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Drug Violence, Fear of Crime and the Transformation of Everyday Life in the Mexican Metropolis

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Author
Villarreal Montemayor, Ana Teresa

Publication Date
2016

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Drug Violence, Fear of Crime
and the Transformation of Everyday Life in the Mexican Metropolis

By

Ana Teresa Villarreal Montemayor

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Loic J. Wacquant, Chair
Professor Laura J. Enriquez
Professor Mara Loveman
Professor Teresa Caldeira
Professor Javier Auyero

Spring 2016
Abstract

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by

Ana Teresa Villarreal Montemayor

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Loïc Wacquant, Chair

This dissertation brings sharp social theory, deep history and precise ethnography to illumine the nexus of social and urban structure, human emotions, and power. I draw on Norbert Elias, Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, among other social theorists and historians, to counter dominant views of fear in the social sciences as a sole destroyer of the social fabric with evidence of how and why fear both tears and tightens the social fabric, both destroys and fosters solidarity. Yet with the exception of a few spaces of hope where families of victims of forced disappearances organized to demand justice from the state, this “tightening” of the social fabric did not transcend but rather exacerbated socio-spatial divides. I draw on comparative urban sociology by Teresa Caldeira, Gerald Suttles and Loïc Wacquant to trace the revamping of San Pedro, a suburb of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area and one of the wealthiest municipalities in Mexico, as an emerging state within a state for the upper class—an example of a new pattern of urban seclusion taking form in Latin America. This dissertation contributes to the sociology of everyday life in the city and the political sociology of fear and violence by providing a rare case study of cross-class responses to gruesome violence.
A Cecilia y Ernesto
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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CADHAC</td>
<td>Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAINTRA</td>
<td>Cámara de la Industria de Transformación de Nuevo León</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATWLAC</td>
<td>Coalition Against Trafficking of Women and Girls in Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEMEX</td>
<td>Cementos Mexicanos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENAPI</td>
<td>Centro Nacional de Planeación, Análisis e Información para el Combate a la Delincuencia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Cable News Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNSP</td>
<td>Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Pública</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Drug Enforcement Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFS</td>
<td>Dirección Federal de Seguridad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENSI</td>
<td>Encuesta Nacional Sobre Inseguridad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMSA</td>
<td>Fomento Económico Mexicano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUNDENL</td>
<td>Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICESI</td>
<td>Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Inseguridad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDMC</td>
<td>The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INEGI</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IITESM</td>
<td>Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDD</td>
<td>National Security Decision Directive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGR</td>
<td>Procuraduría General de la República</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>Partido de Acción Nacional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEMEX</td>
<td>Petróleos Mexicanos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFP</td>
<td>Policía Federal Preventiva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNR</td>
<td>Partido Nacional Revolucionario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>Partido de la Revolución Democrática</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEDENA</td>
<td>Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEGOB</td>
<td>Secretaría de Gobernación</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMAR</td>
<td>Secretaría de Marina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNSP</td>
<td>Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UANL</td>
<td>Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León</td>
</tr>
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This project was funded by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS) and the Sociology Department at the University of California, Berkeley. This research was also assisted by a grant from the Drugs, Security and Democracy Fellowship Program administered by the Social Science Research Council and the Universidad de los Andes in cooperation with funds provided by the Open Society Foundation and the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. I am grateful to all of these institutions, as well as to the Mexican National Council on Science and Technology (CONACyT) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) for funding my first years of graduate school.

For their unparalleled mentorship and unfaltering support, I thank Loïc Wacquant, Laura Enriquez, Mara Loveman, Teresa Caldeira and Javier Auyero. Luis Astorga, Michael Burawoy and Delphine Mercier offered further direction and essential encouragement to complete this manuscript.

I thank Víctor Zúñiga and Fernando Chinchilla at the Universidad de Monterrey, as well as José Manuel Prieto and all other members of the urban violence seminar at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, for providing me with an office and an intellectual community during my two years of fieldwork in Monterrey.

Fieldwork in my hometown—unrecognizable at first due to increased violence—was only possible thanks to the support of my family and local friends, especially Maria Fernanda and Cordelia.

I thank Froy, my beloved intellectual soul mate, for showing me how to enjoy the writing process five hundred words at a time.

For the deep friendships supporting this and all other projects in my life, I thank Zozu, Kara, Marifer, Nazanin, Eu and Alex, Anahi, Raquel, Francesca, Malgorzata, Delphine, Pao, Melissa and Uly, Eva, Reynaldo and Cristina, Lea and Norma.

For his readiness to move with me to a considerably colder climate so that I may continue writing at Boston University, I thank Danok, love of my life!

Most importantly, I thank the informants who shared their stories and experiences with me. May this project help us understand the complex causes and consequences of our fears; may it feed our hopes for global solidarity with the numerous victims of the transnational politico-criminal trades most commonly, yet mistakenly, referred to as “wars on drugs.”
Introduction to the Study of the Plaza

[The] basic tissue resulting from many single plans and actions of people can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created.
From this interdependence of people arises an order *sui generis*, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it.


It was the most violent year in the history of the city. The price of heroin tripled in the United States and drug traffickers in Mexico went to war for their share of the world’s biggest illicit drug market. Homicide rates exploded. “We’re on the brink of hell,” a police chief told a journalist as he and a dozen other police officers “armed to their teeth” looked out the window of a police station in fear. The Governor claimed, “even if we bring the entire army, it would not be enough.” The military, the air force, the navy, the federal police, some state and local police, accompanied by an undisclosed number of US Drug Enforcement Administration officers were deployed to pacify the area. It was 1976, the most violent year to date in the history of Culiacán, Sinaloa when drug traffickers and several domestic and foreign security agencies engaged in Mexico’s first great struggle over a *plaza*.

The first claim I make in this dissertation is that contemporary upsurges of violence in multiple cities in Mexico, including Monterrey, need to be examined in long-term perspective. True, homicide rates were at their lowest in the recent history of Mexico when President Felipe Calderón took office in 2006. Homicide rates rose steadily as he declared a “war” against all drug traffickers, yet such statistics offer only a partial history of violence. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I draw on the works of sociologists Luis Astorga, Pierre Bourdieu, Charles Tilly, Karen Barkey and historian Froylán Enciso to situate a key turning point in state-criminal relations in Mexico, not in 2006, but thirty years earlier. I argue that tables were already turning in 1976 as drug traffickers, subordinated to Mexican officials since prohibition, began to gain some autonomy from the state.

To define such violent confrontations as a “war on drugs” is a misnomer. The second claim I make in this dissertation is that the spread of new patterns of gruesome violence in Mexico is best understood as struggles over *plazas*: localized territories connecting criminal actors, and the state bureaucrats protecting them, to global illicit markets that stretch beyond the illicit drug trade. A localized approach is, thus, necessary if we are to understand how these struggles take place on the ground. Chapter two is a detailed examination of the emergence of new constellations of gruesome violence as new and old criminal groups and different levels of the state security apparatus engaged in a violent struggle over the highly valued *plaza* of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. I examine media coverage of the appearance of hanging and dismembered bodies. I provide ethnographic data of the peace initiatives that emerged to contest the disappearance of hundreds of men and women in this city. Such sudden high levels of
violence in wealthy, industrial and relatively peaceful Monterrey were shocking to locals and foreigners alike. Nevertheless, from a long-term perspective, to dispute control, by any means necessary, over contraband flows in the metropolis that became the main articulator of commerce and contraband in northeastern Mexico since the 19th century is less surprising.

After historicizing my case study in national and regional context in the first two chapters, I turn to the impact of these shifting state-criminal relations and related violence and fear on socio-spatial relations and subjectivities at a metropolitan scale. I drew inspiration from The Civilizing Process, in which Norbert Elias ([1939] 2000) establishes a model tracing causal cascades between processes of state formation, shifts in social relations and individual subjectivities. At the level of subjectivities, I examine the emergence of a cowboy figure in everyday language to encompass these new constellations of violence as los malitos in chapter three. Roughly translated as “little evil guys,” los malitos challenges our contemporary understanding of “folk devils” as outlined in Stanley Cohen’s ([1972] 2002) classic study of Mods and Rockers in the United Kingdom. This case demonstrates that “folk devils” may be used not only to exaggerate, as in Cohen’s early work, but also to euphemize perpetrators of violence. Moreover, los malitos served as a means of obscuring state involvement in violent crimes and criminalizing actual victims accused of “being into something.”

At the level of social relations, I extend an argument formulated by Emile Durkheim ([1893] 1998; [1912] 2008), Marcel Mauss and Henri Beuchat ([1905] 2006) on the relations between physical proximity and moral density to contemporary urban societies going through phases of sudden heightened violence. In The Social Division of Labor ([1893] 1998), Emile Durkheim formulates a “law of social gravity” arguing that as individuals become increasingly interdependent in economic terms, there is a moral shift in the type of solidarity that binds them.1 Marcel Mauss and Henri Beuchat ([1905] 2006) further develop this analysis on the relations between economy and morality in their essay Seasonal Variations of the Eskimos. The Eskimo lived scattered lives over the summer, dwelling in dispersed tents along the coast where they would fish for their daily subsistence. When the winter came, they gathered in long-houses to protect themselves from the cold and to share more limited hunting resources. Yet the Eskimo also built a place of assembly called kashim with a central hearth where shamans lead public ceremonies to drive famines away, where all danced and the old shared legends and myths with the young. Mauss and Beuchat argue that the existence and the events that take place within the kashim cannot be reduced to a functional analysis. The changing character of social relations over the winter was not only about ensuring daily subsistence. The social morphology or the shape of social life has an effect on the character of social relations and moral cohesion. Emile Durkheim ([1912] 2008) builds off these findings by his nephew Mauss and close colleague Beuchat to develop the

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1 Durkheim ([1893] 1998) argues that the division of labor in a society is a direct consequence of three interrelated processes: concentration of the population; urbanization; and increased development of means of communication and transportation (see book 2, chapter 2). As individuals become increasingly bound to each other, they form cities or “points where the social mass is contracted more than elsewhere” (ibid: 239). As this social volume increases, the division of labor is intensified. Individuals increasingly bound by their economic interdependence, produce a new kind of moral cohesion based no longer on similarities (mechanical solidarity) but rather on complementary differences (organic solidarity).
classic sociological argument in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: the underlying characteristic of all religions is the distinction between the sacred and the profane; and this distinction originates in the experience of “the social” that individuals feel when they come together as a group. For Durkheim, “the mere fact of grouping is as an extremely powerful stimulant. Once individuals are grouped, their closeness secretes a sort of electricity that quickly takes them to an extraordinary level of excitement” (ibid: 308, my translation).

In chapter four, I argue that abrupt peaks of crime and fear, like a harsh winter climate, reduce spaces of sociability, which translates into denser sociability experiences and, paradoxically, a heightened sense of community amid a sea of suspect strangers. Drawing on two years of ethnographic fieldwork on everyday adaptations to sudden high-levels of gruesome violence in Monterrey, I outline four logistics of fear or military strategies down-scaled and extended into civilian life: armoring spaces and vehicles, camouflaging (wealth, practices, professions), traveling in caravans or convoys and regrouping in new public spaces. In sum, in this chapter I counter the dominant notion that fear is straightforwardly a destroyer of social fabric and spotlight how and why fear both tears and tightens social relations.

While most research on violence and everyday life focuses on the predicament of the urban poor, chapter five is an ethnographic examination of upper class responses to sudden, explosive, spectacular violence and collective outbursts of fear. I trace the emergence of San Pedro Garza García, one of Mexico’s wealthiest municipalities, as an "armored" municipality within the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. Establishing similarities between the “political fortification” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2007: 58) of San Pedro in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area and Chacao in Caracas, Venezuela in the aftermath of the Caracazo, I establish a new pattern of urban seclusion taking form in Latin American cities. Drawing on two key concepts from urban sociology—Teresa Caldeira’s “fortified enclaves” and Gerald Suttles’s “defended neighborhood”—I argue that this new pattern is characterized by upper class leverage of state resources to create a state within a state for the upper class.

In the concluding chapter, I extract the theoretical implications of my case study in relation to the works of Luis Astorga, Charles Tilly, Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias on the state and organized crime; Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss on the linkages between physical proximity, social density, moral cohesion and emotional intensity; Teresa Caldeira, Loïc Wacquant and Gerald Suttles on urban exclusion and seclusion; as well as Jean Delumeau and Stanley Cohen on fear, folk devils and denial.
Fieldwork Parameters

My insomnia began in the late summer of 2010. Although studying abroad, I experienced violence escalating in Monterrey through the worried voices of my loved ones and the Facebook posts of old friends turned peace activists in my hometown. Friends of friends were shot, kidnapped and disappeared. I was not thinking of studying fear back then, but I was already immersed in the field. During the summer of 2011, I went back to my family’s home for a few weeks. I took notes on how family, friends and acquaintances felt the constant need to update me on what I could or could not do, and where I could or could not go. I experienced how much urban life had changed, as I became a tourist in my hometown.

I decided to conduct fieldwork on this topic in early 2012, knowing a first necessary step would be to relearn how to live in Monterrey. Located in northeastern Mexico, the Monterrey Metropolitan Area is comprised of nine municipalities with a high degree of government autonomy. The total population is around 4.5 million inhabitants. I moved into an apartment located in the old quarter of the wealthy municipality of San Pedro where I was raised, now referred to as the “armored municipality.” I took notes as I reconnected with old friends and previous fieldwork acquaintances I had not seen in years. The beginning of my fieldwork was thus to “revisit” (Burawoy, 2003) a site I used to know. Each of these contacts provided an update on all that had changed from their perspective: the places they were not going to anymore, the sites that had closed, and the cautions they had to adopt. These updates allowed me to regain a sense of place, recover my sleep, and draw the basis for a systematic examination of fear in the subjective and socio-spatial dimensions analyzed in this dissertation.

San Pedro is the municipality where the traditional upper class, high-ranking politicians and high-ranking drug traffickers took refuge from increased violence in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. The local upper class had already begun a process of suburbanization in the 1950s when they moved their homes from downtown Monterrey to the valley of San Pedro located on the skirts of the Sierra Madre Mountains. Yet increased violence intensified this process. Business centers, upper class nightlife and leisure were quickly relocated within this municipality, further impoverishing the rest of the metropolitan area. Many San Pedro residents reorganized their everyday lives within the borders of this municipality. This is the municipality where I focused much of my fieldwork, tracing the consolidation of a state within a state.

During the summer of 2011 and through 2012, I viscerally documented the tension experienced by the citizenry as spectacular violence was on the rise. In 2013, I examined the release and loosening of certain security strategies, as things “seemed to get better.” Embedded in the emotional landscape of the city, I experienced multiple tides of increasing and decreasing fear as publicized in the media and shared in everyday conversations. These experiences allowed me to refine my interview questions and field site observations in order to document the collective management of fear.

Over twenty-four months, I observed: violent death memorials, everyday activities in plazas, shopping malls, schools, private and public universities, markets, country homes. I conducted 60 informal interviews with human rights activists, journalists, academics, politicians, community organizers, among others documented in my field notes. Additionally, I conducted 25 supplementary in-depth interviews with
residents from the upper class municipality of San Pedro and working-class neighborhoods across the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey. I recruited interviewees from previous social and fieldwork networks, as well as from the new acquaintances I made in regular everyday activities I adopted over this period. These included being a visiting scholar at a private university, a member of an urban violence seminar at a public university, a regular yoga practitioner, and a member of a group advocating for increased cyclist and pedestrian rights. Through these multiple entries, I gained the trust of my informants in a context of high violence. In order to reconstruct the escalation of violence, as well as the widespread adoption of social practices to manage fear, I rely on the observations of journalists writing for the most read newspaper in the city, *El Norte*. This dissertation combines extensive qualitative data with an overview of crime/victimization surveys as well as a revision of how violence, fear and related daily practices are portrayed in main local media outlets.
Chapter 1. Drugs, Prohibition and Violent Struggles Over La Plaza in Mexico

How can we interpret sudden shifts, as well as continuities, in long-term violence trends? Why and how does violence shift form? Why does it spread from one place to another? These broad questions underlie much of the scholarly work on violence in Latin America today, particularly in the case of contemporary Mexico where criminal and state forms of violence have increased dramatically over the past decade. I begin this chapter with an overview of recent violence trends in Latin America, focusing on increasing and shifting forms of violence over the past three decades—particularly, the shift from predominantly political to criminal forms of violence. I then situate Mexico within this context by providing: 1) a brief history of criminal and state violence trends, as well as crime data omissions, for 20th century Mexico to clearly situate extreme ruptures in contemporary violence trends; and 2) a closer examination of the development and spread of criminal and state violence linked, although not reduced to, the illicit drug trade.

In the concluding section of this chapter, I draw on the works of sociologists Luis Astorga (2000, 2007, 2015) and Pierre Bourdieu ([1997] 2005) to reinterpret Astorga’s model explaining shifting relations between drug traffickers and the state in 20th century Mexico. I argue that the relative autonomization of criminal actors from the state, issued from the progressive separation of political and bureaucratic fields in Mexico, gave rise to multiple localized struggles over plazas—localized territories connecting criminal actors, and the state bureaucrats protecting them, to global illicit markets (drugs, arms and human trafficking, gas smuggling, among others). From the standpoint of the new criminal actors examined at the end of this chapter (the Zetas in particular), recent struggles to take over plazas in northeastern Mexico involved the deployment of increasingly brutal forms of violence. In subsequent chapters, I focus on the development and impact of violent struggles over the highly valued plaza of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area.

Drugs and Recent Violence Trends in Latin America

Taking homicide rates as a measure for violence levels, Latin America is the most violent region in the world today (see dark red areas in Figure 1). For anthropologist Phillipe Bourgois, who has studied both revolutionary and more recent interpersonal and organized crime violence in Central America for over three decades, “it should come as no surprise that the nations from the region of the world with the highest levels of income inequality and the greatest historical levels of repeated US military, political, and economic interventions… also have the seven highest per-capita rates of homicide in the world” (Bourgois, 2015: 306).
Latin American countries such as Honduras, Venezuela, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico share some of the highest national homicide rates in the world with Lesotho, Swaziland, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Nigeria (see Figure 2). Brutal colonialism, the enslavement of indigenous populations, oppressive peonage systems and “modernization” aids for technology and infrastructure all laid the foundations for the profitable exploitation of Latin America. Local elites served (and continue to serve) as capital accumulation intermediaries for European countries and the United States, particularly throughout the twentieth century. During the Cold War, threats of spreading communism provided a framework for the United States to invade or back military coups in Chile, Argentina, among others, as well as to support counterinsurgency groups in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru, to mention a few. More recently, “militarization and political-economic interventionism by the United States continues in the post-Cold War era in the name of combatting drugs and terrorism rather than communism” (Bourgois, 2015: 308). The spread of addiction to opiates, cocaine, among other criminalized substances in the United States, and increasingly punitive US-backed global drug prohibition regimes provide a key entrance to understand the recent shifts in violence trends in Latin America.
Scholars have traced the beginning of drug addiction in the United States to the Civil War (1861-1865). Wounded veterans were in need of painkillers. After much experimentation with diverse substances, doctors found that a direct injection of morphine into the bloodstream—made possible by the development of the hypodermic needle in the mid-nineteenth century—was particularly effective (Musto, 1973). Although the red poppy flowers required for opium production (extracted from the flower bulb) are not grown in the United States, a “relatively high level of opium consumption was established in the United States during the nineteenth century” (ibid: 2). Increased consumption can be deduced from the rising imports of opium, mostly crude, which peaked in 1896 (and most likely continued to rise but reliable statistics were no longer available after opium was prohibited in 1909).

According to David Musto, “the Civil War, far from initiating opiate use on a large scale in the United States, hardly makes a ripple in its constantly expanding consumption, but addicted Civil War veterans, a group of unknown size, may have spread addiction by recruiting other users” (ibid: 2). Musto introduces an important methodological distinction between consumers and addicts. In the nineteenth century, the consumption of, but not necessarily the addiction to, substances that would be

### Figure 2 Twenty Highest National Homicide Rates in 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Homicides per 100,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesotho (2010)</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Rep. of Congo</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatorial Guinea</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

criminalized in the early twentieth century was part of everyday life in the United States. Pharmaceuticals commercialized opiates in cough and baby soothing syrups, and popular drinks like Coca Cola contained cocaine. In 1909, smoking opium—a practice that was closely associated with the Chinese population, persecuted at the time—was prohibited. Since then, Musto argued, the prohibition of certain drugs in the United States was closely associated with white fear of certain populations: opium with the Chinese; cocaine with Blacks; and later marijuana with Mexican immigrants. For example, a New York Times article from 1935 published the following opinion of a Californian member of the “American Coalition,” a right-winged association, claiming that: “marijuana, perhaps now the most insidious of our narcotics, is a direct by-product of unrestricted Mexican immigration... Mexican peddlers have been caught distributing sample marijuana cigarettes [sic] to school children” (idem: 220).

Since 1909, the prohibition of opium “served notice to other nations that America was determined to rid itself of the evils of addiction” (Musto, 1973: 3). The United States organized the International Opium Commission in China, launching a global drug prohibition regime (described in greater detail later in this chapter). In brief, demand for criminalized opiates, cocaine and marijuana in the US continued to increased over the twentieth century. In the 1970s, President Richard Nixon’s increasingly punitive anti-drug policies attacking drug-supplying countries lead to an increase in the profitability of the drug business and the number of individuals willing to work in this trade. The demand for these criminalized substances thrived off deepening economic inequality in the United States over the decades that followed. Increasing numbers of men and women thrown into spirals of unemployment, poverty and homelessness turned to drugs for business, pleasure and solace (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). For historian Alan Knight, the boom demand for drugs in the United States would have produced “a great neoliberal, NAFTA success” if drugs had been legal in the 1990s, but instead produced devastating consequences for Mexico (Knight, 2012: 126), among other Latin American countries.

Beginning in the 1990s, Latin America scholars began to ask: why did high levels of violence persist and increase in the region as democratic institutions replaced dictatorships in countries like Brazil, Chile or Argentina? Social scientists began to seek new ways of characterizing these emerging democracies with high violence levels (O’Donnell, 1993). Some argued that violence made these democracies “disjunctive” (Caldeira & Holston, 1999), while other scholars asserted that violence is constitutive of these “violent democracies” (Arias & Goldstein, 2010). High levels of violence continued through democratic transitions, yet violence changed in terms of its perpetrators and form. The terror that characterized the everyday lives of thousands under brutal authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 1980s (Menjívar & Rodríguez, 2005; O’Donnell, 1983) shifted. State violence was no longer of the kind that facilitated the torture and execution of political dissidents during the Operation Condor of the 1970s—the US-backed secret intelligence operation that allowed dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil to share information, seize, torture and execute political opponents in each other’s territory (McSherry, 2005). State violence was (and is) increasingly carried out in collusion with criminal actors for commercial purposes such as drug trafficking (Arias, 2006a, 2006b; Auyero & Berti, 2013). Once again, state officials, as well as local elites, function as intermediaries for capital accumulation in the United States where the gross gains of the drug trade are made.
Interpersonal violence, domestic violence and vigilantism also became increasingly common in Latin America over the past few decades (Godoy, 2006; D. Goldstein, 2004; Imbusch, Misse, & Carrión, 2011). Although violence takes different forms across the region, this broad pattern of escalating violence is predominantly urban and, thus, most often examined as a series of urban case studies (Caldeira, 2000; Koonings, 2001; Koonings & Krujit, 2007; O’Neill & Thomas, 2011; Rodgers, Beall, & Kanbur, 2012). This dissertation is one such case study examining the cross-class impact of increased violence on a metropolitan area. In the next section, I provide a broader historical and national context of violence trends to situate my case study.

Crime Trends and Crime Data Omissions for 20th Century Mexico

Considered “exceptional” for its low levels of reported violence when much of the Southern Cone was under authoritarian rule, recent explosive violence in Mexico lead some scholars to re-examine the centrality of violence in its post revolutionary state making processes. Scholarship on state-making in Mexico had previously prioritized the study of formal institutions, leaving aside the role played by hidden informal violence and coercion, i.e. the “dark-side” of state-making (Pansters, 2012). An approach considering both could explain how and why Mexico simultaneously moved towards democratic consolidation (understood as electoral competition, although not in a pacified civil society) and towards violence, insecurity, and militarization over the past two decades (idem: 9). In this section, I combine these recent analyses of violence and state formation with a review of national crime statistics for 20th century Mexico, highlighting an overall quantitative and qualitative increase in violent crime over the past decade.

Scholars interested in the history of crime in Mexico have primarily focused on tracing crime trends for its capital, Mexico City (Piccato, 2001; Speckman, 2002). Based on the number of criminal charges filed between 1895 and the 1930s, such work illustrates a sharp increase in crime rates in the capital at the end of the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911). Violence increased during the Mexican Revolution and began to decrease slowly after the drafting of the Constitution of 1917 and the foundation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) that would later become the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). There are no crime analyses for the first decades of the 20th century for the country as a whole. Hence, we can only speculate to what extent national urban and rural crime rates may have followed similar trends.

The following graph summarizes some of the earliest data available on crime for Mexico at a national level: criminal charges filed for homicide, injury, theft and rape between 1926 and 2008. The data shows that, while charges for homicide and injury decreased, incidents of reported and prosecuted theft fluctuated with economic crises in the 1940s and 1980s and increased at the turn of the century. An overall decrease in criminal charges between the 1940s and 1980s could provide substance for arguments of “Mexican exceptionalism” during the so-called “golden years” of the PRI—the party that uninterruptedy held federal power from the 1920s through 2000. Nevertheless, this argument needs to be modulated given that these statistics measure variation in criminal justice activity and not the evolution of crime itself (Hagan, 1994).
For example, if we take the number of criminal charges filed for rape as a measurement for cases of rape, there appears to be no significant change in this criminal form over eight decades. Yet this would be rather surprising given the fluctuations of other criminal forms. Why would the number of criminal charges for rape per 100,000 people remain constant? Rather than assuming that the number of rapes was consistently low for this period, it is more likely to assume that rape was consistently underreported given the vulnerability of women vis-à-vis their aggressors—particularly in the case of domestic partners. In Mexico, sexual abuse by a husband was not considered rape until 2005. Taking this modern definition of rape into consideration, a national history of rape is yet to be written.

Rape is a useful although insufficient indicator of violence against women in Mexico. This criminal form does not capture the brutality with which hundreds of women and girls have been (and continue to be) murdered. The most publicized cases in recent years are the hundreds of maquiladora workers raped, tortured and murdered in Ciudad Juárez since the early 1990s. Activists and scholars in Mexico have demanded that the state recognize these homicides as “femicides,” yet there is great variation in the adoption of this criminal category in Mexico’s 31 states. Created in the mid-2000s, the National Citizen Observatory for Femicides is the most organized attempt to document this form of gender violence in the country. As with rape, data on criminal charges for homicide, injury or theft do not represent the totality of criminal or violent activity for post-revolutionary Mexico.
According to historian Paul Gillingham, the quantitative data used by crime historian Pablo Piccato to compile Figure 3 is incomplete for certain states and certain periods of “unusually intense violence” in Mexico, such as Veracruz in the mid-1940s and Guerrero in the late 1970s (Gillingham, 2012: 95). Such data might modify the gross volume of violence in this graph. Moreover, this data does not consider the manifold instances in which the military and police forces killed, injured, raped and stole property from citizens during this period. Numerous cases of rural violence such as the repression of the Jaramillista Movement in Morelos in the 1940s and 1950s (T. Padilla, 2008), labor violence by unions such as the CROM with federal support (Aguila & Bortz, 2012), massacres such as the killing of students in Tlatelolco in 1968, the repression of the guerrillas that characterized the Dirty War of the 1970s, and the large-scale antinarcotics campaigns of the 1970s are all missing in this graph. Gillingham detailed his frustration vis-à-vis incomplete or unreachable military archives omitting necessary reports to investigate post-1940 political/state violence in Mexico. These documents could “give historians new levels of insight into the army’s central role in maintaining internal order, which may be why they are absent” (Gillingham, 2012: 94). Historical work is nevertheless accomplished by digging into the political correspondence of low levels of Mexican government, state judicial archives, letters, and provincial newspapers resisting censorship. From these and other sources, Gillingham concluded that fear of reprisal and mistrust of local government lead to the frequent underreporting of homicides. In a letter addressed to President Cárdenas in 1939, a mayor in Veracruz wrote that, “it is customary that anyone who sees anything and tells the authorities is murdered” (Gillingham, 2012: 96).

Crime continues to go underreported in Mexico today. For this reason, the Citizen Institute for Insecurity Research (ICESI) developed the first national victimization survey in Mexico in 2004: the Encuesta Nacional Sobre Inseguridad (ENSI). According to this and subsequent surveys, which were later conducted by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), 9 out of 10 crimes are unreported in Mexico. Unreported crime increased from almost 80% in 2004 (ICESI, 2006) to over 96% in 2008 (ICESI, 2009). Given this extremely high “dark figure” or unreported crime, data on criminal charges in Mexico represent only a fraction of real crime patterns. Crime underreporting, widespread state violence and state manipulation of crime statistics are three important flaws to consider when observing Figure 3, which is nonetheless the best proxy we have to date to speculate on national crime trends and violence in 20th century Mexico.

Following historical criminologists taking homicide rates as a measure for violence (Spierenburg, 2013), I now turn to shifts in national homicide rates over the past two decades. Homicide rates were at their lowest in the recent history of Mexico when President Felipe Calderón took office in 2006. Relying on data from INEGI, the blue dashed line in Figure 4 depicts a stunning three-fold increase in homicide rates during his presidency: from 8 in 2007 to 24 homicides per 100,000 people in 2010. According to Calderón’s Office of the President, about half of these deaths, featured in red, were attributed to “presumed criminal rivalry.”

The variable “deaths by presumed criminal rivalry” does not include the term “drugs” in its name, yet it did correspond to the presidential rhetoric of the time suggesting that the increase in homicides in the country corresponded to drug traffickers
killing each other. The name of the variable hid that the state was (and continues to be) a key perpetrator of violence. The variable also hid the many civilian casualties of this conflict, criminalizing homicide victims. First consulted in 2012 to elaborate Figure 4, the database and methodology used to elaborate this graph were no longer available in 2013. The change of federal government administration in December 2012 meant not only the abandonment of this variable, but also the removal of this database and its methodology from public access.

**Figure 4 Total Homicides and Deaths Due to “Presumed Criminal Rivalry” per 100,000 people**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Presumed Rivalry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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</table>

**Source:** Estadísticas de mortalidad (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2013); Presidencia de la República, Fallecimientos ocurridos por presunta rivalidad delincuencial (Presidencia de la República, 2012); Indicadores demográficos básicos 1990-2030 (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2013).

A citizen report elaborated in 2012 to evaluate the databases most frequently used to determine the number of deaths in the country reproduced some of the content that is no longer available online (Inteligencia Publica, 2012). The report stated that the Ministry of National Defense (SEDENA), the Navy (SEMAR), the Ministry of Public Security (SSP) and the Office of the Attorney General (PGR) jointly elaborated this statistic. Members of each office met with the Ministry of Government (SEGOB) to verify these numbers through the National Center for the Planning, Analysis and Information in the Combat of Organized Crime (CENAPI). This database was supposed to be updated on a monthly basis to inform the public of latest developments in homicide trends, but only one report was published online in 2011 for the period 2006-2010. Although numerous citizens and the Institute for the Protection of Public Access to Information and Data Protection (IFAI) requested updates of this figure from the Federal Office of the Public Prosecutor
(PGR) in the years that followed, the making of this database was discontinued without explanation (Proceso, 2013).

Political scientist Javier Osorio interviewed a high-ranking officer of the National Ministry for Public Security (SNSP) who was in charge of publicizing this data during the Calderón administration. According to this officer, who kept his position at the SNSP when Peña Nieto took office, the new administration thought Calderón made a mistake publishing this data, for it provided a statistical basis for many to criticize his security policies. The officer said Peña Nieto learned the lesson and decided to dispel criticism by ceasing to publish this data (personal correspondence with Javier Osorio, April 6, 2015).

The disappearance of this database from public access is one recent case in a long history of crime data omissions and manipulations by the Mexican government—as sketched above by historian Gillingham’s frustration with criminal databases and archives from the 1940s and 1970s.

Figure 4 nevertheless depicts a stunning and rapid increase against a backdrop of long-term slow decrease in homicides. To explain this sudden spike in violent crime over the past decade, sociologists and political scientists have argued that increased homicides are correlated with democratization. Electoral competition disrupted local patronage networks (Andres Villarreal, 2002), breaking down ‘state-sponsored protection rackets’ (Snyder & Durán-Martínez, 2009) and eroding peaceful configurations between state and criminal organizations (Osorio, 2013). Although this scholarship illustrates shifts in dynamics within the state apparatus in relation to criminal organizations over the past decade, a broader long-term perspective can reveal deeper causes for this upsurge of violence.

Instead of focusing on understanding shifts in “drug violence” as several political scientists do in this emerging field (D. Shirk & Wallman, 2015), I examine violent struggles over la plaza as a socio-historical phenomenon preceding this stunning spike of homicides at a national scale in Mexico. Such an approach allows me to skip the difficulties of isolating murders that are specifically related to drug trafficking (Heinle, Rodríguez Ferreira, & Shirk, 2013) and consider instead: how contemporary increases in homicides, kidnappings, extortion, as well as the brutality with which these crimes take place, are interrelated; how both the state and criminals contribute to this upsurge in violence; and finally, how these struggles stretch far beyond the specific stakes of the drug trade in multiple Mexican localities.

Understanding La Lucha Por La Plaza

Mexican sociologist Luis Astorga (2000, 2007, 2015) employs Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998) concept of field to build a model explaining shifting relations between the Mexican state and organized crime. Organized crime was subordinate to a cohesive and authoritative state run by the PRI during most of the 20th century. Drug traffickers who did not accept to provide a portion of their illicit profits to the state via bribing the police apparatus: to quit, to go to jail or to die. Towards the mid-1980s, as the PRI lost its hegemonic position (and as demand for drugs boomed in the United States generating immense profits for drug traffickers), organized crime gained some autonomy from the political field (see Figure 5).
If Astorga confounds what Bourdieu defines as the bureaucratic field (the state proper) and the political field (the space of agents vying for electoral positions), this is only because these two fields were inseparable during the height of PRI rule. For decades, Presidents chose their successors from within the state and party ranks. Successors were chosen by means of pointing a finger at him, a process popularly referred to as el dedazo. The bureaucratic apparatus was subordinate not to a “house” as in Bourdieu’s model tracing the “autonomization of the bureaucratic field” from a “dynastic state” ([1997] 2005: 31-34), but rather to a monopolistic party during a period when the struggles of agents contending for state positions were internal. Organized crime became relatively autonomous from the state as the bureaucratic and political fields became increasingly disjoint, which is one definition of “democratization” (see Figure 6).

The key distinction Bourdieu grapples with in his model is the progressive, yet ambiguous, dissociation of private and public interest—ambiguous as there is always room for public servants to make private use of the accumulated material and symbolic profits he defines as “statist capital.” The Mexican case complicates this model by adding another layer of interests and actors to the struggle. In line with Bourdieu, “the state is a profitable enterprise… [and] the struggle to make the state thus becomes increasingly indissociable from a struggle to appropriate the profits associated with the state…” (ibid: 41). Yet when the profits associated with the state are not only the outcome of state taxation but also and largely of illegal rents, criminal actors and interests come to play a decisive role in shaping a struggle at the intersection of bureaucratic, political and criminal fields popularly referred to as la lucha por la plaza.

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2 Wacquant (2005: 13-18) notes that most readers of Bourdieu conflate the field of power, the bureaucratic field, and the political field.
Literally, \textit{plaza} means square. Latin American cities founded during the colonial period, including Monterrey, followed an urban blueprint decreed by the Spanish crown in the \textit{Leyes de Indias} or the Laws of the Indies. Cities were designed around a plaza with a church, a town hall, and a market. The phrase “to take the plaza” or \textit{tomar la plaza} in Spanish was first used to indicate that an army had seized military control over a city. Today, \textit{la plaza} and \textit{tomar la plaza} have a different meaning. Through bribery and the mastery and delivery of violence, criminal groups dispute control over territories, both in terms of space and commodity flows, as well as access to the necessary political connections to assist and protect them in their criminal endeavors. In his ethnography of a “drug war zone” in Ciudad Juarez and El Paso, Howard Cambell defines \textit{la plaza} as the intersection of criminal and state forces over a given territory or trafficking route (Campbell, 2009: 20). Extending this definition, \textit{la plaza} is thus a particular form of localized territory linking criminal actors, and the state bureaucrats protecting them, to illegal global markets (drugs, arms and human trafficking, gas smuggling, among others).

