



Criminal Violence in Mexico: Narco-Machine, Masculinity and Media

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Abstract

During the past 20 years, Mexico has seen a dramatic increase in the number of violent deaths associated with organized crime, but the brutality with which these crimes are committed, has grown along. This research digs into the explanatory rationales to this social phenomenon and aims to identify the way in which mainstream media informs about criminal violence and what messages it provides to its audience. The social dispositif of the narco-machine drives the logic of the violence and empowers the perpetrators through the dissemination of their acts of violence captured in media reports, which brings along social prestige and acceptance as the ultimate enactment of masculinity. The analysis of three media reports from a single event where the military hunts an alleged cartel kingpin, identifies criminal organizations and state security forces as counterparts and complementary entities of each other. While these possess their own narrative created by the media in which they convey particular attitudes and values, they also share foundational elements entrenched in marginality, patriotism, powerlessness and gender realization.

Keywords

Organized Crime, Violence, Criminal Violence, Masculinity, Heteropatriarchy, narco-machine, necro-empowerment.

Chapter 1 | Introduction

A friend of mine once told me that one day while he was driving towards his school, he stopped at a red traffic light. A motorcycle was standing in front of him, then someone approached and shot the biker in the head through the helmet. Everyone, including him, was paralyzed, the dead body and the blood were right in front of him and he had no way to ignore it.

Just like the paragraph above, the narration took a few seconds. Yet the effect it had on me, lives to this day.

My friend, Pachas, lives in Ciudad Juárez, a Mexican city next to the border with the United States where in the early 90s, during a period of 12 years, nearly 400 women were kidnapped, raped, strangled and mutilated (WOLA, 2005). This city has also lived for decades now under constant clashes of the so-called organized crime and has been witness of its cruelty in the public space, gruesome displays of dead bodies, mutilations, beheadings, torture.

Pacha's story certainly caused an effect on me I can't fully explain. Since then, I feel a personal attraction to the phenomenon of violence. In different ways I have followed it for years with a mixed feeling of fascination, revulsion, perplexity, rage...

Violent deaths in Mexico have escalated dramatically during the past 15 years. Official accounts reported 10,000 killings in 2006, and escalated to nearly 35,000 in 2019 (INEGI, 2020). Adding to the crisis, an undetermined number, but in the parameters of tens of thousands of people have been forcibly disappeared, from which we don't know their stories (Díaz, 2019).

A broad body of research touches on different aspects of the phenomenon and provides some rationales of this violence, yet we haven't yet seen a different way to deter violence that is not with more violence. In my research journey, I came across *Gore Capitalism* (Valencia, 2010), a profound book that provides elements to analyse numerous variables of the Mexican landscape and identifies violence as a systemic result. It helps greatly to grasp those forces that protect the system that has become inherently violent and selfish. The extensive work of Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid through different essays provides rationales to understand the organized crime machinery and activities that inflict pain and fear as an appealing construct for constant new recruits. Also provides an explanatory framework for the narco-culture, its elements and its mechanisms to attract new members (2017).

Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2018) and Valencia (2010) also delve into the conceptualization of social subjects that, while not exclusive to the organized crime environment, help to identify their motives of pain and marginality to participate in criminal activities. There are many angles from which this problem has been observed, analysed and theorized and where masculinity plays an important element of the studies.

This body of knowledge has broadened the discussion around criminal violence by bringing additional perspectives and topics that interface or play a part in the broader phenomenon. Yet, what I see missing in these studies and what my contritribution pretends to be with this research is to find additional ways to analyze the media reports that inform our reality about the phenomenon of criminal violence, in order to contribute to build a critical view over the media reports and to challenge those dominant voices and to create citizen awareness.

From the moment Pachas shared his experience with me, I felt somehow part of it. It started to hurt in some way. I want to take this research as an opportunity to explore my place within all this violence. Being a man coming from a middle class family in Mexico City, who attended private schools for a good portion of his student life, who lives in a

middle class neighborhood, I have never been touched by this violence. But I have definitely been touched by the forces that drive and protect it.

Machismo, a local Mexican expression of Masculinity, that finds its roots in post-revolutionary Mexico, was an essential element of nation-building as a mechanism to create soldiers in each Mexican man, just like the national anthem states, to protect our land from the enemy. We are all born machos, otherwise we're not men, we're not worthy and even traitors.

Patriotism, heroism, sacrifice are concepts that speak to our core as Mexican citizens, touched by religious, nationalist and masculine components, altogether form a propaganda machinery that is continued by mainstream media.

This research is driven by the premise that the media plays a role in the dissemination of information that creates a narrative around violence and that masculinity reinforces that message in different social settings (Soulliere, 2006 and Watt, 2013). And through this research, I hope to find additional ways to look at this phenomenon by identifying messages embedded into the media reports of criminal violence that naturalize it, that make it palatable.

This is also my personal statement to say that this is not normal, that this violence exists because it's created, because it serves a purpose. And that if indeed masculinity plays a role in the normalisation of this violence, then we have citizen-level tools to understand us and thus, to change us.

Finally, my objectives on this study is to reveal what is the dominant media discourse about criminal violence by a) singling out the representation of criminal organizations and state security forces, and what roles each one of them develop in this narrative; and b) identify what role does masculinity play in the dominant discourse of criminal violence by pointing

out to the specific masculinity messages, how they are conveyed and how they uphold the structures that breeds criminal violence.

For that, I'll employ the media analytical tools of focalisation, framing and membership categorization, which are informed by the theoretical framework and literature review I develop in the next chapter. Such analysis is inserted in a descriptive discourse analysis by a way to describe data as it occurs in a narrative form.

Chapter 2 | Background

Modern Mexican criminal organizations trace back their origins over a century ago. In the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, marijuana, opiates and cocaine were legal and commonly used in Mexico, mainly for medical reasons, and were vastly produced in the northern Mexican states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Chihuahua and Durango (Astorga, 1999). The U.S. Narcotics Tax Act in 1914 created the first significant U.S. black market that peasants, mainly in the coastal state of Sinaloa, covered smuggling opium poppies (Grillo, 2013).

Further events such as the U.S. prohibition of alcohol in 1920 and the U.S. marijuana Tax Act in 1930 kept making the black market bigger and more diversified. By 1960 there were approximately 300 clandestine airfields in northern Mexico (Puyana et al., 2017).

In the 70s and 80s, Florida was a port for large income of drugs coming mainly from Colombia, and started to transition from marijuana into cocaine trafficking. Large quantities of money started to flow from the illicit drug traffic business into legitimate businesses such as banks, restaurants and nightclubs that resulted in an environment with intense violence and corruption (Puyana et al., 2017). Yet the income of drugs into Florida was successfully controlled using a combination of naval ships and radars in the late 80s. Such an event pushed the Colombians and Mexicans to work together to smuggle cocaine using the 2,000 miles Mexico - U.S. border.

Further diversification of criminal businesses has continued since then, along with the territorial disputes due to the illegal activities available therein. While the drug traffic business alone is still the most profitable, the business portfolio has expanded to extortion and kidnapping, theft and trafficking of hydrocarbon products like oil and gas, human trafficking that include migrants, and/or women and children for prostitution and

pornography, private security services, natural resources extraction and trafficking, human organs harvesting and trafficking, etc. (Correa-Cabrera 2017).

The ever-expansive, ambition driven character of these organizations is central to understand the constant clashes between the different criminal groups and state security forces, but up to this point, these organizations in Mexico usually conducted their businesses in a relatively discrete fashion, using an extensive network of protection provided by politicians, security forces and military at all levels, and low-profile “surgical” violence when deemed necessary (Correa-Cabrera, 2017 & Lantz, 2016). A two sided benefit existed for both the criminal organization’s leaders as well as their state allies. An informal set of rules allowed state officials to receive generous payments in exchange for facilitating production, processing, storage, import and export of drugs, while allowing and taking part in the new lines of business. “The particularity of this business is that without the participation of the government, it can’t operate” a criminal organization leader in jail reportedly said (Raphael, 2019).

While such discrete violence is not to be minimized, at the end of the 1990s a new actor came into the scene and transformed the way in which violence was perpetrated and informed. According to Correa-Cabrera, los Zetas organization completely transformed the landscape of organized crime in Mexico mainly because of their use of brutal violence and how it was brought into the public space (2017). The first generation of los Zetas were initially part of the elite special forces unit of the Mexican army who were trained in the U.S. and Israel, had experience in the use of highly specialized military equipment, espionage and counterinsurgency, possessed operative capabilities and received training in interrogation and torture techniques. The 14 original members were assigned by the federal judicial police to create a security body to protect the México - U.S. border in the state of Tamaulipas, specifically to fight the most prominent criminal organization in the area. Ironically, the commander of this body soon became the leader of the criminal organization while still in his federal police post and instructed los Zetas that each one of them should recruit and

train another 20 members with the same training and capabilities, logic that continued for at least three “generations” of los Zetas. (Correa-Cabrera, 2017, Logan, 2011 & Raphael, 2019).

In the early 2000’s, the first mass graves started to appear in Mexico and carried accounts of gruesome killings involving beheadings and bodies dissolved in acid. (Kellner and Pipitone, 2010). According to González Núñez et al., clandestine mass graves have since then been used as a mechanism with pedagogical ends: generate terror, exert control and evidence the impunity with which criminal organizations can act in the Mexican territory (2019).

Los Zetas mark the shift from an illicit business that operates in the shadows to a professional hyper-violent criminal operation. Accounting the violence of this group is a work still in progress by scholars and journalists, however three painful and iconic massacres perpetrated by los Zetas are part now of the historic memory in Mexican society: the execution of 72 migrants in San Fernando, Tamaulipas in 2010, who allegedly were offered to be recruited and refused, whose bodies were found in an abandoned in a remote location; a rampage in Allende, Coahuila in 2011 that resulted in the disappearance of 42 inhabitants and the destruction of dozens of houses for supposedly cooperate with U.S. intelligence agencies; and the killing of 52 people in Monterrey, Nuevo León in 2011 who got trapped inside a casino that was purposely set on fire allegedly because the business refused to pay “protection” to the criminal group (Sánchez del Ángel et al., 2016 & de Mauleón, 2017).

In the same logic, los Zetas’ rivals and allies also account for numerous events like massacres, entire towns where all police agents were executed, personal stories like a “specialist” that dissolved hundreds of bodies in acid, or a 14 years old torturer and assassin, among many others (de Mauleón, 2017).

The number of killings as a product of the clashes with other organizations began to escalate, and the savagery grew along. According to Greyson, los Zetas' use of sadism and media manipulation was fought back by other organizations with the same logic, which led to a “*zetanization* process of how cartels do their fighting” (2014). Other existing criminal organizations had a lot more territories under their control and therefore more resources, but they were rapidly hurt by los Zetas with their sophisticated methods. The rival organizations had to import professional combatants to fight for them and train their security forces to keep up to the challenge.

War was fought physically, but also in the media. La Barbie, an alleged drug lord of an influential criminal organization, well known for his sadistic methods, was part of the efforts from other criminal organizations to fight back los Zetas' expansive ambitions. He was perhaps the pioneer of the so-called *narco-messages* (Correa-Cabrera, 2017) that included press releases, YouTube videos, blankets with written messages and he even produced an autobiographical movie with recreations of shootings, persecutions, explosions, parties and beheadings. (Osorno, 2020). "Inflicting fear into the heart of your target is an extremely efficient way to get what you want." (Grayson, 2014).

