

Anthropos

*Revija za filozofijo
in psihologijo*
*Journal of Philosophy
& Psychology*

LETO • YEAR 2025

LETNIK • VOLUME 57

ŠTEVILKA • NUMBER 1

ISSN 0587-5161

E-ISSN 2630-4082

57

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Revija za filozofijo in psihologijo
Journal of Philosophy & Psychology

ISSN 0587-5161 | E-ISSN 2630-4082
<https://hippocampus.si/issn/2630-4082>

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Guidelines for Authors and Publishing Ethics
and Malpractice Statement are available at
<https://hippocampus.si/issn/2630-4082>

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UP Pedagoška fakulteta, Cankarjeva 5,
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Založba Univerze na Primorskem

University of Primorska Press

Titov trg 4, SI-6000 Koper
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Tisk · Grafika 3000

Naklada · 150 izvodov

Letna naročnina · 20 EUR

Revija *Anthropos* izdajata Slovensko
filozofsko društvo in Društvo psihologov
Slovenije, izhaja s podporo Javne agencije
za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko
dejavnost Republike Slovenije in Pedagoške
fakultete Univerze na Primorskem.

Anthropos is published by the Slovenian
Philosophical Society and Slovenian
Psychologists' Association with the support
of the Slovene Research and Innovation
Agency and University of Primorska,
Faculty of Education.

Kazalo Contents

Introduction

Marina Gržinić · 5

Necrocapitalism, War, Colonialism, Latin America

Economy of Death: The Grey Zone, Cannibal War Machine
and Capitalist Accumulation in Latin America

Antonio Fuentes Díaz and Panagiotis Doulos · 17

Militias, Factions, and Precariousness: Notes on Living Conditions
in the City of Rio de Janeiro Outskirts

*Lia de Mattos Rocha, Monique Batista Carvalho,
and Jonathan da Motta* · 35

Creating a Testimony of the Unspeakable: Testimonial Injustice,
Affects and Political Mobilization of Indigenous Women in México

Natalia De Marinis · 55

Crime, Women and Information and Communications Technologies:
Everyday Management of Insecurity in Santiago and Buenos Aires

Brenda Focas and Alejandra Luneke · 77

The Narconovela and Crime in Colombia:

40 Years after *La Mala Hierba*

Carolina Galindo · 99

The Mapuche People in Vaca Muerta, Argentina:

Between Criminalization and Anti-Extractivist

Resistance Aesthetics

Melisa Cabrapan Duarte · 119

Miscellanea

Recenzija | Danilo Šuster, *Modalni katapulti: uvod v filozofsko logiko*


Marija Švajncer · 145

Introduction

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The dossier presented here, compiled by Antonio Fuentes Díaz, is the result of an invitation I extended during my work on the topic of conflicts in the years 2023 to 2024. I had originally asked Fuentes Díaz for a contribution, but what I received far exceeded that expectation – a powerful, conceptually dense, and deeply analytical wholesale of six contributions from Latin American academics, theoreticians, etc., exploring the violent restructuring of key socio-political concepts. These contributions traverse the complex terrain of state power, capitalism, and necropolitics while examining struggles for Indigenous peoples' rights, the systemic logic of extractivism, and the entangled dynamics of feminicide, criminal economies, and drug trafficking.

It is also important for us to emphasize the double and divergent meanings of femicide and feminicide used in the contributions. In Europe, femicide has often been treated primarily as an extreme form of gender-based violence, typically in the context of intimate partner violence. It is seen as an individual crime, often based on personal motives such as jealousy or control. In contrast, the Latin American concept of feminicide emphasizes that these murders are not just isolated or private acts, but that they are part of a broader system of structural and systemic gender-based violence. Feminicide points to the social conditions that allow such violence to go unpunished, such as misogyny, machismo, poverty, organized crime, and patriarchal norms that are entrenched in both the public and private spheres. Feminicide that has come into the theoretical, critical, and activist political vocabularies developed in Latin America, particularly in México in the 1990s, broadens and deepens the meaning of femicide and introduces critical political and structural dimensions that have a significant impact on how the issue is understood globally, including in Europe. For example, indigenous women, migrant women, and women living in impoverished areas are at higher risk and are often systematically neglected. It demands accountability from institutions

and makes the death of women a human rights issue and not just a criminal matter. Particularly noteworthy is the dossier's ability to show how these phenomena, often dismissed as pathologies of the Global South or anomalies far from Europe, actually prove to be structurally embedded in global formations of sovereignty, governance, and economic extraction. These processes do not remain peripheral but increasingly inform and reflect internal developments within Western nations, particularly how formal state structures and criminal systems interlock and reinforce each other to ensure the continuity of extractivist profit and systemic control.

I owe special thanks to my colleague Dr. Jovita Pristovšek, who was instrumental in formatting and preparing the texts according to *Anthropos*' publication requirements. I would also like to thank Dr. Tomaž Grušovnik and Alen Ježovnik for their unconditional support in publishing the proposed set of texts and for their confidence in the project, which paved the way for its acceptance. To all those involved in the publication of *Anthropos*, from English proofreading to the designer, I must express my heartfelt thanks.

Finally, this project received the full support of Dr. Nina Cvar, the newly appointed editor of *Anthropos*, whose vision coincided with the radical and theoretical core of the dossier.

This collection provides a foundational platform for what I call 'seminal texts of rigour' – contributions that span disciplines such as philosophy, social theory, political aesthetics, sociology, and the humanities more broadly. It creates a critical space for theoretical and political engagement in Slovenia, where such contributions often struggle to find publication.

The Structure of the Edited Thematic Issue

This edited thematic issue of *Anthropos* opens with Antonio Fuentes Díaz and Panagiotis Doulos' text, 'Economy of Death: The Grey Zone, Cannibal War Machine and Capitalist Accumulation in Latin America,' a fundamental analysis of México's socio-political landscape. Rather than simply describing state violence or coercion, the authors examine the intricate relationships between the global necrocapitalist system and the hybrid governance of the state. They argue that since the 1980s, Latin America has served as a testing ground for neoliberal deregulation facilitated by agreements such as GATT and NAFTA.

This context allowed for the convergence of state and criminal enterprises, leading to what the authors call 'hybrid governance' – a shared sovereignty in which the state relinquishes its monopoly on legitimate

coercion in favour of complicity with criminal organizations. The authors highlight the role of ‘criminal capital’ in shaping today’s political economies. This capital thrives on mechanisms of extortion and rent extraction, in which rent, whether through normalized tax systems or criminalized extraction, becomes a central axis of value production. In this framework, capital accumulation depends on the exploitation of resources and populations, creating an economy based on violence and systemic oppression. The authors suggest that this ‘criminal accumulation’ works by dissolving the boundaries between legal and illegal activities, creating ambiguous zones where lawlessness and profitability coexist. These grey zones foster ‘shared sovereignties’ in which state authority is intertwined with criminal organizations, enabling the extraction of resources, income, and even human lives through systematic violence. At the centre of this framework is the concept of the ‘cannibal war machine,’ a mechanism that uses violence not only as a tool of control, but as a method to generate profit and maintain power structures. This process fits seamlessly into the logic of neoliberal capitalism, in which the pursuit of value overrides ethical and legal restrictions. In its extreme form, ‘criminal capital’ embodies the nihilistic core of capitalist logic. It reduces human and material resources to commodities that are exploited in the relentless pursuit of profit.

By analysing these dynamics in the Mexican context, the article demonstrates that criminal machinations are not an aberration but a structural feature of global neoliberalism. It emphasizes the need to rethink the intersections of legality, sovereignty, and violence to understand contemporary systems of power and exploitation. This system reflects the crude logic of value – a stark reminder of how deeply global capitalism is interwoven with mechanisms of death and destruction. This text explores the interplay between extortion, criminal leadership, and contemporary capitalism in México, arguing that criminal activity is integral to contemporary forms of capital accumulation. In the Latin American context, this manifests itself in the ‘economy of death,’ in which value is extracted through the commodification of life and the perpetuation of conflict, embodied by the cannibalistic war machine of drug cartels and criminal groups.

Lia de Mattos Rocha, Monique Batista Carvalho, and Jonathan da Motta, in ‘Milicias, Factions, and Precariousness: Notes on Living Conditions in the City of Rio de Janeiro Outskirts’ examine the complex dynamics of territorial control by armed groups in Rio de Janeiro, partic-

ularly militias and criminal groups, focusing on the outskirts of the city, of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The text places criminal capital in stark contrast to the idealized notions of 'social capital' propagated in the 1990s, revealing the brutal reality that capital serves primarily to enrich those who control production and privatized public goods. The study identifies key variables such as the type of group that controls a particular territory, the degree of territorial dominance, the forms of presence of these groups, and their relations with the local population. Using this framework, the study shows the complicated ways in which armed groups shape daily life and influence patterns of sociability, mobility, and access to resources. The authors argue that these dynamics are not isolated phenomena, but structural features of urban life in Rio's periphery. The control exercised by militias and groups leads to chronic insecurity characterized by violence, fear, and lack of institutional support. This precarity perpetuates cycles of inequality and exclusion and further strengthens the power of armed groups in these areas.

The study examines four key dimensions: the type of armed group operating in each area, the extent and nature of territorial dominance, the nature of their spatial and institutional presence, and their mode of collaboration with the local population. The results show that these armed groups are not only violent actors, but also act as quasi-governmental entities that shape local sociability, regulate mobility, and mediate access to essential services in the absence of the state, or with its complicity. This *de facto* governance leads to a state of chronic insecurity in which residents live in a constant 'state of siege' characterized by surveillance, fear, and fluctuating regimes of order and coercion. By foregrounding the lived experiences of communities under armed control, the study contributes to critical debates about informal governance, urban violence and the interplay of legality and illegality in shaping life on the margins of the city. It calls for an urgent rethinking of public policy that aligns with the realities of those for whom the line between state and non-state power is increasingly blurred. Through this analytical lens, the paper elaborates on how these armed actors not only occupy space but actively shape the urban landscape by structuring everyday life, regulating freedom of movement, shaping the informal economy, and mediating access to basic resources such as water, electricity, housing, and even justice. Such contradictory roles blur the boundaries between crime, governance, and survival and embed the power of armed actors in the social and affective fabric of community life. The authors, therefore, argue that the urban peripheries

should not only be seen as places where the state is absent, but as spaces with multiple sovereignties where legality, illegality, and informality are constantly negotiated. The consequences of this fragmented sovereignty are profound: cycles of inequality are deepened, democratic accountability is eroded, and the urban poor are trapped in a web of conditional allegiances, enforced dependencies, and systemic neglect. Ultimately, this article sheds crucial light on the fact that armed territorial control is not a marginal issue, but a defining feature of contemporary urbanity in Rio de Janeiro. The conditions described – violence, fragmented authority, and the institutionalization of insecurity – resonate far beyond Brazil, offering a critical perspective on urban governance and social life in an age of neoliberal dispossession and securitized development.

Natalia De Marinis takes us ‘back’ to México in her contribution, ‘Creating a Testimony of the Unspeakable: Testimonial Injustice, Affects and Political Mobilization of Indigenous Women in México.’ This article critically examines how testimonial practices are shaped by intersecting structures of ethnicity, gender, and class that determine whose voices are heard, believed, and recognized. Drawing on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Zongolica region of the Gulf of México, the study focuses on the experiences of Indigenous women, whose accounts of violence are often dismissed, their credibility questioned, and their suffering made invisible. From the perspective of the injustice of testimony, the article examines the systematic silencing of these women and the epistemic violence that marginalizes their experiences from public view. At the same time, the article highlights the powerful strategies that Indigenous women and their communities have developed to reclaim their voice and agency. By developing alternative forms of witnessing rooted in affect, memory, and collective experience, they are not only resisting erasure but also creating pathways to truth-telling, solidarity, and justice.

Amid escalating violence in México since the beginning of the war on drug trafficking in 2007, victim testimonies have emerged as important tools to confront societal indifference, challenge state narratives, and promote commemoration and reparation practices. While such testimonies play a crucial role in resisting impunity and reclaiming agency, the process of constructing and legitimizing these narratives is anything but neutral. These counter-narratives challenge the hegemonic framework of victimhood and open up new possibilities for political mobilization in the face of militarization, criminality, and state neglect.

De Marinis conceptualizes the injustice of testimony not simply as the

denial of a speaker's credibility, but as a structural and affective condition that delegitimizes the ability of Indigenous women to speak about violence, dispossession, and trauma in a way that is recognized by hegemonic systems of knowledge and justice. These forms of silence are often naturalized by racialized, gendered, and colonial assumptions that portray Indigenous women as either passive victims or bearers of 'non-modern' knowledge that is unsuitable for political rationality or legal recognition. However, De Marinis does not view this condition merely as a site of loss, but explores how Indigenous women mobilize affects, memories, and embodied forms of storytelling to articulate political demands and contest their exclusion. These alternative forms of testimony become tools of action and resistance that forge communal solidarities and reconfigure the terrain of political struggle. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and situated feminist epistemologies, De Marinis shows how testimonies – exchanged in community gatherings, rituals, or grassroots legal forums – function as sites of affective reparation and collective healing while destabilizing normative notions of truth, justice, and legitimacy. This process is not without tensions, as it must overcome the extractive gaze of institutions and the risk of re-traumatization. Nonetheless, these testimonies offer a form of 'speaking with' rather than just speaking for, emphasizing relationality and the creation of shared political horizons. De Marinis's essay represents a decolonial feminist critique that emphasizes the power of Indigenous women to reclaim the narrative space from which they were historically excluded. Their testimonies, situated at the intersection of pain and political action, challenge epistemic hierarchies and demand the right to be heard on their own terms, not just as objects of pity, but as active political subjects capable of changing the social and affective conditions of justice.

Brenda Focas and Alejandra Luneke, in their study, 'Crime, Women and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs): Everyday Management of Insecurity in Santiago and Buenos Aires,' explore further the gendered dynamics of urban insecurity in Santiago, Chile, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, focusing on how young women navigate and manage everyday experiences of violence and fear through digital and embodied strategies. We shift the focus from México to the vast territory of Latin America. Beyond macro-level analyses of organized crime, the study foregrounds the micropolitics of insecurity, particularly street harassment and sexual violence, and its impact on women's mobility, access to public space, and social participation. The study also highlights the

role of information and communications technologies (ICT) as risk management tools and platforms for collective solidarity. From neighbourhood WhatsApp groups to social media alerts, these technologies mediate women's responses to urban violence and enable information sharing, emotional support, and grassroots monitoring. However, the authors warn that these digital practices can also reinforce fears and exclusionary dynamics, particularly in contexts where state protection is perceived as absent or unreliable. By situating these everyday practices within broader structures of territorial control, urban marginalization, and informal governance, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between violence, gender, and technology in contemporary urban life. It calls for a rethinking of urban policy that focuses on the lived experiences of women and addresses the causes of fear and exclusion in the marginalized areas of Latin American cities.

The constant dissemination of warnings and news about crime and violence can reinforce a 'digital atmosphere of fear' that heightens perceptions of danger and induces overprotective behaviour, especially among women who already bear the burden of dealing with gender-based violence in public and private spaces. Furthermore, these platforms often mirror and reproduce social and spatial inequalities. Access to ICTs, the power to define what constitutes a 'threat' and the power to mobilize responses are unequally distributed. The authors note that racist and class-based assumptions often determine how certain bodies or behaviours are categorized as suspicious, which can lead to dynamics of exclusion, securitization, and moral panic. The article urges readers to reconsider the portrayal of ICTs as neutral or inherently democratizing tools. Instead, Focas and Luneke argue for a critical feminist approach that considers the affective, political and social dimensions of digital security practices. They argue that women's engagement with these technologies is deeply embedded in broader structures of insecurity, inequality and institutional absence – and that these digital strategies represent both a coping mechanism and a critique of state failures to protect vulnerable populations.

Carolina Galindo reflects on the influence of television and the mode of telenovelas in 'The Narconovela and Crime in Colombia: 40 Years after *La Mala Hierba*.' This article examines the emergence of the narconovela genre in Colombia, taking as its starting point the early and controversial television soap opera *La mala hierba* (*The Evil Weed*), which aired in the early 1980s. Through a detailed analysis of the public reception of the series and the media discourse of the time, the study traces the fundamental

role of *La mala hierba* in shaping the narrative and aesthetic framework that would later define the narconovela genre. By placing the soap opera in its historical and socio-political context, the article examines how early depictions of drug trafficking began to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, spectacle and critique. Galindo examines the evolution of the genre and questions its politics of representation, aesthetic changes, and its role in shaping national ideas of crime, power, and identity.

The essay begins by establishing *La mala hierba* as a foundational text in the genealogy of Colombian narconarratives, marking a pivotal moment in which drug trafficking emerged not only as a social and political reality but also as a powerful cultural trope. Galindo traces how the early narconovelas captured the ambiguity of the drug trade, its allure and its violence, its promises of social mobility, and its disruption of traditional class and power structures. These early stories often reflected the blurred morals of a society struggling with the normalization of corruption, impunity, and extralegal authority.

Galindo examines how such cultural products contributed to the symbolic legitimization of criminality and offered complex representations that both reflected and shaped public understandings of power, violence, and aspiration in Colombian society. Furthermore, the article draws connections between *La mala hierba* and contemporary versions of the narconovela, considering its role in the broader Latin American media landscape and its impact on the normalization and commercialization of narcoculture. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the political and ethical implications of crime-based narratives in popular media and how these narratives shape collective memory, national identity, and social conceptions of crime. Galindo critically assesses the massification and commercialization of the narconovela on television, streaming platforms, and in popular fiction. The contemporary versions – highly stylized, dramatized, and often sensationalized – have transformed the genre into a transnational media phenomenon. Galindo points out, however, that these newer narratives often trade complexity for spectacle and reduce systemic violence to personalized dramas of revenge, desire, and betrayal.

Galindo engages with key theoretical debates about aestheticization and complicity, questioning whether the narconovela continues to offer critical insights or whether it has been complicit in glorifying violence and reinforcing harmful stereotypes. She notes that while some contemporary works attempt to question the complicity of the state, paramili-

tarism, or US imperialism, many others contribute to a moralizing narrative that individualizes crime and presents criminality as a pathology rather than a symptom. Importantly, Galindo also emphasizes the gendered dimension of the narconovela. Over time, the figure of the narcowoman has evolved from a peripheral role to a central figure. However, even in an empowered position, these representations often reproduce patriarchal logics, emphasizing beauty, seduction, and tragic downfall, without questioning the deeper gendered structures of narco-capitalism. Galindo concludes her analysis by noting that the narconovela remains an important cultural archive for understanding how Colombians, and increasingly global audiences, confront, process, and narrate the entanglements of criminality, state power, and neoliberal precarity. Forty years after *La mala hierba*, the genre is not only a reflection of evolving national anxieties but also a contested battleground for the politics of memory, representation, and resistance.

The final contribution by Melisa Cabrapan Duarte, ‘The Mapuche People in Vaca Muerta, Argentina: Between Criminalization and Anti-Extractivist Resistance Aesthetics,’ examines the socio-environmental conflict surrounding Vaca Muerta, a major hydrocarbon extraction site in northern Patagonia, Argentina, and its profound impact on Indigenous Mapuche communities in the region. As fracking activities expand under the national and international energy agenda, the Mapuche, particularly those organized in the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko of the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén, have become central actors of resistance against the encroachment of extractivists on their ancestral lands. The study focuses on the criminalization and repression to which the Mapuche communities are exposed due to their resistance to fracking. It shows how state and corporate actors mobilize legal and media frameworks to delegitimize Indigenous resistance. At the same time, the article explores the emerging political aesthetics of the struggle against fracking and shows how these communities mobilize cultural expressions, collective memory, and territorial practices, particularly through intercommunal alliances, to reclaim agency and articulate alternative futures.

By situating Mapuche resistance within broader debates about environmental justice, Indigenous sovereignty, and state violence, the article helps to elucidate how grassroots movements not only challenge extractivism but also create new spaces of visibility and political action. In doing so, it underscores the urgent need to recognize Indigenous struggles

as both epistemic and territorial, and as central to the vision of a sustainable and decolonial future in Latin America.

I am impressed by this analytical and profound investigation, which allows us to reflect at length on the hyper-neoliberal system of contemporary Slovenia, currently led by a turbo-neoliberal vision of the Slovenian liberal party 'The Freedom Movement,' which has replaced a strongly right-wing despotic predecessor, the Slovenian Democratic Party. This ousted right-wing party currently sits in opposition in parliament and has an army of supporters representing 25 percent of all eligible voters in Slovenia waiting for the new parliamentary elections. And finally, the despotic figure of the former right, now given even more impetus by Trump and the right-wing ideological ballast of the right-wing, corrupt EU government (just think of the hidden and criminal vaccine deals), will open up a space in which what we present here as a theoretical discourse from Latin America will become more and more of a visible reality in Europe.

*Necrocapitalism, War, Colonialism,
Latin America*

Economy of Death: The Grey Zone, Cannibal War Machine and Capitalist Accumulation in Latin America

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Abstract. This article argues, based on the analysis of extortion and criminal governance in México, that criminal activities should be understood as a key component of contemporary capital accumulation. This criminal accumulation of capital requires the suspension of restrictions on illegal activities, generating zones of legal-illegal indistinction that allow profitability, shared sovereignties and cannibal war machines that, through violence, generate the extraction of goods, income and bodies in line with the neoliberal enterprise. This means that criminal capital carries out, in an extreme and nihilistic way, the logic of value.

Key Words: extortion, criminal governance, criminal capitalism, war machine, economy of death, neoliberalism, Latin America

Ekonomija smrti: siva cona, kanibalski vojni stroj in kapitalistično kopičenje v Latinski Ameriki

Povzetek. Na podlagi analize izsiljevanja in kriminalnega upravljanja v Mehiki članek zagovarja tezo, da kriminalne dejavnosti predstavljajo ključno sestavino sodobnega kapitalističnega kopičenja. Takšno kopičenje kapitala v kriminalnih okvirih zahteva odpravo omejitev za nezakonite dejavnosti, kar ustvarja območja, kjer se meja med zakonitim in nezakonitim zabiše. To omogoča profitabilnost, deljene suverenosti in kanibalske vojne stroje, ki preko nasilja omogočajo ekstrakcijo dobrin, dohodkov in teles v skladu z neoliberalno logiko podjetništva. Članek ugotavlja, da kriminalni kapital na skrajni in nihilističen način udejanja logiko vrednosti.

Ključne besede: izsiljevanje, kriminalno upravljanje, kriminalni kapitalizem, vojni stroj, ekonomija smrti, neoliberalizem, Latinska Amerika

Introduction: From Drug Trafficking to Organized Crime

The phenomenon of drug trafficking in México and other Latin American regions is complex, given the territorial particularities of the different contexts in which it occurs. In México, it was consolidated between 1940 and 1980, creating a corridor of psychotropic substances from the Pacific to the United States. In the 1990s, its form of operation changed, mainly due to three factors: (1) free market policies following the signing of trade agreements – the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1982 (GATT) and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 – which favoured the trafficking of illegal substances and the transnationalization of drug trafficking; (2) the state's shift towards deregulation of previously coordinated activities, which suspended its central intervention in the management of legalism, leaving it to self-regulation; and (3) the modification of Article 115 of México's Political Constitution, which gave local state governments and municipalities greater control over the administration of federal resources, allowing the rise of local crime-linked groups into governmental structures. These changes allow us to understand the transition from the traditional profile of drug trafficking to global and diversified corporations competing for specific niches. This is the phase towards which the war against drug trafficking was directed.

At least two phenomena have been observed in recent decades regarding this illicit enterprise. The first would be the diversification of activities beyond the cultivation and trafficking of illegal substances, to which its commercial operations have been extended. The second is the predatory way in which the implementation of this diversification has been carried out, which explains, to some extent, the extreme violence in the struggle for markets, territorial control, and its resulting high lethality (Fuentes Díaz 2022, 38–58).

In the case of México, the transformation of drug trafficking groups – from engaging primarily in the production and distribution of illicit substances to functioning as transnational corporations – occurred in parallel with the shift of the post-revolutionary welfare state, which had emerged from the 1910 social revolt, toward neoliberal economic deregulation during the 1980s. This is important because it allows us to understand the emergence of new regulatory actors beyond the state who began to establish territorial controls based on their criminal entrepreneurship.

These transformations enabled the consolidation of groups that generated profits in the form of rents beyond drug trafficking, thereby creating environments conducive to the extraction of resources from a multitude of criminal activities, including kidnappings, illegal logging, mineral extraction, illicit gasoline and gas extraction, human trafficking for sexual exploitation and slave labour, and migrant smuggling, among others. This led to the control of territories for the commercialization and circulation of illicit commodities in dispute or negotiation with the state (hybrid governance), as well as the generalized use of predatory behaviour marked by extorsive practices. These two phenomena, governance and extortion, will be the focus of our examination of criminality and its relationship with capital accumulation.

Hybrid Governance/Criminal Governance

A variety of non-state actors, including criminal groups, have produced new forms of social control by establishing a mix of coercion and consensus (Sampó, Jenne and Ferreira 2023) – coercion against rival groups, consensus on the communities where they deploy their operations – which allows advantages in the profitability of their criminal ventures. This behaviour has been documented in other regions of Latin America, and can be thought of as transformations that shape criminal activities as a functional form of the political economy of capitalism.

The term ‘criminal governance’ (Arias 2017) has been used to refer to the involvement of criminal groups in the coercive capacity to exercise authority and impose rules and standards of conduct in a given environment, offering public services and goods to build their legitimacy, as well as sanctioning challenges or competition to their authority.

This form of government has made it possible to complexify the understanding of the production of political order through the coercion exerted by these non-state actors, which challenge, replace or complement the state, producing shared sovereignties (Mbembe 2003) and hybrid governances (Villa, de Macedo Braga, and Ferreira, 2021). These relationships allow us to observe that, in some geographies, the state has abandoned its locus as the exclusive centre of the legitimate monopoly of coercion and sovereignty – perhaps this locus was never such – as the emergence of multiple regulatory authorities, disputes over sovereignty and, above all, the distancing from the public good has been documented, configuring new statehoods.

The logic of accumulation requires the use of illegal practices as prof-

itable resources, being used by various actors – not only criminals – which forms networks of complicity under illegality between the state, business and criminal groups, operating in different territorial extensions and with different degrees of influence in the formal government structures (Vázquez Valencia 2019), linking state institutions, parties, political leaders, de facto powers and economic elites (Terán Mantovani 2021), which creates indistinguishable zones between the state and crime, networks of hegemonic power that merge legal and illegal activities.

These links have historical particularity and have accompanied the construction of the state (Pansters 2012). One hypothesis we are working with today is that these indistinctions between legal and illegal activities, state-crime, have found favourable conditions since neoliberal deregulation as a new form of the global state, with greater accentuations according to its own particularities, generating a multiplication of ‘grey zones’ (Fuentes Díaz and Fini 2021) that amalgamate criminal and state actors in the imposition of orders that simultaneously allow social regulation, but above all the extraction of resources under illegal practices.¹ In this sense, this criminal governance is fundamentally necessary for profitability (Lerch Huacuja 2024, 33). The expansion of these criminal networks in the region must be understood within the framework of a broader global process. We note here a first outline of a political economy of crime.

Extortion

The majority of the population in the region experiences organized crime not only through lethal and spectacular actions, but above all through daily victimization associated with extortion (Moncada 2021). Extortion is one of those illicit markets in which criminal actors obtain profits through the threat and/or use of coercion, in some contexts, in exchange for the promise of protection or preservation of the life or physical integrity of the victims. The forms it takes include security fees, percentage payments for products from export companies, ransom payments for kidnappings, parafiscal taxes for commercial activities, appropriation of municipal resources, and even payment in kind. An overview of extortion in some Latin American countries shows that it is an increasing ac-

¹ We have referred to this elsewhere as the articulation of a ‘dispositif of the extraction and regulation of redundancy’ (see Fuentes Díaz 2022, 51). On the other hand, it is no coincidence that these phenomena approach what Agamben (1998) considered the zone of indistinction between law and exception.

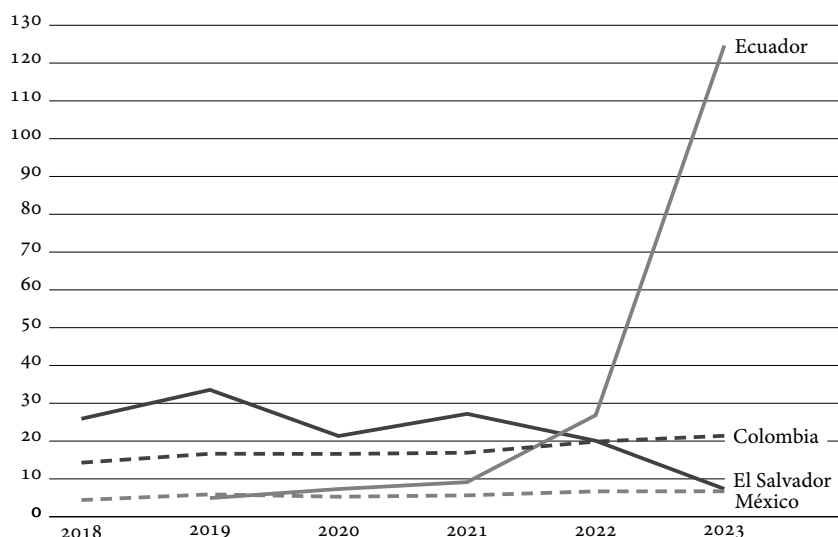


Figure 1 Extortion Rates per 100,000 Inhabitants, 2018–2023

NOTES Based on data from Observatorio Ecuatoriano de Crimen Organizado (2023) and Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (2024).

tivity with different degrees of regional intensity (figure 1). Profits from extortion crimes in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador have reached around US\$1.1 billion annually, with at least 330,000 people being victims of extortion each year (Yansura et al. 2021). In México, reports from the Bank of México (Banco de México 2019) claim that extortion of businesses and services has been increasing since 2015, with a high number of unreported crimes.

We believe that the important role that extortion took on in criminal activities was made possible by at least two moments: the international policies to combat criminal organizations and the fall in international prices for illicit crops, which reduced the high profits obtained by them in the international illegal market. These facts, among others, favoured the shift towards a broad diversification of highly profitable criminal activities, which was accompanied by the emergence of predatory behaviour.

