dynamic domain (Ferree et al., 2002; Koopmans et al., 2005: 28; Ushiyama, 2019).

To reiterate, the DOS approach addresses cultural context elements that facilitate and lead to the emergence and development of social movements within a political environment. The application of the approach has been used to measure and capture the visibility and resonance capacity of social movements and whether their claims are perceived legitimate in the eyes of the public and authorities. To this end, numerous prominent works of this tradition have paid attention to the media coverage of social movements, mainly deploying quantitative and comparative methods (for instance, see Ferree, 2003; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004; Giugni et al., 2005; Bail, 2012; Brown, 2013; Motta 2014; Vasi et al.; 2015; Bail et al., 2017; Anderson, 2018), as other scholars focused on the role of framings (McCammon et al., 2007), emotions (Bröer and Duyvendak, 2009), and transnational diffusion of intellectual discourses (Ushiyama, 2019). At this juncture, the explicitly interactive character of the DOS approach provides the researcher to explore the dynamic interaction between the state, social movements and the public sphere. In this respect, this article argues that the DOS offers a convenient framework since it focuses on the emergence and development over time of a given social movement with reference to the changes in the political system while also prioritising the role of cultural context. In other words, elaborating the rise and timing of protest, the DOS adequately explains both the occurrence and the efficacy of discursive strategies of social movements. Theoretical assumptions of the DOS can be utilised to discuss how political opportunities and dynamics, which led to the emergence of MPJD and the discursive and collective strategies of its participants, contributed to the achievements of its goals compared to the other social movements that occurred in Mexico.

As the article explores in detail, particularly in the last section, a comprehensive analysis of the MPJD requires the presentation of political dynamics and historical background into research. In this respect, the relationship between authorities and the social movement in question needs to be analysed in order. To this end, the following section presents how the policy change implemented under the Calderón government favoured the militarisation of the war against organised crime, and its consequences epitomised the political opportunities that stimulated the occurrence of the MPJD.

MPJD: THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

After taking over the presidency from Vicente Fox Quesada, who had ended almost seven decades of *Partido Revolucionario Instituticonal* (PRI) rule in Mexico, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa launched a war against organised crime in Mexico in 2006 (Morton, 2012). The military units had been deployed in anti-narcotics operations, including the fight against contraband and eradication of illegal crops, since the early 1940s (Astorga, 2003; Mendoza Cortés, 2016).[4] However, the government's militarised campaign from 2006 resulted in an unprecedented escalation both in numbers and in the level of violence in the country's modern history. Between 2006 and early 2011, nearly 46.000 deaths and 20.000 enforced disappearances were reported related to organised crime, particularly narcotrafficking (URL–11). In the same course of time, the CNDH [National Human Rights Commission] received almost 31.000 complaints of human rights violations which included torture, excessive violence, enforced disappearances, and sexual violations allegedly committed by the security officials (Armenta, 2012: 575; Boyce et al., 2015). Discoveries of mass-graves and exhibitions of tortured, mutilated and decapitated bodies in public places also became a daily routine of Mexican people (Campbell, 2014: 65).

In such an environment, where Mexican people ostensibly got accustomed to egregious violence (Misra, 2018), bodies of seven people, bearing signs of torture before asphyxiated to death, were found inside and around a deserted vehicle in Cuernavaca, Morelos in March 2011. One of the victims was Juan Francisco Sicilia Ortega, the distinguished poet, journalist, and activist Javier Sicilia's son (URL– 12). As criticised by numerous observers, in accordance with the official discourse, which 'placed blame on victims' (Staudt and Méndez, 2015), first, the case was portrayed as 'settling of accounts' between criminals (Gibler, 2011). In his speech two days after his son's death, in a 'rare media opening' given to a victim's relatives (Ibid), Javier Sicilia spoke out his son's as well as his son's murdered friends' names, Julio César Romero Jaimes, Luis Antonio Romero Jaimes, Jaime Gabriel Alejo Cadena, Álvaro Jaimes Avelar, Jesús Chávez Vázquez and María del Socorro Estrada in the same incident to make them visible. Sicilia also condemned the authorities and organised crime members for the ongoing violence in the country before calling Mexicans to 'go out on the streets' and 'demand an end to this bloodshed' (URL–13).

[4]These activities were mainly the eradication operations of marijuana crops during the terms of Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo from the 1960s to 1982. On the other hand, Ernesto Zedillo and Vicente Fox deployed the military units to fight against the drug cartels (López-González, 2012: 84-85). However, the scale and duration of these operations in the 1990s and 2000s were explicitly limited compared to the campaign initiated in 2006 in big Mexican states.

