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The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)* publishes groundbreaking and outstanding scholarly and practitioner work on education in emergencies (EiE), defined broadly as quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocation, higher and adult education.

WHEN EMERGENCY BECOMES EVERYDAY LIFE: REVISITING A CENTRAL EIE CONCEPT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

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ABSTRACT

Though "emergency" is a key concept in the field of education in emergencies, scholars and practitioners have long been ambivalent about this term and what conditions it can refer to. In this article, drawing from the work of anthropologist Janet Roitman, I critically revisit the concepts of emergency and crisis, and propose that understanding emergency primarily as a moment of shock or the unexpected event obscures how seemingly normal conditions may produce their own impasses. Rather than being characterized by a consensus of meaning, crises entail narrative constructions that create new temporalities and frame certain questions and responses as possible, others as not. In this article, I juxtapose two narrative constructions of crisis in popular culture to explore how narrative constructions of the war on drugs can produce jarringly different accounts of the crises they are said to represent. I suggest that explicitly attending to the underlying politics of crisis narration—though possibly complicating emergency response—is vital to naming and resolving possible ethical blind spots and impasses in the field of education in emergencies.

THE WAR ON DRUGS: A CONCEPTUAL PROVOCATION FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

According Pearl (2018), someone in the United States is arrested for drug possession every 25 seconds. The number of people arrested for possession has tripled since 1980, with 1.3 million arrests in 2015—six times the number of

arrests for drug sales. One-fifth of the country's incarcerated population, some 456,000 individuals, is serving time for a drug charge; another 1.15 million are on probation and parole for drug-related offenses (Pearl 2018).

It would be reasonable to conclude that the cultivation, distribution, and consumption of controlled substances is drastically reshaping individual and familial lives, as well as institutional arrangements and policies in the US. Comparable snapshots from other countries—for example, the 200,000 people killed in Mexico since 2006 in drug-related operations and the 12,000 killed since 2016 in Philippine president Duterte's notorious drug crackdown—suggest that the adverse effects of the drug trade are transnational and interstitial, thus not easily attributable to one factor or issue. Across nation-states, these interrelated effects have coalesced into broader narratives of crisis that demand a coordinated response—what many states have come to refer to as a war on drugs (WoD).

Rodríguez-Gómez and Bermeo (2020) describe this war as a long-running assemblage of global and national policies, multilateral and bilateral agreements, and military interventions to control the production, distribution, and possession of drugs. It also can be seen as producing a growing range of crises and emergencies, including forced migration, violent conflict, mass incarceration, and environmental degradation (Rincón Ruiz and Kallis 2013; Paley 2014). These effects of the WoD can be viewed as emergent terrains of humanitarian action and, by extension, possible education in emergencies (EiE) responses, in that they are productive of the very disruptions EiE is typically meant to alleviate. Surprisingly, however, the WoD is not typically discussed in EiE literature or practice.

NARRATING THE CRISIS

In this article, I explore the implications of reading the WoD as a crisis or emergency, and of viewing it as constitutive of new theaters of humanitarian action and the provision of education. One question serves as a point of departure for this exploration: How do the complexities of the WoD suggest that the field of EiE must revisit its spatial and temporal notions of humanitarian response—and the narrative framings that legitimate such a response—in settings where emergency and crisis conditions show little sign of abating? This question is of critical importance to EiE, given that the notions of crisis and emergency are central concepts of the field. Moreover, the idea of what situations count as emergencies and how emergency should be understood remains a contested concept within EiE. Burde (2014, 40) has argued that there are durable humanitarian mindsets around how to respond to

emergencies and that, by defining a situation as an emergency, "humanitarians cue in the popular imagination certain images and ideas—a sudden, life-threatening crisis that requires an immediate response. These, in turn, influence and often determine decisions about the kinds of interventions needed." Burde's call for further attention to the hegemonic understanding of emergency in EiE remains generative. While she calls for this work to be done in light of conflict-sensitive education programs being centered in humanitarian emergency responses, my primary aim in this article is to draw critical theoretical attention to the interrelated concepts of crisis and emergency by examining how they are invoked and deployed in EiE discourse, and in representations of the WoD in popular culture. In examining how invocations and narrations of crisis in popular media work to open up particular questions and foreclose on others, this article serves as a conceptual provocation for the field of EiE.

I argue that the WoD is fruitful analytical terrain for rethinking notions of crisis and emergency, for considering what it means to be in a state of crisis indefinitely, and for determining how one can best educate and be educated in such a milieu. Thinking of the WoD in relation to the field of EiE entails grappling with two noteworthy points. First, which of the myriad crisis conditions, events, and circumstances born of the WoD can become intelligible EiE response opportunities or "emergencies"? That is, how are understandings of educational problems and the parameters for action constructed in crisis settings, given the constrained material and temporal conditions in which EiE works and decisionmaking typically occurs? Second, making the WoD a terrain for EiE also compels consideration of what modes of educational action are ethical and needed in the context of a multifaceted intervention that is largely deemed a failure but still ambles on. In the following sections, I engage with these considerations by providing an overview of different approaches to understanding crisis and emergency, honing in on how narrative constructions of the WoD work to engender and legitimate certain responses.

Drawing from recent literature on crisis and emergency in politics, cultural studies, and anthropology—notably Janet Roitman's (2014) work on narrative constructions of crisis—I offer two main arguments. First, long-running, multisited interventions like the WoD highlight the importance of critically attending to narrative constructions of crisis and drawing from new temporalities in EiE responses that move beyond sudden/slow-onset frameworks. Because crisis is, as Roitman (2014) states, an experiential category and constitutive of so many facets of our daily lives, these arguments have implications for how EiE responses are framed and put into practice. Such reflection is important to EiE because it expands the terms that traditionally frame the field and justify