This shift also involved specific forms of governance where extortion finds a place. Criminal organizations involved on illicit crops (marijuana, opium, coca leaves) implemented a model of regulation of social life based on the distribution of economic benefits and public services (such as schools, roads, administration of justice) to the social base used in such activities. In doing so, they established protective relationships with the

labour force employed in these illegal Ventures – following a redistributive logic that, in some ways, resembled the principles of a welfare state (Azula Díaz del Castillo 2017).

The shift towards the diversification of profitable illicit activities, as well as the growing importance of the marketing of synthetic drugs (methamphetamine, fentanyl) has made it unnecessary to take care of the workforce for such criminal ventures, becoming predatory on a social basis based on the search for profitability that has established extortion as a way to achieve it.

In this way, extortion – at least in some Latin American geographies – was accompanied by a breakdown in reciprocity between criminals, the state and communities, which enabled an increase in predatory behaviour necessary to obtain it through the use or threat of coercion. It is no coincidence that a series of movements – including armed ones – have emerged against extortion and other crimes in various Latin American contexts to confront the criminal groups that practice it (Fuentes Díaz and Fini 2021; Moncada 2021, 23).

Extortion, Rent Income and Violence

Extortion is a practice of appropriation of resources that takes the form of rent. According to Marx (1993), rent income is produced when revenue is generated from environments that have not been directly involved in the production cycle of goods – as in the case of ownership of land or scarce natural resources such as water, oil, metals, and minerals.

Thus, some resources, without being part of the direct process of production of goods, generate wealth by being appropriated and incorporated into the flow of social surplus value produced in other spheres. This appropriation of environments external to the production cycle ends up generating profit by being inserted into the cycle of valorization of the commodity form.

Marx's analysis is focused on the land, but it is possible to conclude that there are other areas related to the control of territory that generate rents. What is common to all of them is the extraction of resources, which occurs without interference in their productive cycle. The concept of rent can be defined as the appropriation of profits without the appropriator intervening in the organization of production. This is to say that rent is the extraction of profits from a social cooperation to which the appropriator does not contribute.

We will see later that this form of appropriation is not an anomaly or

externality in the production of profits, but rather an operational form of predatory accumulation of capital, which is reinvested in the circuits of the legal and financial economy and in the maintenance of the armed groups themselves. In this sense, extortionate rent is similar to state taxes, which take the form of rent, appropriating social surplus value for the construction of political order. In this sense, extortionate rent is linked to the production of order and criminal governance.

As rent and extortion are two phenomena that share a similar constitution, they can be considered to be part of the same category of extractive activities. It is for this reason that the process of extraction should be considered a significant aspect of global capital accumulation, which encompasses a diverse range of activities including commodity-based extractive industries, those reliant on the use of data and information (platform capitalism), the global financial system, and even the extraction of rent from criminal operations, among others (Gago and Mezzadra 2017).

In this way, criminal forms of extraction – including the appropriation and commercialization of so-called natural resources – are fundamental manifestations of the political economy of capital (Terán 2021). A significant fraction of its overall composition is involved in illicit and clandestine activities that allow for extraordinary profits from this condition (Covarrubias 2020).

In documented cases across Latin America, criminal organizations have been directly involved in participating in different forms of extraction and commercialization of commodities. These activities pose fewer risks compared to drug trafficking and offer a wide range of opportunities for money laundering – such as gold mining, trafficking in timber, wildlife, and aquatic species, as well as the extraction of iron, coal, diamonds, oil, and land grabbing. In México, some criminal groups have acted as the armed wing of mining companies in order to weaken community resistance to their extractive projects; in other cases, they extort both companies and the populations that eventually benefit from such situations, generating a double rent: extortive and extractive. In Brazil, the so-called militias have been involved in a series of extortive rents, but also in the illegal appropriation of sandscapes that they sell to construction companies associated with them, controlling the entire chain of illegal real estate development (Müller 2024).

All these extraction events generate homicides, rapes, forced displacements, injuries, disappearances and racial and gender discrimination. In this sense we can argue that the tendency towards rent, as a central com-

ponent of capital accumulation, requires violence. Rent denotes a ‘predatory accumulation’ of capital (Bourgois 2018) – a contemporary expression of primitive accumulation (Marx 1982) – which has been able to capitalize on the labour of lumpenized populations expelled from the legitimate economy, even profiting from their death, assuming the extreme realization of the logic of value. Gareth Williams (2021) has identified two tendencies of this accumulation: one that projects itself towards the absolutization of the commodity form and surplus value, and one that simultaneously aims at the minimization of the value of labour, in a way close to what Achille Mbembe (2003) places as necropolitics. In this, the tendency towards rent plays a central role.

For criminal capitalism to take place, it needs to be intertwined with legal capital, for example, in the international financial system through money laundering, and requires a relationship with the state to maintain the definition of illegality. This relationship, which we have called the ‘grey zone,’ de facto blurs the artificial distinction between legal and illegal activities as patterns of predatory accumulation, widening the grey zones and generating macro-criminality networks based on profitability. Illicit merchandise thus requires dispensing with the legal restrictions produced by the modern state form, centred on legality, sovereignty and the monopoly of legitimate coercion in the state. This lack of restriction breaks the metaphysical structures of political theology under which the modern state would have been built, imploding the distinction between *nomos* and *anomie* (Williams 2021, 121).

This interregnum requires hybrid governance – criminal governance – states of exception, security policies, and deterritorialization. Hybrid forms of governance would be a moment of capital that needs to suspend legality to complete its circuit of predatory accumulation. In this sense, the legal-illegal dichotomy as a framework for the legitimacy of the modern state, as well as the notion of the rule of law, cease to be fundamental discursive forms of social coordination – if they ever were.

On the other hand, the coexistence of multiple sovereign entities is contingent upon the absence of assurances regarding economic and social rights for a significant proportion of the population, which the state is unable to provide in light of its embrace of neoliberal deregulation, where flexible labour and the predatory form of accumulation increase situations of uncertainty for social reproduction – as in periods of economic crisis – and the production of superfluous population. The conditions that mediated conflict and social mobility based on wages have vanished,

and governability has been deferred to other instances – NGOs, civil associations, and supranational institutions.

In this sense, the narrative framework from which the sovereign discourse and social defence were built tends to dilute its central axis in the state. This dilution becomes greater when the state itself generates and collaborates with the production of insecurity and grey zones. Therefore, the new form of the state is incapable of upholding its own sovereign theoretical core, namely, the provision of public welfare and the externalization of danger in the designated spheres, as envisioned in *the state of nature* of the Hobbesian model of sovereignty. It is no coincidence that nativist, essentialist or localist discourses are the ones that gain legitimacy for the production of an order that contains the predatory flow. Vignettes on the construction of ‘walls’ are eloquent.

In this framework of accumulation and new regulation, these new forms of violence and responses to it appear in defensive terms, favouring the emergence of defensive or contentious community orders (Fuentes Díaz, Gamallo, and Quiroz Rojas 2022). Here is a second outline for understanding the political economy of crime.

Criminal Capital and the Economy of Death

Criminal capital is not an anomaly, but is part of global value flows (Covarrubias 2020). It should be added that, from the perspective of a critique of political economy, the boundaries between what is lawful and what is unlawful are blurred. This is more of a *formal* distinction than a *real* one. For example, in 2015, global illegal business was estimated to account for between 8 and 15% of global GDP, not including legalized activities arising from criminal capital, while in 2019, money laundering was estimated to account for between 2 and 5% of global GDP (Covarrubias 2020, 32–3).

On the one hand, the state incorporates these value flows in various ways and they appear as part of the GDP, and, on the other hand, through practices such as money laundering, part of these value flows are incorporated into the financial markets. It is no coincidence that the head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime admitted that drug trafficking had helped rescue several banks from collapse during the 2008 financial crisis (EFE 2009). In this sense, it would not be an exaggeration to suppose that the flows of value generated by illicit enterprises played a crucial role in the management of the crisis by various states.

Thus, the particularity of criminal capital is not that it is just another branch of capital, but rather that it embodies the logic of value more

crudely and thus generates extraordinary profits. The peculiarity of the capitalist machine is that, under the dynamics of value expansion, it converts all social flows into abstract quantities (Deleuze and Guattari 2000, 372–4). The content of social practice becomes an empty signifier because the conceptual realization of the commodity-form is *nothingness* (Jappe 2014, 216–7).

To the extent that subjects become the personifications of ‘nothingness,’ they are driven by the *death drive* that not only destroys the other but also destroys themselves (Jappe 2023). In this sense, *thanatopolitics* materializes the nihilistic spirit that lies at the core of the capitalist mode of production and unfolds as an economy of death.

As Marx (1982, 342) argued, capital ‘has one sole driving force, the drive to valorise itself, to create surplus-value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour. Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.’ At the time Marx wrote these lines he also identified certain ‘physical’ and ‘moral’ barriers that curbed the expansion of value and that were related to the self-reproduction of the labour force (p. 341). Criminal capital, for its part, finds the conditions that allow it to comply with capitalist rationality in an absolute manner, as well as to break down all the barriers that are imposed in its way for the generation of surplus value.

Taking advantage of the existence of a postmodern lumpenproletariat, made up of disposable bodies and without any legal protection, the driving force of criminal capital finds in it available lives to suck to death. Part of this surplus lumpenproletariat, the product of a machinery of terror and processes of territorial dispossession deployed under the pattern of neoliberal domination, is recruited into the ranks of the criminal labour market either ‘freely’ or by force (Álvarez Martínez 2023, 378–9).

By 2022, the population considered to be in multidimensional poverty in México reached 36.3%; within this percentage, 29.3% was considered to be in moderate poverty and 7.1% in extreme poverty (Villalobos López 2023, 13). In addition to the above, Rafael Prieto-Curiel, Gian Campedelli, and Alejandro Hope (2023) estimated that, in 2022, the cartel population ranged between 160,000 and 185,000 ‘units,’ and calculated that the death toll corresponded to 120 ‘units’ per week.

These figures indicate that criminal capital is the fifth largest employer in México and that, in addition, its own dynamics require the recruitment of at least between 350 and 370 people per week in order not to collapse

due to the ‘losses’ of labour force that it suffers, whether due to conflicts between cartels or for reasons of judicial ‘incapacity,’ that is, due to death or imprisonment (Prieto-Curiel, Campedelli, and Hope 2023, 1313–4).

The generation of the ‘superfluous population’ in México that feeds the gears of illicit enterprises is not an anomaly, but rather part of the violence that constitutes the capitalist machine as a permanent process of primitive accumulation (Marx 1982; Bonefeld 2011, 381–5). The fact that criminal capital far exceeds physical and moral barriers to generate extraordinary profits indicates the absolute realization of the dynamics of value as an economy of death. If capitalism is defined by cruelty and terror, then criminal capital expresses the capitalist axiomatic, but without the moralistic masks that liberalism displays. So far we have argued that criminal capital is the crudest expression of the logic of value; we will now see how this same logic is configured as a ‘cannibal war machine’ (Whitehead 2011).

The Emergency of Cannibal War Machines and the Reconfiguration of Neoliberalism

To recap, Neil Whitehead developed the concept of the ‘cannibal war machine’ to allude to the reconfiguration of the enterprise and modern military-industrial complexes during neoliberal capitalism. What is characteristic of these cannibal war machines is that they blur the boundaries between war, competition and the economy of death because they operate under the same principle: the accumulation of power and wealth through the systematic use of violence (Whitehead 2011). In this sense, criminal capital is not simply the ‘bad’ or ‘illicit’ counterpart to legitimate economic accumulation; rather, it functions as an integral component of a broader, systemic apparatus – a ‘cannibal war machine.’ This machine synthesizes elements of neoliberal enterprise and the military-industrial complex to perpetuate and expand capitalist accumulation, often aligning seamlessly with legal markets.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari characterized the nomadic groups of the pre-capitalist era as ‘war machines,’ or, more specifically, rhizomatic machines. These operated in a ‘smooth,’ deterritorialized space, such as deserts, and were situated exterior to the state. In modernity, they argued, struggles generate their own war machines against the capitalist ‘model of the True’; that is, they generate mutant, minority and revolutionary machines, such as those we can find in guerrillas and rebellions; but they also argued that war machines were operating under the capitalist ax-

iomatic, such as the financial, technological and military-industrial complexes (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 422).

Since the 1990s, illegal enterprises have been forming their own private armies as a necessary condition to control territories and reconfigure the grey zones that previously existed. Thus, the survival of these enterprises in the competition that occurs in the criminal market depends on the use of extreme violence (Trejo and Ley 2020).

Guillermo Trejo and Sandra Ley argue that the formation of private armies was the result of the destabilization of the grey zones created during the Mexican authoritarian period, when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI by its acronym in Spanish) governed. In the 1990s, electoral alternation in municipalities and states undermined the PRI's hegemony, destabilizing previous pacts established between criminal enterprises and authorities. Faced with this situation, in which the cartels were losing the state protection necessary for their businesses, the formation of private armies began, employing, among others, military personnel previously dedicated to counterinsurgency activities (Trejo and Ley 2020).

Under this dynamic, the armed war between cartels for territorial control was going to intensify during the so-called war against drug trafficking. The result of this war was that the number of deaths and disappearances exceeded the average figures of a civil war. Trejo and Ley's (2020) diagnosis is that this exacerbation of violence is due to the fact that transitional justice processes were not carried out in México during the post-authoritarian period, remaining an *illiberal democracy* characterized by a *weak rule of law*.

This type of theoretical position, which presupposes the separation between the economic and political spheres, does not make visible, on the one hand, that the fact that illicit enterprises are transformed into 'cannibal war machines' is not due to the weakness of the states to maintain *the monopoly of legitimate coercion* – in Weberian terms – but to the restructuring of social relations carried out in Latin America under the pattern of neoliberal domination (Álvarez Martínez 2023). On the other hand, if criminal capital took the form of a cannibal war machine, it is because it operates with the same logic as a neoliberal enterprise (Fuentes Díaz 2014, 306).

In the wake of the crisis of the Fordist model of production, precipitated by the decline in the world profit rate in the 1970s, Latin America became the inaugural testing ground for the implementation of a novel pattern of domination. In the quest to recover the global profit rate and manage the

capitalist crisis, the neoliberal project in Latin America was established through a direct attack on the workforce, an increase in the rate of exploitation, both at a relative and absolute level, and the imposition of a 'model of flexible accumulation' (Harvey 1992, 189) which generated precarious working conditions, accompanied by the annihilation of welfare policies that served as a safety net for the lower classes. In addition, the privatization of common goods and state-owned corporations, the processes of dispossession (Álvarez Martínez 2023, 379) and the deregulation of capital flows were promoted which, as a whole, functioned as a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of social relations.

In México, the reconfiguration of social relations under the new pattern of domination dramatically increased inequality (Bayón 2019), exclusion (Patiño 2004, 138) and the updating of state violence, such as the militarization of repressive mechanisms (Barrios Rodríguez 2021, 199). A key factor in these transformations was the fall of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, which redefined security at a global level. In this scenario, the rhetoric of the communist threat typical of the Cold War was abandoned, requiring the production of an external enemy through the imprecise location of terrorism and an internal enemy under the threat of organized crime. The global war on drugs was a turning point in this shift, militarizing large areas of territory under new war logics, increasing mass violence in many strategic areas of Latin America.

The more the enemy is presented as an omnipresent threat, the more the demand for the state to strengthen itself increases. This, in turn, leads to the legitimization of exceptional uses of violence for political and military control of the territory. Liberal democracies cannot exist without constantly inventing new enemy figures to legitimize the existence of nation-states (Mbembe 2018). Although the figure of the enemy is abstract in legal frameworks, it materializes in a concrete way against the poor, ethnic minorities and social struggles. For this reason, the war on drugs in México was a *selective security* policy that frequently identified social struggles, the poor, and the racially 'inferior' as criminals, which perpetuates power relations based on class, race and gender within the framework of authoritarian neoliberalism (Jenss 2023, 5). In this sense, diagnosing the problem of exacerbated violence as the formation of an *illiberal democracy* shaped by a *weak rule of law* is reductive.

Sustained in a context of pervasive inequality and social marginalization, contemporary forms of violence manifest in different patterns and activate other repertoires. These are characterized by the existence of a

plurality of violent actors who operate according to a logic of profitability based on the extraction of resources within the framework of the globalized transformations of capitalism's expanded reproduction.

These new forms of violence in unconventional settings and with unconventional actors occurred alongside a regional economic reorganization that, in the Mexican case, began with the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. This process marked a new era in which devastating economic conditions were intertwined with new forms of criminal expression in sectors of society devastated by poverty and structural violence. In this new pattern of violence, new repertoires and actors can be found who use it for different objectives. Some distinctive features would be: (1) that a plurality of actors generate it, including the state, but also organized segments of civil society; (2) it is a horizontal violence, exercised to a greater extent by civil groups; (3) it is useful for a variety of objectives with coercive methods and strategies; (4) it is expressed in areas of indistinction between the legal and illegal, the private and the public; (5) it is a spectacular violence; and (6) it functions as a *dispositive for extracting and regulating surplus* that combines the previous characteristics (Fuentes Díaz 2022, 38–58).

In these violent conditions of restructuring of social relations, criminal capital was reconfigured under the figure of the neoliberal enterprise, operating through the adoption of the model of flexible accumulation linked to global competition, the decentralization of production, the expansion of fictitious capital, the acceleration of capital turnover, the processes of primitive accumulation, the deterritorialization-reterritorialization of the body and the *annulment of the subjective experience of time* through the generation of an *industrial reserve army* as a *killable body*. Furthermore, the entire machinery of terror mobilized by illicit enterprises in the neoliberal era has served to devalue land and labour, generating optimal conditions for the expansion of value. In this context, violence is a constituent of capitalist accumulation and competition is a metonym of war (Whitehead 2011), the notion that illicit enterprises operate as 'cannibal war machines' par excellence, holds true.

Final Thoughts: Grey Zones, Cannibal War Machines and the Paradigm of the Political in Neoliberal Postmodernity

Apparently, we find ourselves in an antinomy. At the moment when sovereign power seems to dissolve, at the same time, it is reinforced. On the one hand, the formation of grey zones that dissolve the bound-

aries between *nomos* and *anomie* in neoliberal postmodernity break the Hobbesian/Weberian paradigms of sovereignty. On the other hand, the pattern of neoliberal domination would not be possible in Latin America without the imposition of a permanent state of exception justified by the existence of an unspecified enemy such as the figure of the criminal and the terrorist.

Giorgio Agamben (1998) argues that what constitutes sovereign power is the exception, the threshold between *nomos* and *anomie* that defines which bodies deserve to live. However, what Agamben does not make visible is that thanatopolitics is the expression of the nihilistic spirit of the *value-form*.² The systematic use of militarized violence to control territories necessary to produce and circulate commodities, the practices of extortive rent to appropriate surplus value, and the exploitation to death of the lumpenized labour force, indicates to us that criminal capital is the crudest expression of the law of value, and is a cannibal war machine par excellence, synthesizing the qualities of neoliberal enterprise and military complexes.

To the extent that violence is a constituent of capitalist accumulation, the state and cannibal war machines operate under the same principle: the necrotic expansion of value, articulating a *dispositive for extraction and regulation of redundancy*. From there, not only does the antinomy dissolve, but it leaves open the question of whether the grey zones that blur the boundaries between war and competition, *nomos* and *anomie*, are not an anomaly but the biopolitical paradigm of neoliberal postmodernity.

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² Agamben (1998) saw the paradigm of modernity in the Nazi concentration camps, but he does not link how this whole economy of death crystallizes in the epigraph *Arbeit macht frei* (Work makes one free).

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Militias, Factions, and Precariousness: Notes on Living Conditions in the City of Rio de Janeiro Outskirts

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Abstract. This paper explores the dynamics of territorial control exercised by armed groups – factions and militias – in the outskirts and *favelas* of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The purpose was to investigate and describe the current dynamics of ‘siege’ produced by different armed groups, their effects on local sociability, and the production of precariousness to which residents of these locations are subjected. The research was conducted in six city territories and allowed the construction of a comparative matrix that cross-referenced the following information: type of armed group operating in the location; situation of the territory in terms of armed control; type of territorial presence; and relationship with the local population.

Key Words: militia, drug trafficking, violence, crime, Rio de Janeiro

Milice, frakcije in prekarnost: zapiski o življenjskih razmerah na obrobju mesta Rio de Janeiro

Povzetek. Članek raziskuje dinamiko teritorialnega nadzora, ki ga na obrobjih in v favelah mesta Rio de Janeiro izvajajo oborožene skupine, kot so frakcije in milice. Namen članka je raziskati in opisati trenutno dinamiko »obleganja«, ki jo ustvarjajo te različne oborožene skupine, vpliv te dinamike na lokalno družabnost ter ustvarjanje prekarnosti, ki ji prebivalci teh območij ne morejo ubežati. Raziskava, izvedena v šestih območjih mesta, je omogočila izgradnjo primerjalne matrice, ki

navzkrižno povezuje naslednje informacije: vrsto oborožene skupine, ki deluje na določenem območju; stopnjo nadzora nad teritorijem; tip teritorialne prisotnosti; odnos s tamkajšnjim prebivalstvom.

Ključne besede: milica, trgovina z drogami, nasilje, kriminal, Rio de Janeiro

Introduction

The city of Rio de Janeiro is the second largest municipality in Brazil in terms of population. Known worldwide for its natural beauty and vibrant culture, it has been nicknamed the 'marvellous city'. However, in addition to its beauty, Rio is also a city marked by profound social and economic contrasts, with luxury neighbourhoods coexisting alongside *favelas* and poor neighbourhoods where a large part of the working population lives, and it presents one of the most complex scenarios of urban violence in the country. Marked by the historical presence of drug trafficking and, more recently, by the growth of militias, the city offers fertile ground for analysing how territorial control by armed groups affects public safety and the daily lives of its residents.

Due to the presence of armed groups in their territories, the poor in Rio de Janeiro have been living under 'siege' for decades: subjected to various armed controls, forced to live with shootings, massacres, violent punishments, control of their routines and morals, segregation, and stigma. However, this configuration, represented in the image of the 'divided city' or 'city at war,' has taken on new contours based on the most recent dynamics. Of the spaces classified as 'dominated by armed groups,' 50% are occupied by militias, while the so-called factions divide the other portion of the controlled areas among themselves (Grupo de Estudos dos Novos Ilegalismos/UFF and Instituto Fogo Cruzado 2022). Although the effects of these different territorial controls are similar in many aspects, in the imagination of Rio de Janeiro, the experiences of living under such 'sieges' are seen as very different. Territories dominated by factions are usually represented as the scene of violent police operations and places where illicit drugs and weapons would be openly displayed, but with more flexible control over routines and moralities (Rocha 2013; Carvalho 2014; Machado da Silva 2008; Zaluar 1985). Areas dominated by militias are represented as places with much greater control over routines and moralities but with a much lower risk of confrontations and other episodes of daily violence (Da Motta 2020; Alves 2003; Cano and Duarte 2012).

Thus, the purpose of this paper was to investigate and describe the cur-

rent dynamics of ‘siege’ produced by different armed groups, their effects on local sociabilities, and the production of precariousness¹ to which the residents of these locations are subjected. We understand ‘siege’ in the terms formulated by sociologists Luiz Antonio Machado da Silva and Marcia Pereira Leite (2007), that is, as an understanding at the same time subjective and objective by the residents of *favelas* and outskirts, of their submission to a coercive and violent force, and the constant concern and fear of violent demonstrations, in many cases unpredictable, which prevent circulation and local routine. Thus, we seek to identify how the possible new modalities of ‘siege’ imply new constraints, risks, difficulties, uncertainties, and new types of resistance.

In this way, we seek to answer two specific questions: how do militias and factions occupy the territories where they operate, and what is the relationship between militias and factions and the residents of these locations?

This paper is therefore organized as follows: in addition to this introduction, a second section that briefly reviews the recent history of *favela* residents and their relations with the state and the armed groups that control their residential territories; a third section where we present the results of the research regarding the types of ‘sieges’ observed; a fourth section that delves deeper into the analysis regarding the effects of these ‘sieges’ on local sociability; and a fifth and concluding section, which presents the final considerations.

Living Under ‘Siege’ in Rio de Janeiro

Since the late 1970s, gangs of armed young people have controlled the retail sale of illicit drugs in the *favelas* and outskirts of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Their power is structured around the use of force as an element of coordination of social relations and daily life (Machado da Silva 1999), subordinating the populations living in the areas they control. The dispute over points of sale with other groups of illicit drug traffickers and the constant negotiation with the police over their actions – the conditions of which are often defined based on armed confrontations (Menezes 2018;

¹ The concept of precariousness has been extensively discussed by several authors (Bourdieu 2003; Butler 2004; Das and Randeria 2015, among others), which would not fit within the scope of this paper. In the sense used here, precariousness refers both to the difficult material conditions faced by *favela* residents and to the adverse political conditions to which they are subjected.

Misse 2018) – have led to permanent armed conflicts that have caused thousands of deaths over the years, as well as made the lives of Rio de Janeiro's *favela* residents unpredictable, marked by disruptions to routine, fear, apprehension, and silencing (Rocha 2013; 2018; Farias 2008b; Leite et al. 2018a; Machado da Silva 2008). Also, as a result of territorial disputes, the gangs began to organize themselves into factions, with disputes and alliances that alternate over the decades and with different relationships with criminal groups, both in Rio de Janeiro and in the rest of the country.

Around the same period, the first groups of what are conventionally called militias were formed. What we currently understand as 'militia' is a descendant of death squads, active mainly in Baixada Fluminense² (Alves 2003) and, in a more territorialized way, in the West region of Rio de Janeiro³ (Mesquita 2008; Misse 2011; Pope 2023a; Werneck 2015; Zaluvar and Conceição 2007). According to Alves (2003), these death squads become militias when they start to act in politics, electing members of parliament and creating an institutional arm for their activities. Such institutional relationships create networks of influence with police officers, politicians, community leaders, and state officials, which both guarantee access to resources and reduce conflicts and risks inherent to this type of activity (Arias 2013; Arias and Barnes 2017; Hirata et al. 2020; Pope 2023a; 2023b). Finally, militia members are known for commercializing various 'resources' and services, which they exploit in a monopolistic manner: security, extortion, housing, water supply, gas, internet, additional transportation, and cable television (*gatonet*), among others (Cano and Duarte 2012; Cano and Ioot 2008; Hirata et al. 2020; Zaluvar and Conceição 2007).

However, in the last fifteen years, several changes have been observed in this scenario. In 2008, the Favela Pacification Program was initiated to permanently install Pacification Police Units (UPP) in *favelas*. Its ef-

² Baixada Fluminense is an area of the Metropolitan Region of the state of Rio de Janeiro that brings together 13 municipalities.

³ The city of Rio de Janeiro is geographically divided into four zones: downtown, north, south, and west, and the city government classifies these zones into Planning Areas (APs). The west zone is located in APs 4 and 5. In this territorial division, AP 4 comprises 19 neighbourhoods and has two central areas: Jacarepaguá and Barra da Tijuca, and AP 5 has 21 neighborhoods with five central areas: Bangu, Realengo, Campo Grande, Santa Cruz, and Guaratiba. The two regions are separated by the Pedra Branca massif and represent more than 70% of the entire city's territory, where 2,945,963 inhabitants reside, according to the 2022 Census.

fects, although the project was terminated ten years later, are observed to this day: increased surveillance and control over residents' routines, reorganization of drug trafficking, increased commodification of territories in *favelas*, and increased militarization of life (Carvalho 2018; Rocha 2018; Leite et. al. 2018a; Menezes 2018; Miagusko 2018). In the same sense, the UPPs impacted the restructuring and expansion of militias (Arias and Barnes 2017; Da Motta 2020), especially since of the 38 UPPs installed, only one was in a militia area. Thus, there was no direct confrontation by state agents in militia areas, which contributed to militia members consolidating themselves in the territories already occupied and expanding their control to other areas of the city.

Starting in 2015, another series of events reshaped the relationship between crime, the state, and *favela* residents. The Pacification Program entered a generalized crisis, driven by the crisis in the state government, causing the situated logic of 'militarized guardianship'⁴ (Pacheco de Oliveira 2014). Between 2016 and 2017, criminal factions broke their alliances, reorganizing the crime scene and resulting in an intensification of disputes between drug trafficking gangs, an increase in cargo theft, and a substantial increase in homicides in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Hirata and Grillo 2019; Machado da Silva and Menezes 2020). Since 2018, the year of the Federal Intervention in Public Security in Rio de Janeiro, a new season of mega police operations and massacres with record numbers of deaths⁵ has begun, which continues to the present day. Thus, this period can be read as a moment of consolidation of the management of *favela* and peripheral populations based on the deepening of state violence, where militarization spreads as an organizing element of social life (Leite et al. 2018b) and war establishes itself as the current way of governing and managing – in a colonial model (Mbembe 2003) – life in the city (Magalhães 2020).

⁴ Editor's note: All quotations originally published in languages other than English have been translated by the authors.

⁵ According to data from the Observatório da Intervenção [Intervention Observatory] (Ramos 2019), in the six months of intervention, the number of shootings in the city increased (from 3,477 in the six months before the intervention to 4,850 in the following six months), 31 massacres were recorded with 130 deaths, 742 deaths and 620 injured in shootings, 736 people killed by the police and 81 deaths recorded during the actions of the Army. The Government of Claudio Castro maintains and worsens this situation, reaching the number of 182 deaths in 40 massacres in its first year of government alone (Grupo de Estudos dos Novos Ilegalismos/UFF 2022).

It is in this new context of reorganization of urban violence dynamics, state action, and territorial control that we carried out this research.

The ‘Siege’ Today

To understand how armed control is presented in the territory, how it becomes visible or invisible (or under what circumstances), both for those who live in these locations⁶ and for those who are ‘outsiders,’ we also analysed the reports of interviewed residents, and the statements captured in the field about the ‘climate’ of the location at certain times (Menezes 2018; Miagusko 2018) – which in some cases manifested as ‘rumours’ (Magalhães 2019; Menezes 2020), as well as news published in conventional media and on social networks.

Thus, we classify the forms of territorial presence as ‘Clear,’ that is, with the presence of weapons and clearer identification of the members of the armed groups, and ‘Diffuse,’ without the presence of weapons and/or other indicators and in which the identification of who the members of the armed group are would be more difficult. From this original classification, we derived three typologies, which we present below.

