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Mothers Against Mothering

Mothers Against Illegal Amnesty Movement and the Politics of Vulnerability

This essay focuses on the rhetoric of the anti-immigrant group Mothers Against Illegal Amnesty and the ways in which they deploy their identities as mothers in order to cast migrant mothers and their children as threats to citizen youth and to U.S. national security. Focusing recently on rescinding the automatic rights of citizenship to those born in the U.S., MAIA denies the vulnerability of undocumented children, identifying them as disease carriers and future terrorists. Using the concepts of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, I explore how this very vulnerability is often what produces the most virulent forms of hatred, as anti-immigrant groups seek to deny shared forms of intimacy such as that between mothers and children. By contrast, the New Sanctuary Movement has urged churches in the U.S. to provide protection to undocumented people in danger of being deported and separated from their families—often mothers—and, as such, the NSM represents the potential of a politics based on mutual vulnerability. However, because of their focus on families, the NSM also runs the danger of intersecting with a family values agenda that creates categories of worthy and unworthy victims. This essay foregrounds the difficulty for feminists of deciding to what degree a political movement should be grounded in values associated with mothering.

"Our citizens have new responsibilities. We must be vigilant," said President George Bush in his address to the nation on November 8, 2001. That exhortation was cited by various groups, perhaps most prominently the Minutemen Civil Defense Project, as they organized their vigilante force along the U.S.-Mexico border. At a recruiting meeting of the group that I attended in the summer of 2005 in southern New Mexico, local leader Bob Wright called on the audience to do their "civic duty" in helping their country, to be "another pair of eyes" in these "extraordinary times."

Hundreds of people along the border have responded to the Minutemen's call in the last decade. They arrive at designated border spots in their RVs, pulling out their lawn chairs and settling down to watch for "aliens," engaging in a new leisure activity, one that doubles as civic duty. The Minutemen operate by a code of ethics that distances the group—at least rhetorically—from the nasty history of vigilantism along the border: lynchings of Mexicans and African-Americans in the south by border vigilantes and white supremacists. They claim not to "take the law into their own hands," meting out punishment as they see fit but rather tell their members to call the Border Patrol upon sighting anyone suspicious and claim to assist undocumented people in need of water and medical assistance; they also recruit Latino members to try to prove they aren't racist. They rearticulate the individualism of frontier justice, favoring a communitarian ethos of protecting their communities and the nation during a time when the national government purportedly can't do the job. Whereas some vigilantes proudly say they don't care at all about the justice system or due process, the communitarian vigilante actually perceives himself to be a solid citizen.

More recently, a new border policing group has emerged—one that is much more virulent in its rhetoric. The Mothers Against Illegal Aliens was founded by Michelle Dallacroce of Arizona in 2006 with the motto: "Protect Our Children, Secure Our Borders!" The organization also appeals to citizen action: "Ultimately, it is up to you to decide for yourself if you want to get involved, protect your family and country, or if you'd rather watch from the sidelines and let our government do your bidding as it gives away your livelihood, your future and your country to a foreign entity that is dictating U.S. immigration policy … our children and our country are at risk of being eliminated!" Yet MAIA has none of the political savvy or appeal to tolerance of their male counterparts; they even accused Chris Simcox, a Minuteman leader, of being soft. Dallacroce told an Arizona newspaper that Simcox was "giving in" because he made statements supportive of public education and health care for children of undocumented immigrants." By contrast, MAIA characterizes undocumented immigrant children as "little time bombs, little soldiers," who are "born purposely to manipulate the laws in the U.S.A., to benefit their parents illegally in the U.S.A." In 2010, they renamed themselves Mothers Against Illegal Amnesty and have focused their campaign on so-called "anchor babies," seeking to overturn the constitutional right of anyone born in the U.S. to claim citizenship. Seemingly oblivious to their racist rhetoric—or perhaps even proud of it—they object to the 'impure" nature of these "mixed" legal status families.

