

# No Antiwoman Job Bias In the Narcotics Trade

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Women have a prominent place in Latin America's illicit drug traffic, filling every role from "mule" (courier) to head of a criminal organization.

A short, stocky, middle-aged woman of Chilean descent who owns three wig shops in Buenos Aires is considered by American officials to be one of the major sources of narcotics brought into the United States.

Yolanda Sarmiento, who is 46 years old, has a long history of narcotics involvement.

"She's one of the sharpest dealers anywhere," said Rhyn C. Tryal, head of the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration's office in Buenos Aires.

On April 15, 1970, the New York police raided a West Side apartment allegedly used by Mrs. Sarmiento and seized 72 kilograms of heroin and 47 kilograms of cocaine with a wholesale value of \$3.5-million.

A few days later, the police arrested Mrs. Sarmiento along with her lover, Emilio Díaz González, who is a native of Spain, and two other men outside a New Jersey motel. Federal agents say they were traveling by car from Miami to claim the narcotics that had been stashed in the apartment.

## Escapes City Jail

Mrs. Sarmiento's bail was set at \$100,000. She posted the bail and then fled the United States, leaving Mr. Díaz and his associates in custody in New York.

Several months later, on Jan. 24, 1971, Mr. Díaz escaped from the Federal House of Detention in Manhattan. Investigators in New York believe that Mrs. Sarmiento had helped plan and finance his escape.

The pair were next seen in Buenos Aires where Mr. Díaz was seriously wounded in a gunfight with the Argentine police on Dec. 2, 1972. He escaped and his whereabouts are unknown, but Mrs. Sarmiento was apprehended.

The United States tried to have her expelled from Argentina to New York to stand trial. But the Argentine courts ruled that since her children were born in Argentina, Mrs. Sarmiento was entitled to the rights of an Argentine citizen and so could not be expelled.

Unlike Mafia wives who avoid involvement in their husbands' rackets, Latin women often work closely with their men in the narcotics traffic. When two brothers, Juan and Roberto Hernández, were imprisoned in Mexico for drug smuggling in 1970,



Yolanda Sarmiento

their wives continued their work.

On Oct. 17, 1974, the Mexican federal police investigated their activities in the La Mesa State Penitentiary in Tijuana and discovered evidence showing that the Hernándezes had continued to run their drug ring even behind bars. Also busy in the traffic from her cell was Roberto's wife Helen, who had been apprehended earlier.

A month later, Mexican authorities arrested Juan's wife Patricia in a Tijuana motel as she was delivering a kilo of heroin to a customer from the United States. They found in her possession family records documenting extensive real-estate holdings and a balance in Hernández bank accounts of about \$20-million. She also was convicted.

But the risks for women in the narcotics trade are not always confined to law-enforcement agents. Consider the harsh fate of Ruth Godamez of Chile, who was a dealer in cocaine with her lover, Selim Valenzada. United States narcotics agents had made Miss Godamez a major target and placed her under surveillance.

Mr. Valenzada saw Miss Godamez speaking to someone whom he thought was a narcotics agent and decided that she had become an informer. He shot her five times in the stomach, but she survived the wounds.

Later Mr. Valenzada was expelled from Chile to the United States, where he had been under indictment on a narcotics charge. As he was led to detention, he asked narcotics agents, "Was she talking or did I waste the bullets?" No one answered his question.

Miss Godamez did not "turn"—become an informant—but after several months in jail, Mr. Valenzada has decided to cooperate with the government.



Roberto Hernández and his wife, Helen, were imprisoned in Mexico for the smuggling of drugs.