Around 2007, players in the organized crime arena gave the first steps towards cutting interpreters out from the communication formula. Relevant events such as an interview requested by a prominent criminal organization boss with a highly regarded journalist (Scherer García, 2010), the phenomena of messages written in blankets or banners displayed in public places (Maihold, 2012) and even the phone call from an alleged criminal organization leader to a live radio show (MVS, 2015), keep a “strangely consistent tendency” (Mendoza Rockwell, 2010), which introduced a decisive leap to a landscape with a multiplicity of voices in the organized crime environment to take over the microphone and represent themselves in the media. The step forward of organized crime into the media became increasingly important for their agendas, while the society began to interact with organized crime groups, an entity to which it did not have access before.

In a mixed methods analysis of narco-messages on banners between 2007 and 2010, Phillips and Ríos, explain that “criminal groups “go public” with their communication to their particular audiences: other criminal groups, the state, or the public in the presence of interorganizational contestation, violence from authorities or antagonism toward the local media [...] as this allows them to take credit for their criminal actions, intimidate other potential victims, communicate with public, or threaten police or journalists” (2020).

The interorganizational contestation arena of communication has an interesting shift when it shows that criminal organizations may see “incentives to get the public and authorities on their side” (Phillips and Ríos, 2020). They seek for public loyalty could explain why they would threaten the public or the authorities (Atuesta, 2017), or even try to convince them that other criminal groups or the state are the *real* enemy (Martin, 2011). The increased reporting on violence created two phenomena that led to an important censorship on how criminal violence was reported, which boosted the flourishing of alternative media (Monroy-Hernández and Palacios, 2014 and Castillo, 2010).

For one, the constant publication of bloody clashes started to create a negative international reputation for the Mexican government, to which it responded with a censorship agreement in 2011 with the massive Mexican media outlets to avoid reporting “information that would put at risk security operations against the organized crime and to avoid being involuntary speakers of criminal organizations” (Martínez, 2011). Broadly speaking, mainstream media has kept reporting on such violence but with a strong emphasis on concealing the gruesome details of the events, especially images. The second phenomenon that lives to this day, is the constant attacks on journalists from all media outlets, which has made Mexico the world’s most dangerous country for journalism with 120 journalists assassinated from 2010 to 2020 (Lakhani, 2020). This created a relative vacuum of criminal violence information in the mainstream media.

Unsurprisingly, a divide was set on the reporting of criminal violence. Alternative media have focused on reporting “arrests, violent clashes and executions involving members of organized crime groups, the military, and law enforcement officers” (Monroy-Hernández and Palacios, 2014). These articles often include gruesome videos and photos not found on mainstream media. *El blog del narco* <https://elblogdelnarco.com/> has been for over a decade a popular platform (among many others) for citizens to publish anonymously or pseudonymously in order to avoid personal risk.

But as for the audience of this blog, an analysis of the comments section showed that “participants sometimes seek support in coping with the brutal violence that is so graphically displayed in the articles and so present in their lives offline. Many participants discuss the drug trafficker lifestyle, insult or price rivals or allied cartel members, express dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in Mexico, or comment on the morbidity of execution videos, among other vicious and often inhuman comments” (Monroy-Hernández and Palacios, 2014).

An overwhelming reality after all this is that violence doesn’t stop to exist because it’s concealed or hidden. Before the dramatic increase of violence in the early 2000s, criminal group’s actions and their intentions were subject to interpretation, mainly from journalists. The narratives in the media spoke about a hidden world, unintelligible and as something that was separated from the rest of the society. The exacerbation of violence, its reporting in media and the different voices in such communication requires a new way to read the violence and the messages it carries along.

Chapter 3 | Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Academic research about criminal violence has gradually but consistently transformed in the past decade, mainly by changing the rationales of people to involve in criminal activities, in which poverty played a predominant aspect specially for peasants that saw in criminal activities a way to survive (Sánchez Godoy, 2009 and Freeman and Sierra, 2005). Such reading has been nuanced and fine grain detailed to state that precarity as a social condition does provide a breeding ground for subjects to empower themselves through the exercise of violence (García-Reyes, 2018) . The explanations are becoming more holistic and contemplating additional routes to create more complex analytical frameworks to continue the study of this phenomenon.

Gore Capitalism

Gore Capitalism is a study that provides a conceptual-discourse map to name and explain the realities based on violence and drug trafficking, looking into the dystopian reality generated by the interpretation of globalization and hegemonic economy. (Valencia, 2010).

As a starting point, Valencia warns that globalization is in itself a false concept when she cites U.S. scholar, politician and diplomat Ken Galbraith when he said “Globalization is not a serious concept. We [U.S. Americans] have invented it to disguise our policies of economic entry into other countries” (2010), and continues to cite Pratt: “the term Globalization suppresses the understanding and even the desire to understand. [...] It works as a sort of false protagonist that blocks a more profound questioning about the processes that have been reorganizing the practices and meanings during the last 25 years. We need more terms, we need them to be meticulous and more explanatory” (2007)”. It makes a clear point into

the elusiveness and emptiness of the concept and its use as a sort of scapegoat to avoid a profound rationale of the global economic dynamics. A simpler and more violent concept is hegemonic economy specifically within the context of the Mexico - U.S. relations in which the first exerts its multi-modal power (financial, political, armed and diplomatic) over the second to establish the market conditions because the market to be served is indeed the U.S.’

The concept of gore capitalism functions as an analytical tool for the entire economical, socio-political, cultural and symbolic Mexican landscape, re-written by the organized crime context and politics, which is interpreted as the government model embodied in an economic and symbolic discursive machinery of death management. On a deeper level, it refers to the economical exploitation system that is touched by colonialism, machismo, sexism, organized crime and corruption.

From this, I will only focus on the violence phenomenon and the explicative framework that Valencia provides through gore capitalism. She interprets violence as a systemic problem and as a result of the triangulation of the political oligarchy, the narco-machine and the neo-liberal economy. Such structure is reinforced and protected by two main axes: heteropatriarchal masculinity and excessive consumption driven by capitalism. The political oligarchy being the conservative political class that preserves the status quo of the economical system that protects their power positions in different forms, and the neo-liberal economy that keeps unrestricted the abilities for private business to shape the economy.

This draws a sort of diagram on how different social phenomena get together to enable and reinforce violence, which in turn, places the starting point of my understanding and further analysis over violence that is being reproduced by the media.

Narco-machine

Narco-machine refers to the “logics, geographies and grammars of narco-trafficking as an elusive yet ubiquitous social formation” (Reguillo, 2010). Its logic is violence, the violence that escapes from intelligible measures, that erases bodies, personalities, names. Thus accounted only in numbers, numbers of dead bodies, numbers of limbs separated from their torsos, numbers of massacres per state, numbers of states controlled by an organization.

The vastly graphic, gruesome and cruel depiction of criminal violence happens in the contextualized and situated setting of the narco-trafficking, which brings its own logic and language, thus the need to bring the narco-machine concept as it provides answers to this representation of violence.

The work of violence, as Reguillo (2010) calls it, refers to the violence required by the machine. This frames such dispositif as a system with its own operational logic, in which the narco machine is not there because of violence, but violence is there because of the narco machine. Michael Löwy (2003) put it this way: “the device does not exist there to execute a man, but rather, the man is there precisely because of the device, to provide a body upon which it can pen its aesthetic masterpiece, its illustrated and bloody book, full of details and adornments. The officer himself is nothing more than a servant of the machine”.

Reguillo (2010) considers three elements of the narco machine’s logic. The first one being the suppression of the individual in the acts of violence, where victims are rendered in a category of the vast grammatic repertoire, the different states in which dead bodies are found: ejecutados (executed), encajuelados, (found in the trunk of a car), encobijados (wrapped in a blanket), decapitados (beheaded), pozoleados (dissolved in acid), etc. Individuality is lost, transmuted into a dismembered body, not worthy of a name. The second dimension is horrorism, which is the evidence of the horror that took place. A dead

body, even stripped from its personality, is witness and relates the violence, the torture, dismemberment that occurred. Third is the pervasive, far reaching aspect of the narco-machine. Violence is not confined to a geography, but to the fact that it can happen virtually everywhere, anytime, hence exerting power and dominance even when it cannot be seen, a phantasmagoric presence.

At the individual level, the most salient grammar embedded in the narco-machine is the empowerment through the death of others, necro-empowerment or the industrialization of death. Violence is acquired through the killing and the capital in exchange is the prestige it represents for the executioner. It is the entrepreneurial labor for men for whom the capitalization of death achieves social status and power. The theatrical aspect of it responds to the performativity of death as the main communication and capitalization tool.

The narco-machine, as a primordial element of gore capitalism, is present and protected not only in the geographies of the organized crime activities with its identifiable subjects and practices, but into the ability to permeate and be present in the entire society. The vehicle through which it remains omnipresent (because it is at its core) is a heteropatriarchal masculinity system.

Masculinity

The individual and contextual performativity and reproduction of masculinity is to be further defined in a context where the study case(s) and events take place: organized crime in Mexico. Such context blends two ingredients: the nation state composed by territory and a polity with a governance system, and the organized crime that comprehends the criminal enterprises and the state.

The individual reproduction aspect of masculinity makes the definition of a fixed Mexican masculinity (and any other for that matter), an impossible task to achieve. We do have, however, multiple studies, historical contexts and outlooks from which we can approximate to get a closer look and get a very unstable idea of what that could mean in different social settings.

At the cornerstone of the masculinity definition is the opposition and differentiation from the feminine, that builds a model of what a man should be and what is proper of the other sex (Muñoz Sánchez, 2017, Cerva Cerna, 2018 & Olavarría, 2013). Understanding that masculinity is a form of gender and is not essentialized and therefore socially constructed, a temporal dimension of masculinity makes it volatile, fragile, dynamic; along with its regional, contextual, relational and malleable essence (Kimmel, 1994 y Guasch, 2006).

An additional particularity of masculinity is a perpetual fear emotion: fear of the father figure and his power; fear expressed through homophobia, taking distance from the homoerotic desire; then fear to look feminine in front of other men. (Kimmel, 1994). Masculinities studies suggest that one of the reasons why traditional discourses of gender stigmatise homosexuality is because homosexuals adopt and perform what is conceived as female traits (Kimmel, et al., 2005; Connell, 1995; Viveros-Vigoya, 2001; Gutman, 2007). As the construction of the traditional male identity is principally based on the rejection of female characteristics (Itulua-Abumere, 2013: 43), homosexuality is considered as an aberration since homosexual men are understood to reject their privileged gender and take up the subordinated gender.

The conceptualizing of masculinity takes us to reveal that men and masculinity are not synonyms nor that a man is a fixed concept since masculinity is not owned by men in an exclusive logic because it is not attached to the body realm and also because women also reproduce masculinity. (Cerva Cerna, 2018).

Being a social system, heteropatriarchy is not essentialized, but performative. The masculine gender performance is understood as the uncritical obedience to the gender norms dictated by the hegemonic masculinity, which has among its most ingrained postulates in the Mexican context, has the virility, composed by “economical respectability, indifference before danger, disparagement of feminine virtues and assertion of authority at any level” (Montesinos, 2022). This means that in order to be considered a legitimate male, a man must adopt and perform the choreographies built from the socio-cultural hegemony of masculinity. Based on repetition, the ghost of virility demands entrenched in the origins of the contemporary (post-revolutionary) Mexico, finds its artificial naturalisation (Valencia, 2010b) and rendered as masculine Mexican essence.

The understanding of mexicanity may find its origins in a colonial-racialized labeling of alleged superiority of Europeans. The continent *America* is first named in feminine, with “wild characteristics, a nature to be dominated and civilized”. Mestizos, being the blend of European and American indigenous, could not reach the superiority of the Europeans and were later associated with characteristics attributed to the plebs such as “moral relaxation, alcoholism and the dirtiness of the popular classes” , visions that align with the understanding that economically deprived classes are rendered as a social evil. Marginality is then attributed to heritage and thus, naturalized through the alleged race superiority. Mestizos and Europeans would therefore be associated with dichotomies such as purity vs dirtiness, good vs evil, order vs conflict, peace vs violence, urban vs rural (Rodríguez Morales, 2014).

