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Sociology of Domination - Final Paper

## (Narco) Violence in Monterrey

### Quick and Few Facts of Monterrey

Monterrey is the capital city of the northeastern Mexican state of Nuevo León. It has the third largest metropolitan area in Mexico and is an important industrial and business center, serving as operation host for an array of Mexican companies, including CEMEX, Vitro and Cervecería Cuauhtémoc Moctezuma.

It was known as one of the safest cities in Mexico. This may not have been true, but it was an assumption widely spread in Mexican society. However, precisely since 2005, the city has experienced violence related to turf battles between rival drug cartels in Mexico.

This city, as a case study of fear and violence, remains widely unstudied. In recent years, Monterrey, which is the capital of the Mexican state Nuevo Leon, has been caught in a widespread wave of violence. Narco-violence and the State's actions towards it have changed the way in which the city is portrayed by the media and government. But how has the people lives changed? How is the violence perceived across classes? How they talk about it? This are my broader investigation questions So, I think that taking on the analysis of experiences of violence and fear in Monterrey will broaden our knowledge of the social impact of the current wave of (narco)violence in Mexico.

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*Si tú vendes (drogas) y... estás jalando para Los Zetas ... ¿sabes quién les va a caer? (haciendo referencia a que nadie va a ir a aprehenderlos) No hay ni un solo policía honrado, hasta lo judiciales. Hace poco fueron Los Zetas a mi cantón, están enojados porque ya no quiero vender. Y no, pues voltearon todo (destruyeron en interior de la casa).*

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*Nos quitan los tenis y hasta las gorras”, dice uno de Los Payas (pandilla) . “Aunque estemos nomás jugando futbol o pasándola, nos sacan un tostón (los policías les quitan 50 pesos), cien, depende, pero si llegamos a la demarcación, ya para salir tienes que dar 500, o 300 si eres menor de edad”, dice otro. “O nos gasean adentro de las camionetas si no les damos nada”, comenta un tercero. “Pero a los que venden (drogas) no les hacen nada, ahí sí, jijos (abreviación de hijos de la chingada; bastardos), ahí sí no se meten porque se los cargan (reprenden) ”, añade un joven flaco y alto.*

—¿Quiénes se los cargan?

—Los Zetas (grupo armado criminal del Cartel del Golfo), susurra uno.

—No sé, no sabemos, ataja otro.

(Frausto Crotte, 2009)

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This is a fragment of a note I read in Milenio newspaper that was quite different from the narco-related violence notes that usually appear. It shows how a *pandillero* (gang member) talks about “getting out” the narco-business and how he is stuck between the police and Zetas repression. Little is known about how the narco affects the lives of the inhabitants of Monterrey, especially how people cope and manage to live in a place in which the narco-imagery is increasingly and constantly present and/or created.

Since I’m interested in analyzing perceptions of violence and fear in Monterrey, a city that has been experiencing an escalation of narco-violence, I find crucial to look at the broader narco-situation in Mexico so that I can contextualize

my research. In this paper I am going to review methodology and concepts used for studying Latin American violence during democratic neoliberal times. In this way I think I can situate the background of my research and come up with questions to address the Monterrey case. Here I am going to address larger issues that have arisen in Monterrey and cross them with some studies done in other regions of Latin America. In this way, I can arrange some concepts and ideas that can help me analyze and contextualize the people's perceptions.

I will start this paper by giving some background on narco-violence in Monterrey and the main concerns I have within this case. After that, I will go over some of the concepts that have been used to understand and analyze diverse cases of neoliberal democratic disruptions and use them to understand Monterrey case. I will elaborate on a common concept I found in some of the studies and I think is crucial to study the Monterrey (narco) violence case.

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The last couple of decades have witnessed an unprecedented violence trend in Latin America. There now prevails a daily violence in magnitudes never known in the past, occurring at the time the region has been feeling the impact of the changes in global society (Briceño-León and Zubillaga, 2002).

The new violence in Latin America is a consequence of the convergence of global transformations and local transformations in urban society since the 1980s. It is, thus, a violence born of a process of global mutation which fosters changes and interacts with local trends in countries having dependent economies.

