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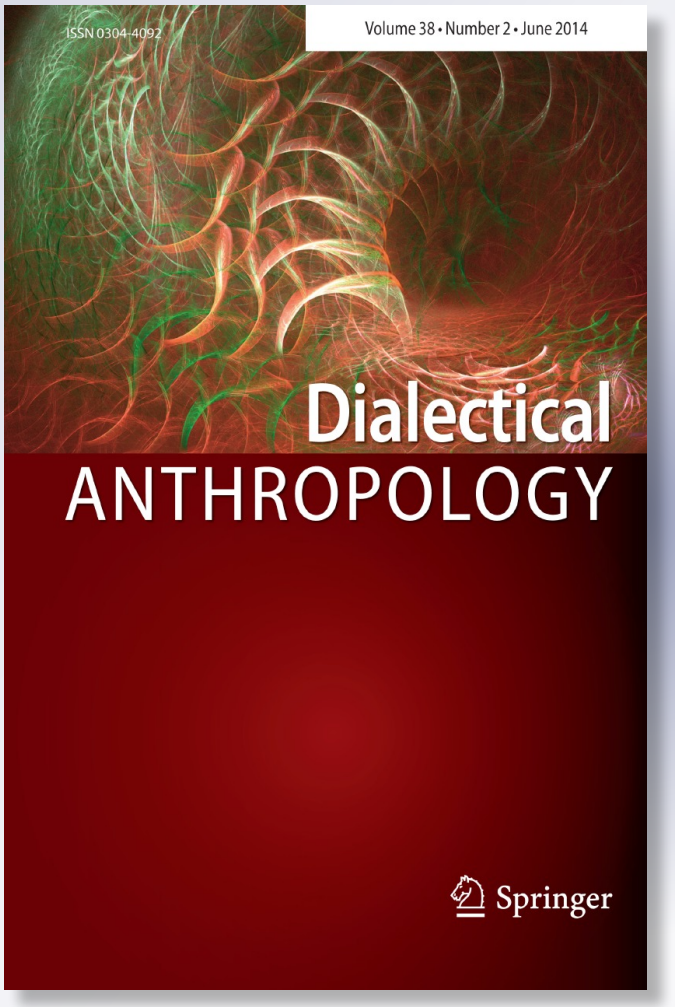

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"You don't see any violence here but it leads to very ugly things": forced solidarity and silent violence in Michoacán, Mexico

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Abstract Mexico has become an ideal laboratory for anthropology interested in studying the transformations of drug trafficking, its economies, and its cultures. Certainly, the challenges are complex and difficult, since criminal violence affects fieldwork and its results. However, when one delves into regions where drug trafficking and organized crime are present, what we can grasp ethnographically are fundamental questions about the relationships that are being generated between the state, neoliberalism, and illegality. In this article, we will analyze the expansion of drug cartels in one of the states most affected by criminal violence: the state of Michoacán, with special reference to the Caballeros Templarios—the Knights Templar. Understanding the origins and structures of this organization can teach us how the transformations of the state and criminal economies are being redrawn in neoliberal spaces.

Keywords State · Drug trafficking · Economy · Informal economy · Everyday violence

Introduction

For two decades, Mexico has descended into a spiral of conflict and criminal violence that seems to have no end in the near future. Entire regions produce plant-derived and synthetic drugs, while drug cartels have been expanding throughout the country and into international territory. There is increasing evidence that the public practices of organized crime are infiltrating the state apparatus, along with increasing processes of corruption and impunity. Levels of armed confrontation between cartels and the state have been worsening. Violence was on the rise in the

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past year despite six long years of military and police campaigns to improve public safety.[1] Accordingly, various indigenous and rural communities are trying to take control of public security in view of the government's failure to do so.[2] Since February of last year, a movement of armed self-defense groups in the state of Michoacán has joined the fight against organized crime.[3] In summary, the problem of violence in Mexico continues to worsen every day, despite campaigns to eradicate it and a "civil society" that is more involved in the monitoring of public policies.

One of the most common explanations for the increase in criminal violence uses the model of social anomie and disintegration as a result of the economic crisis and globalization (cf., Misse 2006) to account for the level of deterioration in moral relations. Meanwhile, those who analyze the proliferation of drug trafficking and organized crime generally attribute it to the displacement of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from the office of the presidency, after holding control at the national level for nearly 70 years (Astorga 2007; Enciso 2010; Flores Pérez 2009; Serrano 2007; Palacios and Serrano 2010). In general, the explanations given for increasing violence and weak governance use the figure of a weak state to explain institutional impunity and atrophy. But as has been demonstrated by several authors (Steputta and Hansen 2001; Heyman 1999; Aretxaga and Zulaika 2005), a weak state exists only to the extent that other actors capture spaces of power and try to act on behalf of the law and the common good. Therefore, our main argument is that violence is not gaining ground in Mexico due to a deficit of the state or an insufficient state. We are facing the unprecedented phenomenon in which the Mexican government is being challenged by a multitude of groups and actors among whom boundaries between legal and illegal are rather blurry. When certain anthropologists, such as Aretxaga and Zulaika (2005), discuss the problem of the deficit of the state, and when Das and Poole (2004) suggest addressing the margins of the state in terms of physical distance and social exclusion, they are proposing to place the study of "the state" in terms of a controversial and often very contentious process of construction. Thus, as Aretxaga points out, it is not that modern societies are experiencing a deficit of the state, but rather an excess of statehood practices: too many players compete to perform as small states (2005: 258). The suggestion that violence does not necessary reflect a failed state aligns with the proposal of Arias and Goldstein (2010), for whom violence cannot be understood as a product of the failure of political systems. Perhaps the excess in statehood practices and discourses of order can be equated with the idea of a violent pluralism to which these authors refer. Arias and Goldstein are very interested in understanding how the policy of violence affected lived political experience, which is essential in analyzing the production and maintenance of the democratic transition (2010: 4). In other words, they propose that—rather than understand the violence endemic in Latin America

[1] http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=336263.

[2] http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=357734.