Literature and popular songs of the revolutionary period work as a resignificative mechanism in which the macho figure, originally defined as a “violent, rude, irritable, dangerous, impulsive, braggart, superficial, suspicious, unstable and fake” being (Ramos, 1934), was gradually transformed into a revolutionary hero that contributes to the nation-building project. Mexican nationalism sees a moral boost in the romanticizing and far reaching *The Cosmic Raze* (Vasconcelos, 1929) essay in which the notion of Mexican

machos would become the social change agent due to their bravery, redefining them as patriotic heroes. Machillot says that “the exaltation of the sacrificed hero is also a praise for obedience. Thus, a whole code of honor is constructed to found the submission of the individual to the needs of the leader and the collective” (Machillot, 2013).

Violence and Masculinity

A widely disseminated theory is that economical marginality, education or corruption are the central causes of organized crime and its violence (Arroyo, 2015 & Verrier, 2018). However, different recent studies have been making breakthrough research on the phenomenon with interesting findings that put masculinity at the center of the discussion.

Karina García-Reyes (2018) interviewed 33 former employees of criminal organizations now in prison for her research, with the aim of taking into account their discursive conditions to join criminal organizations in the first place. García is able to conceptualize what she calls a narco-discourse, synthetically as follows: it is informed by a neoliberal ethos, where poverty is understood as a fixed condition that brings some key ideas: ‘I have nothing to lose’, ‘I prefer an easy life with enjoyment and easy money’ provided by the enrolment in criminal activities. The narco-discourse also produces the idea of ‘a true man’, which embodies the normative characteristics of machismo and justifies violence as necessary in order to survive. These discourses of poverty, masculinity and violence enables the view of criminal activity as something exciting and a source of empowerment.

Making use of empirical references and queer theory, Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid identify the narco-culture as a sex-gender dispositif, and that its fundamental purpose is the reproduction of its economic and symbolic capital (2017).

Narco-culture is a micro universe of expressions of its own and has different exhibitions in music, cinema, religion, architecture, dressing, etc. It provides its own system of values where the basic premise is honor along with characteristics such as bravery, familiar and group loyalty, protection, vengeance, generosity, hospitality, nobility, prestige, etc. Other relevant aspects are: internal regulation forms such as physical violence against traitors and deserters, consumption forms of cocaine usage or gold-made objects, its own argot and codes of clandestinity and conductual models such as an exacerbated “longing for power” and constant seek of hedonism and social prestige. All along a fatalist and nihilist world-vision.

The Foucaultian definition of *dispositif* refers to the heterogeneous network of discursive and material elements with a concrete and strategic purpose within a power relation. (Foucault, 2000). This is needed to understand the authors’ claim that the narco-culture produces sexuality and gender in its subjects: ideas, values, attitudes, perceptions, practices, relations, subjectivities, sexual and gendered identities with adherence to heteronormative and androcentric parameters.

According to the queer theory, the sex-generic identity is always precarious. An unfinished process. The contrary, the terms to call a manhood without doubt and ambiguities, represent nothing else than an anxiety that comes from its origin.

The authors finally assert that drug-trafficking and its narco-culture, promises to its members or applicants the expectation to realize a project of sex-gender identity and at the same time, it allows these subjects to articulate and provide meaning to their relations with men and women as well as their sex-gender practices. And with this, end once and for all with the perpetual liminal state that the sex-gender identity poses and fulfill in bulk all narco-culture postulates.

I felt the need to also look at research of masculinity that is not embedded into the organized crime premises. An interesting approximation is a recent, popular and influential study commissioned by Unilever that took place at the U.S., U.K. and Mexico, where the central analytical tool of the study is a scale of attitudes called the ““Man Box”: a set of beliefs, communicated by parents, families, the media, peers, and other members of society, that place pressure on men to be a certain way”. It continues to say that “these pressures tell men to be self-sufficient, to act tough, to be physically attractive, to stick to rigid gender roles, to be heterosexual, to have sexual prowess, and to use aggression to resolve conflicts”. According to the study, men “in the Man Box” are those who most internalize these messages and pressures, and agree with society’s rigid messages about how men should behave (Heilman et al., 2017).

Methodologically, it claims to have gathered on focus groups a sample of over 1,000 “socially diverse” men between 18 and 30 years old, yet it’s important to note ethnicity is not reported. All cautions of oversimplification and binary results kept, it’s still remarkable that 68% of the Mexican respondents reported that a real man behaves in a certain way. It also states:

Young men reap certain benefits from staying inside the Man Box: it provides them with a sense of belonging, of living up to what is expected of them. Friends and parents may praise them. However, when those same norms tell men to be aggressive all the time, to repress emotions, and to fight every time someone threatens them, the Man Box demands that they pretend to be someone they are not, and study results show how violent and lonely the resulting life can be. (Heilman et al., 2017: 11).

As indicated, masculinity is the starting point of the particular analysis that unfolds ahead. But before, I feel the need to make an important distinction: I refer to masculinity and not

masculinities since the latter can be referred to as “plural and dynamic ways in which masculine norms, attitudes, identities, power dynamics, and behaviors are lived” (Ragonese et al., 2018). This refers to a multiplicity of possible enactments of manhood and thus, remains undefined and uncontextualized.

Media Representation

Media provides the means to disseminate meanings, messages that voice social groups, institutions and ideologies where they “struggle over the definition and construction of social reality” (Gurevitch and Levy, 1985).

This of course applies to all kinds and sizes of media outlets. But since this research is looking into dominant discourses of masculinity conveyed by mainstream media, specifically through news outlets, McQuail’s comments of reality represented by news media seems relevant, that first, news are a manufactured version of social reality and, that news outlets provide “confirmation of popular stereotypes and an unwitting (usually) but active form of social control” (1985).

Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2010) wrote about a media saturation in the “age of terror” referring to the present time in which we are overwhelmed by commentaries and news on pain, coming from different directions, from mainstream media with 24 x 7 coverage (top-to-bottom) and also relatively new forms of online (horizontal). Pain is everywhere in our media produced reality, yet pain is not reported with explicatory resources that help explain its existence.

In understanding pain and the violence that provokes it, we must look into how the media is conveying messages that inform our reality. Hence the emphasis on identifying those messages portrayed in the media around violence in the context of organized crime.

In operationalizing my research question, I find myself using concepts such as “organized crime” that is in itself “a something” that has numerous connotations and ideas. This may have a relatively clear idea to myself, and I have chosen it because I believe it more or less accurately represents a phenomenon. But no matter how much I want to create my own narrative, that doesn’t change the fact that the Netflix series is called *Narcos* and not called “criminal organizations”. In the same logic, it’s easier and maybe richer in meaning to say El Chapo vs Joaquín Guzmán, or Cartel de Sinaloa vs a paragraph that won’t successfully explain the organization.

This refers to the creation of common sense and shared meanings packaged in a sentence or a word, a representative name for people, groups or institutions. This process of media representation contains “constructed images that carry ideological connotations and can produce shared cultural meaning” (O’Keeffe, 2011), that inevitably bring along limitations in their representations or even mis-representations as they make reference to complex social entities.

But it’s a bit more than that, it is about the messages sent by the media, but also about how these are being perceived, digested and contested by the audience, it’s an interactive communication. O’Keeffe (2011) identifies these interactions that take place through a broadcast platform and are oriented to a recipient or audience, making it public, manufactured and on-record. This is media discourse, which I will delve into.

Chapter 4 | Methodology

The purpose of this research is to have a closer and fresh look into the phenomenon of violence within the context of organized crime in Mexico, thus aspects of cruelty, of power over others, of humiliation, the crushing of others through masculinity and the consequent dispossession of masculinity and dignity of the victim are relevant; all this through the analysis of media reports.

At the time that we are confronted with media reports that are graphically depicting events within the Mexican organized crime context such as clashes between different organizations and/or state security forces, shootings, finding of corpses in public places, mass graves, beheadings, etc., we are hit by information robust in context and meaning.

I propose to walk back step by step to dissect such reports in this order: a) media reports that are within the context of organized crime, b) such reports on organized crime possess a heavy content of violence, and c) such violence enactment can be linked to masculinity display, a differentiated gendered aspect.

While a link between masculinity and violence is vastly documented in different researches from varied angles (Hill et al., 2020, Bozkurt et al., 2015, García-Reyes, 2018, Anderson and Umberson, 2001, Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid, 2016), I do not pretend to generalize that violence is always linked to masculinity nor that all displays of violence within organized crime have their foundation at masculinity. I assert that masculinity is one part of some displays of violence within this context, attempting to provide only the identification of an element within the event. I attempt to avoid the appealing promise of reducing reality to facts. This analysis pretends to take distance from the goal of finding the truth of an event and limits itself to broaden the discussion of its elements and meaning.

Methods

The methodological approach of this research relies on two methods: case study and discourse analysis.

Case Study

The nature of my research question and sub-questions are qualitative. I am in this research looking for meanings, for interpretative answers, hence I have selected a case that, from an outside look, already denotes the exercise of violence with an accentuated intentionality to communicate something to others. This case portrays a visual, textual and semantic richness of violence with also evident components of masculinity in its exercise.

Given the multitude of existing research angles, scholars provide varied definitions of what a study case is, but I have chosen O'Leary's concepts for their conciseness and clarity. According to her, a case study is the "method of studying elements of our social fabric through comprehensive description and analysis of a single situation or case; for example, a detailed study of an individual, setting, group, episode or event". Then, a case is defined by her as "a particular instance or entity that can be defined by identifiable boundaries" (2007). In specific, the event type I will analyze in this research are situations that were reported in the media.

This case study, in fact, comprehends three cases that contain meaningful relevant aspects of violence and masculinity. By the selection of these cases, I do not pretend to encapsulate the vast phenomenon of criminal violence in Mexico. However, these are used, metaphorically speaking, as looking into the atom instead of the macrocosmos, hoping their analysis can say something insightful that may improve our reading of these events.

For one, the approach of utilizing case study is proposed in opposition to the limitations of quantitative methods as they may fall short when it comes to providing “holistic explanations of the social and behavioural problems in question” (Zainal, 2017). Yin defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (1984). Such an instrument fits smoothly into the vastly complex phenomenon of violence within organized crime in Mexico.

The descriptive category of a study case is meant to describe a phenomenon as it occurs and has two decisive characteristics: the first one being that it requires a prior statement of a theoretical framework that may explain the event, and the second is that it is usually presented in a narrative form, a sort of descriptive storytelling. I have chosen this approach as it blends correctly with the two main theories of masculinities and narco-machine I have described and contextualized in the previous chapter, which are to be weaved with the corpus of the cases to provide a descriptive narration of their meaning, making use of analytical tools (Zainal, 2017).

Analytical Framework

Media reports are being analyzed with both textual and visual analysis tools of framing, categorization and focalization.

Framing is the process of selecting some aspects of a perceived reality, highlighting them above others by means of visual communication, and making them salient, meaningful, and memorable, so that certain attributions, interpretations, or evaluations of the issue or item described are visually promoted (Geise, 2017). In this study context, it refers to identifying what it is that the receiver or viewer perceives from, first, a cognitive process, which means to identify what consistent set of concepts that are already on the viewer’s mind, are

activated by the discourse. Second is to point out those sets of concepts that are being transmitted to the viewer through the media report.