Urban violence in Latin America is, then, the result of a combination of complementarity and conflict in the global and local dimensions, and in the traditional and modern social processes (García-Canclini, 1995). This means that the economic, political and cultural trends of globalization, embodied in the new forms of business organization and technology, blend with the traditional forms of social organization within each region. Violence and crime in Latin America have been permeated with all these influences, have transcended national borders and have adopted peculiar forms according each locality's culture and social organization. This can be illustrated in the following way: At the global stage, we

refer to the hegemony of a neoliberal/free market economy, consumption as a form of social participation and the weakening of the nation-states. At the local stage, we can refer to the deepening and perpetuation of economic low performance. The weakening of the nation-state in the Latin American countries has taken the form of a dismantling of the welfare state, and locally, that trend has derived in a constant degradation of public/social services and a depreciation of social rights among the most vulnerable and excluded populations. These services and rights include housing, education, employment, health care, personal security.

In Mexico, violence, especially narco-related violence, has escalated and became one of the main concerns of the current Mexican presidential administration. One of the main characteristics of the Calderon's administration, starting in 2006, is the severely armed/militarized and repressive response to narco-threat which has been "blooming" in states and cities where narco-violence was not part of everyday news.

The starting point of the current violence wave in Mexico can be situated in Nuevo Laredo in late 2005. The Gulf and Sinaloa cartels, through Los Zetas and Los Negros, started shootouts and assassinations for months in this border city, which the Gulf cartel had controlled. One police chief, Alejandro Domínguez Coello, lasted only hours from his swearing-in to his assassination and newspapers had to stop reporting the news for fear of retaliation.

Fox administration response to this violence rise was the implementation of Operación México Seguro (OMS): Police and military forces were dispatched to streets, plazas and neighborhoods to combat the trade of drugs and contraband in states of Tamaulipas, Michoacán, Guerrero, Chihuahua and Baja California. In Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas shootings in 2005, OMS strategy was complemented with a strong federal movement: the Mexican army and federal police took control over the city, replacing and interrogating municipal policemen allegedly linked to drug cartels.

President Calderón began his administration in 2006 with a quick and massive response to the drug-related violence, deploying over 6,500 soldiers and federal police agents to Michoacán, with *Operación Conjunta Michoacán*, followed

by operations in several other states affected by drug trafficking and violence. Calderón said he would apply the full force of the state against the drug traffic and would grant “no truce and no quarter” in combating organized crime (Cruz and Garduño, 2007).

Nuevo León, as pointed before, was known as one of the safest regions of Mexico. The increasing violence in the country has affected also this state, where increasing drug-related executions are becoming a daily-basis part of the news. In February 2007, *Operación Conjunta Nuevo León- Tamaulipas* deployed 3,499 soldiers, using three airplanes and six helicopters with the goal of capturing members of Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas (Grayson, 2009: 87)

### Monterrey

Since circa 2006, multiple narco-related kidnappings, executions and shootings have been in the center of widespread fear and insecurity in Monterrey. And increasing feeling of insecurity, felt mostly by the richest sector in has resulted in the formulation of more repressive security policies. Use, abuse, repression and surveillance from the state, its police and criminal organizations is being suffered by the poorest, more excluded sector of the city in the name of “tackling insecurity”. In this section I’m going to show the latest portrayals of poor-“dangerous” populations and address some events that have been articulated in tandem with the government standing toward insecurity in the city: “Los Tapados” blockades and the “Tierra y Libertad” raid, disguised as an anti-drug operation.

Newspapers in Mexico and in other parts of the world have released notes such as “*Los grupos del crimen organizado le han ganado al estado el control de los barrios más pobres de Monterrey, se indica en reportes militares, censos oficiales de la policía estatal y estudios sociológicos.*”(Osorno, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. In the Los Angeles Times, read like this “Mexico drug cartels buying public support - As traffickers recruit among the poor, their networks are being woven into the social

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<sup>1</sup> In this note, the author refers to military reports, state police census and sociological studies. I tried to contact him and asked where I could get those reports he is talking about. I’m waiting for his response and looking for other ways to contact him.

fabric of the country... 'It used to be you tried to help troubled youths. Now there are entire families involved in drugs, consuming and selling' "(Wilkinson, 2009)

Other notes, such as "Pandillas de Nuevo León" is quoted "*En el área metropolitana de Monterrey hay unas mil 600 bandas urbanas, veinte de las cuales están involucradas en el narcomenudeo. La policía local, en vez de combatir a los grupos ligados a "Los Zetas", extorsionan a los jóvenes, los golpean e incluso les venden armas.*"(Frausto Crotte, 2009).