[3] During 2011 and 2012, Michoacán ranked first and second, respectively, in the rate of kidnappings, second only to the violence-wracked state of Tamaulipas. Source: http://www.cambiodemichoacan.com.mx/nota-191134. For 2013 the rate of common crimes began once again to increase over previous years. Source: Secretariado Ejecutivo de Seguridad Pública.

simply as a failure of democratic governance—we need to pay attention to violence as an integral element of the configuration of those institutions and a necessary component for their maintenance.

Both the notion of an excess of statehood practices and discourses of order and the rejection of the proposal that violence is the result of a deficit of democracy, can be very helpful in understanding what is happening with the Mexican state. In fact, in the case of Michoacán, it is very useful for understanding the processes of struggle and confrontation that have consistently been in evidence between various drug cartels and the police and bureaucratic state apparatuses for control over public security. A unique situation has unfolded in Michoacán due to violence and the lack of public security. Informal orders have been created, imposed by drug cartels in their struggle for control of criminal economies and local governance. At the same time, competition among political actors to perform as small states (or speak on behalf of…) helps us to see a field of power in which different practices and discourses have developed that put into play notions of law and order, the legal and illegal, etc. As we will see in this article, violence and criminality in Michoacán have less to do with a deficit of democracy and more to do with a changing articulation of at least three elements: a booming neoliberal regional agro-industrial and mining economy developed in contexts of expanding drug trafficking, through the cultivation and processing of plant-derived and synthetic drugs, when the state government was experiencing serious ideological struggles, whose results opened large gaps through which, via the political parties and civil society organizations, criminal organizations entered the sphere of economics and politics. The result was a facade state, or a shadow state (Gledhill 2001), from which illegality and violence are managed in accordance with prevailing interests.

It is clear that the problem of violence in Mexico cannot be separated from state reform and neoliberal policies, which since the 1980s have been implemented in a radical and relatively undemocratic manner. The effects of structural adjustment policies and the dismantling of the Latin American states produced major changes in social life, in which violence appears to function as an escape valve in the face of the enormous economic, political, and social consequences that most of the population suffered (O'Donnell 1997). All this leads us to suggest that the rise of drug trafficking has not emerged outside of a major transformation of the economy and public power, since there is a "political economy" that produces violence. My argument is that the problem of drug-related violence and organized crime in Michoacán can be analyzed much more effectively if we understand it as a matter of "economy" and "politics" (Narotzky 2004), in the framework of what Harvey (2004) has insightfully characterized as a "model of accumulation by dispossession." For Harvey, accumulation by dispossession can happen in various ways, and its modus operandi involves a great deal of contingency and haphazardness. However, capitalism internalizes cannibalistic, predatory, and fraudulent practices to the extent that accumulation guarantees sites for the production of surplus value. This is the dual nature of capital accumulation. I need not point out the fiction that exists between the state and the sphere of illegality, or between the legal and illegal (Heyman 1999), nor the blurred boundaries between the criminal world and the world of politics, whose relationships give rise to the formation of dangerous

relations in the form of excesses of power (Misse 2006). In this text, I use the concept of accumulation by dispossession to understand, first, the characteristics of Michoacán's regional economies and the formation of various criminal organizations that, using armed force and corruption, have acted on those economies, transforming them into criminal economies through dispossession or the collection of fees. Second, how these criminal informal economies generated informal orders in which forced solidarities have been reproduced in communities where organized crime was able to regulate the daily lives of entire villages, whose abuses and atrocities forged certain forms of silent violence as a way to resist, cope with, and negotiate aggression. Therefore, I use the concept of forced solidarities to understand the effects of processes of alliance and rupture of social groups that are directly and indirectly involved in drug trafficking. These processes are mediated by a regional culture in which the values of silence are fundamental part of generating certain solidarities in the midst of conflict and violence. Similarly, I use the notion of silent violence to understand how communities involved in drug trafficking confront criminal abuses of power and simultaneously build strategies to resist or tolerate them. Silent violence is the sordid side of violence, the way in which people judge both acts of everyday violence and a process of internalization of the atrocities.

The economics and politics of violence

The state of Michoacán is a mosaic of contrasting and internally differentiated regions. The indigenous regions that are home to Nahua and Purepecha peoples contrast with highland regions inhabited by populations considered mestizo. Geography is a significant element in these differences, which partly explains part of the problem of violence that the state is currently experiencing. Located close to sea level, on the coast, the Nahua region survives off the production and export of coconut, even though it is home to one of the largest seaports in Mexico. It is precisely this port that ships thousands of tons of iron and other ores extracted legally and illegally from communal land by transnational companies that have woven complex networks with armed groups.[4] Ore exports are mainly destined for countries such as China and India, whose demands for the steel manufacturing create pressure in the Nahua region from armed groups to continue extracting ore. This port also witnesses flows of the deeply secret illegal economy; it is said that tons of precursor chemicals come from these countries to make synthetic drugs that are then transported to clandestine laboratories located in the highlands. It is precisely in this coastal border region where we find the largest drug growing area not only in this state but in other states. Marijuana and poppy production alternates with ore extraction, as well as clandestine synthetic drug laboratories. The population living in the Sierra Madre del Sur is distinguished by a form of social organization focused on nuclear family households, whose labor force exchanges farmed products for their basic needs and drug production. This mountainous region

[4] http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/02/02/politica/008n1pol.