What makes these women so much more hateful in their acts of border patrolling than the Minutemen? Contrasting the two groups certainly upsets essentialist notions of gender. Or perhaps not. In this essay, I explore the idea

that the role of mother is a particularly volatile one—lending itself to this kind of conservative, family values politics as well as to a progressive politics of mutual vulnerability. In fact, perhaps it is the very vulnerability of the child and the intimacy of the mother/child bond that most motivates MAIA; their recent campaign against citizenship to those born in the U.S. works very hard to cast the seemingly innocent act of giving birth as an orchestrated threat to the security of the nation:

> Babies BORN to ILLEGAL ALIEN FEMALES are NOT citizens of the U.S.A. Being American BORN is not the same as being an American BORN CITIZEN. It takes a citizen to MAKE A CITIZEN. These Illegal Alien FEMALES and their illegal alien infants are all ILLEGAL. Despite the fact that the baby is BORN on American SOIL while the mother is illegally in the USA or drops her bundle of joy at the border! (mothersagainstillegalamnesty.com)

To elaborate a theory and politics of vulnerability, I draw here on the concept of the face-to-face encounter as posited by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. He sees such encounters as crucial moments because of the bareness and vulnerability of the face. Vulnerability produces both compassion and rage, and the two are intimately related. On the one hand, says Emmanuel Levinas: "the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense" is so bare of all adornment as to require an ethical and compassionate response. He says, "The nudity of the face is a bareness without any cultural ornament, an absolution, a detachment from its form in the midst of the production of its form" (53). That moment of the face-to-face encounter is one in which the subject—perhaps only momentarily—sees another subject in his or her bareness. To look someone directly in the face is to undermine any sense of self-certainty. It is the lack of mediation between faces that can lead one to an ethical response, suggests Levinas, since the face, temporarily abstracted from the rest of life, causes one to feel compelled to see the other in his or her nudity, abstracted from all protection, vulnerable to joy and pain, to life and death. And if it is pain the other is feeling, then the response has to be the desire to help, for that person represents nothing threatening and in fact presents the possibility of life itself. However, adds Emmanuel Levinas, this same bareness can produce rage—a denial of the intensity of the mutual vulnerability: "The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence" (86). The hate is produced in response to that moment of exposure—the vulnerability invites violence.

The face of the Latino migrant is rendered especially vulnerable at this moment in U.S. history. On the one hand, this is a time of intensified deportations, border militarization, and incessant congressional posturing on

immigration reform, all of which garner considerable national media attention. The undocumented migrant is no longer the anonymous dishwasher or nanny or refugee in hiding but rather appears as the highly publicized face of the "illegal alien." On the other hand, this is a time of increased integration of Latinos—both indigenous to the U.S. and newly arrived. Today, Latinos are visible in many parts of the country that have never before had a Latino population; Latinos are claiming the U.S. as home in unprecedented numbers. In both instances—that of policing and of belonging—subjects, legal and undocumented, interact intimately, face to face, creating the possibility of friendship, community, desire, all generated by the vulnerability of face to face contact. Vulnerability produces both compassion and rage, and the two are intimately related.

It seems difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the bareness of the face at this point in time. Its production in various situations intervenes, almost immediately and simultaneously, to make the ethical response an often difficult and sometimes unlikely one to achieve. The tendency is to resort to categories that reduce the vulnerability of the face to face, that make the encounter recognizable and therefore safe—the "illegal alien," for example. It is thus worth returning to a moment of the pure, unmediated encounter in order to begin to understand where the compassion of the face to face turns to rage.

Ethics and Mothering

The mother cradling her baby in the crook of her arm. The baby's lips forming a tiny "o" around the nipple, working rhythmically to draw out the spurts of milk. Little hands pressed against the breast, or reaching up for a strand of hair. Mother's eyes gazing downward, baby's eyes gazing up. Seeing what? Elements of a face, at some point, the recognition of who this person is. No name, just a feeling developing from the everyday experience of security and love and sustenance. An experience so deeply embedded in the body and the psyche, to be lived and relived in a manner that exceeds or escapes articulation. For the mother, too, there is both the connection, the baby's face so close, so trusting, and the sheer, sensual experience that makes one's nipples tingle at the memory, even long after the nursing has stopped.