Membership categorization “is a formal analysis of the procedures people employ to make sense of other people and their activities” (Leudar et al., 2004). It is an attitude towards and explication of this aspect of people's cultural logic. This will help reveal the understandings of who is who within a media report. How do we account who is part of an organized crime group or state security forces or civilians, or else? What information is given to us to make such judgement and under what basis this is reliable?

Focalization will help to grasp the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, indicating from which power position is the reality viewed, told, interpreted (Meijer, 1993: 375). It is the filtering of a story through a consciousness prior to and/or embedded within its narratorial mediation. This tool will allow me to differentiate between the narration of the media report and the mental processing of that story by a character or narrator.

Altogether, these analytical tools will be able to provide the necessary data to conduct a thorough analysis from a multi-angled perspective, rather than a narrowed look into them. My learning journey has taken me to unveil that the phenomenon of criminal violence in Mexico is performative and contextual. Therefore, the analysis needs to be narrated, weaving through text the different elements. Discourse analysis then will help me interpret messages as these are situated in a socio-historical context. I write on discourse analysis at the end of this section simply because it is an approach that touches the whole analysis section but in a more passive way, perhaps not always identifiable.

From Schifffrin et al., (2015), I will capture these discourse analysis categories into my examination of the media pieces: 1. anything beyond the sentence, 2. language use and 3. a broader range of social practice that includes non-linguistic and non-specific instances of language. This will help create new relationships between the sentences or messages.

A sort of ladder or steps are proposed to move from qualitative data to understanding and interpretation of people and situations under the analysis: Raw data > Organized data > Reduced data > Interconnected data > Thematic data > Theoretically meaningful understanding.

The main approaches to the study of media discourse can be identified as discourse analytic, sociolinguistic, and non-linguistic. The discourse analytic addresses discourse-level talk and text beyond the word or sentence level, including topic, function, and discourse structure, speech-event-specific discourse phenomena that includes interviews, quotation and reported speech. The sociolinguistic approach refers to analyzing variation and style in the media as well as socially motivated processes of standardization. The non-linguistic analytical research involves the ability to capture meaning when there was no communication intended (Cotter, 2015).

Limitations of this Study

Identifying the cases in the form of media reports that would comprehensively serve as representative of the organized crime scenes of violence in Mexico is very difficult if not simply impossible. We can begin by acknowledging the fact that there's no known universe of these cases. We have approximations to this phenomenon by media reports, academic works and official accounts that themselves recognize their own incompleteness.

A dark witness of this situation, as of 2018 in official figures, is that there are at least 40,000 missing persons, 1,100 clandestine burial sites and 26,000 dead bodies without identification (Díaz, 2019). Numerous organizations of families whose relatives have gone missing, dedicate their time and effort to locate human remains in abandoned properties, dumpsters,

deserts, as does the National Commission of Searching of Missing Persons, who keep on the work of finding the tens of thousands of people that have reportedly gone missing and from whom we do not know their stories. Fair is to say this violence is incommensurable.

Nevertheless, media reports and media representation are raw material for academic analysis that can very well provide new ways to decode information beyond the explicit. The repertoire of media reports in the context of organized crime is vast and diverse. It may go from the very reserved and superficial kind of reporting, to the most gruesome and morbid, from the strict fact-checking approach, to the purely rumor based and even fantasizing story-telling.

The aim of this research is the discussion of the dominant discourse of criminal violence in the Mexican media. Therefore, I look at the mass media outlets as these will have a sizable impact on the way this topic is being related to the audience. I attempt here to identify the meanings that create a dominant discourse around criminal violence in Mexico.

Identification of the Study Case

The selection of the media pieces was informed by the focus of this research, being the main theme: media representation and violence, which contains a heavy aspect of masculinity.

I want to emphasize once more that the analysis and findings generated from the study of this event in the media are not to be understood as a comprehensive analysis of the violence phenomenon, but I maintain the logic that the study of individual cases may very well provide hints to its de-codification; that through individual cases, we can find systemic rationales.

I have chosen the year 2009 for two main reasons, first is that this is before the censorship agreement between the Mexican government and the mass media outlets and second, because it preludes a severe increase in the commission of violent murders in the next four years (SSPC, 2019).

Arturo Beltrán Leyva, an alleged leader of a prominent criminal organization, was killed by navy officers on December 16, 2009. President Calderón called this event an “achievement of the Mexican people”.

The reporting on this event in the media has different settings but since I am interested in knowing the dominant discourse of the so-called organized crime violence, I have selected 3 particular reports on top-to-bottom mass media outlets as these reach a vast audience conveying messages and meaning of the events.

I have performed textual and visual analysis over a curated selection of three reports of this event using the analytical tools of framing, membership categorization and focalization, resulting in eighteen datasets. Below I develop a synthetic description, with centered indentation, which introduces the threefold visual and textual analysis of each media piece. For these resources, the textual analysis is conducted by transcribing the dialogues in Spanish, its original language. A translation into English of those texts is provided in Annexes A, B and C.

Chapter 5 | Data Sources and Analysis

For methodological purposes, from this point on, I am adding in brackets the labels of Raw data, Organized data, Reduced data, Interconnected data, Thematic data and Theoretically meaningful understanding, over the pertinent sections of the analysis, as these sequence shows the flow through which I moved from qualitative data to understanding and interpretation of people and situations under the analysis.

Milenio News with Ciro Gómez

Resource available online [here](#) (icitizenmx, 2009). [Raw data]

The event premiered at an open TV news show at 10 pm, the time during weekdays with the largest audience at the Millenio TV channel. Ciro Gómez, the host of this news show is about to start the narration of a story, when he announces that Carlos Marin, the editor in chief of the news outlet is improvisedly entering the studio. Carlos steps into the set and an assistant approaches a chair to him.

Carlos goes on to describe the event as a confrontation, a label that is maintained throughout the whole note by both journalists. He identifies that “the navy has a balance” of four alleged criminals *dead*, (in opposition to *killed*) and 1 more (alleged criminal) who commits suicide. He then revisits the labels, saying that from the four *hitmen*, one of them is called, prior dramatic pause added, Arturo - Beltrán - Leyva, dramatic pause between the names, and insists on the person that committed suicide (in opposition to *dead* or even *killed*).

The screens of the studio remain the same, no footage of any kind is portrayed and the only visual reference to the event is a subtitle that reads “Arturo Beltrán Leyva Dies, Cuernavaca, Morelos”. Carlos also mentions that the Mexican intelligence services as well as international police agencies had a very strong “interest” in this individual given its relevance in the criminal organization.



Fig. 1. Still from (icitizenmx, 2009), *Muere Arturo Beltran Leyva*, (1:48).

An emphasis is put on the level of certainty about the information of the event when Ciro asks Carlos: is this totally confirmed? He answers by saying “I wouldn’t have stormed into the studio otherwise”. Ciro, the host, summarizes the event, in which he only addresses Arturo Beltrán Leyva and calls him the head of a “very

powerful” cartel, and again labels the event as a confrontation, in which Arturo Beltrán Leyva “falls dead”.

Media Analysis

[Reduced data]

Visual Framing Analysis

The emphasis of the scene is on the formality, the soberness, the institutionalized image of the news outlet and its reporting, the calm across the 3 minutes of reporting, on the manhood of the setting composed exclusively by two educated, informed and well-spoken male journalists.

What is not present is the representation of the event in graphic terms, there are no pictures of anything at all: not the city or the place where it occurred, not even old pictures of the main character reportedly killed by the marines. The only text that makes reference to the event states that a subject dies, while it does not say it was killed. The most salient aspect of the scene is that it omits visual elements that speak about the event. The sobriety of the visual relates a measured, calming message, rather than the violent act it occurred.

Text Framing Analysis

The way both journalists refer to the event is a confrontation, they repeat it several times and they never call it differently. The confrontation had a balance that belongs to the navy, the balance is 4 criminals dead and 1 suicidal, and 3 marines injured but out of risk. Among the 4 criminals "dead" is Arturo Beltrán Leyva, the first time his name is mentioned, Mario Marín paused dramatically between the first name and last names. He repeated the whole information of the "balance", mentioning now 3 hitmen (the name now has changed), mentions Arturo Beltrán Leyva and mentions the person who committed suicide. Rules out the presence of another infamous alleged criminal called "la barbie". It elevates the

importance of Arturo Beltrán Leyva saying international police organizations had great interest in him. Ciro emphasizes the role of Carlos in getting this premier news, the importance of Arturo Beltrán Leyva as head of a "very powerful" cartel, but that he "falls dead" in a "confrontation" with the navy.

Ciro questions Carlos on how sure he is about the information, and Carlos assures him that if wasn't sure, he wouldn't have stormed into the studio the way he did and that Ciro should have no reason to doubt this information.

Framing Analysis Outcome

The frame of a confrontation encapsulates the whole event reporting. Such a frame suggests a calming, sophisticated and planned type of violence exerted by the military over the so-called criminals. The second frame is the balance that normalizes and numbs the idea of the killing. These two frames convey the idea of a well planned execution of an operation, contrary to a battle, almost suggesting that the military simply applied overwhelming violence over the alleged criminals, diminishing their ability for combat. The lack of footage throughout the entire note leaves the interpretation of the event only through words, which convey a binary perspective of the well planned operation (contrary to man-hunt), versus the despicable criminals who were most wanted.

Visual Focalisation Analysis

The event premiered at an open tv news program at 10 pm, the time on weekdays with the biggest audience at the Milenio TV channel, that is an influential media corporation in Mexico that began with only printed newspaper in the 1970s in the north of the country, grew to include more newspapers and magazines in different places of the Mexico and just until 2008 created its TV channel of nation-wide reach (Superbrands 2017).

Ciro Gómez Leyva is the host and considered founder of this news show, he also has decades of experience as journalist and tv host. He's one of the most influential opinion makers in Mexico (Líderes Mexicanos, 2018). At the time the host is beginning to present the note, he indicates that Carlos Marín is entering the studio, who is the editor in chief of the news outlet and he is the one who relates the information to the host and to the audience. This emphasizes the notion that the situation is so relevant that it requires an extra boost of authority.

The setting is a classic news show studio, screens with graphics and logos of the Milenio brand are placed everywhere, a rounded desk made out of wood and crystal, a very formal setting with both presenters wearing full suits.

During the report, there are no images *in off* or on the multiple screens of the studio, the corporate image remains for the whole 3 minutes the scene lasts. Outside of the narration of the event, the only graphic indication of the topic is shown at the half of the transmission in a bottom prompt text that reads "Arturo Beltrán Leyva Dies, Cuernavaca, Morelos (where the event took place)".

When the editor of the news outlet enters the studio, he shakes hands with the host, they do it again when the note was about to conclude, but they keep on discussing more details of the event, and they do it for the third time when with the intention to wrap up that part of the tv show and move on to the next note.

Text Focalisation Analysis

The story is told by veteran and somewhat respected journalists that work for Milenio, a media outlet that identifies itself and is identified as of "center" political view. They emphasize that the story is "very confirmed" and that they premiered the story. Carlos Marín also identifies he worked to obtain the story and went public with it, before the navy

secretary informs about it officially. This can be read as a dividing line of we as the media outlet and them, the state.

Focalisation Analysis Outcome

This event is told mainly from the TV channel and the journalists perspective, the peculiar, soft language they use to describe the event remains institutional, formal, masculine, reputable, honorable. Yet at the same time, the journalists relate the information that is given by the military, in which they identify the masculine, heroic actions of the marines; while diminishing the masculinity of the alleged criminals. The power in the narrative is held by the journalist who voices the state security forces' violence and masculine supremacy over the nullified so-called drug traffickers.