In an open letter published in the *Proceso* magazine within the same week, Sicilia expressed the situation of Mexican society with a traditional saying, '*Estamos hasta la madre*!' [We had enough!] (URL–20) which would be shared and repeated as a motto in the following days (Tirado Segura, 2019a: 102). In the exact text, Sicilia called for civil society to gather around and raise their voice against the prevalent violence and demand for justice, peace, governance with justice and dignity on 6 April 2011 in *Caminata del Silencio* [the Silent Walk], taking off from the monument of *Paloma de la Paz* [Peace Pigeon], in Cuernavaca, Morelos (Ibid).

Thousands of citizens and dozens of organisations responded to Sicilia's call. They protested violence in more than twenty Mexican cities and New York, Buenos Aires, Barcelona, and Paris (URL– 7). During his speech at the central plaza of Morelos, Sicilia, as the speaker on behalf of the families of all victims, recommended President Calderón to convene every Mexican citizen around a 'national pact' centred on security, drugs, labour, education and culture to 'restore the Mexican social fabric and make a move towards peace, justice and dignity' (Moreloz-Cruz, 2011). Sicilia also declared that they were to stay one more week in the plaza with other families of the victims who lost their relatives during the violence, welcome any participant who would join them, and announced a march would take place to the capital given the situation remained the same (URL–8).

In the face of inefficiency and neglect of the authorities, '*Marcha por la Paz*' departed from Cuernavaca on 5th of May to arrive at D. F. Ciudad México on the fourth day to unite with other families and groups coming from the states of Chihuahua and Oaxaca, and also from the cities of Zacatecas, Acapulco, Morelia, San Cristóbal de las Casas (URL–16). On 8 May 2011, when the march ended in Zócalo, Sicilia restated his proposition for a 'Citizen Pact for Peace', which would be signed in Ciudad Juárez, where people have felt the most destructive effects of war on drugs for decades (see Bowden, 2010). The proposed pact had the following aims: 1) to restore and regulate truth and justice; 2) end the war strategy and undertake a focus on the civilian security; 3) combat the corruption and impunity; 4) combat the economic sources and gains of the crime; 5) give particular attention to the youth and effective actions for the recovery of the social fabric; 6) enable participant democracy and democratisation in the communication channels and mass media (Azaola, 2012: 160).

Consequently, Sicilia's and other families' calls reached out to thousands of Mexicans in less than a month. They found an opportunity in the forms of a platform to raise their voices against the prevalent violence in the public sphere. This call for mobilisation transformed the marches and manifested into one of the most significant collective movements in the modern history of Mexico under the name of *El Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* [Movement for

Peace with Justice and Dignity] (Díaz Cepeda, 2020). In the following period, the MPJD organised two caravans for the most emblematic figures of the movement (Garza-Placencia, 2015: 59).

The caravans traversed numerous cities to allow the victims to express their feelings about their losses and make grieves visible. The first caravan consisting of thirteen buses and other 25 vehicles, called *Caravana del Consuelo* [Solace Caravan], headed to the north of the country on 4 June 2011, while a second caravan, Caravan for Peace, ran to Southern Mexico, passing through the states of Guerrero, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Chiapas and arrived in Guatemala. They both had the intention to raise awareness to Central American migrants, *campesino* and Indian communities which have been the victims of violence as a result of a 'dirty war' (see Calderón et al., 2012) in the 1970s (URL–18). Consequently, the two caravans were welcomed by crowds who manifested their pain and solidarity with victims and their claims. The presence of the convoys contributed to the visibility of the victims of the war on drugs, who were the protagonists of the movement. On the other hand, while the Solace Caravan captured more attention, the second caravan rallied to the south received little interest due to the lack of media coverage (Díaz Cepeda, 2020).