Not to be forgotten: dragging one's body out of bed, every two or three hours, to get the baby from the crib, sitting half asleep as it seems all remaining life is sucked from your body. Nipples so sore they can hardly stand to be touched. Breasts so engorged they ache and leak at embarrassing moments. Never being able to go anywhere for more than a few hours, carrying that responsibility around wherever one goes.

In the juxtaposition of these moments lies something close to what Levinas

identifies as the struggle between the natural inclination to put one's own interests first and the ethical obligation to others. He says, "Ethics is, therefore, against nature because it forbids the murderousness of my natural will to put my own existence first" (24). The desire for sleep is not quite akin to murderousness, but that word can be read flexibly, to encompass that first impulse to care for oneself as one akin to self-survival. One craves sleep.

How is it, then, that this impulse for self-survival transforms into something ethical, if ethics is defined as the propensity to put the needs of the Other before one's own? How is it that "mother's instincts" develop, assuming, with Levinas, that there is nothing instinctual about putting another's needs before one's own? I posit that the ethics grows out of the numerous acts of face-to-face and body-to-body caring that constitute mothering, the acts that break down the barriers between self and other even as the mother remains discrete, fully aware of the vulnerability of the child, such that she herself takes on both the vulnerability and the strength needed to protect and nourish the baby. This produces a raw intimacy and vulnerability, a willingness to do anything to protect the child because, in a manner, one is protecting oneself. In a way, it is an extremely selfish politics, for it suggests that the care of this other person is based on care of oneself. To see one's child experience pain is to oneself, literally experience pain. As a mother of two boys, I can recall dozens, perhaps hundreds of instances, in which I was playing with or watching over my child and saw him about to fall or stub his toe or get his finger caught in a drawer—times in which a jolt of pain ran through my own body as I sprang forward, perhaps just in time to prevent the incident—and the pain to both of us.

Yet anyone who has spent hours caring for another person, young or old, knows that the act can't be captured through the adjective "selfish." Most obviously, there is the considerable work involved. In addition, although care requires a constant going out of the self, it also entails a return, such that the constitution and reconstitution of the self is both an act of giving and of receiving, exhaustion and joy. The love is one of mutual intimacy and vulnerability, in which the act of taking on another's care is both necessary and pleasurable. Can any of us imagine not loving another person in a manner that involves care? Not just of children, for we are all constituted by our relations with others, and most likely, this relationship involves some degree of care (whether we acknowledge it or not). As Judith Butler describes this attachment, "We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something" (23). What we're missing is the ability to feel another's pain, and to use that as a springboard for imagining the pain of others outside our immediate ambit. In that sense, intimacy and vulnerability become the basis of a broader politics, and are crucial to imagining the pain caused to others, sometimes in "our" name—as in the U.S. attacks on Iraq after 9/11—which provides much of the context for

Butler's book, *Precarious Life*. Making both a personal and a political argument for the permeability of boundaries between self and other, Butler says that this permeability opens one both to the pleasures of intimacy and the vulnerability of violence—but it is not as if we really have a choice. It's just that some people are more protected from violence, often through no act of their own, whereas others, victims of war and violence, are much more vulnerable. What was different about 9/11, however, was that for a brief moment, the U.S. felt some of that vulnerability. Adds Butler:

> Mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions, just as denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalized fantasy of mastery) can fuel the instruments of war. We cannot, however, will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself, a situation in which we can be vanquished or lose to others. Is there something to be learned from the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability from our own brief and devastating exposure to this condition? (29)

Of course, there are many people within U.S. borders who do feel vulnerable to violence on an everyday basis—something Butler does not acknowledge here. Her point though is relevant to my argument about mothering: Can we maintain and extend this act of vulnerability (on both the part of the mother and child) to a wider politics? Clearly, the U.S. government—and border vigilante groups such as the Minutemen and MAIA—have not responded in such fashion but rather engaged in aggression as a strategy of reasserting boundaries between us and them.