its realm of action. Second, by utilizing narrative and textual methods of analysis from critical media studies, I critically analyze two popular cultural representations of the WoD to illustrate how social crises—including the effects of the War on Drugs in the US—are inscribed into popular cultural production and consumption. These media representations are also highly influential in shaping humanitarian emergency landscapes (UNESCO 2011). Music, literature, and films that address various crises are valuable artifacts for understanding how the parameters and possibilities for political and humanitarian action are framed and made legible across different material, geographic, and political locations. In this article, to compare how distinctive narratives of humanitarian crisis in the US WoD are framed and presented, I analyze two cultural artifacts: "Sellin' D.O.P.E.," an anti-carceral hip-hop song that examines how drug enforcement disproportionally harms Black communities in the US, and *Traffic,* a Hollywood thriller that portrays the WoD through multiple plotlines. While reflective of dissimilar political commitments and visions, these artifacts function as crucibles that distill a "truth" about the drug war crisis they mobilize for our consumption. Through this analysis, I illustrate how different narrative and popular constructions of the drug crisis may reorient understandings and actions within the field of EiE, leading to a consideration of emergencies not just as unexpected events but as outgrowths of the same governance practices that make much contemporary humanitarian work possible and necessary. These analyses point to the need for EiE scholars and practitioners to consider and incorporate different vantage points and understandings of crisis into humanitarian decisionmaking processes, education responses in particular. I conclude with a discussion of how different conceptualizations of crisis can help us understand the effects of the WoD in ways that center the lives of those most affected by crisis. While aware that the work of EiE is fraught—perhaps more so in the context of the WoD—I argue that drawing from a wider set of sources to understand the effects of crisis could expand EiE as a site of ethical possibility.

WHAT'S IN A WORD? THE WAR ON DRUGS AS TERRAINS OF EMERGENCY AND CRISIS

For more than two decades, scholars, practitioners, and advocates involved in humanitarian work have been adamant that education is an integral part of disaster and emergency relief (Aguilar and Retamal 1998; Nicolai 2003). However, the question of what it means to name something an emergency or crisis has long vexed practitioners who deliver education in such settings. As early as 2005, a USAID report, "Education in Crisis Situations: Mapping the Field," noted that the difficulty of defining crisis poses a "larger conceptual problem with maintaining

a distinction between relief and development assistance" (Burde 2005, 5). This conceptual problem is compounded by the fact that different agencies employ diverse understandings of the term "crisis" and use it to refer to myriad issues, making crisis a powerful (if fuzzy) justification for certain forms of intervention. Since that report, efforts have been made to standardize definitions, benchmarks, and approaches used in the EiE field. Notably, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) developed a *Minimum Standards Handbook* to serve as a tool for humanitarian workers, educators, and government officials, as well as an EiE "term bank" to support correct and universal usage of technical terms.

Though INEE does not define "crisis" in the *Minimum Standards Handbook,* "emergency" is defined as "a situation where a community has been disrupted and has yet to return to stability" (INEE 2010, 117). And yet, in linking these concepts so closely, practitioners are confronted with a tautological impasse in which concepts of emergency and crisis are used not only to define each other but also interchangeably and broadly. Certainly the concepts are related and often work as synonyms, but unless these terms are opened up to scrutiny, their interchangeable usage does not provide a strong analytical footing for understanding what is at stake when we speak of these conditions. Moreover, the ways actors employ these terms can shape what is understood as an emergency or crisis. Rubenstein (2015, 105-107) makes a useful distinction between the concepts of emergency and crisis, wherein the former represents an unexpected state that demands immediate action and the latter represents an urgent situation in which a decision is required. Said differently, emergencies emphasize the primacy of (re)action, whereas crises entail framing appropriate action and demand decisive judgment. In the case of EiE, a field largely driven by the need to take urgent action, the definition of what is an emergency has clear implications for what can and should be done. However, as a growing literature on slow-onset emergencies suggests, critical attention is needed to determine how appropriate action is conceptualized and acted on.

Similar to the political expediency afforded by the term "crisis," the WoD represents a potent example of how war rhetoric—seen in other US "wars," such as those on poverty and terror—is used "to elicit public consent for all sorts of disparate ventures" (Noon 2004, 342). As Rodríguez-Gómez and Bermeo (2020) note, this broad policy regime is often characterized by militarized interventions, punitive legislation, and prohibition campaigns—interventions that work in tandem to police, secure, displace, and disproportionately criminalize populations of color. Dawn Paley's (2014) argument that the WoD is a form of continuous war against socially excluded populations in Latin America is especially trenchant for thinking about how invoking crisis as a conceptual and political category can

work to obscure concurrent displacements and loss of rights. Plan Colombia, the US-funded counterinsurgency against drug cartels and Marxist rebels, saw the Colombian military working in tandem with right-wing militias to target suspected sympathizers in rural strongholds of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC. These operations temporarily diminished the FARC insurgency, but they also led to thousands of civilian deaths while the production of illicit coca remained largely unchanged (Miroff 2016). Moreover, the operations produced what observers have termed a balloon effect, where the inroads made in halting production in Colombia dispersed production into Central America and Mexico (Paley 2014), which in turn gave rise to the Merida Initiative or "Plan Mexico," thereby transferring the Colombian intervention into a new WoD territory. A willingness to grapple with how crisis is invoked and deployed in governance and development techniques makes it possible to understand complex and long-running interventions, like the WoD, not as a corrective response to dangerous situations but as incubators of the larger structural shifts that produce instability, violence, and the erosion of rights.

As Bengtsson (2011) observes on the use of the term "fragility" in the field of EiE, there are inherent risks in working with vague terminology and assumptions of shared meaning. Words matter. The terms practitioners use, and how they use them, matter because they are central both to framing problems and to deploying putative solutions that privilege certain interests over others. The ability to name a situation (crisis, fragile, stable, or otherwise) is explicitly political and tantamount to setting the stage for how we may understand, approach, and resolve it. In a world marked by the growing privatization of public services and resources, precarious livelihoods, extended violent conflicts, environmental degradation, climate insecurity, racialized policing/surveillance, militarized borders, and pandemics, the core terms in the field of EiE—"emergency" and "crisis"—find increasing relevance, but they also invite a critical revisiting. It is important to query how education policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers deploy the term "emergency," which situations can be understood as emergencies, and which actors are able to name emergencies and mobilize resources to address them. It is also important to understand how broader understandings of crisis are produced, circulated, and consumed in popular narratives of crisis. Discursively, ambiguity may work to privilege particular understandings and institutional actors and to occlude important contextual histories and local voices and struggles. For example, if the rationale for EiE is to contribute to stability, ease difficult circumstances, or to set things right, so to speak, it is vital to trace which modes of living are assumed to constitute stability and what forms of stability are desirable. It is equally important to be explicit about who gets to articulate the normative dimensions of what stability ought to be and

which power relations are privileged therein. As examined in greater detail below, media depictions play a pivotal role in shaping the contours of what we know and how we know it to be true (Tisdell 2008).