In the next sections, I employ this theoretical model to examine shifting state-criminal relations in Mexico in greater detail, as well as how these changes lead to the emergence of multiple struggles over plazas.

**Phase I: The Mexican State Makes and Subordinates Drug Traffickers**

Although much of the recent wave of violence in Mexico is related to drug trafficking, the two need to be carefully disentangled. The cultivation, trade and traffic of cannabis and opiates took place in Mexico for decades, and in the case of cannabis for a couple of centuries, without violence. In the next two subsections, I trace the origins of contemporary drug-related violence, a key component of \textit{la lucha por la plaza}, back to the beginning of prohibition in 1917 when the Mexican state made and then subordinated drug traffickers. I then examine Tilly’s “logic of international state making” at work as the United States imposed increasingly severe drug prohibition enforcement measures on Mexico through the great bi-national anti-drug operations of the late 1960s and 1970s. With increasingly punitive antinarcotic measures in Mexico and abroad, including the
US-backed crackdown of the French-Turkish heroin route, the price of drugs such as heroin tripled in the US market. These shifts in international drug markets provided further incentives for Mexican peasants and traffickers to enter the drug trade, often in exchange for weapons smuggled into Mexico from the United States. This combination of factors—increased repression of drug trafficking, higher prices and incentives, more weapons—lead to the emergence of the first great struggle over a plaza in northwestern Mexico.

Domestic Origins of Prohibition and Foreign Pressures to Enforce It (1917-1947)

Spaniards were the first to introduce cannabis in the region that would later become Mexico during the colonial period. In 1545 the Spanish Crown decreed that it be sowed for hemp used for clothes and, perhaps most importantly, boat sails. In his work on marijuana and the origins of antinarcotic policies in Mexico, historian Isaac Campos (2012) traces the gradual transformation of the smelly plant the Spanish called cáñamo through its spiritual appropriation by indigenous populations as pipiltzinzañul to its more recent consumption and prohibition as marihuana or marijuana. Marijuana prohibition, Campos argues, did not originate in the United States as is commonly argued but rather in Mexico.

The Catholic Church was the first to demonize the plant that would later be known as marijuana, as it stood in the way of the spiritual conquest of indigenous populations. The use of marijuana persisted despite demonization and spread from indigenous to broader segments of the population. Smuggled into military quarters in diapers, women’s underwear and toys, marijuana was central to the making of the Mexican Revolution. In his lessons on Mexican narcotic history, historian Froylán Enciso (2015) relies on the writings of a Mexican General to provide details of the solace marijuana offered to those in battle enduring pain, suffering and misery. Yet it was a revolutionary General and doctor who requested the prohibition of opium, morphine, cocaine and marijuana to avoid the “degeneration of the race.” With 143 votes in favor and 3 votes against, the Constituent Assembly of 1917 launched drug prohibition in Mexico. The Consejo General de Salubridad or General Council of Public Health was held responsible for the treatment of drug consumers and prosecution of drug traffickers for the next thirty years.

Yet illegality is insufficient to generate high violence in a market (Reuter, 2009). What illegality produced was the establishment of Mafiosi relations between Mexican and American state officials and drug traffickers on both sides of the border who needed to bribe them for protection. In his history of the consolidation of the drug trade in Mexico over the 20th century, sociologist Luis Astorga finds evidence of Mexican public authorities protecting the interests of drug traffickers as early as the 1920s (1995: 31). As suggested by historian Alan Knight, “in the relationship between politicos and narcos, the real Mafia was found among the former… which provides protection to narco interests in return for hefty payoffs” (Knight, 2012: 122-123). Moreover, as the PRI became the hegemonic ruler, the PRI “family” retained “a substantial measure of control” over drug trafficking, reaching upper echelons of the state, including governors and even presidents (idem: 124).

So far, I have sketched the domestic origins of drug prohibition in Mexico. First condemned by the Catholic Church under Spanish rule, the consumption of opiates, cocaine and marijuana was prohibited by the proponents of the Mexican Revolution in
the Constitution of 1917. Yet drug prohibition was questioned in medical circles, leading to a successful initiative to legalize these drugs in 1940. At this stage, foreign pressure from the United States was decisive in continuing and escalating drug prohibition in Mexico. Under pressure from the United States, particularly from the first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics Harry Anslinger, drugs were re-prohibited only four months later.³ Moreover, in 1947, the prosecution of drug consumers and traffickers was reassigned from the General Council of Public Health to the Federal Office of the Public Prosecutor in Mexico. The Mexican state thus aligned with the United States in defining drugs no longer as a matter of public health but rather of public security at a national scale. A few drug-related homicides took place in the 1930s and 1940s in Sinaloa, the birthplace of drug trafficking in Mexico.⁴ Nevertheless, drug violence was rare in this period. In the words of historian Alan Knight, “of course, there was sporadic violence, as new narcos challenged the old… but in general the system ticked over quite peacefully and certainly no threat to national security was perceived” (2012: 124). Drug violence began to take form as such a few decades later in the sierras of northwestern Mexico, concretely in the meeting borders of the states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Durango, commonly referred to as the “Golden Triangle” (see triangle in Figure 7).

³ The pioneering ideas of doctor Leopoldo Salazar Viniegras took hold on February 17, 1940: drug consumers would be treated as patients, not criminals. Doctors would be allowed to provide them with a daily dose of heroine. Drug traffickers like Lola la Chata were furious as their business went down. The United States would not have it. In the midst of World War II, the US government stopped exports of medicinal drugs to Mexico in response. Under this pressure, President Lázaro Cárdenas suspended the new ruling on June 7, 1940. Drug consumers wrote letters in protest to no avail (Enciso, 2015).

⁴ The most significant was the murder of Coronel Rodolfo Loaiza, elected governor of Sinaloa running for reelection. Shot in the Belmar Hotel of Mazatlán in 1944, his murder could be considered the first major drug-related homicide in the country. Blamed on drug trafficker Gitano, the “intellectual authorship behind Loaiza’s murder has been one of the best-kept secrets of survivors of the Sinaloa political class of the time… a law of silence rules similar to the famous Sicilian omertá” (Astorga, 2005: 68). Despite the turbid circumstances surrounding this high-profile murder, drug violence was uncommon in Mexico even as drug production and trafficking expanded.

In 1969, newly elected US President Richard Nixon faced increased domestic drug consumption linked to the cultural changes brought about by the “sixties revolution.” His Special Presidential Task Force Relating to Narcotics, Marihuana and Dangerous Drugs determined that Mexico should be the target to reduce marijuana usage in the United States (Craig, 1980a). This decision to confront internal demand by attacking external offer had, and still has, a devastating impact on Mexico as well as Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, among other countries in Latin America. The Presidential Task Force suggested “new methods” to “reduce marijuana and opium cultivation and curtail their shipment across the border” such as north-bound inspection points, aerial herbicide programs and the prosecution of “selected cases” of Mexicans charged with drug violations in the United States (idem: 558). These initiatives would require Mexican support. Although there was some initial resistance from Mexican authorities, with some pressure Mexico complied with all three US priorities in the years that followed.

In a first meeting to discuss President Nixon’s new antidrug campaign in Mexico City, Attorney General Julio Sánchez Vargas acknowledged to US delegates that there was an increase in both domestic drug cultivation and consumption, yet politely recommended that aerial herbicide programs be tested in the United States first. Both delegations shook hands resolving to “strengthen the cooperative efforts,” yet reached no agreement on the means of doing so. According to political scientist Richard Craig, “it is highly doubtful that any Mexican action short of total acquiescence to Washington’s suggestions would have altered the Nixon’s administration’s plan. The gun was already loaded before the talks” (idem: 560).
Operation Intercept was the beginning. Without prior consultation of Mexican authorities, a “frontal attack” on narcotic trafficking in border cities began with the unilateral inspection of all “vehicles, their component parts, personal baggage, purses, books, lunch boxes, jackets, toys, and in some cases even blouses and hairdos... border crossers received tertiary inspections, with some being forced to disrobe...” (idem: 565). Border economies suffered on both sides, although the impact was stronger on the Mexican side. Mexican businessmen and diplomats called for a stop to mass inspections, which were interrupted after approximately three weeks. Requiring more than 2000 customs and border patrol agents to carry out these thorough inspections, Operation Intercept was too costly to maintain (three weeks cost some $30 million). The actual drug seizures were not worth it. Yet the primary purpose of the operation was not to seize drugs, Craig argues, but to force Mexican cooperation in antidrug campaigns through pressuring Mexico’s border economy (Craig, 1980a). On November 18, 1969, US President Nixon sent an apology letter to Mexican President Díaz Ordaz stating that, “Operation Intercept was conceived as one element in a major campaign to combat the traffic of narcotics from whatever source. It was not intended to single out Mexico, nor to give offense to Mexico” (Craig, 1980a: 578). Following Operation Intercept, Mexican authorities responded with greater involvement in US-driven antidrug programs, beginning with the use of aerial herbicides.

Prior to 1975, Mexican soldiers deployed to destroy illegal crops would use sticks to beat poppy flowers or marijuana plants. As stated above, Mexican authorities had been reticent to use aerial herbicides that could damage the country’s ecology. This changed with the launching of Mexico’s own antidrug campaign: Operation CANADOR (an acronym composed of the first syllables of cannabis and adormidera or poppy flower) renamed Operation Condor in 1976. The United States provided technology to locate illegal crop plots using high level multispectral reconnaissance photographs and helicopters to spray opium and marijuana fields with 2, 4-D and Gramaxone, respectively (Craig, 1980b). Operation Condor Phase I had a second objective: to pacify violence in Sinaloa, where the first major struggle over a plaza took place in 1976.

Phase II: The Tables Turn

For historian Alan Knight, three interrelated processes converged to shift relations between drug traffickers and the state in the 1980s (2012). First and foremost, there was a booming demand for drugs in the US since the 1960s and particularly the 1970s. The growing market contributed to “upset the old narco-político relationship, just at a time when the PRI was entering—possibly terminal—decline” (idem: 126). Second, the PRI lost its hegemonic position and third, state patronage and social benefits declined. Simultaneously, drug traffickers began to build schools and sponsor public works, gaining a broader social basis in response (idem). While the state had held the upper hand in state-criminal relations until this point, providing drug traffickers with protection in exchange for a share of their profits, with booming drug demand and decreased ability to

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5 Given extremely long waiting lines, American tourists stopped traveling to Mexico, although Mexicans kept traveling to the United States. Some Mexicans responded with the cross-class alliance Operation Dignity, requesting that Mexicans shop domestically and refrain from crossing the border. Although symbolically important, the counteraction was insufficient to turn Operation Intercept around (Craig, 1980a).
provide protection the tables began to turn. The spike of violence in Culiacán, Sinaloa in 1976 provides a prime case to examine the first grand *lucha por la plaza* in Mexico. The Mexican state, as well as the United States of America, deployed their full force to pacify Culiacán, a major heroin production site (see arrow in Figure 8).

**Figure 8 Tables Turn in Culiacán, Sinaloa**

![Map of Mexico showing Culiacán and Sinaloa](image)

Source: Google Maps (2016), modifications by author.

**Culiacán in 1976, The First Major Struggle Over La Plaza**

The most violent year in the history of the city of Culiacán, Sinaloa to date is 1976. Key heroin traffickers emerged and were based in this city where homicide rates rose to 217 homicides per 100,000 people that year; a homicide rate topped only by Ciudad Juárez in 2010 with 224 homicides per 100,000 people (Enciso, 2013). Causes included the US-backed crackdown of the then dominant Turkish-French heroin route in the early 1970s. The crackdown of this route created an opportunity for drug traffickers from Sinaloa to take a greater share of the US market where the price of heroin tripled between 1975 and 1976 (idem). Eager for a larger share of this market, lower-rank workers of the drug business (such as *mulas* or those in charge of carrying drugs across the border) sought to establish their own alliances with sierra peasants and become traffickers themselves. Weapons were offered as part of payment for drugs in the US and smuggled into Mexico, fueling violence in Mexico before it affected the US-Mexican border. A greater number of drug traffickers armed with a greater number of guns unleashed what could be considered the first great *lucha por la plaza* in Mexico. “We’re on the brink of hell,” a police chief told a journalist as he and a dozen other police officers “armed to their teeth” looked out the window of a police station in fear (idem). In response to the violence, the
Governor of Sinaloa claimed, “even if we bring the entire army, it would not be enough” (Excelsior 1976, cited by Craig, 1980b: 352).

In January 1977, the Mexican state deployed its full force on Culiacán and surrounding areas: 2500 soldiers, the air force, the navy, 250 federal police, some state and local police, accompanied by an undisclosed number of US Drug Enforcement Agency officers (idem). Peasants were heavily targeted beyond the destruction of their crops. In the words of a “well-placed” US diplomat interviewed by political scientist Richard Craig one year later, “when these units make ground sweeps through known or suspected drug-producing areas they are occasionally too clean. Houses are ransacked, men beaten, women violated, and belongings confiscated” (Craig, 1980b: 354). The number of state officials, traffickers and peasants killed during Operation Condor was not disclosed but the operation was so bloody, that multiple drug traffickers fled Sinaloa. What was deemed as a military success at first—Culiacán was indeed “pacified”—would sow greater violence in the decades that followed. Drug traffickers from Sinaloa scattered across the country seeking new alliances with peasants in other states, cultivating smaller, harder-to-find plots, and organizing new groups in cities such as Guadalajara, Jalisco—the scene of the murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in 1985, the most influential drug-related death of the 20th century discussed in the next section.

The work by Enciso on Culiacán reveals the interest of examining drug-related violence in historical perspective. Current research on drug violence focuses heavily on explaining spikes in national homicide rates for the last decade, especially after President Felipe Calderón declared a war against all drug traffickers in 2006 (Osorio, 2013; D. Shirk & Wallman, 2015). Yet current explanations of increased violence as an outcome of electoral competition—President Calderón and his predecessor President Vicente Fox belong to the PAN party—cannot explain increased violence in Culiacán in 1976 under PRI rule. Increased violence in Culiacán illustrates that shifts in international drug policies and drug market dynamics are also key factors to consider. Increased violence in Mexico in the 1970s is inseparable from US President Richard Nixon’s escalating anti-narcotic policies. Not only did crackdowns of some international drug routes increase drug prices and create incentives for Mexican drug traffickers to multiply and expand their trade, the multiple anti-drug operations carried out by both Mexico and the US during that period contributed to militarize the drug trade even further. In an interview, Enciso argued that, “before the great bi-national operations [Operation Intercept, Operation Cooperation and Operation Condor], drug violence was not only about drugs and it was sporadic. Beginning with these operations there is drug violence as such, struggles over specific sales points, instrumental violence” (Interview, June 25, 2014). The use of violence in such struggles became widespread in the decades that followed.

A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: The “Narco” Threat to National Security

On April 8, 1986, Ronald Reagan established drug trafficking as a national threat in the National Security Decision Directive on Narcotics and National Security (NSDD number 221). In this partially unclassified document (some sections are covered with black ink), President Ronald Reagan stated that while the “domestic effects of drugs are a serious societal problem... the national security threat posed by the drug trade is particularly serious outside U.S. borders...” He argued that the international drug trade threatened the national security of the United States “by potentially destabilizing democratic allies...”
Among other actions, he urged “U.S. military forces to support counter-narcotics efforts more actively…” This directive was a decisive shift in international drug policy as it paved the way for increased participation of armed forces in counter-narcotics affairs (Astorga, 2007). For Luis Astorga, although only Colombia fit the description of a state threatened by drug trafficking in the 1980s, the United States framed the threat as a regional problem (Interview, May 31, 2015). Drug trafficking in Mexico was not a national threat at the time, yet Mexican officials followed US President Reagan’s directive for at least three reasons discussed in this section. First, they were under increased pressure from the DEA after the very controversial murder of undercover agent Enrique Camarena. Second, attacking the “national threat” provided a means of legitimizing an incoming PRI government following a contested election. Third, state officials could use this “national threat” to target criminal competitors.

Even decades later, the full circumstances of DEA agent Enrique Camarena’s murder have not been resolved. He was kidnapped as he left the American Consulate in Guadalajara on February 7, 1985. His tortured corpse was found in Michoacán one month later together with the body of pilot Alfredo Zavala who was kidnapped on February 12, 1985. Zavala’s brother told the media that his brother was an informant for the DEA in Guadalajara and that both deaths were linked to seizures on the ranch El Búfalo in Chihuahua (where more than a thousand hectares of marijuana were confiscated three months earlier using information provided by the DEA). No major drug traffickers were arrested. According to US sources, Mexican officials alerted drug cultivators and traffickers in the area of the operation at least ten hours ahead of time, giving them an opportunity to escape (Enciso, 2009: 2012). Moreover, the operation was nearly cancelled when trucks scheduled to deliver fuel to helicopters provided by the United States were sent to the wrong place “by mistake” (idem). Following corruption charges, eight agents of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS) were arrested. The DEA Administrator at the time, Francis Mullen, accused the DFS and the federal police of protecting drug trafficker Rafael Caro Quintero and helping him escape from Guadalajara (idem: 204). Within a few months, three drug traffickers from Sinaloa were charged with Camarena’s murder and imprisoned: Rafael Caro Quintero (released in 2013), Ernesto Fonseca and Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. The murder of Camarena is key because it marked a crucial turning point in the construction of “the narco” as a threat to national security in Mexico. Before Camarena’s murder, drug trafficking was still enforced by the police with only occasional military interventions. Following Camarena’s death and increased pressure from Washington, the DFS was dismantled, the Federal Office of the Public Prosecutor was “purged” of 1,500 to 2,000 police officers under corruption charges and a new set of agencies was created to militarize public security (idem: 205).

In 1988, PRI presidential candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari took office in a contested election. Many held that PRD candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas had won. Interviewed by journalist Diego Enrique Osorno in 2009, historian Froylán Enciso established parallels between the electoral fraud accusations made against Salinas in 1988 and those made against Felipe Calderón in 2006:

We’re in a very similar situation to that of Salinas. Salinas reached power following an election that was considered a fraud by many. What did he do to

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6 For full document, see http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/23-2771a.gif
obtain legitimacy? [He made] headlines. He imprisoned corrupt union leaders, he imprisoned Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo [one of the three drug lords accused of Camarena’s murder], he made headlines that made him gain support from the US and society. Calderón did the same thing, but it didn’t work for him in the same way (Enciso, 2015).

This search for legitimacy and to maintain PRI dominance in the late 1980s can be read into the militarization of public security agencies during the Salinas presidency, as well as in the federal government’s increased reliance on the military for drug-related operations. For example, the state employed the armed forces in the capture of a drug lord for the first time in 1995 in the capture of el Güero Palma. This was a significant qualitative change in the state’s use of armed forces previously employed exclusively to destroy drug cultivation sites (Chabat, 2010). Although using military force to capture drug lords was presented as a temporary solution, it continued with President Vicente Fox Quesada (2000-2006) and became the cornerstone of President Felipe Calderon’s (2006-2012) security agenda.

The election of Vicente Fox was not questioned. He was the candidate of the conservative PAN political party and the first non-PRI candidate to take the presidency in 72 years. The election of his successor, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón was not as convincing. Many held that the PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador was the legitimate winner—and for months, López Obrador toured the country claiming to be the legitimate president. In the midst of this questionable election, and only eleven days into his presidency, Felipe Calderon launched a frontal attack on all drug traffickers. This was by far the most aggressive anti-narco campaign in Mexican history, leading to a steady rise and spread of drug and related forms of violence throughout the country (Astorga, 2015).

Figure 9 shows the geographic distribution of homicide rates at a municipal level from 2005-2012. The darkest areas feature annual homicide rates of over 100 deaths per 100,000 people. As mentioned above, these statistics have important limitations given that: 1) not all homicides are reported; 2) homicides do not encompass the totality of violent crime experienced in these municipalities. Nevertheless, they serve as a proxy to illustrate how quickly violence spread across Mexico. As mentioned above, drug-related violence emerged in the meeting points of Chihuahua, Sonora and Sinaloa, also known as “the Golden Triangle,” in northwestern Mexico as early as the 1940s and particularly during and after the great anti-narcotic campaigns of the 1970s. The darkest areas of the map in 2005 correspond precisely to this area, although dark spots were already emerging in the northeastern border states of Nuevo Léon and Tamaulipas, as well as the southwestern states of Guerrero and Michoacán.

Together, the six maps in Figure 9 provide an approximation to the geographical spread of stunning violence along western Mexico from Sonora to Michoacán and Guerrero in 2008, then northeastern Mexico from Tamaulipas to Nuevo León and

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7 President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-2000) integrated the military and the navy into the newly created National Public Security Council (CNSP). Drawing on the 1917 Constitution, President Zedillo also urged the Mexican Senate to create the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) in 1999, a national police of over 10,000 officers under his command (Moloeznik, 2007). The PFP was created through a combination of civilian and military police, all trained by the military (Reames, 2007).
Coahuila in 2010 and 2011. By 2012, municipalities with homicide rates of over 75 to 100 deaths per 100,000 people can be spotted in much of the national territory. Yet these maps also show that high violence is unevenly distributed. The areas with the highest homicide rates in 2010 and 2011 seem to delineate major illicit trafficking routes from ports such as Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán northward via highways up the west coast towards New Mexico and Arizona and then from ports such as Tampico, Tamaulipas on the east coast northward towards Texas. Mexican scholars and state authorities sometimes refer to this spread of violence as the *cucaracha* effect that follows efforts to crack down on the drug trade. In sum, increased military interventions lead not to the decline and containment, but rather to the increase and spread of violent crime.
Figure 9 Geographic Distribution of Homicide Rates by Municipality, 2005-2012

Source: INEGI. Maps by Theresa Firestine (Heinle et al., 2013).
In sum, drug prohibition enforcement escalated under simultaneous foreign and domestic pressures. The United States pressured the Mexican government to reform and militarize its security agencies after the murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena. Yet militarization and frontal attacks on the newly defined narco “national threat” also served as a means of legitimizing governments accused of fraudulent elections. Moreover, there is a third factor to consider. State officials may use the state apparatus and the “war on drugs” to hit hegemonic drug traffickers in favor of others and their own interests. According to Mexican historian Carlos Flores, President Salinas de Gortari captured Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, among other high-rank Sinaloan drug traffickers during his Presidency, in order to break down their monopoly over drug trafficking and favor the emergence of other criminal actors in northeastern Mexico. By capturing drug traffickers accused of Camarena’s murder, President Salinas could gain support and resources from the US while debilitating the prime competitor of another criminal group he presumably had ties with: the Cartel del Golfo or Gulf Cartel.

Under Salinas, the Gulf Cartel prospered and became a real competitor of Sinaloan criminal groups. According to an undercover DEA agent, Federal Police Chief Guillermo González Calderoni assisted Gulf Cartel member Juan García Abrego in expanding his trade by arresting competing drug traffickers in the mid 1980s (idem: 238). In 1993, González Calderoni was accused of becoming “unexplainably wealthy” and fled to the United States (idem: 239). Such data illustrates the importance of considering each major arrest not as a victory of the state over organized crime, as is often presented in the media, but rather as the result of shifting alliances between imbricated criminal, bureaucratic and political actors.

Luis Astorga argues that the Mexican state created a self-fulfilling prophecy when it followed Ronald Reagan in declaring drug trafficking a national threat in the early 1990s. It is unlikely that President Salinas or President Calderon could foresee the deadly effects of their militarization strategies. It is more likely to assume, as Elias would say, that the sum of individual actions gave rise to an outcome nobody actually intended. Both presidents and their administrations may have been narrowly thinking of strategies to legitimize their governments, yet the battle of their choice, the one that could ensure millions of dollars in military support and political backup from the United States, was too deeply entrenched in the Mexican state. The state went to war against itself in a way, seeking to construct an external threat that it was unable to separate from itself.

The Gulf Cartel was the first to employ a paramilitary logic, coopting the military elite to conduct kidnappings and extortion (Interview with Luis Astorga, May 31, 2015). These highly trained former military officials broke off from the Gulf Cartel to pursue their own criminal interests as the Zetas. Their interests are diverse, ranging from drugs to human trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, and gas smuggling. Violence became their main means of asserting control over highly valued plazas. As new criminal actors

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8 Carlos Flores, historian at the CIESAS, is currently documenting such intricate relations between high-rank political families and organized crime in northeastern Mexico.

9 Juan Nepomuceno Guerra began a prosperous criminal career smuggling whisky into the United States through the eastern Tamaulipas border in the 1930s. He ventured into marijuana smuggling in the 1970s and by 1987 had an estimated fortune of 5 million dollars and 3,000 acres of land (Enciso, 2009: 214). In the early 1980s, one of his nephews was Major of Matamoros and another, Juan García Abrego, learned the ropes of his trade and became the leader of the Gulf Cartel in 1990.
deployed an increasingly violent *modus operandi*, other criminal groups responded with increased violence to remain competitive in the criminal field.

The tables turned as drug traffickers became a *de facto* national threat. According to Astorga, state officials have three choices now: to stay out of their business, to collude with them or to organize a comprehensive security strategy capable of confronting organized crime at every state level (Interview, May 31, 2015). There has been no such comprehensive security strategy in Mexico to date (idem). Instead, there are regional and municipal turf wars between actors of overlapping political and criminal fields as exemplified in the case of Monterrey that follows.
Chapter 2. A Wave of Spectacular Violence Hits Mexico’s Industrial Core

During the 20th century, Monterrey consolidated itself as the most important industrial metropolis in Mexico. A wealthy metropolis by Mexican standards and a safe one if compared to other large metropoles in the country, the sudden, increased violence described in this chapter took locals and foreigners observing Mexico by surprise in the early 21st century. Although the types of public and grotesque violence I will describe in the sections that follow represent a clear and dramatic rupture in violence trends for the recent history of Monterrey, I draw on historical evidence to establish continuities of both high violence trends and prolific contraband in the region from a long-term perspective.

The core sections of this chapter are structured according to three ways of treating the body that reappeared in northeastern Mexico in the past decade: el colgado, el descuartizado and el desaparecido or the hanging, the dismembered and the disappeared body. I examine recent cases of these forms of perpetrating violence in Monterrey in light of its regional history of violence, providing examples of other times when bodies were similarly hung, dismembered and disappeared. The convergence of these forms of violence in Monterrey, as well as in the wider Mexican northeast, is a unique and unprecedented constellation of violence in both purpose and form. Previous episodes of high violence in the region were punctuated stages leading to the formation and maintenance of what would become the contemporary Mexican state. From the initial conquest to the independence, from the defense from foreign invaders to the revolution and imposition of the new state’s secular ideals or the persecution of its political dissidents, high levels of violence were exerted at each stage by those seeking to control the emerging nation state apparatus.

This recent wave of violence in northeastern Mexico is different in that its perpetrators do not wish to seize the state as such. They want to seize the plaza. Through bribery and the mastery of violence, criminal groups may dispute control over a plaza as defined in chapter one: a localized territory connecting criminal actors, and the state bureaucrats protecting them, to global illicit markets (drugs, arms and human trafficking, gas smuggling, among others). Criminal groups such as the Zetas deployed greater violence to terrify competing criminals, state officials and civilians alike, leading the state to deploy the military and other state security agencies in response. Yet in its efforts to reassert its upper hand in state-criminal relations, the state was both a protector and an aggressor. I provide evidence of civilian murders and disappearances committed by the military and the local police. I then link an exponential increase in kidnapping and extortion to the costs of maintaining struggles over plazas.

Situated between the United States and the Gulf of Mexico, the northeastern states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon and Coahuila (see red highlighted states in Figure 10) emerged as a tight trade and contraband corridor in the mid-nineteenth century. With Monterrey as its trade capital on the Mexican side, massive amounts of cotton from Confederate states were desperately exchanged for gunpowder, silver, wheat, textiles and other commodities as a means of circumventing the naval blockade of all Southern ports during the American Civil War (1861-1865). Escalating violence in contemporary
Monterrey is less surprising if we consider its centrality for this prolific trade and contraband corridor in long-term perspective.

Figure 10 Northeastern Mexico: Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas

Source: Google Maps (2016), modifications by author.

The Violent Struggle over La Plaza in Monterrey

“If we lose Monterrey, everything will be lost...” These words by leading businessman Lorenzo Zambrano during an interview with the Spanish newspaper El Pais in 2011 captured the disbelief of the city’s residents facing increased violence in Mexico’s “business jewel” (Ordaz, 2011). Violence was on the rise in Mexico, particularly after President Felipe Calderon declared a “war on drugs” in 2006. But for a majority of Monterrey residents, the war was taking place elsewhere. Bodies were hung from footbridges and overpasses in border cities like Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, or somewhere up in the mountains of Sinaloa and Durango on the other side of the country. Meanwhile, Monterrey was the land where business dreams came true, for some. Home to prestigious universities, as well as thriving industries and multinational corporations, Monterrey seemed exempt from the gruesome violence tearing apart other parts of Mexico.

This was not the first time Monterrey residents felt sheltered from violence spreading through the country. When British journalist Henry Hamilton Fyfe set off to document what he judged to be the “real Mexico” during the beginning of the Mexican Revolution, he made a stop in Monterrey on his way to Mexico City. Awakened from a dream in which he was beating carpets in his sleep, he recognized the sound of heavy rifle fire that lasted for two days. Although cities in the nearby state of Tamaulipas were ravaged by then, he was surprised the “rebels” would attack Monterrey as the city had
“hitherto been reckoned secure from their attentions” (Hamilton Fyfe, 1914: 45). He drew his assumptions from the several families of foreigners who hosted him—some described as completely oblivious to the turmoil around them—and assured him they would not be troubled as “Monterrey is a city full of foreign interests” (ibid). From his observations and multiple conversations, Hamilton Fyfe concluded that the attack had taken place in one of the “wealthiest and most progressive cities of the Republic—in a place which, owing to its large foreign colony, was supposed to be immune from attack” (Hamilton Fyfe, 1914: 52).

Wealth and foreign interests were as insufficient to shelter Monterrey then, as they were one century later. As the first bodies of the escalating “war on drugs” were hung from footbridges, foreign media such as The Wall Street Journal reported the violence in a tone similar to Fyfe’s. The increased violence, and the “exodus” of wealthy Mexicans, Americans and other foreigners that followed, delivered “a blow to a city, which for some time was proud to be one of the wealthiest and safest in Latin America” (Luhnow, 2010).

Monterrey could be considered one the safest cities in Latin America for a few decades prior to this wave of violence. Homicide rates in Nuevo León, the state where Monterrey is located, remained below 5 homicides per 100,000 people between 1990 and 1998 (see Figure 11). Beginning in 2009 and throughout 2010, public hangings and mutilated corpses began to appear in the city, as public officials were kidnapped and killed in Monterrey and neighboring towns. By 2011, homicide rates had increased nine-fold and doubled the national average—a stunning, explosive growth and reversal of a long-term pattern. The military was deployed to enforce security in the streets, but it also committed multiple acts of violence against civilians. Public officials claimed that this wave of deaths was due to criminals “killing each other.” Nevertheless, the deaths of civilians became increasingly visible with high profile cases, such as the killing of two students at the exit of a highly reputed private university in 2010 described later in this chapter.

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10 The kidnapping and murdering of officials is one way in which a criminal group can terrify state officials into shifting their alliances and protecting them instead. At one level, the struggle over the plaza is a struggle for political protection.
“We thought it would be temporary,” business tycoon Lorenzo Zambrano continued in his interview with *El País*, “that it was related to minor arrangements between mafias. We heard there were drug traffickers living here, but at the time we did not request that they leave the city. I’ll be honest, in Monterrey, we became a bit arrogant.” Speaking for one of the strongest business groups in the country, he called for measures to “save the city” such as remaking the police and building a sense of citizenship among the population to increase its demands on the state. Above all, he called for a fight when other businessmen were leaving. “I was enraged to see them drop in the towel,” he said, “that they did not stay to defend what their parents and grandparents had built.” When the owner of one of the world’s largest cement companies passed away in 2014, President Enrique Peña Nieto interrupted his daily activities to attend his funeral. Zambrano was the type of businessman who embodied an ideal of Monterrey as a land of progress, technological innovation, and economic abundance. Examining increased violence in Monterrey requires highlighting the clash between these images, crafted over decades by city managers and businessmen like Lorenzo Zambrano, and the sudden spectacular violence that quickly erupted on the streets and splashed into the international press in 2010 (Prieto González, 2012). In the next three subsections, I turn to the reappearance of three crude modalities of violent death in the region: *colgados*, *descuartizados* and *desaparecidos*. These crude forms of killing clearly indicate that the increase in violence levels was both of a quantitative and qualitative different nature. These are two dimensions to consider in any analysis of violence (Elías, 2000; Spierenburg, 1984, 2013).
In 2010, a journalist from the local newspaper, *El Norte*, published the following piece reporting what was believed to be the first case of a public execution in “the history of the state” of Nuevo León. In a national context of multiple and equally horrific crimes, this death was shocking and made world news because it took place in a city that had long construed itself as one of the safest and economically prosperous cities in Mexico:

After 12 months of executions, shootings and even car bombs, Nuevo León said farewell to 2010 yesterday with a morbid finding: the body of kidnapper Gabriela Elizabeth Muñiz Tamez, “the redhead,” hanging from an overpass on Gonzalitos Avenue, in Colonia Mitras Norte. This is the first time in the history of the state that a body appeared hanging in the streets in public—an organized crime practice that has been observed in states like Tamaulipas and Chihuahua. (El Norte, 2011a)

Although it may have appeared that way to multiple Monterrey residents, including this journalist, this was not the first time in the history of the state that a body was hung in the streets in public. “Rebel” bodies were hung from telegraph posts during the Mexican Revolution. Journalist Hamilton Fyfe documented his impressions after two days of uninterrupted gunfire in October 1913. He described a Monterrey that was “saved” for the time being, for the “rebels” were repelled:

But it was not the same Monterrey as that which we entered three days before. A cloud of gloom and apprehension brooded over the city. High in the sunny blue sky I saw obscene buzzards float, attracted by the dead men and horses lying stiff and hideous in the dusty streets. From numbers of the poles which carry telegraph and telephone wires dangled limp corpses of the *Carranzistas* [revolutionaries following Venustiano Carranza], hung there as a stern warning to the disloyal. (Hamilton Fyfe, 1914: 51)

The local magazine *Zig-zag* published pictures of those hung for treason from posts as described by Hamilton Fyfe (see Figure 12). Yet this was not an exclusive phenomenon of revolution-related violence in Monterrey. Federal forces also hung revolutionaries in nearby areas and other states as warnings. Less than two decades later, as the successful revolutionaries took over the state, the newly formed federal government employed public hangings during the *Guerra Cristera* or Cristero War (1926-1929). The Church and State entered into violent conflict over anticlerical laws established by President Plutarco Elias Calles. These laws, which went as far as forbidding public religious practices, were both peacefully resisted and violently protested. The federal government executed thousands of Catholics and priests, who were publicly hung from posts or tree branches (Meyer, 1976). Although the Cristero War has not been as thoroughly documented in the state of Nuevo León as it has been in Jalisco, Querétaro, Michoacán or Colima, it is not unlikely that such executions and public hangings by the federal government may have taken place in this state as well.
Although not the first public hanging in the history of the state, the hanging of Gabriela Elizabeth Muñiz Tamez, “the Redhead,” may have been the first of this new wave of violence in Monterrey. In any case, it was the first to be mediatized in the local and international press. Muñiz Tamez was imprisoned in the Topo Chico prison in 2009 under kidnapping and extortion charges. Four days prior to her murder, the 31-year old was being transported from this prison to a hospital due to alleged abdominal pain when an armed group of men intercepted the vehicle to “free” her. Media coverage of investigations related to these events revealed that this was a set-up, involving the harassment and collusion of several prison workers and authorities (El Norte, 2011a). On December 31, 2010, around 6:00 in the morning, a shirtless Muñiz Tamez bearing the word “Yair” drawn onto her bare chest and back with black shoe polish was tied around the neck with a rope and thrown over a footbridge above one of Monterrey’s busiest avenues. Further investigations, as publicized in the media, revealed that “Yair” was a local member of the Gulf Cartel and Gabriela’s former boyfriend. When caught in 2011 by federal police, Yair Pérez López, “el Chicano,” was accused of multiple crimes, including Gabriela’s murder (El Norte, 2011b). The full motives behind her death were not reported in the media, but her public hanging exemplified a qualitative escalation of cruel violence in the city that continued through 2011 and 2012.