is also the origin of armed groups linked to drug trafficking who control drugs and their illegal markets. As you cross the Sierra, rising in elevation, you reach the so-called Tierra Caliente, the "warm lands" that are home to the most important agro-industrial zone for the cultivation and export of lemons and other citrus fruits. Tierra Caliente is a livestock and agricultural zone with dynamic trade flows to the US market, and in particular with soda and juices manufacturers. It is also an area where the country's most important criminal groups are concentrated, since it is a necessary stopping point on the route to other major cities. Drug traffickers came to control almost all the legal and illegal markets through their armed power and corruption. If one follows a sort of climbing road to the center of Michoacán, you arrive at a strategic area called the avocado zone, bordering on Tierra Caliente. The avocado agro-industrial zone, which occupies more than 120 thousand internationally certified hectares, exports a thousand train cars per week and is unique in the world for the quality of its soil and climate. Annually, it produces about a billion dollars from avocado growing and export.[5] Its avocados are considered the highest quality at the international level, destined for export to the US and European markets. For this reason, the area transformed into a drug trafficking haven for the investment and laundering of money from the cultivation and traffic of drugs produced in neighboring regions. For several years, drug gangs penetrated the area to kidnap and extort avocado producers, as well as entering the major social circles of the wealthiest class. In the border areas surrounding avocado-producing zone, we find other subregions, such as the Los Reyes zone where cane sugar was produced for sale to the federal government or multinational companies. The subsequent privatization and disappearance of the sugar mills gave rise to the entrance of agro-industrial economy producing raspberry, cranberry, etc. supported by transnational capital and markets. This subregion borders the Zamora region, of equal magnitude, centered on production of strawberries and other fruits that similarly have maintained a close relationship with the US market and have recently entered the European and Asian markets as well. Over eighty percent of strawberry production produces income of approximately half a million dollars per year and focuses on intermediary companies such as Driscoll, but there are also a significant number of owners of packing and processing plants for strawberry, raspberry, etc. Again, around this subregion of Zamora, toward the north of the state of Michoacán, we find other economically important bordering subregions: Yurécuaro. This region's primary production and export is vegetables, including lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, and radish, which is sold both domestically and on international markets. It is also distinguished by a significant amount livestock production; its labor force, as in all the regions described, comes from Nahua and Purepecha indigenous areas and other parts of the country. There are other important regions, such as the region or Zitácuaro or Huetamo, where agricultural economies of great significance have likewise been developed. As a key piece of information, it should be noted that all the agricultural regions have an abundance of medium- and large-scale private property that ranges from 10, 20, and more hectares per owner. Thus, various forms

[5] http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2014/02/10/produccion-de-aguacate-hass-mexicano-se-multiplico-casi-200-veces-en-15-anos-2678.html.

of property and ownership coexist, but the central feature is small and medium landownership. Transnational corporations lease overly large tracts of land through contracts signed for years. The preparation of the land for agro-industrial production has undergone several transformations in recent years.

This brief description allows us to have an preliminary picture. The economy centers on the cultivation and trafficking of plant-derived and synthetic drugs coexists geographically, economically, and politically with other regional economies. In fact, flows of human, financial, social, and cultural capital are highly dynamic and characterized by local, regional, and transnational connections. The second image one notes is that in all agricultural and mining regions of Michoacán an illegal economy has developed in parallel to the legal or underground on. This illegal economy can be understood based on the investments made in the booming emerging economies, such as avocado, strawberry, and raspberry by people who became wealthy from the drug trade or other activities. This attracted new investments to the agricultural areas, putting pressure, for example, on populations inhabiting the borders of agricultural areas who resist selling their land to be incorporated into the booming agribusiness economies. In the area where mining production is found, the problem is that transnational corporations continue to sign informal and often illegal contracts with social groups that permit ore extraction on their communal land. Alternatively, companies use mining permits issued by the federal government as legal protection for the expansion of their operating limits. The third portrait that emerges is on in which, due to the existence of an illegal economy closely linked with legal businesses, criminal groups have developed control the drug markets, common crime, and, given the strength with which they have consolidated themselves, powerful criminal economies through the collection of fees, taxes, money laundering, dispossession, etc. These economies were consolidated through violence, struggle, and negotiations so that criminal groups could gain predominance in both the economy and politics, in the public sphere, etc.

Given that the economies could not be extended without significant political connections, criminal leaders crafted significant networks with local politicians to expand their domain. The interrelationship between the agricultural economy, the drug economy, and official policy resulted in an overly predatory, violent, and exclusionary regional capitalism. Through this model, other forms of relatively banal criminality expanded. The groups that are part of large and complex networks of organized crime engaged in other types of acts that victimize society, given the "excess of power" they accumulate. Thus, for example, in one municipality or region or another, a criminal group may resort to kidnapping and extortion as a way to support its local organization and pay a sort of franchise fee to the top drug lords, but in other regions, the most important thing is the cultivation and trafficking of drug or the setting up of drug labs. In economically very dynamic agricultural regions, "offices" were installed in parallel to those of the government, to regulate the production, marketing, and sale of agricultural products based on a percentage. In the case of the avocado entrepreneurs from the Uruapan-Peribán-Tancítaro region, the presence of organized crime is part of the landscape itself. It is said one gets enough information from the models developed by government offices, plant health inspections, and the model of landownership. These elements make up the

scenario of extortion, kidnapping, and payment of various fees. In these booming agricultural regions, the extractive form of obtaining quick money covers other commercial lines; in formal commerce, there is no shortage of practices charging certain fees for preventing attacks against establishments or targeting them for extortion or kidnapping. In the organization of the informal–illegal trade in large cities, the collection of fees is supplying or is allied with corrupt union leaders or public officials in command of the ambulatory peddler business.

The way, for example, the agro-industrial and mining economic is interrelated with the illegal economy has had significant political effects. In terms of governability, it led to the emergence of parallel governments, or a "shadow state" (Gledhill 2001), given the domination of the criminal organizations. Both in the Tierra Caliente region and along Michoacán's Pacific Coast, as well as in the eastern region of Michoacán or along border areas between Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Jalisco, there have been systematic armed clashes seeking to beat back or subordinate local governments. It seems that the emergence of parallel governments supposes not only control of the black market, but also a more systematic involvement of these illegal groups in the way in which local governments design and implement public policies, the commitments can be developed with construction companies and the payment from municipal public funds to these companies disguised as civil associations. It is already even commonplace to talk locally of "payment" to the political parties for city government slates of candidates, union leaderships etc., in exchange for being registered candidates for those public office associated with the cartels. Therefore, the problem of parallel governments is both in the co-option of municipal police or certain important authorities and in the control of key public positions that make decisions concerning the flow of money. At this level, the relationship between the criminal order and state order is quite blurry. In the 2011 election period alone, more than 10 % of all candidates to public office withdrew from their campaigns, supposedly for health reasons or illness. These withdrawals were linked to pressures from drug traffickers to impose their own candidates.[6]

Behind the facade governments, groups linked to drug trafficking have developed populist practices in order to reduce the negative effects of imposed violence. One of the most interesting practices is an armed cronyism to gather popular support. In several regions, they have succeeded, but particularly in the area where their leaders are originally from. For example, in one of my recent discussions with people from Tierra Caliente, a merchant couple openly told me, given my absence from the region, that I should not be afraid to go into the zone:

> "They protect you, if you don't come to cause trouble, they aren't going to do anything. On the contrary! They help you… they don't want problems because the federal police and the army only come to fuck things up: to steal, kill and even to rape women… so that's why they want things to be quiet, so that nothing happens… so one can go to the police. If there are problems, they fix them, the go around keeping an eye out to make sure no one is doing shit; if

[6] Data based on information from the Instituto Electoral de Michoacán.

someone gets arrested it goes badly for them, because they don't allow anyone to go around making trouble that draws attention and leads to more surveillance.