Visual Membership Analysis

The note is reported from the TV studio and it's monotonous, only two men are present, no additional voices, nor images are added to the visual, except from the prompt text. As for objects, it's two men, well dressed, well mannered, colleagues, journalists, in a location where they are safe, far from the events they are informing about, presumably wealthy, educated, employed, and thus respected.

Text Membership Analysis

People/Protagonists

Ciro, Carlos, 3 marines injured, The army, 4 alleged criminals dead - singles out Arturo Beltrán Leyva, 1 alleged criminal who committed suicide, La barbie, Mexican navy, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, International police organizations, The musicians

Objects

Perimeter, The note, Party, Communiqué

Ideas

Balance, Dead, Out of risk, Rumors, Most wanted, Drug traffick cartels, Interest, Confirmed?, Persecution, Confrontation, Scoop, Head of the cartel, Very powerful, Details of the "confrontation"

Groups

Media

Marines/Army

Criminals

Intl agents

Civil

Group Membership

Media

Ciro, Carlos, The note, Rumors, Confirmed, Scoop

State Security Forces

3 marines injured, The army, Mexican navy, Perimeter, Communiqué, Balance, Dead, Persecution, Confrontation, Details of the "confrontation"

Criminals

4 alleged criminals dead - singles out Arturo Beltrán Leyva, 1 alleded criminal who committed suicide, La barbie, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, Dead, Most wanted, Drug traffick cartels, Out of risk, Head of the cartel,Very powerful

International agents

International police organizations, Interest

Civil

The musicians, Party

Membership Analysis Outcome

The groups identified in the narrative are clustered in a binary logic which gathers state security forces, media and even international agents in antagonism with the so-called criminals. Ideas such as interest, confirmation, persecution, confrontation are linked to the state security forces but also to the media and international agents, while the alleged criminals are linked to notions of death, suicide, most wanted and very powerful. The labeling process conveys legitimacy and most important, victory to the state security forces, while associating the so-called criminals to death and defeat.

Reforma Newspaper: Police mafia protected the "Boss"

Resource available online [here](#) (Kiosko.net, 2019). [Raw data]

The next day, 12/17, reports of the event were on the front page of all national circulation newspapers. The reports contained vague images such as street views of the condominium where the attack took place, army vehicles and so on. But later that day, in a rather unusual occurrence, pictures of the so-called confrontation from inside the house where the attack took place, were filtered to the media. In a general assessment, the images portrayed walls with numerous bullet holes, patches of blood on the floor, personal items allegedly owned by the people who lived there and dead bodies. All with a high sense of destruction.

The following day, 12/18, most of the newspapers used those pictures on inside notes and one of them decided not to use any of the filtered images. In contrast, the newspaper Reforma placed the note as centerfold in its frontpage and included two pictures of Arturo Beltrán Leyva's dead body.

The frontpage of the newspaper is dominated by the two gruesome images that are unusually violent and explicit for the frontpage of the Reforma newspaper, a conservative, right-wing aligned media outlet, with a strong emphasis on corporate and financial news.

The images account for bloody scenes, with the same dead body in two different places and arrangements. The presence of a soldier next to the corps in the first picture, and banknotes tainted with blood over the same dead body in the second picture create a confusing narrative at a first glance. The morbid scenes depicted begs the viewer to look closely and imagine the chain of events. The closer look inevitably drives the viewer to notice the severe harm on the body and the artificial array of the elements.

The text of the note is relatively short and has no direct relation to the specific scenes portrayed in the images, rather about the investigation that is taking place after the attack and the security tasks carried out by the military and the navy in the perimeter, information that is in full provided by a navy's spokesperson. A sort of disconnection is present between what is being related in the text and the impactful images. The frontpage however, highlights a side note on the lower right side titled "One of the most violent: DEA", in which the acting

administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency of the U.S. comments on the event.



Fig. 2. Image from (Kiosko.net, 2009) *Reforma* 2009 12 18.

The images contain such a high level of violence that is difficult to ignore while reading the text, leaving a sensationalist feeling on the

event and making its relevance for the political life of the country, difficult to grasp.

Media Analysis

[Reduced data]

Visual Framing Analysis

The note takes on the centerfold of the newspaper, in which dominates the two aggressive photographs. A note related to the topic surrounds the images. Each of these images have sub-text. An additional related note is placed on the right lower side.

The emphasis is totally placed on the images that portray the same dead individual, not (only) from different angles, but on different moments, at different places of the same house and with different arrangements. The impact goes right into the violence these images transmit.

The upper image captures and provides the same space to the dead body on the floor and the soldier standing next to it. It is not a casual picture, the soldier posing for the photo is not in motion, but standing and looking at the camera. It very well resembles pictures that hunters have posing next to their dead prey. The background are the walls and doors of the apartment that were shattered and with multiple bullet holes. The soldier's figure is fully captured in the picture, with full gear and holding a long weapon. The dead body on the floor is captured in an angle where the left leg is out and most of the head and right shoulder are hidden. The contrast between the soldier and the corps is overwhelming: the soldier is not only fully dressed but with the whole gear put on, communicating power, stoicism and imperviousness. The corps is wearing flip flops, its pants are lowered to its knees, its white truces are displayed and its white shirt pulled up, communicating fragility, showing the flesh, the bullet wounds. An entire dichotomy discourse.

The lower image is a frontal depiction of the manipulation of the dead body. The picture leaves out the feet and head, so concentrates on the torso. The dead body is moved and placed on a white blanket, next to it is a dense patch of blood. This picture shows in more detail the damage of the body as it uses a flash. Visibly the left arm is broken, the right shoulder is severely damaged to the point that the right arm is almost separated from the torso. Mexican pesos and US dollar banknotes cover the torso forming a grid. The notes are moistened with blood that does not come directly from the body's wounds, but elsewhere. They were carefully placed over the body, along with other personal effects like golden jewels and a cellphone. There are bullet shells near the body and non-military shoes of a person standing next to the corps are captured in the photo.

The overall balance of the framing is a gore depiction of a massacre that contains a heavy meaning of triumphalism, exalting the bravery, manhood, violence and disdain of the military over the defeated so-called criminal, whose dead body is manipulated in a macabre arrangement on which, I conjecture, the body was harmed either in agony or post-mortem. The body is necessarily manipulated to pull its pants down to its knees and its shirt up, showing its flesh, its lost intimacy, exposing its undergarments in humiliation, in manhood humiliation, vulnerable, defeated to the point that his body is disrespected and exposed. On top of that, the banknotes and the personal effects on the torso, tainted artificially with blood sends a sort of "institutional" message as the protocol dictates the personal effects should be photographed, of course not on top of the body, but it provides a double message of mockery but still being institutional. This puts together an iconography composed by the symbolist of the personal effects: money, gold(en) items, a cellphone as the primary work tool, that lies over a destroyed body.

Text Framing Analysis

What emerges on the main text is an institutional message, always clarifying that the information was provided by navy spokespersons, underlying the disciplined tasks they developed during the attack, the protection they provided to the neighbors and civil population in general, and how the president himself commissioned them to carry out the entire security work. This is done without forgetting the relevance of the main character Arturo Beltrán Leyva, by calling it by one of his nicknames "The Chief of Chiefs".

The lower right section is framed differently from the rest of the text and with a red line. It emphasizes the United States' involvement, and first titles the section "One of the most violent", which leaves the question of who does it even refer to. The first line identifies that the cartel of Arturo Beltrán Leyva was one of the most violent on earth. It attributes the intelligence operation to the U.S. intelligence agencies and leaves the Mexican forces as "brave partners". Yet it delivers the action as a symbolic victory for the Mexican president. It mentioned that Arturo Beltrán Leyva's reign has ended and that his cartel is directly responsible for the violence that dominates Mexico.

The wording of "... is the result of significant cooperation and intelligence sharing between law enforcement agencies in the United States and our brave partners in Mexico" puts the intelligence work on the hands of the U.S. and leaves the bravery, or field work on the Mexican side by denying the Mexican intelligence services participation. By taking ownership of the intellectual work being done by the U.S. agencies, it goes on to give this victory to the Mexican present, as some kind of gift. Furthermore, the identification of the "direct responsibility" of the cartel over the violence that dominates Mexico, the DEA disassociates itself and the U.S. at large, from the responsibility in the drug-related violence.

Framing Analysis Outcome

The salient aspect is primarily the dead bodies, this provides the first impact because it breaks from the expected images on a newspaper. The violence that the dead bodies

endured is evident and purposefully portrayed with a main message in each photo. In the first photo, the man-hunt that took place, as a soldier stands next to the dead body, posing for a photo in an unequivocal intention to show his prey. The second photo portrays the dead body with a higher detail of the injuries, the blood and the additional array of the bank notes and personal belongings, purposefully tainted with blood, covering the torso.

The main text on the note is almost irrelevant as it is completely disconnected from the impactful photos. Yet the subtitles on the photos add to the main frame starred by the photos, relating details of the physical violence such as high-caliber weapons, disfigured face, left arm broken, right shoulder destroyed. And it also conveys details of the symbolic violence such as his pants semi-lowered, upholstered with banknotes over the destroyed and half-naked body.

And lastly, the highlighted text about the DEA involvement in the event, places the blame of the whole violence in the country on the so-called criminals, stating the necessity, the justifiable aspect of the violence exercise from the military. In a reading sequence, the observer first is impacted by the dead body, the blood, the injuries and the manipulation of the body, then reads further details of the violence and finally is conveyed the idea that such assault, abuse and insult over the so-called criminal is justice, it is necessary as he was responsible for any other violence.

The masculine message of the justice embodiment on the soldier, relates to the very foundational notion of the Mexican macho that wages war to bring peace as a patriotic act. Yet the underlying aspect of the necro-empowerment is present on the profitable merchandise the dead body represents for the military, as they brag they were able to defeat and also destroy the evil.

Visual Focalisation Analysis

Reforma stands out to be the only national circulation newspaper to portrait Arturo Beltrán Leyva's dead body on the frontpage. It is also the newspaper with the biggest printing and reach in the country, known as conservative and with a right-wing and corporate orientation (Rodelo and Muñiz, 2017). Mexico's president at the time was Felipe Calderón from the conservative, right-wing PAN party, who declared a so-called war against drugs in Mexico when he took office in 2006, thus this event is of the utmost relevance for his administration.

The view embedded here is the newspaper's (with at least, a common political and economical agenda as the President's administration). It puts at (literal) front-and-center the victory of the navy soldier over the death of a so-called capo. The dichotomy is over victory and death.

Text Focalisation Analysis

The story is about the different findings after the navy operation in which Arturo Beltrán Leyva was killed. All information on the note is provided by navy spokespersons. They relate that they have found evidence that Arturo Beltrán Leyva was protected by corrupt local police, about the personal belongings of Arturo Beltrán Leyva and his team, and how the neighbors were protected during the attack. The main article is somewhat vague, without much relevance, in contrast with the aggressive images that capture the attention. In summary, it's the state vision through the navy spokespersons that is being transmitted, information that is filtered to the audience through the lens of the newspaper.

However, the subtitles below each picture are different. Both images are a quick recount of the bloodshed with keen attention to the violence, the destruction of the body, and the particular array of the elements. The titles "the death of a drug-lord" and "dirty money" emphasize first the evident result of the attack, the killing, but also emphasize the intense violence against the body. The second indicates the array of the banknotes and personal effects moistened with blood over the dead and naked body was done with the purpose of

sending a message. This is the particular newspaper narrative, in which they are more free to interpret the images and to provide such comments.

Lastly, the lower right note is spoken on behalf of the DEA, representing the U.S. vision on the topic. The narrative goes around the collision between the U.S. and Mexican governments and their cooperation.