MAIA

The paradox, as I have suggested above, is that the intensity of mothering can also produce some virulent and hateful politics, stemming precisely from the "will to put my own existence first," or, in an only slightly extended definition of self, to put one's own family's existence first and to see Others as a threat to the family. In other words, the desire to protect one's family and to see that family, based in biology, as a privileged relationship, over and above all other intimate ties, can lead to discrimination against those outside this narrow definition of family. This belief is at the heart of much of the anti-immigrant movement and is most specifically stated in the rhetoric of the Mothers Against Illegal Aliens movement. Joining other anti-immigrant organizations, MAIA

has crafted their message around a highly conservative and problematic notion of "mother." Hence, my title: I am differentiating between mothers as a biological category that is used to assert the superiority of particular kind of family as the basis of a particular kind of nation—and mothering as a process of making oneself vulnerable to others, of erasing boundaries. I am also foregrounding the difficulty, for feminists, of deciding to what degree a political movement can or should be grounded in values associated with mothering, something I will address further below in my discussion of the New Sanctuary Movement.

Calling for mothers to take action to protect their families, MAIA argues that immigration is a direct threat to *their* children—increasing crime, causing disease, and crowding the schools. They join a long line of anti-immigrant activists who invoke the "rule of law" as a means of defining national borders and keeping out "undesirables," a category which is racialized, gendered, and sexualized. Immigration policy favors the nuclear family. As Eithne Luibhéid notes, the "heterosexual, nuclear family relations (serves) as the primary basis for admission to the United States by reserving nearly three-quarters of all permanent immigration visas for people with those ties" (xv). Yet even heterosexual, nuclear family arrangements are opposed when they do not adhere to the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant norm—i.e., when women have too many babies, which is presumably linked to their race and their religion. Harvard professor Samuel Huntington argued in his 1999 article, "The Hispanic Challenge," that the core U.S. identity—which for him is WASP—is under threat due to a growing Hispanic population that stubbornly refuses to assimilate—meaning they retain their language, their religion, and their large families. He disparages Latinas for what he bluntly refers to as their "high fertility rates."

In articulating the MAIA agenda, Michelle Dallacroce is even more specific in targeting the mother/child relationship and the children themselves. Her rhetoric transforms mothering from an act of intimacy between mother and child that could serve as the basis for a wider ethos of caring into an act of intimacy that serves as the basis for a hateful rage. There is something about the vulnerability of the face of the immigrant child that prompts in Dallacroce a murderous rage, and that something seems to clearly be the fact that they are children, like her own, with similar needs. Yet in order to deny this mutual vulnerability, she must construct them as fully volitional and evil subjects. Consider her rhetoric:

> Each illegal alien infant will grow up … and vote … and change our political landscape. These children are not harmless to the U.S.A. They are little time bombs, little soldiers from other countries who when

> 18 will and have been trying to take over the U.S.A. from within our political system and even our school boards. (cited on <http://www.adl.org/civil_rights/anti_immigrant/maia.asp>, accessed 31 July 2010)

In order to construct the immigrant child as not childlike—to deny the similarity between her children and these children, and the similar desires of other mothers to care for their children, she must construct them as threats, and demonize the very bond between these mothers and their children (the idea that mothers come to the U.S. to bear children in order to give them a better life is particularly galling to her, even though her rhetoric is premised on a better life for her own children). Indeed, she takes away their infancy and childhood by ascribing to them an inordinate agency from the moment of birth, or before. Their mothers are not seen as mothers in their own right but rather as categorical Others—lawbreakers, Spanish-speakers, germ-carriers, takers of the resources of her children. Dallacroce deploys the love for her own children into a campaign of hatred for other women's children. The very act of intimate care for the vulnerable is rearticulated into one of hatred, denying the vulnerability of undocumented children and transforming them into the enemy.