One of the cases that drew the greatest amount of attention and popular attraction in certain regions where drug trafficking forms part of daily routines is the "protection" of women by that criminal organization in the face of a typically macho society. In several rural regions and municipalities or neighborhoods, organized crime supposedly does not allow physical abuse against women, reprimanding men for causing public disorder. The punishment of men for abusing women has spread like wildfire in many marginal areas, where women say that they themselves even seek out some kind of contact with illegal groups to reprimand their husbands for being adulterers or drunks and wife-beaters, as well as their children who abuse drugs. The "courage" of some of these women leads to a great deal irony, due to the use of more violence to eliminate part of it. However, all this tells us that organized crime has defined a set of strategies for the protection of society, in order to gain sympathy and trust, which paradoxically contribute to greater centralization of violence by the criminal group in order to pacify society under the order that organized time is trying to build. This situation can best be described as an informal order.

The routinization of the informal order constitutes a longer-term challenge for criminal organizations, because this is not achieved with just a couple of fear-based strategies. My interviews and discussions with the people suggest that there is an almost unspoken conviction concerning organized crime's involvement in the production of the local order. And to accomplish that, it has been necessary to invest economic and political resources in order to consolidate these informal orders. There are comments that in some urban neighborhoods in cities such as Apatzingán, Uruapan, and Morelia they are building "subsistence" stores in order to sell basic food goods at a price below market to attract people to their ideals and goals. These stores do not try to make a profit from the sale; rather they become a means that seeks to alleviate the adverse effects of other, more lethal, practices such as kidnapping or extortion and drug sales. Viewed in a general way, organized crime has managed to build a practical and ingenious discourse to control the hostile environment and adapt it to their own interests and objectives. To do so, it seems they always go beyond the routines of the public security forces and military.

Rumors say that the senior organized crime leaders who abstain from consuming any kind of intoxicating substances in order to maintain "professionalism" in their activities (see Martínez and Padgett 2011). The staff they recruit go through various tests, as well as requiring the approval of the leaders to ensure greater control and make sure that activities are not affected by excesses that lead to mistakes or exaggerations.[7]

[7] As I've already mentioned, after the appearance of the so-called community guards in several municipalities where drug trafficking has a major presence, the nature of the social order has changed significantly. At the time of writing this article, there is a constant tension on how a new social contract will be negotiated within communities that once again will allow certain groups to impose their rules.

Evolution of the cartels

As we have discussed, the regional mosaic of Michoacán is characterized by distinct, internally differentiated regions. Of course, throughout history, regional economies have emerged and displaced others. During the 1960s, for example, the main characteristic of certain regions was the production and export of cotton, while a decade later lemon came to the fore, which continues to dominate at the present. These economic flows, of course, have been interspersed with the rise of some products and crises among others, both legal and illegal. During the 1980s in Michoacán, a period when the state's economy suffered a major agricultural crisis, marijuana and poppy production grew exponentially. This consolidated criminal groups who also leveraged migration experiences and friendship networks that were interwoven into the transnational field of migration. Michoacán is one of the states with the highest level of legal and illegal migration to the United States. Thus, after dominating the formation of gangs and family groups in the control of the drug business, one cartel emerged—Milenio or Los Valencia[8]—which centralized drug production and trafficking and started the massive transfer of cocaine from Colombia to Mexico and the United States, in the midst of warlike prohibitionist policies in the Andean region.

It had the support of several politicians and police officers to lend it stability. At the beginning of 2000, it underwent a splintering due to the intervention of the Zetas cartel, which at that time was the armed wing of the Golfo cartel, which sought to control the territory of Michoacán. The Zetas included leaders from the Tierra Caliente region that had migrated and contacted the Zetas in the north. After the fall of the Zetas and their expulsion from Michoacán, its remnants formed a new organization called La Familia Michoacana. Its public debut in 2006, which took the form of a display of five human heads on the dance floor at a strip club in the city of Uruapan (one of the most populous cities in the state), caused a national uproar. This would be the first act of a series of peculiarities, such as being integrated through semi-religious codes and an organizational structure that mimicked the Central American counterinsurgency.[9] After several years, it managed to turn itself into a strong organization with transnational networks and state political connections, in addition to social programs that put it in closer contact with the population in a conspicuous manner. Its state leadership was strengthened through strong ties with large US criminal groups, which were trafficking methamphetamine processed in Michoacán; this activity would lead it to occupy one of the highest ranks in

[8] During the 1980s, several national cartels were created or consolidated. One such is Sinaloa, geographically located in the state of the same name, in northwestern Mexico. Another in operation was the cartel of Juan N. Guerra in the state of Tamaulipas, which later became the Golfo cartel, along with the Arellano Félix cartel in the border city of Tijuana and the Juárez cartel. Others powerful cartels also made their appearance in the 1990s, such as Pacífico, which brought together the powerful Beltrán Leyva drug traffickers. These cartels are not the only ones, and their reconfiguration is very complex to trace.