In the remainder of this article, I argue that the definitions of emergency and crisis introduced above, while supple, fail on two counts. First, they render emergencies as unexpected and urgent happenings but do not reflect the fact that an emergency may itself be a product of statecraft or be politicized, manufactured, or sustained for profit by local and nonlocal actors (Klein 2007; Paley 2014; Loewenstein 2015). Second, they construct a temporality in which crises are decisive events with measurable effects best approached with clear indicators like the INEE Minimum Standards, target populations, and standard responses. Such tidy understandings of emergency—as moments necessitating swift response rather than critical reflection (Bengtsson 2011)—can neglect messy and inchoate forms of breakdown, instability, and attrition that are ongoing if not always perceptible aspects of social life. Following Rubenstein (2015), although the WoD is often framed as a response to myriad emergencies, it cannot be understood strictly as an emergency situation in itself. Many of its known targets—displacement, armed conflict, mass incarceration—emerge as the effects of state policies and antidrug actions. In fact, the WoD presents policymakers and EiE actors with multiple, concurrent, and interrelated humanitarian crises that require delimitation and decisions on how best to respond.

RETHINKING CRISIS AND EMERGENCY

There is a growing literature that critically theorizes the related notions of crisis and emergency as indeterminate conditions (e.g., Agamben 2005; Berlant 2011; Wagner-Pacifici 2017; Roitman 2014; Rubenstein 2015). Given my focus on frames that enable EiE responses rather than on the EiE responses themselves, I draw primarily from Roitman's (2014) work on these concepts to illustrate different temporalities of crisis that have important implications for the EiE field. Roitman is a useful interlocutor, as she has written extensively on the concept of crisis with the aim of examining how it is constituted as an object of knowledge and the different ways crisis narratives can be put to work. She provides a genealogy of the concept, beginning with the ancient Greek term *krino* (meaning to decide, to judge, to choose), which was prevalent in medicine. In this context, crisis denoted the turning point of a disease or a critical phase in which life or death was at stake, and it called for an irrevocable definition and decisive choice between alternatives.

A key point of interest to the field of EiE is Roitman's assertion that crisis narratives introduce new temporalities. Crisis is mobilized in narrative constructions to signal turning points, or transitional phases, that establish both a basis for action and a particular teleology that is implicitly directed at a norm. The political utility of a crisis narrative is that it evokes a moral demand for a difference between the past and the future, where the past is recast as wrong (or the temporal location to discover what went wrong) to make room for a different kind of future. Thus, a crisis can "become an imperative or device to understand how to act effectively in situations that belie, for actors, a sense of possibility" (2014, 2). It is important to note here that crisis narratives are fashioned to produce meaning, and to open certain possibilities and foreclose on others in terms of creating opportunities for action or coordinated response. Roitman argues that calling a situation a crisis posits that a deviation from the normal has occurred, regardless of whether such a claim can be substantiated.

Within the EiE field, crisis narratives frequently center on the provision of education in relation to natural disasters, conflict settings, and displaced and refugee communities (UNESCO 2011; Nicolai and Hine 2015). The provision of education services under these circumstances similarly marks out new temporalities in delineating what is to be done. Nicolai and Hine's (2015) review of investment in EiE responses indicates that there is typically little engagement with "long-wave" events and "complex emergencies," and none in high-income countries, which suggests that the temporal, spatial, and political dimensions of crisis in EiE responses are narrowly defined. Narrow constructions of crisis help to focus the scope of action, but they also have to be understood with respect to the material support for EiE efforts, as funding cycles for EiE, like other humanitarian responses, are much shorter than the crisis situations they are meant to alleviate (UNESCO 2011). Indeed, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2017) reports that protracted refugee situations across the globe now last on average an estimated 26 years, which raises fundamental questions about the viability of the short-term funding cycles that drive contemporary humanitarian responses. The mechanisms of funding for emergency education responses have to be considered here as well; appeals for long-term planning resulted in only 38 percent of education requests being funded (UNESCO 2011, 205). The scarcity of funds for education responses poses additional challenges for developing EiE programs that are informed and sustained by specific contextual factors. Roitman's (2014) arguments are similarly instructive in highlighting how invocations of humanitarian crisis establish a moral basis for EiE responses, but in ways that frame and reduce what is to be done to correspond to the constrained capacity of humanitarian actors to respond. Such narrative constructions of crisis pave the way for education responses that, while

well-meaning, are not sustainable and do not (or cannot) necessarily address longer timeframes, larger systemic arrangements, or interrelated complexities.

There is also the question of what EiE programs actually do to orient participants to their lived experiences of crisis. While EiE programs are thought to safeguard psychosocial and physical wellbeing and to contribute to possibilities for peace, little to no research has been done that tracks people's changing perceptions of EiE over time, and little is known about the views of children and youth in these settings (Nicolai and Hine 2015, 15). The empirical record suggests that students' experiences of EiE are complex. In a recent study examining civic education efforts for refugee youth in Lebanon, for example, Abu El-Haj et al. (2018) found that these lessons emphasized obedience to authority, and also taught children to be ashamed of their social positions and to distrust their own knowledge. Comparably little is understood about how emergency education responses for youth might unfold and inform their self-conceptions in the multinational, extraordinarily diverse settings marked by the WoD. We know that education in conflict settings is often understood as helping to establish clearer boundaries between civilians and combatants (UNESCO 2011). In the WoD, however, action plans that rely on greater policing and military operations in arenas of everyday life may further blur the lines between civilians and offenders. Historically, antidrug education efforts in the US, like Drug Abuse Resistance Education or D.A.R.E., have promoted abstinence and avoidance of circumstances and settings in which drugs are present. Educators and humanitarian actors have to consider how such pedagogical aims or life skills would translate in settings characterized by economic precarity and informal labor markets, where the distribution and consumption of drugs are intertwined with local economies and daily life. If students know of family or community members implicated in these activities, such educational interventions would run counter to the complexities of their lives and would not speak to their sociopolitical and relational realities.