Consolidated Militia Control and Diffuse Territorial Presence

One of the locations surveyed is characterized by the long-standing presence of militias and the absence of records of armed conflicts.⁷ In that location, a resident had to discreetly point out to our researcher the militia members who were guarding the street, because the researcher was unable to identify them on his own. However, after locating who the militia members were and where they were, the researcher reported that the local atmosphere became more tense due to this surveillance. According to the reports obtained on that occasion, everyone who frequents the area ‘learns’ who the militia members are over time. However, those who have economic ties to the armed groups – whether because they rent houses that belong to the group or because they use the transportation service controlled by them, among others – need to acquire this ability to read ‘who is who’ more accurately. Those who display disruptive behaviour, in

⁶ The fieldwork was carried out in six different locations in the city of Rio de Janeiro, which, due to their characteristics, allowed us to construct a typology that guided the analyses and resulted in the data presented. It is also worth noting that the locations were divided into areas under the control of militia groups, drug trafficking factions and disputed areas in the western (AP4 and AP5), northern (AP3) and downtown (AP1) regions.

⁷ Names and references have been removed to preserve the anonymity of the interlocutors.

disagreement with the rules imposed by the militia group, are more actively targeted by the surveillance that this group exercises and are more directly affected by this oppression: they are the ‘kids’ of the neighbourhood.

It is worth noting, however, that this knowledge is tacit, in the sense that it is sufficient for individuals to ‘navigate’ the space, avoiding unnecessary confrontations and activating the protection offered when necessary. When referring to the militia members who operate there, local residents use their first names more often than their membership in known groups – such as *ligas* (league) or *bondes* (gangs). The relationship between territory and armed control is more personalized and mentioned in private conversations or based on ‘rumour’ (Magalhães 2019; Menezes 2020), than something stated in public or acknowledged – closer to a ‘domestic’ record than a ‘public matter.’

Thus, in this location where the presence of the armed group is diffuse, knowledge about who is a militia member, who is a police officer, and what each of these individuals represents in the territory is fundamental for ‘navigating’ within this dynamic. The diffuse presence does not mean that the environment is considered less monitored by those who live there or visit it, only that such surveillance is exercised in a more subtle way – which requires a greater ability to read the environment and its dynamics.

In another large neighbourhood in the West Zone, also under the control of a traditional militia group that has been operating in the area since the mid-1990s, a similar situation occurs. At first glance, it is not easy to recognize who the militia members are, since there is no distinctive feature that identifies them as such. According to interlocutors, anyone can potentially be a militia member. However, despite it not being easy to identify them, the group exercises strong control over the territory; even if they do not know who they are, the residents know that they are there, ‘camouflaged.’ And it is this camouflage that guarantees the success of the monitoring and surveillance of the neighbourhood’s daily life, ensuring that the ‘security’ offered by the militia members is considered efficient by the residents. In general, there is a promise of security that is fulfilled in practice and that makes the residents feel safe, as shown in an excerpt from an interview:

For example, in [the place] they don’t carry weapons, but they carry walkie-talkies, so they communicate all the time. On the streets and such, there’s always someone [one of them]. I always say I used to

leave bars at dawn sometimes and there was no transportation. I would sometimes walk home drunk, from [the place] to my house, it's a 20-minute walk, so you fly by, you don't even notice. And then sometimes I would go back home drunk with money in my pocket, and a cell phone, and nothing would happen, and it still doesn't happen today. [...] even Uber, when I take an Uber from [girlfriend's name]'s house to my house, they [...] say 'Oh, I like to take passengers to [name of the place], because it's peaceful.' [Man, Black, 30 years old]

Thus, in these situations, we classify the presence of armed groups as diffuse, marked by not being easily perceptible, but strongly felt.

Consolidated Control of Trafficking, Clear Territorial Presence

Another location studied, in the central region of Rio, has been the scene of many disputes between rival factions for control of the sale of illicit drugs in the area. It is currently controlled by a specific faction, which can be considered consolidated, and, in the perception of residents, the location is under constant threat of invasion/confrontation by the rival faction, which controls neighbouring territories. On the border between these territories, it is possible to observe the ostentatious display of weapons, as well as the presence of the 'walkie-talkie' boys. Similarly, on access roads, it is possible to notice the presence of individuals controlling the circulation of cars and motorcycles, which is only allowed when the driver is identified as a resident. At this 'checkpoint,' motorcycle drivers are required to enter without helmets and cars must have their windows open and the interior lights on. Residents also stated that they do not use GPS equipment or cameras on the dashboard of their cars, so as not to be mistaken for 'enemies' recording the location.

Due to the local armed group's constant need to 'defend' its territory, the spatiality of this location is marked by physical features and records that are reminiscent of war scenarios. Barricades were recently placed at some entrances, according to local 'rumours,' to hinder a possible invasion, either by another faction or by the police. Some internal alleys were closed with gates and padlocks to prevent the circulation of members of the illicit drug trafficking group. Likewise, many houses in the location have high gates and walls with broken glass and barbed wire, among other evidence of the architecture of a 'city of walls' (Caldeira 2020). Thus, the very production of the local physical space refers to the constant appre-

hension and concern about armed confrontations, even if only as a possibility or latency, which would allow the concept of territorial ostensibility to also be expanded to the dimension of the material production of the local space.

Disputed Territorial Control, Clear Territorial Presence

In another neighbourhood in the West Zone, the fieldwork focused on three *favelas* that have different forms of presence: (1) one occupied by the militia 'since forever' or 'since when it was just the Minas Gerais police'; (2) one occupied by militia members from the aforementioned *favela* since the 2000s; and (3) one under the control of a drug faction known as the militia's 'historic enemy.' Due to this territorial configuration, which brings together expanding militia groups and a rival drug trafficking faction, the region has been the scene of intense armed conflicts between groups that take turns fighting for control of the *favelas*. Thus, although it is largely considered a 'militia area,' the neighbourhood is the scene of the clear presence of these armed groups.

In the first *favela*, which is 'consolidated' by a militia group, residents reported that it is easy to identify who the militia members are because they are 'in the same place every day' – so 'everyone knows' who they are. This presence, however, is not accompanied by a permanent display of weapons, which are kept out of sight of residents, unless there is 'some problem': then they appear. In the second, considered a 'disputed' territory, the militia group behaves notoriously and violently: weapons are visible and they are very aggressive towards residents, especially when it is time to collect the security fee. According to reports, they enter the alleys weekly, shouting 'Security!', indicating that it is time to pay the fee. And in the third, with a consolidated occupation by a faction of illicit drug traffickers, but with recurring attempts at invasion by militia groups (so far unsuccessful), the presence is clear, with the drug-dealing spots set up at the entrance to the *favela*, just a few metres from the military police vehicle. In this sense, in the case of this neighbourhood, the territorial presence of armed groups combines different modalities: more diffuse in the places where militia members are consolidated, clearer in the places where drug trafficking factions are active, and in the 'disputed' location.

The relationship between territorial dispute and clear presence can also be observed in the case of a *favela* in the West Zone, also researched. The site of one of the first UPPs inaugurated, the *favela* lived for years with the discreet presence of drug traffickers, according to its residents. However,

after the closure of the UPP activities, drug trafficking became more visible in the area, although only in specific areas. The area is currently the scene of clashes between factions that take turns controlling the local illicit drug trade, which has gradually expanded the presence of armed individuals to the rest of the *favela*.

Reports gathered during fieldwork also indicate that there is a ‘residual’ militia in the *favela*, remnants of an armed group that operated there during the years when the territory was an area of militia activity. However, the members of this group were no longer interested in operating in the area and exerting strong moral control over the routine and sociability of residents, as the militia did previously (Da Motta 2020; Mendonça 2014). Thus, a kind of ‘joint operation’ between drug trafficking and militia has taken shape in the area, in which the former exercises territorial control – essential for the continuation of the illicit drug trade – while the latter economically exploits certain local resources (charging fees and exercising a monopoly over the provision of services such as gas, cable TV, and water supply, among others). In this way, drug trafficking presents itself and ensures the management of order in the territory, thus exercising political control, while the militia is configured as an almost invisible organization, but present in the exploitation of services and collection of fees. The coexistence of the two groups in the same space would have the purpose of guaranteeing economic benefits for both.

The same correlation between territorial disputes and ostentation was observed in territory currently controlled by a group of drug traffickers. Since 2019, the neighbourhood located in the North Zone has been the scene of numerous police operations as well as clashes between factions. Recently, the streets of the area have become a battle scene, with barricades on the main roads, chases, and operations, which have been carried out for several days in a row and simultaneous locations. For several consecutive mornings, the population awoke to the sound of gunshots in areas identified as ‘outside the *favela*,’ something that was unusual not long ago. Due to these confrontations, barricades on the streets that give access to the *favelas* are now part of the scene, as is the practice of approaching drivers. A ride-hailing driver reported that a colleague had been approached ‘by the guys,’ arriving at the passenger’s destination ‘all pissed with fear.’ Another ride-hailing driver said that it was forbidden to get in with the phone attached to the car window (to make it easier for the GPS equipment to see), as the drug traffickers might think that it was being filmed. The ‘siege’ observed in this location (as in the neighbour-

hood in the central region) directly affects the movement of residents and makes the presence of the local armed group obvious and unavoidable.

Therefore, the various confrontations with the police forces and the changes in the hierarchy of command of the factions operating in the area have changed the type of territorial presence: if before the drug traffickers sought to cover up their presence more, to avoid conflicts and not to disrupt their highly lucrative businesses, nowadays the experience of daily violence has increased, even spreading to other territories. When the main group of drug traffickers operating in the neighbourhood was led by an authority figure – known for his violence, but also for his charisma – the neighbourhood enjoyed a reputation for being ‘peaceful.’ Now, however, the relations between drug traffickers, police, and residents have become unstable, dubious, and vulnerable, undermining the feeling of security of those who live there.⁸

The feeling of insecurity experienced by residents and the desire for a calmer and more stable routine was expressed, in one of the reports collected, in the statement of the difference in treatment of the population by the different armed groups:

Researcher: Going into this subject more, there is drug trafficking, which we have a better idea of what it is, and there is what appears to be a militia. What is the difference between these two groups in your perception? Is there a specific activity that one does that the other does not? Or is it more in the way they act?

Interlocutor: It’s more about the way they act. What they do is practically the same thing, which is taking money. Charging fees, that kind of thing. Vans, motorcycles ... it’s the same thing for both. But the way they deal is different.

Researcher: Do you mean with the residents or among themselves?

Interlocutor: With the residents, because the criminals treat them one way and the militia treats them another. Militias have stricter rules compared to criminals. Criminals have more freedom, in this case. But, it’s that. It’s that freedom that, if you break something or

⁸ A frequent rumour identified in the field – and also mentioned in Rio de Janeiro newspapers – reported a ‘partnership’ relationship between a local drug trafficking group and a militia member, who was allegedly teaching the group tactics and practices of extortion and territorial control. This possibility of combining the two types of territorial control greatly concerned the research interlocutors. However, it has not yet been possible to investigate this issue in greater depth.

do something wrong, you'll pay a price too. It doesn't matter to both.
[Man, Black, 25 years old]

Correlations between Types of Territorial Control and Modes of the Presence of Groups in Localities: Variations in 'Sieges'

From the data collected, we observed a correlation between armed control in the area being consolidated or a 'disputed' territory, the presence of the armed group in the territory being diffuse or ostensive, and the 'siege' experienced by the residents.⁹ The absence of confrontations in territories of consolidated armed occupation produces a diffuse presence of group members throughout the territory, probably because, without the threat of confrontations, they do not need to display their weapons to signal their military power to potential rivals and the police forces. The groups that operate in these territories thus enjoy the 'political advantages' mentioned by Daniel Hirata et al. (2020) – less frequent or even absent police operations, and privileged events where confrontations erupt in the territory, altering routines and bringing terror to residents. As highlighted in the aforementioned study, it is militia groups that benefit from these advantages. In territories controlled by drug trafficking gangs, on the other hand, whether or not they are 'in dispute' matters less – being 'in the hands of drug traffickers' explains the ostentatious territorial presence. However, we observed that when the territory is under militia control but is 'in dispute', the presence becomes more ostentatious, especially due to the display of weapons as a signal to rival groups – thus bringing the type of 'siege' imposed on residents closer to the experience of those who live in areas where drug trafficking groups operate.

As a consequence, we observed that the notoriously territorial presence also directly influences the type of relationship that the armed group establishes with the population under its control. The frequency of con-

⁹ Throughout the text, we have indicated how in all areas, regardless of whether they are under armed control of drug traffickers or militia members, the practice of extortion has expanded, with the increasingly intense use of threats and physical violence. This practice has been responsible for several episodes of violence, both actual and potential, reported by our research interlocutors. This mode of action, which confuses traditional distinctions between the practices of militia members and drug traffickers, is called 'parasitic entrepreneurship'; due to the intensity of the exploitation practiced against populations that have already been historically impoverished, and more intensely so in recent times. Due to the scope of this paper, we will not be able to explore this dimension in more detail.

frontations or their constant threat of outbreak produces more conflictual local sociability, with high levels of surveillance and monitoring and constant complaints from residents about the absence of the ‘peace’ that existed in previous moments, whether by militia groups or drug trafficking factions. From these connections, we produced a typology of experienced ‘sieges’: whereas residents of ‘disputed’ territories experience a ‘siege by terror,’ or whereas residents of territories under consolidated control experience a ‘panoptic siege.’ We argue that it is this distinction that produces the most profound effects on local sociability and the daily lives of residents. Therefore, it is these effects that we explore in the next section.

‘Siege’ Typologies and Their Effects on Local Sociability

‘Disputed’ Territorial Control: Siege ‘By Terror’

In the neighbourhood of the North Zone, a ‘disputed’ territory controlled by drug trafficking groups, the former ‘boss’ of the largest *favela* in the area adopted a welfare policy, aiming to gain support from residents. However, this ‘good neighbour policy’ was also built on the use of a network of lookouts, many weapons, and agreements with the officers of the Military Police Battalion responsible for the area, paying them large bribes. In addition, he also avoided confrontations with the police so as not to attract attention, especially from the media. With the current ‘boss,’ however, the number of confrontations and police operations has increased, leading to criticism from residents. According to one of the interviewees in the survey, ‘the former boss had more control over the neighbourhoods and avoided exposure.’ Thus, for many of the residents interviewed in the survey, the current drug trafficking leadership is considered ‘weak,’ as it has no control over the daily disorders, such as the increase in the number of assaults and robberies – something that was rare under the previous ‘boss.’

The lack of control over local violence, in the words of the interlocutors, contrasts with the increasing control over the moral lives of residents. One of the main drug dealers in the area converted to the evangelical religion¹⁰ and began to prohibit manifestations of African-based religion within the *favela* (threatening the death and expulsion of practicing residents). He prohibited the use of white clothing and sacred bead

¹⁰ The reports from the interlocutors did not indicate which religious denomination the drug trafficker had joined, nor whether this conversion had implied joining a specific movement.

necklaces [sacred artefacts] and attacked and destroyed religious temples – forcing the religious residents themselves to tear down the places designated for practices, break their sacred bead necklaces, and break statues and other artefacts used in their activities. Even after his assassination, these practices remain in force.

In the West Zone neighbourhood, also classified as ‘in dispute’ but under militia control, many interlocutors mentioned that the biggest problem they are currently facing is the armed conflicts between groups for control of the *favelas*. Some interlocutors also pointed out that, during the period when a traditional militia group operated in the area and controlled most of the *favelas*, the neighbourhood enjoyed order and security. The current group, however, only serves to collect security fees but does not effectively guarantee them.

The case of the *favela* in the West Zone, in turn, is characterized by the territorial dispute between different factions for control of the illicit drug trade in the area, which intensified after the departure of the UPP in 2018, and the ‘joint operation’ between drug trafficking and militia, which is still in operation. However, in terms of the type of ‘siege’ experienced, it is the armed confrontations resulting from the disputes that characterize the routine in the area and that bring insecurity and unpredictability to the residents. Thus, although the local militia is not involved in the episodes of armed violence that occur there, this ‘political advantage’ is not extended to the residents, who live with ‘the worst of both worlds’: extortion practiced by the militia and the risk of shootings involving drug trafficking.

The locations in this group therefore have in common the experience of living in a situation of open armed conflict, a violence that can erupt at any moment and transform the streets of the locations into ‘war scenarios.’ Thus, although they are territories under the control of armed groups of different categories (drug trafficking gangs and militias), what brings them together is the experience of the ‘siege by terror,’ which subjects residents to living conditions marked by fear, insecurity, and unpredictability.

Consolidated territorial control: ‘Panoptic’ Siege

In the neighbourhood in the central region, under the consolidated control of a group of drug traffickers, violence is latent, especially as a threat. Thus, surveillance and monitoring of residents are constant and felt very strongly by them. The fear of having trouble with a drug trafficker, of being mistaken for an informant, or of breaking some implicit rule deter-

mined by them affects the residents' entire routine. In addition to restrictions on coming and going and the concern of always having to 'ask for permission' – whether to build a house, open a business, carry out a public activity, etc. – residents also feel prevented from accessing rights and guarantees, especially when these involve justice and/or security agencies. In the field, we observed a situation where members of the residents' association assisted a woman in a situation of domestic violence. They advised her to find another house in the *favela* to escape her abusive husband, but without going to the Women's Police Station – so as not to break the prohibition imposed by the drug traffickers themselves on 'bringing the police to the *favela*.' Thus, such 'control devices' are already incorporated by the residents themselves, guiding their conduct (Farias 2008a, 175).

Also in the West Zone *favela*, which is under consolidated control by militia groups, the feeling of surveillance and monitoring is repeated, albeit in a more diffuse form – in line with the type of territorial presence exercised by the local armed group. However, the moments of encounter between residents and militia members are restricted to commercial transactions – these are moments when bills are collected, or services offered by the latter are used. Thus, those residents who depend most on the services offered by the latter – such as those who rent their homes, for example – are more exposed to a possible violent encounter with the militia members.¹¹ Those who depend most on the services of the militia would, consequently, be more exposed to extortion by it. However, as we observed in the field, all residents seek to know what the expectations are regarding their conduct on the part of the militia members – since meeting them is a condition for avoiding being victimized by retaliation. Thus, tacit knowledge about who the militia members are, who, as previously mentioned, are not easily identified, and what types of practices are prohibited¹² is essential to survive in these conditions.

¹¹ It is worth noting that services – such as alternative transportation, cable tv and internet, among others – are offered in a monopolistic manner. Therefore, when we refer to the provision of services, we know that residents do not have the option of contracting services from other providers. However, some interlocutors made a point of emphasizing that, when possible, they choose not to access such services so as not to have to deal with the militia members.

¹² Another field report states that the violent death of a young man who was selling hot dogs in the area, attributed to the militia group, was due to the fact that he had 'shown off' signs of 'having money,' such as jewellery and clothes of a certain brand. For the

In turn, in the neighbourhood in the West Zone under consolidated militia control, the interviewees reported that they are often unable to identify who the militia members are in their daily lives since they often do not display specific distinctive signs. However, this invisibility gives the members of the armed group a ‘camouflage,’ which would be favourable to more effective surveillance. If ‘anyone can be a militia member,’ then how do you know when you are being watched? One interviewee reported that he was in a bar with friends, most of them young Black people, after participating in a political demonstration in another neighbourhood, and that when they were discussing episodes of racism, they were approached by an older Black man who entered the conversation and questioned what those present were saying. According to the report, he said: ‘And then people get into this racism thing, but everyone I know here who has money is Black. Like the police chief at [police station number], who is Black.’ For our interlocutor, the man, without directly identifying himself as a militia member, was indicating his membership in the group by mentioning a close relationship with a police officer and was also embarrassing the young people, who did not respond to the supposed provocation and ended up leaving the place.

The reports presented in this section therefore express an experience of ‘siege’ that is not exactly that of the ‘terror’ described above but is characterized by a feeling of constant vigilance and the resulting need for self-control, seeking to avoid breaking any rule imposed by the local armed group – whether explicit or understood as possible. In this sense, we classify this type of ‘siege’ as a panoptic siege, referring to Michel Foucault’s (1977) concept, which describes the feeling of potential continuous surveillance, which leads people to behave according to shared norms and expectations, shaping their behaviour in a disciplined manner. Although this form of ‘siege’ appears to be less violent than the ‘siege of terror,’ Juliana Farias reinforces that this experience can be described as a form of ‘suffocation,’ the effects of which can be felt more gradually, but which, in the end, also cause the impossibility of breathing (2008a, 189).

Whether as an experience of terror or as a ‘suffocation,’ the lives of *favela* residents in Rio de Janeiro remain ‘under siege,’ albeit in different

interlocutors, he thus demonstrated that he had other incomes besides selling hot dogs, which attracted the attention and consequently the retaliation of the armed group. He would therefore have been reckless in not obeying this implicit rule, although considered obvious by the residents.

ways. The perpetuation of this condition, therefore, marks the lives of Rio de Janeiro citizens living in *favelas* and the outskirts.

Final Considerations

In this paper, based on ethnographic fieldwork in six areas of the city of Rio de Janeiro, we identified diverse territorial control dynamics practiced by armed groups in Rio de Janeiro that we described as the current dynamics of 'siege' (Machado da Silva 2008) produced by different armed groups, their effects on local sociabilities, and the production of precariousness to which the residents of these locations are subjected.

Thus, we argue that 'living under siege' by armed groups in Rio de Janeiro today is determined less by the type of group that controls the territory and more by the practices that these groups adopt in managing territories and populations – practices that can be exercised in a multitude of combinations. By relating to qualifications or denominators as 'type of armed group operating in the location' (drug trafficking or militia) and 'type of territorial control' (consolidated or disputed), we identify that these produce two different modalities of territorial presence: clear and diffuse. These, in turn, when recombined with the previous variables, produce different forms of 'siege': the 'siege by terror,' experienced by residents of territories where the dispute for territorial control prevents any predictability in routine and sense of security, and the 'panoptic siege,' experienced by those who live in territories less subject to daily armed confrontations, but where surveillance by armed groups and self-surveillance determine sociability.

The results of our research point to experiences of 'siege' that combine different configurations of relationships between armed groups, state forces, and residents of the outskirts. Notwithstanding these combinations, the portrait we draw is that of Rio de Janeiro as a 'city under siege' (Graham 2011), whereas armed groups 'govern' the population in a violent and abusive manner, varying only in the dosage between control and the exercise of the power to kill (Leite 2018). In this portrait, the state is highlighted in its role as co-producer and co-manager of this armed government, whether through its repressive policy or through the intentional absence of public policies that guarantee this population their rights to public services, economic development, and security. In our city, armed violence, restricted sociability, and precariousness are reproduced continuously and historically, limiting the population's possibilities of living and surviving.

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Creating a Testimony of the Unspeakable: Testimonial Injustice, Affects and Political Mobilization of Indigenous Women in México

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Abstract. In the context of widespread violence that México has experienced increasingly since the launch of the War on Drugs trafficking in 2007, victims' testimonies have emerged across various settings, fostering empathy and constructing a narrative that challenges the criminalization and societal passivity in the face of violent death. These testimonies have played a crucial role in shaping commemorative practices and facilitating reparative processes in cases where impunity persists. However, the construction of testimonies and memories is far from neutral. These narratives are shaped by intersecting racial, gender, and class dynamics that influence what can be told and heard at a given time. Drawing on extensive fieldwork conducted in the Zongolica region in the Gulf of México, this article explores how the testimonies of Indigenous women have been subjected to specific forms of injustice. Their experiences of violence are often denied, their credibility questioned, and the harms they endured erased, leaving them marginalized within accepted testimony of violence. Furthermore, the article highlights how Indigenous women and their communities are actively seeking truth and justice by creating alternative testimonial practices to promote reparations processes, foster solidarity, and bring to light the profound impacts of militarization and criminal violence in their communities.

Key Words: violence, México, Indigenous women, testimonies, Femicide, Feminicide

Ustvarjanje pričevanja o neizrekljivem: pričevanjska nepravica, afekti in politična mobilizacija staroselk v Mehiki

Povzetek. V kontekstu splošnega nasilja, ki ga je Mehika v veliki meri doživela po začetku vojne proti trgovanju z drogami leta 2007, so pri-

čevanja žrtev vzniknila v različnih okoljih, s čimer spodbujajo empatijo in gradijo pripoved, ki se zoperstavlja kriminalizaciji ter družbeni pasivnosti ob nasilnih smrtih. Ta pričevanja so ključna za oblikovanje spominskih praks, hkrati pa olajšujejo procese poprave v primerih, kjer prevladuje nekaznovanost. Vendar pa gradnja pričevanj in spominov ni povsem nevtralen proces; oblikujejo jih rasni, spolni in razredni konstrukti, ki določajo, kaj se lahko v določenem trenutku pripoveduje in sliši. Članek, ki temelji na obsežnem terenskem delu v regiji Zongolica v Mehikem zalivu, preučuje posebne oblike krivic, ki jim pričevanja staroselskih žensk pogosto podležejo. Njihove izkušnje z nasiljem so pogosto zanikane, njihova verodostojnost zmanjšana, škoda, ki so jo utpele, pa izbrisana in ostaja na robu tega, kar se sprejema kot verodostojno pričevanje o nasilju. Obenem se članek osredotoča na načine, kako staroselske ženske in njihove skupnosti iščejo resnico in pravičnost, pri čemer ustvarjajo alternativne oblike pričevanja, ki omogočajo procese poprave, spodbujajo solidarnost in osvetljujejo globoke vplive militarizacije in kriminalitete na njihove skupnosti.

Ključne besede: nasilje, Mehika, staroselke, pričevanja, umor žensk zaradi spola (femicid), sistemski/institucionalni umor žensk (feminicid)

Introduction

The so-called War on Drugs in México, declared by Felipe Calderón Hinojosa at the end of 2006, resulted in a significant escalation of violence. This was achieved through the deployment of troops and the extension of borders in search of new areas of high capital profitability. The immediate consequence of the pervasive atmosphere of terror was the collective silence and paralysis of society in the face of violent death and the visible presence of weapons. The enunciative construction of the war, which defined two distinct blocs – the state against criminal groups – was a fictitious construction that resulted in the criminalization of certain populations, primarily young and racialized individuals. It also led to an indifference of society, which was subsequently disrupted by the testimony of victims in various settings, wherein they revealed the identities and recounted the experiences of individuals whose voices had been silenced during the most tumultuous years of the violence.

In 2011, the kidnapping and murder of the son of the poet and activist Javier Sicilia resulted in a significant mobilization of victims throughout the country. The Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD) was established through caravans in various regions, uniting victims and relatives who had not received any responses from the judicial institu-

tions. This mobilization marked a departure from previous forms of political mobilization. Despite lacking prior political experience, many victims found a space to articulate the deep anguish they had endured as a result of the murder or disappearance of their relatives, the forced displacement, and the other manifestations of criminal and state violence.

The mobilization of victims in México constituted an affective intervention that forged a connection between victims and a broader public. Testimonies began to circulate in different public acts, including mass marches and caravans aimed at bringing together additional victims of violence, as well as at the very sites where the violence had occurred. These included clandestine graves in inhospitable terrain, mass graves in public cemeteries where the justice institutions buried bodies without identification, and the 'kitchens' where drug traffickers dissolved their victims, or the living spaces destroyed by the violence that forced them to relocate (see, for example, De Marinis 2019; Macleod and Duarte 2019; Gordillo-García 2023). The affective dimension of political action in these scenarios became increasingly evident as a result of performative acts, through which the pain of the victims and collective indignation became an important emotional force in the search for truth and justice in the country.

The affective turn, which conceptualizes affect as the capacity to affect and be affected, has enabled a shift in perspective, moving beyond the human and bodily surfaces and rejecting the two dominant approaches to emotion that prevailed throughout much of the twentieth century. On the one hand, there is the view of emotion as a phenomenon confined to an interiority that is projected outward, a perspective that has been prevalent in psychologizing analyses. Secondly, there is the view from an exteriority present in the structures that people internalize, a position that has been advanced mainly by the sociology of emotions (Ahmed 2004; Clough and Halley 2007; De Marinis and Macleod 2018).

A perspective on the circulation of emotions, as proposed by Sara Ahmed (2004), offers a means of transcending the limitations of individualizing or sociological approaches to the study of emotions. This allows us to comprehend contemporary scenarios of violence and political mobilization of victims in México as scenarios of multiple affectations, in which pain, joy, indignation, and other emotions become forces of political mobilization that connect victims/survivors with other audiences (De Marinis and Macleod 2018; De Marinis 2018b).

In this article, however, it is argued that the construction and reception of testimonies, the circulation of emotions, and the construction of

memory are not neutral processes. The construction of gender, ethnicity, and racialization that permeates the bodies of certain groups and populations affects not only the circulation of testimony but also the very possibility for victims to bear witness and for others to listen. This article presents the findings of a study based on long-term ethnographic work and press documentation of two cases of Indigenous women victims of sexual violence and feminicide¹ It explores how the testimonies of Indigenous women and relatives of women victims of sexual violence and feminicide were received during the early stages of militarization as part of the War on Drugs in the country and the increasing criminalization of communities that followed. The cases occurred in the Nahua Indigenous region of Zongolica, in the state of Veracruz, in the Gulf of México. This analysis will examine the testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007) that their testimonies faced and how this shaped other forms of performative construction in public spaces that facilitated broader connections and solidarities through shared indignation (Taylor 2003; De Marinis and Macleod 2018).

Violence, Criminality and the State in Zongolica, Veracruz

On February 25, 2007, Ernestina Ascencio was found dying near her home in the community of Soledad Atzompa. She was able to vocalize the following: ‘Pinomeh xoxokeh nopan omomotlatlamotlakeh,’ which was translated into Spanish as ‘The men in green threw themselves on me.’ Despite the local population’s best efforts to transport her to the nearest medical facility, three hours away via dirt roads, she succumbed to her injuries the following day. Ernestina was 73 years old. Her relatives and neighbours, who found her in a state of distress, publicly denounced the violence inflicted on her body by the soldiers who were stationed in their communities for an extended period. The initial autopsy report revealed evidence of sexual and physical torture. Ernestina’s case triggered significant upheaval at local, regional, and national levels. This was not only due to the violence perpetrated against the body of an elderly Indigenous woman, but also due to the lack of accountability in the case, which was

¹ *Feminicide* derives from the concept of femicide, i.e. the killing of a woman or girl specifically because of her sex. It includes the complicity or negligence of the state in preventing, investigating or punishing the crime. It was coined in connection with the fight against the murder of women in México in the nineties (see Monárrez 2000; Lagarde 2006; Borzacchiello 2024).

concluded months later without any resolution. Prior to the announcement of the final verdict, President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa stated in an interview that Ernestina had died of gastritis (Gallegos and Herrera, 2007).