In other words, MAIA illustrates the potency of Levinas' argument that there is a fine line between love and hate, between compassion and rage. Children and the relationship between mother and child is one of the most vulnerable, and the face of the child surely one of the least menacing, most defenseless faces we can imagine. To turn that face into the face of an enemy, MAIA must make them into virulent agents, capable of destruction through disease. In November 2007, Dallacroce posted a video on the Mothers Against Illegal Aliens website that stated the following:

> With diseases such as mono, chagas, hepatitis, staff infections, and flesh eating diseases, it is reasonable for a reasonable person to conclude that many of these diseases are here and on the rise because of our OPEN AND INSECURE BORDER with Mexico and the fact that Illegal Aliens are not subject to medical inspection or certification, as are legal applicants. With our children being exposed to and infected by the SUPERBUG in our schools, it should not be inconceivable that we are now being exposed and subjected to attacks by diseases which put our lives at risk because of learned bad behavior and unexceptable [sic] and prohibited cleaning practices which could kill us and our children while staying in any hotel or eating at any restaurant anywhere in America!

> The next time you eat in a restaurant or sleep in a hotel or motel … just remember to bring your own food, dishes, untensils [sic], glasses, towels, and maybe your own water. The person who cooked your meal or made your bed may very well be the one who picked your fruit and vegetables, yesterday.... and we've heard the stories about what they do in the fields … haven't we?" (cited on <http://www.adl.org/civil_rights/anti_immigrant/maia.asp>, accessed 31 July 2010)

Dallacroce makes immigrants into everyday threats, purveyors of disease due to their culture—a blanket assertion which makes children as guilty, if not more so, than adults. Furthermore, these sites of everyday practices such as schools, hotels, and restaurants, are connected to national security, for if the borders had been adequately secured, the threat of disease would have not occurred. Hence, the domestic becomes the site at which all of "us" face the consequences of the failure of national security.

And also, then, the site at which mothers can play a crucial role in defending the nation; the "dirt" and contagion of the migrant child represent a threat that far exceeds the actual home even as the home is accorded considerable power in relation to national identity. As anthropologist Mary Douglas writes in *Purity and Danger*, "Dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder" (2). Really, then, the desire for cleanliness and order is about conformity and homogeneity—maintenance of the familiar. The fear of difference as that which cannot be controlled. The household is one apt place through which to assert the importance of control, for it would seem that if there is any site, "we" can control, it should be our home. Thus, Dallacroce's rhetoric about children and disease and schools may be particularly appealing because her concerns appear to be legitimate ones that any 'good" mother would have. The domestic is connected to other sites, and desire for control over one's home and family is not just an illusion of control over other spaces, since there are clear connections to the ideologies that have led to such national political movements as old as Manifest Destiny and as recent as stepped-up border control. The domestic is not an inferior or less influential political space; rather, claims about the sanctity of the biologically defined family operate as powerful rhetorical weapons in the campaign for deportation of Others who threaten the community and the purportedly Christian nation in which that family resides.

The same conjunction of xenophobia, family values, and right-wing Christianity is at play in the dozens of anti-immigrant ordinances passed in the last few years in small towns throughout the country. In Hazleton, PA, for example, the city in 2006 passed one of the first and most-draconian laws, mandating

fines on landlords who rent to, and employers who hire, undocumented people and requiring city documents to be printed in English only.[1] In one of the trials on its constitutionality, a leading critic of the ordinance, a Latino doctor, reported receiving hate mail that referred to him as "subhuman spic scum." Such ordinances have often been passed in the name of "small town values," which are linked to "family values." The former CNN news anchor Lou Dobbs held a town forum in Hazleton and defended the mayor's attempts to keep out criminals and terrorists and keep the streets safe for the children.

While on the surface, these events seem like secular occasions, there are deep-seeded connections to the Christian right—connections are not always fully acknowledged. For example, Dobbs is an ostensibly objective newsman who lamented on his show the erosion of church-state separation—saying "we have precious little protection against the political adventurism of all manner of churches and religious organizations." Yet he appeared as a guest on the weekly news radio show of the influential conservative Christian group, the Family Research Council. The Family Research Council's leader, Tony Perkins opened the group's special conference on immigration in 2005 with this remark: "At question today is, do we have an immigration policy that is serving to strengthen the cultural fabric of our nation, which has a great influence on the family? The answer is no. We must get this right" (qtd. in Zaitchik 1). "Getting it right" means deportation: more than 90 percent of FRC members polled favored immediate expulsion for undocumented immigrants. On Perkins' radio show, Dobbs said that his real problem is with *liberal* religious groups arguing for amnesty for undocumented immigrants: "My problem is the political direction those churches, especially Catholics, are taking in pushing for amnesty and not border security."[2]