Months after Gabriela’s death, two men were found hanging from the same footbridge on June 5, 2011, also around 6:00 a.m. Their hands were cuffed behind their backs. Their bodies showed signs of torture and they hung from their necks tied to the footbridge with chains. One of the bodies was missing a foot, which was found lying on the avenue. Messages for organized crime were found on the scene, but the content was not revealed in the mainstream media (El Norte, 2011c). Three days later, on June 8, 2011, an armed group of men stopped their convoy of vehicles on the top of an overpass at the intersection of Avenida Revolución and Avenida Chapultepec in southern Monterrey around 9:00 a.m. They forced two young men out of the vehicles. They taped their mouths, tied their hands holding radiophones with ropes to the edge of the overpass
and dropped them, leaving them hanging alive over passing cars and bystanders. They shot them, publicly executing one and injuring the other. They left a note behind for a criminal group that showed up at the scene moments later (El Norte, 2011d). Multiple bodies were hung in several parts of the city through 2012, sometimes bearing notes for organized crime on or near their bodies (El Norte, 2012).

A first difference between the colgados of the Revolution or the Cristero War and these contemporary killings is that the executers were not seeking to seize the state as such. They were clearly contesting that the state should be the sole entity to exert violence, but they were not seeking to become the state. If some of these hangings were punishments for treason, then they are best understood as revenge or vendetta actions between criminal groups. The dead bodies, which were messages themselves, bore words or notes that were not readily understood by the general public. The full meaning of arrangements of letters such as “Y A I R” vertically drawn onto a chest and back is not intended for all, but rather for a very particular audience.

Similarly, specific objects and body arrangements signaled further warnings. For example, the radiophones and taped mouths mentioned above suggest that the hung men were halcones, that is, snoops or individuals who communicated messages to organized crime. Their execution was carried out in public as a likely threat to other halcones in the area, a means of deterring others from working for rival groups. The missing foot from one of the men hung from a footbridge mentioned above may, too, have signified something to those endowed with the knowledge to decode these “dramatized” executions (Spierenburg, 1984).

In sum, previous public executions in Monterrey were instruments of political violence directed towards the “disloyal” or those not aligning with the state’s secular ideals. The state or those wanting to become the state were the executioners. In terms of contemporary struggles over the plaza, hanging bodies became an instrument for criminal groups to impose their supremacy over a given space, defining their territory through their ability to instill terror over rival criminals.

Los Descuartizados: “The Streets Of Monterrey Smell Delicious, Like Carne Asada”

Pedro (all interviewee names are pseudonyms) is a photojournalist from Ciudad Juarez, the city with the highest record of homicide rates in Mexico. He received an offer to cover violent events in Monterrey in early 2012, a job other photojournalists could not withstand for more than a month. When offering him this appointment, the international press agency he works for told him, “If you’re going to Monterrey, you know what the situation is like, we think that since you come from Ciudad Juarez you might last longer [than other photojournalists], but we also understand if you don’t want to go” (Field notes, August 26, 2013). Pedro had covered violence in Ciudad Juarez for sixteen years. “I was used to working with violence, amidst shootings,” he said, a bulletproof vest resting in the chair between us. “I arrived and they would tell me there were three deaths at a bar and I’d be like, so what? What’s the big deal?” Yet despite the lower homicide rates, Pedro explained that the characteristics of violent deaths in Monterrey were different, “bloodier” than the workings of organized crime in Ciudad Juarez.

With the headline “Escalating Crudeness,” a journalist published a note in El Norte describing one of the first dismembered bodies found behind a lake on the outskirts of Monterrey in 2006:
With escalating terror, a new chapter in the war against the *narcos* in Nuevo Leon was written yesterday when the executed and dismembered body of a man [a state official] was found behind the dam of the Presa de la Boca…. in what seems to be the continuation of a wave of death unleashed by supposed Zetas… experts found a note in one of the bags threatening that “heads will continue to roll” unless the government captures members of the Gulf Cartel listed in the note. The note also said that members of federal corporations protect that cartel. (Ramírez, 2006)

Finding a dismembered body near Monterrey in 2006 was an extraordinary event. The tone in which this newspaper article was written captured the rarity of this occurrence, framed as a “new chapter” in the history of the state. The journalist hesitated when writing that the death was carried out by “supposed Zetas” and proceeded to detail the content of the note—a practice that would soon be abandoned by journalists signing off as “staff” instead and providing no information on the content of these notes, most likely due to increased attacks on newspapers and journalists. Assuming that the journalist provided an accurate account of the content of this note and assuming that the content of the note is real, this violent death would clearly exemplify that the struggle over la *plaza* is a simultaneous struggle for political protection and supremacy in a criminal field. This is the area where criminal and bureaucratic fields intersect. Through a grotesque execution of a state official, one criminal group threatens other state officials to side with them instead of the group they currently have alliances with.

Over time, journalists shifted their tone when reporting dismembered bodies for this newspaper, making no more comments on shifts in cruelty but focusing instead on counting bodies and events. On June 7, 2011, *El Norte* staff informed in the article entitled “Seven bodies found in *narcofosa* in Juarez” that this *narcofosa* or narcograve was the fourth to be found in the municipality of Juarez in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area (not to be confused with Ciudad Juarez):

Army personnel found three *narcofosas* yesterday where seven bodies were buried, some of them beheaded, with their hands tied and bearing signs of torture… according to authorities, one of the bodies was dismembered. This is the fourth case of a *fosa* found in this municipality. The first was reported on June 29, 2010 on the ranch Los Leones where 12 bodies were found. On July 22 of the same year, in a deserted piece of land known as the Hacienda Calderon… nine *pozoz* were found with 51 corpses. Six days later… another clandestine *fosa* was found with one body. (*El Norte*, 2011e)

There are currently no official statistics on the number of bodies that have been dismembered or beheaded at a local, regional or national level in Mexico. There are thousands of articles such as this one in which journalists from different newspapers took on the task of counting bodies and classifying them by location, providing some details on the circumstances of these killings (dismembering, signs of torture, found in a grave). This data was organized in interactive “criminal maps” made available to *El Norte*
subscribers.\textsuperscript{11} For example, Figure 13 is intended to assist subscribers in “locating areas of risk” featured with red dots that are links to articles on executions, homicides and armed confrontations between organized crime and state authorities. A quick glance at the map reveals that all nine municipalities of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area were affected in 2011—especially Monterrey and Guadalupe.

**Figure 13 El Norte Criminal Map of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area for 2011**


\textsuperscript{11} For a few years, the first page of the online version of the newspaper *El Norte* was a criminal map of the city with a timeline of all the newspaper articles published on these violent deaths. Little by little, increased sections of every municipality of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area were covered with red dots signaling each of these violent events as reported by this newspaper. *El Norte* also began to publish a tally with the number of deaths in three categories: criminals, state officials and civilians.
Relying on such newspapers articles, a group of peace activists and volunteers from Mexico and abroad took on the task of counting deaths on a weekly basis in order to contest underreported deaths in official statistics (Velez, 2012). As of August 2015, the project called *Menos Días Aquí* was still counting deaths.

A group of peace activists in Monterrey, as elsewhere in Mexico, sought to shift media and government attention focusing on counting bodies with the slogan “*no son cifras, tienen nombre*” or “they are not numbers, they have names.” When 49 dismembered bodies were found on a highway between Monterrey and the nearby town of Cadereyta on May 13, 2012, this group gathered shoes, handmade signs and their voices to protest rising indifference in front of the state government office:

“Have you noticed that those shoes form a number?” a man asks the four-year old holding his hand. “A two?” she replies. “Look, that is a four,” he says using his finger to retrace in the air the number formed by a line of shoes lying on the floor of the Explanada de los héroes of the Macro Plaza in downtown Monterrey, “and that is a nine.” He moves his finger above high-heels, tennis shoes, men’s shoes, a pair of kid’s shoes. “Ok, let’s go,” and they leave the small shapeless crowd of men, women and kids who curiously approach the shoes framed by hand-written signs taped to the ground. “How many in Cadereyta?” the central one asks. This morning, about 49 mutilated bodies (68 is the unofficial count) were found on the highway between Monterrey and Cadereyta. “Their faces are unrecognizable,” a woman tells me after laying down a sign she brought with the question “Where is he?” and a picture of her son who disappeared months ago. I had seen her at several events of this kind before but never as sad as today, crying and sniffing as the pair of news reporters and cameramen covering the event interviewed her. Her dark sunglasses could not cover the redness and swoleness of her cheeks and forehead. She tells me the police would only be able to identify the bodies using...
their DNA and, as I wonder out loud about the unlikelihood that they would have DNA samples to match them to, she replies quickly, “We all have them.” “We” as in the family of the hundreds of men and women who have disappeared in the last few years and I finally understand what this news means to her. As her son’s picture lies on the ground between the four and the nine, she’s wondering whether his body lies among those found on the highway to Cadereyta.

It is a sunny Sunday afternoon and most of the Explanada de los Héroes is covered with empty plastic water bottles. Hundreds gathered earlier to celebrate Mother’s Day and receive free hair and make up tips from the state government. Hundreds still walk around eating corn and cotton candy, making their way through the lines of artisans who set up a crafts fair, laughing at a clown performing on the steps leading to the Museum of Mexican History, dancing tango on the sidewalk in front of an Argentinian ice cream shop where a bandoleon player sings of love and despair. “Let’s go, this gives me the creeps,” a young woman says as she understands what the shoes are about and quickly takes her friend with her. Few among these hundreds notice the shoes and even fewer stop by. Those who do and who are not interested in asking if they may have one of those pairs of shoes, will listen to the organizers talk about the need for change through small actions of honesty. “Don’t keep the change if you notice that the lady of the cash register made a mistake,” a woman organizer says and affirms that these small changes can detonate a powerful movement. About the 49 bodies, she says we don’t know who they were, cannot say they were criminals as some have implied, that is up to the government to decide. “I feel there is nothing we can do,” a man says in reply. Most people who stop to listen leave without saying a word. (Field Notes, May 13, 2012)

By 2012, crude violence had become a decreasingly shocking part of everyday life in Monterrey. This field note describes social dynamics at a key public space on a day with particularly horrific news. Few contested the violence, which was either ignored or avoided by the majority at the plaza. Like these peace activists, the Catholic Church also condemned the “indifference shown by authorities and society towards the massacre of 49 people in Cadereyta” (El Norte, 2012b). A year before, an also indifferent attitude towards escalating violence was portrayed by a local artist taking one dismembered body as a centerpiece in his painting, “The Streets of Monterrey Smell Delicious, Like Carne Asada” (see Figure 15).

Fascinated by this painting, a geographer invited the artist to a seminar on urban violence I regularly attended at a public university in Monterrey. For the artist, the painting showed “how beer can work as an aspirin sometimes, and carne asada as well, those family gatherings, football, all part of… ignoring… what is going on” (Field Notes, February 11, 2013). The artist tapped into a main alternative to nightlife clubbing I

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12 Sierra Ventana and La Independencia, two of the most violent neighborhoods in the metropolitan area, were the inspiration for the hills in the background of the painting. The artist clarified that the white UFO-like disk hovering over them was: “a reference to this not knowing what will happen to them [neighborhood residents], a UFO can arrive and take them and nobody will know” (Field Notes, February,
found in my interviews when several men and women claimed to have substituted clubbing with the local tradition of meat grilling or carne asada at home. For a local art critic, the painting accurately depicted how Monterrey residents or “regios” learned to “flow” with escalating violence:

López paints a caustic portrait of regio idiosyncrasy. He shows the pastimes and prides that are almost a faith dogma for regios: beer, football and carne asada. All flavored with the new and omnipresent ingredient of exacerbated violence. The main character, mustached, bellied and hairy, seems undisturbed by reality and, doing nothing about it, flows with the situation. It’s sad, but the scene is so verisimilar it borders the obscene. Even sadder, as it seems we have misplaced our shock in regard to escalating violence, perhaps under the gambling tables. (Granados 2011)

Figure 15 The Streets of Monterrey Smell Delicious, Like Carne Asada

Source: Las calles de Monterrey huelen bien rico, a carne asada, painting by José López (2011), picture by Ricardo Lazcano (2013)

11, 2013). The UFO was a means of depicting the inexplicable kidnappings, disappearances and enforced disappearances described in the next section.
The art critic found this painting to be verisimilar in its depiction of regio attitudes towards violence. Yet for an actual Zeta, the association of a dismembered body and the smell of carne asada was no metaphor. In March 2013, New Yorker war correspondent Jon Lee Anderson visited Monterrey. Local journalist Diego Enrique Osorno facilitated his interview with a Zeta member on diverse topics, including “the kitchen,” a place up in the hills away from highways where Zetas disappear bodies in barrels of burning diesel. The Zeta explained that the method takes about half an hour to disappear one body, limb by limb. Diesel is gradually added to keep a fire going, releasing a very particular scent. “The first time I was part of that,” he said to Anderson in the taped interview:

I couldn’t eat chicken or meat for a month because the scent is almost the same than when you walk by a grilled chicken stand... You end up jaded, kind of crazy, you don’t know what to do. When I came down from the sierra, there was a time when I was walking down the street and I would smell this scent and think, ‘look, they’re cooking someone there’... and I’d turn around and see they were selling chicken or carne asada. (Osorno, 2013)

The brutality and savagery with which bodies have been dismembered in Monterrey has brutal precedents in northeastern Mexico. Spanish settlers and other European immigrants violently confronted the Apache and Comanche native settlers they referred to as los salvajes or los bárbaros from the 16th through the 19th centuries. At times, peace agreements were reached in exchange for food, land and gunpowder, but these agreements were only temporary. Multiple raids, including the burning of homes, the theft of thousands of horses and mules, the massacre of thousands of cattle, the abduction of hundreds of children and women, and the murder of hundreds of men were documented in correspondence between officials of the time.

The “Indian problem” was aggravated with Mexican Independence in the nineteenth century, as troops in the north were scarce and political authorities were in constant rotation. For example, on November 8, 1839 a judge from the town of Marin—located 26 miles away from Monterrey—requested help from the prefect of Cadereyta, for that morning the bárbaros had carried out “atrocious deaths on the Hacienda of Higueras, taking married women, girls and boys” (Vizcaya Canales, 2001: 79). Two days later, the prefect of Cadereyta addressed the Governor of Nuevo León to inform him that he would send 12 to 14 men to assist the people of Marin. The night before, a man came to him at two in the morning escaping from the Indians (there was no mention of

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13 Monterrey was founded in 1596 on the Spaniards’ third attempt to settle in a land populated by nomadic warrior tribes. The Apache and the Comanche in the area admitted no missionaries and followed no orders to settle and turn to agriculture or cattle-raising for their sustenance as other groups did in the land that would become central Mexico. The Spanish called these unpacified areas of the New Spain tierra de guerra viva or “land of ongoing war” (Vizcaya Canales, 2001). The Spanish crown devised an alternative colonization model and built presidios or fortified settlements along the northern border of the New Spain to protect these settlements (Vizcaya Canales, 1987: 54).

14 For historian Isidro Vizcaya Canales, who wrote the most comprehensive works on the “Indian problem” in northeastern Mexico, “The most painful aspect of these barbarian incursions [of the 1830s and 1840s] was the kidnapping of people, mostly women, children and teenagers. Adults deprived of their freedom were subjected to horrible humiliations. When the abducted were very young, they generally adopted the customs of the Indians and even forgot their language.” (ibid: 20)
whether these were Apache or Comanche). The man said they were around 300, some had guns but most were armed with bows and arrows. The man thought they were after their horses, yet he had seen that they also took women and gave them “bad treatment” (Vizcaya Canales, 2001: 79). Two days later, a group of residents from Cadereyta addressed another letter to the Governor in which they claimed to have witnessed “the fury of the bárbaros” who attacked their ranches and left “multiple corpses even of children inhumanely slaughtered, taking many of all ages and sexes” with them (ibid: 80).

Historian Isidro Vizcaya Canales affirms that in 19th century Nuevo León, “all rural occupations were extremely dangerous, as these workers were always at risk of murder or abduction by the salvajes. Moreover, the bárbaros caused considerable damage to cattle raisers” (ibid: 60). In their raids, the Lipan Apache were most interested in taking horses and mules with them—which were used for transportation, food and traded for firearms with Texas settlers—as well as massacring cattle. Having no mules or horses meant Nuevo León town settlers could not transport their goods, which lead to the economic decline and impoverishment of multiple families, as well as the abandoning of small towns out of fear of further raids. Settlers sought to live in close proximity with each other.

In 1856 Governor Santiago Vidaurri gave the Lipan Apache an ultimatum. When he received news that raids continued, he proceeded to order their roundup and execution, women and children included. Those who survived responded with increased cruelty, ruining the cultivated land and killing men who, according to the Governor of the time were, “descuartizados [dismembered] and their pieces hung from chaparro trees as if to exhibit the cruel release of their vengeance” (ibid: 78). There are fewer historical accounts of how the Apache were treated by the Spanish and Mexican authorities, but Vidaurri informed the federal government that the killing of the Lipan Apache had been “denatured and horrible,” yet imperative and aimed at their “complete destruction” (ibid: 74). Over time, some Lipan Apache settled in Monterrey or other towns “blending in” with the rest of the population, while others joined the Mezcaleros reservation in New Mexico in 1905 (ibid: 81). Historian Vizcaya Canales described the violent clashes between the Lipan Apache and the different authorities of the time as a carnicería, the closest parallel to the contemporary dismembering of bodies carried out by groups also referred to as salvajes and bárbaros.

By introducing another period when bodies have been dismembered (and abducted) on the land that became northeastern Mexico, I do not wish to imply that drug traffickers are like the Lipan Apache or vice versa. Instead, I want to raise the question of how high levels of violence and state formation are historically interrelated in this area. Uncovering the patterns that marked the “civilizing process” (Elias, 2000) of the region is outside the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, I suggest that there are parallels between contemporary patterns of violence and the Indian raids of the 19th century, when Apaches and Comanches defended their autarky terrorizing the incoming population, practicing kidnapping and extortion, and holding very ambiguous relationships with the newly independent Mexican state: at times negotiating peace, at times forming alliances with state officials for contraband (of cattle), at times being played against each other (the state allied with the Apache to fight the Comanche, for example), and at times being violently crushed by the state.
**Los Desaparecidos: Where are they?**

As elsewhere in Mexico, there are only approximate numbers of how many men and women have gone missing in Nuevo León in recent years. The local human rights group, Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos (CADHAC), documented over 1,007 cases of disappearances in the state between 2009 and 2012 (Human Rights Watch, 2013: 92). Yet many are not reported to authorities or human rights groups out of fear. Another local human rights group, Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León (FUNDENL), founded in 2011 by family members of the disappeared began to document the stories of their disappeared loved ones in embroidered handkerchiefs exhibited in public plazas (Ramírez Atilano, 2014). Several times over the course of my fieldwork, I observed men and women approach FUNDENL activists to request that the name of a missing loved one be embroidered with the circumstances of their disappearance, as they would not report it elsewhere. These handkerchiefs may be the only record available for some of these disappearances, which suggest state involvement in these crimes (see Figure 16). For example, Gustavo Castañeda Fuentes was:

Detained and disappeared by municipal police of Monterrey, Nuevo León, patrol cars 534, 538 and 540 on February 25, 2009. “I have your smile tattooed on my heart I love you my son.” Your parents and brothers do not stop looking and waiting for you. Embroidered by: Mom.

**Figure 16 “I Have Your Smile Tattooed On My Heart”**

One of several hundred handkerchiefs exhibited in downtown Monterrey as part of the Embroidering Peace initiative of FUNDENL. Picture by author, September 30, 2012.
This handkerchief states that local police were involved in the disappearance of this man, providing the exact patrol car numbers that would allow for their identification. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch collected evidence of multiple cases of state involvement in disappearances in Mexico “committed by members of every security force involved in public security operations, sometimes acting in conjunction with organized crime” (Amnesty International, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013: 1). Unlike the wave of forced disappearances of the 1970s—when the state targeted political dissidents in Mexico’s “Dirty War”—current disappearances respond to multiple logics and are carried out by multiple actors. Abducted by both state and criminal actors, some of these men and women are used for trafficking, while others are forced into different types of criminal and sexual labor. Other examples of embroidered stories of the disappeared as summarized by their family members provide clues into the everyday circumstances in which these crimes took place in several municipalities of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area—Apodaca, Juárez, Monterrey and San Nicolás de los Garza. The following stories were displayed among 200 others during a peace protest I observed in front of the Governor’s office on October 26, 2013:

23-year old. Apodaca, Nuevo León. “A woman cried out her name. She came out and gave her a kiss. Ten minutes later they took her.” February 2010.

Disappeared August 12, 2010 when he went to work, together with his brother-in-law in Villa de Juárez, Nuevo Léon. Both are still missing.

18-year old. La Estanzuela, Monterrey. After taking a taxi with three neighbors, none of them have returned…

March 2011. He went out with his brother and four friends to a store in San Nicolás de los Garza, none of them returned. The six are still missing.

Stepping out of the house for a moment, going off to work, taking a taxi, going to a store—these are the incomplete stories family members repeat to themselves and to others of lives inexplicably interrupted. The case of the 23-year old woman abducted as she stepped out of her house exemplifies a pattern established by human rights NGOs linking the recent disappearance of some 500 women in the working-class municipalities of Apodaca and Guadalupe to sex trafficking. In an interview with local journalist Sanjuana Martínez, the director of the Coalition Against Trafficking of Women and Girls in Latin America and the Caribbean (CATWLAC) affirmed that:

The Mexican drug cartels have found a niche for huge profits in the trafficking of women and girls for purposes of sexual exploitation and pornography. Annually, they earn more than 10 billion dollars. Unfortunately, the federal Attorney General’s Office (PGR) is not pursuing the cartels for the trafficking of women, just for drug trafficking. (S. Martínez, 2013)

Defining present day armed conflicts between criminal groups and different levels of the state security apparatus as a “war on drugs” obscures the multiple global illicit markets
these violent groups are inserted in. The struggle over la plaza may also involve a struggle to control other illicit markets in which state protection is also necessary. In this case, the complicity of the state in these disappearances is perceived in the answers given to the mothers of dozens of these young women from Apodaca (ages 15 through 23) who were told by local police: “They left because they wanted to” (ibid). Young women are particularly at risk of abduction, as exemplified by the following newspaper article published on May 12, 2014:

Being 30 years old allowed a woman to free herself from several subjects who hours earlier had forcibly pushed her into a pick-up truck… Her kidnappers, who also took two young women ages 15 and 16, received an order via radiophone to release her, for she was over the age the boss had requested. This case was revealed around midnight on Monday in downtown Monterrey where the woman was released from the pick-up truck, but the two teenagers were not. (A. Martínez, 2014)

The journalist gave no information on why the women were abducted, but we can speculate that these disappearances are part of a larger pattern of abductions carried out by a hierarchically organized group—the kidnappers were communicating and following the instructions of a boss. Moreover, dismissing a woman who was over the “requested” age suggests that the selection criteria for these disappearances has little to do with what these women actually do. The director of CATWLAC informed the journalist that forcibly abducted women are also recruited as halconas (lookouts or spies), assassins, or mules (drug transporters) in criminal organizations (S. Martínez, 2013). Scholars conducting research on individuals under the age of 18 who are forced to work as spies, porters, messengers and combatants in conflicts around the world use the term “child soldiers” (Gates & Reich, 2010). Besides being used for trafficking, some of these young women may be abducted as “child soldiers” for a struggle over la plaza.

The other three handkerchief chiefs described above suggest that men, including an 18-year old, were abducted in pairs or small groups. Physical force and some kind of organization is required to abduct groups of four to six men, suggesting that there are also patterns to these disappearances. In the context of an escalating struggle between competing criminal groups and different levels of the state security apparatus, as occurred in 2010 and 2011 when these disappearances took place, these men might have been forcibly recruited to fight.

There are two precedents of this form of violence in the state: the abduction of women and children during the Indian raids of the 19th century (mentioned above) and the forced disappearance of political dissidents, including students, during Mexico’s Guerra Sucia or Dirty War of the 1970s. Yet unlike previous cases of desaparecidos, there is no clear, straightforward answer to the question raised by thousands in Mexico today: Where are they? There are multiple actors and multiple logics at work. Moreover, the state is involved as both a protector and an aggressor.

The Military as Protector and Aggressor

On March 19, 2010, a group of soldiers shot Jorge Antonio Mercado and Javier Francisco Arredondo, two graduate students standing outside a prestigious college in Monterrey—
the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM). Human rights activists argued that the soldiers who shot them left guns by their side, as alleged evidence that they were sicarios or gunmen. Several peace activists I spoke to agreed that the deaths of Jorge Antonio Mercado and Javier Francisco Arredondo marked a “before” and an “after” in Monterrey. One of them said that “the students of the Tecnológico did not participate before [in peace protests], they were living in a bubble, so when they were hit they came out… we saw that frustration and we had been waiting for that frustration” (Field Notes, December 12, 2012). A prominent human rights defender, member of Alianza Cívica Nuevo León, thought these deaths were indeed “a starting point in Nuevo León, Jorge and Javier die in an event that is still not clear, the population feels helpless… they hit a prototype of the city [and] groups of young people began to take the streets” (Field Notes, March 15, 2013). Although the deaths of these students were not the first of this wave of violence, they were the first public victims of a specific sector of the population that had hitherto been unaffected. A student and activist from the ITESM, commonly known as the “Tec,” told a journalist in 2010 that “the reaction we are seeing [students protesting] is linked to the fact that the two guys that were murdered were from the Tec, because that moved a social class: the business class, which is not used to protest or get involved in this low-intensity war” (S. Martínez, 2010). Four years later, family members and activists still demanded that the military “clean their names” (Campos Garza, 2014) and sought the support of the local human rights agency CADHAC and Amnesty International to bring these soldiers to a civil court (Santiago, 2014).

These killings were not unique. The visibility of such cases often depends on family members calling on the media and enduring the setbacks of the Mexican justice system. For example, Jorge Otilio Cantú, a 29-year old doctor specialized in music therapy, had just returned home from his honeymoon. He was driving his pick-up truck to work on the morning of April 18, 2011, not far from the ITESM, when seven soldiers opened fire and killed him. As in the case of the two students described above, soldiers left a gun by his side as alleged proof that he was a criminal. His father went as far as meeting with President Felipe Calderón multiple times to demand justice. “My son’s case is not unique,” he said at a seminar on urban violence I regularly attended at a public university. “It is one of hundreds if not thousands of murders committed by the military here in Monterrey… murders that can be considered state crimes” (Field Notes, April 8, 2013).
A man unpacks a briefcase full of folders containing paperwork related to his son’s death. Picture by author, 2013.

“This is a little bit of what I’ve got.” He pulled out a pile of carefully classified folders from a dark leather briefcase. “I have at least seven piles like this one at home.” Military testimonies, letters to the President, court proceedings, human rights reports, newspaper articles, pictures and other documents amassed over two years since his son was shot. He is a doctor in his late sixties, dressed in black from head to toe. He wore his dark hair combed back and a pair of glasses hanging from his neck and spoke in a low voice. “I am going to talk about the via crucis [the walk of the cross] that I have lived through because of the death of my son.” He wrote more than 15 messages to former President Calderón. “Some of these letters I sent directly to his home; he never had the courage to answer any of them, by mail or in person. I had the opportunity of seeing him three times, one of them, he didn’t even recall what I had told him a few months before.”

The doctor looked through his archives for a letter he wrote to honor the second anniversary of his son’s death that would take place a few days after the seminar. He was not sure of what newspaper would publish it, but if nobody did, then he would. He read the letter slowly, seated in one corner of the room, calmly recalling his son’s wedding with a smile and how the family had never seen him happier:
“Never would we have imagined that he would be murdered sixteen days later,” he read, quickly dropping his smile. He looked at the group… “I will make a parenthesis here, I speak of murder because we are convinced that he was murdered, it has been demonstrated, their training [the soldiers’ training] made them avid to kill.” As he said this, he shifted into anger, then took a deep breath and went back to the soothing memories in his text, recalling his son’s last vacation. The group silently followed the father through a brief recollection of honeymoon stories from his son that inevitably gave way to the deadly account we were all anticipating. “The death of one’s child is the greatest pain of all,” he read, his voice falling, his lips trembling, his eyelids instantly reddened. “Forgive me,” and his voice broke as he reached his son’s death in the text. Short pause, a few tears in the room and the father returned to the text. He began to read faster, grabbing the words he had written to pull himself up, with a tear resting on the crease of his upper lip. His voice rose as he spoke of demanding justice against forced disappearances and state crimes. “Now I spend much of my time reviewing cases of injustice.” (Field Notes, April 8, 2013)

Like the family members of the disappeared described in an earlier section, this man underwent a professional transformation. Originally trained as a doctor, the pain of his son’s death, perfectly tangible in this field note written two years after the event, drove him to become an expert on the Mexican justice system. One year after this seminar, around the third anniversary of his son’s death, Jorge Otilio Cantú’s father sent yet another letter to local media outlets. On the Day of the Military when armed forces were celebrated, he questioned why “no authority… talks about the barbarian acts that the military has committed in our state and all over Mexico… will we ever have a judicial power that acts in accordance with our Constitution that has been stepped on so many times?” (Milenio, 2014).

These and many other cases of extrajudicial killings might explain why the percentage of Monterrey residents who claimed to trust the military dropped from 50% in 2010 to 38% in 2012 (Corpovisionarios, 2012). Nevertheless, more Monterrey residents claimed to trust the military in 2012 than the federal government (23%), the state or local government (19%), judges (18%), police (18%), the congress (16%), public functionaries (13%) or politicians (12%). At a local level, this survey suggests that despite the increased separation of political and bureaucratic fields in the Mexican state (one definition of “democratization”), three-fourths of the population do not trust these institutions. Moreover, Monterrey residents had particularly ambiguous attitudes towards the military, both calling on it for protection trusting it more than any other institution, and fearing its acts of aggression.

**Sustaining The Struggle Through Increased Kidnappings and Extortion**

As homicide rates exploded, Monterrey residents experienced a simultaneous exponential increase in kidnappings and extortion. Until recently, the wealthy were the most affected by these criminal forms. Yet kidnappings became widespread across the class spectrum in recent years, terrorizing both rich and poor. Official crime statistics are particularly unreliable in relation to kidnappings, as victims and their families are unlikely to report these crimes due to low trust in police enforcement and justice institutions, not to
mention direct threats from kidnappers. Nevertheless, a careful revision of available crime statistics and victimization surveys reveals rising trends in kidnapping rates both in Mexico and Nuevo Leon (México Evalúa 2011). Working class and wealthy men and women were also routinely extorted during my fieldwork; forced to shut down small taco stands, tortillerías, and corner stores, as well as larger clinics and other businesses. Why? How are these standardized forms of kidnapping and extortion related to the gruesome forms of violence described in this chapter? In this section, I examine a high profile case of extortion that made use of spectacular violence: the 2011 attack on the Casino Royale located at the intersection of some of Monterrey’s busiest avenues. I then speculate that these patterned crimes in northeastern Mexico may have increased as mechanisms to draw resources from the population in order to sustain a costly struggle over la plaza.

It was a sunny Thursday afternoon in August of 2011. The Casino Royale was well attended, especially by women playing bingo and slot machines. The casino’s security camera taped the arrival of four vehicles in front of the main entrance. Traffic continued to flow on San Jeronimo Avenue. Doors opened, men stepped out. The video taped a few men remaining close to their vehicles, while others hurried into the building. A storm of people rushed out seconds later heading towards the parking lot. The men standing by the vehicles remained on the lookout, while more people hurried out. Moments later, the men went back into their vehicles and a black curtain of smoke began to obstruct the visibility of the scene. Amidst smoke, the cars left. Traffic continued to flow on San Jeronimo, as thick dark smoke gave way to blasting flames.

Inside the casino, emergency doors were locked (it is unclear whether this was deliberate). Those who fled into restrooms in panic were trapped. Three hours after the attack, local journalist Sanjuana Martínez captured survivors’ anguish as many waited for news of loved ones trapped inside. Patricia, for example, was trying her luck at the slot machines with her husband Eduardo that afternoon. They heard cries, gunshots and started to run. They were holding hands at first, but lost each other in the crowd. Once outside, Patricia managed to talk to him over the phone and heard him say, “I can’t do this anymore mi reina, I can’t breathe.” Firemen tore holes in the casino walls on the outside to get people out (S. Martínez, 2011). Eduardo was one of the ten men and forty-two women, two of them pregnant, who died in the fire.

As investigations unfolded, a group of men, allegedly Zeta members or others working on their behalf, were apprehended. Local journalists reported that, according to state agents, these men testified that the initial intention was to “scare” the casino owner into paying extortion or cobro de piso, that is dues owed for operating the casino (García, 2011). The event lead to the deployment of around 3,000 federal police agents who were sent to Monterrey that weekend as part of a new security strategy (Arroyo, 2011).

Almost a year later, a few days before the first anniversary of the attack, journalist Sanjuana Martínez captured the pain of family members in endless mourning. Some of them claimed to keep their family’s homes or bedrooms intact. “I don’t know if I can overcome grief,” said the daughter of a woman who died in the fire. “I understand death… but an attack like this cuts lives short.” Every Thursday, family members of the victims met in front of the casino to place flowers in front of the victims’ crosses and mourn with each other. “Look, I’m not expecting justice anymore,” a father told the

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15 The three-minute video circulated on several news channels multiple times and has been viewed by millions on YouTube.
journalist, “I’m not expecting anything. Actually, what I want is to die and go where my son is.” His son, Ruben, was a high school student working at the Casino Royale for the first time that afternoon. He was praised as a local hero for bending his body to provide a stepping boulder for others to escape the fire before falling to its fumes (S. Martínez, 2012a).

On August 25, 2012, a couple of hundred people gathered for the first anniversary memorial of the Casino Royale attack. Organized by family members and human rights activists, the memorial took place in front of a wall of crosses set up for the victims, as well as pictures, flowers and candles arranged in the front of the charred casino. The event sought to bear witness to their ongoing pain and demands for justice (see Figure 18). The memorial began with a mass in a nearby church, followed by a protest march to the casino. I joined the protest and walked next to a young woman who survived the fire. She was mourning the death of eight of her co-workers, whose families have received no compensation from the casino for their losses. “There was a lot of screaming,” she recalled as we passed a truck of policemen, covered in dark uniforms from head to toe:

Their gear hides their expression, only their nose skin is visible. They hold long guns with both of their arms and look from one side to the other… I approach one of the holes that firemen struck on the exterior walls [of the casino] to help people out. Two women [standing next to this hole] are pointing at the top floor. One woman says to the other, “I really don’t know how she did it; she said she ran that way but it makes no sense.” They are former workers as well, still reconstructing the facts. Dust has settled on the coin machines, the piles of chairs and tables, evidence waiting for the case to be resolved. “The air was hotter than 100 degrees Celsius,” a friend said as she approached me…. “People died just by inhaling that air”… There were several such holes on the walls with smoked streaks from the fire. A nearby sign read, “We are not held responsible for any damage to your vehicle, partial or total theft, fires or natural disasters. The company.” (Field Notes, August 25, 2012)
By 2012, 17 individuals had been arrested as alleged members of organized crime responsible for starting the fire (Campos Garza, 2012). Yet the Casino Royale tragedy also exposed a network of corruption between casino owners and the federal state authorities granting permits or overlooking operation irregularities that have not been prosecuted (S. Martínez, 2012a). Casinos, which are essential for money laundering, became increasingly common in Monterrey over the last decade.

While most scholarly efforts are currently focused on understanding trends in drug-related homicides (Heinle et al., 2013; D. Shirk & Wallman, 2015), it is equally important to examine how different forms of criminal violence are interconnected and patterned. The spread of kidnapping and extortion practices in northeastern Mexico suggests that new criminal groups operating in the area not only contest the state’s monopoly over the use of violence but also its monopoly over taxation—the right to draw resources from its population in exchange for “protection.” For example, a male resident of San Nicolás in his sixties explained what the avenue we were standing on was like before the deployment of the military on the streets:

Different commandos were constantly driving through this avenue displaying their AK-47… asking for, well, derecho de piso [extortion]… the one who sold
barbacoa [shredded beef], the one who sold electric parts, the one who rented music, the one with the taco stand, the little store owner, the tamales guy, so it was a very serious problem…. because behind these different flashing trucks with armed men you saw the local police, so it was all organized, until this whole [military] confrontation against them took place freeing things up… (Field Notes, June 30, 2013).