Twelve years later, another case occurred in a community in the same Indigenous region as Ernestina's. Nancy (19 years old) was at her mother's house when her former spouse arrived to speak with her in the early hours of one day in August. Nancy's mother, Irma, was so deeply asleep that she was unable to discern the tension in Nancy's ex-husband's expression and the 'swollen veins' on his neck. Irma was left to sleep with her granddaughter, Nancy's six-year-old daughter, while Nancy left the residence for the last time.

The discovery of her flip-flops on the side of the road was the family's first indication that something was wrong. An exhaustive search was conducted throughout the night by the entire community, but Nancy could not be located. The local authorities informed Irma that she needed to file a missing person's report, initiating a lengthy and arduous process. Upon arriving at the police station to file the report, Irma was informed by telephone that Nancy's clothes had been found in various locations throughout the community. When she was shown a photograph and asked to confirm whether the trousers pictured belonged to Nancy, she responded affirmatively.

The disappearance of Irma's daughter resulted in significant disruption within the community. In numerous instances, she underscored the assistance she and her family received from their neighbours as she recalled the experiences of that period, which was characterized by disorganization, confusion, fatigue, and despair. The circumstances of that day precluded her from recognizing the errors made in the file when the prosecution altered the names and locations referenced in her testimony. This resulted in significant complications at a later stage. Furthermore, she was unable to identify the mistreatment and violence inflicted upon her as a consequence of the considerable number of times she was compelled to provide a statement and the subsequent loss of evidence that could have established the culpability of the sole suspect.

Five days after Nancy's disappearance, Irma observed a group of vultures descending the slopes of nearby hills. She then followed the vultures' flight path and informed her brother of the situation. They immediately made their way to the site and discovered Nancy's body, undressed, lying on a rock. Three years later, thanks to the efforts of a women's organiza-

tion that provided support throughout the investigation and resisted attempts at impunity, the perpetrator was identified and convicted of femicide in a hearing attended by numerous members of the community who had gathered to demand justice.

The two women were from communities situated in the Indigenous region of Zongolica, a mountainous area in the state of Veracruz.² This region is among the most significant Indigenous zones in the state of Veracruz, with a notable Nuhua population. The region is also of strategic importance due to its border location and historical significance as a producer of coffee and tobacco, which has made it the object of various interests over the centuries. During the Porfiriato period in the early twentieth century, *haciendas* were established by external actors who acquired vast tracts of land through the process of dispossession and the granting of military concessions (De Marinis 2018a). As a result, the Indigenous population was compelled to seek refuge in the higher, colder, and less productive lands. Consequently, a considerable proportion of this population was compelled to engage in forced labour on the haciendas or sugarcane plantations of the lower, temperate lands. In the 1980s, the coffee crisis marked a pivotal moment characterized by a surge in male migration to the northern states and the United States, the rise of Indigenous movements against *cacicazgos* and historical dispossession, and an intensifying process of militarization and counterinsurgency.

Long before the military onslaught, the region had already been affected by the so-called War on Drugs. The armed uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in the neighbouring state of Chiapas in 1994 made Zongolica, like many other Indigenous regions, a potential flashpoint for further uprisings. A common feature of these regions was the significant inequality resulting from historical dispossession and exploitation, which gave rise to social movements that, in some cases, resorted to armed conflict to protect their territorial and political interests. The government implemented a policy of militarization and selective persecution of the leaders of social organizations, which was further intensified over time (Gibler 2014).

² The regional division of Zongolica is ethnically homogeneous, comprising one of the largest concentrations of Nahuatl speakers in the state of Veracruz. Despite the lack of precision in its delineation, 14 municipalities are recognized as part of this region, with Indigenous populations that represent up to 90% of the total population in some municipalities.

Over time, the Zongolica region has experienced a rise in criminal activity and a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity. Its mountainous terrain and strategic location at the crossroads between the coast, primarily the port of Veracruz, and the states of Oaxaca and Puebla have made it an ideal hub for drug trafficking and other illicit activities. The deployment of public forces has failed to improve the situation; on the contrary, it has contributed to an escalation of violence. This situation has been further exacerbated by the so-called War on Drugs, which has led to the rapid expansion of military camps across several municipalities and the proliferation of criminal groups in the most vulnerable areas, where local authorities have been unable to effectively resist.

During the tenure of Governor Fidel Herrera (2006–2010) in the state of Veracruz, the consolidation of cartel headquarters in major cities was observed. The Zetas criminal group gained power in several regions, initially focusing on drug trafficking and subsequently diversifying into other criminal activities, including kidnapping, robbery, and extortion. Subsequently, they proceeded to occupy an increasingly expansive region within the state, a process that was facilitated by the overt collaboration between this criminal organization and the government administrations of Fidel Herrera (2004–2010) and Javier Duarte (2010–2016). These alliances enabled them to secure electoral victories, which in turn facilitated their occupation of a greater number of territories and local institutions (Human Rights Clinic 2017).

Notwithstanding the cartel disputes and direct military attacks occurring in the capitals of many states, the regions most affected by violence were those where a convergence of accumulated grievances had occurred. There was a notable increase in the number of homicides, kidnappings, and disappearances, although the figures vary widely and there is a significant information gap, particularly in Indigenous and rural areas. In contrast with the official discourse, which attributes the violence to organized crime groups, there is evidence indicating that a significant proportion of the disappearances were perpetrated by officials from one of the three levels of government. In the Mexican state of Veracruz, a total of 647 clandestine graves were discovered between 2006 and 2022, representing the highest number of such graves found in the country during that period (Secretaría de Gobernación del Gobierno de México 2022). The humanitarian crisis in the state has been further compounded by the control of the media. From 2000 to the present, 33 journalists have been killed ('Periodistas asesinados en México' n.d.).

A noteworthy aspect of the pervasive violence in the country is that it extends beyond the domain of drug trafficking, which was the predominant narrative during the period of increased militarization. Rather, it has been driven by the search for greater profitability in emerging economic sectors. The expansion of criminal violence coincided with the expansion of agricultural production, including avocado monoculture, the timber industry, and open-pit mining (De Marinis and Fuentes 2023). In these contexts, a process of ‘ownership’ emerged, characterized by the concentration and expansion of control over bodies and territories for the accumulation of capital (Segato 2016).

In the context of this quasi-state control, exercised through the actions of armed corporations with the participation of state forces, women’s bodies began to be subjected to a distinct form of extreme violence, as has been evident in various contexts since at least the 1990s. In the 1997 Acteal massacre in Chiapas, in which a group of 45 Indigenous supporters of the EZLN who had been expelled from their community were killed, the bodies of women, including pregnant women, were subjected to particularly brutal treatment. Sexual violence was a recurrent tactic used in the torture of women in other massacres of the period, such as those in Aguas Blancas, Guerrero (1995), and Loxicha, Oaxaca (1997–1999). Yet these manifestations of violence were consistently omitted from the public discourse of the organizations involved.

In the same decade, the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez marked the beginning of a new phase of feminist mobilization in México. The nature of these killings – including torture and mutilation – had significant implications for the construction of sovereignty in this border region. The fact that women’s bodies were abandoned in one of the most dangerous borderlands, where different legal and illegal orders intersected, signaled a new stage in the articulation of a distinct form of sovereignty (Wright 1999; Monárrez 2000; Lagarde 2006; Borzacchiello 2024). As Rita Segato (2013) has argued, sovereignty and the exertion of control by one will over another were inscribed on women’s bodies. The so-called ‘Juárez dead’ embodied the construction of sovereignty on the border, not merely through the power to kill the subjugated, but through ‘their psychological and moral defeat, and their transformation into a receptive audience for the display of the dominator’s discretionary power of death’ (p. 39).³

³ Editor’s note: All quotations originally published in languages other than English have been translated by the authors.

This passivity can be understood in relation to the emergence of new logics of capitalist dispossession, which brought about a significant shift in the socio-economic condition of large segments of the population. This population transitioned from a state of poverty and exclusion to a status of surplus (Reguillo 2021). Within this process of dehumanization, young, feminized, racialized, and migrant bodies became the targets of a criminalizing discourse that produced a numbing effect, severing social empathy and disconnecting the broader public from the realities of violent death and the suffering of others.

Injustice and Testimonial Violence in Gendered and Racialized Orders

The sexual violence and murder of Ernestina at the hands of soldiers, as confirmed by the initial autopsy reports, and the fact that she was an elderly woman, disrupted any predictable framework for interpreting the war. A comparable rupture occurred in the case of young Nancy, who was killed by her partner, despite having expressed his intentions to other members of the community. How her body was found unclothed, bearing signs of sexual violence, and discarded in a ravine constituted a manifestation of violence that defied predictable violence within the context of an Indigenous community.

In several instances, the testimonies of both direct and indirect victims have served as the primary political instrument for articulating resistance to the war and demands for justice. This prompts the question of how such testimonies, particularly those of victims and their relatives, have been received within Indigenous contexts. In light of the unequal structure that determine which voices are deemed intelligible and audible in society at any given moment, I will analyse the audibility and reception of the testimony of Ernestina, an elderly Indigenous woman from one of the poorest regions of the country, and well as that of Nancy's mother, within both community and official justice settings. The aim of this analysis is to explore how the prejudices that underlie testimonial injustice, manifesting differently in each case, have played a pivotal role in sustaining impunity.

According to the case file, Ernestina uttered a few words before her death, which were translated into Spanish as, 'The strange men in green came upon me.' The fact that the testimony was in the Náhuatl language led many to suspect that it was not entirely truthful. However, the family and community members, who were those to find her, were convinced

that she was referring to the sexual violence committed by soldiers. This interpretation was later echoed in various media reports. Her statement that ‘they jumped on me’ raised further doubts among outsiders. In many Indigenous languages, there is no specific word for sexual violence. Most of them don’t even have a direct word for violence in general.

For numerous Indigenous Nahua women, as well as women from other Indigenous regions, the expression ‘*échararse encima*’ (literally, ‘to jump on me’) is commonly used to describe acts of violence with sexual implications (De Marinis 2020). This poses a serious challenge in legal settings, where interpreters often lack a gender perspective. When Ernestina’s words were translated literally and without cultural context, it sparked a significant controversy. This type of translation gave many people, especially those who aimed to discredit the accusation, a reason to question the validity of her statement. A clear example of this was the reaction of María del Rocío García Gaytán, the director of the National Women’s Institute (Inmujeres), who later told the press the following (Morales 2007):

[The testimony] was given in Nahuatl, and it was clear that the woman was dying; her voice had completely lost its strength. Two versions of the incident have been reported: one in which ‘the soldiers approached me’ and the other in which they ‘harmed her.’ At first, I was outraged and released a statement demanding that those responsible be held accountable, whether they were military or civilian. However, after reviewing the CNDH bulletin, which offers a detailed account of the incident, I’m no longer sure about what actually happened.

The aforementioned statements, which were widely circulated in the national press over an extended period, bring to light a key element of what Miranda Fricker (2007) defines as ‘testimonial injustice.’ This term refers to the prejudices that contribute to a credibility deficit in the reception of certain individuals’ testimonies. Fricker identifies two distinct types of injustice. The first, termed ‘epistemic injustice,’ involves the devaluation of an individual’s capacity to possess knowledge, which can lead to their being perceived as lacking the dignity of an epistemic subject. The second, known as ‘hermeneutic injustice,’ stems from a lack of shared interpretative resources, which results in certain grievances being misunderstood or misrepresented, especially by those who experience them. This form of injustice reveals the structural and systematic biases that

hermeneutically marginalize specific groups, making their testimonies vulnerable to distortion or dismissal.

Ernestina's case illustrates how both forms of testimonial injustice contributed to the emergence of epistemic mistrust rooted in the deep-seated systematic prejudices and the historical marginalization of her community. This was not a mere oversight; rather, it constituted a deliberate attempt to undermine the credibility of her testimony. The injustice became immediately evident after her death, as her voice was swiftly sidelined and overshadowed by an array of forensic details. When the testimony of Ernestina and other witnesses was deemed unreliable, and if their capacity as knowers was denied, then the burden of truth was transferred to the body itself, which was then forced to 'speak' through forensic interpretation.

One of the most striking aspects of this case was the central role that forensic evidence played in shaping the public controversy, as reflected in numerous press releases over several months. The forensic focus effectively positioned Ernestina's body as the only credible source of testimony, while simultaneously elevating medical knowledge as a more legitimate and authoritative voice. Although autopsy results were instrumentalized as part of a broader strategy to construct impunity, they also posed a significant challenge to the pursuit of truth undertaken by those in solidarity with the case, including certain journalists and members of social organizations.

The initial autopsy findings were promptly released to the public, however, the full details did not become available until April 13, 2007, nearly six weeks after Ernestina's death, when journalist Carmen Aristegui published a report on the matter. It later emerged that the report's original author was not Aristegui herself, but Regina Martínez, a journalist from Veracruz known for her thorough coverage of the case. Martínez was later accused of having obtained the photograph through infiltration.

The findings were detailed and exhaustive, with extensive excerpts from both autopsy reports published in the most national newspapers. In this case, medical expertise was initially upheld as a legitimate source in the search for truth, even as government authorities denied the possibility that Ernestina's death was the result of sexual violence. However, this scientific authority was later undermined by deeper, more entrenched prejudices. Another form of injustice emerged: the marginalization of the region where the medical and judicial institutions responsible for Ernestina's care and the initial investigation were located. Officials from

other institutions cast doubt on the professionalism of the local doctors, pointing to alleged procedural irregularities. These claims led to the request for a second autopsy, conducted just a few days after the first. This second report became the basis for concluding that Ernestina's death was due to natural causes and not a criminal act. The case was closed in May of that year. In a matter of weeks, the family and the broader community moved from a position of active mobilization for justice to one of complete silence.

Similarly, these forms of testimonial injustice were evident in Nancy's case, more than a decade later. However, the circumstances differed, as the incident involved a civilian victimizer and received far less media coverage. After Nancy's mother filed the complaint, serious challenges emerged during the registration process, which negatively affected the case's progression. Immediate consequences included errors in the documentation of Nancy's clothing, which had been found in the community. The issuance of the arrest warrant for the sole suspect was significantly delayed, ultimately allowing him to flee the community. As a result, the mother, often accompanied by other family members, was forced to undertake a number of trips, including long journeys to the state capital, located over seven hours away. When the garments were retrieved more than a year later, there was concern that potential fingerprints – possibly those of her spouse – had been erased. Although the witnesses' testimonies unequivocally implicated the primary suspect, they were ultimately deemed insufficient. Irma also identified the passage of time as a factor that contributed to the bureaucratic violence she endured.

The first few times we went to file a complaint, we had to wait a long time, both inside and outside the building, and it was very stressful. On top of that, the staff in charge didn't respond to us quickly enough. I found the process challenging, the one time I had to give a statement. The person responsible for recording it was busy with other tasks and seemed to have started taking notes before I had even finished speaking. She didn't wait for me to finish before beginning the transcription. As a result, my statement wasn't recorded accurately. I remember her saying, 'You will say so,' after I corrected her about who found my daughter – my brother Germán, not the people from Tonalixco, as she had written. When I pointed out the mistake, she simply replied, 'I can't go back on that.' Given my emotional state, I wasn't sure how to respond. I didn't know if I had

the right to challenge what had happened or demand that it be corrected.⁴

The interaction between Indigenous peoples and the justice system is profoundly shaped by systematic racism and the deep inequalities that define their relationship with the state. México also ranks among the countries with the highest levels of impunity, which poses a significant obstacle for Indigenous peoples seeking justice. Furthermore, the chronic lack of essential services limits their access to healthcare, education, and legal support. When Indigenous people attempt to seek redress through official channels, they are frequently met with violence, intimidation, or institutional indifference – factors that often deter them from continuing with legal action.

A particularly notable aspect of Nancy's case was the prolonged impunity, as it took three years before an arrest warrant was finally issued in México City. This breakthrough was only made possible thanks to the persistent efforts of a women's organization, which offered unwavering support to the family and intervened when it became evident that the case was stagnating.

In a context where impunity is the norm, the testimonies of victims and witnesses are often rendered illegitimate and ineffective. Their voices are denied space for expression, and the specific contexts and grievances they endure are frequently ignored. Although forensic evidence is regarded as essential to provide links between perpetrators and victims, it is often lost or not analysed within the critical window in which traces can still be preserved. This broader forensic crisis has also affected numerous cases where such analysis is crucial to establishing accountability, particularly in instances of homicide and feminicide. Thousands of the disappeared have been discovered in clandestine graves, overwhelming the country's forensic capacity. As a result, lawyers from women's organizations working in Indigenous regions must invest a significant effort in reconstructing files that were poorly compiled from the outset.

In this case, a crucial witness, the victim's uncle, who discovered the body, hadn't given his testimony for over a year. We began working on a revised and more accurate statement, alongside a comprehensive review of all existing expert reports and those still pending. On top of that, we found out that items of the victim's clothing found

⁴ Interview with Irma, Zongolica, October 2023.

during the search hadn't been sent to the Directorate for Genetic Profiling. About a year and three months later, these garments were sent for analysis. However, it became clear that the sample had been mishandled, rendering the clothing unsuitable for testing. The responsibility for covering the cost of this transfer fell on the victim or her family, as the prosecution lacked the necessary resources. In such cases, there are a few mechanisms available to seek redress, including filing complaints with the State Coordinator of Specialized Prosecutors or the Attorney General's Office. We've had to engage with these institutions repeatedly to make any progress.⁵

The experiences of the families in the pursuit of justice, marked by evidentiary challenges and prosecutorial shortcomings, have led to the perception that they were subjected to inhumane treatment. This not only undermines trust in the institutions involved but also reinforces the broader perception of state-sanctioned impunity. Even in cases where the perpetrator is found guilty and receives what is considered a relatively severe sentence in the local context of femicide, there is often no institutional accountability for the serious procedural errors or the years of delay. In such instances, the burden of pursuing justice has fallen almost entirely on the family. As a result, the objective of justice remains unfulfilled, and sentencing becomes a mere formality, an act devoid of restorative and transformative impact. Furthermore, acts of institutional violence, the broader social harms, and the consequences for the affected communities are frequently minimized, ignored, or left unacknowledged.

The cases of Ernestina and Nancy exemplify how the testimonies of victims and witnesses are routinely discredited or rendered invisible within institutional processes. While acts of spectacular, physical violence against women's bodies are often centered in both institutional and community narratives, other forms of harm – those less visible or less easily articulated – are pushed to the margins. These silenced grievances find alternative pathways for expression, outside the confines of formal legal channels.

Creating a Testimony of the Unspeakable and Silenced

In the case of Ernestina, her testimony, delivered in Nahuatl, was dismissed and deemed illegitimate within the broader context of militariza-

⁵ Interview with Elisabeth, lawyer of Kalli Luz Marina, an organization of Indigenous women, Orizaba City, October, 2023.

tion, despite the existence of prior complaints involving military personnel. Similarly, in Nancy's case, her account of gender-based violence perpetrated by her partner, situated within the context of rising criminal violence in the community, was marginalized and distorted in the transcription of her mother's testimony, which ultimately went unheard. The pursuit of a legitimate and credible voice within deeply unequal epistemic structures, in which Indigenous people are systematically devalued, has led to the erasure of women's testimonies. As a result, their bodies become the sole site through which violence is recognized and validated. This occurs not only because of the symbolic message inscribed upon the body and projected outward, but more fundamentally because medical and forensic discourse is granted exclusive authority. In the end, it is this technical testimony, superimposed on the body, that becomes the only account considered credible.

In this pursuit of truth and justice, a range of representations and public demonstrations have been employed to challenge impunity and advance a search for truth that demands both access to justice and guarantees of non-repetition. In Ernestina's case, the act of delivering a vital testimony and the limited vocabulary in her language to express concepts such as sexual violence or the presence of the military posed significant obstacles. In Nancy's case, the failure to acknowledge and address the broader community's grievances surrounding her death – and the implications it held within the local context – constitutes a serious injustice. In both instances, alternative testimonial strategies were developed to provoke a deep emotional response, challenge the criminalizing narratives surrounding the victims, and disrupt the atmosphere of terror that had been inscribed through their bodies.

In response to the widespread scepticism surrounding Ernestina's testimony, a photograph of her face was circulated a few days after the official narrative began to take shape. This act appeared to be an effort to prevent the case from falling into oblivion and to ensure that it did not go unpunished. The image accompanied an article published in *Proceso* magazine on March 11, 2007, authored by journalists Regina Martínez and Rodrigo Vera (2007). Regina, who had covered what would become one of the most significant cases of her career, was later murdered in April 2012, during the administration of Governor Javier Duarte de Ochoa (2010–2016), a period marked by the highest number of journalist killings in the state of Veracruz.

In the photograph, Ernestina is positioned on a white ceramic surface.

The image captures her face and upper torso, with the rest of her body covered by a white sheet. A small amount of blood is visible seeping from the occipital region of her skull. Near her head lies an empty Coca-Cola bottle, while in one corner of the frame, a bloodstained rag and what appear to be plastic cloths or gloves are visible. It was later revealed that, due to the investigation launched against the journalists who disseminated the image, the photograph was part of the judicial case file initiated on February 26, 2007. This detail aligns with the timing of the autopsy, which took place several hours after Ernestina had been admitted to the hospital in a state of severe distress.

The dissemination of the photograph had several significant consequences. First, it resonated with a broader audience, particularly amid the prevailing scepticism surrounding Ernestina's testimony during the official investigation and the subsequent construction of an official narrative. Among the most active agents in the pursuit of truth were the deputies and senators from the opposition party, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). The party's secretary repeatedly cited the photograph, presenting it as irrefutable evidence of a cranioencephalic fracture, supported by the visible pool of blood beneath Ernestina's head (Castro 2007). Moreover, journalist Carmen Aristegui publicly challenged the president of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), who had dismissed the findings of the initial autopsy. While the CNDH report concluded that the cause of death was gastritis and internal bleeding, Aristegui (2020) posed a critical question: 'How can the photograph of Ernestina be interpreted as evidence of a cranioencephalic fracture if the bleeding was internal?'

The image stood out for its compelling composition, which synthesized multiple visual elements to produce a striking and memorable portrayal. Unlike a written chronicle, whose accessibility may vary depending on language complexity and audience, photography speaks a universal language, with the potential to reach a broad public (Sontag 2003). The act of photographing confers a sense of reality upon its subject, making what is represented appear incontestable. In this case, the photograph of Ernestina's face rendered the reality of her violent death undeniable. While some may have attributed the presence of blood to the autopsy process, many in the press interpreted it as unequivocal evidence of a violent death.

The presence of blood in the photograph made the reality of the conflict more tangible. This conflict is not limited to the struggle against drug traf-

ficking within the country; it also encompasses an ongoing war against the population, particularly against Indigenous communities, marked by structural and systemic violence. Ernestina's case exemplifies this, as she was denied timely medical attention due to the absence of nearby health-care facilities; the closest one was several hours away from her community. The photograph further underscores the broader conditions that frame the deaths of Ernestina and other Indigenous women. It captures a body laid out on a slab – the standard site for autopsies, surrounded by objects that convey a sense of abandonment. The empty Coca-Cola bottle beside the corpse and the presence of soiled clothes evoke a profound feeling of neglect, desolation, and degradation.

In Nancy's case, the community's peaceful protests served as a platform for articulating broader grievances and for reconstructing the impact of the violence inflicted upon her body, which had been discarded like refuse on the hillside. Her murder represented a profound rupture within the community, leaving a lasting imprint on its social fabric. In more isolated communities – where increasing numbers of young people, particularly men, were being recruited into criminal or drug-related groups – there was a notable rise in criminal activity. This environment gave rise to specific and heightened threats against women, both within the domestic sphere and in public spaces.

Nancy's murder served as a form of social deterrence, sending a chilling message to the entire community: remain passive and exert control over lives that had been rendered expendable. In the aftermath, the victim's mother recounted that men within the community began using her daughter's case to intimidate other women. 'The fate that befell Nancy will befall you as well,' they warned. The incident left a profound mark on the collective psyche, plunging the community into a prolonged period of mourning. As one witness described it, 'A pervasive atmosphere of sadness was palpable.'

The sexual and extreme violence inflicted upon women's bodies has far-reaching communal repercussions that are frequently silenced within formal justice processes and seldom find expression in alternative forums. These spiritual and affective harms deeply disrupt community relationships and are rarely acknowledged (Hernández Castillo 2016; De Marinis 2019).

Sadness, in this context, is not merely a fleeting emotion but a manifestation of profound social wounding, an injury that undermines the very fabric sustaining collective life. The integration of healing practices and

the provision of time for communal recovery are essential components of any meaningful reparation process. Yet, such elements are largely absent from the current justice system, which tends to emphasize individual cases, prioritize punitive outcomes, and quantify reparations in economic terms, approaches that fail to address the broader, collective dimensions of harm.

In Nancy's case, Irma made it clear that securing a conviction was only one component of a broader struggle for justice, one that sought to address the deep harm inflicted upon the community. On the day of the hearing, a significant number of community members gathered in solidarity. Demonstrators assembled outside the courthouse, expressing their demands through a silent protest featuring placards calling for justice in Nancy's name. The community stood with Irma and her family, including Nancy's daughter and sister, who had invited supporters both to apply pressure on the authorities and to show collective support. The accused's parents were also present. Although he was ultimately sentenced to 55 years in prison, the community's sense of impunity persisted, as the perpetrator never acknowledged responsibility for his actions.

The acknowledgment of his actions and a request for forgiveness would have constituted a form of reparation for all those he had harmed. Within Indigenous communities, forgiveness is not merely a personal gesture but an act of recognition and a pathway toward collective healing and reparation (Saavedra Hernández 2019). In the absence of such recognition, the community's collective performativity during the hearing underscored a lingering, unresolved grievance, one that remained peripheral to the formal justice process.

Final Reflections

In numerous justice processes, whether within ordinary judicial frameworks or transitional justice contexts, the testimonies of Indigenous women have been subjected to specific and recurring forms of violence. Beyond the pervasive silencing of sexual violence in contexts of war and armed conflict, intersecting systems of oppression, such as racism, economic marginalization, and historical exclusion, have given rise to distinct forms of testimonial and epistemic injustice. Nevertheless, several studies documenting the emergence of these testimonies have highlighted their destabilizing impact on both women and their communities. The testimonies of Indigenous women victims have revealed the interwoven nature of violence, showing that sexual violence cannot be under-

stood in isolation or as serving merely sexual ends. They have further illuminated the collective dimensions of harm, underscoring the potential of reparations to contribute to the healing of social fabrics torn apart by violence (Fulchirone 2016; Crosby and Lykes 2019).

The political force of such testimonies lies not only in their content but also in the actions and reactions they provoke (Jelin 2002; Bacci 2015; De Marinis and Macleod 2020). Their capacity to evoke emotional responses is rooted in their relational character. In some cases, testimony becomes a form of witnessing by proxy, an act performed by those who speak on behalf of victims who are no longer able to articulate their experiences due to death or the destruction of their subjecthood. In contexts where violence annihilates not only individual bodies but the very conditions of humanity for historically marginalized groups, the role of the audience becomes central in the pursuit of truth and the preservation of memory. From this perspective, the circulation and reception of Indigenous women's testimonies must be critically examined, not only in light of gendered silences and normative boundaries of what is deemed 'sayable,' but also in terms of racialized structures that determine what is heard, believed, and rendered legible to broader publics.

Ernestina's photograph played a pivotal role in galvanizing public reaction at a moment when national concern over the unfolding war's toll was intensifying. The image of an elderly Indigenous woman lying in a pool of blood became emblematic of the war's violence, an affront that resonated far beyond her community. In contrast, in Nancy's case, the fragmentation of family and witness testimony, compounded by a bureaucratic process seemingly designed to erode any possibility of justice, led to the strategic use of her photograph in various performative acts. These acts aimed to pressure local authorities into action during a judicial process that lasted more than four years. However, the individualized focus of the justice system created further exclusions, specifically, the inability to account for the collective wounds that Nancy's violent death had exposed.

In both cases, the public visibility of the victims' bodies, treated as disposable or degraded matter, underscored how military and criminal logics have come to dominate Indigenous territories and bodies, disrupting normative expectations of violence. These forms of systemic criminality not only fractured communities but also prompted unprecedented collective performances of grief and resistance by community members and their allies. Through these collective narratives and acts, individual-

ized and often invalidated testimonies are re-legitimized, and the broader scope of collective harm is articulated, a harm that urgently demands recognition and reparation.

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Crime, Women and Information and Communications Technologies: Everyday Management of Insecurity in Santiago and Buenos Aires

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Abstract. In recent decades, crime has become a public concern and a daily issue in Latin America. While much research has focused on organized crime and crime prevention, less attention has been given to how crime affects the everyday lives of young women in cities. This study, based on interviews with women in Santiago, Chile, and Buenos Aires, Argentina, reveals that their primary concerns are street harassment and sexual crimes, which mainly impact their mobility in the city. Women avoid relying on mass media for information, instead turning to their mothers and grandmothers as primary sources of knowledge and fear. Chilean women express higher levels of concern, significantly restricting their activities, particularly leisure, compared to Argentine women. Despite these differences, women in both countries have adopted technologies for self-protection, although their lives remain deeply affected by the fear of crime.

Key Words: crime, fear of crime, women, urban mobilities, Information Communications Technologies (ICT), Latin America

Kriminal, ženske in informacijsko-komunikacijske tehnologije: vsakodnevno soočanje z negotovostjo v Santiago in Buenos Airesu

Povzetek. V zadnjih desetletjih je kriminal postal pereč javni problem in vsakodnevna skrb v Latinski Ameriki. Čeprav je bilo veliko raziskav osredotočenih na organizirani kriminal in njegovo preprečevanje, je

manj pozornosti namenjene vplivu kriminala na vsakodnevno življenje mladih žensk v urbanih okoljih. Ta raziskava, ki temelji na intervjujih z ženskami iz Santiaga v Čilu ter Buenos Airesa v Argentini, razkriva, da so njihove glavne skrbi nadlegovanje na ulici in spolni zločini, ki pomembno vplivajo na njihovo mobilnost v mestu. Namesto zanašanja na množične medije glede pridobivanja informacij se te ženske obračajo na svoje matere in babice kot primarne vire znanja ter preventivnih ukrepov. Čilenske ženske v primerjavi z Argentinkami izkazujejo večjo stopnjo zaskrbljenosti, kar pomembno omejuje njihove aktivnosti, zlasti preživljanje prostega časa. Kljub razlikam v zaznavi so ženske v obeh državah sprejele različne tehnologije za samozaščito, vendar so njihova življenja še vedno globoko zaznamovana s strahom pred kriminalom.