The anti-immigrant group that has helped author many of the local ordinances, the Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR) has connections to the religious right, as documented by the Southern Poverty Law Center, although they purport to be a secular group. FAIR is among the 250 new nativist groups that have formed since April 2005, when the first Minutemen Civil Defense vigilante border patrollers announced itself, according to the SPLC. The SPLC also reports that hate crimes against immigrants are on the rise—up 48 percent since 2000 (<SPLCenter.org>). Many of the hate crimes reported were not against immigrants passing through town—although there were some of those as well—but rather against Latino residents who were simply on their way to school, or attending a party, or working at their grocery store. The very everydayness, the belonging, the rightful claim to a home is what in many cases seems to have prompted the sometimes-murderous rage. If Levinas is correct, in other words, what prompts the hatred and even the desire to kill is not the recognition of the other as Other but rather the moment

that *precedes* the differentiation: the Latino as neighbor, friend, lover, mother. The moment of commonality.

So it would seem that by this point, my argument has led to a point where the category of "mother" should be dissolved in favor of something like "caregiver," given the ease with which mother is appropriated by the right in the name of family values. That seems unlikely any time soon, however, but the question is in fact how can mothering be redefined as a practice rather than an identity category? Can anyone be a mother? How does one "stay with" the particularity of this person rather than jumping to a generalized level at which point the person comes to represent a concept? How can mothering embody a practice rather than an ontological category?

Sanctuary?

Can a radical politics be based on the bond between mother and child? Or will that almost inexorably revert to a form of exclusion and essentialism? In this section, I consider these issues in the context of the New Sanctuary Movement, which has decided to help families in danger of being separated through deportation. Although in many ways the NSM represents the radical political potential of a politics based on the valorization of mothering, it also runs the danger of intersecting with a family values agenda that creates categories of worthy and unworthy victims.

The face of the undocumented mother is a compelling one, both strong and vulnerable. Called by some in the national media "the human face of the Sanctuary Movement," Elvira Arellano, mother of an eight-year-old boy named Saul, was working without papers at O'Hare airport in Chicago in 2002 when she was arrested in an immigration raid and later convicted of using a fake Social Security card. She was ordered to appear before immigration authorities on August 15, 2006. On that date she took refuge in the Adalberto United Methodist church, which had declared itself a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants; she maintained that she should not be separated from her U.S. citizen son. She soon joined forces with Chicago activists to build *La Familia Latina Unida* (the United Latina Family), an organization for families like hers. Forming alliances with other immigrant rights' groups, the families organized the writing of a private bill sponsored by Congressman Luis Gutierrez and Senator Dick Durbin, both of Illinois. A private bill suspends public law for a named individual or group subject to that law; if passed, it would make the members of *La Familia Latina Unida* an exception to the laws requiring the deportation of millions. Although unsuccessful in its legislative efforts, *La Familia* helped spark the formation of the New Sanctuary Movement; it was also during this time that Arellano acquired national visibility as the face of

the sanctuary movement. After a year in the church, Arellano announced she was leaving to participate in an immigrant rights' rally in Los Angeles aimed at publicizing the NSM. On August 19, 2007, upon leaving a mass at Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church, she was apprehended by immigration officials and deported to Mexico.

Arellano represents a poignant case of the injustices of the U.S. immigration system: a single mother whose deportation would mean separation from her young son. In the images that appeared in various media outlets, she often looked directly and boldly at the camera; in others, she appeared with Saul, sometimes with a poster in the background that said "Don't deport my mommy." Some critics claimed she was exploiting her son (including, not surprisingly, Michelle Dallacroce); her supporters argued that the humanitarian thing to do was to keep mother and child together. Within the context of heated immigration debates about who represented what to whom, she represented no threat often associated with "illegal aliens"—obviously not a drug dealer or criminal, she seemed to be working hard on behalf of her child, with the sanction of a church. Her situation was used by immigrant rights' activists to publicize the injustices of the system in terms that emphasized family. Said the Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, national coordinator of the Los Angeles-based New Sanctuary Movement, which invited Arellano to speak to its members, Arellano represents exactly who the movement seeks to help: "families with U.S.-citizen children, with a long work record in this country, no criminal history, and who are part of the fabric of our country, who face the prospect of having parents ripped away from their kids."