RETHINKING TEMPORALITIES OF CRISIS

Roitman argues that the term "crisis" is now increasingly understood "to be a condition, a state of affairs, an *experiential category* [my emphasis] . . . posited as a protracted and potentially persistent state of ailment and demise" (2014, 16). This conceptualization of crisis moves the causes of disruption beyond any specific event—the terrorist attack, the episode of conflict, the earthquake, or the hurricane—and toward the larger, seemingly banal socioeconomic and political arrangements that frame everyday life. Said differently, it is not only the spectacular event or catastrophe that introduces uncertainty, disruption,

and instability into the lives of a community. Thus, we must consider that crisis conditions are exerted and exacerbated by ongoing and mutually reinforcing processes that often go unquestioned as normal.

Such an indeterminate temporality of crisis, one without a clear origin or endpoint, challenges the logic and targets of rapid or "early" emergency response and the moral basis of humanitarian intervention. What we must contend with then, following Roitman (2014), is that we are living in far more indefinite conditions of crisis than we imagined, conditions that distribute harm differentially and are sustained by the very systems that provide humanitarian relief to alleviate them. This is especially true in the WoD, where poor, rural, Black, and indigenous populations in Latin America and poor, urban, minorized populations in the US bear the brunt of the harm caused by antidrug policies (Paley 2014).

As discussed above, the idea of emergency in the field of EiE is usually defined as an unexpected shock of intense but brief duration. Recently, however, attempts have been made to rethink the temporality of emergency and, notably, to account for what are known as slow-onset emergencies, which INEE defines as "an emergency that does not emerge from a single, distinct event but one that emerges gradually over time, often based on a confluence of different events."[1] The UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2011, 3) names examples of "global challenges—such as climate change, food and energy price spikes, macroeconomic trends, irregular migration, rapid population growth, and urbanisation—[that] are contributing to increasing vulnerability and humanitarian need." Although the introduction of a slow-onset emergencies framework can potentially broaden the theoretical scope and the theaters of emergency action, there is evidence to suggest that shock-based understanding of emergencies still predominates humanitarian relief responses. In other words, the frameworks of EiE are too narrowly conceptualized and applied in circumstances of emergency that they cannot necessarily address. There are clear limits to sudden-onset approaches that emphasize preparedness in the case of the WoD, where there is a long history of states building on what exists and where responses intensify without grappling with the material causes and effects of the responses themselves.

Undoubtedly, a deeper exploration of the explanatory possibilities and limitations of slow-onset emergencies remains important for the EiE field, especially when considering the increasingly protracted and interconnected nature of contemporary

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1   INEE adopts UN OCHA's definition of slow-onset emergencies. See https://inee.org/resources/ocha-and-slow-onset-emergencies. INEE's definition of slow-onset emergencies will be published in 2020 in an updated EiE glossary, though the draft glosary was consulted in 2019.

humanitarian challenges like the WoD. In my analysis of two popular cultural representations of the WoD that follows, I engage closely with questions of how popular representations of crisis in the WoD direct our gaze to different geographies, communities, and everyday experiences of human lives. These examples illustrate how the juxtaposition of distinct WoD narratives enable several important possibilities: first, to complicate normative assumptions about the drivers of (and solutions to) humanitarian crises emanating from the WoD; second, to draw transnational links between human communities affected by the WoD; and, finally, to draw attention to systemic issues such as militarization, racialized policing, and mass incarceration that are often made invisible in narrow humanitarian responses. In doing so, I illustrate how narrative analysis, enjoined with critical attention to power, social relations, and political and economic conditions from which narratives emerge, represents a potent approach the EiE field could embrace in order to challenge normative understandings of what may count as an emergency, its temporal and spatial dimensions, and its contributing factors and effects.

METHODOLOGICAL/ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

Narratives present situated accounts of the world, and in this respect it is important to examine narrative constructions of crisis. Narratives draw attention to the fact that our understandings of a reality and the possibilities of shared meaning emerge from one's social location and, relatedly, that different understandings of an event, situation, or reality are not only common but to be expected. As feminist security studies scholar Annick Wibben observes, "narratives are sites of the exercise of power; through narratives, we not only investigate but invent an order for the world" (2011, 2). Thus, my focus here is on the practices and politics of narration, rather than on the relative efficacy of one narrative over another.

Narratives can also be understood as social texts that are subject to analysis, insofar as they circulate social meanings (Fürsich 2009). Narrative analysis reveals the relationship of utterances, talk, and media to the social construction of norms and institutional discourses (see Souto-Manning 2014 for an innovative critical application within education research, and for a substantive review of the approach itself). My analysis here is informed by the work of Wibben (2011), and by cultural theorist Stuart Hall's (1984) assertion that narrative has to be understood as inherently political, in that it stakes out claims to reality and constructs reality while providing a situated account of it. Hall's critical treatment of the role of British media in constructing hegemonic claims of reality and imbuing them with cultural legitimacy during the Falklands War is instructive

for analyzing how popular cultural forms may perform a similar function with respect to narrative constructions of crisis in the WoD. Indeed, we would be remiss to ignore the enormous effect popular media depictions of crisis as entertainment have, both consciously and unconsciously, on what and how we think—about ourselves and others, and about personal and social issues (Tisdell 2008, 48). In the following sections, I critically analyze two treatments of the drug war in the US, one in film and one in hip-hop music, as illustrative examples of how narrative constructions work to direct and curate distinct popular understandings of crisis. As Adorno (1976) has argued, popular culture works as a site of politics, in that it is frequently implicated in securing popular consent to dominant social relations and the status quo. However, narrative constructions within popular culture can also be subversive, particularly when not beholden to commercial interests and profit motives (Ciccariello-Maher 2005).