Multiple interviewees provided similar accounts of widespread extortion and kidnapping, whereby criminal groups such as the Zetas obtained necessary resources to continue waging their struggle over la plaza. A new criminal group is likely to have fewer economic resources with which to bribe state officials than a previously established one in a given plaza. Gruesome and spectacular violence may be a cheaper means of shifting state-criminal alliances in favor of a new group than offering greater bribes. Nevertheless, maintaining high levels of violence is costly, particularly when the state deploys its full force in response. A new criminal group confronted with the military will need more weapons and staff. From the standpoint of a new criminal group fighting to take over a plaza, such costs might explain sudden waves of widespread kidnapping and extortion, as these groups sought to raise the funds necessary to continue exerting high levels of violence.

Old Constellations of Contraband in Northeastern Mexico

As mentioned above, the upsurge of gruesome violence described in this chapter shocked residents and foreigners alike. While high levels of violence seemed credible in other ravaged parts of the country, many were surprised that such horrors should take place in wealthy and industrial Monterrey. Yet high levels of violence will be less surprising if we consider Monterrey’s pre-industrial history. In this section, I trace the emergence of Monterrey as a trade and contraband capital for northeastern Mexico in the nineteenth century, as well as its geographic, economic and political centrality for contraband routes that continue to this day.

According to local historian Isidro Vizcaya Canales, northeastern Mexico may have undergone a slower economic and demographic development than the region that would become central Mexico during the colonial period because it lacked a port of its own—commercial activity was centered in the port of Veracruz, mostly benefitting this port and Mexico City (Vizcaya, 2006: 3). This changed in 1820, when the port of Matamoros was established in the neighboring state of Tamaulipas to facilitate commerce through the Gulf of Mexico, followed by the port of Tampico in 1823. Two wars created the conditions to catapult Monterrey from an agricultural and cattle-raising town to the main distribution center of foreign goods in the newly independent Mexican state: the US-Mexican War and the American Civil War.

Following the secession of Texas and the Guerra de Intervención or the US-Mexican War (1846-1848), the northern US-Mexican border was redrawn along the Río Bravo or Río Grande. Located less than 100 miles away, Monterrey became a trade center in an emerging regional and bi-national economy along both sides of this river (Cerutti, 1993). Ten years later, the federal government established a Free Trade Zone in Tamaulipas, which became extremely lucrative when Abraham Lincoln announced the Union Blockade of all Confederate seaports during the American Civil War (1861-1865).
Large quantities of cotton—the primary crop and export of the Confederate states—could no longer be exported to Europe via New Orleans or Charleston. Confederates were desperate for a passageway to the Atlantic Ocean and found one through northeastern Mexico. For four years, Matamoros became a de facto “Confederate port” facilitating Confederate legal and illegal commerce with different parts of the world including France, England, Cuba and even some Union ports (Delaney, 1993). The Unionists were aware of this route but they could not stop it. First, it was legal. Second, Mexican merchants argued that the import of weapons, gunpowder and other military equipment through Matamoros during this time was intended as resources for the Mexican federal government at war with the French, although these were indeed destined for the Confederates (ibid: 101). Third, captains began to employ a series of contraband tactics to dissimulate their trade. For example, captains unloaded authorized goods during the day and war-related goods at night that were not registered by Mexican customs agents (Delaney, 1993: 110). Goods were also stored by merchants who had warehouses on both sides of the river, facilitating their transport from one to the other via ferries or smaller boats (idem). During this period, the British Consulate in Matamoros allowed any boat leaving this port to use the British flag, allowing Confederate steamboats to navigate the Rio Grande (Tyler 1993: 113). Alternatively, Confederate boats also used the Mexican flag (ibid).

During these four critical years, massive amounts of cotton were exchanged for massive amounts of gunpowder, diplomatic correspondence and cargos of salt, blankets, shoes, coffee, rice, wheat, corn, medicine, and other essential articles of national origin (or claimed to be of national origin after import) dispatched from Monterrey to Texas (Graf, [1942]1993 cited by Cerutti, 1993). The commerce was so great that the US Secretary of State was told in 1864 that stopping the trade in Matamoros would be equivalent to having an army of 10,000 men, “for all gunpowder that the rebels received west of the Mississippi came from Mexico” (Delaney, 1993: 110).

The governor of Nuevo León at the time was Santiago Vidaurri, a man who sought to exploit this unique commercial opportunity to the fullest. In 1862, a Union Consul complained that the cotton trade in Monterrey had reached “immense proportions” (Tyler, 1993: 112). Vidaurri had decreased import taxes and transformed Monterrey into a “free depot” where an unlimited amount of cotton could be stored for up to a year in exchange for a dispatch fee (ibid). Having annexed the nearby state of Coahuila to Nuevo León a few years earlier (1856), which provided up to 50,000 dollars a month from cotton imported through Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Vidaurri opened three more border towns for free trade in Tamaulipas: Camargo, Mier and Reynosa (ibid: 123).

Regional wealth was so great, that Vidaurri saw no point in being part of Mexico. He initiated a secession movement calling for the independence of the República de la Sierra Madre. Meanwhile, the federal Mexican government was impoverished and at war against the French. Chased out of Mexico City, Benito Juárez relocated his federal government in San Luis Potosí and demanded that Vidaurri share cotton taxes with him, but Vidaurri refused. Vidaurri sided with the French instead and continued to govern northeastern Mexico—he was executed for treason a few years later under Porfirio Díaz. This series of circumstances produced the equivalent of a gold rush in Monterrey that would provide necessary capital for the industry to come.
The end of the American Civil War brought an end to the extremely lucrative position northeastern Mexico had occupied as a main trade route between the United States and Europe. Nevertheless, it did not bring an end to the “super scandalous contraband carried out along the border of the Río Bravo” as described by local, José Eleuterio González in the 19th century (cited by Izcaya: 26). In an effort to decrease contraband, and most likely to decrease the commercial advantages that had given the northeast such autonomy from the center, the federal government reorganized and tightened a customs line in 1870 as a means of stopping clandestine imports. Originally set up in 1850, this protectionist policy imposed on both Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas required that all foreign products passing through Nuevo Leon be registered in Monterrey. It was a second customs line. Check-points were enforced in the southern parts of the city, where merchants were expected to show passes from the Customs Line Corporation or Corporación Contrarresguardo (ibid). Many rejected the customs line in Monterrey. The governor at the time thought this was the federal government’s means of discrediting the commerce in the north (ibid: 29). In 1881, a local newspaper informed that:

Contrabandistas [bandits] of Marín and Lampazos [towns close to the US border] seem to have dropped their mask and declared a war against the government, particularly against its agents, with the slogan “muera el contrarresguardo y viva el contrabando” [death to the customs line, long live contraband]. (Vizcaya: 29, translation by author)

Both local authorities and local bandits were against this federal policy. For local authorities, higher import taxes and further obstacles on imports meant fewer revenues (Vidaurri had made a fortune by cutting import taxes, motivating massive imports). Considering Vidaurri’s separationist attempt, the customs line policy framed was an economic protectionist measure can also be read as a federal means of disciplining the northeast and curtailing its resources. For historian Vizcaya Canales, “it is very difficult to get a sense of how important contraband was and even harder to determine to what extent it favored or hindered the commercial development of Monterrey” (ibid: 29). Although scholars have documented Monterrey’s industrialization in great detail (Cerutti, 2000; Cerutti & Valdaliso, 2003), a comprehensive history of contraband in the city and the region is still missing. Such a history could elucidate deeper causes for the recent wave of violence described in this chapter. For example, licit commerce along the Matamoros-Monterrey connection declined with the end of the American Civil War and the development of trains in the 1880s and 1890s connecting Monterrey north to Laredo and south to Mexico City. Nevertheless, this historic trade route might help us understand why the Gulf Cartel operating out of ports such as Matamoros would fight a battle for Monterrey a century and a half later. How are the bandits declaring a war against the federal government in the name of contraband in the late 19th century similar to and different from those battling other criminal groups and the state in the early 21st century?

For historian Alan Knight, the contraband situation in northeastern Mexico today is similar to what it was in the 1920s and 1930s, when dealers combined drugs with other goods and services and political protectors were decentralized (2012). Criminal actors such as the Zetas, operating in the region are not only interested in drug trafficking, but
also human trafficking, kidnapping, extortion of migrants, and gas smuggling (Correa-Cabrera, 2014). On this last point, both journalists and academics have alerted that recent horrific violence in northeastern Mexico may be inseparable from the discovery of the country’s largest shale gas deposits in that area in 2011, the Cuenca de Burgos (Correa-Cabrera, 2014; Osorno, 2012). Millions of gas liters have been smuggled into the United States and sold to major oil companies according to the Mexican national oil company PEMEX (Harrup & Luhnow, 2011, cited by Correa-Cabrera, 2014).

Considering this long history of contraband, it is important to examine intense trafficking of all sorts taking place in and around Monterrey today. While some Monterrey residents, such as businessman Lorenzo Zambrano cited in this chapter, claimed that drug trafficking and thus drug violence came from elsewhere in Mexico. Nevertheless, a long-term perspective suggests that contraband is closely related to the industrialization and wealth of Monterrey. If the federal government took the trouble of setting up extra custom lines and check-points on the metropolitan southern borders as industrialization took off, then we can assume that the contraband in question was substantial. Tensions between the northeastern region and the federal government continue to this day and the slogan of those 19th century bandits—death to customs lines, long live contraband—seem a closer fit to describe the violent conflict in northeastern Mexico today than a “war on drugs”.
Chapter 3. They Say Los Malitos Drive Pick-Up Trucks

“It used to be an unknown enemy,” said Mauricio, as he recounted his initial perceptions of increased violence in Monterrey. “You can’t see it. You can’t hear it, you don’t know what its name is, its shape. It wears nothing, no dress or uniform, not even a tattoo, doesn’t drive any vehicle in particular.” The sudden increase of violence in Monterrey, outlined in chapters one and two, was so shattering to his worldview, that Mauricio described his initial perception of perpetrators of new forms of violence as “anyone, anywhere” (Interview, March 1, 2013). Yet as violence escalated, striking both wealthy and poor, a pick-up driving cowboy-dressed devilish figure emerged in everyday discourse to characterize common anxieties as fear of los malitos. Roughly translated as “little evil guys,” this was an uncommon “folk devil” (Cohen [1972] 2002). Folk devils are typically portrayed as exaggerated threats to society, yet los malitos provided Monterrey residents with a means of euphemizing, refracting and normalizing gruesome violence. This chapter revisits Stanley Cohen’s (1972; 2002) classic notion of “folk devil” in light of his later work on denial. The case demonstrates that folk devils may be instrumental not only to the production of a “moral panic” but also to the social construction of denial and collective normalization of violence.

I begin this chapter establishing an analogy between sudden increased violence and an epidemic. In Monterrey, violence escalating was experience like a plague getting closer and closer to the self. I hone in on specific sensorial problems arising from increased violence, such as the difficulty of distinguishing gun shots from other loud sparking or firing sounds. These sections provide texture to my claim that there was generalized anxiety, which was soon turned into los malitos. I provide the basic characteristics of this figure, as well as a discussion of who is represented and who is obscured by this “folk devil.”

Everyday Measurements of Violence

Although subject to debate (Spierenburg, 2013: 19), homicide rates are widely used in criminology and other social sciences as an indicator of violence levels. Relying on this method Figure 19 (previously presented in chapter 2) depicts a blatant spike in homicides in Nuevo León between 2009 and 2012. During this short period, long-term violence trends were reversed as homicide rates increased almost ten-fold from 5 to 47 homicides per 100,000 people, doubling national homicide rates. From the standpoint of an analyst examining this graph, an increase in violence is clear. Yet from the standpoint of everyday life, residents relied on the proximity and frequency of criminal activity in their social circles to fabricate their own measurements of violence.
During my formal interviews and casual conversations with Monterrey residents, I sought to reconstruct their experience of the beginning of this wave of violence. I initially expected them to mention the events that marked key qualitative shifts in violence in the region examined in chapter 2: the execution of two students at a private university by soldiers in 2010; a casino set on fire by organized crime in 2011; the appearance of 49 dismembered bodies on a nearby highway in 2012. Yet these were not the events interviewees referenced. Interviewees tended to highlight criminal activity in their social networks as the major turning points in the metropolitan escalation of violence. In the following excerpts, Mario, Jorge, and Aurora relate their experiences of escalating violence to the victimization of friends and acquaintances:

It all started with one or two kidnapping stories and everybody thought it was something really strange and… little by little it became clearer, every time you would hear this [a kidnapping] happened to “the friend of a friend of a friend” and then “the friend of a friend” and then it happened to a friend [pause], then, yes, I began to feel a fear in me and in the collective as well, right? (Interview with Mario, 30-year old San Pedro resident, February 6, 2013)

I know several people who have been forced out of their vehicles. I know people who have been assaulted, who have been caught in crossfire as well. It’s no longer “the friend of the friend of your compadre’s neighbor”… it’s people close to you, it’s your friends who have gone through these experiences… you know that it is perhaps very likely that you’ll be next, sooner or later… it’s sad, isn’t it? To reach these extreme thoughts… it’s a kind of resignation to think, “It’s going to happen to me.” (Interview with Jorge, Monterrey resident, March 5, 2013)
We’re at a point where friends of our families and friends have been kidnapped or killed, what’s next?… the only thing that can get worse is having our families kidnapped or getting killed ourselves.

(Field Notes, Aurora, 32-year old woman, San Pedro resident, March 25, 2012)

All these examples illustrate turning points in individual perceptions of escalating violence: the kidnapping of a friend in the case of Mario; friends being forced out of their cars or caught in crossfire in the case of Jorge; Aurora’s sense that violence could only get worse if her family or herself were kidnapped. In this sense, the escalation of violence was experienced like an epidemic getting closer and closer to the self. Other interviewees referenced shifts in everyday practices as an indicator of violence levels. Carolina and her family moved to Monterrey in 2009 to escape violence in the neighboring state of Tamaulipas, where violence was already high. Carolina explained that residents in Tampico, Tamaulipas—located less than 300 miles away from Monterrey—changed their cars and consumer habits in response to escalating violence (including her husband who switched a pick-up truck for a mini SUV). The absence of these everyday shifts in Monterrey in 2009, particularly among the members of the upper class she interacted with, was the basis for her initial assessment of lower levels of violence in the area:

We arrived in Monterrey and there was talk of insecurity and I was like, what are they talking about? There is no insecurity here. If they’re driving BMWs and Mercedes, nobody has changed their lifestyle here, maybe you don’t go to McAllen [a popular weekend shopping destination in the Texan border] anymore because you won’t drive on a highway [out of fear of hijacking], but nobody is being discreet [nadie le está bajando a nada], everyone is still wearing their designer purses.

(Interview with Carolina, San Pedro resident, February 28, 2013)

The use of distinctive vehicles, jewelry, purses, as well as nightlife practices, were some of the daily practices that did shift across the class spectrum as the incidence and prevalence of spectacular violence increased in Monterrey (see chapter 4). While analysts rely on official homicide statistics to measure levels of violence, Monterrey residents elaborated their own everyday measurements of violence on the basis of “stories” and shifts in everyday practices. Towards the end of my fieldwork in 2013, I observed Monterrey residents ask each other, “Is it [violence] getting better or are we getting used to it?” Interviewees such as Jorge thought everyday stories were more reliable than media coverage of violent events:

Perhaps there is no trustworthy indicator that can tell you “yes” or “no” [violence levels are decreasing]. I think that what people perceive is most important… “it’s lower because I’m not seeing as much on television,” maybe that’s a government strategy to calm the population down… [but] then you have the United States sending travel alerts to keep their citizens out of northern Mexico… so you don’t know who to believe… You form your own criteria, not with what the media tells you, but with what you’ve seen or what you’ve heard from acquaintances and
friends. I think that information is more reliable than what the media tells you. (Interview with Jorge, Monterrey resident, March 5, 2013)

Jorge references the centrality of senses for the elaboration of violence indicators. “What you’ve seen” and “what you’ve heard” are key means of measuring violence levels. Yet senses can be tricky, too, as examined in the next section.

Are Those Gunshots?

Lucía was driving home one Saturday afternoon after watching a soccer game at her brother’s house during the World Cup of 2010. The 42-year old filmmaker drove through a tunnel from the wealthy municipality of San Pedro to Monterrey and arrived at an intersecting avenue. Cars driving in the opposite direction jumped over the traffic island, onto and across her lane, parking at a fast food restaurant to her right and running out of their cars. It took her a few seconds to realize a shooting was taking place between the military on her right and another armed group on her left. A bus driving in the opposite direction jumped over the traffic island as well and landed diagonally in front of her (Figure 20 is her illustration). “I was trapped. I ducked as low as I could, finding room among the pedals and called my brother,” she recalled during our interview, ducking as low as she could on her couch. Moments later, the bus began to move. Her brother on the phone told her to stay still but she refused, seeing the bus as her cover to get out. Hiding among the pedals, she changed gears and started moving slowly behind the bus, both vehicles headed north to a nearby gas station where soldiers ordered them to keep driving. She did not leave her house for three days after the incident. “I felt a dagger in my stomach,” she said, stabbing her gut with an imaginary blade. “I bought a stone with rosemary, basil and rue at a nearby herbal store and cleansed myself repeatedly, then burned the stone” (Interview with Lucía, Monterrey resident, July 1, 2012).
Lucía was caught in crossfire. Most of my interviewees were not, but all were frequently confronted with the sensorial question: are those gunshots? Numerous confrontations between criminal groups and different levels of the state security apparatus lead residents to mistake other sounds for shootings. For example, a resident of San Nicolas wrote a letter to the editor of El Norte in 2010 to express his complaint against a major local brewery for disregarding the potential effects of using fireworks during their anniversary celebration:

What were they thinking at Cervecería Cuahutémoc; they let loose their 120th anniversary celebration, without caring about the panic they caused among the population who thought the fireworks were gunshots. On the other hand, pilgrimages [to the local Sanctuary of the Virgin of Guadalupe] won’t be able to
use fireworks because they cause panic and alarm among neighbors. (V. Rodríguez, 2010)

This letter was written in December, a month when thousands block streets to make a pilgrimage to the local Sanctuary of the Virgin of Guadalupe, located in the neighborhood of La Independencia. That these groups were prevented from using fireworks shows that shifts in local customs were needed to avoid further assaults on the senses.

Fear of being caught in crossfire also lead to the development of tweeter accounts such as #mtyfollow or #balacera#monterrey to report shootings (Avila Loera, 2010: 70-71). Interviewed for a local newspaper report on how “gadgets become vital,” a local professor provided details on the advantages and downfalls of monitoring such tweeter accounts when his children were out in 2010:

I keep my Tweetdeck open… That way I can monitor where my children are so that they don’t go where there’s a problem or in case they need to come home quickly… The problem is that sometimes there’s a tweet that says, for example: “Very loud noises were heard in the south area, near Lázaro Cárdenas,” and it turns out that … it was a party and they threw fireworks and then there’s a situation of panic… a negative side of [using] social networks [to monitor shootings] is that they throw us into spirals of paranoia… (Menchaca, 2010a)

One individual’s concern over a very loud noise can trigger panic among hundreds or thousands within seconds. Social media both reassured and alarmed local residents monitoring such tweeter accounts, especially when preparing to leave home or work. An online joke site provided a space to chat (and joke) about widespread concern over loud noises on December 23, 2012. An anonymous joker posted a meme (Figure 21) on a popular online site, perhaps enticed by the multiple fireworks ignited in Monterrey as part of pre-Christmas celebrations. The meme “Not Sure if Random Fireworks or Gun Shots” appeared under the title, “Living in Monterrey, a violent Mexican City” (MCNAMARA, 2012).
Within twelve hours, the meme had triggered an online conversation on this topic between Monterrey residents and people from other cities in Mexico and around the world. Supportive messages of “we feel you bro” and “I know the feel” were initially stated by men and women from Monterrey and other Mexican cities such as Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Torreón, Tijuana. Similar comments posted by men and women recalled this feeling as part of lived experience in Brazil, Venezuela, Israel, and Lebanon. A touch of national pride was added to the conversation by a male commentator who claimed: “A real Mexican can distinguish if those are gunshots or fireworks xD.” Two other male commentators gave advice on how to distinguish fireworks from gunshots:

Male1: By now I can really tell the difference, it’s all in the pattern you know….  
Male2: Well if it has an echo then it’s fireworks, if it has almost no echo and sounds drier then its fogones, it’s that simple.

The following Facebook post by Maria, a Monterrey resident in her early forties, exemplifies several posts I documented with similar content: “Fireworks should be forbidden in a city with levels of violence as high as this one. Damn Magic Forest” [a local

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16 The 161 comments I read in 2012 were no longer available when I consulted this website again on November 14, 2014. Nevertheless, I kept a digital copy of part of this conversation from 2012.
amusement park], I hate it” (Facebook post, March 21, 2013). Maria received ten likes within a couple hours and the following comments:

Commentator 1: 😊
Commentator 2: That’s what my sister said yesterday when a firework was set off near my house
Maria: It was horrible a while ago at Magic Forest because of their “Happiness Day,” I mean, come on
Commentator 2: When they give notice or you know it’s something they will celebrate, it’s ok, the problem is when you need to investigate
Maria: Exactly
Commentator 2: Tragic Forest!!!!!!
(Facebook post, March 21, 2013)

One of Maria’s contacts refers to the “the problem” of “investigating” a sound, of verifying whether one is in immediate danger or not. As I stepped out of a convenience store and walked in the direction of the Purisima plaza in downtown Monterrey, I began to hear firing sounds:

Tac. Tac. Tac. Tac. “Gunshots?” I think. Tac. Tac. Tac. Tac… I exchange a look with a woman eating corn. Tac. Tac. Tac… she confirms what they are with a nod. “They’re coming from the hills, but you can hear the echo over here.” I’m wondering whether it would be good to take refuge indoors, but nobody moves, the thirty people gathered [for an event in the plaza]… are not moving… conversation themes move away from the worn-out gunshots. “I better go inside,” someone said. “No, don’t worry about it, it’s up there,” said another. (Field Notes, April 24, 2013)

Multiple times during my fieldwork I heard loud noises that I was unable to distinguish, particularly if I was home alone. On this occasion, I could rely on others to confirm that the firing sounds I heard were indeed gunshots. People in the plaza reassured each other, and myself, that we were in no immediate danger and thus had no need to take refuge indoors. They could establish the distance between the shooting coming from the hills of La Independencia, a few miles away, and us more precisely than I could. A week later, I attended a dance performance at a center located closer to La Independencia and heard another shooting:

Tac. Tac. Tac. Tac. I recognize the sound of gunshots, much closer this time. Standing in an open area of the theater, I exchange looks with a dozen other people waiting [outside] for the dance performance to start. “Are those gunshots?” a man asks with his children nearby and I nod. We went inside. (Field Notes, April 31, 2013)

The dance performance was not cancelled and the organizers made no mention of the shooting; it was not considered a direct threat to the attendees. It is a paradox of fear that as a threat comes closer, the ability to establish distance between oneself and a threat is
refined. As one is exposed to real shootings, one is less likely to be deluded into thinking other firing sounds are shootings. That is, one becomes more assertive in distinguishing danger. Sensorial refinement goes further as individuals learn to calculate distance between oneself and a shooting. Carlos, who is a resident of La Independencia where the two shootings described above took place, describes this process in an interview:

At first you heard them [shootings] and “stay away from the door!”… we didn’t know whether they were at the corner, “no, it was up there”… but we got to a point where it was so much that I now knew that the sound, you could calculate, no, it’s a kilometer, they are firing at each other, I would go outside and smoke a cigarette and listen, look, now from that way! [He simulates calmly smoking a cigarette and pointing in the direction of his shooting-memory]... now, better to sit down and listen how they fire at each other but you could calculate that [the shooting] was far away… (Interview with Carlos, April 16, 2013)

As multiple shootings take place in his neighborhood, the sensation of proximity to danger shifts from “here” as exemplified by Carlos crying out to his family to stay away from the door of their house, to a “there,” so “far away” he can calmly go outside and smoke a cigarette to appreciate the distance he establishes between himself and danger. Sensorial refinement allows for a surreal stretching of space. Moreover, repeated exposure to gunfire can also open a sort of hermeneutics of shootings. Alicia, a 32-year old graphic designer, described interpretation attempts by her gun-loving friends:

At night, on weekends, it’s happened to us to hear shootings… and I have friends who are really into guns [super aficionados a las armas], so they’ll say, “this is a I-don’t-know-what”… and, man [wey], you’re listening to the bullets… “this is a whatever-rifle” [pause], and that is “another weapon” and then “that is the army”… (Interview with Alicia, February 18, 2013)

Unlike her friends, Alicia knew little about guns, but she provided a peek into collective attempts to interpret action based on patterns of sounds.

**Evil Euphemisms**

Although the word *narco* (short for *narcotraficante* or drug trafficker) was commonly used in political and media discourses to name and encompass new perpetrators of violence, these acquired a different name in everyday life. When violence escalated in Nuevo León, words like *narco* or Zeta could be too fear invoking to pronounce. Leslie, a sociologist I met with regularly, conducted research on a topic unrelated to violence in a municipality close to Monterrey in 2007 where she observed the following:

In Parás, we interviewed a woman who was well informed [of what happened in her town]… she invited us to an event. I remember [the woman saying], “here in Parás, everybody knows it, they’re here,” but she wouldn’t say who. She drew a Z on the tablecloth, she would look at you and she drew a Z… “They are taking over places, they are watching us.” (Interview with Leslie, September 9, 2013)
The woman’s hesitance to pronounce the name of the criminal group Zeta captures the dimension of her fear. The word was taboo for her, at least at a public event. In his history of fear in the West, French historian Jean Delumeau (1978) traced a similar refusal among residents of several European cities in the 17th and 18th centuries to speak of incoming plagues:

A sort of unanimity in the refusal of words considered taboo. They were avoided. Or, if they were used in the beginning of an epidemic, then it was in a negative and reassuring tone such as ‘it’s not really the plague.’ To name evil would be to lose the last resort to keep it away (ibid: 147, translation by author).

Similarly, several interviewees in Monterrey feared using certain words to name new perpetrators of violence in public places. “If you’re in a coffee shop and you’re talking about drug traffickers or a fucking kidnapper or whatever, people are afraid of using those words” (Interview with Mario, February 6, 2013).

In 2009, as Monterrey residents sought to explain to themselves who was responsible for these new forms of violence, conversations began to feature a new character: los malitos. Roughly translated as “those little evil guys,” the term is almost cute compared to other names used to designate those involved in organized crime elsewhere in Mexico: la maña, los mañosos, los malandros or los malos (all references to evil). As noted by Delumeau, social groups will seek to construct and name what they are afraid of (1978: 31). This process provides solace, by transforming an unclear or unknown threat, as illustrated by Mauricio’s perceptions above, into a concrete object one can confront, at least in discourse. In this case, multiple forms and sources of violence, multiple perpetrators of violence were synthesized, simplified, and euphemized as los malitos.

The term los malitos is first mentioned in a main local newspaper as part of a resident’s account of car theft in 2009: “los malitos (gunmen) pointed a gun at him [her neighbor], pulled him out [of his pick-up truck] and then drove out through the same street” (El Norte, 2009). The newspaper reporter felt the need to include a parenthesis in this piece and explain that los malitos were gunmen. Over time, explanations were no longer necessary as the term gained widespread use to the point of annoying some local residents. In letters to this newspaper’s editor, the use of the term was contested multiple times in 2010:

Why call them “malitos” or “mañosos”? Call them by their name: assassins. (El Norte, 2010)

Why do they [people] call them “malitos”? These are not the enemies from Pipo’s “little adventures,” these are real-life criminals who do not care about anybody’s life. Call them by their name and fight them accordingly. (R. Moreno, 2010)

The second complaint points to a popular reference easily recognizable to many Monterrey residents, including myself, who watched a local family TV show in the 1980s and 1990s. José Marroquín Leal (1933-1998), warmly known to many Monterrey residents as Pipo, the King of Clowns, had a pink face, orange hair spiked on one side,
ski-like shoes, and the habit of pressing children’s noses on their birthdays singing “peep peep.” His popular TV show, aired until his death, included a segment on his aventuritas or little adventures with sidekick Professor Pilocho against los malitos: men armed with handguns or rifles, dressed in cowboy attire, complete with a hat, a heavy mustache, buckles and boots. As a rule, good confronted evil in these short stories in which Pipo unmistakably managed to outsmart los malitos and find a way out of danger.

This reference was most likely the initial inspiration for the use of this term in Monterrey, which has not, to my knowledge, been used in other parts of Mexico similarly ravaged by state and criminal violence. The earliest appearance of this term in my field notes is a quick note I wrote after a phone conversation with my mother while I was studying abroad in 2010. Although I had not yet decided to conduct fieldwork on violence or fear, I felt an urge to make note of such conversations. It was a time of generalized panic:

Mom says she hears sirens all the time. She says the quintas towards Santiago [country homes located in a nearby town] have been abandoned and that they are now inhabited by the “malitos.” She says it feels like living in the times of the Revolution. (Field Notes, August 28, 2010)

Two years later, as I resettled in Monterrey, the term was still widely used and came up numerous times in my conversations with men and women from lower and upper class neighborhoods. For example, a taxi driver commented on the closure of many small businesses in his neighborhood in the municipality of Apodaca following repeated extortion events. He recalled a conversation with the owner of a hardware store that took place five days before the interview:

I tell him, “hey, have the malitos come here” [oye, no te han caído los malitos] and he said, “well, they haven’t until now… Why do you ask?” And I tell him, “I’m a neighbor, I live on this avenue, over there… my daughter’s business, she had a taquería and the malitos came [cayeron los malitos], they wanted 20 thousand pesos”… (Interview, March 9, 2013)

I shared a table with an upper class woman at a birthday party who similarly closed a health clinic after criminals attempted to extort her:

She said los malitos came [le cayeron los malitos] to extort her. They threatened her saying they knew where she lived and where her kids were. She closed the clinic and sent her two sons to study abroad… “I would rather close my business than give one cent of the money my patients paid to improve their health to los malitos.” (Field Notes, August 11, 2012)

Confronted with similar threats of extortion, both rich and poor closed businesses to avoid further threats from los malitos. They both used the same expression: que te caigan los malitos, having los malitos show up or fall upon you. Although this term was often used in a commonsensical way, some interviewees had a critical stance toward it. When asked where they thought this term came from, two male interviewees replied:
I don’t like this calling them “los malitos.” This is organized crime, we try to diminish it; they’re delinquents…. (Interview with Cristian, February 19, 2013)

How can you live with the violence… of the sicarios, the narcotraficantes… You diminish it. It’s like the one who has emphysema, he minimizes it, “it’s a little lung infection,” to be able to live with it. “Oh, it’s los malitos” because if I say assassins, how can I go out if there are assassins? (Interview with Santiago, February 26, 2013)

Santiago illustrates most clearly what is achieved through euphemizing new perpetrators of violence with this term: to be able to live with it. The term los malitos draws no distinction between different perpetrators of violence, for example, between different groups of organized crime. Yet some interviewees took the classification one step further. Elena, a schoolteacher in the municipality of Guadalupe, made the following distinction:

I already had a classification… I didn’t get it from Monterrey, but China [a nearby town in Nuevo León where some of her extended family lives], los malos took [levantaron] cousins of mine, [we] even [had] a death in the family, los buenos were from the Golfo and los malos were the Zetas… (Interview with Elena, June 8, 2013)

In Elena’s classification, the terms bueno and malo or good and bad corresponded to different levels of violence employed by organized crime. The “good” were not those who were not involved in crime, but rather those who employed less violence in their criminal activities. Such a classification attests to what Elias calls the “lowering of the standards of tolerated violence” (Elias, 2000). Elena recalled a recent conversation with a friend, whose son-in-law was kidnapped. Her friend told Elena, “Oh, we are praying to God that it’s los buenos, because at least they don’t kill” (Interview with Elena, June 8, 2013). When five cars of armed men claiming to be part of the Gulf Cartel stopped Mauricio on a highway on his way back to Monterrey from South Padre Island, they told him he was lucky:

I was trembling, they told me they were from the Gulf Cartel and, “Why didn’t you stop?” “I don’t know,” [he replied] in the middle of the highway and, “If you hadn’t stopped with the Zetas, first they would have gunned you and then they would have asked questions.” They took my passport, broad daylight, machine guns, armed, they saw I wasn’t a Zeta and I was like, “What’s going on? No soldiers?” “No, we are the soldiers here.” (Field Notes, January 17, 2012)

Previously an “unknown enemy,” the new constellation of violence had a face and a name for many Monterrey residents. “The traffickers, the halcones… the kidnappers, the ones running the security houses [casas de seguridad where the kidnapped are held hostage], the killers. It’s all there, the different groups, all encompassed in the term los malitos” (Interview with Jorge, March 5, 2013). Nevertheless, others, such as Mauricio, disliked the widespread use of the term. “I hated that term los malitos, as if you could
minimize [this] shit.” For him, it was clear that violence was part of a business, “with different criminal branches: extortion, drug and arms trafficking… It has a name: the Gulf… the government is involved… everyone is involved, the gringos and the Mexicans, everyone is part of a rotten system” (Interview with Mauricio, March 1, 2013). Complex state-criminal collusions, as well as different types of criminals were synthesized in the folk devil los malitos.

The Making of a Cowboy “Folk Devil”

Specific objects and particular physical features became feared for their reference to these new social categories of el narco or its euphemized version, los malitos. The basic elements of the stereotyped feared criminal included: driving pick-up trucks, wearing mustaches, cowboy hats and boots. In the next excerpt, a group of college students in their early twenties describe how they react to individuals fitting this description on the streets:

Student 1: If you see a man in a truck behind you and he’s wearing a mustache and boots [which the student wouldn’t be able to see, but imagines nevertheless], no, be afraid.
Student 2: I put on my stupid face, I swear, I’m like driving and I see a truck and I put on my fragile face, you know, like I’m an asshole, don’t kidnap me because I’m stupid [he laughs, a male student laughs with him], I swear.
Student 3: I start to sing… I feel like if I’m in my world and I’m dancing [she dances, shakes her head around]… then they’re gonna be like, no, not her, she’s having such a great time [she laughs, two male students laugh with her].

(Field Notes, September 6, 2012)

To present themselves as unsuitable victims to individuals they perceived as criminals given the specific physical attributes mentioned above, a male college student “puts on a fragile face” and a female one sings to appear to be “having such a great time.” They laugh because there is a funny edge to some of these everyday performances that can be appreciated in the comfort of a group, even if the real and imaginary threats they are confronted with are not funny. Located in northern Mexico, the use of pick-up trucks in Monterrey is widespread as part of a local cowboy culture. This is particularly true in the countryside, where pick-up trucks provide a prime means of transportation through rugged terrain, and useful to transport goods to and from the metropolitan area as well. The fact that pick-up trucks would become feared objects meant that Monterrey residents were continuously expecting the worse when they saw one, especially if they saw several pick-up trucks together. Checo for example, the owner of a motorcycle store in San Pedro, referenced the adrenaline shot he felt at the sight of two pick-up trucks when riding his motorcycle in the countryside:

You always have that [fear]… you’re traveling on a path and you suddenly see two pick-up trucks facing you… you pray, believe me, you pray…you see two pick-ups, eight guys in front of you and hail-Mary-full-of-grace-our-lord-is-with-thee until you pass them. There is an adrenaline shot, until you pass and then you say, oh [strong exhale], they were ranchers, they were farmers, etc, but you
always have that perception and you have to overcome that fear and you need to control yourself. (Interview with Checo, February 20, 2013)

The first thought that comes to mind when Checo sees two pick-up trucks is danger. Particular objects lead individuals to hold their breath, but there were also particular tastes and behaviors that placed them in a state of alert. Moreover, both narcos and los malitos were perceived as men with low education and squandering habits at bars or restaurants. Santiago, a literature student at a public university in his early thirties, went to a bar in Monterrey that he believes has begun to adopt cultural elements from the state of Sinaloa—considered the birthplace of drug trafficking in Mexico. The bar plays Sinaloan banda music and serves shrimp tacos. According to Santiago, the women who attend this bar wear shorter skirts and shirts showing a low cleavage (enseñando el escotazo). He was with a group of friends, when the presence of men with squandering habits made him want to leave immediately:

You know when it’s narcos… you see a table with two ugly guys and three whisky bottles that they’re not going to drink, even if they’re drunks, they order the bottles to show that they have money, otherwise you order one, drink it, and then order another one, why get 3 bottles of the same whisky? And with several girls, eight really attractive girls, well, they’re narcos. I mean, they didn’t get them because they’re attractive… they all dress the same: boots, cowboy pants, reptile belt, hat, yeah… They’re unkempt, fat, with thick beards… (Interview with Santiago, February 26, 2013).