[9] During the reign of the Milenio cartel several Guatemalan former "kaibiles" were apprehended, who were allegedly training drug traffickers with sophisticated methods of torture and disappearances. Apparently La Familia inherited these methods, given its inclusion of some former members of El Milenio and the Zetas. The Kaibiles were military elite trained by US commandos in the use of "scorched earth" war tactics.

international synthetic drug production. La Familia Michoacana became notorious for its narco-messages[10] delivered to its rivals, to police forces, to state and federal governments, as a way to intimidate and inhibit their combative actions. It is also the same cartel that has been identified, as an organization, with a religious fanaticism exhibited in its narco-messages, recruitment, and training. As one of its most famous messages prays: "La Familia does not kill for pay, it does not kill women, it does not kill innocents; only those who must die, die. Let it be known to all: this is divine justice."[11] Among their main stated objectives, they declared that they would take safeguard Michoacános from any group seeking to enter Michoacán to impose their laws, posing as an social protection organization and a challenge to the state, which they classified as corrupt and allied with other Mexican cartels.

After the splintering of La Familia Michoacana following the arrest of Jesús Méndez, alias El Chango the Caballeros Templarios emerged in 2009. This organization was created by the other leader of La Familia, alias "El Chayo" or "the craziest," fighting and eliminating all those cells and political actors who did not want to form part of the new cartel.[12] This group made palpable the closer relationship with society, under a display of the protection of life. While it is true that Los Templarios have challenged the legitimacy of the Mexican state in claiming to safeguard public safety and to replace the state in social tasks, they have also benefited from the state as it has built-up its stronghold and illegal expansion. On the one hand, they seek to control the "business of illegality" in all forms, from drugs to common crime, a project that incorporates a strong cooptation of spaces, networks, and institutional linkages to lessen the costs of such activities. On the other hand, they clash against certain institutions of the state and especially federal government, using the hacking of government institution's computer networks as a resource to protect themselves against acts of war or espionage and those of other cartels. Third, they have created a mechanism for wealth extraction through extortion and the payment of fees, along with the dispossession of property from private owners. They not only control the production, sale, and export of drugs as a criminal activity, but also to have infiltrated large local and regional economies by extracting attractive revenue through the collection of a sort of tax in parallel to state taxation. In many cases, there are rumors of their legal appropriation of property through transfers of land titles or agro-export companies to the name of the drug traffickers and their straw men, many of whom pose as upright citizens.

La Familia, and later Los Caballeros Templarios, are the only cartels that really seem to have a political project of how society should function, using slogans such

[10] Narco-messages are brief communiques written on one or two pieces of pieces of paper, stuck (with an ice pick) to the body of a murder victim belonging to opposing groups or the government itself. For example, "this is what happens to Zetas, sincerely, La Familia.".

[11] In November 2006 La Familia Michoacana paid Michoacán newspapers for two advertising spreads that publicized this narco-message.

[12] Nazario Moreno, alias El Chayo, (it is said) wrote a book entitled *They call me "the craziest"*, which tells his life story and how La Familia Michoacana emerged. For example, he recounts the very interesting story of his childhood, full of hardship and violence, but with an impressive capacity to overcome these difficulties. His discourse is an accurate representation of the regional culture that many men in the region re-create. This aspect can be better understood when I analyze the practices of his criminal organization.

as "silver or lead" (Finnegan 2010). They built a localist ideology of spatial appropriation of the territory of Michoacán ("we will defend the Michoacanos") and a surprising adaptation to the environment and its exploitable resources that, contrastingly, does play discursively with images of the nation as excluded peoples.[13] Finally, they have constructed a policy of building ties to society through financial support, material aid, conflict resolution, etc.., which gives them some legitimacy and tolerance. Campaigns of this type are common in entire regions in order to enable them to operate in strategic territories for drug production and trafficking.

For some time during which Los Caballeros were disputing the territory of Michoacán against other cartels and the federal police, media events were launched showing rapprochement toward the population, showing arrestees, mostly young people, allegedly involved in common crime, who were forced to walk the streets wearing signs on their chests or backs, saying "I am a thief" or "This happened to me because I'm a rapist." The alleged cleanup of common criminals in rural or urban areas spread as one of the most striking actions that sought to preserve the security that the state could not guarantee. To Los Caballeros, the issue of social order is key, given their ideology, and I imagine that it has to do with the representation that is made of the state, in seeing it as a corrupt and weak institution. Therefore, the practice of trying to build parallel orders is not seen as illegal but rather is based on a near mystical principle of Los Caballeros: a religious order Synarchist origin. In extensive areas, they have already managed to build informal orders that are reclaimed by sectors of the population, including businesses.[14]

In summary, between 2006 and 2012, several cartels have emerged to dispute part of the territory. After the disintegration of the El Milenio cartel, La Resistencia emerged, operating in the Ciénega de Chapala to control the movement of drugs toward Jalisco. Later emerged the Jalisco Nueva Generación cartel (CJNG) that has fought over the state. Emerging from the same fracture of El Milenio, we see La Familia Michoacana, which was a combination of Zetas and Los Valencia; similarly, a rather strong crime group called La Empresa emerged, associated with La Familia after its rupture. Later, upon the cleavage of La Familia Michoacana, there arose Los Caballeros Templarios. Currently, this cartel is the dominant group,[15] while some cells of La Familia dominate borderlands with the state of Mexico, and La Resistencia associated with the CJNG disputes territory on the

[13] It is noteworthy that the town of Apatzingán, the main city of the region of Tierra Caliente these cartels were born, served as the main refuge of the Insurgent Movement led by Father Hidalgo in the eighteenth century struggle for national independence. In the same municipality the First Mexican Constitution of 1814 was signed, containing the declaration of national independence.

[14] Reclaiming the order imposed by the Caballeros had its breaking point with the emergence, toward the end of 2012, of several armed groups calling themselves community guards, which fought to banish the cartel members because of the growing excesses that they were causing with their criminal activities. Although there is still much confusion about the nature of these new armed groups, it seems that the political landscape has changed dramatically for drug traffickers and criminals.