Ključne besede: kriminal, strah pred kriminalom, ženske, urbana mobilnost, informacijsko-komunikacijske tehnologije (IKT), Latinska Amerika

Introduction

I always do several things ... I exercise after work, but in winter, for example, I significantly reduce my activities because, since it gets dark earlier, I prefer to get home while it's still light.¹ [Young woman, Santiago, Chile]

The response of this young woman from Santiago de Chile to the question of how crime affects her daily life exemplifies the experiences of many young Latin American women. Currently, Latin America is the most violent region in the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021; 2023). Its cities report high levels of criminal activity, a situation exacerbated by factors such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the penetration of organized crime into various territories. The United Nations Global Drug Report (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2021) highlights the prominent role Latin America plays in post-pandemic drug trafficking dynamics, including an increase in illicit drug shipments and greater use of land and river routes for trafficking, contributing to a rise in homicidal violence. Thus, Latin American democracies today face the spread of organized criminal violence throughout the region. Even countries like Chile and Argentina, which

¹ Editor's note: All quotations originally published in languages other than English have been translated by the authors. Editor's note.

have historically shown better indicators of lethal violence, are now encountering new criminal patterns linked to transnational crime.

This scenario has a direct correlation with fear of crime, which shapes the daily lives of Latin Americans. Various surveys report increasing concerns about crime in the region, particularly in Southern Cone countries such as Chile and Argentina. According to the 2024 IPSOS survey on attitudes toward crime and law enforcement, 61% of Chileans and 45% of Argentinians cited crime and violence as their primary public concerns. These figures have risen compared to previous years, with Chile ranking second in Latin America, despite being relatively safe in terms of homicide rates compared to other countries in the region. The 2023 Latino-barómetro survey (<https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>) also highlights the growing fear of crime in both Argentina and Chile, where women, in particular, report significantly higher levels of fear than men. In Argentina, for example, nearly twice as many women as men report feeling afraid.

The gap between actual crime rates and the perception of insecurity is evident at both the national and individual levels. Not all individuals experience the same level of fear; factors such as class, age, ethnicity, and, especially, gender explain these differences (Lee and Mythen 2017). These disparities have been extensively explored through social and criminological studies since the 1970s (Hale 1996; Ceccato 2011; Ceccato and Nalla 2020). Evidence suggests that individual, social, and environmental factors influence the perception of fear of crime. At the individual level, sociodemographic variables such as gender and age significantly affect the level of fear reported, with older adults and women exhibiting higher levels of fear (Hale 1996; Pain 2000). Various analyses confirm that women consistently report higher levels of fear, while young people, despite being more frequently victimized, tend to express less fear.

At the social level, income levels are a noteworthy finding in the literature, although no clear trends are observed: 'International studies show slightly higher fear levels among lower-income groups, particularly due to greater social vulnerability, living in less protected areas, and difficulty replacing stolen items' (Kessler 2011, 90, note 12). Furthermore, environmental and community factors have proven to be key determinants in the perception of fear: neighbourhood disorganization, the presence of incivilities, low collective efficacy, physical deterioration, and interpersonal trust are consistent explanations in this regard (Sampson 2012). In terms of the physical environment, theories suggest that labyrinthine ur-

ban designs, poor lighting, and a lack of natural surveillance make public spaces appear more unsafe, particularly for women (Jeffery 1971; Pain 2001; Navarrete-Hernandez et al. 2023; Luneke Reyes, Trebilcock, and Robles, 2020).

Regarding gender, it is well known that women report greater fear, which is also associated with dealing not only with property crimes in public spaces but also with situations of a sexual nature (Walklate 2017). Gender dynamics in public spaces lead to specific ways of inhabiting the city. As analyses of fear of crime have shown, the violence women perceive in public spaces and flow areas creates a daily sense of insecurity (Kessler 2009). From a feminist perspective, fear of crime generates immobility for women (leading them to avoid going out) and is rooted in a context of unequal power relations between men and women that sustain dominant masculinity in public spaces (Srivastava 2012; Loukaitou-Sideris 2012). Thus, women's mobility and safety are interdependent because many women feel unsafe when they travel the city. A global study of 28 cities revealed that women were 10% more likely than men to feel unsafe in the subway and 6% more likely to feel unsafe on buses (Ouali et al. 2020). Another global report from 2022 indicated that 32% of surveyed women felt unsafe in urban spaces; 97% of young women in the UK reported having been sexually assaulted in public spaces, 55% of them felt unsafe using public transportation in Brazil, and 12% of them had experienced harassment in public bathrooms in EU countries (ARUP 2022).

In Chile and Argentina, a 2018 study on women's safety in public spaces revealed very high levels of fear of crime on public transportation, especially among women. In Buenos Aires, 72% of women reported feeling unsafe on public transport, compared to 58% of men. A similar situation occurred in Santiago, where 73% of women reported feeling unsafe, compared to 59% of men. The causes of this perceived insecurity vary by gender, with women highlighting the presence of men on buses and trains and the threat of sexual assault as significant factors influencing their fear. Researchers have linked these differences to the experience of sexual harassment in public spaces. According to the aforementioned study, 89% of women surveyed in Santiago and Buenos Aires reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime, with 49% having experienced it within the last 12 months. This includes harassment on the way to or from public transport, as well as within vehicles themselves (Allen et al. 2018).

The effects of fear of crime are numerous. Fear of crime reduces so-

cial interactions and fosters interpersonal distrust (Sampson 2012); it encourages the fortification of communities, further fragmenting cities and increasing social isolation (Caldeira 2000). In the case of women, the evidence highlights that perceived insecurity in public spaces negatively affects their mental health, causing daily anxiety and stress. Additionally, experiences of violence on public transport limit women's economic opportunities, as they tend to reject job offers that are too far away. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has shown that deficient and unsafe transportation reduces women's participation in the labour market by up to 16% (Oficina Regional para América Latina y el Caribe 2017).

As a result, recent research has focused on the processes, practices, and meanings that crime produces socially. As highlighted by Vania Ceccato (2011), Sandra L. Walklate (2018), and Vania Ceccato and Mahesh K. Nalla (2020), fear of crime should be addressed in terms of its productive capacity – understanding not only the causes but also the social and spatial effects it generates. Within this subfield, analysis has focused on the measures and practices that individuals and communities use to negotiate the anxiety and uncertainty produced by violence and crime in their immediate urban environments. The concept of 'managing insecurity' relates to sociological theories of risk management, which assume that insecurity is the result of human initiative and can be discouraged by actions that limit criminal behaviour and prevent risks and threats in public spaces. Villarreal (2015) refers to these as 'logistics of fear,' small everyday tactics that allow individuals to control perceived threats. The literature generally identifies two types of logistics: evasive and defensive. Evasive practices enable individuals to isolate themselves from risks and dangers. If the individual knows their environment well, this knowledge becomes a resource that allows them to anticipate emerging risks and threats on an individual basis (Auyero and Kilanski 2015).

These practices generally affect two aspects of daily life: mobility and the use of public spaces. In insecure cities or neighbourhoods, people spend more time at home, leading to the abandonment or disuse of urban spaces meant for socialization, such as parks or streets, due to the fear of victimization. Additionally, insecurity restricts individuals' mobility, as the more dangerous a route is considered, the less it is used, and individuals limit the times they venture out, preferring to use private vehicles (Kessler 2009). In high-violence cities, community caravans (travelling together) or moving in groups on public transport are common strategies (Villarreal 2015). Parents also avoid letting their children travel

alone, escorting them to and from bus stops, and constantly monitoring their movements and those of their friends (Luneke Reyes 2021).

Defensive practices, on the other hand, aim to protect individuals from danger. On a personal level, people take self-defence classes or carry weapons such as knives or firearms. To ensure their safety, they install geo-referencing systems on their cars or electronic devices (Auyero and Kilanski 2015). Protecting streets and homes is also common using enclosures (bars, gates, locks) or socio-technological systems (alarms, dogs, etc.), which are mobilized individually or in cooperation with neighbours. The use of WhatsApp, apps like SoSafe in Chile, or community alarms is widespread in various Latin American neighbourhoods, serving as platforms where neighbours inform each other of potential risks in the area (Torres 2017). In gated communities, common practices include hiring private security, building perimeter walls, installing gates at access points, surveillance cameras, and any devices that make the community resemble a fortress (Breetzke, Landman, and Cohn 2014; Grundström 2017; Lemanski 2004; Tedong et al. 2014). Conducting daily activities in the presence of such devices creates a sense of safety for individuals (Kessler 2009).

In the case of women, who are more frequently victims of sexual violence, they exhibit more preventive behaviours and a wider variety of strategies to manage insecurity in daily life than men. The 'She Moves Safely' study from 2018 also highlights that women, especially those with low to medium incomes, tend to plan and use more expensive transportation options, such as taxis or similar services, to avoid public transport (Allen et al. 2018, 82). In this sense, studies reveal that the masculinization of public spaces and areas of movement shapes women's mobility patterns and inhibits them (Koskela and Pain 2000). The specialized literature shows that, in general, these practices lead to restricted mobility, influence decisions about where to live, limit transportation options, and reduce the walkability of cities (Navarrete-Hernandez et al. 2023; Herrmann-Lunecke, Mora, and Vejares 2021). Specifically, 'areas of access and walkability to public transportation are marked as the most dangerous in the urban landscape, particularly for women' (Luneke Reyes, Trebilcock, and Robles 2020, 163).

A less explored aspect in this body of knowledge is the detailed study of insecurity management practices and their relationship with new information technologies and their use in daily life. Although the connection between fear of crime, gender, and safety has been widely addressed, and

the analysis of urban mobility has recently reintroduced the gender gap in this aspect of everyday life, less attention has been given to how technological advances allow women to negotiate more easily with crime in daily life, particularly in cities with higher levels of fear of crime. In this context, we ask how social information technologies are shaping the everyday security management practices of young women. Our main hypothesis is that technologies today mediate fear of crime and urban living, especially shaping mobility practices and access to the city, allowing women to cope better with the fear that crime generates.

To answer this question, we conducted a qualitative comparative study in Santiago and Buenos Aires in 2023. Both cities share similar characteristics as capital cities of two Southern Cone countries in Latin America, exhibiting relatively low levels of lethal violence compared to their regional peers. They are large cities with similar degrees of urbanization. The differences between them are directly related to the varying levels of fear of crime reported in international surveys. For both cases, we reviewed and analysed documents and specialized literature; applied the same information collection instrument; and selected a similar sample of participants. Thirty women aged 18 to 29 were interviewed, occupying various roles (students, workers, caregivers) and living in different areas of the city (at varying distances from the centre of their respective cities). The interviews were structured around key themes. First, we sought to understand the women's everyday mobility, paying attention to the means of transport they used to navigate the city. Once we had an idea of their modes of mobility, we delved into their perception of insecurity regarding their movement within the city, identifying the factors that influenced these perceptions and how they were constructed. Finally, we sought to understand the measures and actions they took to manage their mobility, especially those measures that made them feel safer, with a particular focus on how these measures were related to applications and new social information technologies. The results were analysed qualitatively using a thematic approach, organized into grids, and interpreted based on the relevant literature. Below, we present the main findings of this research, and in the final considerations, we highlight the theoretical and empirical findings of the study.

The Main Threat: Sexual Violence and Street Harassment

Despite the presence of crime associated with transnational organizations in Latin America and the fact that countries like Argentina and Chile now

face this threat, the main source of fear for young women remains sexual violence and street harassment. All the women we interviewed expressed fear regarding this issue, linking the primary risks to the presence of men in public spaces and areas of mobility. However, not all women experience the city with the same level of concern or fear of crime, as their fear is highly influenced by their personal experiences, families, peers, and the societal imagination surrounding public spaces. As the comparative evidence shows, the perception of insecurity is shaped both by direct experience and by the symbolic and social elements present in each society (Kessler 2009).

Some of the women interviewed move through the city in a constant state of alert, often altering their mobility patterns to avoid situations they perceive as risky. Others, while recognizing the issue of insecurity, do not allow it to paralyze them, finding ways to distance themselves from their surroundings and navigate through situations they consider inevitable.

Talking on the phone makes me feel safer – it's like a mind trick because I know it doesn't really change anything. I mean, if someone wants to rob me or do something to me, they'll do it anyway [*laughs*]. But being on the phone with my mom or dad makes me feel more at ease on the bus. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

In both cases, certain environmental elements and situations contribute to the feeling of being 'constantly on alert.' These elements, deemed risky or dangerous, are multiple and often relate to the women's exposure to violence. The fear of being a victim of crime is commonly associated with violent acts, such as physical assaults and, more specifically, sexual violence, rather than material loss in the case of robbery.

And more than just the act of having my things taken, it's the distress of being mistreated, hit, or having someone get too close to me ... [Worker, young woman, Buenos Aires]

This aspect tends to distinguish women from their male peers. As one interviewee put it, 'It's something only women understand.' For these women, moving through the city as a woman is inherently different from moving through it as a man, and they almost universally identify men as one of the key dangers in their environment. Whether it is a crowded subway car with mostly men, a male Uber driver, or being alone with a man on a bus, these factors heighten the fear experienced by the women. In this sense, as analysed in a Latin American study (Allen et al. 2018), the masculinization of public spaces contributes to greater fear associated

with crime. Many women report feeling less afraid when there are more women present in their surroundings. This relates to the fact that men represent not only a material threat but also a physical and sexual one, with the possibility of being victims of street harassment or even rape. It is also linked to their relative physical vulnerability as women.

For me, generally, street harassment is more top of mind. I've never really cared if someone steals something from me. It's never been a major fear for me. In fact, when I'm out at night and I tell my male friends that someone strange is on the bus, for example, they'll say, 'But hide your phone!' I don't care about my phone; what matters to me is whether someone says or does something inappropriate. So, it's always been like that. If I put my phone away and close my bag, I feel okay. What matters are other things, not robbery. [Student, 22 years old, Santiago]

This correlates with the literature, which states that women experience cities differently from men, particularly when it comes to their perception of insecurity. Thus, 'being a woman entails a specific, differential, and additional fear in comparison to the subjective representation of fear or insecurity experienced by men' (Añoover López 2014, 29).

In general, when I think about my fears while walking through the city, they all involve men. Seeing a man on a corner, seeing a group of men together – it's even worse. An Uber driver doesn't inspire trust either. When I think about walking around, it's never women that make me feel afraid or defensive. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

Therefore, the perception of risk is strongly influenced by being a woman in public spaces and interacting with hostile environments and individuals.

It really makes me angry that it's so unfair to be a woman. It sounds cliché, but the cliché is so true. Like, my brother can go out alone, and neither of us feels any worry when he does, but if I go out at night, I wouldn't even consider going alone [...] not because I think about it consciously, but because I feel like I'm putting myself in danger. So, it's not even something I consider as an option. I only think about it now because we're in an interview, and I'm reflecting more deeply on my decisions. But in practice, I make them unconsciously ... In the end, it's like ... Patriarchy [*laughs*]. [Student, 29 years old, Santiago]

These risks, identified by the interviewees, are often associated with

environmental elements that facilitate the commission of crimes, a loss of subjective control over the environment, and becoming highly visible in public spaces, which exposes them to sexual risks. Darkness emerges as a key factor in constructing fear, as it facilitates crime by concealing potential perpetrators and hinders the ability to maintain control over the environment due to a lack of visibility. Among the environmental elements that increase the likelihood of crime are the absence of potential witnesses, darkness, and access to escape routes for criminals. The presence of more people, especially other women, makes women feel safer. In contrast, the presence of unknown men creates greater social distance and distrust (Luneke Reyes, Trebilcock, and Robles 2020).

The presence of men also makes me to avoid certain spaces. For instance, if there are a lot of men around, I move closer to spaces where there are women, or I prefer spaces that are emptier. If there are five seats available and four are occupied by men, with one seat in the middle, I'd rather stand than sit between a group of men. [Student, 22 years old, Santiago]

Darkness, combined with the absence of potential witnesses, creates an insecure environment because it conceals potential aggressors who may suddenly appear. The proximity of highways also contributes to the perception of insecurity, as it offers a quick escape route for potential criminals. This perception is linked to the deficit of natural surveillance, which environmental design theories have identified as a predictor of crime (Newman 1997).

I have a therapy session in the city centre at three in the afternoon, but by the time I'm done, it's four, and that's when the crowds start to build up. I prefer to take a shared taxi at that time, so at least I'm sitting more freely, even though it takes longer to get home. I could take the train because it's faster, but it's horrible, with people pressed up against you. You've got men staring at you, a guy with his sweaty arm on you, or someone drinking next to you. [Worker, 22 years old, Buenos Aires]

Other situations lead young women to lose subjective control over their environment, which becomes unpredictable, increasing their sense of insecurity and forcing them to remain alert. This loss of control is caused by the presence of people deemed dangerous or unpredictable, such as immigrants, homeless people, or those consuming alcohol, all of whom are primarily associated with men's behaviour. This feeling of loss of con-

trol intensifies in crowded spaces, such as public transportation or street markets, where too many external stimuli require constant vigilance to avoid uncomfortable or dangerous situations, such as sexual harassment or violence.

When there's a lot of people, I can't stay fully aware of what everyone is doing. When there are fewer people, it's easier to keep track of those around me. [Student, 21 years old, Santiago]

The city centre is always packed when I'm there because all the courthouses are around, so lawyers are always rushing around. Then you've got street vendors and all kinds of people moving through the area [...] It gets so crowded during those hours that I think that's why harassment happens more frequently. Though I have noticed that it's gotten better recently. Three years ago, my experience in the city centre was entirely different. Walking through Plaza de Armas (in the downtown of the city of Santiago), for example, I would expect the worst. Now, I bundle up and wear lots of clothing so that I don't stand out, and things are calmer. But before, I would head there bracing for the worst. [Student, 29 years old, Santiago]

A significant source of fear is when rideshare drivers, like those using Uber, change routes, which puts women in a more vulnerable position since they are already exposed by the fact that a stranger is driving the vehicle. Darkness also plays a role in this, as it increases the loss of control over the environment and thus also fear, given the impossibility of being aware of one's surroundings. In the dark, any person could appear suddenly, turning potential dangers into unpredictable threats. The threat of street harassment leads young women to view their own visible presence in public spaces as a risk. Thus, 'blending in' becomes a form of protection to avoid victimization. From this, a series of actions deemed risky emerges, actions that expose women to harassment or other forms of aggression. Chief among these is how they present themselves through clothing; appearing feminine is considered risky, as being visibly a woman places them in a position of vulnerability. Wearing colourful clothes, carrying handbags, or being the only woman in a subway car full of men are perceived with fear, prompting actions specifically aimed at reducing visibility.

At night, I usually put my hoodie up and try to cover myself as much as possible. [Worker, 26 years old, Santiago]

I always dress conservatively because street harassment in the city centre is unbearable, especially during the summer. I'd rather be hot than show any skin. I hate being looked at, and in the city centre, men are constantly gawking. [Student, 29 years old, Santiago]

In the mornings on the bus, I wear the uniform I use for work because it makes me feel more disguised, more covered up. With regular clothes, I immediately look more like a woman. I don't wear makeup during the week for the same reason. On the bus, it's all about not being noticed. That's what matters most to me. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

The Transmission of Fear in Families: The Role of Mothers and Grandmothers

When it comes to understanding how young women construct their perception of safety, it is evident that personal experiences play a role, but this perception is also largely influenced by their relationships with peers and family, as well as by their exposure to media and other sources of information. Some young women choose to avoid the news because it increases their feelings of insecurity, while others used to follow it but have since stopped. Many have decided to reduce their exposure to television and certain social media platforms to avoid excessive exposure to alarming content. It is common for young women to report that they prefer not to watch too much news, especially television news, which they feel amplifies fear unnecessarily. For those who prefer to stay informed, they primarily rely on social media and news websites.

The media often exaggerates the dangers, so a lot of it comes down to experience, hearing things like 'Watch out for this' or 'Be careful with that.' Watching the news just makes me more scared, so I try not to watch too much. [Student, 25 years old, Buenos Aires]

I watch the news, and there's also a Facebook group for my neighbourhood where people post about where robberies happen, so I use that to navigate. I check it almost every day, mostly in the mornings, so I know which areas are dangerous, but it's also helpful to know if, for example, there's a strike on the Alsina Bridge. [Worker, 28 years old, Buenos Aires]

I don't like watching TV for information. I used to watch it all the time, but I realized it just made me more scared. Before, I would

think, 'Nothing bad has ever happened to me,' but recently, I had a couple of attempts where people tried to snatch my purse, and that's when I started avoiding the news because it made me over-think things. [Caregiver, 26 years old, Santiago]

Young women also acknowledge that their perception of safety is shaped by the conversations they have with their peers and family members, particularly female relatives like their mothers and grandmothers. Among peers, they tend to share similar daily experiences, while within their families, the knowledge and perceptions they receive are often shaped by their mothers or grandmothers, who instil these concerns and teach them safety techniques. In some cases, their peer groups remain alert but are not overly alarmist, allowing them to discuss security measures within their group, such as sharing locations or checking in on each other's well-being.

However, a significant difference is noted in how family dynamics affect these young women's perceptions of security. Women whose mothers are more 'relaxed' tend to adopt a calmer attitude when navigating the city, while those whose mothers are highly concerned report that this has strongly influenced their current perception of safety and their public behaviour.

Others, while acknowledging that their mothers or families are very apprehensive, do not limit their mobility accordingly. For women who still live with their families, they often take safety measures that their families encourage, even when they don't feel these measures are necessary. For example, they may allow themselves to be picked up or implement safety precautions recommended by their family.

I think my mom is the one who's influenced me the most because she's experienced a lot of street harassment. She always asks me to share my location when I'm in an Uber, which is rare, but we both feel more afraid of Uber than other forms of transport because of being alone with a man. She taught me that public transport is much safer than other options, like Uber or walking alone at night. She also takes the bus and subway to work in the city centre because driving and parking there is impossible and too expensive, so she takes public transport. [Student, 22 years old, Santiago]

When I get home, my mom starts: 'Did you see what happened?' and repeats all the crime reports that my grandma already told me about. Then my dad sits me down and says: 'I want you to know this

happened, and you need to be careful ...’ She tells me how to protect myself and what to do. [Student, 24 years old, Buenos Aires]

In many cases, parents relay preventive measures they picked up from media reports, passing them on to their children.

My parents mostly keep me informed; they always tell me to be careful. After going through it several times myself, I’ve started noticing certain things. I don’t read the news, but I get alerts on Twitter, and most of what I know comes from home. [Worker, 20 years old, Buenos Aires]

The family environment not only transmits perceptions about public mobility but also teaches young women various mechanisms to keep in mind when navigating the city. These include not wearing headphones, not using their phones in the street, putting their phones away when public transportation is approaching a stop, always having pepper spray in hand while walking, being alert to suspicious behaviour, avoiding walking alone in dangerous neighbourhoods (especially at night), dressing more conservatively at night, sharing their location, informing others of their whereabouts, constantly scanning their surroundings, carrying their backpacks in front on public transport, and always standing near the door.

In general, young women show greater distance than other age groups in terms of media consumption and the credibility they assign to these sources, while at the same time demonstrating a clear predisposition to remain vigilant in the face of increasing insecurity, which, in some cases, includes reference to media-reported cases. Young women display what can be considered incidental consumption of news related to insecurity: even though they may not actively seek out news on web portals, social media, or television, they are still aware of it, either through their families or because cases are shared on social media. They often come across this information without actively searching for it, as news reaches them through different channels.

Thus, an intergenerational circular space emerges in terms of experiences and sensitivities related to insecurity: just as young people follow the advice of their parents regarding crime, older adults receive recommendations from their children and follow their advice as well (Focás 2020).

I am incredibly fearful when I move around, just like my mom. I feel bad blaming her [*laughs*], but she really taught me to be constantly

on edge – not just cautious but downright hysterical. And I'm even worse when it comes to my daughter, Emi. She's even more hysterical than I am. I think the pandemic made us all worse because, besides the fear of being kidnapped or robbed, there was the fear of getting sick. My mom went a little crazy – she was terrified that she was going to die. And then when she got COVID, nothing happened. She just had a cough, that's it [*laughs*]. [Caregiver, 28 years old, Santiago]

These experiences are intertwined with rumours and family conversations, becoming the source of information that ultimately shapes women's perceptions of security and the strategies they use to navigate insecurity.

ICT's and the Management of Insecurity in Gendered Urban Mobility

The central role of new technologies as allies in crime prevention has been addressed by various authors from a governmental perspective (Ríos 2019; Aguirre Sala 2016; Lavorgna and Ugwudike 2021). However, less attention has been given to the role of ICTs (Information and Communications Technologies) in the everyday management of security, particularly their use in sharing information, opinions, and solutions related to security issues (Galar 2018; Galar and Focás 2018). In terms of using social media as a means of managing security, local research has shown that state crime prevention programmes incorporate electronic identification and control tools, particularly WhatsApp groups and citizen assistance apps, as instruments for managing or avoiding conflicts between social classes (Torres 2017; Lio and Urtasun 2016; Lio 2019). Additionally, recent research explores the integration of social networks and messaging services in the (self)management of urban security (Vélez 2019).

In relation to women and urban mobility, we found that the most-used apps by young women for transportation are Uber, Didi, and Cabify. Additionally, Google Maps is frequently mentioned as a tool for navigating the city. These apps serve different purposes in terms of mobility. Transportation apps, for instance, are not only used for commuting but also for sharing trip details and driver information, as explained by a young woman from Argentina:

I avoid putting myself in uncomfortable situations. If it's late, I try to move with people and avoid being alone. I take the bus in busier areas, and whenever I feel in danger, I send my live location to my family and friends. If I take an Uber, I send the car's details, the driver's

name, or a screenshot of the ride to someone. [Student-worker, 22 years old, Buenos Aires]

In addition, other apps on their phones contribute to their sense of safety. As mentioned, sharing their location via WhatsApp is one of the most common security measures. Some differentiate between day and night, sharing their location only at night, while others share their location both day and night. Furthermore, women also use mapping apps to plan their trips, which helps reduce mental stress and makes them feel safer. Planning their routes before heading out allows them to calculate the travel time, decide on the best mode of transport, and avoid taking out their phone when navigating unfamiliar areas.

I'm very much a planner. The other day, I had a yoga class in Providencia, and the night before, I was already planning the route: I'll do this, take this bus, and then walk. Plus, sharing my location and knowing my route ahead of time gives me a sense of security because I know I won't need to take out my phone or ask someone for directions. So, that gives me some peace of mind. [Caregiver, 26 years old, Santiago]

When I travel at night, before I get on the bus, I check the license plate. If no one else gets on, I send a message to my mom or partner: 'I'm on this bus.' When I take a taxi or go out with new people, I send messages to my friends with details like the car's license plate, the driver, and where I am, so they know in case something happens. [Worker, 22 years old, Buenos Aires]

I always share my live location and plan my route using Google Maps. I check which bus to take, how long the journey will take, and what streets I'll need to walk down. I always do that before leaving, no matter what. [Worker, 23 years old, Santiago]

Finally, some of the women we interviewed mentioned using apps that allow them to share their location continuously with others, particularly friends or sisters. They referenced an iPhone feature that enables this, as well as an app called Live 360.

Conclusions

Insecurity has become a public concern and a daily issue in Latin America over the past twenty years, with various studies focusing on crime prevention tactics and the management of everyday safety. In simple terms,

managing everyday safety involves using preventive strategies to avoid becoming a victim of crime. Evasive practices, such as avoiding areas considered dangerous, restricting activities to certain times of the day, or choosing one route over another, are common. Defensive strategies also include the use of protective measures like installing alarms, cameras, fences, or hiring security services. Both individual and collective actions, as well as the deployment of such devices, shape the feeling of insecurity and define new ways of navigating the urban landscape.

However, one aspect that has been less addressed in studies of insecurity and crime is how these issues shape the daily lives of young women, who use various technologies to protect themselves and feel safer. In this study, we focused on how young women in two Latin American cities – Santiago, Chile, and Buenos Aires, Argentina – manage their everyday safety. This research highlights not only the everyday tactics they employ when navigating urban spaces but also the cognitive and emotional effort this entails. In this sense, we believe that this work contributes to at least three key dimensions in the literature and has implications for public policies that have addressed crime prevention from a gender perspective.

First, the results show that in both cities, women experience mobility with fear and insecurity. Young women are primarily concerned about street harassment and sexual crimes, and these are the aspects of their mobility that are most affected. In comparing the interviews, we noticed that Argentine women tend to ‘normalize’ urban risks and dangers more than Chilean women, who express greater anxiety and uncertainty when discussing their movements. For Argentine women, managing these risks does not necessarily involve restricting their outings; instead, they demonstrate a greater understanding of urban spaces than previous generations. Fear of crime studies have often focused on mobility restrictions as a protective strategy (McCrea et al. 2005; Walklate 2001). However, this study reveals another dimension: young women do not necessarily limit their outings but instead implement preventive measures almost instinctively, often showing creativity in ensuring their own safety. Regarding these risks, both Argentine and Chilean women avoid relying on mass media for information about crime, evaluating the role of the media negatively in spreading fear. However, the young women’s perceptions still show an indirect influence from information received through their parents, immediate family, and social networks, which they then reinterpret in conversations with their peers.

Second, the study shows that these young women identify their moth-

ers and grandmothers as their main sources of information and fear: it is their female caretakers who teach them how to protect themselves and manage their safety in daily life. The comparative analysis reveals that Chilean women express higher levels of concern about crime, which more significantly limits their mobility in the city, especially in terms of leisure activities. Unlike Argentine women, Chilean women are more likely to avoid going out, restricting their daily lives to a greater extent.

In the narratives presented in this study, we can trace some key relationships that emerge from intergenerational connections. As Carmen Leccardi and Carles Feixa (2011) explain, certain events mark a before-and-after in collective life, and in this case, it is evident in the socio-cultural changes brought about by preventive practices against crime. Here, mothers and grandmothers play a central role as 'guardians' of safety in a hostile environment for young women.