Santiago, like many Monterrey residents I talked to, had a very precise idea of what a narco looks like. This figure is male, even if there is a long history of female traffickers in Mexico (Carey, 2014). He dresses like a cowboy and shows off his wealth in a public place. Some interviewees, like Jorge, a tech worker in his forties, were critical of the stereotype:

You can’t stereotype “this is a malito” because of how they dress or behave… drawing attention with sumptuous pick-up trucks, behaving in public as if they own the place, ordering very expensive food and drinks. You realize that, the people who run these groups do not dress or act that way… (Interview with Jorge, March 5, 2013)

Jorge knows people who work in the drug trade that do not fit this description. He said they are “educated,” pointing to yet another element of the stereotype: low education. Nevertheless, questioning the stereotype is another way of highlighting its existence. The widespread attribution of certain physical characteristics and types of behavior to a semi-fictitious character Monterrey residents perceived in their everyday work or leisure routines served the purpose of rationalizing uncertainties in the midst of a blurry “war on drugs.” The category los malitos and certain objects (pick-up trucks) did become a symbol for new constellations of violence, in the same way that “the fur-collared anorak and the scooter [characteristic of the “Mods”]… became sufficient in themselves to stimulate hostile and punitive reactions” (Cohen, 2002: 38). Nevertheless, this category
served to simplify perpetrators of violence and obscure the degree to which state security agencies were involved.

A Sharply Delineated Social Category to Interpret a Blurry War

As mentioned above, the term *los malitos* does not draw distinctions between different fractions of organized crime or between different types of criminals (kidnappers, killers, drug traffickers, etc). It also does not consider the state as a perpetrator of violence, even if there is abundant evidence of the state carrying out extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and colluding with criminal actors (Amnesty International, 2013; Daly, Heinle, & Shirk, 2012). The creation of *los malitos* was a collective enterprise serving very precise function. It is precisely because one could not be sure of who was a threat that it became necessary to create a very defined figure to encompass and name fear; to adopt a particular fear as a shared habit (Delumeau, 1978: 48). The perversity of this figure, *los malitos*, lies in its representation of both perpetrators of violence and victims. In an attempt to rationalize a blurry war and in a desperate effort to believe that one could be categorically spared from harm, Monterrey residents affirmed that victims of homicide or forced disappearances were “surely into something,” “had ties,” and were certainly *malitos*. Several college students highlighted this point in a conversation at the end of class:

Student 1: they kill somebody and then it’s like, “well it was surely because of” or “he was surely so and so”
Student 2: “he had ties,” yeah, “he was into something”
Student 1: they kill a cop and it’s like, “of course he was part of it”
Student 2: or they kidnapped so and so and “mmmm well it’s because he was a drug addict”…
Student 1: I think that’s how it started… it was about drawing a line and saying “well, he must have done something, right?”…
Student 4: to protect yourself as a society, incorruptible, I mean, to say “he was wrong, we’re still right,” I mean, we’re pure but he was wrong
Student 2: and people say “good”
Student 4: “it was his turn because he was a *malito*”
(Field Notes, September 6, 2012)

It was precisely because one could not be sure of who could be victimized that individuals affirmed that victims were forcefully criminals and thus guilty of their victimization. Drawing a line between oneself and multiple victims by means of categorizing them as *los malitos* provided justification for various killings. Cohen’s (2001) later work on denial becomes more relevant in the formation of this “folk devil,” fabricated at the bottom and not top, which served to normalize violence.

Cohen on Cohen: Folk Devils and the Social Construction of Denial

After nearly twenty years of academic life in Great Britain, Stanley Cohen (1942-2013) moved to Israel with his family in 1980 where he became involved in human rights issues. The South African sociologist best known for his work on *Folk Devils and Moral
Panics ([1972] 2002) turned from the analysis of social overreaction to minor vandalism in Britain to the study of social underreaction to the routine torture of Palestinian detainees in Israel (Welch, 2007). Although there was some unease and concern, Cohen was puzzled to find that, “there was no outrage… there was something like an unspoken collusion to ignore (or pretend to ignore?) the whole subject [of torture]” (Cohen, 2001: xi). Perhaps finding his sociological toolbox inadequate, Cohen turns to psychoanalysis and philosophy to examine the slippery question of “denial” through the writings of Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre. In States of Denial, he builds a theoretical binary—denial/acknowledgement—he was only partially satisfied with (Cohen, 2001: x). Although this work provides a monumental catalogue of types of denial carried out by both individuals and states, the sociological mechanisms that were so clearly outlined in his earlier work are missing. In this article, I bridge the work of the early and late Cohen by examining the utility of his notion of “folk devil” not only to the production of a “moral panic” but also to the social construction of denial. In doing so, I seek to restitute the social basis of his early analyses to his later questions.

“Moral panics” is the most popular concept of Cohen’s theoretical pair. Cohen used to joke with his colleagues that “if he had a penny for every time the concept of moral panic has been misused, he would have long previously been able to take early retirement” (Taylor, 2013). Addressing this conceptual confusion, multiple scholars have established, reformulated and reviewed criteria to clarify its basic elements (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Levi, 2009; Young, 2009). Yet in this ongoing debate lifting this concept to the status of a “moral panic theory” (Ben-Yehuda, 2009), the core characteristics of “folk devils” have been largely taken for granted. Drawing on labeling theory, Howard Becker’s (1963) writings on outsiders in particular, Cohen defines “folk devils” as “distinguishable social types… visible reminders of what we should not be” ([1972] 2002: 2). In chapter two of Folk Devils and Moral Panics, he provides a “media inventory” for the manufacturing of the youth groups Mods and Rockers as disproportionate social threats to society in Great Britain. The media relied on: 1) exaggeration and distortion (the use of misleading headlines, for example); 2) prediction (assuming that a fearful event will inevitably happen again); and 3) symbolization or the process whereby a word (Mod, for example) and certain objects (hair styles, motorcycles) become equated with a status (delinquency) and related emotions (fear).

There was symbolization at work in the social construction of los malitos in Monterrey. In the same way that “the fur-collared anorak and the scooter [characteristic of the “Mods”]… became sufficient in themselves to stimulate hostile and punitive reactions” (Cohen, [1972] 2002: 38), cowboy hats and pick-up trucks became a symbol for new perpetrators of gruesome violence in Monterrey. Yet unlike the Mods and Rockers, los malitos is not an exaggeration but rather a euphemism of a real social threat. It is a caricature of the deadly criminal actors it misrepresents, as well as a means of refracting the involvement of the state as a perpetrator of violence. Moreover, los malitos is not a product of the media but of everyday discourse only occasionally picked up by the media. Such a case calls for a revision of the socio-emotional basis upon which a “folk devil” may emerge, as well as of the different functions it may fulfill.

In his history of fear in medieval Europe, Delumeau (1978: 30) draws a relevant distinction between anxiety and fear. Whereas anxiety relates to a global sense of insecurity in the face of an unclear or unknown danger, fear has a concrete object one can
confront. Delumeau argues that anxiety is harder to bear than fear, leading social groups to fabricate specific fears (peurs particulières) or named fears (peurs nommées) in response. Although he does not use Cohen’s language, Delumeau is also interested in the fabrication of “folk devils.” His is not a “media inventory” but an “inventory of evils” manufactured by the Church to organize generalized anxiety into fear of: Turks, Jews, heretics, and women, particularly sorceresses. In the midst of agricultural disasters, urban and rural revolts, threats of Turkish invasion and the decimation of the black plague, Delumeau argues that “the West conquered anxiety by ‘naming,’ that is by identifying, and ‘fabricating’ particular fears” (Delumeau 1978: 31). Cohen would agree that “scapegoating… [is] more likely to occur in situations of maximum ambiguity” and that naming is key, for “as soon as the new phenomenon [of adults’ post-war anxieties around economically autonomous youth, in his case] was named, the devil’s shape could be easily identified” ([1972] 2002: 219-220).

In a similar fashion, los malitos provided Monterrey residents with a means of organizing an incomprehensible increase in violence as a specific fear of pick-up-driving evil men dressed in cowboy attire. There is clearly a stereotyped criminal in this figure that, as mentioned above, obscures state involvement in increased crime. Yet the most perverse dimension of this “folk devil” is its ability to encompass not only (multiple) perpetrators of violence but also victims. In an attempt to rationalize a blurry war and in a desperate effort to sustain the belief that one could be categorically spared from harm, Monterrey residents affirmed that victims of homicide or forced disappearances were “surely into something,” “had ties,” and were certainly malitos. This is the point where the early and late Cohen can be integrated in one single theoretical framework. The “folk devil” becomes an artifice to draw a moral boundary between good and evil that hopes the “good” might remain safe through condemning the “evil” whose deaths or disappearances are so justified. Such a case suggests that “folk devils” may be fabricated at the bottom and not only at the top (media, political actors, church), to normalize violence through: 1) euphemization instead of amplification; 2) fusing victims and perpetrators; while 3) screening the state and the political roots of the problem.
Chapter 4. The Logistics of Fear

Contemporary studies of fear, including fear of crime surveys, tend to highlight the negative facets of this emotion: fear makes us stay at home, suspect of our neighbors, reduce our nightlife (Briceño-León, 2007; Cárdia, 2002; Pain, 1997; Reguillo, 2002; Rotker, 2002; Sparks, Girling, & Loader, 2001). Yet precisely for these reasons, fear can simultaneously tighten and strengthen social relations. Individuals may group in caravans or convoys to confront feared trajectories or they may seek to regroup for mourning or for leisure in parks and streets that would be threatening if they were out alone. I counter the dominant notion of fear as a destroyer of the social fabric with evidence of how and why fear both tears and tightens social relations.

Gruesome, spectacular violence imposed practical constraints on the simplest everyday activities for Monterrey residents. In the words of a journalist observing this phenomenon prior to my arrival in the field, a “momentary analysis” was required to fulfill everyday activities:

Fear originated by violence and insecurity has slowly but steadily paralyzed regiomontanos [Monterrey residents]. Activities that used to be carried out without prior thought now require a momentary analysis: “is the neighborhood I am heading to safe?” “Should I go out at night?” “What street should I take to arrive safely?” (Menchaca, 2010b)

Over the course of my fieldwork, Monterrey residents frequently spoke of a “before” when they didn’t think twice about carrying out everyday activities versus an “after” when they had to “think through things.” “Now everything begins with security: where are we going? What time are we going? How are we going?” said one. “There is whole logistical exercise that has to be done now; you have to think through things” said another (Field Notes July 15, 2012; Field Notes August 16, 2012).

Local survey data (ENSI-7) on fear of crime, victimization risks, perceived insecurity, as well as shifts in everyday activities provide evidence of the widespread impact of violence on individual behavior. I draw on this data to examine shifts in four standard everyday social activities (going out at night, visiting friends or relatives, going out for lunch/dinner, and going out for a walk), as well as four security measures adopted at home (adding locks, gates, cameras, and watch dogs). I compare data on Monterrey with two cities in northern Mexico with lower and higher levels of violence: Mexicali and Ciudad Juárez. I conclude that higher levels of violence were correlated with significant shifts in individual behavior and that these shifts were considerably greater in relation to the social activities than the security measures considered by this survey.

After analyzing survey data on the widespread impact of increased violence on everyday activities, I draw on ethnographic observations and local media accounts to outline four logistics of fear.17 The term logistics, a military term in its origins, is particularly adequate to describe the practices documented in this chapter given that these

17 The general theoretical framework for this chapter, as well as the lower class portion of the data, were previously published in an edited volume on violence and everyday life in the urban margins (Villarreal, 2015).
are military strategies down-scaled and extended into civilian life: armoring spaces and vehicles, camouflage (wealth, practices, professions), traveling in caravans or convoys and regrouping in new public spaces. Unlike most scholarship on violence and everyday life focusing on the living conditions of the urban poor (Auyero & Lara, 2012; Goffman, 2009; D. Goldstein, 2004; D. M. Goldstein, 2003; McIlwaine & Moser, 2007; Wacquant, 2004), this study began as an examination of the impact of violence and fear on the upper classes. It is precisely this entry point that allowed me to detect the four strategies I develop in this chapter, as these were far more visible with the resources of the wealthy. I then set out to examine whether these strategies held true across the class spectrum. I found that both upper and lower class residents sought to armor their neighborhoods and homes, camouflage themselves and their businesses out of fear of kidnapping and extortion, travel in caravans to avoid hijacking, and regroup to compensate for the loss of previous social spaces and practices. While the first two strategies reconfirm what most scholarly work on urban violence has documented in terms of fear tearing the social fabric and destroying public space, the last two strategies attest to a less examined dimension of fear. The central claim I make in this chapter is that fear may both tear the social fabric and bring people together; both destroy public space and create new forms of social life.

**Fear of Crime Statistics**

Drawing on the victimization survey (ENSI-7) carried out in 2010 by the Mexican National Geography and Statistics Institute (INEGI), the following graphs summarize residents’ fear of crime, perceptions of risk and insecurity for the cities of Mexicali, Monterrey and Ciudad Juárez. These three cities correspond to cases of medium, medium-high (rising) and high violence in 2010. Individuals were asked whether they feared becoming victims of a crime when they left their home (1=never; 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=always). Monterrey residents’ responses to this question were located between sometimes and often, between Mexicali and Ciudad Juárez. When asked whether they thought their likelihood of becoming a victim was high or low (1=very low, 2=low, 3=high, 4=very high), Monterrey residents reported that their likelihood of becoming victims of a crime was high, again, located between Mexicali and Ciudad Juárez. When asked to assess the current security situation in Monterrey (1=good, 2=regular, 3=bad, 4=really bad), residents considered that the security situation was halfway between regular and bad.
Considering these graphs together, fear of crime, perception of victimization risk and perceived insecurity increased as violence levels increased. This finding may seem commonsensical, yet it contrasts a whole “culture of fear” literature arguing that fear of crime is a function of the media or political manipulation and not “real” risk (Furedi, 2006; Glassner, 2009; Simon, 2006). The graph provides a comparative baseline for the next graph on shifts in social activities and security measures adopted in these three cities. Each of these two variables was constructed by compiling data from four ENSI-7 questions. The variable social activities sums up whether individuals stopped: 1) going out at night; 2) visiting relatives or friends; 3) going out for a walk; and 4) going out for lunch or dinner. The variable security measures indicates whether individuals made the following security-related adaptations at home: 1) adding locks; 2) fences or walls; 3) setting up an alarms and 4) getting a watch dog.

These variables provide insights into the behavioral shifts of hypothetical average residents for each of these cities. In 2010, the average Monterrey resident changed 1.84 of these 4 social activities and adopted 0.69 of these 4 security measures. These results were one point higher than Mexicali and one point lower than Ciudad Juárez. Thus, higher perceptions of fear of crime, risks of victimization and insecurity were correlated with greater shifts in social activities and security measures. The difference between the shifts in these cities was much greater in relation to the variable social activities than security measures. This may be due to the fact that individuals already had locks, gates, walls and dogs. The ethnographic findings of this paper provide insights into how residents reinforced the security measures they already had: locking doors or gates they previously left unlocked, covering the see-through areas of gates they already had in place, increasing the height of walls that were already there or changing the breed of their dogs (from poodles to dobbemans, for example).
In sum, this survey data revealed that higher levels of violence were correlated with significant shifts in individual behavior and that these shifts were considerably greater in relation to the *social activities* than the *security measures* considered by this survey. Yet a crucial limitation of this victimization survey, like other victimization or fear of crime surveys, is that questions are designed to measure shifts in individual behavior. Yes or no questions such as “did you stop going out at night?” give us an approximate sense of what percentage of individuals may have stopped going out at night. However, the method cannot tell us how people continued to go out at night, as well as what these new strategies can reveal in terms of shifts in social relations. Moreover, the ethnographic portion of this paper will reveal other *security measures* adopted by Monterrey residents to cope with organized crime not considered by these survey questions—designed most likely by modeling victimization surveys developed in the United States or Great Britain measuring individual responses to petty and not organized crime. An updated survey might consider questions such as: Did you change the exterior of your business to avoid extortion? Did you change your place of residence out of security concerns? When dealing with organized crime, individuals may change their residence, occupation, even physical appearance, among other aspects discussed in the following sections of this chapter.
Armoring
1: defensive covering for the body; especially: covering (as of metal) used in combat
2: a quality or circumstance that affords protection
3: a protective outer layer

As mentioned above, the average Monterrey resident adopted 0.69 of 4 security measures considered by the ENSI-7 survey in 2010: adding locks, fences or gates, alarms and watch dogs. In this section, I examine a series of related practices summed up in a word that became increasingly popular in everyday usage and state policies: armoring. Public officials used “armoring” to encompass new security strategies deployed in municipalities and neighborhoods across the Monterrey Metropolitan Area (for the “armoring” of the municipality of San Pedro, see chapter 5). Among the upper class, the armoring of everyday spaces was extended to vehicles. The reporter of a national newspaper described a vehicle armoring plant in Monterrey in 2010:

Their [the upper class] level of fear can be measured in the level of armoring they request… level 5, which resists blows from R-15 and AK-47 guns… Two armed guards with 9 mm guns secure the entrance of Armorcar [a pseudonym] in downtown Monterrey. A row of luxury cars stand in line ready for pick-up. Most of them have a level 5 armoring. (El Universal, 2010)

Maria, an art dealer in her thirties, used to drive a convertible BMW. In conversation with some of her friends she recalled what it was like to drive with the wind blowing through her hair: “I don’t give a damn about cars, but I loved that car… I felt like a movie star” (Field Notes, March 26, 2013). Her parents bought an armored car for her and sold the BMW without asking her. After assessing the risks of drawing too much attention with the use of bodyguards, the family opted for car armoring, as well as the use of private security when necessary. She described an episode when her car stopped in the middle of the street. She got out of the car, a policeman approached her and in no time private security—alerted of her vehicle malfunction through a private security system—arrived and shouted:

“Get in the car!”… they had one [private security agent] on one corner, one on another and I’m like, wait, the car turned off… and they scolded me, “Why do you think you have this car? So that you never get out, never. Never! [she shouted hysterically] What you just did is a warning for us, you get it? The policeman is a thief.” All the time, you have to be locked up… if something happens, the button [she simulates pressing a button], don’t get out of the car, you can’t open the windows [windows cannot be lowered completely, as that would defeat the purpose of driving an armored car], sometimes I say air, I need air… (Field Notes, March 26, 2013)

This example illustrates the collision between private and public security: scolded by her security employees, this woman was advised to stay away from state officials they referred to as criminals or “thieves”. When asked whether it would be better for her to drive a more discrete car—a common strategy described in the next section—this woman replied: “They [private security] told us they [criminals] go for the ones who are not
protected first, but I wonder if this armoring is really effective.” I attended a meal organized by a business association for a General to provide his perception on security in the region. I was seated at a table with three businessmen and a Captain. When prompted on whether security had improved, the Captain replied:

“Businessmen have armored themselves and their security is better…” [he recalled that] a businessman was chased down by criminals shooting at his vehicle, “but because he was in an armored car, he survived.” The Captain said the man stayed in there until the soldiers arrived. (Field Notes, June 11, 2013)

The Captain asserts that “security is better” in terms of the improved security measures of the upper class, which included the use of armored vehicles. In 2012, Armorcar became the main armored vehicle provider in Mexico armoring a total of 400 units in 2011 and 2000 in 2012 (Brito, 2012; Informativo, 2011). The plant manager explained that their offer was expanding to other sectors of the population as well:

Even if luxury vans are still the most armored vehicles, Armorcar offers a range of seven levels of protection and we now offer armoring for some middle-range cars or vans purchased by middle executives of big firms, the directors of government agencies and the directors of middle firms. (Informativo, 2011)

In the case of armored vehicles, behaviors first adopted by the elite began to spread to other social strata. Armoring a vehicle costs between US$30,000 and US$70,000. Yet the security industry responded to generalized fear among all social strata with “armoring” options for different budgets, including the “armoring” of car windows for the equivalent of US$20.

Closed-off and gated neighborhoods became increasingly common not only among the upper classes but also in middle and working-class sectors. A few years before the wealthy municipality of San Pedro was politically marketed as the “armored municipality” of the metropolitan area, political actors of primarily middle and working-class municipalities were already discussing and implementing “armoring” policies. Escalating drug violence hit working-class municipalities like Guadalupe first, making neighbor municipalities like San Nicolas nervous of violence spillover. As a result, a

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18 See Elias on the spread of courtly manners to other social strata in France during the 18th century. “There was a more or less limited courtly circle which first stamped the models only for the needs of its own social situation and in conformity with the psychological condition corresponding to it. But clearly the structure and development of French society as a whole gradually made ever broader strata willing and anxious to adopt the models developed above them: they spread, likewise very gradually, throughout the whole of society, certainly not without undergoing some modification in the process” (Elias, 2000: 92).

19 The Monterrey Metropolitan Area is comprised of nine municipalities. Information on the number of closing-off authorizations provided to neighborhoods in the past twenty years was requested from local authorities for each of these municipalities. Two municipalities did not respond, three replied that they keep no registry of closed neighborhoods, one affirmed that no neighborhoods have been closed off and the remaining three provided the following information for 2009-2012: in Guadalupe, 17 neighborhoods were closed off with the program “Safe Neighborhood”; in San Nicolás de los Garza, 28 neighborhoods were “armored” and San Pedro officials replied that 25% of their neighborhoods were private or semi-private in 2013. Hence, there is great variation on whether and how each municipality regulates and keeps track of neighborhoods closing off.
former Mayor of San Nicolas sought to build a wall between these two municipalities in February 2008, arousing public debate and rejection before increased violence brought its approval two years later (A. Rodríguez, 2008a, 2008b; A. Rodríguez & Martínez, 2011). This Mayor spearheaded local initiatives to gate parks, soccer fields and neighborhoods starting in 2007 with the program “Armoring Neighborhoods,” paving the way for the following administration (2009-2012) to gate 28 neighborhoods. A newspaper article in 2009 gathered comments from residents and authorities from several municipalities to assert that in the face of increased violence and crime:

Many city residents have made a decision: to lock themselves up… together with their neighbors, they have decided to gate their neighborhood and control its access. Means used to isolate themselves include fences, chains and even large flowerpots. (Montes de Oca, 2009)

For Memo, a 57-year old San Nicolas resident who paid his education making one thousand tamales per week, such public policies may have contributed to emptying public spaces like the park across from his house:

You used to be able to go out on the block, with kids… there were shootings nearby but people still got together… now they’re empty even by day, on Sundays… they gated almost all parks in San Nicolas, they put steel fences around them… cameras in some of them… they call it armoring… the municipality asked the people to vote… they voted yes… but now with the armoring, they don’t use it… (Interview with Memo, October 21, 2012)

Unable to render public space secure, the local state replicates private security strategies and prompts the gating of neighborhoods and parks—although these measures may have contrary effects, for neighbors may feel more vulnerable inside a locked space with nowhere to run if a shooting takes place. For Memo, armoring his home in San Nicolas took the form of locking a front gate at all times that was previously left open during the day. This move involved convincing and training family members to enforce this family policy. “We all have keys [to the front lock]… my sister is the one who is still too trusting [muy confianzuda], she hasn’t gotten used to the key and she leaves it open and we call her attention…” (Interview, October 21, 2012). He recalled hearing at least 30 shootings in the three years prior to the interview, with deaths of between four and ten people in five of them. Nevertheless, his father did not want to lock the front gate. Memo recalled his exact words: “No, we can trust each other here [aquí hay confianza]… I hate being locked up like an animal.” Memo’s father was harassed by youth in his neighborhood and changed his mind about the lock, stopped his daily walks, spending increasingly more time at home. “How our life is changed by all this,” Memo added, “such a strong violence.”

Guadalupe, considered the “dormitory municipality” of the metropolitan area and home to many factory workers followed San Nicolas with its program “Safe Neighborhood” gating 17 neighborhoods in this same period (2009-2012). However, some Guadalupe residents did not wait for authorities to approve closing off their neighborhoods, setting up fences instead (El Norte, 2011). Residents of other
municipalities applied similar security practices using “chicken wire, wooden or metal poles, security booths, guards, bars, barrels, block walls, barbed wire, cameras and even laboriously crafted iron fences…” (Vázquez, 2013). Where walls were already in place, some residents opted for increasing their height. For example, Juan, a 30-year old man spoke of his municipality Juárez as: “no man’s land, the police is there to harass and not protect, a lot of corpses have been found in nearby hills, people are just looking for opportunities to rob” (Field Notes, April 12, 2013). In response, he raised the walls of his home an extra 2.5 meters. Diana, a woman living in San Pedro, requested that her family raise the height of a gate bordering their home from “one meter to three or four meters, no, let’s say it was two meters, which was too low, and it was raised to twice that height” (Interview with Diana, February 10, 2013).

Both upper and lower class residents responded to increased violence and fear with gated neighborhoods, closed streets, walls, all indicators of increased fear and tears in the social fabric. The upper class employed its own means to gate its neighborhoods, while middle and lower-class sectors could also rely on local state support to do the same. With state support, structures first associated with the upper class were spread into middle and lower class sectors of the metropolitan area. Additionally, the securing of everyday spaces was extended to vehicles, as illustrated by the growing armored vehicle industry in Mexico. The word “armoring” employed in these state policies was also popularized in marketing and everyday language. During my fieldwork, I was offered an armored bank account (cuenta blindada) and made note of several billboards advertising talks to armor personal relationships (blindar tu relación de pareja) and even highlighting the importance of prayer to armor one’s soul (Ora, blindar tu alma). Yet in its most practical sense, arming may draw more attention to individuals or businesses attempting to avoid crime. In the next section I turn to a sample of camouflaging techniques they may employ instead.

Camouflaging
1: the disguising especially of military equipment or installations with paint, nets, or foliage; the disguise so applied

It was a cool, sunny day in an exclusive country home on the outskirts of Monterrey when dozens of men and women gathered to celebrate the 60th birthday of three of their friends. Violence and security were common topics discussed over food and drinks. Seated at a table with three upper class women, I learned stories of who among the party guests had been kidnapped, who had been extorted and who had left the city. The sample at my table was small and yet sufficient to gain a sense of widespread victimization among the upper class, as one woman had a kidnapping in her family and the other had to close her business following extortion. This second woman commented on the security practices of a man who had just left the table—a member of a wealthy family who founded one of the largest firms in the city. “This man keeps a very low profile,” she said, “Nobody in his family uses bodyguards or chauffeurs, the man bought a beetle and drives this car around town” (Field Notes, July 11, 2013). In contexts of heightened violence and crime, the use of markers of wealth such as luxury cars or bodyguards is reassessed as a risk factor. Thus, many upper class residents changed their cars as a means of “lowering their profile,” a phrase I heard repeatedly during fieldwork observations and interviews. Checo, the owner of a motorcycle business catering to the upper class,
reported wealthy men showing up at his store in San Pedro in old, damaged pick-up trucks:

I would say that in 2010, 2011 all Porsches, Carreras and big cars like that disappeared [from the streets]… Monterrey was always a city where… you showed what you had… in 2009, 2010 in its peak, people hid their cars… or they took them out of the country to be able to use them… and they were worried about “which van or what look is good for me.” They asked, “Hey, what do you think about this little ol’ truck?” (Interview with Checo, February 20, 2013)

The widespread adoption of these individual camouflaging strategies can be observed in shifts in the local automobile market. In a newspaper article, the president of the Association of Car Sellers of Monterrey (ARCA) detailed a process of “inverse shopping” revealed in used car sales in 2011 relative to 2010. He explained why, in his view, sales for used luxury cars dropped 50%, while sales for used middle-range cars increased 30%:

Someone who was driving a Suburban on a daily basis wants to sell it due to fear and buy a Jetta, the one who had a Jetta feels in the same situation and prefers a Monza… a lot of people are lowering their profiles… it’s what we call inverse shopping… because the recommendation that we’re all making right now is not having a luxury van, better to sell it or store it, get a small car, so this is why these are scarce and expensive. (Ortega, 2011)

As a result, there was a high offer of used luxury cars at bargain prices during this period. Mauricio, a factory owner in his early forties, recalled during an interview that he heard people from Guadalajara traveled to Monterrey when violence was at its peak to buy cars because, “people were selling their [luxury] cars like crazy” (Interview, March 1, 2013). People were also losing their cars like crazy as vehicle theft soared and Nuevo León became the state with the highest car theft rates in the country. The table below shows a clear and steady increase in both car theft and the proportion of car theft carried out with violence (with guns) starting in 2007.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Total Car Thefts & Car Thefts with Violence (with guns) \hline
2007 & \ & \hline
2008 & \ & \hline
2009 & \ & \hline
2010 & \ & \hline
2011 & \ & \hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Car theft data for states of Mexico (2007-2011).}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{20} Car theft is the most reliable crime figure in Mexico, as individuals are required to report theft in order to claim insurance for a stolen car.
Specific vehicle models deemed popular among organized crime became subsequently unpopular in used car lots, as documented in a newspaper article from 2010:

Given the wave of car thefts with violence, *regiomontantos* began to change their luxury vans at car lots... for more modest vehicles... “Nobody wants a Tahoe,” said the president of ARCA, “actually, they have offered us several Tahoes, Suburbs, Expeditions because this is a vehicle with a high demand among organized crime.” (Villasáez, 2010)

*Mauricio* too changed his pick-up truck after drug lords stopped him on a highway on his drive back to Monterrey after a weekend at his vacation home in South Padre Island, Texas. “I had a Honda Ridgeline pick-up, which I was told is a favorite among *narcos*” (Field Notes, January 17, 2013). Fearing that he might be stopped again, he changed his pick-up truck for a Civic. Interviewees thus reported “an analysis” of what vehicles they thought organized crime might prefer and should thus avoid using as described by *Checo*:

A family car... suddenly, they were stealing the mom-mobiles too because those two doors opened like this [he simulates sliding a van door open] and they could pull out their *cuernos de chivo* [guns]... there was an analysis of which vehicles could help you go unnoticed... People who were driving a Ferrari a year before and you see them driving a regular little pick up or a beetle.

(Interview with *Checo*, February 20, 2013)

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21 When I began my fieldwork in 2012, I was told over several informal conversations that in 2010 and 2011 one could see small caravans of such stolen luxury vehicles on the streets as organized crime moved around the city. When the military reinforced its operations, organized crime “lowered its profile” as well, adopting more discreet vehicles. Military personnel informed members of the upper class during a security talk I attended, that organized crime had shifted its strategies and was now employing ice cream trucks or similar commercial vehicles or taxis to move more discretely around the city (Field Notes, June 11, 2013).
Not all residents who changed their vehicles in Monterrey during this period sought to “lower their profile.” For some, the dropping prices of luxury vehicles created opportunities to obtain a higher status vehicle, such as one of Santiago’s friends:

A friend got a [used] 2006 Audi and I kept telling him, don’t buy it, they can kidnap you… I’m telling you, it’s an indicator, because he bought it from some small, middle businessmen… who didn’t use it out of fear… But anyway, he was more concerned with complying with a certain status [cumplir con cierto status].

(Interview with Santiago, February 26, 2013)

Emiliano and his family left Monterrey for Mérida after paying a high ransom for the return of a kidnapped family member. He had since become more aware of his surroundings. When we met at a party in Monterrey in 2012, I asked what he looked out for when scanning his surroundings. “You see something that doesn’t match; someone who is driving a car they don’t look like they could afford to buy.” In a context where some of the wealthiest residents drive ol’ pick-up trucks and luxury cars are offered at discount prices, “mismatches” between vehicles and stereotypes of what their owners should look like are likely to occur. In this way, increased violence prompted a temporary collapse of previous classificatory schemes. By the end of my fieldwork, the luxury vehicle market had recovered (El Norte, 2013) and luxury vehicles were visible on the streets of San Pedro again.

Whatever the vehicle, residents were advised by public authorities and private security personnel to avoid driving in predictable ways to avoid crime. For example, during a security talk at a health club in San Pedro, military personnel highlighted routine practices as elements that may increase risks of victimization:

What is a situation of risk?... To travel alone. to take the same route to work or school everyday. If we are predictable, if we take the same routes on the same schedules, we are... giving very valuable information to somebody that could harm us... (Field Notes, October 17, 2012)

Similarly, private security personnel advised individuals to avoid schedules. Mauricio recalled suggestions from the Israeli security experts hired by his family, as well as the stress related to practicing not being predictable:

I’ve never had schedules; this is something they [private security] recommended, not having schedules... I had to park in different places at different times until I thought, stop it, I’m either leaving or I’m going to calm myself down... (Field Notes, January 17, 2013)

Specific professionals of interest to organized crime developed their own techniques to lower their profile. Following a wave of targeted kidnapping of doctors, particularly surgeons and nurses, hospitals advised doctors to refrain from using doctor coats or scrubs in public. Interviewed by a journalist, a doctor in 2010 gave the following advice: “You have to be more careful, lower your profile, avoid wearing your [doctor] coat outside or in the car. And, if they call you, verify who is calling” (Vázquez, 2010).
Carolina, a forty-year old mother of two living in San Pedro, accompanied her youngest sister into labor at a hospital and discovered doctors had become targets when the gynecologist and pediatrician showed up without uniforms:

The pediatrician was all dressed in black, that’s his look, and the gynecologist was all preppy. Of course, they can’t be out there dressed as doctors because they are targets... and I told the pediatrician, “Juan, this is the first time we see you dressed up.” “Yes, you can’t go around dressed up as a doctor anymore.” (Interview, February 28, 2013)

Camouflaging techniques spread across the class spectrum as kidnapping and extortion became increasingly common in middle and working-class sectors (although working-class sectors had higher homicide or armed robbery rates, both kidnapping and extortion are crimes that used to be most common among the upper classes). To avoid extortion, small businesses removed signs and advertising or adopted a run-down appearance. For example, Leslie followed the closing of multiple small businesses on an avenue in San Nicolás where she works, including a car lot and butchery. She said she likes to eat at a small food stand that has managed to stay in business. Although the place is clean on the inside, the broken paint on the outside suggested that the place was rundown:

What he sells does not match the appearance of the stand, it’s horrible on the outside, but then he has kept it as a strategy… “don’t let it seem like business is going too well and add chains”… no, he keeps it as a stand inside a building that does not draw attention. (Interview with Leslie, September 9, 2013)

Rather than armoring his small business adding chains that may draw attention, this owner turned to aesthetics and adopted what could be considered a camouflaging technique. Contrary to broken windows theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) asserting that untended property may attract criminal attention, broken paint in an extortion-plagued setting may actually deter crime.

Susana, a long-time resident of a very poor neighborhood in Monterrey offered another camouflaging example. One by one, the small businesses on her street closed due to extortion. Samuel who sold beer in his house to his neighbors was no exception. Needing a new job, he got a small van to work as a mover.