[15] It should be noted that since 2013, specifically in 2014, self-defense groups in partnership with the army and the federal police have implemented an organized crime cleanup strategy that has severely fractured the domain of Los Caballeros. In very likely they will wind up regrouping in other criminal organizations.

border with Jalisco. A very bitter struggle is to control the streets at the border with the state of Guanajuato, where at least three cartels are fighting for dominance, apart from incursions into Michoacán of cartels such as El Golfo and the Zetas themselves. In short, between 2006 and 2012, five (5) cartels emerged that are fighting for control of territory and the streets[16] which has led to one of highest rates of homicide and kidnapping or extortion.[17] This is the most tragic paradox that can help us understand why cartels such as Los Templarios cannot be seen simply as a problem of a deficit in democracy or the failure of the regime to eliminate violence. The competition among various political, whether legal and illegal, to replicate practices and discourses of statehood and order has generated a deep space of struggle where cartels, government, and sectors of society do not have clear boundaries of demarcation.

Forced solidarity and silent violence

The strength of the Michoacán cartel and its penetration into different spaces of social, political, and economic life has reformulated lifestyles and esthetics of body (Das 2008), in the context of a deep understanding of the regional culture (Lomnitz 1995) in which criminal groups operate. To begin with, the fact that the La Familia Michoacana cartel adopted this name is no accident. There is an open challenge and distancing from the national government, its rules and civic values the name of "The Family." The notion of "family" as appropriated by the native population refers to a value deeply rooted among the people who live immersed in the drug trade. To refer to it, they say: "There is a lot of government now" or "there's no government in this territory." The La Familia Michoacana cartel used this localist ideology (Lomnitz, ibid.) so regionally ingrained, to present itself as a group of local origin that seeks to protect local society from foreign actors. To accomplish this, it built a strategy of building closer ties to the population through aid, work, security, local justice, etc. Similarly, after the rupture of La Familia, the Caballeros Templarios emerged, which again used regional symbols to achieve greater social acceptance. It is interesting to realize that Los Caballeros reappropriated a symbol of localist ideology related to a historic movement known as Synarchism. This movement inaugurated in the early 1930s was Catholic, nationalist, anti-communist, and national unionist in focus. By the 1960s, Synarchism was revived politically in Michoacán's regions, after a fierce crackdown by the federal government. Its main objective was to contain the supposed communist advance very easily associated with General Lázaro Cárdenas, who had distributed thousands of hectares of land, supported the Cuban Revolution and declared his support for the Leftist movements in Mexico. Since Lázaro Cárdenas was a loyal anti-clericalist and important member of the Masonic Lodges, Synarchism identified him as a figure who had to

[16] For an excellent report on the functioning of the organization and its conflicts in Tierra Caliente, see the work "La República Mariguanera" by Dalia Martínez and Humberto Padgett: http://www.m-x.com.mx/2011-08-07/republica-marihuanera-2/.

[17] See "Territorios violentos," online article. At: http://www.nexos.com.mx/?P=leerarticulov2print&Article=56102.

be politically contained. In this scenario, Michoacán's regional Synarchism resurfaced. These ideological historic struggles have been revived by armed movements that are far removed but culturally similar. El Los Caballeros cartel reappropriate the image of a Great Cross on the chest image of the medieval Templars to identify themselves as a movement that sought to restore public safety and peace. There are certain assumptions that some of their leaders are Masons; in residences that have been seized some Masonic symbols syncretized with other symbols have been found.

The way these ideological practices are translated into everyday life, personal and group relationships, and conflicts over drug crops and trafficking or local sale and consumption of drugs (plant-derived and synthetic) have built a type of forced solidarity among the population. I use this notion to refer to the great complexities that are occurring in villages and families to describe the tensions and conflicts that it generates: for example, to be a town dedicated to the cultivation of drugs, where parents could make their living by tending some small plantings, but whose children are taught in school that the drug is illegal and criminally penalized. At the same time, their adolescents or adult siblings might consume it or might serve as gunmen for a group from the town. These senses of morality are what I think is at the heart of the notion of enforced solidarity. The different forms of alliance and conflict are what I intend to capture when I use the notion, understanding over time how the ties of solidarity among people and families in general are remade. It is a term to describe the limit contained in fact of living under the framework of a single space where lifestyles are contradictorily opposed and often violent.

The forced solidarities that have been woven over several years in these territories are profoundly variable according to circumstances. That is, they are morally relative and situationally defined. To grasp what Veena Das describes about how violence penetrates the temporal structure of social relations (2008), the notion of enforced solidarity is very useful in understanding the challenges people face when confronted with violence itself. How we tolerate and negotiate it, make ourselves invisible, or use it to justify or lend credence to some action. I wish to refer now to a series of transformations that drug violence has wrought in personal and family life during the dominance of the Knights Templar cartel. This is what I will call silent violence.

I had been absent for several months from my fieldwork in the rural town of El Capulín, located in the heart of the Tierra Caliente region of Michoacán, Mexico, when I arrived on the afternoon of September 30, 2011, at the house of Senor Ramiro and his wife Estela. As we began to talk, the conversation immediately turned to focus on violence. For Mr. Ramiro and Ms. Estela, in Tierra Caliente, it's not been too many years since the problem of violence arose in the way they are experiencing that year.[18] Mrs. Estella affirmed categorically, "[H]ere the violence is very silent and it can't be seen but it produces very ugly things." After they told me about a case in which they experienced extortion and the way that had to resort to

[18] Although we must know that it was in this region that the first national campaign against drug trafficking was conducted in 1959 using and infantry battalion. Since then the violence has been systematically (see Maldonado Aranda 2012).

cell of Los Templarios to avoid being taken advantage of, the couple told of other equally dramatic stories showing how violence is experienced in rural villages engaged in drug trafficking.

During our conversation, Ramiro was soon reminded of the way his grandson (the son of one of his older daughters, who did not want to take care of him in the US and so returned him to the village with his grandparents) had died months before our meeting. They associated his death with alcohol and synthetic drugs that were being sold indiscriminately to young people in the village at that time. There was a certain outrage due to the fact that this type of drug can be gotten without any sort of restriction, despite the damage it was causing to young people. In fact, several drug laboratories have been destroyed in the area around nearby villages. These events were not coincidental. Since the La Familia drug cartel controlled the state of Michoacán and later Los Caballeros Templarios, at various locations where their main leaders have lived, there has been a rapid change in the social and moral relations among people. At first, drug sales to young people from the villages were more or less regulated to avoid both visibility of the drug lords as possible interpersonal conflicts, but once the cartels achieved more power, including more than the government itself, its the sale and consumption of drugs spread and diversified. Many residents viewed these practices with great concern, although it was difficult to confront. Organized crime had coopted practically all policing and spaces for the administration of justice.