Focalisation Analysis Outcome

The perspective this event is related is mainly from the military, it stands out on the graphic as the soldier is the only one standing in a pose of victory, and on the text, it is the military who provides details of the investigation. It is the law enforcement's voice that takes over as this includes the Mexican military and secondarily, the U.S. intelligence agencies that convey a sort of endorsement for the Mexican military actions.

The voice and power is of the law enforcement agents, who speak about their prowess and victory over the defeated so-called criminals. The power and victory conveys a crushing enactment of masculinity over the criminals whose masculinity is nullified by their defeat, death and ridicule of their bodies. The death capital is provided by the criminals' dead bodies and claimed by the military.

Visual Membership Analysis

Two categories embodied by the dead body and the soldier: State security forces and criminals. Here now they hold a representative aspect of ideas taken by what they represent. The dead body is precisely that: death, defeat, shame. The soldier represents bravery, victory, violence, pride.

Text Membership Analysis

People/Protagonists

Mexico Navy, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, high commander (President Felipe Calderón), marines, bodyguards, residents, tenants, visitors, Cuernavaca police, Military sources, capo, DEA, law enforcement agencies, United States, partners, Mexico, Michele Lenhart, acting administrator of the DEA

Objects

Photographs, agendas, information, plane, drugs, apartments, Altitude complex, cellphones, religious images, jewelry, department 202, seven luxury vehicles, census, condominium, Military zone, firearms, grenades, tanks, entrance, high-caliber weapons, banknotes, other objects, pockets, body, planet,

Ideas

Protection and business networks, investigation, process, events, transfer of drugs, decision, high commander, surgical operations, transfer, decommission, protection, restricted, support, roadblocks, reconnaissance operations, inhibit attacks, structure, two attacks, situation, deploy, killed, disfigured face, left arm broken, right should destroyed, pants semi-lowered, Upholstered, carefully, destroyed, half-naked, exposed, message, most violent, assured, crippling blow, significant cooperation, intelligence, sharing, brave, great victory, reign, directly responsible, violence, dominates,

Groups

Government of Mexico

Government of the U.S.

Cartel

Civil society

Group Membership

Government of Mexico

People/Protagonists: Mexican Navy, high commander (President Felipe Calderón), marines, Cuernavaca police, Military sources, Mexico,

Objects: census, Military zone, tanks, high-caliber weapons,

Ideas: Protection and business networks, investigation, process, events, decision, high commander, surgical operations, decommission, protection, restricted, support, roadblocks, reconnaissance operations, inhibit attacks, structure, situation, deploy, carefully, message, crippling blow, significant cooperation, intelligence, sharing, brave, great victory

Government of the U.S.

People/Protagonists: DEA, law enforcement agencies, United States, Michele Lenhart, acting administrator of the DEA

Objects: none

Ideas: assured, crippling blow, significant cooperation, intelligence, sharing

Cartel

People/Protagonists: Arturo Beltrán Leyva, bodyguards, capo,

Objects: Photographs, agendas, information, plane, drugs, cellphones, religious images, jewelry, department 202, seven luxury vehicles, condominium, firearms, grenades, entrance, banknotes, other objects, pockets, body, planet,

Ideas: transfer of drugs, transfer, two attacks, situation, killed, disfigured face, left arm broken, right shoulder destroyed, pants semi-lowered, upholstered, destroyed, half-naked, exposed, most violent, reign, directly responsible, violence, dominates

Civil society

People/Protagonists: residents, tenants, visitors,

Objects: apartments, Altitude complex, condominium

Ideas: dominates

Membership Analysis Outcome

From a visual and textual perspective, the narrative links the state security forces with ideas of protection, intelligence, heroism, victory and pride, while attaching the alleged criminals with defeat, death and shame. And this is also in this way the power is distributed across the narrative. The power is held by the military by assigning specific grammars such as intelligence operations, sophisticated strategies and interagency cooperation, but at the same time, visually linking them to violence exercise, supremacy over the defeated bodies on the floor. Justice making through legitimate violence.

The so-called drug traffickers are linked to grammars such as death, broken bodies, half-naked. The exposure of their fragile and destroyed body not only puts them on the receiving end of the legitimate violence, but strips their manhood to defend themselves

and fight back. This violence perpetration is righteous and deserved since they are responsible for the violence that dominates Mexico.

El Universal newspaper: It's been 10 years since the operation in which Arturo Beltrán Leyva fell

Resource available online [here](#) (El Universal, 2019) [Raw data]

Arturo Beltrán Leyva forms part of a long list of individuals that allegedly played a leading role in a criminal organization that have been arrested or killed by state security forces. These individuals are made public figures regardless of the positive or negative appreciation from the different audiences, and like other relevant figures such as thinkers, academics or politicians, there are periodic reports, normally on the anniversary of their killing/detention, remembering their legacy.

On the tenth anniversary of Arturo Beltrán Leyva's killing, El Universal, a national circulation newspaper, released on its website a note on video about this event. This seems a simple recount of the events that were informed 10 years before, however, it does provide a broader selection of footage of the event, emphasizing the heavy gunfire both on audio and on the walls inside the place where the attack took place, filled with bullet holes. It shortly narrates an alleged plot between Arturo Beltrán Leyva and his family, and el Chapo and how this led to different outcomes. The focus remains on the violence, destruction and death caused by the marines and how their

manipulation over Arturo Beltrán Leyva's body was highly criticized. Yet it remarks that in the so-called confrontation, one marine died and how he was honored by the high commands of the navy and as a response, Arturo Beltrán Leyva's hitmen killed two of the marine's relatives for revenge.



Fig. 3. Still from (El Universal, 2019) *Se cumplen 10 años del operativo en que cayó Arturo Beltrán Leyva* (1:15)

This is a mere recollection of information previously made public and it fails to identify why Arturo Beltrán Leyva was chased by the navy and what was the outcome of his killing if this was a step towards the pacification and/or diminishing of the drug trafficking activity.

Media Analysis

[Reduced data]

Visual Framing Analysis

The note on video emphasizes first the heavy gun shooting on the event by removing narration and background sounds for a few seconds. The narration then starts with a relatively good sync with the footage presented. The first clip shows partially Arturo Beltrán Leyva's dead body and goes on to present clips with bullet holes, bullet shells, a heavy presence of the military and navy soldiers inside and outside the house where the attack took place, shows profusely the details of the walls and floors that account for the clash, the violence and the destruction, then it shifts to footage of El Chapo, who is arguably the most prominent figure within the organized crime environment as he is related to Arturo Beltrán Leyva. It makes salient two partially censored photos of Arturo Beltrán Leyva's body, but it leaves uncensored the blood patch next to the dead body on the first, and on the banknotes next to the dead body on the second. Various images and clips of the funerary services and cemetery are shown yet it finishes by showing again the soldiers in action. What is omitted is the after effects of this event, I'm referring to the wave of violence that was unleashed after the fracture of the organization that allegedly Arturo Beltrán Leyva led, which drove multiple splinter organizations to dispute the vacant control of the territory. Or even refer somehow to the multiple violent events that have taken place since then, for which, this event was not only in vain, but resulted in the escalation of generalized violence.

Text Framing Analysis

A woman's voice narrates the story, and begins by identifying an ownership of the so-called war against drugs of the now ex-president Felipe Calderón. Actually, two new presidents have held office since then. Yet it emphasizes that the government hurt something called drug trafficking through actions of the Navy . To say Arturo Beltrán Leyva was killed, it employs the verb "abatir", which can be translated as to defeat, to crumble, to bow down, a euphemism frequently employed to label killing or assassination.

It dedicated a good portion of the narration to relate Arturo Beltrán Leyva, the main character killed by the navy, with el Chapo, arguably, the most well known figure in the Mexican environment of organized crime. It underlines the way Arturo Beltrán Leyva's body was exposed and manipulated by the marines and asserts that these actions were highly criticized as the scene they created relates to ""executions of drug trafficking"". Continues to point out that Arturo Beltrán Leyva's brother did not attend the funeral and that ""only women"" claimed his body.

Attempts to highlight the heroic actions of the navy by mentioning the death of one marine and the despicable actions of the so-called criminals who later killed members of the dead marine's family. Perhaps this is a mitigating discourse of the blame assigned to the marines who tampered the assassination scene and manipulated the body.

This being a 10 years lookback of the event, it simply refers to some information that was well known, it does not provide any piece of new information, but most importantly, it doesn't refer to any of the later events of violence that find in this event its origin. It doesn't speak about how the violence escalated in the state of Morelos after the attack or how the allied organization Arturo Beltrán Leyva led was fractured and created multiple groups that began an endless fight for controlling the territory.

Framing Analysis Outcome

The main frame is the operation, not the alleged criminal and his legacy. What is salient is the military capability of the Mexican state, the way in which they were able to hunt a group of so-called criminals. The heavy firepower, the violence, the destruction of both, the apartment where the event took place and the body of Arturo Beltrán Leyva. And what is omitted is precisely Arturo Beltrán Leyva, as he is mainly shown dead on the floor, and is now remembered in relation with el Chapo. His figure and personality is undone by exalting the framed military power and their capabilities.

Visual Focalisation Analysis

The story is being told by the newspaper with a distance of 10 years. The visual narrative portrays the soldiers moving, fighting, defeating, while the accounts of the so-called cartel criminals, which only represents Arturo Beltrán Leyva, is laying on the floor, mutilated, ridiculed, dead. Footage of soldiers in action outside of the house where the attack took place and then inside the house one everyone inside is dead and the place trashed, then images that can be related to the alleged criminals are of the cemetery and ambulances.

Text Focalisation Analysis

It is the media outlet who is telling the story, it does not use a particular narrative attributable to the government, yet it does maintain a constant labeling of the events as confrontation, that something called drug-trafficking was injured by this attack, maintains a narrative in which el Chapo is still the most important player in the organized crime environment.

While it is a woman's voice narrating the note, no particular gendered discourse is present. Quite on the contrary, the part where it's said that "only women reclaimed the body" denotes some disdain for them and renders them as insignificant, opposite to Arturo Beltrán Leyva's brother who could not attend the funeral, who deserves to be called by name.

Focalisation Analysis Outcome

The story is narrated from the Mexican state perspective, bragging of their gun-power and ability to perpetrate violence. Standing victorious next to the alleged criminals who are placed on the floor, defeated. The military are shown empowered through the death of the criminals, but more importantly, it identifies the battle is not over, as there are more criminals yet to hunt. More focus is placed over el Chapo and other criminal groups than

the alleged criminal that was killed 10 years before, almost suggesting the violence will continue.