A third caravan began its tour to reach Washington on 12 September 2012, traversing through twenty big states including California, Arizona, Texas, Georgia and New York, where the participants gathered with representatives of organisations, to demand from the US government to 'end the war which they created' (URL–1). Internationally distinguished film directors, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Alfonso Cuarón, and Guillermo del Toro, and actors Kate del Castillo and Diego Luna gathered with the convoy in Los Angeles. They expressed their solidarity and support to the movement (Rathbun, 2019: 129). However, the expedition in the United States did not grab a sufficient interest, and its impact remained limited.[5]

Having gained visibility and consonance and proved its claims legitimate in the public sphere, the MPJD established itself as candid to dialogue with the authorities to restore democracy since its emergence. First, Javier Sicilia was received by President Felipe Calderón at the presidential palace in the aftermath of his son's death (URL–6). Following the demands made in marches and manifests, first, the *Comisión Permanente del Congreso de la Unión* [Permanent Committee] invited Javier Sicilia and other representatives of the movement to discuss their demands on public security, the combat against organised crime, and the potentiality of a bill to prevent kidnappings in the country (Azaola, 2012: 160). Similarly, on 23 June 2011, the representatives of the MPJD met with President Felipe Calderón

[5]For a brief review of the impact of the third caravan in the United States see Staudt and Méndez (2015).

in Chapultepec Castle. Both sides agreed to set work-tables during which representatives of the civil society and officials would further explore the opportunities for *i*) a new administration of justice; *ii*) a new national model of relations, assessment and justice for the victims' rights; *iii*) a new model of security strategy which would orient towards the human rights and peace; *iv*) impetus of participant democratic mechanisms and democratisation of communication channels before their next reunion (Garza-Placencia, 2015: 64).

On 28 July 2011, a second meeting took place between the representatives of the MPJD and the legislative branch. The prominent issues of the meeting were the legislation of *Ley General de Víctimas* [General Law for Victims], the establishment of a Truth Commission to hear and investigate the victims, and the veto of the National Security Law, which proposed to legalise and broaden the army's involvement in public security issues and also granted the framework for the definition of crime (Díaz Cepeda, 2020: 54). The law was strongly criticised by the participants of the MPJD as the authorities' intention of cutting the dialogues. Sicilia and other leaders of the movement mobilised people around protesting the enactment of the law in Mexico City with a march in silence towards the national palace (URL–3).

As a consequence of this broad opposition by the MPJD and other civil organisations that allied with the movement, such as *Las Abejas*, *Otra Campaña* and various campesino syndicates (URL– 10)[6], not only the National Security law but also the approbation of Federal Code of Penal Proceedings, which contained potential human rights violations and the modifications of the Organic Law of Judicial Power, which pretended to create a specialisation of military justice, was suspended (Azaola, 2012). Additionally, MPJD effectively supported the Political Reform, Créche Law, establishment of a special auditor for Federal Police Force, the formation of a Truth Commission, and the inclusion of five civil consultants to the National Public Security Council. Eventually, the Créche Law and some points of the Political Reform and an initiative to federalise the crime of forced disappearances were approved (Ibid).

The MPJD representatives and President Calderón had a second meeting on 14 October 2011 in the Chapultepec Castle (URL–15). However, the meeting explicitly differed from the first since the movement had lost momentum compared to the previous months. As Garduño and Méndez (URL–9) note, the dialogues acquired a 'double-character' in which 'the civil society defended its rights, and the

[6] It should be further noted that the biggest social mobilisation in Mexico, the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) declared various communiqués stating they supported and stood alongside the MPJD while leaders of the latter expressed their solidarity with the guerrilla army. In one of the most indicative cases, more than fifteen thousand indigenous people gathered and 'marched in silence' on 7 May 2011, in San Cristóbal de las Casas where the EZLN exerts power. See 'Movimiento por la Paz refrenda su hermandad con el EZLN' (URL – 2).

state-officials resisted to be controlled'. Even though the meetings between the MPJD representatives and authorities appeared 'as spaces of tension' (Garza-Placencia, 2015: 60), alternative solutions and public policy implementations were effectively formulated, mainly those concerned the civic demands for the victims of violence as materialised in *Ley General de Víctimas*. Despite the unanimous approvement by the Senate and Chamber of Deputies on 26 March 2012, President Calderón vetoed the final form of the Law on the basis of the unconstitutional controversies of the proposal in July (URL–19). However, the formation of *Procuraduría Social de Atención a Víctimas de Delitos*, an institution criticised by the MPJD representatives for being ineffective and neglecting the months of bilateral work of *Ley General de Víctimas*, was confirmed (Díaz Cepeda, 2020: 57).

At the end of 2012, the political influence of the MPJD (*re*)epitomised when all four candidates voluntarily agreed to meet with the representatives of the movement before the presidential elections. Eventually, the newly-elected President Enrique Peña Nieto enacted the *Ley General de Víctimas* on 9 January 2013 as he promised before the elections (URL–5). In a similar fashion, the current president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, gathered with the MPJD representatives and dedicated a significant part of the campaigns and governmental programs to the eradication of violence, aid to the victims of the war on drugs and promoting human rights in 2019 (URL–17).