Thus, the expansion of public sale and consumption of drugs became a routine. Near the town where my friends from El Capulín live, there is technological school attended by hundreds of young people whose drug market has been controlled by a cell of gunmen who live in the village. Given the excess power concentrated in the hands of the drug lords of the Templarios cartel, these criminal cells are given free rein to do their own local business. Thus, they began to sell drugs indiscriminately and openly, even to children. Between the town and the school, there is a constant flow of students: "they don't get out, they drive around slowly, exchanging drugs for money. And then the taxi leaves. It's like that all day." As a result of the above, several conflicting and morally reprehensible situations have been triggered. Drug use among children and adolescents is condemned in rumors and whispers. It's that… the "little girls" (young women) of the town or surrounding area, who are drugged by their own peers and then raped or abused and molested, and "Nobody knows anything!" my informants exclaimed, surprized by such acts. There are similar reactions to the problems of sexually transmitted diseases among young people, but especially those who come from the north, which seems a worrying case for village residents. They talk about young people who become addicted and then go wandering around like "lunatics" in the village.

However, one of the most striking issues is that behind these facts there is a tug of war between certain sectors of the population and the group that is selling drugs in the village. For our informants, as a result of the illegal group's taking control of the drug supply, they began to have problems with car accidents, youth on drugs who raped their own companions or who found themselves pregnant without knowing for sure what happened, etc.; such observations generated a stream of opinion about the consequences the village's youth are suffering thanks to synthetic drugs. To Ramiro

and Estela "what they're selling now is cocaine, and not crystal meth any longer, because it was causing a lot of damage to the people." According to then, the people of the village began started to feel outrage toward the group that was supplying the drugs. Apparently, these rumors reached the ears of traffickers and, according to them, they made a decision to change the type of drug to avoid trouble with the residents. It is even said that Los Caballeros as an organization came to prohibit local sales of synthetic drugs in several places in Michoacán as a way to lessen the criticism and reactions of the population. But contradictorily, several young people working for clandestine laboratories clandestinely supplied drugs. In some cases, even graduates of the technical schools become synthetic drug manufacturers. These types of cases unleashed public complaints from some parents due to the problems with the rape of their teenage daughters, and the police began to investigate such incidents. Along our path to the area around the town, when we talked about life in the village, we saw young "cholos"[19] who were already high, who passed around us singing or shouting while Ramiro cried out to me "Look at them; that's what happens to them when they do crystal meth."

The notion of silent violence, then, is both a local term to refer to the degree of deterioration in everyday relationships and a notion to understand the sordid side of violence. Silent violence is a discourse on the moral ambivalences left behind in the wake of the exercise of violence. I have documented how people construct ways to negotiate, cope with, or avoid violence amid these tensions (Maldonado Aranda 2013). Silent violence, in short, helps us grasp the "grammar of social relations" and the "aesthetic of the senses" as Das has purposed (ibid.).

It must be pointed out that silent violence is part of the routine that rural villages or working-class urban neighborhoods are experiencing daily in the midst of the militarization of public order. The most alarming thing is that, due to the lack of NGOs and alternative state initiatives, it is associations like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or certain liberal pastors of local churches who are taking responsibility for the public health of drug addicts or practices of violence.[20] But contradictorily, AA groups have been taken over by criminal organizations to help support them financially and also to recruit gunmen or to serve as a hiding place for traffickers. Such a thick layer of violence is what the state's order of the crime and violence has produced. As Ramiro himself comments once again, and like others interviewed clandestinely from the same place, concerning the problems they face as farm workers when there are federal or military checkpoints near the town, on the road to the essential oil and lemon juice processing companies that they sell their crops to. In long workdays that start very early in the morning to avoid the midday heat,

[19] A cholo is a male, usually young, who dresses similarly to migrants from the United States: pants or shorts and knee socks with tennis shoes and an American t-shirt.

[20] However, the church has generally maintained a deep silence on the major problems of violence and disappearances. It is said for example, that several members of Los Caballeros prefer to go to the Light of the World Church for communion, instead of the Catholic Church. Light of the World is a very regional historical product of western Mexico, where it was born in the early sixties in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, under the guidance of a priest with strong leadership characteristics who had been expelled from the Catholic Church. The Nueva Jerusalén congregation, in Puruarán, Michoacán, within the region of Tierra Caliente, is a similar case.

farmers hurry to harvest their lemons so they can transport them to the processors. However, the federal or military checkpoints regularly prevent them from reaching these factories thanks to the row of trucks parked on the road. One of the problems this causes is that when the checkpoints slow them down too much, the processors either no longer take their lemons or they buy them at very low prices, because the harvest cannot withstand sitting around for more than one day due the heat. This causes losses for the farmers who go during the day. The outrage against the military forces increases as farmers know that no drug dealer is going to go through these checkpoints. Then, they build their own conspiracy theories about how the only thing the government is trying to do is harass them and not let them work in peace. Indeed, if you look at regions with major drug problems you will find military or police checkpoints at some crossroads or a bend in the road, checking passing vehicles going through at that time of day. The question that many people ask is whether the police or military or are innocent or are they doing it on purpose? Because if there were caravans of drug traffickers or shipments in transit, they would realize where the checkpoints were, given the information systems they've built to ensure that their illicit goods reach their destination. Conversely, and maybe even ironically, people note, for example, that late at night caravans of trucks pass through the small villages, along winding dirt roads—probably carrying drugs—and the police do nothing. Such contradictions are, to the people of the region, a reason to question or to raise criticisms about the true reality of drug trafficking and the war on drugs.

In somewhat more dangerous situations, farmers in Michoacán face violence more directly. In the Sierra, for example, ranchers and farmers have had to keep absolute silence in the face of an "invasion" of the region by unknown people who grow drug crops or install clandestine synthetic drug laboratories along the mountain passes or on the hillsides. Several families were forcibly displaced due to this situation, but others, more numerous, were left to live on their land, turning a blind eye to what happens in the vicinity of their farms. Silence is the main weapon against the violence of organized crime and the state.[21] It is even said that children from a young age are instructed to remain silent if they are ever questioned. Such situations are producing forced solidarity in terms of social inactivity, under which forms of silent violence are interwoven like the flow of underground rivers that feed the roots of a tree.