Finally, ICTs and especially apps have become essential tools in the daily management of young women's safety, with live location sharing replacing the need for accompaniment by family members, friends, or partners. In both cities, young women have learned to protect themselves by using technology and platforms intensively. Despite this, the everyday lives of young women remain deeply affected by crime and violence in Latin America.

This study's results also reveal many similarities between the experiences of young women in the cities of Santiago and Buenos Aires. Despite differences in how the cities are perceived and inhabited, both case studies demonstrate that the urban environment becomes a hostile space for these women, limiting the development of their lives. The analysis of the young women's narratives highlights how the unequal distribution of power between men and women is manifested in the urban space.

This also implies recognizing that fear of crime is not solely related to the presence of organized crime but is instead associated with multiple risks and threats. The criminal complexity facing Latin American societies today refers to the various manifestations of crime and insecurity in cities, particularly when analysed from a gender perspective. This study highlights the need to further explore the differentiated ways in which crime is structured and its social effects in Latin American cities.

Acknowledgment

This article was funded by the Millennium Scientific Initiative Program (ANID) NCS2024_058 and PICT/PIBAA: Communication Policy and Risks; News, Audience Gatekeepers, and Patterns of Digital Consumption.

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The Narconovela and Crime in Colombia: 40 Years after *La Mala Hierba*

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Abstract. This article analyses the origins of the narconovela (narco-soap opera) in Colombia, focusing on the controversy caused, at the start of the 1980's, by the soap opera entitled *La mala hierba* (*The Evil Weed*). Through an analysis of its reception during the time it was on the air, some links with the current discussion about this genre will be established, along with some links with its impact on the legitimization of narcotics trafficking and crime in Colombia and Latin America in recent years.

Key Words: narconovela (narco-soap opera), drug trafficking in Colombia, crime, Latin America

Narconovela in kriminal v Kolumbiji: 40 let po telenoveli *La mala hierba*

Povzetek. Članek obravnava izvor žanra narkonovele (narkotelenovele) v Kolumbiji, pri čemer se osredotoča na polemike, ki jih je v začetku osemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja sprožila telenovela z naslovom *La mala hierba* (Zla trava). Z analizo recepcije te telenovele v času njenega predvajanja vzpostavljamo povezave z aktualno razpravo o tem žanru in preučujemo njen vpliv na legitimizacijo trgovine z mamili in kriminala v Kolumbiji ter Latinski Ameriki v zadnjih letih.

Ključne besede: narkonovela (narkotelenovela), trgovina z mamili v Kolumbiji, kriminal, Latinska Amerika

According to the Global Report on Cocaine (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2023), Colombia not only continues to be the biggest producer of cocaine in the world, but it also broke a new record for the amount of land devoted to growing coca in 2022, reaching 220,000 hectares, a 13% increase compared with the previous year. After more than five decades when the then president of the United States, Richard Nixon,

declared the War on Drugs, its failure has not only become evident (Vuliamy 2011), but one also notices a certain legitimacy given to drug trafficking, which is reflected in different expressions in what T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer would call the 'cultural industry,' especially in a genre which has become very popular in recent years – the *narcotelenovela* (the narco-television soap opera), usually known as a *narconovela*.

Although most of the studies on the *narconovela* have focused on the series produced in countries like Mexico and Colombia during the past twenty-five years, the origins of this genre date back to 1983, when a soap opera named *La mala hierba* (*The Evil Weed*) (Bossio 1982¹) was shown on TV; it was based on a 1981 novel of the same name by the Colombian writer Juan Gossain and caused a big public controversy at the time. Thus, the purpose of this article will be to examine the debate caused by the airing of this telenovela, as well as the impact of the subsequent growth of drug trafficking in Latin America on the consolidation and expansion of the *narconovela* genre as a means to legitimize criminal activities in the region, especially narcotics trafficking.²

To meet that aim, this text is divided into three parts: the first discusses a series of conceptual approaches to the term 'narconovela'; the second explains the methodology of this investigation, which presents a synthesis of the soap opera *La mala hierba* and analyses the main public controversies it caused in Colombia; finally, the third part discusses how *narconovelas* are a means of legitimizing criminal activity, especially drug trafficking.

A Conceptual Approach to the Narconovela

In the words of the GUMELAB project, the concept of the *narcotelenovela*, usually known as the *narconovela*, may be described as a subcategory of Latin American telenovelas dealing with drug trafficking and the fight against it in Latin America. Narratively, paired with fictional and cinematic elements, the serial format narrates the wars between drug cartels, or drug trafficking and its relationship to local politics. Mostly, it is about the trafficking of cocaine. In the foreground of a *narconovela* are the drug

¹ Editor's note: In references to television series in the text and in the list of references, a year of their premiere is listed.

² I would like to thank Mónica Contreras and my colleagues on the 'History Transfer through Entertainment Media in Latin America' project (Laboratory for Memory and Digital Media Research – GUMELAB – of the Free University of Berlin) for all their support in the investigation leading to this article. And likewise thank Daniela Soacha, of the Universidad del Rosario, for her meticulous work as my research assistant.

lords and their drug cartels. The viewer sees the events from the perspective of drug traffickers and can identify with them as well as feel sympathy for them. Supporters of other drug cartels, the family, the police, or paramilitaries play secondary roles (GUMELAB, n.d.).

Before giving a more precise explanation of other characteristics of this particular genre, it is important to remember that, in general, soap operas (especially Latin American ones) have borrowed their main characteristics from the melodrama (which was introduced in Germany in the eighteenth century), the main subject of which is the universality of love and sentiments (Gaona 2022). In line with the view of José Luis Cabrujas, the melodrama has some key features, like the presence of polarized characters who are clearly defined as good and bad; the expression of powerful and unalterable feelings, where love is strong and prevails over everything; the victory of good over evil where truths are revealed and the guilty are punished; along with a descriptive portrait of the people of the place and the simple man, in particular, along with allegorical scenes which dramatize human experience and the simple life (Gaona 2022, 29). The last aspect thus situates the soap opera as part of that broader universe known as ‘popular culture,’ which, according to Peter Burke, is located beyond the frontiers of elite groups, or rather, is characteristic of the subordinate classes (González Díaz 2018, 68).

The particular form of the narconovelas ‘can be classified as an action series, with scenes that show violence, murder, sex, excess, intrigue, and drugs. Common themes of the narconovela also include impunity from prosecution and corruption, as well as the weak power of the State and society’s distrust of institutions and politics. Narconovelas show a reality of Latin America that often results from the failure of political institutions: the intervention of criminal organizations’ (GUMELAB, n.d.).³. Like soap operas, the narconovelas are part of a special universe which authors like Omar Rincón and other experts in Latin America have described as the ‘narco culture’ (see, e.g., Rincón 2013; Abad Faciolince 2008; Álvarez Gardeazabal 1995; Correa Ortiz 2022; Becerra Romero 2018; Sandoval Piñeros 2020; Pardo León 2018). Although it is not possible to provide an extensive discussion of this term here for reasons of space, it is important to note that the use of the word ‘narcoculture’ began to be important in academic studies when the Colombian writer and politician

³ Editor’s note: All quotations originally published in languages other than English have been translated by the authors.

Gustavo Álvarez Gardezabal defined a ‘culture of narcotics trafficking’ as a revolutionary change in Colombian society, a kind of ‘revolution in reverse,’ characterized by a concentration of land ownership in a few hands (instead of being distributed among many), the exponential growth of illegal economies and levels of violence and (most importantly), a radical change of values: the replacement of the morality of sin (characteristic of Catholicism) by a morality of money (Álvarez Gardezabal 1995, xvi), which can buy everything (or nearly everything), even the full and open inclusion and acceptance of the drug trafficker in the circles of the traditional elites.⁴

This change in the ethical dimension also led to a series of changes in aesthetics and tastes in those sectors of society which, through drug trafficking (or activities linked to it), managed to enter the world of consumption. These transformations are expressed in what Héctor Abad Faciolince describes as forms of ‘gigantism’ (2008, 514) – an ostentatious display of wealth by the purchase of properties, automobiles, and expensive clothes; the devouring of large portions of food, and the imitation of foreign styles, especially architectural ones. The ‘taste of the mafioso’ thus emerges as a caricature or exaggeration of the taste of the bourgeois, a hyperbolic form represented by what Omar Rincón (2013, 7) calls ‘the theme park of opulence and bourgeois ostentation; they join all which gives him the status of the privileged class (art, objects from exotic cultures, leading-edge technologies, expensive liquors with a well-known cachet) with the characteristic customs of his class (a circle of trusted friends, womanizing, land ownership and worship of the mother), all meant to show how well he has done in life, to prove his success.’

The cultural industries were not indifferent to this trend. Although space does not permit a detailed account of such cultural expressions of the narcotics-trafficking phenomenon, such as music, literature, film, etc.,

⁴ An example of this is the case of Jaime Builes, a well-known drug trafficker, who returned to the town where he was born as a newly rich man who was accepted by the families of the traditional elite for whom he worked as a peon when he was young. He bought the town’s social clubs, ice cream parlours, farms and other places where people gathered. According to the account by the journalist Germán Castro Caycedo, ‘it wasn’t long before both the rich and the poor accepted the inclusion of Builes and his rise to the highest social position in Fredonia [...] “he was no longer Jaime but Don Jaime” [...]. His marriage to the daughter of a member of the “local aristocracy” finally put the seal on his membership in the elite and would be the ideal occasion to celebrate his turning into the boss of the town’ (Duncan 2011, 167–8).

it is important to single out the emergence of new aesthetic forms found in the genres of the *narcocorrido*,⁵ the *sicaresca*⁶ and a wide variety of films which glorify the law's fight against drug traffickers or, instead, vindicate (in their own way) the lifestyle of those who are engaged in that business.⁷ Along the same lines, the narconovelas emerged a few years later and wound up consolidating themselves as one of the most popular cultural products in the field of narco-culture.

⁵ The *narcocorridos*, better known in Colombia as *corridos prohibidos*, is a musical genre whose roots lie in the traditional Mexican *corrido*. Catherine Heau defines it as 'the group of songs regarded as originating in the local or regional oral tradition or produced by well-known singers and song writers on a local or regional level, as opposed to songs from other countries' (Lira-Hernández 2013, 31). The Mexican *corridos* narrate different historical and local events, and there is no doubt that they reached their highest point during the Mexican Revolution, which, in turn, was depicted in the 'golden era' of Mexican cinema. Several decades after the end of that era, the *corridos* no longer told epic stories about the revolutionary period, but, rather, the experiences of members of organized crime and not only in Mexico but in Colombia as well, precisely in regions where Mexican culture is strongly rooted in its popular culture. In the words of Julián Alveiro Almonacid Buitrago (2016, 58–73), the *narcocorridos* 'portray narcotics trafficking in terms of its beliefs, tastes, territories [...]. They also speak of those who have been marginalized by the state, geo-political processes and the actors in the internal conflict.'

⁶ *Sicaresca* is a play on words from 'picaresque' and 'sicario', the Colombian term for a hired killer, especially in the context of narcotics trafficking. It was coined by the Colombian writer Héctor Abad Faciolince and refers to a particular kind of literary genre whose protagonists were initially narcotics traffickers or hitmen employed by the drug cartels. Years later, *sicaresca* was used by journalists to report on the lives of the leaders of the paramilitaries and other criminals. In the opinion of Abad Faciolince (2008, 518), the commercial success of this kind of literature is due to a 'kind of fascination with evil [...] with the cult of the doubtful heroism of murderers' in Colombian society.

⁷ Finally, it is worth pointing out that in the early 1990s, at one of the worst moments in the battle between the big drug cartels and the Colombian state, the production of various Colombian films depicting a fictionalized version of narcotics trafficking began: they were told from the standpoint of some of its actors, particularly the 'lords of drugs.' There were a growing number of these kinds of productions at the start of the twenty-first century. In this ample filmography, it is worth singling out some, like *Amar y vivir* (Barreto 1990), *Rodrigo D: No futuro* (Gaviria 1990), *La virgen de los sicarios* (Schroder 2000), *María llena eres de gracia* (Marston 2004), *Sumas y restas* (Gaviria 2004), *El Rey* (Dorado 2004), *El trato* (Norden 2005), *Rosario Tijeras* (Maillé 2005), *Apocalipsur* (Mejía 2005), *El Colombian dream* (Aljure 2005), *Paraíso Travel* (Brand 2008), *Perro come perro* (Moreno 2009), *El arriero* (Calle 2009), *El cielo* (Basile 2009), *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* (Bolívar Moreno 2010b), *El cartel de los sapos* (Ferrand and López 2008), *Jardín de amapolas* (Melo Guevara 2012), *Estrella del sur* (González Rodríguez 2013), *Manos sucias* (Kubota Wladyka 2014), *Pájaros de verano* (Guerra and Gallego 2018), *Pescador* (Glusman 2018), and *Lavaperros* (Moreno 2020).

Before giving a detailed account of what we believe was the pioneer of the narconovelas, as is the case of *La mala hierba*, it is worth going back to the initial trajectory of this genre in Colombia, before it spread to and became popular in other Latin American countries, especially Mexico, and also the Hispanic community in the United States.

Following the strong impact on the viewing public of the first soap opera, which openly dealt with the subject of drug trafficking in Colombia, namely, *La mala hierba* (1983),⁸ there was a lapse of several years before Colombian television produced other ones. The high levels of violence in the cities unleashed by the war between the big drug cartels and the Colombian state, along with the dynamics of the armed conflict in the rural zones, had created a kind of tacit censorship of any dramatization of such violent occurrences and one of its bloodiest facets, the economy of drug trafficking. Thus, it was not until the 1990s that productions which dealt with such themes, either in an open or tangential manner, began to flourish, such as the country's internal war (see Galindo 2025), hired killers,⁹ drug trafficking and its links with some sectors of the Colombian state, and the special characteristics of the illegal or semi-legal economies.

About the latter, it is worth singling out the case of the *Fuego Verde* (*Green Fire*) series (1996), produced by RTI television and written by the US journalist Thomas Quinn and US filmmaker Benjamin Odell. It centred on daily life in the emerald mines in the Department of Boyacá, a region marked by violence and power struggles among the grand *señores* (bosses) there. While the high ratings of the series showed that it had a wide acceptance by the Colombian public, it caused a big controversy among the inhabitants of the emerald zone, who thought that it stigmatized them as violent persons and typical representatives of a system of illegal economies. These kinds of criticisms are still being levelled against such productions, but, paradoxically, the number of Colombian television series and soap operas about illegal economies has grown over the years and they have even become an export product.

Two general trends are found in television series and soap operas about drug trafficking. In line with the interpretation of Mónica Contreras Saiz and Hannah Müsseman (2023, 20), we might say that a first group of such programmes 'deal with different aspects of the history of drug traf-

⁸ We will discuss this impact in detail in the following section.

⁹ This is the case of the popular 1991 series *Cuando quiero llorar no lloro*, also known as *Los Victorinos*, where one of its protagonists becomes a hired killer (Santofimio 1991).

ficking in Colombia, exploring their connections with the political history of the country and the Colombian armed conflict [...] they employ some strategies to give an authentic portrayal of reality.¹⁰ In this first set of soap operas,¹¹ there is a lesson to be learnt, a certain 'moralist function: he who gets involved in narcotics trafficking winds up dead or in prison' (22). Their instructive nature becomes more apparent when the story is told from the standpoint of members of the police force or the judiciary, or victims. However, since these productions are aimed at a broad public, this type of moral guidance is inevitably given another interpretation or has a different reception by some of the spectators. That is true of series like *El cartel de los sapos* (*The Snitch Cartel*), seasons 1 and 2 (Camilo Ferrand and López 2008); *El cartel de los sapos: el origen* (*The Snitch Cartel: Origins*) (Aguilar 2021); and especially, the production that was most acclaimed on an international level, but was also the most controversial, namely, *Escobar: el patrón del mal* (*Pablo Escobar, The Drug Lord*) (Uribe, Cano, and Klement 2012). Generally known as *el patrón del mal*, the series was meant to pay homage to the victims of the head of the Medellín Cartel. In fact, two of its producers are relatives of Escobar's victims and they had a clear intention to demystify the heroic character attributed to Escobar in some social circles in Colombia and other countries (El Espectador 2012). Paradoxically, both certain sectors of public opinion and its own audience¹² have criticized the series for having a boomerang effect, that is, it has exalted the figure of Escobar or granted a tacit approval to his conduct or that of his partners and henchmen (Duzán 2023).

¹⁰ In that respect, the authors have spotted four strategies of authentication: (1) the use of books of investigative journalism, testimonies, or historical novels, (2) the use of the names of real persons or very similar ones, which helps the audience to relate to the events in the story, (3) a casting procedure which finds actors and actresses who resemble the characters they portray as closely as possible, (4) the use of archival material, and (5) filming in the places where the events occurred (Contreras Saiz and Müssermann, 2023, 130).

¹¹ In this group of soap operas and series, we find such productions as: *El fiscal* (Londoño, Perez Florez, and Suárez 1999), *Pandillas, guerra y paz* (Bolívar Moreno 2000), *La viuda de la mafia* (Peña and Barreto 2004), *Correo de inocentes* (Londoño and Noguera 2011), *La Mariposa* (González and Ramírez 2012), *En la boca del lobo* (Rempel 2016), *Bloque de búsqueda* (Hiller 2016), *El general Naranjo* (Hoyos 2016), *Noticia de un secuestro* (Jorquera Arriagada and Wood 2022), and *Goles en contra* (Gonzalez and Prince 2022).

¹² The GUMELAB project has made an interesting effort for analyzing the debates about *El patron del mal* and other series which appear in the ambit of social networks (see Müssermann et al. 2024).

The second group of productions, which began in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, is represented by the narconovelas, properly speaking, those which are mainly told from the standpoint of the narcotics trafficker or his collaborators or people who are close to him. A more detailed analysis of these kinds of productions will be presented in the third section. For now, it is sufficient to point out that reviewing the origins of the narconovela can provide us with important leads for understanding why these productions have turned into a mechanism for legitimizing criminal activities in Colombia and Latin America. For that reason, we need to pause here and discuss the phenomenon produced in Colombia in the first half of the 1980s by *La mala hierba*.

The Marijuana Boom in Fiction: *La mala hierba*

In Colombia, 1982 was a year of transition in the history of drug trafficking. A controversial member of the Colombian Congress, Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria, had been elected deputy to Congressman Jairo Ortega. At the end of the year Escobar travelled to Spain as a member of the Colombian Congress, officially invited to the inauguration of the new socialist president of that country, Felipe González, and at the start of 1983, after being granted a visa to the United States, he and his family visited that country (where a photo of him was taken in front of the White House). Luck seemed to be smiling on him. In the words of James D. Henderson (2015, 52), Escobar ‘had power and prestige. Already one of the country’s wealthiest men, his fortune swelled with each passing week. [...] His real estate and business interests in Miami were extensive. At that instant there seemed to be little threatening the future of Escobar and Colombia’s other cocaine magnates.’

A few months after the congressman and his deputy, Escobar, were elected, a new soap opera began to become popular with the Colombian public. The first chapter of *La mala hierba* was aired on June 7, 1982. It was based on the novel of the same name by the journalist Juan Gossaín, which had been published by the Plaza & Janés firm barely a year before and became a bestseller. Although Gossaín’s book has been classified as fiction, it is based on his research as a journalist into the phenomenon of the *bonanza marimbera* (marijuana boom) in the Colombian Caribbean region in the 1970s. And although this boom had already ended by the time his novel was published (1981), its effects on important sectors of Colombian society were evident. According to its author, his intention was to use this narrative to denounce the change in the system of values

caused by the first major drug trafficking economy in that South American country.

Before giving a detailed explanation of the story told in the soap opera, it is necessary to present the methodology used in this investigation, which is based on an exhaustive review of press articles at the time the programme was aired (1982–1983),¹³ an interpretation of the novel (Gos-saín 2019) and the vision of the soap opera.¹⁴ In addition, secondary sources were consulted, especially those on the phenomenon of the marijuana boom¹⁵ and some cultural productions derived from it. However, it is necessary to clarify that this analysis focuses on the controversies caused by the soap opera rather than a detailed study of its content.

In contrast with the trafficking of cocaine, the phenomenon of the *bonanza marimbera* has not been widely studied by Colombian and foreign academics. While it is necessary to acknowledge that there have been some rigorous studies of the subject by historians, such as Darío Betancourt Echeverry, a victim of forced disappearance by paramilitary groups in the 1990s (see, e.g., Betancourt and Luz García 1994), James D. Henderson (2012; 2015), Eduardo Sáenz Rovner (2021), and, recently, Lina Britto (2020; 2022), there are many unanswered questions about this chapter of

¹³ A total of 54 press articles were examined, from the newspapers *El Tiempo* (6) and *El Espectador* (14) and the magazines *Semana* (1), *Cromos* (1), *Magazín Dominical* (1), *Carrusel* (2), *Elenco* (11) and *TeleRevista* (18).

¹⁴ All the chapters of the soap opera produced by Caracol Television (120) have been retrieved and are available on the Caracol Play payment platform.

¹⁵ The *bonanza marimbera* (marijuana boom) refers to the period in Colombian history between 1972 and 1978 when the production and smuggling of marijuana flourished to the point where it became an import-export sector. The term *bonanza* has been used in macroeconomic analyses of Latin America to explain the expansion of the exploitation and export of a particular kind of commodity goods (agricultural, mining or energy) and the consequent effects. Although cannabis has been grown in Colombia since colonial times, when hemp was brought from South Asia for the manufacture of rope, it was not until the 1970s that a new variety known as ‘Santa Marta Gold’ was developed, thanks to technological advances driven by the strong demand in the US market. It was very successful among consumers and turned Colombian marijuana into an export product. Due to limitations of space, we cannot mention all the changes which the boom led to in the societies of the local producers, but the statistics speak for themselves: at the high point of the boom, 20,000 to 30,000 farmers grew cannabis on 50,000 to 70,000 hectares, which amounted to annual exports of up to 20,000 metric tonnes (see Henderson 2015, 30). At the start of the 1980’s, marijuana was replaced by another recreational drug which became the favorite of US consumers: cocaine, the start of a new boom in the Colombian economy.

Colombian history, especially the daily lives and histories of the families and persons who were part of this economic fever. For this reason, first journalistic accounts and then fiction were the most important mechanisms to fill this gap in knowledge about a crucial period in Colombian history. There is no doubt that the majority of the public gets its first information about historical events from literature, especially the entertainment media such as film and television.¹⁶ In this respect, journalistic productions like *La noche de las luciérnagas* (Cervantes Angulo 1981), literary ones like *Leopardo al sol* (Restrepo 1993),¹⁷ musical,¹⁸ and audiovisual ones (like *Pájaros de verano*¹⁹), and the subject of our study, *La mala hierba*, have been the immediate point of reference for knowledge of the marijuana boom in Colombia and other countries.

The setting of the soap opera *La mala hierba* is a fictional place (La Antillana) in an equally fictional country (La República del Caribe). The story follows the Miranda family over three generations, centered around the parents of Cacique Miranda (here, 'Cacique' is a title meaning 'Chief,' not a personal name), Cacique Miranda himself (the protagonist), his wife Genoveva, and their only child, Roberto de los Ángeles.

The story of the Miranda family is the pretext for narrating the trajectory of the lives of those who entered into the marijuana business in the Caribbean region of Colombia, attained the glory and power which 'easy money' yields, used violence and corruption as the quickest and most effective means to fulfil their aims and were finally destroyed by the same violence.

¹⁶ It is worth singling out here the work of the US historian Robert A. Rosenstone (1995), who has championed the use of films as a method for teaching history. For its part, the GUMELAB project uses the term 'soap operas of memory' (coined by Mónica Contreras) to mean 'those which narrate different historical events, that is, verifiable ones, which are set in the context of a fictitious and melodramatic script and are recognizable by their viewers or their parents or grandparents. They are called soap operas of historical memory not only because they are a record of the social and political events which they depict, but also because they evoke the personal memories of their viewers' (see Contreras Saiz 2019).

¹⁷ In 2010, the US television channel Telemundo (aimed at the Hispanic public) transmitted the soap opera *Ojo por ojo* (Bolívar Moreno 2010a) based on this novel.

¹⁸ In addition to some productions in the genre of the *corridos prohibidos*, the *vallenato*, another genre of popular music, has dealt with the power of the trafficking of marijuana in the Caribbean region of Colombia during the boom (see Bonivento van Gricken 2022).

¹⁹ *Birds of Passage* (2018) is a film, directed by Ciro Guerra and Cristina Gallego, which tells the story of some families from the Wayuu indigenous community who become involved in the marijuana trade.

The first chapter sets the course of the story with the murder of Cacique Miranda's father by members of the Morales family. As a result, Cacique's mother makes her son swear that he will avenge his father. At the beginning of the story, Cacique and his family live in poverty, within an economy centered on the smuggling of goods, particularly between Colombia and Venezuela. Thanks to his job as an assistant on his cousin's bus, Cacique frequently travels to different parts of the Caribbean region and forms part of the circle of smugglers, selling goods like whisky and cigarettes to support his family. This was not unknown in the family, as his father had also been a smuggler, albeit a small fry. As the years go by, Miranda meets two major smugglers in the zone: an old acquaintance of his father known as Palestino (who belongs to the Syrian community of La Antillana) and the Old Jew (a descendant of Polish Jews who emigrated to the Republic of the Caribbean). The two are part of a gang that steals and sells large amounts of merchandise from Panama. Miranda's involvement in this criminal network not only enables him to overcome his poverty, but also to amass a small capital that gives him social acceptance and prestige in La Antillana.

A scene in the first novel of the soap opera shows how, when he is drunk in a bar, the then young Cacique Miranda allows a gypsy woman to read his fortune in the palm of his hand. The gypsy foresees that he will become the richest and most powerful man in his region. Although Miranda's initial reaction is one of laughter and scepticism, the prophecy of the fortune teller will come true two decades later when, on a trip to Miami, the protagonist (who is already a veteran smuggler) encounters a person who will change his life and that of his family: Dick Levi. Levi is a citizen of the United States and a cousin of the Old Jew. He has had a long, tough career in the underworld. Levi began his career in crime as a poor boy from the Jewish community in New York who was forced to sell illegal lottery tickets on the street and later took part in drug trafficking, a business he learnt about during his years in prison. When he finds out what Miranda is doing, Levi proposes that he get into the transportation of marijuana, as the Republic of the Caribbean promises to be a new supplier of the drug.

Despite his qualms about the consumption of hallucinogens, Miranda not only agrees to Levi's proposal but gets into the business with such a will that he winds up as the leader of all of the links in its chain, from the planting of marijuana to its sale in the United States. The crops are grown in the White Mountain (the fictitious name of the Sierra Nevada

de Santa Marta Mountain range near the Caribbean coast of Colombia). Once harvested, they are shipped by sea and, later, transported in light planes, the most effective and safest ways to ensure that the marijuana reaches the distributors and consumers in the United States. Miranda is part of a criminal network made up of Tanus (a relative of Palestino and owner of several vessels), us pilots, corrupt policemen like Commander Mendoza, small farmers who grow the crop, bankers and whole families in La Antillana. The marijuana business leads to overnight fortunes and excesses of every kind and, of course, violence as well, which the Miranda family has never been exempt from. Even when he was poor and just starting as a smuggler, the Cacique Miranda obeyed the orders of his mother and organized the murder of the Morales brothers to avenge their killing of his father.²⁰ And since then, violence has continued to be the most effective way to undo his rivals. But it is not enough. His ambitions reach a higher level. The Cacique Miranda also longs for political power, but that job must be left to Roberto de los Ángeles.

Roberto de los Ángeles grew up with the privileges that Cacique and Genoveva had never enjoyed. He was the only child of the Miranda family, and his father pinned all his hopes on him, not hesitating to send him to study Political Science at Harvard University. Although he could not finish his course there after being briefly imprisoned in Florida (with the help of his father and Levi, he escaped from jail), he finished his education at an elite university in Bogotá, where he met his future wife, María Jimena Isaza, a member of an aristocratic family and close to the nation's circles of political power. The marriage of Roberto and María Jimena turns into an alliance that benefits both families: the Mirandas establish contacts with the Colombian government, which helps them to launder their assets, and the bride's family gets access to the capital they had lost a long time before. The Mirandas 'launder' their surname and the Isazas their finances.

It is precisely at this point, nearly at the end of the story, that we must pause and look at what people thought about *La mala hierba* at the time. As mentioned above, while the year in which the soap opera began to be

²⁰ The vendetta is part of the cultural universe of the Wayúu ethnic community, part of which lives in the region of La Guajira along the Caribbean coast of Colombia. In *La mala hierba* (Gossain 2019), La Antillana is a fictional version of La Guajira and that, added to the indigenous origin of the Miranda family, partly explains why revenge is part of the lives of its protagonists over several generations.

broadcast coincided with the election to the Colombian Congress of the most powerful cocaine trafficker in Colombian history (whose criminal activities were an open secret), many Colombians condemned *La mala hierba*. A review of the press articles at the time reveals two major trends in the criticism levelled against the soap opera by the general public, professional commentators and letters to the editor. One (which was less frequent) stressed the explicit or excessive violence of the series, while the other attacked the soap opera as a defence and glorification of crime.

The objections of the former had to do with some relatively frequent scenes in the soap opera (like those which gave a graphic description of the murder of members of the Morales family or other enemies of Cacique Miranda in plain view of the public, at a movie theatre or Mass, or shocking scenes like the murder of a man in front of his little son or young children playing with the bloody head of their father). They strongly scandalized some sectors of the viewing public and the Colombian government. Despite this condemnation of the very violent nature of the soap opera, what was most striking about many of the comments in this controversy was the accusation that the soap opera was an apology for crime. To illustrate this, it is worth quoting some opinions that have supported or attacked this argument:

It is a veritable, Machiavellian justification of crime. It exploits a situation in which the issue of marijuana buzzes in our ambit to present the argument of this 'novel.' What is going to happen when young people who are thirsty for adventure watch it on tv and see the Cacique Miranda and his friends, surrounded by beautiful women, flaunting their valuable jewellery and squandering their money? Aren't they going to emulate them? Aren't we only a step away from another marijuana boom when our kids – and even our grownups – see how easy it is to become an overnight millionaire? Isn't that the lesson of the Cacique Miranda? What is the point of all the official efforts to end this cursed trade, when the government meanwhile promotes it by allowing such an ogre to be televised?²¹

The human being always tends to imitate others and, generally speaking, the personages we see on television lend themselves to being idealized, but not always in a positive way. [...] When the *Violencia* arose in

²¹ Letter by José Osorio, from Barranquilla, published in the letters to the editor section of *El Tiempo* in August 1982.