Salvatierra's characterization of the immigrant mother directly opposes the MAIA rhetoric: these mothers are like all mothers (and parents) who work hard for their children's futures—children who are, no less, citizens. They represent no threat but in fact contribute to the nation because they operate on terms on which everyone agrees. Thus, while the NSM powerfully counters the hateful discourse and valorizes the practice of caring for children as one that merits political inclusion, it does so on terms that could easily be recuperated within a family values agenda. The NSM as a national group has said that it hinges its offer of sanctuary on the preservation of the family, since it believes that one of the major problems with current immigration law is that it does not sufficiently respect familial ties. The movement calls on congregations to "publicly provide hospitality and protection to a limited number of immigrant families whose legal cases clearly reveal the contradictions and moral injustice of our current immigration system." They also call for "an immediate moratorium on all raids and unjust deportations that cause the separation of families, until such time as the broken system of immigration laws is fixed."[3] While this may be a savvy political move that draws mainstream support for sanctuary, it also raises

questions about who is excluded. To return to Salvatierra's quote: What if the children are not U.S. citizens, for example? Or what if the mother has received food stamps—is she not hard working enough? Or has a minor criminal offense, for whatever reason? Are they somehow less worthy of protection?

It is useful here to contrast the NSM to its predecessor, the Sanctuary Movement that began in the 1980s to protect refugees fleeing war-torn Central America. They couldn't return to El Salvador or Guatemala because to do so would risk torture, death, or starvation in countries that were run by death squads funded by the U.S. government. Responding to the injustices of the situation, religious activists across the U.S. began the sanctuary movement, developing an underground network in the tradition of the underground railroad for slaves that transported and crossed refugees into the U.S. and then provided them shelter in churches and homes. Of course, the U.S. government was not about to let these acts go unpunished. The Immigration and Naturalization Service infiltrated one of the movement's primary locations, Tucson's Southside Presbyterian Church, and gathered evidence; in September 1985, the government put eleven Sanctuary workers on trial; eight of them were convicted on charges including conspiracy, "bringing an alien illegally into the U.S.," and "concealing, harboring, or shielding illegal aliens" (Cunningham 46). That did not stop the movement, however, as activists in Tucson and elsewhere throughout the U.S. continued their work into the 1990s, until the worst of the wars had ended.

The sanctuary offered refugees was a liminal space, formed in the complex intersection of religious freedom and the law. Activists drew on a tradition of conscientious objection (such as occurred during the Vietnam War) and civil disobedience to argue that their religious beliefs obligated them to provide shelter to people, even if the state claimed that such shelter violated the law. Although some of the activists hoped that the separation of church and state would discourage the state from violating the sanctity of the church, they knew they could not count on that protection, given the gravity of the threat their movement posed to the U.S. government. Many of the refugees could testify to the abuses perpetrated by the very governments in El Salvador and Guatemala that the U.S. supported and called "democracies." The fact that the U.S. judicial system regularly denied asylum to refugees despite their valid claims was further reason for the U.S. government to seek to silence the refugees and the Sanctuary activists.

Unlike the 1980s movement, which openly defied laws regarding transportation and shelter of undocumented peoples, the current Sanctuary movement, while also critical of immigration law and the U.S. government, says that it is not breaking the law. It hinges this claim on its decision to act openly in providing shelter to people in churches, asserting that, "violations of the Im-

migration and Nationality Act depend(s) on concealment of undocumented peoples." Most of the people being sheltered—which is only a handful compared to the 1980s—are not eligible for political asylum, as there are no longer wars in Central America (though there is still considerable violence linked to the history of U.S. intervention). Thus, the movement bases its claim for providing sanctuary on injustices in immigration policy—primarily, the fact that policy allows for certain family members to be deported while others remain behind. The NSM is contingent on reform of the law rather than rejection of its premises.