Selection of Media

In this section, I draw from narrative constructions in the 2000 film *Traffic* and the 2002 song "Sellin' D.O.P.E." by hip-hop duo dead prez as they relate to the WoD. I have chosen these social texts because they are roughly contemporaneous accounts that offer contrasting points of entry into understanding the WoD as a crisis and in assigning and ordering its effects, thus highlighting knowledge production as a site of politics. While there are more recent media treatments of the WoD, notably the Netflix series *Narcos* and the 2017 feature film *Loving Pablo,* these depictions focus largely on enforcement measures against the Medellín cartel in the 1980s and 1990s, and on the pursuit of Pablo Escobar in particular. Though not as recent, *Traffic* is noteworthy for moving past dramatic portraits of "drug lord" personalities to attempt a contemporary, multinarrative, and systematic engagement with the US drug war. Similarly, while there are numerous songs that explore the pernicious effects on individuals caught up in the drug trade (e.g., "Love's Gonna Get'cha" by Boogie Down Productions, "The Ten Crack Commandments" by the Notorious B.I.G., "Peruvian Cocaine" by Immortal Technique), "Sellin' D.O.P.E." offers a more comprehensive and multilevel counternarrative to *Traffic*'s depiction of the drug war. These examples together are useful for analysis, in that they attempt far-reaching explorations of the social, economic, and politics factors that shape the WoD.

Analysis of Media

In analyzing these narratives, I hew to a repertoire of diverse but interrelated forms of textual analysis that have precedent in critical media studies, including literary-critical interpretive strategies (Fürsich 2009, 241). Fürsich (2009) discusses

how critical analysis of media need not attend only to the manifest content (i.e., the visible or audible) but to the production and signification of broader cultural meanings. I come to these media with critical constructivist and poststructuralist epistemic commitments. These commitments draw my analytical focus not only to the production of situated accounts and knowledges but also to broader relationships of power and the possibilities of legibility within discursive and normative frameworks that confer authority to particular narratives over others. Analytically, this entails attending to (mis)representations of institutional and political norms, power dynamics, and the visibility of marginalized communities.

My analysis proceeded as follows. I viewed *Traffic* several times to move beyond a passive consumption of its manifest content and to develop critical insights into its narrative framing—that is, how and why the story was being told as it was. I thus was able to identify relevant scenes and transcribe portions of the dialogue that I deemed thematically significant for consolidating a larger crisis narrative about the WoD. Similarly, I listened to "Sellin' D.O.P.E." several times in order to transcribe its lyrics and identify its key themes. After I transcribed them, I selected an excerpt of the lyrics that explicitly exemplified a counternarrative of crisis, one that queried the benevolent framing of enforcement of the WoD by highlighting its disproportionate effects within Black communities. It is important to note that the process was dialogical and inductive, insofar as my multiple viewings and listening to one text yielded insights that drew me back to the opposing text, and eventually toward broader comparative insights. For example, listening to "Sellin' D.O.P.E." helped me give specific attention when viewing *Traffic* to how questions of race and racial disparities in arrests, prosecution, and incarceration were addressed (or not). Finally, the process of expanding these observations through memo writing helped me consolidate my analysis.

THE WAR ON DRUGS IN NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CRISIS

Staying the Course, Narrowing the Scope: Depictions of the Drug War in Soderbergh's *Traffic*

The film *Traffic,* directed by Steven Soderbergh, was released in 2000 to widespread critical acclaim, including Oscar awards for directing, acting, and screenplay. A cinematic adaptation of a British television series of the same name (*Traffik*), *Traffic* sets forth several simultaneous (though not always overlapping) narratives about the drug trade and enforcement efforts in the US and Mexico. The narratives are

meant to convey the different perspectives and lived experiences that intersect with the WoD, with storylines featuring rich white suburban kids from Ohio, US law enforcement officers and politicians, high-level dealers living publicly respectable lives in Southern California, and Mexican military officials and law enforcement officers in Tijuana.[2]

My task here is not to recount *Traffic*'s plot in its entirety but to look at the representations of the drug war as a crisis, one that Roitman (2014) explains carries a moral demand to act. A significant plotline involves the character Robert Wakefield (played by Michael Douglas), a federal judge who is nominated to serve as the new federal drug czar and to outline the government's strategy to win the drug war. Wakefield approaches the task earnestly, proclaiming to reporters that the drug crisis "affects all families" and promising to continue to improve on existing measures. Wakefield tours the US-built infrastructure of the WoD, notably intelligence and border-security operations. In these scenes, he is told by the solemn customs officers that they are outmatched and cannot compete with the resources of the cartels, which leads him to push his staff for "outside-the-box" ideas that culminate in a demand for very "in-the-box" joint enforcement and information-sharing efforts with their Mexican counterparts to deal with cartel activity.

On the Mexican side of the border, the film follows two Tijuana municipal cops in their efforts to stem the flow of drugs. The film opens with a shot of them discovering and stopping a large shipment of drugs in the Baja California desert. Their success is short lived, as the contraband is seized by a Mexican army convoy led by a general who is later revealed to be collaborating with another cartel while enforcing raids against its Tijuana-based rival. Thus, high-level corruption is marked out as the first source of crisis in the WoD as a threat that demands active intervention, but one that is intractable in the context of governance in Mexico. Significantly, political corruption in the US is not depicted as a crisis of the same magnitude, if at all.

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2   Language is unquestionably a site for the exercise of power, and I seek to write in ways that open political possibilities and confront unjust structures. In this article, I intentionally capitalize "Black" as an antiracist and anticolonial practice, one meant to orthographically reflect how the enslavement of African peoples in the US was premised on explicit negation of their personhood and erasure of national/ethnic ties. Such a move is consistent with the arguments I am making here about the importance of language and of centering the lives and dignity of those most affected by crisis. Conversely, I do not want to capitalize "white" for two reasons: first, because capitalizing the word is a stylistic practice (though not exclusively) of white supremacist discourse; and second, the use of "white" does not imperil the ability for people to trace and claim their ethnic origins.

Less visible are narratives of crisis that illustrate the implications the WoD have for everyday life. In the scenes in Mexico, the transport drivers working for the cartels—the ordinary citizens whose lives are permeated by the drug trade—have few if any speaking parts. They are literally the human scenery for the "real" action, which *Traffic* depicts as law enforcement's cat-and-mouse pursuit of and clashes with traffickers. Thus, *Traffic* stakes out two related arguments: first, that the "war" in the WoD is primarily between law enforcement and dealers, with everyday citizens affected peripherally; and second, that efforts to enforce the law against traffickers is a Sisyphean task and unlikely to decisively end the flow of drugs into the US.