He is careful not to park his van outside his home. Instead, he parks a couple of blocks away from his house. His number is listed on the van and if he receives a call that he thinks is trustworthy, he takes the job. (Field Notes, June 30, 2011)

Like Samuel and the owner of the food stand mentioned above, many small business owners adopted poor aesthetics, removed signs, or devised other methods of dissimulating their worksite. Working-class residents like Elena, a 59-year old public school teacher living in Guadalupe, expressed her concern with becoming invisible:

They have kidnapped a bunch of people here... they were keeping them [kidnapping victims in a security house] four blocks away because it looked like
they had a lot of money, they had a big pick-up truck [un camionetón]… I have tried to become invisible, and I think a lot of people have experienced that as well… (Interview with Elena, June 8, 2013)

While the upper class reassessed their use of luxury vehicles or jewelry, working-class residents changed their clothes, hairstyles and even facial hair in an effort to avoid crime. Memo from San Nicolas shared his personal strategies on how to stay safe:

Don’t carry anything in your hands, dress as austerely as possible… I’ve heard some guys [office employees] carry their ties in a plastic bag… I used to wear dressy pants [pantalón de vestir], shirt, shoes, now, around here, tennis shoes, jeans… don’t carry anything of value… (Interview with Memo, October 21, 2012)

Residents altered their appearance out of fear of being mistaken for someone they think might be involved in organized crime. Luis, a male resident of Sierra Ventana in his late forties shaved his mustache and cut his hair after two pick-up trucks followed him home from the bus stop after work. Luis concluded he had been followed because he was mistaken for Raúl who lives a few blocks away:

They confuse me because some people say to me, “aren’t you Raúl?” “You’re not the Raúl that I know.” I know he lives further down but he has been confused with me and I have been confused with him… I used to wear a mustache and longer hair… ever since I realized I could be mistaken [for someone who he thinks might work for organized crime], I won’t lie, I’m afraid. (Field Notes, September 7, 2013)

In 2008, fashion scholar Amanda Watkins began to document a very particular style developed by the young men and women of La Independencia, a marginalized working-class neighborhood with high levels of violence. “I thought wow! This is so cool! It’s quite LA-ish… a Mexican hip-hoppity kind of thing” (Interview, August 27, 2013). She showed me pictures of the style (see Figure 25) defined by these men and women as Cholombiano, i.e. “combining cholo and Colombian aesthetics” (Watkins 2014). Fashion observers highlighted the centrality of their haircut:

[W]hich draws equal parts inspiration from American hip-hop, Puerto Rican reggaeton, and ancient depictions of Aztec warriors... Snoopy-like sideburns that start at the top of their heads and are glued to their cheeks with sickeningly large handfuls of hair gel… (Loyola & Ruiz, 2011)
Watkins remained in touch with the young men and women she began studying prior to the escalation of drug violence (2009-2012). More recently, she learned that several men had changed their hairstyle due to military and police harassment:

If they [police and military] got hold of them, they cut it [the hair] off… they developed a kind of bullying… this is something a lot of them told me, the reason why the fashion has almost disappeared, they’re a little bit scared, everyone thinks they’re the bad boys… it seems to me that they were the scapegoats. (Interview, August 27, 2013)

I confirmed this observation at her book presentation a few months later. Several of the men photographed in her project were invited to share the stage and comment on the experience, yet none of them wore the haircut anymore (for more examples of the haircut, see Watkins 2014: 200-210). On stage, Toughman, a leading figure in this community,
said they had to change their style due to “marginality.” When he stepped down to get a beer, I approached him to ask how exactly they had changed their style:

I used to wear my bangs down here [he marked the spot with his hand halfway down his chest]… the military cut it off… “Hey, who are you working for?” [he recalled the military asking him] I work for nobody… the guy on the [book] cover [also had his hair cut off]… local police, military and they don’t cut it with scissors, they use a Rambo knife in the granadera [police van or truck] and then they left you in another neighborhood… el morro [a guy] had to pay 300 pesos to keep his hair… (Field Notes, 03/15/2014)

In this last example, the police extorted a young man who paid around US$20 to keep his haircut—a considerable sum for a working-class man. From a wealthy man driving a beetle to avoid crime to a working-class man altering his haircut to avoid police harassment, this section provided several examples of how upper and lower class Monterrey residents shifted their appearance in order to “lower their profile.” Small businesses, uniforms and routines were also camouflaged in an effort to avoid kidnapping or extortion. Like armoring practices, camouflaging techniques provide evidence of tears in the social fabric as residents became increasingly suspicious and fearful of each other. Fear brought great isolation, yet it also fostered the formation of new social ties examined in the next section.

Caravanning and Convoying
1: a: a company of travelers on a journey through desert or hostile regions;
b: a group of vehicles traveling together (as in a file)

Traveling in caravans is a security practice that predates the modern state. In the case of northeastern Mexico, prior to the development of train infrastructure, commerce between Monterrey and nearby cities such as Saltillo, the ports of Matamoros and Tampico, as well as the border towns of Laredo and Piedras Negras relied on bridle paths (Vizcaya, 2006: 14). These paths were often in poor shape, particularly when it rained. Moreover, multiple thefts and attacks were recorded in times of political instability and revolts. For these reasons, between the 1850s and 1880s convoys were used to transport goods and stagecoaches would transport people:

Common convoys were usually formed with twelve cars, each pulled by fourteen mules, which could transport over 55 tons of cargo. The operation of a convoy was almost a ritual, subject to strict rules. Both fleteros and caporales and drivers were reputed to be honest and very responsible, who could be asked to transport any good in all safety, even large sums of money. Convoys moved in all directions: towards Matamoros, Piedras Negras, San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Durango, Chihuahua, and sometimes, New Mexico (Vizcaya, 2006:15).
These forms of transporting goods and people became less relevant with the development of train infrastructure in the region, which began in 1881.22 Trains were faster and cheaper than stagecoaches and became increasingly popular, offering daily service and leisure excursions between Monterrey and Laredo or Monterrey and Mexico City. More than a century later, and in order to confront feared trajectories both outside and within the city, the population in northeastern Mexico relied on convoys as a means of transporting goods and people again. A 2011 newspaper article documented the transportation strategies of Monterrey migrants traveling home for Christmas from the United States:

Fear of violence lead a great majority of *paisanos* [Mexicans living in the United States] who arrived for Christmas vacations to travel by day and in groups through the highways of Nuevo León and this is how they plan to return to the United States. Many of these caravans were spontaneously formed, given that individuals sought to continuously travel near others, even if they did not know them. (Villasáez & Rodríguez, 2011)

The fact that vehicles that previously traveled independently would seek to “travel near others, even if they did not know them” demonstrates that an individualist lifestyle is dependent on a certain degree of monopolization of violence by the state. Where the state cannot guarantee the safety of its travelling citizens, individual drivers may seek to group to increase their safety with their numbers. Alternatively, individuals chose to ride a bus in order to travel in the company of others just as others used stagecoaches a century before. *Elena*, for example, highlights not only a shift in the number of people she needs to travel with to feel safe, but also references an important gender dimension in her previous travelling practices:

I used to travel [to McAllen, Texas] on Fridays, I would go there and come back on Sunday in my car, all women, my sisters, my daughers, my little nephews. I don’t do that anymore... I feel safer in the bus... (Interview with Elena, June 8, 2013)

Several women I spoke to asserted that they would no longer travel on highways without a man in the vehicle. Over breakfast, six women discussed security practices and one was surprised that another would consider driving to South Padre Island, Texas with her girlfriends without a man, as she would never dare to do so. “For some time the highways were very dangerous last year,” another told me. “People would carry their IDs hidden in

22 In 1860, a line was established between Monterrey and Matamoros (which took three days to travel); 1867, a route between San Antonio and Monterrey (which took six days to travel). This trail did not follow the most direct route, but rather the one that would allow the *diligencia* to make stops in other towns, as a transfer station could not be set up due to fear of an attack from Indians. Not surprisingly, the first tracks were laid down between Matamoros and Monterrey in 1881—although it is puzzling that train constructors did not finish the line until 1905 when other lines were built much faster. Train tracks between Monterrey and Laredo were laid in fourteen months and completed in 1883. Four years later, Monterrey was connected with the capital via San Luis Potosí in 1887 as part of the so-called Mexico-Laredo or National route (Vizcaya, 2006:18-19). Tracks between Monterrey and Tampico were laid in 1888 and completed by 1891.
a stocking or in their underwear as well as their phone in case they were carjacked” (Field Notes, January 21, 2012).

Both cars and buses were hijacked. Elena travelled with a bus company she believed had some arrangement with organized crime, as it had not suffered attacks as other bus companies had. Although there is no way of knowing how many individuals opted to travel by bus instead of by car as violence escalated, a newspaper article from 2011 suggested that the demand for this service was higher than usual. Just as individuals sought safety in the higher number of passengers travelling by bus, bus drivers too sought to travel close to each other to increase their safety:

Transportation between McAllen and Monterrey was in high demand over Spring Break… some buses travelled in caravans for security reasons. Bus drivers explained that the demand was so high buses were leaving every five minutes… bus companies preferred to increase their offer by day and eliminate night or early morning travel. (Domínguez, 2011)

Over the course of my fieldwork, I observed and was part of several spontaneously formed caravans. Most guests of an upper-class birthday party I attended in a country home on the outskirts of the city left at dusk except for the three men who had organized the party, their wives, a couple of workers and I.

When the wives had finished packing the leftovers and the last workers were paid, one of the men suggested that we drive back in caravan [vámonos en caravana], one car after the other. The couple I was driving with had finished packing their things first and the man said the person who had suggested driving back together was fearsome [miedoso]. We had to wait about 10-15 minutes for the other two couples to finish packing. (Field Notes, July 11, 2012)

The caravan was employed for a thirty-minute drive into the city, where the caravan split as each of the three vehicles drove home. Yet caravanning was not only practiced on highways, it was also practiced within the city (see chapter 5). Adventurous men who previously rode their motorcycles into the desserts surrounding Monterrey came to fear the paths they knew so well, even by day. Carlos, a local motorcycle champion, who was raised in La Independencia was a fearless rider since an early age. He partnered with Checo to start a business selling motorcycles and organizing tours for the upper class. As violence escalated, they turned from solo riding to travelling in small groups. “Animals travel in packs to protect themselves from lions,” Carlos explained (Interview, April 16, 2013). “We work with the power of the pack,” said Checo (Interview, February 27, 2013). As a means of motivating fearful clients to join them, Checo began to post videos of their expeditions online in 2010. The picture below was taken from one such video in which he provided details on the size of a group of motorcyclists who assembled prior to an expedition:

It is 7 am, here we are at the first toll booth, we’re looking at the convoy, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 [he strolls along the highway on the opposite side of a long line of parked pick-up trucks, a clear blue sky and rising sun at a distance]. We are
approximately 17 pick-ups… Here it is, the full convoy. Motorbike adventures in its Hot Springs-Bustamante route!

Figure 26 “The Power of the Pack”

A convoy of fourteen pick-up trucks with motorcycles prepare for an excursion on the outskirts of Monterrey. Video by Checo, posted online, 2010.

The word “convoy” was used to describe the same social formation as the caravan, with an increasingly militarized language. Convoys were not only employed in leisure activities. For the workers of one of Latin America’s most important steel manufacturers located in a town near Monterrey, the convoy was used for the daily commute to work. In order to guarantee the safety of its employees living in Monterrey, the company requested that they congregate in a hotel downtown where they were driven in a “convoy” to the plant. Employees were forbidden to commute to the plant on their own. Caravans, convoys and carpools, as well as travelling by bus were all means of grouping to increase the safety of each individual in a feared trajectory.

Caravanning reached a political dimension in 2011. Following the murder of his son, poet Javier Sicilia launched a widely mediatized Caravan for Peace from Mexico City to Ciudad Juárez. Over ten days, the caravan stopped at a dozen cities collecting testimonies of victims or their families. I documented its passing through Monterrey that summer:

White paper bodies hang from the ropes circling a plaza in downtown Monterrey . . . Slowly but surely federal police trucks start to line up on the street across from the plaza with soldiers holding long guns as the sun sets . . . “Lock your arms together in case someone tries to break the line!” “Who will try to break the line?,” a friend standing next to me asks. “Let’s hope nobody does,” the organizer says nervously and continues on his way. His nervousness is contagious, especially given the increasing number of military and police surrounding us. My friend reassures us, “Nah, there have been no cases of shootings at peace marches.” As a precaution, many have brought their cameras or smart phones and
film the arrival of more police cars and finally, the appearance of a bus followed by a few passenger trucks [the caravan]. The crowd starts cheering, “You’re not alone! You’re not alone!” A mob of reporters halt the first members of the caravan to get off the bus . . . The crowd cheers and dances as Javier Sicilia and other members of the caravan make their way up to the podium . . . A few introductory speeches give way to the main purpose of this gathering: a woman takes the microphone and begins to tell the story of her disappeared son . . . “You’re not alone! You’re not alone!” She gathers her breath to continue and states the numbers of the police patrol cars responsible for the disappearance of her son. Her voice breaks again and the crowd cheers again. She describes the frustration of being turned away by officers reluctant to investigate the case but assures us that as long as she is alive she will not stop looking for him. “They took him alive! I want him alive!” . . . A dozen parents share their grief, their pain, their anger but also their hopes for justice as soldiers in civilian clothes continue to stroll around the crowd. “Where is everyone?,” a father cries out. “Are they at work? Are they watching television? Are they lazy? We need to stop being afraid!” (Field Notes, June 7, 2011)

The Caravan for Peace was both a security measure adopted by a group of activists, news reporters and human rights victims travelling through some of the most violent areas in Mexico at the time, and a means of fostering new social ties among these groups and those who would be willing to listen and support them. The caravan offered courage for family members of those who are now called “the disappeared” to come forward and, for the first time at a local level, to publicly accuse the state of its crimes and negligence in investigating them. Courage was necessary, as this accusation took place in front of the very security agencies that were being accused, some of them easily identifiable by their uniforms, others covertly moving in civilian clothes through the crowd. Despite the fear that was referenced in the victims’ speeches and that was felt in the nervousness of organizers and others present, multiple times, the group comforted the individual who was speaking up with the words: You are not alone.

The passing of the Caravan for Peace fostered the formation of local human rights groups dedicated to finding their missing family members such as the United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León (FUNDENL). Among other activities, this group has sought to create public awareness around these less visible forms of violence by embroidering hundreds of handkerchiefs with the names of the dead in red and the disappeared in green. The handkerchiefs were exhibited numerous times at a public plaza in downtown Monterrey, the first of two regrouping activities I turn to in the next section.

**Regrouping**
1: to reorganize (as after a setback) for renewed activity
2: to alter the tactical formation of a military force

“Public space is the first thing to go, public space is the first thing we need to take back,” said Maria, a local human rights activist (Field Notes, February 25, 2013). Seated beside her, Laura rearranged a pile of handkerchiefs she had brought with her including several she embroidered for her son. She was at home when it happened. Armed men irrupted into her house and took her son in front of her eyes. Two years had passed with no news
from him, despite the multiple searches and numerous visits to various state agencies. “You think the world should stop but it doesn’t,” she said with a broken voice. “We’ve encountered such apathy and had to walk on our own for some time.” The handkerchiefs she held in her hands are a means of telling the story of her son and the many other stories people ask her to embroider differently, more humanely (see Figure 27).

Monterrey is one of several cities in Mexico and abroad to have a local group of *bordadores* working on embroidering and displaying these handkerchiefs at public plazas and related human rights events as a means of creating awareness around these crimes (De la Fuente, 2012; S. Martínez, 2012b). Like the *chismosas* described by Zubillaga, Llorens, and Souto (n.d.) in Venezuela, it was the mothers and other family members of victims who stepped up to organize new community responses to violence in the absence of adequate state measures. Although few people attended these public gatherings that began as weekly get-togethers in March 2012 and gradually shifted to monthly meetings by the end of the year, the practice of embroidering handkerchiefs for the dead and disappeared endured and continues to this date (as of January 2015).
Men and women stop to watch members of FUNDENL hang rows of embroidered handkerchiefs at the Macroplaza in downtown Monterrey, Nuevo León. Picture by author, September 30, 2012.

Since 2009 and 2010, human rights activists have employed diverse tactics to draw attention to increasing violence (see chapter 2), yet none was as successful in consolidating new social ties and an actual space to regroup as the practice of the bordadores. In January 2014, at the exact date of the third anniversary of the disappearance of her son, Laura and several members of FUNDENL decided to permanently occupy a public plaza in downtown Monterrey. Located across from the governor’s main office, an abandoned plaza featuring the statues of a few toreros was covered with handkerchiefs, pictures of missing men and women, as well as small candles outlining the name of Laura’s missing son. Amidst poetry, art and song, Laura’s second son placed the name of his missing brother and nine others on a glass sculpture located at the end of the plaza. A video featuring over a hundred disappeared men and women was projected onto a bare wall. Standing in front of a row of interlocked mothers, siblings, and nephews turned human rights activists, Laura faced a crowd of around sixty people, including a few journalists and news reporters, and called those whose names were placed on the sculpture to come forward and remove them (Field Notes, January 11, 2014). She then called all who have lost a family member to make use of this space:

We have decided to take this public plaza permanently to remind the government of the urgency with which it must act. We invite all family members to come place the name of their desaparecidos and desaparecidas, to lose the fear that leaves a majority of cases unreported to authorities. (Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos de Nuevo León, 2014)
This plaza was the first dedicated to the cause of finding the thousands of men and women who have gone missing in Mexico (and the only one to my knowledge, as of January 2015). This plaza is not a memorial. FUNDENL stated that this is a place for “active waiting,” a place to come together and to demand every single day that the state address each of these disappearances (idem). In short, it is a place for regrouping. Only when the actions of the state become transparent, and the people whose names are featured on the glass sculpture come forward to remove them, will the sculpture regain its transparency. For this reason, FUNDENL renamed this plaza in disuse as La Transparencia de la Víspera (the Eve of Transparency, although the poetry is lost in the translation). A few months after this event, the names were mysteriously removed from the sculpture. Members of FUNDENL were quick to replace them (see Figure 28) and denounced the state for daring to remove the names of their loved ones. The plaza has since become a site for the display of an increasing number of embroidered handkerchiefs as well as a place for other men and women, like Laura’s son, to be remembered on the anniversary of their disappearance. The plaza has also been colloquially referred to as the Plaza of the Disappeared.

Figure 28 La Transparencia de la Víspera

Source: FUNDENL Facebook page, April 12, 2014.

Fear and Solidarity

Much scholarly work on fear in the social sciences has focused on explaining variations in individual perceptions of “fear of crime” (Dammert, 2012; Farrall, Jackson, & Gray, 2009; Lee, 2001) or the existence of “cultures of fear” (Furedi, 2006; Glassner, 2009). Although focused on explaining fear, this scholarship provides little evidence on what fear is or how it can reconfigure everyday spaces and practices. A sudden wave of
spectacular drug violence produced an unfortunate, ideal site to study these concrete aspects of fear as residents of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area reconfigured their everyday lives in response. In this chapter I sketched out four logistics of fear as a means of analytically organizing shifts in everyday life in response to increased violence and crime. In the first section, I briefly traced “arming” policies ranging from closing streets and gating parks to raising higher walls and enforcing further security measures at home. In the second section, I turned to camouflaging techniques employed by residents seeking to become “invisible.” Both armoring and camouflaging strategies reconfirmed what much scholarship on urban violence has documented: fear makes us stay at home, suspect of neighbors, retreat from public space (Caldeira, 2000; Rotker, 2002). Yet I argued fear may not only isolate individuals, but also bring people together. In the third section, I documented examples of caravanning practices where individuals sought collective transportation strategies as a means of coping with a feared trajectory. In the last section, I presented one example of new forms of public space where individuals regrouped for public mourning (another example, the emergence of new state-sponsored family walks, is discussed in chapter five). I argued these last two strategies attest to a less examined dimension of fear calling for further attention on how fear may not only to tear but also tighten the social fabric.

Beyond the Monterrey Metropolitan Area, groups of bordadores have regrouped in plazas in Guadalajara, Tijuana, Aguascalientes, Torreón, and Xalapa, to mention a few cities in Mexico (M. P. Montero, 2012). I witnessed these local groups stretch solidarity ties for the first time at a national scale in downtown Mexico City on December 1, 2012. Hundreds of handkerchiefs hung from light posts along the Avenida Juárez the day current president Enrique Peña Nieto took office, only to be quickly removed when protests took a violent turn. Solidarity ties stretched beyond national borders. Handkerchiefs were embroidered by sympathizers in Tokyo, Montréal, Santiago de Chile, Córdoba, and were exhibited in public plazas in Barcelona, Brussels, and New York, among others (Bosch, 2014). The growing Bordando por la paz initiative evokes memories of mothers circling the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires or women embroidering arpilleras in Santiago de Chile (Agosín, 1996). Hence, just as there are patterns to how increased violence, crime, and fear have led to the abandonment of public space in Latin American cities (Caldeira, 2000), might there also be patterns to how citizens have sought to reclaim or recreate public space?
Chapter 5. San Pedro: A State Within a State For the Upper Class

The upper class of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area began a process of suburbanization from downtown Monterrey to the valley of San Pedro Garza García in the 1950s (see highlighted area in Figure 29 to situate San Pedro). Violence and fear quickly intensified this process. In the first section of this chapter, I examine the “flight” of numerous upper class families settling across the border in Texas. I then examine the “political fortification” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2007: 58) and reorganization of upper class living within San Pedro for the majority who stayed. Despite evidence that feared drug lords live within this municipality—several Zetas were arrested in their homes in San Pedro in recent years—the sustained belief that these borders delimit an “armored” or safer territory than the rest of the metropolitan area guided much of the social life of the San Pedro residents I observed and interviewed.

Leaving aside the effects of this “armoring” on crime, I focus on its effects on urban inequality. I place analytical emphasis not only on shifts in the built environment, such as the widespread use of walls and gates, but also, and especially, on shifts in leisure practices that provide evidence of further layers of urban inequality brought about by increased violence and fear. Exacerbated urban inequality was tangible in the unequal distribution of nightlife across the metropolis, the use of differentiated curfews within and outside this municipality, and the emergence of new forms of state-sponsored leisure for the upper class in response to the loss of other forms of leisure to fear and violence.

Figure 29 San Pedro Garza García

Source: Google Maps (2016).
In the concluding section of this chapter, I establish similarities between the “armoring” of San Pedro and the creation of the municipality of Chacao in the Caracas Metropolitan District, Venezuela in the aftermath of the Caracazo. Drawing on two key concepts from urban sociology—Teresa Caldeira’s “fortified enclaves” and Gerald Suttles’s “defended neighborhood”—I argue that San Pedro, like Chacao, exemplifies a new pattern of urban segregation taking form in Latin American cities characterized by the upper class’s leverage of state resources to create a state within a state for itself.

**The Texan Flight**

Upper class flights are common reactions to disasters, plagues and waves of violence. In *La Peur en Occident*, historian Jean Delumeau provides examples of “bourgeois flights” on the onset of cholera outbreaks in the 14th and 18th centuries when “the rich, of course, were the first to take off, creating collective panics” (Delumeau, 1978: 148). When violence escalated in Monterey in 2010, an unknown number of wealthy families fled the city. An upper class school, for example, lost more than 300 students one semester, as well as some foreign teachers who packed their bags overnight after a shooting took place outside their campus. The wealthy were not the only to leave, but they did have more resources to do so. Some families moved to Mexico City or cities in southern Mexico, while others left for Europe. Yet the most significant concentration of families moved across the border to Texas. In the first section of this chapter, the Texan Flight, I sketch this relocation process often prompted by kidnappings and extortion attempts. Drawing on interviews with “stayers” and “leavers,” as well as media coverage of the flight, I extract the particularities of this new type of migration to cities such as Dallas, Austin, Houston, San Antonio and McAllen, in light of decades of migration flows between Nuevo León and Texas.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, at least 230,000 Mexicans were displaced due to drug violence between 2007 and 2011, particularly from the states of Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Durango, Guerrero, Sinaloa and Michoacán (IDMC, 2011). Half of the displaced fled to the United States, while the other half relocated across the Mexican territory. There is scarce information available on the circumstances of these migration flows and the living conditions of the displaced. Although there is no state effort to document the phenomenon yet, there are a few grassroots initiatives. For example, a group of journalism students based both in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and El Paso, Texas created *Mexodus*, an online database of stories and news pieces documenting “the flight of middle class families, professionals and businesses to the US and safer areas of México because of soaring drug cartel violence and widespread petty crime in cities such as Ciudad Juárez” (Mexodus 2012). Scholars too have created statistical proxies to determine the scope of security-related migrations to the US, arguably creating “new Mexican immigrants” (Rios, 2011). In the case of those leaving Monterrey for the United States out of security concerns, research has been limited to a review of media accounts of the phenomenon (Durin, 2012). There is currently no empirical research documenting the new settlements of families who have fled Monterrey and relocated to border towns such as McAllen, as well as larger metropoles in the United States such as Houston, Austin and San Antonio where the neighborhoods Sonterra and Stone Oak are now referred to as “Sonterrey” and “Little Monterrey.”
Fleeing Kidnappings and Extortion

Many wealthy Monterrey residents have owned apartments or homes in San Antonio for decades to facilitate their weekend shopping sprees. In the words of a local news reporter commenting on this recurrent phenomenon prior to escalating violence, “it is unnecessary to rely on Gallup or Mitofsky [surveys] to know that thousands of Mexicans associate San Antonio with shopping. The distance between us [Monterrey and San Antonio] is so short [less than 300 miles]… that many choose the half-day drive that will allow them to meet the cowboy boots at the entrance of the North Star Mall [a popular commercial center in San Antonio]” (El Norte, March 31, 2007). It is no doubt this familiarity and initial infrastructure that made San Antonio one of the preferred cities for some members of the elite to seek refuge from escalating violence and crime. Over the course of my fieldwork in San Pedro, multiple residents shared stories of friends, family members and acquaintances who left Monterrey due to security concerns. Often times, the decision to leave was taken after an experience of direct victimization or a threat of direct victimization. The following field notes exemplify these stories as they were informally shared and gossiped about at social events. The first is a short conversation with upper class women at a birthday party for three 60-year old men, which I attended in 2012:

The live band finished playing and was replaced by a group of semi-drunk 60-year olds singing local songs. One of the women at the table [where I was seated] whispered in my ear that…the man who had taken the microphone to sing a song
Victimization stories and related decisions to leave Monterrey were part of everyday conversations and gossip chains. These stories were whispered into people’s ears, including my own, despite individuals’ deliberate requests to keep them a secret. The whispering suggested that the kidnapping of the man mentioned above was the decisive event behind his decision to relocate across the US border with his wife. While seated at this same table, a man in his 60s openly commented on how a family member portrayed his recent move to San Antonio:

I just saw my cousin’s husband last week. He moved after a security incident at his work [no details provided] and he said he was very happy… said he is “never coming back.” He seemed as excited about his life in San Antonio as a peasant would feel moving to the city. He portrayed San Antonio as the “land of opportunity” [emphasized with a skeptical tone]. I think my cousin’s husband is trying to present his situation as better than what it is. (Field Notes, August 11, 2012)

In this second conversation, the decision to migrate was also taken after a “security incident.” This man mocked his family member’s enthusiasm for San Antonio by comparing him to a peasant and remained skeptical of the advantages of such a move. Eduardo, a former San Pedro resident in his mid-thirties, moved with his family to San Antonio in 2010. I knew him from high school and had not seen him in almost a decade when we met for coffee in 2012:

As we went over the stories of the friends we shared, he told me a doctor friend of his moved to McAllen with his wife who is also a doctor. They were threatened by criminals and set up a small clinic across the border, led by his friends’ father-in-law who is also a doctor. (Field Notes, August 9, 2012)

One of my early fieldwork strategies was to document my encounters with old friends and acquaintances I had not seen in many years. The natural flow of these conversations involved providing updates on the lives of many Monterrey residents, some of whom had left. Through such updates, I learned of multiple migrations triggered by either direct victimization or threats of victimization, such as the doctor mentioned above. Here are other examples drawn from conversations with old friends and interviewees:

One of my husband’s clients left in 2007, he was one of the first victims of this new wave of violence. He was kidnapped and when he was released, he moved with his family to San Antonio the next day… (Conversation with female professional, San Pedro resident, mid-30s, Field Notes, January 25, 2012)
most of them [moved] to the United States, McAllen, San Antonio, Houston… one friend, they left, they were there for awhile, they came back and a few months later, the father was kidnapped, they settled it, they had to pay who knows how much and he was released three days later and they moved back to the United States. (Interview, Jorge)

Yet not all individuals who left Monterrey, or San Pedro in particular, were directly victimized or threatened. Eduardo, for example, moved with his wife and three daughters to San Antonio out of fear of violence. He applied for an investor’s visa and set up a branch of his family business across the border. “My priority is my family and I do feel safer there.” He was in San Pedro for the weekend to visit his parents and pitch a new business idea to his father. I asked how he perceived his family and friends living in Monterrey now that he lived abroad:

They have gotten used to the violence. I haven’t and I notice it when I come. I also have friends who have had close encounters with violence, like a friend who was chased in his car and managed to escape. I never had any incident like that happen, but I wouldn’t wait for it. (Field Notes, June 9, 2012)

Like Eduardo, other families and couples left out of fear of violence, particularly in 2010 and 2011, as both violence and fear of violence escalated. Although I was living abroad at the time, I got a taste of the collective panic when I met my family for a short vacation in Austin, Texas in August, 2010 (my field notes were recreated 16 months later as I realized the research relevance of that meeting). We were shopping downtown and as my sister tried on some cowboy boots, my mother turned to me and asked:

“How do you know when it is time to leave?” She recalled conversations with a friend of hers of German descent whose family left Germany shortly before the rise of the Berlin Wall and drew a parallel with the situation in Monterrey. In those days my sister was thinking of settling in Austin after graduating from UT and getting her first job there. So we spent the rest of the weekend with a real estate agent looking at several houses and apartments—the real estate agent advertised himself in a local paper in Monterrey and spoke of the several families he had recently assisted in finding homes in both Austin and San Antonio… “You should start thinking of a way to apply for residency and leave Monterrey out of your future plans,” she told me. “We’re very settled there, but you should start your life somewhere safe.” Although she missed my older brother, my younger sister and I, who currently live in the US, she was glad we were not in Monterrey. There was a tone of sacrifice to the conversation at times that was very unsettling. I thought I had no idea of where my family lived anymore or what reality they were going home to… my younger brother told me a childhood friend of his had been kidnapped and did not reappear even after his family paid the ransom. When we said goodbye, I asked myself whether I would see my brother again. What was the difference between my brother and his childhood friend? They went to the same school, came from a similar socio-economic background, lived in the same
neighborhood and probably went out to similar places. (Field Notes, December 10, 2011)

This conversation I had with my family was not unique. My mother’s question “How do you know when it is time to leave?” was a common question in 2010 and even in 2012 and 2013 at the time of my fieldwork. It was based on real stories of victimization, kidnappings in particular. Like my family, many families posed the question of whether to leave, and if so, when. For some, the time to leave was when something happened: a kidnapping, an extortion or a kidnapping or extortion attempt. For others, like Eduardo, there was no sense in waiting for something to happen. That real estate agents in Austin or San Antonio would advertise themselves in local papers in Monterrey in 2010 gives us a sense of the demand for such services. My parents decided to stay in Monterrey for the time being, but applied for US citizenship when my brother became a US citizen in 2013 “just in case.” “Moving is not part of the plan,” my mother told me, as that would mean abandoning the music school she has worked so hard to build, as well as her home.

Houston was another popular destination for “leavers” frequently mentioned by interviewees. For example, Cristian, a 60-year-old San Pedro resident who is originally from Tamaulipas, said some of his neighbors moved,

mainly to Houston and San Antonio… All I know is that in some places like The Woodlands [a master-planned community of over 100,000 inhabitants in the Houston metropolitan area], it came to a point where there were so many so obnoxious [afrentosos] regios [moving in] that there was a movement against Monterrey families… You know how obnoxious the women can be, they go to schools and they double-park. (Interview, February 19, 2013)

Cristian learned of this “movement” against incoming Monterrey settlers at a dinner party. He imagined that it was probably issued in response to an “obnoxious” attitude of regios, upper class regios in particular, exerting old class privileges in new contexts. Further research is needed to dig out the points of tension between these incoming families and more established families in Texan neighborhoods such as The Woodlands, but this move was significant enough to make local news. On August 26, 2011, as multiple newspapers around the world reported that 52 people were incinerated in the Casino Royale in Monterrey, The Houston Chronicle published the article “The Woodlands: Paradise for Mexican Businessmen” in Spanish. Violence had yet to peak, but according to the journalist, as early as 2010,

a great number of Mexicans from Monterrey arrived at The Woodlands to stay. “There was such a great need that we focused solely on helping the people from Monterrey,” said Adriana Valencia, a financial advisor… based in The Woodlands. Those who move in tend to be wealthy families. (J. Moreno, 2011)

The journalist interviewed several real estate agents working in The Woodlands area who commented on the shifting character of home purchases over the past few years. Prior to the increased violence, wealthy Monterrey residents purchased vacation homes for occasional use. Yet increased violence lead to home purchases for relocation, and the
need for expanded services from lawyers, public accountants and real estate agents to assist them in processing visas, green cards and opening their own businesses. One real estate agent, who helped Mexicans open some 30 businesses in 2010, said that when these Mexicans move to Houston, “they bring their wealth. It’s not a bad thing for Texas, it’s a blessing” (ibid). According to this journalist, the west side of The Woodlands began to be referred to as “Little Mexico.”

Migration flows from Monterrey to Houston are not new, particularly for the working-class. A ten-year ethnography detailed the migration history of skilled urban workers from a neighborhood in Monterrey to Houston, Texas (Hernández-León, 2008). The migration flows between these two cities were so intense, that bus routes were established between Houston and specific Monterrey municipalities: Houston-Guadalupe, Houston-Apodaca, among others. What is new about these recent migrants is that migration is prompted by security concerns, which are not exclusive to the wealthy. In a conversation with a painter in Monterrey, I learned that a working-class man living in Sierra Ventana who assisted her in her workshop was threatened with being forced to join organized crime and fled to Houston immediately. He was then able to bring his wife and children across the border to join him. His move was facilitated by the fact that his father lived in Houston. Security-induced migration is not exclusively an upper-class phenomenon, although the upper class has more resources to carry out the move and may be received as a “blessing” for some.

**Women and Children First**

When the violence escalated, *Mauricio* sent his wife and children out of the country for a few months while he figured out what to do with his brothers and their family-owned business. He decided to stay and bring his family back, although they moved their home from La Huasteca, a canyon on the outskirts of the city, to San Pedro. At the time of our interview in 2013, *Mauricio* still considered that he might need to leave at some point:

Someone from our office called me [a security expert hired by his family] to tell me to be aware of bombs because there were bomb threats in Santa Catarina [where his family-owned factory is located]… How do you watch out for bombs? Several times per week, my brothers and I would meet and ask, “When are we going to decide to leave?” We’re still talking about it. We just met and wondered, “Are we sticking around or are we leaving?”… My suitcase is not made, but let’s just say that I keep it in sight. If anything happens, let’s go…

We thought of moving to Austin, but it’s not that easy, it’s not that comfortable, and it’s not that great. It would be a nice experience for the children… but you don’t want to feel like you’re leaving at gunpoint out of fear. I have friends who have left, who have moved to the US or elsewhere. Several acquaintances are in Austin and San Antonio, basically… some of them adapt and are very happy, others don’t… some of them go through the horrific hassle of going back and forth, they have their business here [and the family in Texas], so they’re here for three days, there for four days… every week, to move that way is really rough. (Interview, March 1, 2013)
From Mauricio’s story, we can extract the gender and class particularities of this recent “golden migration” of wealthy Monterrey residents to Texas. For a few months, Mauricio, the main breadwinner in his family, stayed in Mexico and provided for his family living abroad. This is a reversed dynamic of decades of Mexican migration to the United States where the main breadwinner, male or female, crosses the border to provide for a family staying in Mexico. In some cases migrants move back to Mexico, in some cases they are deported, in others the family reunites with them in the United States, but staying to work in Mexico to provide for a family living in the United States is a new phenomenon. For Mauricio, this arrangement lasted for a few months only, while his wife and kids lived in another Latin American country where his wife is originally from. Yet Mauricio also mentioned that some of his friends kept that arrangement for longer. While visiting my sister in Austin in 2011, I met a couple from Monterrey with a similar arrangement. As violence escalated, the lawyer in his thirties moved his wife and newborn child to Austin. He drove back and forth, but would pay for flights for his wife and newborn to travel to and from Monterrey when necessary. In these cases, the man took on financial responsibility for his family as well as greater risks both in his place of residence and means of transportation to and from his work site and new family residence. After a year, this couple moved back to Monterrey.

Texas was by far the most frequently cited destination for these upper class “leavers.” To a less extent, I heard of families moving to Mérida in southern Mexico or Mexico City—which used to be perceived as very dangerous by people in Monterrey but became safer in comparison. Monterrey was itself a somewhat safer destination for “leavers” from Tamaulipas, which had (and still has) even higher levels of violence. Carolina, who was raised in San Pedro, moved to Tampico, Tamaulipas when she got married. Violence escalated in Tamaulipas earlier than Nuevo León:

It got so rough, they were kidnapping women, that Paco [her husband] told me, “go to Monterrey”…I arrived in Monterrey on September 8, 2009… We had been planning our house for four years, we gave everything away. Paco told me, “I’ll catch up with you, I need to leave things organized over here, I can’t just run out like a crazy goat” (Interview, February 28, 2013).