I would argue, then, that the old Sanctuary movement exemplified the idea of mothering as a practice. The movement sheltered people based on their fear of returning to a war zone, without regard to familial status; it decided who to help based on the experience of suffering and migration—who would be tortured, killed, or in danger if they had to return to their countries. Membership in this community was not contingent on any particular identity—be that familial, national, race, ethnic, gender, etc. A loose, diasporic notion of community formed around the mutual recognition of suffering and injustice: the particularity of that person rather than their categorical identity.

By contrast, the argument by the NSM and *La Familia Latina Unida* that migrant families should be an exception to the general rules of deportation relies on a category—the Mother, the Family—that produces another set of categories: the worthy victim and the unworthy victim. The worthy victim of immigration policy is the one who can prove her belonging on the basis of an already established and accepted identity. If she is a mother, or perhaps a father, and works hard, with no criminal record, there is a chance that she can qualify for a legalization program, and eventually for citizenship; furthermore, if she or he marries a legal permanent resident or citizen, the path to legalization is fairly easy, further cementing the link between citizenship and family. The unworthy victim is the one who cannot prove belonging on those established grounds. Hence, the very appeal to the status of mother is one that concedes that the U.S. has the right to grant belonging based on family. In reality, the "unworthy victim" is just as worthy of claiming a home in the U.S. if one considers the underlying reasons for migration to be economic and political—the destruction of one's home, often due to U.S. political and economic intervention—as argued by the initial Sanctuary movement. Whether one is a mother or not—though a compelling identity in many ways—should not be the basis for belonging to a community or a nation.

"Family," by contrast, cannot be grounded in biology or even its imitative forms. The old Sanctuary movement looked to the radical Jesus for their definition of community. This Jesus was radically opposed to family values and was no proponent of a homogeneous community. He was a wanderer, a migrant; at a

young age, he left his home and took to the road, acquiring followers, disciples who became his family; his community was fluid and shifting, not grounded in either biology or place. He told his potential followers that, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and his mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). One must actually reject, even hate, one's biological family and love strangers with whom one has no necessary connection. Philosopher Slavoj Zizek interprets this passage as the essence of agape, which, as described by Saint Paul, is "the key intermediary term between faith and hope: it is love itself that enjoins us to 'unplug' from the organic community into which we were born" (121). Agape requires us to forsake the easy kind of love that depends on predictable ties—like the familial and national allegiances invoked by the Christian right. Rather, says Zizek,

> As every true Christian knows, love is the *work* of love—the hard and arduous work of repeated "uncoupling," in which, again and again, we have to disengage from the inertia that constrains us to identify with the particular order we were born into. Through the Christian work of compassionate love, we discern in what was hitherto a disturbing foreign body, tolerated and even modestly supported by us so that we were not too bothered by it, a subject, with its crushed dreams and desires—it is *this* Christian heritage of "uncoupling" that is threatened by today's "fundamentalisms," especially when they proclaim themselves Christians. (129)

To think in such broad terms about who needs our love, care, and compassion—and from whom we want to receive it—would dispel the notion of the "foreign body." For a person can be considered "foreign" only if the categories of belonging based on family, biology, and homogeneity remain in place. As long as there is a clearly defined biologically based family as the norm, anyone who seemingly represents a threat to that norm will be defined as an Other, whether tolerated or hated. Agape requires a dismantling of identities of belonging and asks instead for a practice of compassionate love that works to ensure anyone can fulfill their dreams and desires.

[1]In July of 2007, the Hazleton ordinance was declared unconstitutional in federal court. In issuing his opinion, Judge James M. Munley wrote, "We cannot say clearly enough that persons who enter this country without legal authorization are not stripped immediately of all their rights because of this single act.… The United States Supreme Court has consistently interpreted

[the 14th Amendment] to apply to all people present in the United States, whether they were born here, immigrated here through legal means, or violated federal law to enter the country" (<www.aclu.org>). The city of Hazleton is appealing Judge Munley's ruling.

[2]These comments were made on the Family Research Council's Washington Weekly Radio show on June 9, 2007.

[3]See <www.newsanctuarymovement.org>.

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