ANALYSIS OF MPJD: AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE OF EFFECTIVE DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

The MPJD was not the first but one of the most compelling grassroots mobilisations that emerged in Mexican society recently. As Bizberg (2015: 264-266) notes, although various significant social mobilisations took place, such as the Zapatista movement, the Mexican civil society had been 'absent' from the politics as a result of the disassociation or weakly representation by the political parties from the 1990s. As a result, unlike the efficacious protests and mobilisations from the 1970s to 1990s, most social movements could not grow to nation-wide participation or achieve their primary goals. From the 1990s to the mid-2000s, scales, scopes, effects and achievements of numerous protests and mobilisations remained limited in Mexico. To mention specific and comparable cases, activist incentives of Miranda de Wallace and Alejandro Martí, who had run determined and persistent anti-kidnapping campaigns, did not generate satisfactory outcomes until the early 2010s despite having resonated on a national scale (Barroso, 2014: 220). After having suffered from the violence at the hands of both criminal organizations and security officers (HRW, 2011), civilians were not only convinced but also had ongoing learning that the political realm, which had become an exclusive domain of the '*partidocracia*' (Bizberg, 2015), and coercive

apparatus of the state, was closed to them. In this respect, facing a coercive state and an unprecedented increase in the number of victims of violence compelled the Mexican society to seek new and applicable discursive strategies in its search for peace and justice.

As briefly mentioned through the examples of incentives by de Wallace and Martí[7] it was that insecure environment, mainly created by the Calderón government, increased the chance for the emergence of various social groups outside institutional channels of the state and political parties. The initiation of the war against *narcos* prompted a moment in which collective reactions augmented significantly. Additionally, the escalation of violence in the country, prevalent and the persistent impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2011, URL–11) and the security crisis in conjunction with an intrinsic stigmatising discourse that placed blame on victims changed the peoples' perception and put an end to their belief in the restoring of peace in society through traditional political channels. The process ended up channelling civil action and protests toward specific paths, such as streets, squares, roads and caravans, where the MPJD emerged and forged itself through these cartographies. Participants of the MPJD repeatedly stressed that President Calderón's war against organised crime led to unprecedented violence in Mexico since the days of the Mexican Revolution. In short, participants of the MPJD, of whom the majority were victims of the war on drugs, used their opportunity to protest and open the room for alternative political instruments.

The initial target of the MPJD's discursive strategies has been Mexican public opinion. The movement appeared as a consciousness-raising mobilisation. The first step for resolving the problem of violence the MPDJ formulated was to develop consciousness on the question of violence in Mexican society. That is why the principal demand of the movement was centred on the victims and their family members. The primary assumption of the MPJD was that victims of drug-related violence were predominantly neglected in the public sphere. Accordingly, the presence of the MPJD essentially became related to prompting changes in public opinion. The movement effectively impacted public opinion regarding the subject of injustice against the victims, and the situation of the disappeared people, in particular, became a problem to be openly discussed in the public space. Hence, its outcomes were often most visible in the arenas of everyday life and culture.

On the other hand, MPJD's discursive and practical repertoire were not thoroughly immaculate. Victims' activism was already dynamic when MPJD emerged, and numerous organisations and widely-known activists, including

[7]It should be noted that each figure experienced the abduction and murdering of one of their children in 2005 and 2008, respectively (Barroso, 2014: 220).

Pietro Ameglio Patella and Emilio Álvarez Icaza, along with *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (ELZN), responded to Sicilia's call. The eminence of Sicilia and other intellectuals redounded to the visibility and resonance of MPJD from the beginning in this respect. Additionally, the presence of intellectuals, such as Sicilia, influenced the movement's language and discourse as it adopted and demonstrated a rational and aesthetic repertoire compared to the traditional movements. With Sicilia's influence, MPJD's discourse resonated with human rights, feminist, and anti-militarization activists. That discourse emerged from the 'deaths, destruction, and resistance among survivors, but was articulated with a vision of dignity, hope and consolation' (Staudt and Méndez, 2015: 146). As a result, the movement's protagonists' grievances as emotions were strongly felt in the public sphere. For instance, as Díaz Cepeda (2020: 45) notes 'different from the customary chants, poetry was read. Further, this time it was the victims, and not the politicians or core activists who were speaking at the demonstrations.'