In making this argument, the film leaves its viewers with the impression that there are few options to fighting the WoD outside of continued policing and militarization, one being the decriminalization of drugs. Notably, there is little to no discussion of why militarized enforcement is the only way to address the drug trade, and there is no mention of the vested interests of those in the US who benefit from extending the WoD, such as US Customs and Border Protection (Vera 2013), prison contractors (Alexander 2012), or private arms manufacturers, who find willing markets for their products as enforcement and prohibition become increasingly militarized. Nor is there mention of the significant role a protracted violent conflict plays in fueling migration to the US (Vera 2013). As a result, the understanding of crisis that is foregrounded in *Traffic* does not necessarily carry what Roitman (2014) terms ethical demands for a different kind of future. Rather, the film's critique seems to build up to an ambivalent call for more efficient governance and border-security coordination, and it does not address the ways US policies and militarized efforts to stop the cultivation and distribution of drugs are implicated in other humanitarian crises.

Traffic moves repeatedly across the US-Mexico border and other sites, including Washington, DC, and wealthy and low-income neighborhoods in Cincinnati. It is in Cincinnati, of all places, that the movie attempts to humanize the effects of the drug war and provides a closer investigation of its effects. The result is strange portrait of white upper-class youth ennui, in which the Wakefields' daughter Caroline, an overachieving student at an elite private high school, regularly gets high with her privileged friends to escape what they refer to as "fake social conventions."

Traffic's treatment of the demand side of the war is heavy-handed and at times descends into crude racist stereotyping. It shows young Caroline spiraling down a path of drug use and addiction, and depicts the nadir of her descent as being high and obliviously exchanging her body for money and drugs in a motel in a

predominantly Black neighborhood. The scene implies that the height of anxiety for the concerned parents of a "good" young white girl is her having sex with a Black man in exchange for drugs—an embodiment of how far she has fallen. It is curious that Caroline's descent into addiction is depicted as the human face of suffering in the drug crisis, and that securing her wellbeing (or that of youth like her) is the second moral demand set forth in the film. For all of its narrative juxtapositioning, tracing of intersecting storylines, and vague commitment to "listening" that takes place in an all-white rehabilitation space at the end of the movie, *Traffic* has surprisingly little to say about how Black and other communities of color are explicitly targeted in the WoD. There is nothing about the sentencing disparities between Black and white drug offenders or the disproportionate imprisonment of Black men in the US prison system that fuels what Angela Davis (1998) refers to as the "prison industrial complex." Instead, shots of Black Cincinnati are limited to passing glances at crowded street corners from Wakefield's car as he looks for his strung-out daughter. Mirroring the scenes of Mexicans in Tijuana, Black residents of Cincinnati have no speaking parts; they just appear as human scenery, as if Black neighborhoods exist primarily as locations for white people to secure and use drugs. The film inadvertently addresses racial disparities in the enforcement and prosecution of the WoD through scenes in which Wakefield is assured by his colleagues that his daughter's criminal record can be expunged and that the press will not report his daughter's misfortunes.

As a multinarrative exploration of the WoD, particularly its treatments of the limitations and challenges confronting enforcement policies and efforts, *Traffic* does succeed in highlighting that the WoD cannot and should not be understood from a single perspective or space. *Traffic* also highlights how wealth often facilitates impunity and immunity from the reach of the law, and that those lower in the hierarchy of social relations bear the brunt of the consequences. These highlights are perhaps why the film leaves something to be desired, particularly in its relative neglect of a robust and critical economic and political analysis. When directed at the treatments of lives and communities that are disproportionately harmed by the WoD, the narrative constructions of crisis in *Traffic* are often underdeveloped and crude. In turn, these representations work to suggest an order of the disposability of lives and bodies and to secure support for the status quo. As a result, the film's narrative account of crisis offers a much narrower response to the question of what is and what went wrong than it intends, and it does not convincingly convey a demand for a different moral order or future (Roitman 2014). *Traffic*'s narrative framing thus leaves the viewer with little sense of the possibility for a different future outside of better coordination, better mobilization of resources, and better law enforcement in the WoD. Intentionally or not, this framing legitimates the very governance and criminal justice structures that are fueling the crisis conditions noted at the

start of this article. Here again, we can observe how narrow constructions of crisis help to focus the scope of action and to constrain the notion of what else may be possible. In this sense, there is a parallel here in how invocations of humanitarian crisis justify EiE responses, but in ways that narrow those conditions to better align with the limited capacity of actors without interrogating the role of those actors in producing or sustaining the status quo.

Counternarratives and Building toward a More Just Future: Representations of the WoD in dead prez's "Sellin' D.O.P.E."

In contrast to *Traffic,* the 2002 song "Sellin' D.O.P.E." from the hip-hop duo dead prez offers a much more explicit political and economic treatment of the drug war from within Black communities, and it does so from a first-person vantage point offered by MCs M-1 and stic.man. The song was featured in the 1998 independent film *Slam* and released on a mixtape by the duo in 2002. Artistically, dead prez is part of a long tradition of political and didactic rap that has origins in hip-hop music. The group is known for its explicitly political music characterized by a commitment to Black liberation, anticapitalism, and social justice. In this respect, dead prez can be understood to occupy a role of organic intellectuals in hip-hop in the Gramscian tradition (Dyson 2003, cited in Ciccariello-Maher 2005). This stance is exemplified in a 2003 interview with bandmember stic.man:

> I have a belief in political education in the sense that if we can get a firm understanding of how we got in this social situation, it will unify people to change it . . . With Dead Prez, we want to be something that black people can find as a link, instead of another attack on black people. We want black people to feel like, I'm being represented.[3]

Political scientist Ciccariello-Maher observes that "there are several central didactic axes that extend throughout the work of dead prez . . . the 'war on drugs' and the criminalization of Black urban youth" (2005, 144). These axes represent what Roitman (2014) would term the narrative constructions of crisis that are set forth in their music, which address the impacts of there being more than one million African Americans in the US prison population. "Sellin' D.O.P.E." engages with both axes and represents a critical understanding of the impact of criminalization on Black communities, as well as a deeper exploration of the political economy of the drug war. The first-person narrative and its treatment of