Just as Mauricio sent his wife and kids abroad and stayed in Monterrey to figure things out as violence escalated, Paco, too, sent his wife and kids to Monterrey and stayed in Tampico for a period of time. The family strategy was similar: women and children first. Carolina took refuge in her mother’s home for a few months, before her husband arrived and they were able to rent a house in San Pedro. Nevertheless, her husband’s work was in Tampico. Just as Mauricio’s friends moved back and forth between Monterrey and Austin or San Antonio, Paco moved back and forth between Monterrey and Tampico. According to Carolina, numerous families moved from Tampico to either Monterrey or Texan border towns such as Brownsville or McAllen. “They left for their own safety, because they are kidnappable.”

Moving Back?

Just as many wondered whether to leave, those who left wondered whether to stay in the United States, whether to move back to Mexico and if so, when. When I met Eduardo in
2012, he said he formed a new community in San Antonio with other families from Monterrey and mentioned that his wife had two groups of female friends: one group from Monterrey and the other from San Antonio. “She knows how to behave in each group and has managed to integrate.” He believed he would never move back to Monterrey and was rather concerned with how to make a couple million dollars to move his parents and siblings to San Antonio with him. Nevertheless, less than two years later he moved back to Monterrey. Business was hard. Living in San Antonio was expensive and the security in Monterrey seemed to improve. Like Eduardo, some “leavers” moved back to Monterrey within months or a few years:

some of the people who left for San Antonio or Austin, many middle class, are now coming back, because they can’t afford that double life. (Conversation with female professional, San Pedro resident, mid-30s, Field Notes, January 25, 2012)

Further research is needed to determine the new challenges these families face in Texas. Zambrano mentioned the fact that those who are part of the elite in Mexico can be “discriminated” against as they become minority groups in the United States. I got a glimpse of the more intimate challenges that can emerge within a household in conversations with “leavers” passing through Monterrey, such as a forty-year old woman I met at a sports club in San Pedro. Priscila moved from Monterrey to Austin with her family in 2010. She was in town for a few days visiting her parents and in-laws. As she relaxed in the sauna room, she spoke of increased domestic work as one of the key shifts of her life in Austin:

In Monterrey, I could pay two full-time domestic workers for a given amount all week. In Austin, for the same amount, I have one person for 12 hours a week. This changed everything. I had to come up with many strategies; for example, I’ve forced my children to become more organized. Laundry, for example, I now place three laundry baskets: one for whites, one for colored clothes and one for black clothes. If they mess up, too bad! I demand that they put the right clothes in the right basket because that saves me time when I put clothes in the machine at night and put them in the drier in the morning. I didn’t have to do any of this in Monterrey, these and other things were taken care of… I’ve had to learn how to do everything. (Field Notes, February 20, 2013)

Moving across the border meant that the family could no longer afford the level of household comfort this woman, and her children, had in Mexico. “We’ve adapted. I live in the most expensive neighborhood with other people from Monterrey,” she added, perhaps to uphold a claim to upper class status while complaining over the loss of certain class privileges. She was happy to be away from her kids for that short stay because she felt “exhausted”—presumably from the increased domestic work. She also felt conflicted on whether or not to move back to Monterrey. Her children—ages 15, 13 and 9—had no interest in moving back. Yet her tone was nostalgic. Comparing her situation with other women with older children in Texas, she said others are moving back and leaving their children behind in the United States. Yet her children are too young for that. “I fear that if I stay in Austin for longer, I’ll stay not for five or ten years, but permanently.” Sandra
exemplifies that “leavers” confront new fears in the United States. In this last remark, she speaks of fear of establishing permanent residency in the United States.

Carolina used to make five-year life plans, but she told her husband, “this is life now, we’re going to plan month-to-month.” Their kids were enrolled in a school in San Pedro for the year during our interview in 2013. She planned on finishing that school year and then maybe moving back to Tampico, Tamaulipas for the next:

I know my husband wants to move back to Tampico… I told him I need to know that certain people are moving back because if they go back, then that means that they’re well-informed, they know… these are people who had to leave because they would get caught, they were driving armored vehicles… people with lots of money, I don’t have a lot of money but if they are going back then it’s because they feel calmer, because they don’t even have to work… [they are moving back because] people from Tampico love Tampico. (Interview, February 28, 2013)

Carolina’s means of assessing safety in Tampico was by observing who was going back. If Tampico was safe enough for those who were wealthier than her, than it should be safe enough for her. Individuals made such calculations of safety and place in relation to wealth. Similarly, when Alicia talked about a couple of friends she considered far wealthier than her, she said:

We [her husband and her] don’t understand why they [a very wealthy couple] are still here [in Monterrey], they are moving because they used to live in Valle Oriente [the limit of San Pedro and Monterrey] and that area is too hot [ya está muy caliente para ellos] for them, these are things I’m used to hearing but know that I’m repeating it, it sounds funny. Because they thought, “we’re either leaving Monterrey or we’re changing neighborhood.” That was the logic. (Interview, February 9, 2013)

Alicia lives in one of the most exclusive residential areas of San Pedro. Her husband owns a business in the luxury sector, as well as several properties in the city. In comparative terms, she is wealthy. Yet she does not feel wealthy in comparison to the particular couple of friends she is talking about and finds that Monterrey is not safe enough for them. To say that a neighborhood was “too hot” for them was to say that it wasn’t for others who presumably stayed in the neighborhood. Her friends relocated to a neighborhood high in the mountains guarded by two security booths.

Prior to the escalating violence, wealthy families lived along the national highway, in small towns, some of them retired next to golf courses located in nearby towns. As violence escalated, some of them moved to San Pedro. Cristian decided to sell his house in San Pedro when his daughters left, as it was too big for his wife and him. “A lot of people moved from the national highway to San Pedro. When we were selling our house, a lot of people came to see it, they lived on the highway” (Interview, February 19, 2013). For the wealthy that stayed, San Pedro became a refuge, an “armored” city for the elite.
The “Armoring” of San Pedro

On January 26, 2010 the newly elected Mayor of San Pedro published his Municipal Development Plan for 2009-2012: to armor San Pedro. A wealthy member of the local elite, Mauricio Fernández ran for office with the slogan “We have to armor San Pedro” (see Figure 31) and was praised by locals for “having his balls in place” (Osorno, 2009). His armoring strategies, which required applying a new municipal tax, included further training and arming of the local police, as well as working outside the law with death squads he called grupos rudos. During the three years he held office, he was accused multiple times of acting outside the law.

Figure 31 “We Have to Armor San Pedro”

The cornerstone of Mauricio Fernández’s electoral campaign hangs from the fence of a house. Picture by José Manuel Prieto.

Towards the end of his three-year term, the local government led by Mauricio Fernández advertised the “conclusive results” of “three years of armoring San Pedro” and “grabbing the bull by its horns” in the Sierra Madre edition. In the top half of Figure 32, the local government claimed that less than 1% of homicides and car thefts in the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey took place in San Pedro between January and August of 2012.
Figure 32 “We Grab the Bull By The Horns”

Local government ad in the *Sierra Madre*, October 19, 2012.

In the bottom half of the ad, rape, simple theft, house robbery and car theft rates for the municipality of San Pedro were compared to criminal rates in five Texan cities: San Antonio, Plano, Dallas, Houston and Austin. The ad was a direct response to elite “leavers,” implying that crime in San Pedro (not Monterrey) was lower than in any of these popular “leaver” destinations. Nevertheless, these were not the criminal forms my interviewees were concerned with. Kidnapping and extortion were not addressed. Providing statistics for the first would have been useless, as kidnappings are the most underreported criminal form in Mexico. Moreover, there are no statistics for extortion. Yet this comparison elaborated by the local state illustrates an increasing division between San Pedro and the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. It also reflects the thoughts of some members of the elite: living within San Pedro or moving to Texas.
I attended the last breakfast former Mayor Mauricio Fernández organized for San Pedro neighborhood representatives before leaving office on August 30, 2012. The Mayor displayed his own armoring strategies arriving in two armored Suburbans with a group of bodyguards, eight of whom accompanied him into the room where the meeting was held at a social club. He wore dark pants, a designer shirt, sleekly gummed-back hair and a large fossil ring. “I am leaving an armor behind,” he told the several dozen neighborhood representatives before him after giving details on the setting up of a new camera system in the municipality (Field Notes, August 30, 2012). Some of its neighborhoods decided to reinforce their security measures by closing off its access and hiring private security guards for their areas. In the case of Olinalá, an exclusive neighborhood in San Pedro located on the Sierra Madre Mountains, residents set up booths in a public highway to limit access to it by non-residents. During this breakfast, the Mayor spoke of two house robberies that had just taken place in Olinalá. The Mayor asserted that:

The robberies were perpetrated by the private guards neighbors hired to protect them… When a neighborhood decides to gate itself, my police have no more access to it; I have no control over what happens there. (Field Notes, August 30, 2012)

He suggested that residents submit information on their private guards to him so that he may carry out a background check on them. Shortly after, the representative from Olinalá stood up. He was tall, fair-skinned, also wearing a designer shirt and said the burglars were ex-police officers. He turned the Mayor’s request around and asked that he share information on the police officers he fires with their private security agencies. This observation exemplifies the tug-and-pull of information and resources constantly taking place between the upper class and the local state in this municipality where public and private “armoring” strategies often collide.

In the case of Olinalá, the closing-off of the neighborhood was carried out without state approval. “That booth is illegal because it is a public highway,” said Alicia, an Olinalá resident (Interview, February 7, 2013). Alicia, a graphic designer in her thirties, provided a more nuanced description of what it is like to live in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods in San Pedro:

Nati [an ex-Governor] lives there, all the malitos live there [she laughs], the guy from the Casino Royale lived there, last year in December the marines came up to pull a guy out of his house, it’s really funny, they take refuge there and people just look away [la gente se hace pendeja]… You hear from your neighbor’s domestic worker that so and so comes home with garbage bags full of cash… What do you do next? Nothing. (Interview, February 7, 2013)

23 When the Mayor’s daughter told him several of her European friends had family rings that were several centuries old, the Mayor decided to begin a family tradition of his own with rings bearing the oldest fossils in existence (see documentary El Alcalde).
24 I conducted several observations in this neighborhood, which can only be accessed by car. An official identification was required at the entrance booth. Pedestrians were not allowed in or out. Domestic and construction workers employed in the area had to be driven in and out, in a taxi if necessary (taxis are less expensive in Mexico than the United States and are often employed by the working-class).
Closed off in a neighborhood up in the mountains guarded by a booth and private security, Alicia did not necessarily feel safe. She knew some of her neighbors, did not wish to meet the others and avoided neighborhood meetings. She walked her dog regularly and was appalled by the recent death of two dogs. "The other day, they killed a pit bull with an arrow, and last year with a bullet... and you’re like, what's their problem with dogs? ‘Don’t let your dog bark?’ They’re dogs!” Noisy dogs, a common problem among neighbors anywhere, were silenced with bullets and arrows in one of the most exclusive residential areas in San Pedro.

At the time of my fieldwork, it was rumored that high-ranking drug lords were also taking refuge in San Pedro. The former mayor Mauricio Fernández responded to these rumors in an interview for a documentary in which he said, “if you see, San Pedro is [politically marketed as] the safest municipality in Mexico, then that is an invitation not only for good people but also for bad people” (Altuna, Rossini, and Osorno 2012). That drug lords had taken residence in San Pedro became a well-known fact as several of them were apprehended in the years that followed. Most recently, on March 6, 2015, Óscar Omar Treviño, also known as the Z-42, was detained in San Pedro. Local media informed that there were two other houses linked to him, one of them in Olinalá:

The new house attributed to the boss in San Pedro is located on Olmo Street 145 in the Olinalá compound. Others owning homes here include the ex Governor Natividad González Parás [referred to as “Nati” by Alicia above], the Mayor [of Monterrey] Margarita Arellanes, state officials and businessmen. Nestled in the Sierra Madre, the residency had a luxury pick-up truck in the driveway, the gate was forced open and there were two military vehicles inside (Robles, 2015).

In the days that followed, four other members of this criminal organization were also detained in San Pedro. Media attention focused on the fact that the house where the Z-42 was arrested was located meters away from municipal security cameras—the “armor” Mauricio Fernández advertised at the end of his term as signaled above. A columnist for El Norte known as the People’s Lawyer or El Abogado del Pueblo captured the worries and feelings of some San Pedro residents vis-à-vis these arrests:

Multiple questions and worries are unleashed by the detainment of the “Z-42” and his head of finance in San Pedro, a municipality that claimed to be “armored,” a “holy island” [“Saint” Pedro] in the midst of a sea of dangers, and precisely safe from the last letter [the Z’s or Zetas in Spanish]… for it was believed San Pedro was a bastion of the Beltrán-Leyva, a rival group, who did not allow anyone to enter or alter peace in “their” territory. These “truths,” if they were ever true, collapsed. Experts on the subject have told us that there is simply NO WAY in which these Zeta leaders could have installed themselves in San Pedro without some form of protection… there were local security cameras at a short distance from the entrance of the house where the financial head lived and was detained. The big question is whether these cameras were set up to protect the neighborhood or to protect him. This would not be the first time that organized crime has infiltrated control centers to detect any threats or moves against them…
the shameless presence of individuals linked to the leadership of one of the most feared, bloody and violent groups of Mexican organized crime in San Pedro with impunity should be a matter of great concern for all, residents and nonresidents. This is an indicator that something is rotten, that is, what was thought to be a BASTION of security in the state and the country has shown its total vulnerability: nothing is spared from the most destructive elements of organized crime in Mexico anymore. To recover what was lost will be a major challenge, even for Mauricio Fernández. (El Abogado del Pueblo, 2015)

As developed in chapter two, Monterrey residents have thought at several points in their history that wealth and foreign interests should be enough to isolate the city from the violence taking place elsewhere. In response to increased violence, the upper class took refuge in San Pedro and its residents bought into the idea that if Monterrey had not been spared, then San Pedro could be. Just as business leader Lorenzo Zambrano cried out in 2010 that, “if Monterrey is lost, then everything is lost,” this editorialist claimed in 2015 that if San Pedro is not safe then “nothing is spared.” The discourse and the surprised tone is the same reproduced at a smaller scale. Such news revealed not only that San Pedro is not isolated from its surroundings, but also that violence and the decisions of where it should be exerted are orchestrated within its very core. The columnist also informed that federal authorities carried out the capture of the “Z-42” without giving notice to local authorities. The police were rounded up by the military (a common practice when capturing drug lords) in the early morning of the operation. This practice reveals disagreements between government levels that may be due to competition among political parties (the federal government is PRI, where the local government is PAN), intensified in times of elections. That several groups of organized crime lived and were disputing control over San Pedro at the time of governmental elections made the cover of a national newspaper (see Figure 33).
San Pedro residents expressed doubts in terms of why and how the municipality would be protected. Tanya thought San Pedro was not “armored,” but rather that some politicians were “allied” with organized crime (Interview with Tanya, December 4, 2013). Mario heard rumors that “the most powerful businessmen from Monterrey got together to pay the cartel that controls San Pedro and that this is why there’s peace or at least why there is more peace than elsewhere” (Interview with Mario, February 6, 2013). Several other interviewees thought that the relative pacification of San Pedro was due to some type of negotiation between local authorities, the business class and organized crime. Beyond these rumors of informal arrangements, the fractured business class did respond to increased violence by coming together to place increased demands on the state.

**Reviving the Consejo Cívico**

Several interviewees referenced the 1970s, and the death of prominent industrialist Eugenio Garza Sada in particular, as a precedent to the present security crisis. Although there was no rampant crime at the time, the upper class felt threatened when the September 23 Communist League supposedly attempted to kidnap Garza Sada who was shot on site. According to one of Garza Sada’s family members, more than 150,000 people marched from La Purísima Church to the Del Carmen Cemetery to pay homage to
the head of the Cuautémoc Brewery and founder of the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Salinas Rocha, n.d.). Following his death, the business leaders of the city united to form the Consejo Cívico (formerly known as the Consejo Cívico de las Instituciones) or Civic Council as a means of placing demands on the federal state as a civic and not as a business block—they specifically avoided making demands through the local chamber of commerce CAINTRA. During an interview with Cristian, a former president of the Consejo Cívico, I learned that in light of the present security crisis, the business class had sought to revive this organization as “there was again an important need to interact with the government, not as industrialists, but as a civic body” (Interview with Cristian, February 19, 2013). Cristian said the “great figures of Nuevo Léon” came together and “injected great resources” to the CINLAC. They increased the budget of this organization “10 to 15 times.” Comparing the business class in Monterrey to others across Mexico, Cristian said that:

Nuevo León is an exception but there are not great stories to tell from the inside. It’s a tug-of-war too, just as in many families. There are many low blows, many differences, lots of politics. But the crisis of the last few years has made them come together just as they did thirty years ago with [or rather against former Mexican President] Echeverría; violence made them come together. (Interview, February 19, 2013)

When asked who “they” were, Cristian said, “nobody knows… It’s the famous G-10.” A few companies have disclosed their membership in this organization: Grupo Alfa, FEMSA, CEMEX. Others have not or are rotating members. “They’re pretty much the same families as thirty years ago, more or less, but in the last twenty years there’s been a lot of disintegration, family feuds...” Yet in the face of increased violence, the fragmented business class considered the “need to unite to pressure the government to do things.” “We lost control,” he said, “it was very perverse, the people who are supposedly hired to protect the citizenry become the thieves, the extortionists, the killers” (Interview with Cristian, February 19, 2013). I asked about the secrecy, if these industrialists were demanding transparency from the state why would they remain so discreet? “That’s how they like it,” he said, “they are titiriteros [puppet masters].” Although there is a lot of foreign capital in Monterrey, it was “the locals, the old elite” who came together to confront this security crisis.

**Revamping the State Police**

One of the lines of action pursued by the organized business class, aka “the G-10,” in response to widespread corruption of the police forces as described by Cristian was to revamp the state police. With higher salaries, new uniforms and tougher weapons, the Fuerza Civil was formed through joint efforts between the state government and the business elite. On September 14, 2011, the first generation of Fuerza Civil police graduated from the newly formed University of Security Sciences. Self-defined as “a new generation of heroes, made up of braver, smarter men and women better trained to protect what matters the most: the security and tranquility of families,” the new police relied heavily on marketing strategies to rebrand a state institution as a civic institution made up of hero citizens (see Figure 34 and Figure 35 for recruitment ads). Television ads were
structured as action movie trailers, with armed agents descending from helicopters, ready for battle.

**Figure 34 “We Need You”**

![Recruitment ad for Fuerza Civil, 2015.](image1)

**Figure 35 The Civil Force**

![Recruitment ad for Fuerza Civil, 2015.](image2)

“Sometimes I hear my children say, ‘that cop is bad.’ ‘The cop?’ I tell them, cops are there to protect you, they are not bad,” *Carolina* recalled telling her children. “I don’t want them to have that idea of bad cops, even if there are bad cops.” In an emergency, Carolina would not call the local police, *Fuerza Civil* or the military. “No, I don’t think so. I would call *Paco* [her husband] and if *Paco* were not around, I would call my brother-in-law.” For *Carolina*, the decision of whether to contact a state security agency and if so, which one, fell on the men in her life. When her children asked her about the “soldiers” patrolling the streets, she told them, “Those soldiers are looking out for us.”
“From whom?” they replied. “They’re protecting the city, so smile at them and say thank you.’ Because I feel, poor soldiers, people see them and freak out. ‘Smile at them, give them thanks, they’re looking out for us’” (Interview, February 28, 2013). She said the “soldiers” wore blue uniforms and rode standing on pick-up trucks, which means they were actually members of Fuerza Civil as the military wears green uniforms. Yet in a state with several layers of police and military forces deployed on the streets, where police are armed with bulletproof vests and long guns, it is not surprising that Carolina would be confused and think they were part of the military. After all, the military was also patrolling the streets of San Pedro at the time, as well as the greater Monterrey Metropolitan Area. When he saw the military on the streets, Mario thought, “on one side, it’s a reminder that there is a strong conflict… but on the other side I think, well, who knows what the situation would be like if the military were not on the streets” (Interview with Mario, February 6, 2013).

Mauricio was driving home after a concert when a policeman looking out for drunk drivers stopped him. “I saw his face and I thought, ‘this dude is not good, this dude is not taking care of me, I have to watch out for him’ [este bato no es el que me cuida, de este me tengo que cuidar], so I don’t feel like being out at night, to have to watch out for myself is to not have a good time.” When asked if he would call the local police in case of need, he replied, “I wouldn’t dream of it.” When specifically asked if he would consider calling the San Pedro police, he repeated, “I wouldn’t dream of it.” For the federal police he gave the same answer. When asked if he would call the military, he replied, “Well, I don’t know, I would call the person hired by my family.” Mauricio would resort to private security before considering any level of the state security apparatus. For Mauricio, the decision of whether to contact a state security force and if so, which one, fell on private security. Others, like Esteban, would consider calling the police in San Pedro if they needed to, but would not trust local police in other municipalities. Higher trust in San Pedro police was one element leading individuals to adjust the borders and curfews of their everyday activities to stay within San Pedro, particularly at night.

Reorganizing Everyday Life Within a “Bubble”

Residents spoke of San Pedro as a “bubble” in terms of exploding real-estate prices. Closed condominiums proliferated as developers cashed in on generalized feelings of insecurity to redefine luxury living as inhabiting multi-million dollar apartments. Yet the metaphor of the “bubble” also serves to highlight how certain forms of social life, such as public nightlife, continued and even grew in San Pedro as they were destroyed elsewhere in the metropolitan area. Moreover, as multiple forms of leisure were abandoned outside of San Pedro, new forms of leisure emerged within it with the support of the local state. San Pedro residents thus completed a new stage in urban segregation in the metropolis by relocating not only their homes, but also their workplaces and leisure practices within its perimeters.
A Growing Real-Estate Bubble

Preference for living in the “armored” municipality partially explains an increase in its real estate prices while prices elsewhere in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area dropped. According to the president of the National Chamber of Housing Development for Nuevo León (CONADEVI) who was interviewed by a local journalist, the price of a square meter in San Pedro increased 45% in 2011:

It’s because of the feeling of security in San Pedro…we’ve seen a higher demand and prices increased in these districts in relation to the rest… where prices have dropped below market levels. (Diaz 2011)

For Tanya, the multiplication of apartment buildings in San Pedro is “terrible.” She doubted that there is a market for the numerous real estate developments that emerged in recent years (Interview with Tanya, December 4, 2013). Alicia also perceived that “it’s weird” that numerous new expensive buildings were empty, either for rent or for sale. “Everybody wants to live in San Pedro, but nobody will be able to afford it, how long will those buildings be empty?” (Interview with Alicia, February 9, 2013) Mario was suspicious of where the money came from for these developments:

Those super apartment complexes have a lot to do with money laundering because it’s ridiculous, some apartments are worth over one million dollars and they’re empty and they’ve been that way for years and they keep building… same thing with the little plazas, there’s not enough demand to be building [that way]… (Interview, February 6, 2013)

His parents have some close friends who moved to one such apartment after they were robbed. They thought, “let’s go to an apartment where there’s security, you get an armored door and that’s it” (Interview, February 6, 2013). This was also the core of Mariana’s story. I met Mariana in 2012 through a close friend of mine from college. She is an artist in her fifties, married and mother of two children. We were part of a women’s group and met several times before she invited me to have lunch at her home, which is located in the first closed condominium of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. Like the “fortified enclaves” studied by Caldeira in São Paolo (2000), Mountain Views (a pseudonym) is an apartment complex with restaurants, cafés and a few small businesses and offices on its lower level.

Mariana drove her Honda up to the entrance guarded by private security. I had visited Mountain Views a couple of times before. On previous visits, I was asked to show an ID at this checkpoint and give the name of the restaurant or business I wanted to visit in the lower level. Yet Mariana had a control device on the front of her windshield, so the security gate opened automatically. We drove around the apartment complex and down to the parking lot that I already knew. Yet there was a second security gate, activated once again by her remote control, that lead us to a private parking lot where I saw cars I had not seen on the streets for some time: one Ferrari, one Porsche, and several Audis (Field Notes, November 15, 2013).
Mariana parked. We took the elevator up to the floor where her apartment was located and walked in. Her domestic worker was preparing lunch. I commented on the artwork on the walls, the beauty of the space and she said, “It was hard for me to move here.” She got the idea of buying an apartment at Mountain Views from a close friend who recommended the building. There were only two left. They decided to buy it without thinking too much about it. Then she started to have doubts about the move. “I thought, I’m not going to be able to fit my house here, it’s not going to fit.” She changed her mind and told her husband, “let’s sell it.” The apartment was still under construction, so she chose bathrooms and kitchen countertops and cabinets that she wouldn’t have chosen for herself. She didn’t imagine she would end up living there. Shortly afterwards, she was in her home in Monterrey with her husband and son inside the house when the family was robbed. She woke up, walked downstairs and realized their two cars had been robbed, as well as a computer and some money from her bag. “The feeling of insecurity was too much,” she said. So she told her husband, “let’s move to Mountain Views, let’s try it, if we don’t like it we can come back.” They moved to Mountain Views and they are now renting their home. “Look, it was really hard to adapt,” she continued, it was hard to adapt to the spaces, the living room is spacious but the rooms are small… the advantage is that when you want to travel, you simply close the door and leave, you don’t have to worry about anyone having to look after it… disadvantages, even if I own my apartment, I don’t own what’s downstairs… I don’t decide what stores open in the lower level… and the developer just had the idea of opening some football courts in the back [she pointed in the direction of the courts] so now I’m listening to the referee at night when I want to be calm… spaces are reduced, the bathroom we have has one sink and if Juan [her husband] and I want to get ready at the same time, we can’t do it… well, these are the complaints of a rich bourgeois girl, but it has been hard to adapt. It’s not the same as living in a house. (Field Notes, November 15, 2013)

When I walked in, I asked if we could step out to the balcony to take some pictures. I told her, “I’m still not used to these spaces.” I grew up in a two-story house located a few blocks away at a time when there were no constructions of this kind in the city. “This was the first,” she said. “When we moved here, we never imagined that there would be these many towers. Now we want to leave. But really, I want to leave Monterrey.” As a result of increased violence and crime, Mariana had changed not only the location but also the structure of her home, which ultimately constrained her life to the point to make her want to leave the metropolitan area.

Violence and The Unequal Distribution of Nightlife in the Metropolis

When violence escalated, nightlife in Monterrey imploded, particularly in the Barrio Antiguo, which is Spanish for “the old quarter.” In the 1990s, these few blocks in downtown Monterrey were constructed as the nightlife center for the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. For two decades, the area had dozens of bars catering to all social classes, age groups and varied musical tastes: rock, metal, pop, electronic music, trova. I came to know many of these bars as a high school and college student going out in my
late teens and early twenties in Monterrey. In the sections I trace the implosion of nightlife in downtown Monterrey and its reemergence in San Pedro.

The Death and Revival of the Barrio Antiguo

As a college student, my favorite venue in the Barrio Antiguo was a bohemian-style café that served food and drinks from noon until past midnight. I met Pablo, the owner, through common friends in 2007 and we stayed in touch over the years. In 2012, we met up and I learned of the circumstances that led him to close his café after almost 15 years:

They never dropped on me [nunca me cayeron], but they did know where and who I was. For a while, there was this 23-year old kid that would show up every night with his girlfriend between 7 and 8, or 8 and 9, I can’t remember, but he would always show up at the same time and stay for one hour. One day, I saw him cuffed in the newspaper and they said he was one of the guys that controlled the Barrio. So they let me work, maybe because they liked the place for themselves… some clients spent up to $10,000 [pesos] per night, men would come in with several women and ask for six bottles for their table, and well, who else would they be? (Field Notes, August 11, 2012)

One day in 2010, as he was driving up to his café, he saw four men pointing guns at his neighbor who was lying on the floor. The neighbor owned a business next door. He decided not to park and kept driving. Yet at that moment, he decided to close his business. Parked some blocks away, he walked back to his café, went inside and told his employees to excuse him but that the business was closing. “When I saw my neighbor I thought, I’m next.” As the violence escalated, multiple business owners such as Pablo decided to close or were literally shot down. The most emblematic was the closing of the Café Iguana after a shooting in which two employees and two other people were killed, as this concert bar was one of the venues that made the Barrio Antiguo popular. Pablo called the owner the day after the shooting to give him his condolences. The owner was not thinking of closing at first, but Pablo said he was threatened further and finally decided to close. The front of the Café Iguana became a mourning site not only for those killed in this shooting, but for city nightlife altogether.

One year after the shooting, I joined a group of activists organizing a musical event to remember the shooting and call for the revival of the Barrio Antiguo. Standing before the closed doors of the Café Iguana in 2012, I observed a fourteen-year old girl pose for her dad’s camera as her mother told me she would not let her go out at night now or even when she grew older given “the situation” in Monterrey:

She plays the model, shifting her weight from one leg to the other, oblivious to the bullet holes behind her. She stands before a bright green wall covered with pictures of rock bands and young people singing or standing in line in front of this same wall. I count nineteen bullet holes around her, now part of a colorful collage that also includes the graffiti, “No more blood. Out with the government, the narcos and the army, RIP Pablito and el enano [bar employees killed in the shooting].” … Ever since [the shooting], a black ribbon hangs from the main entrance where Pablito used to check IDs (he checked mine a couple of times with
his stern look and long beard). The fourteen-year old and her parents continue their walk through the old quarter choosing different sites for their photo shoot and I lag behind. I am waiting for two activists to finish posting a sign on the bright green wall that reads “Party in the Barrio Antiguo,” an initiative taking place one block away in memory of this shooting. “Take a picture of me right here,” says a fifty-year old man, one of the activists, to the other. Fully conscious of each bullet hole behind him, the man has chosen to stand proudly next to graffiti that reads, “We will fight for you until you wake up.”… One block away, a music band is doing a sound check, the first of a long list of bands craving a stage to perform on. For the next few hours, metal, rap, tango and rock performers play for a crowd of 100-150 people… One of the organizers speaks in between performances. “The purpose of this event is to wake the old quarter up from its slumber, to promote peace, to reclaim this space that has been lost to fear.”… According to another activist who has spoken to residents of el Barrio Antiguo, two women were shot dead two blocks away two weeks ago. Their bodies were removed and the police never showed up. The only people who knew about it were the residents. Another shooting took place one block in the other direction a few weeks ago and still another a few blocks further down towards the Macro Plaza a month ago… Although crowds will walk along the Macro Plaza located two blocks away, few will walk into the Barrio Antiguo. (Field Notes, May 20, 2012)

Increased violence and fear lead to the decline of the Barrio Antiguo. Some of the buildings that were shut down reopened as research centers, language schools or other businesses operating during the day. Yet as human rights activists and musicians craving a stage organize to attempt to “revive” this nightlife center, nightlife was budding somewhere else. As bars in the Barrio Antiguo, and elsewhere in the metropolitan area, were shut down, new bars emerged in San Pedro. The Café Iguana briefly reopened a second location in San Pedro in 2013, an indicator of the relocation of nightlife to this municipality.

**San Pedro as The New Nightlife Center of the Metropolis**

*Jorge*, who lives in downtown Monterrey, used to go out in “some plazas with bars that were very calm” in southern Monterrey near the national highway. “Suddenly they’re gone, they closed,” he said. As an alternative, his friends organized *carne asadas* at home, carefully selecting the home that was most central to the group to avoid long trajectories after dark. As mentioned in chapter 2, organizing a *carne asada* or barbeque at home, which is a local tradition, became a main alternative to clubbing or going out to bars. Alternatively, *Jorge* said those “who can do it” went out in San Pedro:

> Most people now, if they go out, they’ll go out for dinner early or in areas like, for the people who can do it, in San Pedro, where supposedly, it’s what people have been saying, that these areas are armored or protected. Or at least you don’t hear as many things happening as in other municipalities… San Pedro is too far so they [his friends] think, “nah, let’s stay home”…

(Interview with *Jorge*, March 5, 2013)
Violence privatized nightlife, which increasingly took place within the home. Jorge heard rumors of public nightlife continuing in San Pedro, yet this was not an option for him or for his friends due to the distance they would need to travel home after dark. Their two alternatives were to meet “early” (see next section for more on self-imposed curfews) or to gather at someone’s home, preferably not too far from one’s own. Distance was key. Checo, who is also a Monterrey resident, had similar impressions of public nightlife burgeoning in San Pedro where its residents could stay close to home. He referenced the emergence of a new type of nightlife in semi-private plazas:

What is the safest municipality? Well of course, San Pedro. This is why you see these plazas are full, and [if] people say, “I’m going to the Barrio Antiguo,” [others will answer] “No! Go to Plaza 401” and it’s full on Saturdays and all because you can say, “I’m going home from here, it’s close, we’re in San Pedro.” Obviously, it’s very hard to see a Porsche in Monterrey or a Ferrari or an Audi… but go to the parking lot of the plaza 401 on a Saturday [night and you’ll see these cars], but don’t leave San Pedro! (Interview with Checo, February 20, 2013)

Violence exacerbated socio-spatial segregation by fragmenting and unequally distributing public nightlife across the metropolitan area. A nightlife center called El Centrito, which literally means little downtown and is smaller than the Barrio Antiguo, was reactivated with new bars and clubs. Rosa, a San Pedro resident in her early twenties, commented that, “You used to go out in the Barrio Antiguo, now you go out in the Centrito, you used to go to el Bar Rio [a live music bar in Barrio Antiguo that closed due to violence], now you go to the Pink Donkey [a club in the Centrito], it’s the same thing.” That the shift in nightlife centers and bars appears as the “same thing” to Rosa means that she was able to continue her nightlife practices despite increased violence. The shift in place meant that nightlife continued in one area of the metropolis, while it was obliterated in another. It also meant that it was no longer only certain nightclubs, such as the Bar Rio, but nightlife itself that had become a privilege of the upper class.
Figure 36 The Republic of San Pedro

Ads for a new bar as featured in the *Sierra Madre*, 2012.

Figure 36 features two ads advertising a “New Club Coming to Town” in San Pedro Garza García, Nuevo León in 2012. “The People’s Club” is advertised in English with the use of an elegantly dressed white woman, a distinguished lion and a well-dressed ram. The name of the bar, Republic of San Pedro, echoes the separatist attempts of Governor Santiago Vidaurri (aforementioned in chapter 2) who wanted to break from the Mexican central government in the nineteenth century to establish the Republic of the Sierra Madre in northeastern Mexico, with Monterrey as its capital. Although in a smaller scale, the bar accurately advertised San Pedro not only as an exclusive municipality within the Monterrey Metropolitan Area, but also as a state of its own.

**Borders and Curfews**

The municipal boundaries of San Pedro were internationally recognized as separate and more secure than those of the rest of the metropolitan area. In a 2012 travel warning for Mexico, the United States Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs informed US citizens that non-essential travel to Nuevo León should be deferred, except for the Monterrey Metropolitan Area “where you should exercise caution.” In the case of US Consulate personnel in Monterrey, these,

may not frequent casinos, sportbooks, or other gambling establishments and may not travel outside the San Pedro Garza García municipal boundaries between midnight and 6 a.m. (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2012)
By January 2014, the San Pedro curfew for Consulate personnel was relaxed one hour, as these were expected to stay within San Pedro “between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m., except for travel to the airport after 5 a.m.” (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2014). Similar curfews operated within families. Carolina’s sister would not allow her sixteen-year old son outside San Pedro after dark. Carolina was even stricter with herself:

I don’t leave San Pedro… the farthest I go is Costco [located at the limits of the municipality with Monterrey], beyond that I’m like… if I’m going to Valle Oriente [a shopping mall located beyond Costco] I’ll go with Paco [her husband] and I’m feeling a bit, “oh, oh, I’m leaving San Pedro.” Even if Paco’s like, “how snobbish [qué fresa].” I’m like, yes Paco, really snobbish [fresísima], don’t take me out of San Pedro. I like this area and I don’t like to leave. I feel like there are cops and I feel it’s safe and I’m not all paranoid. (Interview, February 28, 2013)

Carolina constrained her everyday life to the municipal boundaries of San Pedro. Her children’s school, her mom’s house, “everyone” she relates to lived close by. Tanya, a San Pedro resident as well, reorganized her social relations and stopped visiting friends living outside San Pedro. Moreover, she stopped collaborating with providers located outside this municipality for work. “I used to go into Fomerrey [a low-income neighborhood] to look for things,” she said. “I would go anywhere, anytime, at night… I used to drive domestic workers to their homes, not anymore,” she said with a shiver (Interview with Tanya, December 4, 2013).