This relatively innovative mechanism articulated the victims' emotions and sufferings while increasing the visibility and legitimacy of their claims in the public sphere. In Bizberg's (2015) words, 'as it is a habit in every political meeting, in mentioned manifests, leaders of different organizations spoke, while the victims were kept silent. The MPJD was the first to give the victims the word; many Mexicans were astonished.' Accordingly, numerous participants stated that they were marching or travelling with caravans to 'demand justice'. They were 'encouraged not to stay mute' and finally could 'speak out for the first time (BBC, 2011b, URL–4). To paraphrase one of the prominent participants, Nepomuceno Moreno Núñez, who was assassinated in 2011, 'no one was paying attention to me until I joined the movement' (URL–14).

The strategy of making the victims and their families visible and saving them from dehumanisation became more salient with spatial tactics of the movement. The first 'Silent March' and following the occupation of the Zócalo, which is the symbolic, cultural, and political centre of México City, and 're-appropriation' of public spaces in which cartel members perpetrated violent acts against vulnerable groups explicitly attested to these strategies (Muñoz-Martínez, 2015: 166; Ameglio Patella, 2016). In a nutshell, making the victims of the prevalent violence visible were the key discursive strategies that kept the MPJD flowing and effective.

The movement had the character of a combination of many social movement organisations, defending different methodologies and goals. At this juncture, the organisational structure of the MPJD attested both to vertical and horizontal dimensions. On the one hand, a decisive leadership was materialised under the name of Sicilia; on the other hand, a consistent discourse against violence and for restoring peace was successfully formulated. The movement mostly remained

horizontal in structure in the sense that it had a leader who was a publicly known figure. The leadership of Sicilia and other representative figures, such as Emilio Álvarez Icaza, as well as the attention they attract by the media, have created tensions in terms of whose voice has been included within the movement. However, it should be underscored that Sicilia's authority was more symbolic rather than hierarchical. From 2012, Sicilia announced that the MPJD needed a more horizontal re-structuration, and he planned to temporarily retire from the position in the movement. Furthermore, another pioneering figure of the movement, Icaza, left his active role to the end of the same year (Díaz Cepeda, 2012).

The discursive strategies of the MPJD were developed and adopted following the inability of the government to provide security despite its increasingly militarised policies. During the institutionalisation process, each social movement enters into dialogue with political institutions or participate in the states' policy-making processes and seek to shape political outcomes (Johnston, 2014). As Polletta (2008) indicates, various social movements relied on the so-called old strategies, including political dialogue and participation in legislative processes. Put succinctly, recent social movements have moved into the state systems, and some of their activities were oriented towards the state.

The ultimate goal of the MPJD has never been the unconditional alteration of the existing political power configuration. Instead, the movement has aimed at transforming and reforming policies, political institutions, and legal regulations. Accordingly, instead of completely rejecting the traditional political channels and discourses, the movement has strived for reconciling and form a dialogue with the authorities. Its emphasis on police and judicial reform has been an explicit mark of its objective to transform Mexican politics and hegemonic security discourse. To reiterate, the movement and declarations made by its representatives have maintained developing and adopting some 'strategies' to keep it away from contentious politics and place it in a rather conventional political realm. Hence, the movement aimed at re-organising the relationship between the state and drug cartels and the hegemonic discourse in the long run.

According to the participants of the movement, sporadic violence in the Mexican society has primarily been the result of the states' policies, both the Mexican and the US, while the securitisation of the drug-trafficking persists at aggravating the situation. At this juncture, it is critical to note that opportunities occur with concomitant risks, which lead the movement leaders and participants to calculate the possible outcomes and costs of activism. In the case of the MPJD, the provisional, and even the inevitable given the prevailing insecurity, risks were threats and death to its participants. Conscious of the potential jeopardy against victims and their families, the speakers of the movement have paid

extreme attention while addressing the authorities and narco-traffickers. For instance, Sicilia's manner and statements were explicitly restrained and incisive even though he intensely expressed his grief and frustration. In his declarations, Sicilia asserted that he was aware that the situation was unlikely to change over a night; however, he respectfully declared that President Calderón was mistaken in his strategy of war against organised crime. In his following words, Sicilia demanded that the army members continue to defend the nation, respect human rights, and consider each citizen as a 'Mexican with a name'. He appealed to the authorities, first and foremost the President, legislatures, governors and mayors, to attend to the poverty prevailing in the communities, municipals, states from where numerous youngsters leave for joining the lines of *narcos* due to the lack of education, job and opportunities. Followingly, he continued to ask for the authorities to understand their responsibility and role in destroying the nation, turning it into a 'hell', and search for other remedies 'before there would be no return'. Finally, Sicilia (2011) respectfully appealed to '*señores* narco-traffickers' to take up their codes of honour and respect to society, cease executions of innocents, and attempt to 'tie-up and control their demons'. However, even this extremely cautious and respectful discourse could not prevent the murders of forty-eight movement participants (Díaz Cepeda, 2020: 58).