Colombia, due to the influence of Mexican films, most of the bad guys took the names of the most famous delinquents of the revolution, like *Tiro Fijo* [sure shot], *Charronegro* [Black ghost] and Mariachi. It would be interesting to find out how many caciques Miranda already exist in Colombia.²²

In contrast with these kinds of opinions, a larger number of letters, notes and opinion columns questioned the negative comments and said that it would be impossible to deny the reality of drug trafficking when it already had deep roots in certain sectors of Colombian society and a strong impact on the country:

This novel is only being criticized because, in a succinct way, without an absurd varnishing, it depicts the problem of drug trafficking in Colombia and the resulting consequences; police commanders participating in the boom, Colombian and gringo mafiosos who lord it over a whole town, a bank manager who lends himself the money of its depositors, crimes which the Cacique Miranda bribes the authorities to cover up, spoiled daddy's or mommy's boys like Roberto de los Ángeles and the victims of it all, like Genoveva [...] [G]entlemen moralizers: all this is happening in Colombia, why hide it?²³

La mala hierba has been put in the dock [...], organizations interested in the fight against drugs have invented the story that it is encouraging narcotics trafficking, drug addiction and a load of vices. To dramatize (turn into theatre) the daily bread of Colombian society cannot be regarded as an incitement to consume or sell drugs. Instead, it is another way of showing the country what that country is living through, hears about and suffers from every day, ever since some Americans full of money and planes and anxious to 'get stoned' turned into the major promoters of the crops and a business which messed up our economic system and destroyed the little that was left of our social morality. An in-depth debate, where both the problem of drugs as such and the impact of this kind of programme on its audience are taken into account, is important and necessary.²⁴

²² Statement of the criminal lawyer Germán Navas Talero in the magazine *Elenco*, September 1982.

²³ Letter from Hugo de Jesús Caraballo, from Montería, published in the letters to the editor section of the newspaper *El Espectador*, October 1982.

²⁴ Commentary by the journalist Lucy Nieto de Samper, in her column 'Detector' in the magazine *Elenco*, September 1982.

I agree a little with the opinions about the harmful effect of *La mala hierba* but this harm is always relative since it depends on the education of the person who sees it and his understanding of things.²⁵

During this debate in the press, the Colombian government decided to censor the soap opera. The National Radio and Television Institute levied a fine of 30,000 pesos on the producer, Caracol Television, on the grounds that the series was violent and was a defence of crime. But the censorship went further. The producer was forced to change several scenes as well as the finale of the soap opera. Although the fate of Cacique Miranda remained the same in both the book and the soap opera (murdered at the hands of a descendant of the Morales family), the fate of Roberto de los Ángeles was radically changed. While in the novel, the son of the Cacique is elected the mayor of La Antillana, in the soap opera, he becomes handicapped after he is shot, and the Miranda family loses their whole fortune. The only capital which the heir holds onto is the knowledge of English he acquired in Boston and he then makes his living as a teacher and translator, while Roberto and Genoveva suffer the same loneliness and poverty. The soap opera ends with the words of Genoveva, who, in the wisdom of a Caribbean woman, says: 'the devil takes away ill-gotten gains.'

Some Final Thoughts: From *La Mala Hierba* to the Boom of the Narconovela in Latin America

In the year following the broadcast of *La mala hierba*, a public debate emerged that ultimately led to the 'political death' of Congressman Pablo Escobar. In August 1983, Senator Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, speaking in the Congress itself, accused Escobar of being one of the leading capos of cocaine trafficking in Colombia. After weeks of controversy, during which the newspaper *El Espectador* published judicial evidence supporting Lara's accusation, the Congress stripped Escobar of his parliamentary immunity. A judge then issued a warrant for his arrest. The rest is history. The same day, Escobar launched a war against the Colombian state, which began with the assassination of Lara, the judge, the director of the newspaper and all those who stood in his way (including thousands of policemen and innocent civilians). Even to this day, Colombians are still feeling the consequences of this war, as seen not only in the persistence, expansion and transformation of the phenomenon of drug trafficking,

²⁵ Opinion of the priest Marino Troncoso, published in the magazine *Elenco*, September 1982.

but also the consolidation of a narrative genre within the narco-culture, like the narconovelas, which, like cocaine, also became an export product.

As we pointed out in the first section, the broadcast of *La mala hierba* was followed by an atmosphere marked by silence and a strong censorship of the fictionalization of drug trafficking on Colombian television. This silence coincided with the war, which Escobar declared and would only begin to completely break down in the second half of the 1990s. A review of some recent events in the country's history shows us key connections between the changes the country went through in the 1990s and this new willingness to tell stories about drug trafficking on television. Escobar's death in 1993, the extradition of the heads of the Cali cartel in the following years and what was known as the 'Proceso 8000,' the investigation into President Ernesto Samper's links to drug trafficking, showed that the drug trade already had a certain degree of legitimacy, not only as an economic activity but also as a mechanism of social mobility in the country. The fact that Samper remained in the presidency showed that drug trafficking was already part of the country's political structure.

In addition to all of the above, the emergence of two major private television channels was linked to the liberalization of the economy and the adoption of new economic policies in the 1990s. These channels began to meet the demands of that part of the public that liked and were eager to see stories about drug trafficking, which was possible because the state no longer intervened in the content of such series with the same rigour as in the previous decade. These two factors, along with other expressions of the narco-culture and changes in the structure of narcotics trafficking itself (the multiplication of the cartels and the involvement of big Mexican cartels) paved the way for a new form of narconovelas, different from the pioneering ones twenty years before, ones which were narrated from the standpoint of the trafficker or his associates, or persons in his closest circle of friends. In this way, they were free to express the public's fascination with the phenomenon of drug trafficking and all its effects on Colombian and Latin American society, due to the possibilities it offered to certain sectors of society which had been excluded by the traditional elites and the social structure which accompanied the tragic start of its republican life. Among them were: *El cartel de los sapos* (Camilo Ferrand and López, 2008), *Narcos* (produced in the USA by Netflix) (Brancato, Bernard, and Miro, 2015), *Las muñecas de la mafia* (*The Mafia Dolls*) (López and Camilo Ferrand, 2009), *Sin senos no hay paraíso* (*Without Breasts There Is No Paradise*) (Bolívar Moreno, 2008), *Rosario*

Tijeras (Pelusi and Quintanilla 2016), *El Capo* (Bolívar Moreno and Gonzales 2009), *Alias el Mexicano* (*Alias the Mexican*) (Navas 2013), *La viuda negra* (*The Black Widow*) (Uribe and Bolívar Moreno 2014), and more recently USA-produced, Netflix-distributed *Griselda* (Miro et al. 2014).

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The Mapuche People in Vaca Muerta, Argentina: Between Criminalization and Anti-Extractivist Resistance Aesthetics

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Abstract. In this paper, I contextualize the conflicts that characterize Vaca Muerta in northern Patagonia, Argentina, a geological formation of unconventional hydrocarbon reservoirs that over the past decade has become an area of national and international energy interest. However, social discontent, particularly from the Mapuche communities pre-existing in the area and forming the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko of the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén, has led these communities to express their repudiation of the oil companies and the governments in power due to the consequences of fracking: environmental damage, territorial dispossession, the criminalization of the Mapuche people, and the impoverishment of the local society. In this context, I examine the persecution of these communities and the increase in repressive measures under the current government. I also describe and analyse the inter-communitarian resurgence and resistance and how these create new political aesthetics to confront extractivism.

Key Words: Mapuche people, Vaca Muerta, extractivism, criminalization, aesthetics of resistance

Mapuči v Vaca Muerti v Argentini: med kriminalizacijo in estetikom odpora proti ekstraktivizmu

Povzetek. Prispevek kontekstualizira konflikte, ki zaznamujejo Vaca Muerto v severni Patagoniji v Argentini, geološko strukturo, bogato z nekonvencionalnimi nahajališči ogljikovodikov, ki je v zadnjem desetletju postala središče nacionalnega in mednarodnega energetskega interesa. Družbeno nezadovoljstvo, zlasti med mapuškimi skupnostmi, ki na tem območju živijo že od nekdaj in ki tvorijo regionalno koalicijo

Xawvn Ko konfederacije Mapučev iz Neuquén, je privedlo do odklonilnega odnosa do naftnih podjetij in vlade zaradi posledic frackinga: okoljske škode, razlašanja zemlje, kriminalizacije Mapučev in obubožanja lokalnih skupnosti. V tem kontekstu preučujem pregon mapuških skupnosti in porast represivnih ukrepov pod aktualno vlado. Prispevek prav tako analizira ponovno krepitev medskupnostne solidarnosti in odpora ter načine, s katerimi skupnosti ustvarjajo novo politično estetiko za soočanje z ekstraktivizmom.

Ključne besede: Mapučí, Vaca Muerta, ekstraktivizem, kriminalizacija, estetika odpora

Introduction

This paper aims to contextualize the conflict that characterizes Vaca Muerta, a 30,000 square kilometre geological formation that extends over the Argentine provinces of Neuquén, Mendoza, La Pampa, and Río Negro, and contains unconventional shale and gas reservoirs. During the last decade, these resources have turned Vaca Muerta into an area of national and international energy and strategic interest. The unconventional hydrocarbon deposits are in different exploitation processes, whether intensive through fracking (hydraulic fracturing), exploratory, or infrastructure laying; however, the activity has turned Vaca Muerta into a geographic region that has its epicentre in the city of Añelo.

Despite the promises of development of the megaproject, *Editor's note: In decolonial and Indigenous scholarship, megaprojects are seen as tools of colonial-capitalist expansion, reinforcing the dispossession and invisibilization of Indigenous peoples. Resistance to these projects is deeply tied to movements for territorial recovery, autonomy, and ecological justice.* the social discontent of a large population – but in particular of the Mapuche communities that pre-exist in the area and that make up the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko¹ of the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén – has led them to express their repudiation of the oil companies and the provincial and national governments in power for the consequences of fracking:

¹ Xawvn Ko is the regional organization of the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén. The term comes from Mapuzugun, the language of the Mapuche people, and is written using the Ragileo graphémica system, an orthographic system officially adopted by the Confederation in 1998. In Mapuzugun, Xawvn Ko means 'meeting of the rivers.' In Spanish, it is rendered as Consejo Zonal (Zonal Council). The Xawvn Ko regional coalition comprises 14 Mapuche communities, 5 of which are located in the Vaca Muerta region, a zone of intensive natural resource extraction.

environmental damage, territorial dispossession, criminalization of the Mapuche people, and impoverishment of the local society, among others. In this framework, one of the specific objectives is to problematize the persecution of the communities grouped in the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko and the increase of repression against them in the current governmental context. Likewise, I propose to describe and analyse the Mapuche resurgences and the anti-extractivist resistances that the Mapuche people in this location have been deploying intercommunally and how these provoke and exhibit new political aesthetics to confront extractivism.

In methodological terms, the research that underpins this writing is ethnographic, based on participant observation techniques, in-depth interviews, records of community and inter-community meetings, and analysis of archives of the confederation, legal documentation, and news reports. As a member of a Mapuche community of the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko, it is important to note that my ethnographic work is deeply intertwined with and shaped by daily practices as a Mapuche activist. On the one hand, this gives me access to internal situations and private or otherwise difficult-to-access materials for outsiders; on the other hand, it requires ongoing self-criticism and peer criticism. Although it is not possible to delve into the construction of Indigenous methodologies here, it is important to note that the reflections I present arise from my lived experiences and involvement with the Mapuche communities of Xawvn Ko, as well as from direct participation in their resistance against oil extraction. In this context, despite my deep engagement in the research and active presence in many of the scenes described, the ethnographic choice has been to employ a third-person narrative with an omniscient perspective throughout the text.

Regarding the organization of the article, I first briefly situate the development of Vaca Muerta within the framework of national and provincial energy policies and as part of a larger trajectory of hydrocarbon exploitation in the region, with socioeconomic and environmental consequences manifested by different sectors of the population. Then, I focus on the state response to these manifestations during the last years and on the special criminalization of the Mapuche people, describing the mechanisms of persecution and stigmatization of the communities of Vaca Muerta.

In the third part, I present and describe the general processes of individual and collective Mapuche resurgence in Puelmapu, Argentina, from

a sociohistorical perspective. This exploration aims to understand the political, community, and inter-community organization of the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko communities in Vaca Muerta. I conclude by describing the strategies of resistance against oil extractivism, to analyse the types of actions carried out and the performances executed and exhibited by the Mapuche people, investigating the possibilities of considering them as (new) aesthetics of anti-extractivist resistance.

A Decade of Extractivism Expansion in Vaca Muerta

In 2012, the extraction of non-conventional hydrocarbons became a multi-scale strategic objective of Argentina's hydrocarbon policy. This shift was symbolized by two key events: the expropriation of 51% of Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF) (Ley 26.741 2012) and the YPF-Chevron pact in 2013, which introduced fracking in the local oil industry, particularly in Neuquén (Scandizzo 2016; Pérez Roig and Rizzo 2022). These developments led to increased state intervention in shaping a new energy matrix, aiming to address the growing internal fuel shortage and rising commodity prices (Svampa 2019).

The introduction of hydraulic fracturing brought novel technological procedures, despite being banned in countries like Ecuador due to environmental concerns. It also attracted national and foreign companies with new capital. The provinces administer subsoil resources, and the Neuquén state manages oil concessions, permits, investment compliance, corporate responsibility practices, and environmental impact control. The province benefits economically through oil royalties, positioning it as Argentina's highest tax-collecting province.

However, Argentina's shift towards a neoliberal economic model has had negative repercussions in the area (Andújar 2005; Beliera 2019; Balazote and Radovich 2000). The privatization of state-owned hydrocarbon companies like YPF (Sabbatella 2014) in the late 1990s led to a socioeconomic crisis and increased unemployment. This resulted from the state's diminished role in the sector, ineffective local redistribution of oil revenues, and capital flight through transnational companies.

Over the past decade, since YPF's renationalization and the development of unconventional exploitation in Vaca Muerta, poverty rates have risen. This trend has been exacerbated by the Javier Milei government's adjustment policies since late 2023, sparking social conflict across various sectors: oil unions, education and health workers, social organizations, and Mapuche communities. These groups primarily express their

dissent through direct actions, including peaceful occupations of government buildings, blockades of oil routes and deposit access points, and work stoppages. These protests, mirrored nationwide due to the country's socioeconomic crisis, have met with government repression. In the Vaca Muerta area, this was exemplified by the June launch of the 'Productive Safety' Programme by the Ministry of Security under Patricia Bullrich. The minister emphasized protecting the mining area and announced the deployment of a Gendarmería Nacional unit in Añelo to ensure companies' legal security for increased productivity and national economic growth.

This programme has drawn criticism from Mapuche communities of the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko and 'Lofche No a la Megaminería' (Cañuqueo and Cabrapan Duarte 2024) of the Parlamento Mapuche Tehuelche de Río Negro. During the Wiñoy Xipantv ceremony, a Mapuche renewal of cycle celebration, the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén issued a statement declaring, 'The Mapuche people are on alert. The recent political decisions by the national government, driven by economic motives to facilitate extractivism in our territories, are deeply concerning,' highlighting the focus on lithium and oil as strategic sectors (cited in Gallo 2024).

Repressive Attack in Xawvn Ko

The current tense relationship between the State and the Mapuche people in Argentina is not recent, but historical, and has foundations that will be addressed later. Nor is the territorial conflict of the communities in the oil context of Vaca Muerta recent, as well as the increasing criminalization of the Mapuche during the last decade, mainly during the government of Mauricio Macri (2015–2019), with Bullrich in charge of the Ministry of National Security.

It should be noted that during this period and under Macri's mandate, the actions of the armed forces led to the deaths of Santiago Maldonado in Pu Lof en Resistencia, in Cushamen, Chubut, and Rafael Nahuel in the Lof Lafquen Winkul Mapu, in Lake Mascardi, Río Negro, in August and November 2017, respectively. Months earlier, in Vaca Muerta, the Minister of Security, the then Chief of Staff Pablo Noceti, and three heads of the Gendarmería Nacional ordered and carried out the illegal entry into the Lof Campo Maripe in June 2017²

² Editor's note: Lof Campo Maripe is one of the most prominent Mapuche communities

This entry of the gendarmerie into the community violated Indigenous rights and the physical and mental integrity of its members due to the oversized and violent operation that, in the words of the federal defender, ‘could’ve turned into a total mess.’ With the solidarity of other social sectors, a criminal complaint was filed the same year by a group of human rights organizations, union organizations, and parties of the City of Neuquén under the charge of ‘Abuse of authority and failure to comply with the duties of a public official’ (248 of the Argentine Criminal Code) against the Minister, the Chief of Staff, the Head of the Agrupación XII Comahue, the Regional Commander, and the General Commander of the Gendarmería Nacional. In 2021, it was the Lof Campo Maripe, through its *logko* (highest authority) and *werken* (spokesperson), which became the plaintiff to promote the case. This process summoned Patricia Bullrich and the rest of the accused to testify despite their request for the statute of limitations on the criminal action, which had strong media resonance.

The illegal actions by these officials took place in the context of members of the Lof Campo Maripe resisting the entry of YPF’s drilling equipment into the Loma Campana field for fracking and maintaining a camp at the site for over a month during the harsh winter to prevent the operation. Lorena, the *werken*, says that when the gendarmerie entered the community’s territory:

The tents were set up – small ones – and the aunt says they were kicking them, two gendarmes at a time. ‘No!’ she thought, ‘they’ll destroy us.’ Aunt Mabel feared they’d hit her. They kicked the truck [a cart adapted as a cabin] that we’d secured from inside with wire. They opened the door, and a gendarme said, ‘Calm down, she’s alone.’ The aunt was in pyjamas. Before this happened, she managed to call the uncle, saying, ‘The gendarmerie is here!’ She could see through the truck’s wooden slats: ‘So many of them – uniforms, trucks, everything. The gendarmerie is here!’³

The *logko* Mabel expressed her belief that the armed forces were ‘practicing what they would later do’ in Cushamen and Mascardi in the months to come. Fortunately, there were fewer people present at the time, especially young people, because, had they been there, the forces would have beaten them, and they would have resisted more. The *werken*, speaking

resisting extractivist operations in Vaca Muerta, especially fracking by YPF in Loma Campana.

³ Interview with Lorena Bravo, *werken* of Lof Campo Maripe, December 2021.

with anguish, remarked, 'we could have been just another name on the list.' This accusation and fear expressed by the Lof authorities is significant, as Laura Kropff Causa (2020) has analysed. It highlights the particular logic by which necropolitics operates, drawing on Mbembe's concept of necropolitics as forms of subjugating life to the power of death. This subjugation is intensified when otherness is defined at the intersection of ethnicity, age, and gender.

In recent years, young Mapuche men have endured most of the state violence in repressive actions during territorial defence efforts. One example is the killing of Elías Garay from the Lof Quemquemtrew in Río Negro. The presence of real estate and forestry industries in these territories has led to what can be described as the re-patriarchalization of these lands, a mechanism of extractivism that has directly contributed to the masculinization of criminalization. Judicial prosecutions and the murders of predominantly young Mapuche men aged 20 to 30, evidence this. *There is concordance with the Latin American general context, as 9 out of 10 defenders killed during 2020 were men* (Global Witness 2021). However, women and children have also faced violence, as seen during the eviction of Lof Lafquen Winkul Mapu at the end of 2022 (Sandá 2022; Molina and García Gualda forthcoming).

The perception of greater repression against young people has influenced resistance strategies in Lof Campo Maripe. Since the start of direct actions to protect the territory and demand its formal recognition as a Mapuche community, it has been the older women who have taken the lead. These women climbed drilling rigs, chaining themselves to the machinery until they received a response from the state. Such decisions arise from community and inter-community agreements, with guidance from the broader Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko, which collectively determines the best strategies. From a feminist perspective, this could be seen as a form of strategic essentialism, where older women take the forefront in making anti-extractivist resistance visible.

However, for a critical analysis of struggles against extractivism, it is important to avoid exclusively feminizing these efforts. Instead, it is essential to understand them within the framework of a broader recognition of the tactics used by Mapuche communities. Both academic and feminist discourses, as well as the contributions of NGOs, have helped amplify awareness and resonance around the defence of Indigenous territories.

Returning to the reason behind the entry of the armed forces into

Campo Maripe, it was the YPF company that reported the ‘impediment to the energy supply,’ as the occupation of the property had disrupted YPF activities involved in extracting, processing, or distributing energy. In 2019, the Minister of Security, through Resolution 768/2019 (‘Ministerio de seguridad: Resolución 768/2019’ 2019), extended the ‘Jurisdiction of the National Gendarmerie to areas determined by the National Director of the National Gendarmerie within the geographical boundaries of the Vaca Muerta geological formation.’ The objective of this measure was to ‘provide physical protection to the facilities of the Hydrocarbon Exploitation Plants’ and to ‘ensure the vital economic interests of the National State.’ Consequently, the representation of the Mapuche in this region was reinforced as both a national and provincial threat, with the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko of the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén being one of the organizations with the most conflict with the provincial authorities.

This portrayal did not originate during this period but dates back to earlier territorial claims and the defence of Mapuche communities in the area during the 1990s, in the context of the gas fields’ development associated with the Mega project in the Loma La Lata deposit, which involved conventional resources extraction (Cabrapan Duarte 2022). Newspaper headlines such as ‘Mapuche Communities Launch Offensive Against the Mega Project’ (*Diario Río Negro*, July 21, 1998), ‘Mapuches Refuse to Abandon MEGA’ (*Diario Río Negro*, August 23, 1998), and ‘Mapuches Attack Repsol-YPF Headquarters’ (*Diario Río Negro*, May 3, 2001) framed the presence of these communities negatively, portraying them as obstructers of development and violent actors, rather than highlighting the unconsulted installation of these projects in their ancestral territories.

In the current context, headlines such as ‘Mapuches Halt New Investment from Shell and YPF’ (*Diario Río Negro*, June 28, 2017), ‘YPF Denounces: Mapuche Conflict Halts Multi-million Dollar Investment’ (*Clarín*, May 27, 2018), and ‘The Mapuches Insist on Conditioning the Construction of the Néstor Kirchner Gas Pipeline and Could Affect Investments’ (*Infobae*, 2 August, 2022) illustrate the continuity of this decades-long narrative, albeit updated in light of new investments, technologies, and a shifting political landscape characterized by explicit repressive policies.

Indeed, local and national media constantly emphasize the negative impact that Mapuche communities have on the productivity of the hydrocarbon industry, frequently portraying them as adversaries of extrac-

tive energy projects in Vaca Muerta. Furthermore, narratives such as, ‘They claim territorial rights, but in reality, they seek economic gains; they want to finance Mapuche communities with money from the gas pipeline’ (Poppe 2022) reinforce the impression that these communities are motivated solely by economic interests in the resources located beneath the land they inhabit.

While this framing underscores a public and direct conflict between Mapuche communities and companies,⁴ along with the State’s persecution of the former, it is critical to highlight that, in the legal sphere, the criminalization of the Mapuche is largely driven by private landowners. These individuals hold legal titles to lands traditionally occupied by communities, recognized by private property laws, often with multiple owners per community territory. Many of these titles were acquired in the 1970s, particularly in this region. These private owners are also recognized by the provincial government and oil companies as *surface owners* of the lands where resources will be extracted, entitling them to compensation from the concessionaires under Provincial Law 2183, passed in 1996.

In 2021, a group of individuals, signing themselves as a ‘group of owners and businessmen from Añelo,’ submitted a petition to the governor of Neuquén, claiming that the Mapuche ‘are sprouting like mushrooms just below the new oil wells’ and denouncing ‘the farce of being ancestral communities with the Vaca Muerta boom.’ This contributed to the negative portrayal of the Mapuche communities. Through this petition, as well as similar mechanisms, these individuals also raised administrative objections to the communities’ ongoing legal procedures, such as the registration of legal status, which is a requirement for state recognition as an Indigenous community. In these objections, they questioned the communities’ Indigenous authenticity, effectively delegitimizing their territorial rights as a Mapuche community, which are regulated internationally by the ILO Convention 169 and enshrined in the National Constitution following the 1994 reform, as well as the 2006 reform of the Neuquén provincial constitution.

This reveals the influence that powerful groups exert over the regulation and enforcement of Indigenous rights, alongside the individualized

⁴ An example of this situation occurred in May 2024 when two female authorities from the Newen Kura community – also part of the Regional Coalition Xawyn Ko – were arbitrarily detained for opposing a YPF project’s advancement. This incident drew repudiation at both local and international levels (International Rights of Nature Tribunal 2024).

persecution through which members of Xawvn Ko communities are harassed under criminal charges of usurpation. As Melissa Moreano Venegas, Karolien Van Teijlingen, and Sofía Zaragocin (2019, 18) note, this ‘is one of the outcomes of criminalization and violence, aimed at isolating and targeting key figures in social organizations and movements,’ using legal mechanisms employed by private landowners that impact the security and subjectivity of the communities and their members.

Criminalization has partially achieved its goals: the non-recognition of Mapuche communities as such, preventing territorial surveys⁵ delegitimizing their identity and organizational processes as Lof (a Mapuche territorial and familial community unit)⁶ and stigmatizing the Mapuche people in Vaca Muerta. However, from a strictly legal standpoint, most cases brought against community members in this region by private landowners have not resulted in criminal convictions, with the exception of the trial faced by the Lof Campo Maripe over two years.

In 2019, this trial culminated in the acquittal of six community members. As Sabrina Aguirre (2021) notes, this trial highlighted not only the questioning of Indigenous territorial rights but also the Mapuche authenticity of the defendants. The accuser stated: ‘I know the Campo family, not a community’ (witness 6, hearing of April 14, 2019, cited in Aguirre 2021, 61). This tactic, often employed by public officials, seeks to cast doubt on ethnic origin, as when the mayor of Añelo denied the existence of communities in the area, except for the Paynemil community. In response, the Mapuche staged a peaceful occupation of the mayor’s office to protest his public statements, in the context of the pandemic in August 2021. During this direct action, they demanded the mayor issue a public apology, with elder women telling him:

They don’t have to recognize us, we are natives of the territory. We must recognize those who came from outside! We are Argentine citizens, but we are the Mapuche nation. My parents did not know their rights, that is why they did not form a community. [They were

⁵ The territorial survey in Neuquén province, mandated by National Law No. 26.160 of 2006 (Ley 26.160 2006), was conducted from 2013 to 2015. It covered 18 Mapuche communities out of the existing 70. By 2022, various Indigenous Peoples across Argentina demanded a fourth extension of the law. Its term was expiring once again, with more than half of the communities still unsurveyed. This law’s importance lies in its power to prevent evictions.

⁶ Editor’s note: *Lof* is not a generic word; it refers to a distinct socio-political and territorial organization in Mapuche society.

afraid, they were afraid of being discriminated against, added Josefa Campo.] I am Mapuche, and I declare myself a community when I want, not when you feel like it, the government has to register us. 'Ah, they were family.' Yes, we were family, but when we knew our rights we called ourselves the Mapuche community, because we are Mapuche.⁷

Dispossession, Resurgence and New Aesthetics of Resistance

When Patagonia was incorporated into the Argentine territory and nation-state (Delrio 2005), a racialization process promoted by a historically justified state project, politically and scientifically, which defined Indigenous Peoples as wild, enemies, foreigners, or extinct, was developed (Lazzari and Lenton 2000). It was through military campaigns – and press coverage – that the Argentine State created an 'internal other,' perpetrated violence against it, and justified their actions, while at the same time silencing, a process that today the Mapuche people and the academy undeniably call and refute as 'genocide' (Pérez 2016; Delrio et al. 2018).

On both sides of the Wajmapu (the ancestral Mapuche territory), the systematic projects of the 'Pacification of Araucanía' (1861–1883) in Chile and the 'Conquest of the Desert' (1878–1885) in Argentina oppressed Mapuche society through physical and symbolic violence. These processes not only structured the formation of these states, but also deeply reconfigured relationships within and with the Mapuche society in social, cultural, economic, territorial and intersectional terms. In Patagonia Norte, the consequences, as well as the causes, of this genocide included the concentration of the land in the hands of 'ideal citizens' (landowners, military, foreign investors), together with the death and displacement of those who were considered a threat. These displacements took the form of violent evictions, raids, economic pressure and forced servitude (Cañuqueo et al. 2019), which led to the deterritorialization and the subsequent reterritorialization of the Mapuche people.

Through reterritorialization, the families and communities that had dispersed and relocated at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, either fleeing independently or through agreements with the military to collaborate during the campaigns, rebuilt and redefined their new places of origin. The stories of populations displaced to terri-

⁷ Speech in direct action at the Añelo mayor's office, Celinda Campo and Josefa Campo, August 19, 2021.

tories where they could begin again are representative of the experience of the majority. The escape routes, predominantly running east to west, led to the Andes mountain range or to cross-air areas that served as temporary shelters during genocidal campaigns. The new settlements were often established in regions then considered unproductive for agriculture or cattle grazing. However, a change in the economic utility of the Patagonia desert occurred later, after the discovery of hydrocarbons (Cabrapan Duarte and Stefanelli 2022).

The 1990s in Latin America witnessed an increase in the mobilization of Indigenous Peoples, which coincided with the emergence of broader social movements (independence movements, peasants, environmentalists, afro-descendants and feminist organizations) and the affirmation of Indigenous identity as native peoples in Argentina. This period was also marked by significant advances in international Indigenous rights, such as the adoption of the Convention 169 of the ILO in 1989, which Argentina incorporated into its national legislation in 1992 (Ley 24.071 1992), ratifying it in 2000. This was followed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007. These frameworks, together with the reform of the Argentine Constitution of 1994, had a deep impact on northern Patagonia and catalysed numerous actions of the Mapuche people to claim and protect their territories (Alwyn 2004).

These times fostered processes of territorial and community protection and recovery in Puelmapu (Mapuche territory in Argentina) in the form of *lof* (communities); they also mobilized different Mapuche organizations with different expressions and forms of action. In the case of the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén, although it was created in 1970, it was between the '80s and '90s that an autonomous process began, since the original organization involved the provincial State, in particular the Movimiento Popular Neuquino party, and the Catholic Church, which had strongly promoted the formation of the Confederation (Lenton 2010).