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3   See "Walk Like a Warrior: Interview with Dead Prez." http://rosaclemente.net/walk-like-warrior-interview-dead-prez/.

the drug trade stands in jarring contrast to *Traffic*'s use of Black bodies to simply suggest criminality and (white) moral degradation. In the chorus and opening verse of the song, stic.man positions drug dealing relative to the persistent poverty and lack of opportunity in Black communities:

> [Chorus]
> Sellin' dope, serving weed. We had
> To hustle to hustle just to eat
>
> [Verse 1: stic.man]
> Ain't no hope in the streets—you broke, you sell dope
> All my young n***** outside hustling coke
> Know the drama. If you ain't sellin' crack, then it's ganja . . .
> Bagging up my nickels and dime, going through
> Difficult time, writing my life's story in rhyme
> But when I look at all the n***** they hit with mad time
> In proportion to the big kingpins, it don't fit
> You could get caught with barely a half a slab
> And the judge sentence you like you ran the ave
> I ain't planned to get rich from sellin' that shit—it was survival
> My game plan was not to get knocked by 5-0

In this verse, stic.man argues that drug dealing in Black communities is a survival mechanism, something done to secure basic human necessities, like food. The words "you could get caught with barely half a slab" (a trivial amount) and get a sentences like you "ran the ave" (avenue) indicates that the decision to deal is not made lightly but with the recognition that, as a Black man, the consequences of selling drugs are severe and that there is a fundamental difference in the risks and rewards between those positioned at the top of the drug game and those struggling at the retail level. In contrast to *Traffic,* "Sellin' D.O.P.E." makes it clear that law enforcement and the criminal justice system are not part of the solution or that the protagonists are fighting the good fight, but that they in fact are systemic drivers of a crisis that disproportionately affects Black communities in the US.

The disparities in criminal sentencing named in dead prez's lyrics are not merely a passing observation in the song; rather, they draw the listener's attention to the class- and race-differentiated harm wrought by the WoD. That is to say, "Sellin' D.O.P.E." gives us a critical understanding of the impact of criminalization in Black communities and a more robust exploration of the political economy of the WoD. As Ciccariello-Maher (2005) cogently notes, the sophistication of dead prez's analysis is that, while they are able to explain the rationality of selling drugs, they

also recognize the overall effect on the Black population: "The one thing bigger than dope games is prison: one million n***** inside." This observation is prefaced with the line, "Statistics show it's sick *how we living* [my emphasis]," which draws the listener's attention to a crisis that is protracted and open-ended and without an end in sight. Here dead prez anticipates Roitman's (2014) formulation of crisis as an experiential condition and as the defining category of our contemporary situation, and as such poses an open-ended moral demand to address the crisis of Black life as overly policed and incarcerated. Toward the end of the song, stic.man asks, "But what we gonna do when we're caught up and have to face responsibility?" Though not explicit in its demands—which is not a limitation, given the group's collectivist political investments—the question does not leave the listener with a sense of passivity or condescending judgement. In "Sellin' D.O.P.E.," the narrative construction of crisis around the drug war evokes a moral demand for a different kind of future, but the song simultaneously functions less as a specific call to "just say no" than as an invitation to critical collective reflection that envisions a more just future in a system that currently dehumanizes and devalues Black life. Ciccariello-Maher (2005, 154) identifies this as the "dialectical development" of political hip-hop's pedagogy, one that is emergent and ongoing. Arguably, these pedagogical efforts can not only interrupt dominant narrative constructions of crisis as they pertain to the WoD but turn them on their head. In so doing, they challenge uncritical answers to the questions of what went wrong and what we are to do now—the very questions narrative accounts of crisis are meant to frame and answer (Roitman 2014).

DISCUSSION

The analyses of these two narrative constructions of the WoD offer important insights to scholars and practitioners of humanitarian aid in general, and those in EiE in particular. As Wibben (2011) argues, narratives offer us an order and account of the world. By constructing a situated account of reality, narratives inform the possibilities of knowing, response, and action. Narrative constructions of crisis, seen in the media analyzed in this article, can direct our gaze in incommensurable directions and contribute to how we identify and delimit the possibilities of humanitarian response (or nonresponse). In *Traffic,* the crisis of the WoD is best understood through the challenges of enforcement and corruption, rather than as a humanitarian crisis. Consequently, the possibilities and prospects for a humanitarian response within such an account are dim, in that those implicated in this narrative account of crisis are primarily state law enforcement agents and those deemed by the former

as operating outside the law. *Traffic* suggests that the human cost of the WoD is discernible only in affluent suburban communities in the US—hardly a staging ground for humanitarian aid—rather than in the many communities displaced by the cultivation, enforcement, and distribution of drugs (Paley 2014).

Dead prez's "Sellin' D.O.P.E." queries the assumption that drug enforcement serves the public wellbeing by highlighting the devastating effects it has had in the US, particularly in Black communities. The upshot of this narrative construction could be that it is criminalization, and racialized policing and sentencing more specifically, that is fueling a crisis of incarceration that continues unabated because law enforcement and incarceration are themselves lucrative activities sustained by the WoD. Despite its significantly different narrative construction of the drug crisis from that of *Traffic,* dead prez's rendition of crisis is also not one in which an appropriate humanitarian response is immediately apparent. The difficulty translating this crisis narrative into a humanitarian response in which EiE practitioners have a central role to play may stem from the limits of humanitarian aid itself. Humanitarian aid, especially when understood as a form of "soft power" (Egnell 2010), is almost always projected outward from the Global North to the Global South. The exemption of low-income and minoritized communities in the Global North from the humanitarian imagination is not questioned, as they are sites that cannot be seen (i.e., hegemonically understood) as a humanitarian emergency. And yet, the US WoD has very much fueled a humanitarian crisis in these communities. It has systematically undermined the gains of the civil rights movement by over-policing and disproportionately incarcerating poor people of color (Alexander 2012), to the point that the many forms of state violence, discrimination, and surveillance directed toward Black communities in the US would justify claims for asylum protection for the affected individuals if they were not already living in this country (Jorjani 2015).