Visual Membership Analysis

People/Protagonists

Arturo Beltrán Leyva, soldiers, journalists, cops, el chapo,

Objects

vehicles, bullet shells, condominium, personal belongings, money, hearse, grave, guns

Ideas

imprisonment, violence, death,

Groups

State security forces, criminals, journalists,

Group Membership

State security forces

People/Protagonists: soldiers, cops

Objects: vehicles, bullet shells, guns

Ideas: violence, bravery

Criminals

People/Protagonists: Arturo Beltrán Leyva, el chapo,

Objects: bullet shells, personal belongings, money, gave, guns

Ideas: imprisonment, death

Journalists

People/Protagonists: journalists

Objects: none

Ideas: none

Text Membership Analysis

People/Protagonists

Felipe Calderón, government, Navy, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, BL cartel, organization, drug lords, el Chapo, Federation, authorities, partner, Alfredo BL, marines, women, two relatives, the press, security personnel,

Objects

condominium, prison, territory, body, pants, banknotes, blood, rosary, scene, narco-cemetery, images,

Ideas

10 years ago, war against drugs, struck a blow against drug-trafficking, luxury, killed, criminal, distant cousins, betray, left, concentrated, Sinaloa and Chihuahua, imprisoned, corrupted, 51, alliance, accused, turning over, unleashed a war, exhibited, moved, fell, on top, operation, lowered, full, carried, actions, highly criticized, very similar, executions of drug trafficking,

funeral, captured, journalistic notes, only women, claim, died, confrontation,
hailed in honors, murdered, hiding the faces, operations, arrests

Groups

Government

Criminal organizations

The press

Group Membership

Government

People/Protagonists: Felipe Calderón, government, Navy, authorities, marines
two relatives, security personnel

Objects:

Ideas: 10 years ago, war against drugs, struck a blow against drug-trafficking,
exhibited, moved, operation, lowered, full, carried, actions, highly criticized,
very similar, executions of drug trafficking, confrontation, hailed in honors,
operations, arrests

Criminal organizations

People/Protagonists: Arturo Beltrán Leyva, BL cartel, organization, drug
lords, el Chapo, Federation, partner, Alfredo BL, women,

Objects: condominium, prison, territory, body, pants, banknotes, blood,
rosary, scene, narco-cemetery

Ideas: luxury, killed, criminal, distant cousins, betray, left, concentrated, Sinaloa and Chihuahua, imprisoned, corrupted, 51, alliance, accused, turning over, unleashed a war, fell, on top, funeral, captured, only women, claim, died, murdered

The press

People/Protagonists: the press

Objects: images

Ideas: journalistic notes, hiding the faces

Membership Analysis Outcome

The state security forces are embedded in a broader membership comprehending the Mexican government with the political main actors such as the president. On the other hand, the alleged criminals are also present in a broader group that comprehends the actors in the event, but also including other predominant players allegedly part of criminal organizations.

The narrative goes around putting at the front and center the military soldiers who carried out the attack, who are endorsed and backed by the broader Mexican state, creating a higher hierarchy to support the violence and justifying its necessity to now go after other alleged members of criminal organizations.

The narrative completely suppresses the notion of a peace objective among all this violence and almost suggests that it will continue indefinitely. It continues to acknowledge that

violence has only increased after the killing of Arturo Beltrán Leyva as his organization fractured into splinter organizations who now dispute the territory. With the endorsement and unconditional support to the military actions, the Mexican state embarks in an enterprise of empowerment through the death of the so-called criminals that has no visible end.

The notions of manhood are still present through the depiction of the dead body of Arturo Beltrán Leyva and the way in which the soldiers assert their supremacy by assaulting his body. And while the report acknowledges that there was some criticism against them because of these actions, these are diluted with the additional information that after the killing of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, some hitmen of his group went on to kill some family members of a marine who participated in the operation, which has pushed authorities to conceal the faces of the state security members who (will continue to) participate in these operations.

Chapter 6 | Discussion

[Interconnected and Thematic data]

To reveal what is the dominant media discourse about criminal violence, I have formulated the tasks of, first, singling out the representation of criminal organizations and state security forces, and second, identify the key masculinity messages in the media reports, how they are conveyed and how they uphold the structures that breed criminal violence. To approach this, I walked backwards by first addressing the masculinity messages to unveil what role it plays within the representation of criminal organizations and state security forces, in order to conclude what is the dominant media discourse on criminal violence and how this connects with the narco-machine.

Enacting Masculinity

This research is striving to problematize on, perhaps, one of the most salient, visual and gruesome displays of violence that find its origin in the enactment of a local (Mexican) masculinity. Yet westernization of many aspects of our social life creates a horizontal common ground for masculinity meaning. Ever-present aspects such as risk-taking, self-discipline, physical toughness, and/or muscular development, aggression, violence, emotional control, and overt heterosexual desire permeate the ground on which the violence in this research occurs.

Masculinity messages are conveyed across the three different reports through value codes, however, they are not continuous, they blend and bend according to the media outlet and its formatting particularities.

The first report conveys a message that transmits both, a sense of achievement and a notion of calmness, soberness. A sense of authority is portrayed in the reporting where both journalists exalt notions of professionalism, hard-working, reliability, reputability, seriousness. What is mentioned is a confrontation that alludes to the idea of a clash between equal forces, that contains a notion of respect for one another, but on which, one of the parties involved, “fell”. While not mentioned explicitly, it provides an idea of an honorable battle, of a just cause. It therefore justifies the necessity of violence by normalising it by using the confrontation label.

Honorability, bravery, group loyalty and even repression of emotions are values that are not only used to represent the violent clash, but are attitudes that are also enacted by the two television hosts relating to the event.

The second report changes the tone drastically to a pure visual impact, yet values such as violence to resolve conflict, stoicism, bravery, loyalty and emotion repression are present there too through the images that capture the standing soldier next to the corpse. The two pictures portrayed in the frontpage of Reforma’s newspaper are witness of the marines’ work on Arturo Beltrán Leyva’s body. The first one, while simple, shows a vast destruction through bullet holes in the walls of the house, the soldier standing next to Arturo Beltrán Leyva’s body depicts the result of the hunt carried out by the marines. The stoic and unharmed soldier shows off his prey, removing all emotion from the massacre.

The journalists also link the military with soft but convincing ideas such as: they confront, they have a “balance”, (rather than killed an x number of people), they are injured after the confrontation. And also associate the alleged criminals of death, suicide and most wanted.

By setting the event as honorable, just and necessary, it provides a calm ground on which two days later, the gruesome pictures come ahead, changing the narrative to a bloody

confrontation, and since the military was already represented as the embodiment of justice, then justifies the violence and sadism against the alleged criminal.

The second photograph goes deeper into this narrative: Arturo Beltrán Leyva's body is adorned with iconographic elements that appeal to the narco-culture: lots of cash, golden personal belongings, religious images, all tainted with blood to illustrate his violent end.

The newspaper that is usually reporting on financial news, leaves that behind to put at the front and center the pictures, it makes it even more salient and continues to visually associate the military with the notion of victory, bravery, pride; while linking the alleged criminals with death, defeat and shame.

And above all, his body was manipulated by pulling his pants down and his t-shirt up. It is the fragility of his flesh, the total vulnerability of a man. Pulling the pants down or pantsing is identified as a sexual harassment act (Espelage et al., 2016) and thus, an intimacy violation. But it's also the representation of the nullification of manhood. We are never as exposed and vulnerable as when we are born, we are born unclothed: "when one has been stripped, denuded, dispossessed of all else familiar [...] vulnerability one experiences when one is stripped of the clothing of security" (McGeachy, 1994). The codes of fragility and emasculation connect with the feminine, as opposition and differentiation from the masculine.

The undoing of masculinity is perhaps the most salient aspect, especially because this is an intentional assault over the dead body with the precise intention of making it public. The tampering of the scene does not allow to trace back the sequence of events as it occurred. But since the second picture shows the dead body over a white blanket and in a different position from the first picture, it shows that the scene was planned for exhibition to some extent.

If all the elements are put together for a single message, they refer to emasculation: the removal of his masculinity by erasing his adulthood and taking him back to the most vulnerable state: being naked, exposed and fragile. By ridiculing the narco-culture elements that ascribe him as part of the organized crime category exposing them over his naked body. All this is adorned by the gore aspect of the scene: the theatrical use of graphic and visceral violence with the use of special effects, with an emphasis on the fragility of the flesh, dramatizing the body's mutilation.

This act pretends and succeeds in erasing the masculinity from the so-called criminal, up to the point that on the third report 10 years later, Arturo Beltrán Leyva is mainly mentioned in reference with el Chapo and the values underlined are those of military braveness and justice. The salient aspect of the third report is precisely that nothing is being reported, it is a simple remembrance of the violence, how the heroic marines killed the most-wanted criminal from whom there's nothing left.

And it is the ever-present notion of violence as a mean of justice in the hands of the military what remains, the embodiment of the mythical Mexican macho in the military soldiers that defend the vulnerable people from the enemy. Which contributed to the notion of the use violence as a nation-building process.

Representation

Fixed and continuous, the representation on these reports is of the utmost importance since it renders particular social logics to the state security forces and to the criminal organizations.

What is represented as state security forces has its own grammars: they are brave and protective, they confront, they perform operations, they use intelligence, they cooperate,

have great victories, they are honorable. A recurrent word assigned to them in Spanish is “abatir”, which is an euphemism for killing that literally means to beat down, to reduce. Therefore, they don’t kill, they bring down the enemy, hence lowering the violence aspect of the act.

The narrative towards the marines is maintained through the end. Despite the evident lack of protocol about the manipulation of the dead body, their representation of justice emissaries, of Mexican heroes is ever-present.

As for organized crime members, their grammars are also solid and maintained throughout: they’re all hitmen, they’re most wanted; they possess firearms, luxury objects, they are exposed, destroyed, they are dead; they are violent and criminals, they betray, they unleash war and are responsible for all the violence. They only deserve to die and there’s no question or even mention around their alleged responsibility on criminal acts, even less to argue human rights claims about legally defending themselves.

The media discourse on this topic is clear and is maintained through the time. It points out that criminal organizations are violent and responsible for the totality of the violence. When the security forces come in, they are their counterpart, the embodiment of good that fights evil. Interestingly, the criticism towards the marine’s actions was not essentially because of the violence they perpetrated against the dead body, but because it “resembles executions of drug trafficking”. The only moment on which the marine’s solid media representation was at jeopardy was precisely because there was a chance that they could cross to “the other side” of the spectrum of good vs evil.

A problem emerges when the discourse of the honorable state security forces vs the despicable criminal organizations is observed within the case of Arturo Beltrán Leyva’s killing and the further manipulation, mistreatment and assault on his dead body perpetrated by the marines themselves.

The contradiction here is not that the labels are simply reversed: that marines are despicable and the so-called criminals are innocent. But that the potential of violence and brutal depiction of their acts with the specific purpose of reputation publicising is not exclusive to one group or the other.

Narco-machine and Necro-empowerment

[Interconnected data and Theoretically meaningful understanding]

Following the events that relate the origins and evolution of the criminal organizations and further public brutalization of their violence, one can wonder if at some point the state security forces transitioned to enter the same arena of violent communication. On one hand, previous research has identified that one of the appealing characteristics of criminal organizations is that it offers a fast track of empowerment. Such empowerment comes most prominently through sex-gender realization in the sense that the membership to a criminal organization provides status of unquestionable heteronormativity that is exercised through violence.

On the other hand, the military as well brings along an institutional subset of values and even promises. Connell identifies that the military has prominently helped in shaping the definition of hegemonic masculinity in western cultures: “violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military; and no arena has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity in European/American culture” (2005).

Reit asserts that the “military provides access to resources that allow an individual to fulfill a hegemonically masculine identity” (2017) and this resembles very well the journey in which los Zetas criminal organization traces back its origins in an elite unit of the Mexican army

and how their enemies had to bring military training from soldiers from Guatemala and Israel to fight them back. In the same tone, Hinojosa underlines a sort of benefits that the enrolment in the army bring along: “through military training and service, members become physically fit, receive economic security, and are sanctioned by the country to use violence and aggression in order to dominate other peoples and nations” (2010).

Foundationally, criminal organizations as well as the military possess similarities on their “solution package” they offer to their recruits, which helps to understand why is it that they both come together and engage in a communication that is based not only on the defeat of the other, but to visually celebrate their supremacy.

The dominant media discourse is that of the narco-machine, of empowerment through the death of others. This is what frames the event and comprehends the whole phenomenon of criminal violence. Thus, the violence must be portrayed and it must be published. The executioner is there because of the narco-machine’s omnipresence and not all the way around. The narco-machine produces the executioner and the latter re-produces the narco-machine through the public display of violence.