This notes show that there is an increased notion of linking the low-income population to the drug cartels, criminalize and abuse them via media and local police. This type of statements highlights that the poorest population is linked to narcotraffic, that they are abused/used both by the police and narco, thus represent the criminals of the city. But as the concept of biopolitical domination establish, these notes, at the same time hide the relations of domination and resistance within those populations.

The same low-income *colonias* that are referred by these notes are the ones implicated in two of the latest demonstrations linked to the narco and deeply associated with the poor of Monterrey, Tapados and Radio Tierra y Libertad raid.

- Tapados

In February 2009, "Tapados", a massive crowd made up of children, women and presumably *cholos* (or gang members) blocked the main avenues of Monterrey, asking the army to leave the state. These groups where faced by the state and federal police. The PGR- Nuevo León chief, Aldo Fasci, said that there is strong evidence to link the drug cartels with the Tapados' mobilization. The people, presumably from low-income neighborhoods (*colonias*), had been paid –around 30 dollars and school supplies- by the drug cartels and create chaos and fear in the city. After this event, there have been talks about penalizing street manifestations/blockades.

- *Radio Tierra y Libertad Raid*

In June 6, 2008, *Radio Tierra y Libertad* (RTyL), a community radio station located in the lower-income neighborhood of Tierra y Libertad on the outskirts of Monterrey, was victim of an anti-drug mobilization. RTyL is one of the few organizations that push for infrastructure improvements in this neighborhood that started as a squatter. Approximately 120 heavily armed Federal Preventive Police participated in the raid. The police ran up three streets in the neighborhood, reportedly yelling, "No one go outside! This is an anti-drug operation!". (Bricker, 2009)

Both of the last paragraphs show two sides of the narco-dynamics in which the poor populations can get caught: criminalized by being poor, linked to the narco organizations and repressed by state institutions – police – and either sponsored or used by narco organizations.

Javier Auyero in *The Hyper-Shantytown: The Neo-Liberal Violence(s) in The Argentine Slum* identifies three kinds of violence that impact the lives and social strategies of the residents of the slum he studied. He locates these violences in a context of neoliberal policies effects in the poorest zones of Argentina. These violences are (1) daily interpersonal violence, (2) intermittent state repression and (3) structural violence of mass unemployment.

These are neoliberal expressions of the free-market - "unfitness" that I see in how that pandillero talked about Zetas and police in his life. Also both in the actions of the Tapados, RTyL poor and the state responses towards it.

The criminalization of the poor and the state's desire to hide them is not new. Just like in other places in Latin America, the gang members poor habitants are not rarely labeled as criminals. But there's no doubt that the current "narco" component has worked and a "criminalization enhancer". The "insecurity" created by poor populations has tackled by the state through anti-drug operations discourse. These techniques and strategies are rolled out by the state to govern a specific set of subjects in the society, in this case, the one's that won't have a privileged place in the neoliberal frame in which Monterrey is set. This falls in what Michel Foucault would elaborate as governmentality, "The Techniques and strategies by which a society is rendered governable" (Jones, 2007: 174).

For me it is not clear how state (or even narco-organizations) techniques are articulated. It could be helpful to think of those techniques as entrenched and reproduced by individual in everyday life. At this point we can see that power is mostly in state and narco hands, using, rejecting and abusing populations that remain at the margin of the neoliberal democratic regime. As Alice Goffman elaborates in her study of power in a Philadelphia ghetto (2009) power, in that case, looks occasional, incomplete, selective, through which certain people are only occasionally (if not randomly) monitored, searched, observed, or dispossessed. The narco and state presence in Monterrey seems to be somewhat similar: they are occasionally and selectively present, but they – at least at superficially – create fear in the population. The Tapados and RTyL could be seen as selective, occasional acts of power demonstrations.

The Tapados and RTyL, by interrupting main avenues, by daring to give media voice to the poor, are making themselves visible and confronting the city that is policing to hide them. Though short-lived and very different to movements like *piqueteros* in Argentina, there still is a sense of contesting the state containment and repression in which poor people live.