Such a formulation, along with the call to rethink the notion of crisis at the heart of the EiE field, undoubtedly poses more of a challenge than answering the question, "What is to be done?" Following Roitman (2014), this article does not aim to settle on the correct definition of crisis or prescribe an explicit pathway to better crisis management. Some will argue that this limits its ability to inform EiE practice. As Bengtsson (2011) concluded, clarifying conceptual frameworks—in this case the framework of emergency—will likely clarify the task of what is to be done and promote better responses. I certainly see value in that argument. However, it is also important to extend her insights by arguing that more precise language alone does not resolve questions of power or of which stories can be told, or of who gets to construct narratives of crisis and make moral demands for a different kind of future. My juxtaposition of *Traffic* with "Sellin' D.O.P.E." illustrates that narratives

pertaining to a particular phenomenon, in this case the WoD, can construct incredibly divergent understandings of what has happened, what is to be done, and where the theaters of humanitarian action are to be found. "Sellin' D.O.P.E." reveals a number of blind spots in *Traffic*'s construction of the drug war crisis and points to an altogether different set of moral demands that are not readily translatable to contemporary EiE responses. When read against existing policy and advocacy efforts, such juxtapositions also demonstrate which crisis narratives predominate, that social suffering is unequally distributed, and which actors shape the possibilities of action. That there is not an obvious humanitarian response to the narrative constructions of the deleterious effects of the WoD set forth in both media illustrates the need to consider both the scope and the sites of humanitarian action in crisis circumstances produced by the "normal" functioning of political and economic arrangements.

REFLECTIONS FOR SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS

In this article, I have argued that the existing temporal and spatial frames of the related terms "crisis" and "emergency" represent a conceptual stumbling block in the field of EiE at a time when situations deemed as such are increasingly a product of "normal" political and economic arrangements. I draw from Roitman's (2014) theory of crisis to suggest that there is analytical utility in rethinking the concept in ways that reflect that crisis is not necessarily a momentary shock or the product of something going drastically wrong, but the product of things working as they normally do. Looking at the US WoD, there is ample evidence indicating that the policies and practices of the war are not failing but are, in fact, succeeding in entrenching and enriching those with powerful vested interests (Vera 2013; Paley 2014; Cohen 2015). Roitman's (2014) urging to consider what narrative constructions of crisis do—meaning which questions, histories, and actions they sanction and which they do not—enables a consideration of frames of crisis as critical sites of politics. Is the Trump administration's border-security crisis one of so-called "drug dealers and rapists" from Mexico (and Middle Eastern terrorists hiding among them) overrunning the US, as President Trump has repeatedly argued without any supporting evidence? Or is the real crisis the coerced migration of individuals, families, and unaccompanied minors from Central America and Mexico who have been compelled by violent conflicts, economic insecurity, and forced displacements—much of it actively funded and supported by the US government, as were the Guatemalan and Salvadoran civil wars—to flee their homes and their nations? Attending to different narrative constructions of crisis gives us different understandings of the impact of the WoD, which then direct us to thinking more systematically about those who are

bearing the brunt of the harm caused by the WoD and those who are benefiting from it. As the conditions that create or count as emergencies continue to evolve and escalate, it is reasonable to expect that humanitarian agencies and actors will increasingly find themselves contending with their own crisis—that of containing the scope and charge of their efforts.

These points are not meant as an indictment of international humanitarian aid practices or emergency response *tout court*. They are meant instead to instigate a more explicit engagement with the narrative constructions of what are understood as crisis events and situations, particularly the normative and ontological assumptions that constitute an ethical basis for acting on behalf of a community's or an individual's welfare. From a critical constructivist and poststructural inquiry perspective, it is vital to attend to how the production and circulation of knowledge is affected by relations of power, and how they sanction certain accounts, actions, actors, and institutions as reasonable or unreasonable. The critical analysis of WoD narratives in popular culture presented in this article is one way of doing so, but an assumption of shared or universal understanding (e.g., "humanitarian aid ultimately has a positive effect" or "this is an emergency situation in which I am morally compelled to act in X way") will be problematic. As Dubois (2018, 1) argues, a current flaw in the current global humanitarian system is a deep Western bias in the interpretation of its core principles—including humanity and impartiality—and in how these principles are applied in relation to the human communities at the center of crisis responses. Grappling with these questions and critically revisiting these principles should not be an invitation to passivity in the face of harm—rather, as Roitman (2014) suggests, they can initiate critical reflection on how knowledge of crisis is produced and mobilized, and to what ends. Engaging with questions of what counts as an emergency and who can pronounce one can lead to a mapping of political and economic interests that enables some situations to be named and others to be ignored or to remain impossible to name. This knowledge may in turn allow different understandings of the WoD and its pervasive effects to emerge.

Intentionally drawing from a broader set of voices in decisionmaking and strategic planning around humanitarian interventions may complicate taking decisive action, but it will simultaneously reveal valuable tensions, contradictions, and new terrain for action and advocacy that were previously dismissed or seen as unrelated. For example, educating youth to avoid possible imprisonment by avoiding drug traffickers or dealers as a "life skill" may also be instructing them to shun family and community members who are economically and emotionally integral to their lives. As Abu El-Haj et al. (2018) argue in their examination of refugee

civic education, EiE practitioners must consider the broader social and relational effects their education responses have. Further, they must plan their responses more intentionally in order to facilitate collective action and critical conversation on the broader policies and economic and political conditions that push people toward drug production and trafficking in the first place. By the same token, giving critical attention to narrative constructions of crisis may reveal that some modes of humanitarian work, intentionally or not, are merely bandages that help to maintain a particular normative and political order. We have to be willing to recognize that existing mechanisms of naming and acting on crisis must be considered not only problematic but as problems (crises) themselves. There is something further to explore in slow-onset emergencies and in rethinking the temporalities of crisis discussed above; namely, what slow and deliberate advocacy and transnational coalition-building may mean in the face of crises produced by systems that also provide relief, and how they may need to become more central tasks for EiE scholars, advocates, and practitioners. In this sense, the work of EiE scholars and practitioners can be transformed so they not only put out fires "out there" but also envision and create alternative structures to confront the crises that emerge from the militarism and securitization that make so much of current humanitarian work possible.

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