The empowerment through the death of others works as a dispositif that fabricates the meaning of supremacy because at the time a dead body lying on the ground is already a statement of its own death, this is not accomplished as long as this is made known to others, it has to be appropriated to announce that it now belongs to the attacker in the form of a trophy, the hunt to be remembered. Supremacy does not happen in the private sphere, but in the public arena through the media, hence its usefulness as a reality maker.

Chapter 7 | Continuation

[Theoretically meaningful understanding]

As an overall objective in this research, I wanted to identify what is the dominant media discourse about criminal violence. In doing so, my first task was to single out the representation of both criminal organizations and state security forces. Media reports maintain a well articulated narrative that clearly divides and opposes them to each other in a binary discourse of good vs evil.

The contribution of this research lies on the contextualized and historical perspective of criminal violence and its foundational relation to masculine values in Mexico, which is the premise to delve into a critical analysis of media communication of criminal violence, exposing the contradictions between the media discourse and the enacted roles of the criminal organizations and state security forces.

Yet the analysis shows the particular elements in which the navy soldiers go into the capitalist activity of necro-empowerment by seeking appreciation and recognition, but also pretend to be feared, to be known as brave, fearless and champions of justice that would not only defeat, but humiliate and nullify the bad guys. They enter into the gore aspect of their work, by creating a visual narrative of their prowess. Criminal organizations in the media reports are presumed to be guilty, violent and responsible for all the violence in the country, however, they take on the submitted role of victims, defeated, dirty, worthless and humiliated. They embody the capital that is claimed by the marines, their bodies play the exchange currency that empowers the navy soldiers.

Valencia (2010) and Reguillo (2010) explain that one element of the narco-machine is that through the sadistic acts of violence, victims are transfigured into something else that is not a person. Victims become a sort of trophy, an emblem of the killer's victory, but also an

emblem of their own defeat. The particular grammar of Arturo Beltrán Leyva is his own name. As he was transformed into a public figure, in the same logic as Pablo Escobar or el Chapo, his name is the trophy in itself. And while there's a biological line that separates life from death, there seem to be numerous symbolic lines to cross someone's death, both in the physical corporeal realm, but also into the symbolic realm of how they are remembered.

My second task was to identify what role does masculinity play in the dominant discourse of criminal violence by pointing out to the specific masculinity messages, how they are conveyed and how they uphold the structures that breeds criminal violence.

The media provides a strong narrative with patriarchal and masculine messages. The premier of the event was announced by two men in a formal scene, in which the host and the editor in chief of the news channel engage in a sort of discussion: the editor presumes to have real and truthful information that no one else has; the host challenges him to re-confirm the veracity of the report; and the editor replies that he is so sure that he interrupted the show precisely because the report is reliable and places "his word" as guarantee of honor. The masculine values of honor, loyalty, protection, hospitality and prestige are present in this seemingly simple report, values that are shared with other masculine social institutions.

The reproduction of the pictures in the newspaper taking over the first page centerfold, the first in which the soldier stands next to destroyed dead body of the alleged criminal and the second picture where the corps is assaulted and ridiculed conveys messages of supremacy from the soldier over the corps, of the seeming capacity, skill and power of the marine over the dirty, fragile and nullified dead body defeated on the floor. As the narco-machine requires, the violence perpetrated is useless unless it is disseminated and it is done with the undoing of the dead body's masculinity, portraying a theatricalization of his fragility and ridiculing those elements that relate to his membership as criminal.

The particular selection of this case has taken me to profoundly challenge my assumptions around criminal violence, its representation and the way I consume media information. The realms of perpetrators and victims seem very different today. This has led me not only to erase the lines that divide both groups of interest, but to realize that violence, as an outcome of a reality produced by the narco-machine and the media, is ever-present.

As I hand-picked these three reports of the event, there were many more reports on it and even reports over other reports about the event. An important number of them criticized the dissemination and reproduction of the gruesome images, appealing to moral standards and respect to the victim. But my personal and academic position is that it is necessary to be confronted with images that portray the violence that occurs. Different people will surely have various reasons to look or not at those, but the absence of them also transmits ideas, and at the time we're informed of violent events like the one analyzed here through only words and vague images, it's easy to accept and normalize a blurred constructed image of the events.

The confrontation with these images is important because it humanises the object of violence, an image of a mutilated body is not a fact, but a truth. A sole textual narrative tends to provide facts about a violent event while invisibilizes the human victim and their pain. This should not be forgotten.

Annexes

[Organized data]

A. Transcription of Milenio News with Ciro Gómez

Ciro: How are you? Good night, about the information we had about this confrontation in Cuernavaca, Carlos Marín is entering, Carlos Marín, how are you good night, Carlos, go ahead, come in Carlos, please.

Carlos: Hi Ciro

Ciro: How are you Carlos? Good night

Carlos: Sorry for the irruption

Ciro: No, no, no. On the confrontation in Cuernavaca

Carlos: Well, very quickly, yes. It is a confrontation that, as is known, was carried out by the Mexican navy, with a siege from the Mexican army, but the marines in the confrontation have had this balance: four alleged criminals dead in the confrontation plus one by suicide. But in the confrontation, but of the four dead in the confrontation, one is called, imagine, Ciro, Arturo - Beltrán - Leyva, the Barbie was not there as it was rumored and three other hitmen also died and a fifth deceased is because he committed suicide

On the part of the navy, there are three soldiers, three marines wounded, but out of risk. And that's the balance of...

Ciro: So, Arturo Beltrán Leyva died?

Carlos: Arturo Beltrán Leyva, who is one of the most wanted men, part of the so-called cartels in Mexico, and with great interest in different police organizations in the world.

Ciro: Sorry for the question, but, very confirmed?

Carlos: If not, I wouldn't have stormed into your studio here, Ciro. The note belongs to the person who works it, I won't tell you more. Good night.

Ciro: Well what a thing, eh? What a thing because this also starts from the weekend with that party, where the navy storms in, the musicians are arrested, a chase begins there. And apparently, these people, the Beltrán Leyva, couldn't get away, until the confrontation (today) at 8:30, 8:45 and Carlos Marín is informing us here, scooping, Arturo Beltrán Leyva, head of that cartel, very powerful, falls dead in this confrontation with the navy.

Carlos: Yes, and in a few minutes, I suppose that in half an hour or something like that, the secretary of the navy will broadcast one of those communiqués, which one would like full of details of how it was and at what time ...

Ciro: Maybe that's how it comes

Carlos: But hey, for now have no doubt, I would not come here with

Ciro: You are a good reporter Carlos Marín

Carlos: Don't say that Barbie was there because Barbie is a doll ...

Ciro: Well, it is the information we had,

Carlos: Thanks. Well I'm going, can I get up?

Ciro: Yes, please. Thank you.

Carlos: Excuse me

Ciro: Thanks to Carlos Marín

Carlos: Ciro finishes in half an hour. I go out of work every day to what? What time? At 11.

Ciro: Before the news ends. Thanks. Thanks for the information to Carlos Marín.

B. Transcription of Reforma Newspaper: Police mafia protected the "Boss"

Cuernavaca.- The action of the Mexican Navy in which the capo Arturo Beltrán Leyva, "The Chief of Chiefs", was shot dead, uncovered several protection and business networks.

After the operation in a subdivision of Cuernavaca, the Navy found documentation that involved state and municipal police in protecting the Cálitel de los Beltrán Leyva, naval sources revealed.

They added that they found software, files, and narconómina that indicate that the police received money and even escorted "El Barbas."

They also investigate possible whistles on the part of state officials, to the leaders of the criminal organization of the Beltrán Leyva before military operations.

"Photographs were collected, some agendas and information that we still have to process," confirmed naval sources.

According to the informants, the investigation does not end with the death of "El Barbas"; now they go for his main contributors.

The investigations of the Navy are born from two events. One is the transfer of drugs by plane from Acapulco to Morelos.

The other, the decision of the high command (President Felipe Calderón) that the Navy assume operations that that same agency calls surgical.

Along these lines, the marines searched each of the 312 departments that comprise the Altitude complex in Cuernavaca.

The marines revealed that cell phones, religious images and jewelry were also found in department 202, which was occupied by Beltrán Leyva. They also decommissioned seven luxury vehicles belonging to the capo's bodyguards.

The housing complex was protected by the Army.

The residents were identified through a census carried out by the Navy on the same day of the operation, when they took the tenants to the Altitude's gym.

The access for visitors was restricted. In fact, with the support of the Cuernavaca Police, several roadblocks were installed around the condominium.

Throughout yesterday, Army troops mounted various reconnaissance operations in the main streets of Cuernavaca to inhibit attacks on the structure of the late Beltrán Leyva.

Military sources indicated that, during the early hours of yesterday, two attacks were reported on the 24th Military Zone with firearms and grenades. Faced with this situation, they deployed two tanks.

THE DEATH OF A DRUG-LORD. Arturo Beltrán Leyva was killed at the entrance of his department by elements of the Navy, who used high-caliber weapons. His body was left with a disfigured face, his left arm broken; his right shoulder destroyed; and with his pants, semi-lowered.

DIRTY MONEY. Upholstered with carefully placed banknotes and other objects that he carried in his pockets, the destroyed and half-naked body of the capo was thus exposed to send a message.

It is one of the most violent.- DEA

WASHINGTON.- The DEA assured yesterday that the cartel led by Arturo Beltrán Leyva is one of the most violent on the planet.

"His death has dealt a crippling blow to one of the most violent cartels in the world and is the result of significant cooperation and intelligence sharing between law enforcement agencies in the United States and our brave partners in Mexico," said Michele Lenhart, Acting Administrator of the DEA.

She described the operation as a great victory for President Felipe Calderón.

"The reign of Arturo Beltrán Leyva has ended. His cartel has been directly responsible for much of the violence that dominates Mexico," she said.

C. Transcription of El Universal newspaper: It's been 10 years since the operation in which Arturo Beltrán Leyva fell

Ten years ago, in the midst of Felipe Calderón's "war against drugs", on December 16, 2009, the government struck a blow against drug trafficking. The Navy carried out an operation in the luxury subdivision "Altitude", in Morelos, in which Arturo Beltrán Leyva, "El Barbas", leader of the Beltrán Leyva cartel, was killed.

This is how this criminal organization came to an end. They were distant cousins of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, who supposedly betrayed them and left the Federation, which was the group in which several capos concentrated in the past, including those from Sinaloa and Chihuahua.

While "El Chapo" was imprisoned in the Puente Grande prison, the Beltrán Leyva family took over his territory and gave him money in the prison, where he corrupted the authorities to live a life of luxury and later escape.

Beltrán Leyva, 51, broke his alliance with "El Chapo" in January 2008, when Beltrán accused his partner of betraying him for turning over his brother Alfredo, known as "El Mochomo", which unleashed a war between the two.

The body of "El Barbas" was exhibited and moved from the place where he actually fell. On top of the body, the marines who carried out the operation lowered his pants, placed banknotes full of blood, a rosary and various objects that the capo carried.

The actions of the marines were highly criticized, as the scene was very similar to the executions of drug trafficking. His brother, Héctor, could not attend the funeral of Beltrán Leyva, who after some years was captured. According to journalistic notes, only women went to claim the body of the Sinaloa.

"El Barbas" was buried in Jardines de Humaya, the best-known narco-cemetery in Sinaloa.

A marine also died in the confrontation, who was hailed with honors by the Navy. However, days after the event, the Beltrán Leyva hitmen murdered two relatives of the marine in Tabasco. Therefore, from that moment on, the press considered hiding the faces of all security personnel in the images of operations, arrests and other operations related to drug trafficking.

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