As aforementioned, the MPJD primarily aimed at transforming and reforming policies, political institutions and legal regulations through specific and tangible outcomes such as the enactment of *Ley General de Victimas*. In this sense, combined with the past experiences of the movement leaders, of whom the majority had been pursuing political activism for decades, the movement was centred and institutionalized around a reasonable and achievable goal that would pave the way for further confrontations and dialogue with the state. The Law obliged the authorities of three governmental sectors and three Constitutional Powers and 'any office, agency, organism or public and private institution' to offer help, assistance, and integral compensation to the victims (see Espinosa and Gordillo, 2017). On the other hand, it is safe to argue that the Mexican government enabled enacting the *Ley General de Víctimas* in order to take the movement under control. With the making of the law, the MPJD started to lose its dynamism, and the media lost its early interest in the movement. Furthermore, as the DOS approach reiterates, the contours of the playing field changed suddenly in the Mexican public sphere, given the effects of the upcoming presidential elections. Meantime, the allegations over the frauds became rampant, and another nationwide social mobilisation, *YoSoy13*2, which targeted the PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto, gained increasing reception in the mass media (García and Treré, 2014). Consequently, with the effects of internal complications such as the departure of Icaza and Sicilia, and the decline of its visibility and resonance due to the diminishing media coverage, the government has succeeded in abiding by the movement.

CONCLUSION

This study scrutinised the emergence and development of *Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad*, which emerged in an environment where extreme violence and securitised discourse prevail, through the lenses of the Discursive Opportunities Structure approach. Applying the three mains components of the DOS –visibility, resonance, and legitimacy– the analysis demonstrated that the movement has managed to receive a response both in the public sphere and from the authorities since it effectively formulated claimed compelling and legitimate demands. MPJD initially took advantage of its leaders' recognition and established networks and used this opportunity to capture nationwide media coverage. Furthermore, leading figures, such as well-known poet Sicilia largely shaped the movement's discourse which has manifested both an aesthetic and rational language rooted in strong post-materialist cultural values, including death, destruction, grief while also referring to human rights anti-militarisation, resistance, dignity, hope and consolation.

Despite consisting of various civil society organisations, MPJD endured its dynamism and upheld its main objectives: making the victims of the war on drugs visible without stigmatisation in the public sphere and taking concrete steps towards building peace in Mexican society. To this end, the movement adopted a relatively innovative repertoire of action by touring the country with caravans and performing pacificist gatherings in which the victims were enabled vocal. This stance and consistent methodology of MPJD both kept its visibility alive and compelled the authorities to open dialogues with its representatives. On the other hand, MPJD further succeeded in formulating discursive strategies along with rational and legitimate claims and did not target the existing political system. Accordingly, these efforts were materialised in the General Law of Victims, which was considered unprecedented in modern Mexican history compared to contemporary social movements. Quintessentially, the opportunities and constraints of the Mexican politics, termed as playing field in the study following the DOS' lexicon, changed to the end of 2012. The resonance of MPJD's claims and its dynamism partially diminished. Overall, the study contends that using effective discursive strategies, MPJD proved a significant and influential movement in Mexico in recent years.

As the development of MPJD verifies, mobilising and contesting the hegemonic discourses in highly securitised societies and threatening environments require stark cautious and rational strategies. The findings of this study demonstrate that seizing discursive opportunities and performing resonant discursive strategies could supply an efficient toolkit for a social movement to achieve its goals even in challenging and repressive systems. In this sense, the DOS approach provides the researcher with a practical and consistent conceptual and theoretical framework

for future studies and debates that seek to understand the emergence and evaluate the effectiveness of social movements in risky conditions. Consequently, by analysing the case of MPJD, which emerged and developed during the ongoing war on drugs in Mexico, this study contributes to the growing social movements studies that aim to understand the drug wars and opportunities that arise in these environments.

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