In a study done by Giorgi and Pinkus on the *piqueteros* case in Argentina, *Zones of Exception Biopolitical Territories in the Neoliberal Era*, they explore the dynamics whereby distinctions associated with the territorial—such as inclusion/exclusion, inside/outside – enact a biopolitical logic. Although very different cases, I think the main concepts of the idea managed by Giorgi and Pinkus can be seen in the two Monterrey cases. “The interruption of a central avenue in the city or a national route in the provinces is a way to prevent not only the separation and invisibility of the poor, but also to contest *the territorialization of what is fundamentally biopolitical*” (Giorgi and Pinkus 2006: 99)

The Tapados and RTyL cases are just small demonstrations of the responses of the poor communities to the new political distributions of space, and of the very notion of “public space” in the context of increasing containment and repression of poor-“dangerous” populations in the name of pleasing the security needs of middle-upper classes. The poor responses are more than a small demonstration of



resistance to the obvious state abandonment in which they live, but show how neoliberalism constituted itself as a *politics of space*, in which free-market “fit” and “unfit” are located, imagined and separated.

But in the case of Monterrey, we have to have in mind the “narco” component, and how it has been used as a tag and motive to tackle low-income communities like the ones that hosted the Tapados and RTyL.

Socioeconomist Guilhem Fabre (2003), who has studied the dynamics that have fueled the growth and gains of criminal business says, “Far from being a perversion of capitalism, drug trafficking and money laundering can be considered as the prolongation of the liberal regime of maximization of profits in the context of the globalization of international trade”.

These processes have criminalizing and “demonizing” effects on excluded, poor populations. The criminalization of the poor in Mexico has its own geo-historical social context. In this case, narco-delinquency, for example, is a dynamic transnational process that targets specific populations, dispersed by local criminal justice practices that shape where, when, and against whom to apply the force of the law (Skolnick and Fyfe, 1993).

This progression is fed by what sociologist Michel Foucault would call biopolitical practices (Lemke, 2001). These practices constantly produce and reproduce illegal drugs as a real danger to the individual and social bodies, rather than as entrenched in relations of domination and resistance. The state consolidates and disperses discourses of narco-danger that come from middle-upper class insecurity and hysteria about the “scourge of drug addiction”.

It is true that narcotraffic’s labor force is not exclusively found in the lower classes of the society, but they are definitely more prone to become part of this illegal economy. Why? In the neoliberal age, poor populations find themselves at the margins of the market economy. They have few opportunities for social mobility and economic well-being. One of these opportunities is joining the drug economy.

Under these conditions, getting involved in the drug business by selling them becomes a very appealing alternative. Sometimes is the only alternative they see as viable. Here we can see a “statehood” characteristic of narcotraffic: when

excluded population find themselves out of the neoliberal market economy, they find another economy that opens up. A person can earn more by selling drugs than by working in a legitimate salaried work offered by free-market economy.

### Final Remarks

As said before, the criminalization of the poor and the state's desire to hide them is not new. Just like in other places in Latin America, the gang members/poor habitants are not rarely labeled as criminals. But there's no doubt that the current "narco" component has worked and a "criminalization enhancer". The "insecurity" created by poor populations has tackled by the state through anti-drug operations discourse and a recently announced San Pedro's domestic workers' surveillance strategy. This techniques and strategies are rolled out by the state to govern a specific set of subjects in the society, in this case, the one's that won't have a privileged place in the neoliberal frame in which Monterrey is set.

This paper shows an increased notion of linking the low-income population to the drug cartels, criminalizing them and stimulating/ reproducing this consternations via media and state. In the case of Monterrey this stands, but it is not clear how people cope with this. It looks like there are some sociological implications and responses that are still to study. How are the low-income living the violence trend in Monterrey? How do people cope with the everyday (narco) violence? Do people has a "narco" talk? How does state is represented, thought and seen in everyday life? In a visible or invisible way? Has life changed at all? Is more dangerous than before? What are the perceptions of the society? How are criminal organizations, like the Zetas, portrayed and perceived in everyday life? How do people deal and think of the techniques in which the state contains the narco-threat? More importantly, which are these techniques? The fragment reproduced in the first part of this paper gives a hint good enough to make believe there is something going on. Dominating and repressing forces - both coming from the state and presumably from the narco - are changing the ways in which people

move, think and feel about them? In what ways? All of these questions will work to try to answer a bigger question: How do power operates in this society?

The repression and policing towards low-income population in Monterrey is definitely marked by the narco-threat. This threat is rapidly growing in the minds and lives of Monterrey population and to know the extent of the narco effects in the society and the role of the state, further research is needed.

The Tapados and RTyL (which is not widely known) incident may be seen as isolated cases by the state and mainstream thought. I believe they are demonstrations of a very local way of incorporating power created through narco-population-state interactions worth analysis through experiences and perceptions of the people that live within this society.

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