Like how Asha, a Punjabi woman whom the Partition of India left widowed and who had to face adverse situations as a way of life, incorporating the duel to her everyday life because of her widowhood (Das 2008, 217, passim), I also think of the hundreds or thousands of people who have been subjected to violence, in which the order of the state and organized crime are just the spark that sets off the powder keg of even more raw realities. For Das, one of the most important aspects is how the violence of the Partition of India is integrated into everyday relationships, not in the way of asking how the events of the Partition were *present* as past events but rather how they came to be incorporated into the temporal structure of social relations

[21] The notion of silence does not mean that people end up being indifferent to any situation; rather, it is a strategic way of interacting, discussing or not, listening to rumors or not, as a way to protect themselves.

(2008, 244). That is what we are concerned with when we discuss the importance of the experience of testifying: "that if the way of being with others was brutally wounded, then the past comes into the present, not necessarily as a traumatic memory, but rather as a poisoned knowledge "(ibid). Asha had to endure the absence of her husband, the criticisms of her family, her refusal to live in her home, accusations of being the lover of her similarly widowed brother-in-law, etc. These forms of molding her life to her new realities is what Das calls inquiring about the esthetics of the senses, how to behave in situations that do not give way to rumor, building one's body in a certain manner given widowhood and limiting her comments, where violence reaffirms hierarchies and discourses of domination. This is how I think about part of the problem of violence in Mexico, a poisoned knowledge that has entered the daily life of countless families and villages or cities, forming a new grammar of moral relationships that the militarization of the war on drugs cannot imagine.

Conclusion

In this brief tour, we have realized how part of the criminal violence that afflicts Mexico has been configured, and in particular in the state of Michoacán. First, we see that armed groups such as drug traffickers and organized crime have been part of an economic and political transformation over the longer term, where both the agricultural economy and the drug economy—as economies of extortion, kidnapping or the extraction of rents in the form of taxes—are part of a pattern of accumulation that a Mexican journalist insightfully referred to as tributary despotism.[22] Under these practices, the various regions of Michoacán are experiencing processes of redefining the forms of forest ownership, such as in the Purepecha mesa, which has led to violent ethnic disputes. In the region of Uruapan-Peribán, the transnational avocado economy has generated a profound reorganization of croplands through money laundering and dispossession of land by criminal groups strongly allied with major public figures. Meanwhile, in Tierra Caliente, the agro-exporters who export lemon oil and juice for beverages are subordinate to the direction of peasant organizations whose leaders are probably tied to drug trafficking, and that impose prices, marketing strategies and taxes on production. Criminal actors are not outsiders to the official policy put into practice by the government and the political parties. Therefore, drug traffickers are not "traditional" armed actors, nor the result of failed modernizations in the search for citizenships, but rather a consequence of a regional type of capitalism that has been implanted in more prosperous agricultural exporting regions, where growing drug crops or chemical processing is interwoven with export crops. In this sense, the government and illegality are not separate things; they are part of a model of governmentality whose production of local contingent orders is always reworked through state violence and the criminal world. It is in interconnecting these logics of power where violences generate individualized productions of harm, and very

[22] http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2014/02/11/opinion/017a2pol.

particular types of victimization. Thus, the Caballeros Templarios cartel—which appeared as a result of ruptures and alliances with other cartels—is an organization that allegedly seeks to build a new local order as an alternative to the state, competing with it for legitimacy and the role of supposedly safeguarding public security. Although their methods seem archaic and their leadership figures represent supposedly traditional cultural idiosyncrasies, they are quite familiar with how the logic of transnational capital works. The organization is commonly referred to as their "company," whose methods of extracting rents or taxes, corruption, security, etc., are parallel to the methods of modern neoliberal states. For various sectors of Michoacán, the cartel represents a more effective means of administering justice or bringing order that the state security apparatus cannot give. As a result, in part, state violence and the criminal order generate informal orders that are contingent, to which common people must adapt, resisting the violence generated by these powerful forces, facing it or evading it depending on the specific circumstances in which they are situated as actors. This is what I wanted to capture with the notions of forced solidarities and silent violence.

We would like to end by pointing out that what we have experienced during these long years of struggle against drug trafficking has been a situation that is humanly reprehensible thanks to the number of murders, missing persons, displaced households, etc., provoked unnecessarily by the war. The "collateral damage" of which former president Calderón spoke is so very painful and unquantifiable, and yet there are no civil humanitarian organizations to date that can contribute to alleviate its personal implications. In the medium term, what will the reality of drug trafficking and the effects of the continued effort to eradicate it look like? This is a question hanging in the air, with the hint that the answer is, more tragedy. New problems, unfortunately, are already appearing. After the face-to-face fighting between the army and the drug cartels, since the beginning of the year 2013, an escalating number of armed self-defense groups and community police have been confronting organized crime. In early 2014, the self-defense forces had expanded to nearly half the state of Michoacán, taking control of municipal seats and some villages. Several mayors in office were expelled, and dozens of gunmen arrested. From the beginning, the relationship between the self-defense groups and the Mexican Army has not been clear, but there is already sufficient evidence to say that a strategic alliance has been built to clear the area of crime. Behind the self-defense groups are various political actors as a strong agricultural entrepreneurs affected by the extortion, civilians sectors of the population tired of criminal abuse and others that are more organized such as the Catholic Church and civic organizations. Until that time, the self-defense groups continued to expand to other territories not controlled by them. In the mid-January 2014, it reached a kind of stalemate in which the federal government announced the restoration of the state of Michoacán through a strategy of safety and development. Projects involving millions of pesos in government investment were announced. The self-defense groups were "legalized" by means of an outdated law military called the Rural Defense Corps, and they have been registered with the Mexican Army, along with their weapons, to try to create local police forces. However, although it has been split into Los Caballeros Templarios cartel, things are not very clear in the short term.

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