The reterritorialization experienced by Mapuche people and families who survived the genocide encompasses complex processes of non-belonging, often coupled with significant organizational efforts. These experiences frequently involve trajectories of territorial and intergenerational mobility – some of which have been more or less forced (Kropff Causa et al. forthcoming). Such individuals or groups, whether they identify as Mapuche or not, may be undergoing – or have undergone – processes of Mapuche resurgence (Cabrapan Duarte 2025).

Within this context of diaspora and forced displacement – marked by silencing and disidentification – the erasure or concealment of Mapuche identity occurred, though never entirely. This erasure functioned simultaneously as a strategy of escape and as a consequence of the brutal colonial and state-led genocidal apparatus. The physical and material dismemberment of families, territories, and bodies, along with the symbolic fragmentation of surviving bodies, constitutes an inescapable historical foundation for contemporary Mapuche resurgence. It offers a painful explanation for the experience of inhabiting a body rendered uncomfortable and confusing, externally marked and defined by racialization and systemic racism.

The Notion of Resurgence

I return to the notion of resurgence, which, for Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) of the Nishnaabeg Nation, in addition to being forms of resistance to colonial domination and expressions of self-determination of the peoples, comprises subjective, individual-collective, everyday practices with diverse expressions. In this sense, the resurgence of the Mapuche community, which also includes individual or personal revivals, involves the knowledge, recovery, and display of various diacritics that, in our case, were previously absent from the recognition and visibility repertoires of families settled since the late nineteenth century along the banks of the Neuquén, Colorado, and Limay rivers.

These diacritics, which, following Claudia Briones and Alejandra Sifredi (1989), can be understood as representations of ethnicity, are varied and are mobilized by communities in specific contexts, whether during direct actions or within spaces convened for organizational, political, or ceremonial purposes. They also involve training spaces and the transmission of knowledge to act or execute the diacritics of identity. As the authors maintain, emphasizing the situational dimension of ethnicity, this is the instance where actions channel ethnicity through cognitive and interactive forms that put it into play. Likewise, there is variability between these actions depending on the social group in question, which responds to the procedural and structural dimensions that affect the margins of manoeuvre to carry out these actions. In recovering these analytical contributions to observe the actions of the communities of the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko in Vaca Muerta, it is necessary to distinguish between actions of territorial defence and resistance, which demand direct actions (for example, roadblocks, access to oil fields, pres-

ence in multi-sector marches or demonstrations and peaceful occupations) and actions that themselves update Mapuche protocols – which contain specific knowledge and forms – such as *xawvn* (assembly meetings) or *gejupun* (ceremonial spaces).

Regarding the first situation, although the main action is to congregate in a specific space and show collective presence and resistance, in the direct actions that bring together the communities, different symbols emerge with different representations. Among these expressions is the *wenufoye*, the representative flag of the Mapuche people in both Argentina and Chile (Ancan 2017), which is displayed at roadblocks or hung on the buildings of oil companies. Another is the use of traditional Mapuche clothing by both women and men, a practice increasingly embraced and encouraged – particularly by communities with a longer history of cultural continuity, compared to those undergoing more recent processes of resurgence. Meetings have taken place mainly between women, where work is done and discussed about the meanings of clothing, and its historical and contemporary use, and the pattern of the *kypam* garment (Mapuche clothing) is also made or shared, for adult women and girls. The effects of these instances of sharing cultural knowledge are then seen in the various collective spaces, reflecting processes of reaffirmation of both personal and collective identity.

Likewise, the incorporation of musical instruments (*kulxug*, *pvfvjka*, *ñorkin*, *xuxuka*) as ways of expression, as well as during recreation and learning spaces generated by adults, predominantly by women, for children, also functions as diacritics. Their sound provides an aesthetic characteristic of Mapuche art that reconnects those present with the generations that precede them, and that music seems to bring back. This movement can be considered as part of the construction of Mapuche memories, where oral narration is not necessarily explicit, although it can occur, enabling a place of sensitivity, even in a context of tension and danger of repression, as it is a measure of direct action. These diacritics also show that spaces of resistance are formative spaces, not only in terms of what territorial defence implies but also in terms of the transmission of knowledge that occurs spontaneously and that provides moments of celebration and enjoyment despite the situation.

Certain social and cultural Mapuche contexts require the implementation of more rigorous protocols, particularly in ceremonial, spiritual, and political spaces. These include smaller *gvbamtuvvn* (parliaments) or *xawvn* (meetings) where community authorities convene.

Ceremonial Spaces

This discussion will focus on ceremonial spaces, as they exemplify the preservation and transmission of intergenerational knowledge through specific formats and practices. These ceremonies can be viewed as performances in the anthropological sense. They serve as crucial acts of cultural transfer, conveying social knowledge, collective memory, and a sense of identity through repeated, structured actions (Taylor and Fuentes 2011, 20). These performances adhere to predetermined behaviours governed by established rules and norms.

Previous anthropological studies, though limited, have examined Mapuche ceremonial representations in this oil industry region. Notably, the thesis of Karine Lopes Narahara (2018) interprets these ceremonies as cosmopolitical practices – interactions between humans and non-humans for territorial defence. Their research compares celebrations of the Cofederación Mapuche de Neuquén in the provincial capital, such as the Wiñoy Xipantv, with the gejpun ceremony at Lanín Volcano in the Andes Mountains.

Of particular interest is the Wiñoy Xipantv ceremony, specifically its inaugural performance in Vaca Muerta, within the Lof Fvta Xayen community, marking the 2024 winter solstice. This event held significant cultural and spiritual importance, while also carrying political weight due to its location in a contested territory and an area of non-conventional oil exploitation. The Confederation's invitation for this event stated:

‘Great cultural mobilization of the Mapuche Nation to celebrate the restart of life, Wiñoy Xipantv’

The call for the intercultural celebration of the national Mapuche day within the framework of Wiñoy Xipantv will be to what is today called Vaca Muerta. It moves from the scenario of recent years that was the Neuquén Plateau in the territory of the Lof Newen Mapu to the Vaca Muerta area. The reason is the enormous concern about the growing contamination caused by the advancement of fracking.

We call on pu wenvy [friends], supportive and committed companions in the defence of nature and life, to share a day of homage to our Mapu, a day of celebration and festivity where the wajmapu offers us the rebirth of all lives, biodiversity or Ixofijmogen.

We look forward to seeing you this Sunday, June 23, at 9 am at the Tratayen Site.

To provide context for the location and the community where the celebration took place, the Lof Fvta Xayen traces its origins to the 'Paynemil Reserve,' established through occupation permits managed since the late nineteenth century by José Paynemil. The 'Paynemil Tribe,' originally from Azul, in the southern region of what is now Buenos Aires province, relocated to the Tratayén and Añelo areas, establishing their communal life along the southern banks of the Neuquén River. With the growth of the family and territorial expansion, one of José Paynemil's daughters, Damiana Paynemil, moved in the mid-1940s to the northern bank of the Neuquén River, towards Tratayén Norte, where she settled with her husband and first children at Puesto Los Algarrobos. Damiana had five children, who, in turn, raised their families in the area, creating various *puestos* (homesteads with animal pens and orchards) along the riverbanks and extending toward the *barda*, the elevated terrain. Today, the community consists of the descendants of these families and is primarily driven by the younger generations, the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Damiana Paynemil.

The Lof Fvta Xayen formally established itself as a community in 2015, joining the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko of the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén to engage in inter-community territorial defence against growing threats of dispossession. From that point forward, the community sought legal recognition, based on its historical occupation of the land as well as the reaffirmation of its identity, family origins, and ancestral Mapuche territory. In this process of identity affirmation and Mapuche resurgence, the inter-community decision to host the Wiñoy Xi-pantv, both as an internal and intercultural celebration open to broader society, led the Lof to prepare as the host of this important event.

Preparation for the event involved welcoming approximately 400 attendees and working for months in advance to set up the ceremonial space, known as the *rewe*.⁸ This included constructing the *ramada*, a semicircular structure where different communities prepare food and take shelter during and after the ceremony, which in this case lasts the entire day. The preparations also entailed gathering the necessary elements for the *rewe*, such as the *iwe* and *metawe*, traditional ceramic utensils made by the Lof with the guidance of a *kimelfe* (master artisan), and

⁸ Editor's note: A ceremonial and territorial unit – the smallest spiritual-political division in Mapuche society, often formed by several Lof (Mapuche communities) that share a sacred site.



Figure 1 Wiñoy Xipantv Celebrate in Lof Fvta Xayen, 23 June 2024
(photo by Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén, <https://www.facebook.com/share/19HUy7HRJq/>)

‘dressing’ the rewe with everything it requires: *lawen* (medicinal plants), seeds, *ko manzana* and *musay* (apple, wheat, and pine nut drinks), as well as blue, yellow, green, and black flags resembling the wenufoye, *choyke* (ostrich) feathers for the *choyke purun* dance, and traditional Mapuche instruments.

The ceremony also featured the *awvn*, a moment in which riders, mostly men, circle the ramada in a clockwise direction, demonstrating their everyday horsemanship skills. This moment is deeply significant, as the earth seems to pulsate with the thunder of galloping hooves, and the dust kicked up by the horses, combined with the rhythmic sounds of the *kulxug* played by the women, creates an atmosphere of profound spiritual connection.

It was the first time that such a large-scale ceremony was held in the area, and the first time a rewe was raised in the community. This deeply moved the members of Lof Fvta Xayen, both the elders and the youth, as it marked a significant step in their reaffirmation as a Mapuche community. The community authorities welcomed the participants, sharing with them the family’s history, the significance of the land, and their journey toward becoming a unified community fighting for their rights. During this moment, they remembered Grandmother Inocencia, the daughter of Damiana Paynemil, who had recently passed away. She had been an inspiring figure, a crucial example of determination in the fight to protect

their land and territory against private landowners and oil companies that had been encroaching on the area since the 1960s.

Did Damiana Paynemil's father, the logko of the reserve in the early 20th century, ever imagine that his descendants would one day raise a rewe on the other side of the river? Could Damiana have foreseen that the territory where she built her life with her husband and children would, decades later, be coveted by the oil industry and fractured by extraction techniques? Did the children and grandchildren – who are now central figures in the defence of Lof Fvta Xayen – ever imagine in their youth that their future would be communal?

Today, the Wiñoy Xipantv is celebrated in the shadow of the looming oil infrastructure, a joyful event for the communities of the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko. They gather together and welcome members of the non-Mapuche society who have travelled over 80 kilometres, venturing deep into the territory to participate in this celebration. [Field notes, June 2024]

In a complex political context for the Mapuche people, marked by tensions with the national government due to its explicitly anti-Mapuche stance since the presidential campaign of the La Libertad Avanza party, there was uncertainty surrounding the holding of the Wiñoy Xipantv in a territory under conflict. Specifically, concerns were raised about whether the event might provoke reactions that could disrupt its course. However, the ceremony proceeded without interruptions or police inspections and even garnered media attention. Reports highlighted the collective statement signed by Mapuche organizations from Río Negro and Mendoza, which was read by the werken (spokesperson) of Lof Campo Maripe during the afternoon. The statement expressed concern over comments made by Security Minister Patricia Bullrich regarding the formation of the Productive Safety Unit for strategic national areas, including Vaca Muerta, while reaffirming the Mapuche commitment, renewed during this Wiñoy Xipantv, to continue defending the *mapu* (land-territory) from the encroachment of extractivist industries. The statement also denounced the escalating levels of soil, air, and water pollution caused by fracking, the improper handling of oil waste, the proliferation of open-air pools for drilling waste, and the lack of essential services (water, gas, and electricity) for both the communities of Xawvn Ko and the broader population. This critique was framed in stark contrast to the wealth and energy produced by Vaca Muerta on a national and international scale,

underscoring the rising poverty and unfulfilled promises of development linked to the Mega project.

In light of the accounts of this ceremony, we can interpret the Wiñoy Xipantv as a moment in which the performance of ethnicity, as described by Briones and Siffredi (1989), emerges through a series of diacritics. These elements not only display but enact Mapuche identity, while simultaneously positioning the ceremony within broader processes of self-determination and resurgence in response to historical subjugation – both the legacy of genocide and the current threats posed by oil extraction that continue to oppress the Mapuche people. These diacritics, far from being superficial symbols or mere strategic choices, are rooted in cultural and ceremonial protocols that give this celebration its performative dimension. These protocols consist of rules that are reproduced and transmitted across time and space, and in the context of resistance, they generate new anti-extractivist aesthetics.

Here, I draw on María del Rosario Acosta López's (2022, 149) concept of aesthetics as a political task, where aesthetics initiate 'unsuspected possibilities through the inventive capacities that arise with resistance.' For the philosopher, these aesthetics make audible what epistemic violence has rendered inaudible and illegible, transforming these actions into creative acts of resistance that interrupt the silencing. Thus, considering the Wiñoy Xipantv ceremony held in Vaca Muerta as an aesthetic of resistance allows us to view it as a performative act that, beyond reproducing the cultural values and patterns of the Mapuche people, directly challenges the extractivist future assigned to the site where the ceremonial space is erected. This performance underscores alternative modes of territorial defence. However, this aesthetic of resistance should not be viewed solely as combative or reactive, as one might see in direct actions. On the contrary, its strategic execution involves processes of Mapuche resurgence, both personal and communal, and the transmission and recovery of cultural, philosophical, and spiritual knowledge. In this way, these aesthetics are not only forms of resistance but also acts of creative renewal.

Conclusions

Shortly before finishing the first submission of this paper, the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko carried out new direct actions in Vaca Muerta, blocking access to all fracking waste treatment plants, identifying these so-called 'oil dumps' as critical nodes in the hydrocarbon production

chain. The communities maintained these blockades at five treatment sites for 48 hours, aiming to pressure the provincial government to resume previously agreed commitments. These included the registration of the legal entities of five communities, the implementation of the Law of Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation approved in 2023, and the continuation of the territorial survey initiated the previous year. The atmosphere was tense, with threats of eviction from the companies looming and further aggravated by Security Minister Patricia Bullrich's public calls for the governor of Neuquén to take repressive action. She even threatened to deploy federal forces herself and urged oil companies to house groups from the Productive Safety Unit within their facilities in Añelo to assist in the eviction of the Mapuche. After hours of intense negotiations between community leaders and provincial government authorities at the blockade site, an agreement was reached. The government committed to resuming the outstanding measures, while the Mapuche lifted the blockades and returned to their communities.

Despite this outcome, the situation was very tense as it was clear that the political landscape had shifted, and forced eviction was an imminent threat, in line with security policies under Milei's government. Just as during the Macri administration, when violent state operations targeted Mapuche communities, resulting in two deaths and the intimidation of Lof Campo Maripe in Vaca Muerta, the threat of renewed violence remains palpable in Xawvn Ko territory.

Simultaneously, the media continued to stigmatize the communities, spreading false narratives that misrepresented the blockades as affecting the general population and industry, when in reality, only access to the waste treatment plants was obstructed. These actions were also framed as extortion, rather than environmental defence. However, these logics of criminalization and prejudice were once again countered by the ten communities of the Regional Coalition Xawvn Ko present during this action. The diacritics of Mapuche ethnicity – flags, clothing, musical instruments, and dawn ceremonies – came to the forefront, reaffirming cultural identity amidst the protest of the Mapuche people in Vaca Muerta. These cultural markers, through their performances and aesthetics, reinforced intergenerational bonds among adults, children, and the land, asserting resistance against criminalization for defending Indigenous rights, and demonstrating the power of inter-community political action against repression and the new dispossessions driven by extractivism in Vaca Muerta.

Just as a *rewe*, a ceremonial space, was erected in one of the most affected areas by fracking, reviving communication with the natural forces and restoring cultural and spiritual practices long silenced by Indigenous genocide, these actions – ranging from the strictest to the least strict protocols – can be understood as part of a broader political aesthetic. While rooted in traditions and knowledge transmitted intergenerationally despite historical subjugation, these actions serve as sociocultural and political interventions that challenge the dominant extractivist order. They articulate new forms of resistance against extractivism, interweaving cultural, spiritual, philosophical, and political aesthetics. These anti-extractivist struggles of the Mapuche people in Vaca Muerta, in addition to being acts of denunciation and resistance, embody creative, dynamic processes that continuously redefine their existence and pre-existence in their ancestral territory.

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Miscellanea




Recenzija

Danilo Šuster, *Modalni katapulti: uvod v filozofsko logiko*

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Danilo Šuster je pri Univerzitetni založbi Univerze v Mariboru kmalu po izidu svoje, v strokovni javnosti in medijih odmevne knjige *Kaj delajo filozofi?* (2019) objavil novo delo z naslovom *Modalni katapulti: uvod v filozofsko logiko* (2023). Znanstvena monografija je zaradi visoke teoretične ravni, zahtevnih problemov, strokovne terminologije in simbolnih zapisov namenjena zlasti bralkam in bralcem, ki obravnavano in sorodno tematiko poznajo ter iščejo nove miselne izzive, zagotovo pa se bodo vanjo poglobili tudi tisti, ki se želijo na zapletenem področju izobraziti ali pa v študijskem procesu na slovenskih univerzah poglobiti in razširiti svojo vednost. Avtor spretno krmari med življenjskimi primeri (pri tem kaže svoj espri, domiselnost in duhovitost) in nerešenimi vprašanji iz zgodovine filozofije, sodobne logike ter vedenjem, ki ga v zvezi z njimi za rešitev ponujajo uveljavljeni logiki, od Jana Łukasiewiczza, Nenada Miščevića, A. J. Ayerja in Roberta Stalnakerja do številnih drugih, omenja pa tudi slovenske, Marka Uršiča, Olgo Markič, Franeta Jermana in Andreja Uleta. Slovenski filozofinji in logičarki Maji Malec se zahvaljuje za skrben pregled svojega dela. Avtor slike na ovitku, *Kolaža na platnu*, je Branko Šuster.

Šuster svojo knjigo razdeli na dva dela, in sicer: »Modalni katapulti« in »Uvod v modalno logiko«; prvi ima poglavja »Predikator in miselni poskusi«, »Pogojniki in leni dokaz«, »Med Resnico in Neresnico«, »Argument iz posledic«, »Borges in Fitch« in »V dilemi«, drugi pa »Modalna logika«, »Deontična logika« in »Protidejstveniki«. V »Predgovoru« pravi, da lahko filozofska logika danes pomeni tako filozofsko raziskavo osnovnih logičnih pojmov in uporabo logike pri reševanju filozofskih problemov kot tudi raziskovanje alternativ in razširitev klasične logike, in to zato, ker so filozofska vprašanja največkrat povezana s sklepanji in z argumenti, pri katerih standardna logika ne zadošča. V knjigi obravnava tudi vprašanja osnovnih logičnih zakonov, prevladuje pa »logika« filozofskih

problemov. Šuster zapiše, da obdobja minevajo in smeri se spreminjajo, še vedno pa velja, da različnih vej sodobne filozofske logike ne bomo razumeli, če ne bomo poznali osnov modalne logike. Nova knjiga ni klasični učbenik, saj v prvem delu igrajo osrednjo vlogo zahtevna vprašanja, pri katerih je v jedru neki modalni argument, pravilo ali sklepanje, v drugem delu pa se je mogoče seznaniti z aparatom modalne logike. Z modalnostjo so neposredno povezane večvrednostne logike, protidejstveni pogojniki in deontična logika. Podan je klasičen uvod v normalno (propozicionalno) modalno logiko in semantiko možnih svetov, ki vključuje standardno deontično logiko, knjigo pa sklene podrobnejši prikaz nemonotone logike in semantike protidejstvenih pogojnikov. Avtor zapiše (str. 2): »V uvodu v modalno logiko sledim klasični shemi, najprej logika (aksiomatski sistem) in potem semantika možnih svetov, vendar ga skušam obogatiti s kritično obravnavo spornih sklepanj in tez (›paradoksov‹) in smiselno povezati z razpravami v prvem delu knjige.«

Ted Chiang je avtor kratke zgodbe Kaj se pričakuje od nas, v kateri nastopa Predikator, naprava v velikosti daljinca za avto, z gumbom in s svetilom. Lučka se zablika s pritiskom na gumb, vendar vedno sekundo pred dotikom. Gre seveda za znanstveno fantastiko, v kateri Predikator deluje s pomočjo krogotoka z negativnim časovnim zamikom in pošilja signal v času nazaj. Obstoj te naprave naj bi dokazoval, da svobodna volja ne obstaja, saj igralci ne morejo prekršiti pravil igre, luč se namreč vedno zasveti sekundo, preden pritisnejo na gumb. Če pa želijo to zvezo razdreti in čakajo na blisk z namero, da bi se odpovedali pritisku na gumb, potem bliska ni. Po dnevih obsedenega igranja in neuspešnih poskusov, da bi napravo pretentali, ugotovijo, da izbire niso pomembne, še več, tretjino igralcev je baje treba hospitalizirati, saj se na koncu znajdejo v stanju akinetičnega mutizma, v neke vrste budni komi, stanju, v katerem se sami niti hranijo ne več. Danilo Šuster meni, da jedro elegantnega miselnega eksperimenta o času in svobodni volji tvori zmotna »logika« fatalizma. Futuristična naprava, ki vnaprej signalizira našo odločitev, ne dokazuje, da nimamo svobodne volje. Avtor pravi, da miselni eksperimenti spadajo v tisti del filozofske orodjarne, ki je morda najbližje umetniškemu delu, saj nas vodijo do tega, da v domišljiji »uzremo« in razločimo pojmovne komponente tam, kjer jih običajno ni, v filozofiji pa gre po navadi za jasno določen spoznavni smoter – potrditev ali ovržbo kake teorije ali hipoteze. Chiangov miselni eksperiment temelji na ločitvi pojmovnih komponent, za katere se zdi samoumevno, da sodijo skupaj, filozofsko jedro pa je razmislek o pojmovanju časa, vzročnosti in človekovega delo-

vanja. Dejanski red našega delovanja je vzročni, medtem ko je izkustveni red časovni, končni proizvod teh pojmovno-kemičnih reakcij v Chiangovem eksperimentu pa je fatalizem, ki v vsakdanji rabi označuje neko življenjsko držo, v katero zapademo, ko začnemo verjeti, da nič, kar lahko zdaj naredimo, ne more spremeniti tega, kar se bo zgodilo. Za tradicionalnega fatalista je vsak dogodek v preteklosti, sedanjosti in prihodnosti vedno že »fiksiran« samo zaradi zakonov logike ter narave pojmov resnice in časa, zanj ima resnična napoved pred kakim dogodkom enak metafizični status kot resnično poročilo. Zgodi se lahko znameniti »modalni kapult«, ki »izstrelji« domnevno začetno neogibnost premis na sklep prek vezi, ki so same neogibne. Avtor premislek sklene z naslednjim spoznanjem (str. 18): »Chiang je bolj prepričljiv v fenomenologiji fatalizma, a tudi psihologiji zasvojenosti – vsi poznamo razne viralne naprave, da ne govorimo o največjem sodobnem viru obsedenosti s pritiskanjem na gumbe. Danes bi Predikator verjetno bil *aplikacija* za pametne telefone, ki jih leta 2005 še ni bilo. Kaj nas *sili* v to, da pritiskamo na razne gumbe in ekrane – to je zares vprašanje, ki zadeva jedro naših svobodnih izbir.«

V poglavju »Pogojniki in leni dokaz« se Šuster osredini na zavrnitev lenega argumenta, takega, ki temelji na logični zgradbi pogojnikov. Argument o nemožnosti vplivanja na preteklost ima popolnoma enako zgradbo kot fatalistov argument o nemožnosti vplivanja na prihodnost, ki je bil že v antiki znan kot »leni« argument. Logika pogojnikov v naravnem jeziku se razlikuje od logike materialne implikacije, v kateri je propozicija tавтоloška. Avtor poudari, da gre v njegovi interpretaciji za problem vzročnosti in metafizične osnove trditev o nepotrebnosti, dejanska resnica ne zadošča za čudne trditve o nepotrebnosti in neučinkovitosti. Prepričan je, da je standardni filozofski ugovor proti vnazajšnji vzročnosti, se pravi argument iz preklica, neuspešen. Paradoksalna zgradba lenega argumenta, ki govori o tem, da so sprejemljive premise in sklepanje, ne pa tudi argument, je sicer logično zanimiva, tisti, ki se ukvarjajo z njo, pa potrebujejo presenetljivo zapleten logiški aparat za njegovo razrešitev. »Že prvi raziskovalci logične zgradbe naših misli so se zavedali, da je logika dokazov za fatalizem povezana z razpravo o naravi *pogojnikov*« (str. 31).

Šuster se zamisli nad Aristotelovo trditvijo, češ da očitno ni nujno, da je od vsake trditve in nasprotnega zanikanja eno od teh resnično, drugo pa neresnično, kajti kar velja za stvari, ki so, ne velja za stvari, ki niso, ampak mogoče so ali niso (str. 34, odlomek iz Aristotelovega spisa *O razlaganju* je prevedel Boris Vežjak). Avtor nameni pozornost natančni opredelitvi

logičnih zakonov bivalence in izključene tretje možnosti ter preuči sprejemljivost aristotelske rešitve, ki govori o tem, da je za stavke o prihodnosti veljaven zakon izključene tretje možnosti, ne pa tudi načelo bivalence. V standardnem logiškem zapisu sta zakon izključene tretje možnosti in zakon neprotislovja kot logična zakona pravilno oblikovana sintaktična izraza v jeziku propozicionalne logike, načelo bivalence pa je semantično načelo. »Lahko bi rekli, da je po tem načelu *realnost* takšna, da naredi vsako trditev v danem jeziku za resnično ali neresnično« (str. 39). Danilo Šuster med drugim omeni, da nova logika dopušča svobodo izbire tako, da poleg resničnih in neresničnih propozicij vpelje možne oz. nedoločene propozicije. Novi logični sistemi, kot so večvrednostna logika, parakonsistentna logika, logika supervaluacij, parapopolna logika in drugi, dopuščajo razlikovanja, kakršnih klasična logika ne pozna. Sodobna logika supervaluacij je parcialna dvovrednostna logika, ki dopušča vrzeli in po avtorjevem mnenju najbolj ustreza aristotelski rešitvi: ohranitev zakona izključene tretje vrednosti brez bivalence. Če je »navadni determinizem« trditev, da iz dejstev o preteklosti sveta po zakonih narave sledijo vsa dejstva o prihodnosti sveta, potem logični determinizem dokazuje, da je vsak dogodek v preteklosti, sedanjosti in prihodnosti vedno fiksiran, ne glede na to, ali je determiniran ali ne (to se zdi neverjetno). »Logični determinizem ni filozofski izziv, ker bi mu uspelo resno utemeljiti, da je vse, kar se dejansko pripeti, neogibno, mi pa na to nimamo vpliva. Starodavni dokazi za fatalizem pa so logično zanimivi, saj nas silijo v filozofski razmislek o pojmovanju resnice in logičnih zakonov« (str. 58).

Avtor podrobno obravnava van Inwagnov modalni argument za nezdrujljivost svobode in determinizma (4. poglavje) ter analizira protipripihre osrednjemu sklepanju, ki temeljijo na odsotnosti izbire glede indeterminističnih dogodkov. V naslednjem poglavju na zanimiv način opozarja na povezavo med Borgesovim kratkim »dokazom« (Argumentum Ornithologicum) in sodobno logično razpravo o obstoju resnic, ki jih nihče niti v načelu ne more spoznati. V nadaljevanju predstavi tradicionalne filozofske pristope k praktičnemu sklepanju. Izhodišče sodobne deontične logike, logike norm, logike obveznosti, logike normativnih sistemov in logike imperativov je obravnava obveznosti kot posebnega primera nujnosti, primera, ki temelji na analogiji med deontično in aletično modalnostjo, kot jo prikazuje tradicionalni modalni kvadrat. Spopade se z moralnimi dilemami, v katerih se od dejavnika zahteva, da realizira vsako od dveh med seboj nezdrujljivih dolžnosti, torej vsako posebej, ne more pa obeh hkrati. Obstoj dilem je problem za standardno deontično

logiko, ta jih s svojimi postulati prepoveduje. Šuster meni, da so moralne dileme dejstvo naše moralne realnosti, zato jih logični sistem ne bi smel takoj izločiti.

V prikazu modalne logike avtor predpostavlja poznavanje osnov klasične propozicionalne (stavčne) logike. Modalna logika je razširitev standardne logike, ne pa njena alternativa. Moderna logika je oživila Leibnizovo idejo, da je nujna resnica tista, ki je resnična v vseh možnih svetovih, možna pa je ona, ki je resnična vsaj v enem. Izhodišče je popolna enakopravnost možnih svetov: vsak je enako možen glede na vsakega drugega. Sodobna semantika temelji na ideji, da je sistem možnih svetov strukturiran z relacijo dostopnosti med svetovi, nekateri so povezani med seboj, drugi pa ne. Sistem svetov, ki so povezani z relacijo dostopnosti, je semantični okvir, imenovan Kripkejev okvir. Avtor posebej preučuje nekatere temeljna načela osnovnega sistema in njihove medsebojne povezave, pri tem pa posebno pozornost namenja načelom sklepanja. Obravnava nekaj možnosti aksiomatiziranja množice deontičnih logičnih tez, enakovredno jih je namreč mogoče aksiomatizirati na različne načine. Pisec pri tem opozarja na meje deontičnega formalnega aparata, temelječega na normalni modalni logiki. Pogojniki so osrednji predmet logičnega preučevanja od antike dalje. Avtor v zadnjem poglavju temeljito predstavi logiko protidejstvenih pogojnikov (»če bi bilo res, da A, potem bi bilo res, da B«), ki ni monotona. Dodajanje novih premis v pogojniških sklepanjih lahko spreminja veljavnost, zato jih ne moremo tolmačiti kot nujne materialne implikacije. Avtorjevo izhodišče za drugačno logiko in semantiko je razumevanje protidejstvenikov kot spremenljivo strogih pogojnikov (D. Lewis).

Na zadnji platnici knjige *Modalni katapulti: uvod v filozofsko logiko* je navedenih nekaj pozdravnih besed hrvaškega filozofa in logika Nenada Smokrovića ter slovenske filozofinje in logikinje Olge Markič, recenzenta in recenzentke avtorjeve znanstvene monografije. Za Smokrovića knjiga sodi med vrhunce literature te vrste v Sloveniji in celotni regiji. Pridružujem se vrednostni sodbi Olge Markič, da je knjiga Danila Šusterja pionirsko delo o filozofski (modalni) logiki v slovenskem jeziku in izviren prispevek na tem področju.

Literatura

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