Alicia imagined that if she went downtown, “I might be taken out of my car at a stoplight.” This happened to her brother, to the sister-in-law of her sister-in-law, and two more acquaintances in the municipalities of Monterrey and Escobedo. Yet she then remembered people had been taken out of their cars in San Pedro as well. “Oh no, there were two others here in San Pedro… but it was a moment when this got too hot [fue un momento que se calentó demasiado].” When her memory confronted her with evidence of the risk of being taken out of her car in San Pedro, she justified it as a moment when things “got too hot,” assuming this moment was an anomaly in San Pedro.

Specific transportation strategies were employed when leaving San Pedro. Some bought a “second car” to drive in areas considered not safe enough to drive in with their usual car. Alicia’s uncle, for example, had six cars: “he loves cars but he can’t go out with them all… one is for the supermarket, it’s like the ‘service car.’” Individuals who did not purchase a ‘service car’ might resort to using a taxi when traveling outside San Pedro. For example, four San Pedro residents wanted to attend a small get-together at the house of a mutual friend in Monterrey. The invitation was treated like a mission. Instead of driving over individually, as they would have done before escalating violence, the four friends decided to meet at one house and take a taxi together. This was a small dinner party and the organizer resented that the four guests from San Pedro arrived almost two hours later than they were expected to. The next day, I met with one of them who explained:

They were late because they were waiting for one of the friends who also wanted to take the taxi [not out of economic necessity, but as a safety measure as the fourth friend did not want to be left behind]… “We feared getting lost or going
That four friends would feel the need to gather at one’s house before heading to a slightly larger social gathering illustrates how increased violence may add new nodes to everyday logistics in the form of petit social gatherings prior to feared trajectories. That they would feel compelled to do this because they were leaving the “armored” municipality of San Pedro further elucidates how increased violence contributed to accelerate social and spatial segregation in this metropolitan area.

**Fear and Leisure**

“I loved going out of town,” said Mauricio with a touch of nostalgia. “I liked going to rivers, mountains, take the car out for a drive… I do feel like they stole that from me” (Interview with Mauricio, March 1, 2013). He recalled trips that he had forgotten were even possible before. “What do you know,” he said, surprised by his memories of the outdoors, “it was so deeply hidden, I didn’t even remember… but I am afraid to go out, and with the children.” In the process of an interview, interviewees were often prompted to recognize the changes they were taking for granted. Like Mauricio, many San Pedro residents abandoned common forms of leisure that required leaving the municipal borders. In the following subsections, I outline shifts in border tourism, the abandonment of villas and ranches in the outskirts of Monterrey, and the emergence of new forms of state-sponsored leisure within San Pedro.

**Decreased Border Tourism**

“Those trips to McAllen are over,” said Alicia, referencing a popular weekend shopping trip for many in Monterrey (Interview with Alicia, February 9, 2013). My dad and I decided to go to McAllen for the day a few months later. I asked my dad whether we would cross the Laredo-Colombia International Bridge. “No, Nuevo Laredo,” he said, “it’s more direct and I think there are less people crossing through Colombia” (Field Notes, April 19, 2013). It was a common practice to consider likely border-crossing traffic when planning such a trip from Monterrey, although we would soon realize this was not necessary given decreased border tourism at the time.

As we entered Nuevo Laredo, the first image that came to my mind was that of several bodies hanging from an overpass, as well as the words of a fellow researcher who had visited several northeastern border towns recently, including Nuevo Laredo. Nuevo Laredo was the border town where she had to interrupt her research fieldwork, as she felt observed and followed. I had not crossed the border by land in three years, and my father, in one year and a half. We reached the bridge with surprise, as it was practically empty, compared to how we used to see it. We used to wait hours in line simply to reach the bridge, but here we drove nonstop to 13 open lanes at the border with scarcely five cars each. Waiting in line, my father recalled an old game we used to play when my siblings and I were young children:

“Do you remember the clue game we used to play?” “Clue game?” I replied.

“Yes, for example, you would say ‘Beware’,” he told me looking at a sign on the
edge of the lane warning incoming travellers to ‘beware’ of importing forbidden goods [we were supposed to find objects we were given clues for]. “Of course,” I replied, “you had to entertain kids. I remember times when we would stand in line for up to four hours. I remember the color game… you would say ‘red’ and we had to count the number of red cars.” (Field Notes, April 19, 2013)

The border agent was taking a long time to assist the few cars ahead of us. We were a bit puzzled by the wait, but then understood why the agent was taking this long when we reached our turn. The border agent asked where we were going (“just crossing the border for the day”) and what we were planning to do (“pick up mail, go to the bank, buy some hiking shoes”). The agent commented on my father’s English, asked how I liked living in California and then asked when was the last time we came to the United States. He then got chatty, which I assume he was with previous travellers as he had fewer cars to attend than before. “How are things in Monterrey? Is it getting better?” he asked. He said his wife had family in Monterrey, “it’s a pity, there are nice places there. Nuevo Laredo too, [a] nice place to go eat, ruined.” When he started working at the bridge in 2008, the average wait used to 90 minutes to two hours. “I remember getting off duty at midnight with a full bridge,” he said (Field Notes, April 19, 2013). My father, the border agent and I exchanged memories of missing waiting lines, of massive land tourism gone under.

_Mauricio_ owns an apartment in South Padre Island, Texas where hundreds of San Pedro residents own beach homes and gather over weekends, and vacation breaks. He hesitated on whether to go or not, given that he was stopped by drug lords on the highway (as mentioned in chapter 3). In his view,

Some people go back and forth everyday, but you do hear sometimes… “this woman or this family, they took their passports and car, money, they left them on the street.” I don’t want to go through that with my kids, but then again… it’s time to say, “enough.” I think a lot of people are… enough or I’m leaving… life has to go on, you can’t stay locked up. (Interview with _Mauricio_, March 1, 2013)

Some continue to travel as usual, others stop travelling, and yet others begin to travel differently. “People [who can afford it] fly to the Island [short for South Padre Island],” said _Alicia_. Flying is worth mentioning given that this location is 230 miles away from Monterrey and usually accessible by car. She recalled a recent trip to South Padre Island with two of her friends who developed quite sophisticated logistics to get there. “Check this out,” she said,

They took us to the heliport [located in San Pedro]… flew the helicopter to the Aeropuerto del Norte [private airport] and then got in a jet and well, I was like, what’s the problem with driving to the [main] airport? And they were like, “no, because the military registers outgoing planes and too many people know who is leaving and at what time”… Brownsville by jet and then a van to the Island. (Interview with _Alicia_, February 9, 2013)

As outlined in chapter 4, increased violence and fear problematize everyday life. What used to be a comparatively simple car trajectory between a home and a beach home (see
Figure 37) for a couple with the necessary travel documents, became a multimodal journey. The route now involved a car, a helicopter, a jet, a van and three additional transfer points: the heliport in San Pedro, the airport in Monterrey, and the airport in Brownsville. Not only were Alicia’s friends unwilling to drive across northeastern Mexico due to fear, they were also unwilling to drive out of San Pedro to get to the private airport. When the land is unsafe, the upper class takes the sky.

**Figure 37 Getting From San Pedro to South Padre Island**

Source: Google Maps (2016).

“It’s an amazing subculture [San Pedro residents gathering in South Padre Island],” Alicia said laughing. “If you own a jet, why go to the Island?” “So why?” I ask. “Because ‘we bought this gigantic apartment for two million dollars that nobody’s using,’ so that’s why we went, to use it; it’s new, six bedrooms, nobody’s using it” (Interview with Alicia, February 9, 2013).

**Abandoned Villas and Ranches**

Country homes and villas in the outskirts of Monterrey were similarly abandoned to violence and fear. At the time of our interview, Alicia had not been to her husband’s country home near the Presa de la Boca, a nearby reservoir, in over three years. It was easier for her to go to a beach town in Texas—with all the logistics that entailed—than to visit a country house located scarcely twenty miles away from her home. “It was great to go,” she said. Her mother-in-law used to spend every Saturday afternoon there. Jorge too claimed, “nobody wants to go to a quinta, let alone sleep there, out of fear of what may happen at night” (Interview with Jorge, March 5, 2013). Most of my interviewees, both upper and middle class, who owned ranches or country homes, had stopped frequenting them. “I don’t allow myself to go anymore,” said Esteban, “corpses have been found outside the ranch… why go?” (Interview with Esteban, January 12, 2013).
Lucia had not been to her family’s country home in over a year when I first interviewed her in 2012. I met her through my close friend from college, Eugenia. She accepted to be interviewed in her home, where she kept a framed picture on her desk of “a place where I could dream… but it wasn’t paradise anymore” (Interview with Lucia, June 1, 2012). The picture showed a one-floor white house with an orange tile roof against a blue sky, perfectly trimmed green grass amidst orange trees and a large pool. She held the picture in her hands with yearning, wondering if she would be able to go back some day.

Six months later, Lucia invited Eugenia and I to come along as she ventured into the possibility of taking that loved place back. We were stopped at a military checkpoint on our way there—which Lucia had feared on her last visit in 2011, but not this time as she had become accustomed to living in a “state of war”. As we drove into town, Lucia thought we were being watched but would not be bothered by halcones (snoops working for organized crime). “I have this theory that they recognize my car, that they know who I am, where I live, but they will not bother me” (Field Notes, January 25, 2013). We drove down a narrow paved road and arrived at the front entrance of Lucia’s property—a long fence, a gate, and a lock. Past the gate, we drove along a narrow dirt road that gave way to a cleared area among orange trees on a tiny hill with a one-floor white house that matched the picture Lucia keeps on her desk at home (see Figure 38). We parked, pulled out food, beer and laptops from the trunk of her car.

Figure 38 Lucía’s Paradise

Lucia took off her shoes, popped a beer open and began to recall stories: how her neighbor in the next door ranch was murdered last year, most likely because he was into some kind of “dirty business”, “he was from Reynosa after all”; the son of the local
butcher who was kidnapped and has not reappeared even after his family paid the ransom; the cousin of the gardener’s wife who was shot in the head for attempting to sell a fancy car to narcotics who did not want to pay for it; her cousin who pulls out his .45 and shoots the ground a couple of times every time he arrives in his plot next door to indicate that he is home and armed; the multiple shootings she heard in the same direction around the same time of the day for weeks, in the direction where the military was now based and found a pit or fossa full of decomposing corpses a few months later. As she drank her beer and uncovered her stomach to tan under the January sun, she told me:

Never ever, in this place, which I consider paradise, where we used to walk around barefoot in our diapers, how could I ever imagine that one day I would be the neighbor of someone who would be murdered because he was in with the narcotics, or that the place where I learned how to drive a van, um, that two decapitated bodies would appear there. I juxtapose those images because for me, this place, I don’t want it to have that meaning. I want to keep giving it that meaning, she stretches her arm forward as if she could reach out and bring paradise back, I mean, and I think that the fact that all the people here are holding on and are keeping this place and if we keep coming, in the end, this will clean it, will save it, because we’re very close to Cadereyta and this town has not experienced what other towns further in [into the sierra] have experienced, because it’s harder for the military to have access there or whatever. (Field Notes, January 25, 2013)

Three days later, I walked into an office I shared with a woman in her mid-forties at a local private university. “How was your weekend Ana?” she asked smiling. “Great, I went to this ranch in Cadereyta, it was sunny, there was a pool,” I told her smiling back (Field Notes, January 28, 2013). She popped her eyes open. “Ana, be careful, don’t go there.” She began to tell me stories she had heard from her brother-in-law who owns a country home in the same area. He stopped going because of multiple kidnappings. He recently went back and was devastated to find that his country home had been fully ravaged. “They took everything Ana, the furniture, the kitchen appliances, the water pump, everything, even the ground has began to sink.” On whether he would consider reporting the theft she told me, “No, he’s the kind who thinks that the further away you are, the better.” I knew what she meant, but asked nevertheless. “Well,” she said:

They think filing a report is dangerous, they say they are colluded [with criminals], the very police of Cadereyta where they would have to file a report, they are colluded, so they choose not to… they’ve heard many stories from the neighbors of those plots where it wasn’t only about simple theft, but who have been kidnapped, killed, who have been forced to keep, um… drugs in their ranch or stolen cars… what I see is that they are letting this wave of violence pass… so to speak, with the hopes that one day they may be able to recover their things and their land, their quintas, right? (Field Notes, January 28, 2013)

An uncle of mine also has a ranch in this area. During a Christmas meal in 2012, I overheard him say that he decided to rent it so that the land would not be uninhabited.
Otherwise, *los malitos* might simply take over the ranch or take whatever they want from the house. “It is preferable to rent it out for very little to a rancher who will take care and work the land,” Some time later I asked my uncle if he had been to his ranch lately. He replied, “There is nothing there for us anymore.”

**The State as Leisure Provider**

In 2011, bicycle activists and sympathetic officials agreed to close one of the main arteries of San Pedro, the Calzada del Valle, for a few hours for bicycle use on Sundays. They did not expect that hundreds, and then thousands, of people would show up to make use of the space in other ways. The local government initially offered free use of bicycles and little by little more activities and services were added: free yoga classes, concerts, a food and crafts market, free entertainment for kids provided by NGOs or local businesses. During my first observation in 2011, the streets were secured by local police patrol cars at every corner, as well as police on motorized standing scooters riding along the 5-km perimeter. By the end of my fieldwork, more discreet means of surveillance were adopted (closed circuit cameras). Enough local businesses were interested in paying fees to the local state in order to advertise in this space that the weekly event not only became sustainable but profitable for the local government in San Pedro (Interviews with the two officials hired to manage the weekly event, July 13, 2013).

The success of this leisure initiative among the upper class was inseperable from the loss of other leisure options mentioned in the previous sections of this chapter, such as the abandonment of country homes and villas previously visited over the weekend due to fear of leaving the city, as well as the abandonment of all outdoor activities in non-secured spaces. The Chipinque Natural Park located within San Pedro was an exception, as it is secured at the entrance. Its number of visitors greatly increased. Paradoxically, as fear decreased the number of leisure spaces considered safe by the upper class, it reinforced sociability ties in the old or new social options that were created for this purpose. Social ties were renewed in San Pedro de Pinta, as residents claimed that the initiative allowed them to recover that “neighborhood feeling” and “sense of community.” In 2012, a San Pedro resident told a newspaper reporter that this initiative was like going back to “the values from before that were lost” (Uribe Salazar, 2012).
I observed the development of San Pedro de Pinta over two years. There was a decline in interest and number of residents making use of it in 2013. Reduced interest may be due to improved security perceptions in 2013 and the readoption of leisure options that were temporarily abandoned. The San Pedro de Pinta program was replicated in the working-class municipality of Escobedo in 2012. One year later, all Mayors of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area elected for the 2013-2016 period implemented a closed street policy for leisure practices on either Saturdays or Sundays or vías recreativas (leisure avenues). I conducted observations in most of these sites during my fieldwork, including the opening event for the vía recreativa in downtown Monterrey, named Convive Monterrey (Socialize Monterrey). Blocking streets on a regular basis with leisure activities provided a space and incentives for residents to gather or regroup. The regularity of these initiatives fostered the construction of new social ties at a neighborhood level and in some occasions, the renewal of old social ties as well. To reformulate an old sociological argument, fear, like a harsh winter climate, produced fewer spaces of sociability, which translated into denser sociability experiences and, paradoxically, a heightened sense of community amid a sea of suspect strangers (Mauss and Beuchat, 2006).

States Within States: A New Pattern of Urban Seclusion in Latin America

In her analysis of shifting spatial segregation patterns in São Paulo, Teresa Caldeira (2000) establishes the centrality of fear as a driving force for urban segregation. Fear of epidemics transformed Sao Paolo as the upper class moved out of a condensed city and into a center-periphery urban formation in the mid nineteenth century. Similarly, fear of crime is the driving force underlying the formation of “fortified enclaves” where social homogeneity can be walled and preserved. Contemporary São Paulo became a “city of
walls, with a population obsessed by security and social discrimination” (ibid: 231-232). 
Although this pattern of urban segregation can be observed in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area, the fortification of residence, consumption, leisure and workspaces does not capture the totality of urban segregation observed in my case study.

A closer analogy can be established between the segregation of San Pedro from the rest of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area and the formation and fortification of the municipality of Chacao in the Caracas Metropolitan District, Venezuela in the aftermath of the Caracazo. 25 Three months after the poor “blacks came down from the hills” arousing racial “fear of penetration” in the upper classes in 1989, the federal government passed a law to make municipal status easier to achieve in Venezuela (Ciccariello-Maher, 2007). Shortly afterwards, the municipality of Chacao was formed. The wealthy had already begun to settle in that area, but declaring Chacao a municipality made its boundaries official and lead to increased segregation. In the late 1980s, core business activities moved away from the traditional center of Libertador to Chacao, which became a “pole” for corporate agglomeration (Nagoda, 2005: 8). I observed a variation of this economic move as multiple businessmen set up offices within San Pedro in response to increased violence and crime and began to operate their businesses located in other municipalities from afar. That is, in the aftermath of increased fear of violence, economic activities, and most especially the value of real estate, grew in Chacao and San Pedro to the detriment of other metropolitan areas. Moreover, in San Pedro, I observed a booming nightlife and extended curfews as bars where closing elsewhere in the city. Hence, one of the particularities of municipalities such as Chacao and San Pedro in relation to the “fortified enclaves” identified by Caldeira is the “political fortification of the municipality” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2007: 58).

In The Social Construction of Communities, Gerald Suttles draws on early works by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess to reformulate the concept of “defended neighborhood” as “an area within which people retreat to avoid a quantum jump in the risks of insult or injury they must take in moving about outside that area… a response to fears of invasion from adjacent community areas” (1972: 57-58). The extension of this area is variable for Suttles, and can be as small as one building in the case of extreme distrust. Focusing on what he (mis)characterized as “slums” in the United States (Gilbert, 2007), Suttles identified mechanisms of territorial defense including the existence of vigilante gangs, which he claimed emerged out of the failure of the police and courts to protect property and lives. 26 The concept of “defended neighborhood” has been widely utilized to examine the relations between crime, territory and ethnic relations in the US (Ryken, 2009; Schwirian, 1983). Yet a key distinction between this scholarship and the cases of San Pedro and Chacao is that contrary to the poor dwelling in “defended neighborhoods,” the rich are able to mobilize and leverage state resources in their favor.

25 On February 27, 1989, following a 100 percent increase in transportation costs, “the poorest residents of the hilltops surrounding Caracas did the unthinkable: they came down” (Ciccariello-Maher 2007: 53). The military was deployed to stop lootings, leading to the death of hundreds and perhaps thousands, according to unofficial estimates.
26 For similar arguments on gangs establishing "localised orders" in the US see Moore, 1991; Padilla, 1992; Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991; Venkatesh, 1997; Vigil, 1988; for Central America, see Rodgers, 2006.
Conclusion: On Fear, Solidarity and State-Making

In this concluding chapter, I extract the theoretical implications of my case study in relation to the works of Luis Astorga, Charles Tilly, Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias on the state and organized crime; Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss on the linkages between physical proximity, social density, moral cohesion and emotional intensity; Teresa Caldeira, Loïc Wacquant and Gerald Suttles on urban exclusion and seclusion; as well as Jean Delumeau and Stanley Cohen on fear, folk devils and denial.

As mentioned in chapter 1, in Seguridad, Traficantes y Militares and related works, Mexican sociologist Luis Astorga (2000, 2007, 2015) employs Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998) concept of field to build a model explaining shifting relations between the Mexican state and organized crime (see Figure 40). Astorga argues that organized crime was subordinate to a cohesive and authoritative state run by the PRI during most of the 20th century. During this period, drug traffickers who did not provide a portion of their illicit profits to the state had three choices: to quit, to go to jail or to die. Strengthened by a booming drug market in the United States, organized crime gained some autonomy from the political field in the 1980s as the PRI lost its hegemonic position.

Figure 40 Astorga’s Model of Shifting State-Drug Trafficker Relations in Mexico

Astorga argues that the Mexican state created a self-fulfilling prophecy when it followed Ronald Reagan in declaring drug trafficking a national threat in the early 1990s. Some political actors used the state apparatus and the “war on drugs” to hit hegemonic drug traffickers in favor of others and their own interests. This relative autonomy allowed

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27 Ronald Reagan launched the vision of drug trafficking as a national threat on April 8, 1986 in the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) number 221 on Narcotics and National Security. For more details, see chapter 1.

28 Historian Carlos Flores (CIESAS) documents the relations between political families and drug traffickers in northeastern Mexico. These relations can allow us to situate the capturing of a given drug trafficker not as an immediate victory for the “war on drugs” but rather as a move in more complex criminal-political game. By hitting one criminal group, the state may be favoring another. For examples, see chapter 1.
new criminal actors to emerge. Deploying an increasingly violent *modus operandi*, other criminal groups increased their levels of violence to remain competitive in the criminal field. The tables turned. Drug traffickers became a *de facto* national threat. For Astorga, it is now state officials who have three options: to stay out of drug traffickers’ business, to collude with them or to organize a comprehensive security strategy to confront organized crime at every level of the state apparatus. Yet there has been no such comprehensive security strategy in Mexico to date. Instead, there are regional and municipal turf wars between actors of overlapping political and criminal fields.

Astorga establishes no distinction between Bourdieu’s bureaucratic field and political field in his model because the two were inseparable during PRI rule (see Wacquant, 2005 for essential pointers to make this theoretical distinction). Presidents chose their successors from within state/party ranks for most of the twentieth century. In Bourdieu’s model, the bureaucratic apparatus of the “dynastic state” was subordinate to a “house” ([1997] 2005: 31-34). In the Mexican case, the bureaucratic apparatus was subordinate to a monopolistic party. Yet as the bureaucratic and political fields became increasingly separate in the last two decades of the twentieth century, a process some might define as “democratization,” organized crime became relatively autonomous from the state (see Figure 41).

Bourdieu argued that such progressive dissociations of private and public interest are “ambiguous,” given that public servants may still make private use of the material and symbolic profits associated with the state. “The state is a profitable enterprise,” he argues and, “the struggle to make the state thus becomes increasingly indissociable from a struggle to appropriate the profits associated with the state…” (ibid: 41). Yet when these profits are not only the outcome of taxation but also and largely of illegal rents, criminal actors and interests must be taken into consideration. In chapter 1, I presented the *lucha por la plaza* or a struggle taking place the intersection of the bureaucratic, political and criminal fields. As mentioned earlier in that chapter, Latin American cities founded during the colonial period followed an urban blueprint decreed by the Spanish Laws of the Indies. Cities were organized around a plaza or square with religious, political and economic powers surrounding it (a church, a town hall, and a market). “To take the plaza” meant that an army had seized military control over a city. Today, *la plaza* refers to a territory, which involves physical space, commodity flows and political protection. *La plaza* is thus a particular form of localized state-criminal territory and the struggle over it involves state and criminal actors, as well as those aspiring to occupy state positions for criminal interests.

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29 Coopting the military elite (who would later become the Zetas), the Gulf Cartel was the first to adopt a paramilitary logic conducting kidnappings and extortion (Interview with Luis Astorga, May 31, 2015). These practices were subsequently adopted by other criminal groups.

30 As Wacquant (2005: 13-18) notes, most readers of Bourdieu conflate his three concepts to rethink relations of rule and hegemony at the top of social space: the field of power, the bureaucratic field, and the political field.
The Mexican case brings new meaning to Charles Tilly’s provocative analogy of war-making and state-making as “organized crime” (Tilly, 1985), particularly if we consider how the state may fabricate and exploit criminals. This analogy can be fleshed out and elaborated to apply to the Mexican case through a comparative historical detour suggested by Karen Barkey’s aptly titled book *Bureaucrats and Bandits*. In this study of the 17th century Ottoman Empire, Barkey (1994) examines how the state can produce and use bandits. In this case, the state used and incorporated bandits as a means of state consolidation. First, the state made the bandits: the state mobilized young landless males as soldiers according to their warfare needs and these turned to banditry or became mercenaries when demobilized. Second, the state used the bandits: these were the “helping hands of anyone wishing to repress the peasantry” including tax collectors or state officials (Barkey, 1994: 12). Third, the state incorporated the bandits when they became a “widespread phenomenon” and the main challenge to the consolidation of Ottoman rule. “Once banditry developed, the state both used it and was drawn into negotiations with its leaders… gaining loyalty by crushing, often enough, the same bandits it had employed” (ibid: 12). The sociologist and historian argues that “as society appeared chaotic under the spell of banditry, the state found ways to incorporate bandits and increase its sphere of control” (ibid: 16). Bandits strengthened the Ottoman state both by repressing potential upheaval in the countryside and by inclusion into the state apparatus. Barkey thus argues that banditry may contribute to consolidate the state, yet she also states that these bandits or *celali* did not pose a serious threat to the Ottoman state—the state “manufactured banditry” but “the new social group it created in many ways remained its servants” (ibid: 142). This is a crucial difference when examining contemporary Mexico. Although able to exploit drug traffickers from their manufacturing through prohibition and until the 1980s, the Mexican state lost control over the bandits it created. Moreover, both the bureaucratic and criminal fields in question are not circumscribed to Mexico. Although the struggle over *la plaza* between multiple and colluding state and criminal actors takes place in Mexican territory, much of the character and resources employed for these struggles have been supplied, and at times imposed, by the United States of America. Such a case thus exemplifies Tilly’s “logic of international state making” whereby one state lends, gives, sells (and I would add, imposes) war-
making means on another (ibid: 184-5). Thus, both the bureaucratic and the criminal fields in question are transnational.

In Figure 42, I summarize the core argument underlying the five chapters of my dissertation. In brief, after situating my case study in national and regional context (chapters 1 and 2), I examine the impact of these shifting state-criminal relations and related violence and fear on social relations and subjectivities at a metropolitan scale. I drew inspiration from The Civilizing Process, in which Norbert Elias ([1939] 2000) establishes a model tracing interdependent processes of state formation, shifts in social relations and individual subjectivities.31

Figure 42 State-Criminal Violence, Socio-spatial Relations and Subjectivities

Figure 42 has two columns: the struggle for la plaza and the creation of a state within a state that ensued from it. In the first column, we see the impact of the struggle for la plaza described above in socio-spatial relations and subjectivities. At the level of socio-spatial relations, I draw on classical works by Emile Durkheim ([1893] 1998, [1912] 2008), Marcel Mauss and Henri Beuchat ([1905] 2006) to counter the dominant notion that fear

31 For Elias, these are inseparable processes. Examining the case of France, he equates state formation to the monopolization of violence and taxation, which brought about the pacification of society, allowing for distinct types of social relations and individual subjectivities to emerge: a court society where individuals learned to regulate their affect. Elias thus provides the basic structure for this model with three interdependent layers: state formation, social relations and individual subjectivities mediated by shifts in levels of violence and fear as experienced in the everyday.
is straightforwardly a destroyer of social fabric and spotlight why fear both tears and tightens social relations: it both destroys and creates new forms of social life by stimulating morphological changes in everyday practices (see chapters 4 and 5). Mauss and Beuchat utilize the case of the Eskimo to illustrate in greater magnitude a feature that is common to other social groups: that external circumstances and the manner of grouping and dwelling affects the character of collective activities. In the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim ([1912] 2008) further examines the relations between physical proximity, social and moral density with an increased focus on emotional intensity. In a nutshell, he argues that the everyday life of a social group is divided into the ordinary moments of scattered existence and the extraordinary moments of social gatherings. When a group comes together to worship, to celebrate or to mourn, the social ties binding individuals to each other are renewed. Individuals experience themselves as something greater, more powerful, something transcending their very selves. I extend this argument to contemporary urban societies undergoing sudden heightened violence. I argue that abrupt peaks of crime and fear, like a harsh winter climate, reduce spaces of sociability, which translates into denser sociability experiences and, paradoxically, a heightened sense of community amid a sea of suspect strangers.

Contemporary studies of fear tend to highlight the negative facets of this emotion: fear makes us stay at home, suspect of our neighbors, stop going out at night (Briceño-León, 2007; Cárnia, 2002; Pain, 1997; Reguillo, 2002; Rotker, 2002; Sparks et al., 2001). Yet precisely for these reasons, fear can also simultaneously tighten and strengthen social relations. For example, individuals may group in *caravans* or *convoys* to confront feared trajectories or they may seek to regroup for mourning or for leisure in parks and streets that would be threatening if they were out alone (Ana Villarreal, 2015). This “tightening” of the social fabric, however, may not cut across class lines but rather increase urban seclusion, willful at the top and forced at the bottom. Next, I draw on two key concepts from urban sociology to formulate a new pattern of segregation taking form in Latin American cities: “fortified enclaves” and “defended neighborhood.”

Teresa Caldeira (2000) establishes the centrality of fear as a driving force for urban segregation in her analysis of shifting special segregation in São Paulo: just as fear of epidemics drove the Paulista upper class out of a condensed city and into a center-periphery urban formation in the mid nineteenth century, so fear of crime lead the middle and upper classes to generate “fortified enclaves” in the peripheries where social homogeneity could be walled and preserved at the end of the twentieth century. Contemporary São Paulo could no longer be mapped “by the simple opposition of center-rich versus periphery-poor… but rather [became] a city of walls, with a population obsessed by security and social discrimination” (ibid: 231-232). This pattern of urban segregation and walling of wealthy residencies was also present in the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. Nevertheless, it did not fully capture the type of segregation observed in my case study.

As mentioned in chapter 5, there are relevant similarities between the segregation of the municipality of San Pedro from the rest of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area and that of Chacao from the Caracas Metropolitan District in Venezuela. Following the *Caracazo*—a wave of riots that aroused great fear of violence among the upper class in 1989—the municipality of Chacao was formed. Although the upper class was already settled in that area, declaring its borders official municipal borders allowed for further
concentration of resources within this perimeter. Corporate centers relocated their offices from other municipalities in Caracas to Chacao, just as they did from other municipalities in Monterrey to San Pedro. While real estate declined with violence elsewhere in the Monterrey and Caracas metropoles, it increased within San Pedro and Chacao. The upper class in these two localities did not only set themselves apart by employing private security to enclose their living areas, but by making private use of the state to craft a separate state for themselves.

These political boundaries have a material basis—both Chacao and San Pedro have an autonomous police force with significantly more resources than any other police force in their metropolitan areas—but they are also present discourse and imagination. In his masters thesis on the dramatic development of Chacao, Are Nagoda states that, “approaching Chacao by car, the municipal border is perhaps even more striking as one is welcomed by large road signs carrying the municipal logo, saying ‘You are now in Safe Territory’” (Nagoda, 2005: 9). Similarly, residents exhaled with relief when they entered “armored” San Pedro. Even if there are no physical walls dividing Chacao and San Pedro from their metropolitan areas, there is widespread recognition among upper and lower class residents that San Pedro, like Chacao, is something else, a “tiny municipal nation-within-a-nation” as political scientist George Ciccariello-Maher defined Chacao (ibid: 60). Moreover, the borders of San Pedro were enforced at times with military inspection points and were internationally recognized. For several years, US Department of State travel warnings stated that consular staff “may not travel outside the San Pedro Garza Garcia municipal boundaries between midnight and 6 a.m.” (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2012).

Monterrey and Caracas are not the only metropolitan areas to experience this new pattern of urban segregation in Latin America. When Dennis Rodgers returned to Managua, Nicaragua in 2002 after five years of absence, he noticed that in response to increased crime: “rather than fragmenting into an archipelago of self-sustaining and isolated islands of wealth within a sea of poverty [or “fortified enclaves”], urban space has undergone a process whereby a whole layer of the metropolis has been disconnected from the general fabric of the city” (2004). This disconnection, disembedding or armoring of one municipality in relation to a metropolitan area may have a theoretical precedent in what sociologists and criminologists have long characterized as a “defended neighborhood,” albeit with important differences.

Gerald Suttles reformulates Robert Park and Ernest Burgess’s concept of “defended neighborhood” in The Social Construction of Communities. He defines it as an area where people retreat to avoid a “quantum jump in the risks of insults or injury”; a response to “fears of invasion” (1972: 57-58). Mechanisms of territorial defense may include vigilante gangs, which Suttles argued emerged from the police’s and courts’ failure to protect property and lives (for more on gangs establishing "localised orders" in

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32 This disconnection or “disembedding” as Rodgers calls it, was achieved, among others, through increased private security, multiple “beautifying” public works and especially through the elaboration of a new transportation network including: the replacement of traffic lights with roundabouts (to prevent carjacking); a bypass road to avoid a high-crime area; and overall road improvement in areas connecting upper class spaces at the expense of roads elsewhere. “None of these new roads and buildings are for us poor folks, they’re only for the rich and their big cars!... It’s impossible to go anywhere now with all those big cars cruising around so fast. Have you tried crossing those roads? It’s impossible, especially in the roundabouts...” said an interviewee to Rodgers (2004: 122).
the US see Moore, 1991; Padilla, 1992; Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991; Venkatesh, 1997; Vigil, 1988; for Central America, see Rodgers, 2006). Yet contrary to the poor dwelling in “defended neighborhoods,” the wealthy in San Pedro and Chacao were able to mobilize and leverage state resources in their favor.

To sum up, in the second layer of Figure 42, sudden and explosive violence and fear both tore and tightened the social fabric, increasing urban segregation and leading to the reorganization of upper class living within a fortified perimeter, a strengthening micro-state within a weakening macro-state. Just as Loïc Wacquant (Wacquant, 2008, 2009, 2014) has examined changing forms of urban marginality in advanced societies or urban polarization from below and their political roots and reverberations, this study suggests that there are also significant shifts in how urban seclusion takes form at the top of the class spectrum or urban polarization from above. In this Mexican case, we see shifting dynamics of organized, self-targeted “sociospatial confinement” (Wacquant, 2010) as the upper classes restrain their housing, business and even leisure activities within an increasingly fortified municipality, as well as different challenges to managing “problem categories” as criminal leaders live in the same neighborhoods as the upper class.

Finally, coming down to the third level of Figure 42, concerning subjectivities, I examined how increased violence spawned new powerful collective representations of fear, as well as how these become vehicles for the normalization of violence. In La Peur en occident (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles), French historian Jean Delumeau acknowledges the challenge of developing an analysis of fear at a collective level. Fear is often defined as an individual emotion—contemporary fear of crime surveys are an example. Yet Delumeau’s focus is on fear as “a social group’s habit of dreading something (real or imaginary)” (Delumeau, 1978: 29, my translation). I draw on Delumeau to examine the way in which widespread insecurity and anxiety was focused and transformed into los malitos, although not by the Church, as was the case for Delumeau. Los malitos differs from the “inventory of evils” provided by Delumeau in that it was not the product of ecclesiastical discourse. Emerging from pop culture, the figure los malitos was, more precisely, a “folk devil,” although not exactly in Cohen’s sense. In chapter two of Folk Devils and Moral Panics, Stanley Cohen ([1972] 2002) presents a “media inventory” for the manufacturing of such fearsome categories: 1) exaggeration and distortion; 2) prediction; and 3) symbolization.

Los malitos, roughly translated as little evil guys, was not the outcome of manufactured news, fashioned at the intersection of the journalistic and political fields. This cowboy figure emerged in everyday discourse when words like narco or Zeta were too horrifying to pronounce. Inspired in a local television show, in which a clown routinely confronted two robbers, los malitos was not an exaggeration but rather a euphemism for new perpetrators of violence. This demonstrates that folk devils can be fabricated in two ways: accentuation or euphemization. The category and certain objects (pick-up trucks) did become a symbol for new constellations of violence, in the same way that “the fur-collared anorak and the scooter [characteristic of the “Mods”]… became sufficient in themselves to stimulate hostile and punitive reactions” (Cohen, 2002: 38). Nevertheless, this category served to simplify perpetrators of violence and obscure the degree to which state security agencies were involved. Moreover, the perversity of the category lies in its representation of both perpetrators of violence and victims.
The category *malito* was not only used to stereotype a feared potential victimizer, but also to criminalize actual victims. That is, in an attempt to rationalize a blurry war and in a desperate effort to believe that one could be categorically spared from harm, Monterrey residents affirmed that victims of homicide or forced disappearances were “surely into something,” “had ties,” and were certainly *malitos*. Cohen’s (2001) later work on denial becomes more relevant to our understanding as I examine how the formation of this “folk devil,” fabricated at the bottom and not top, can actually serve to normalize violence through: 1) deflection instead of accentuation; and 2) fusing victims and perpetrators while 3) screening the state and the political roots of the problem (similar to the discourse of the "underclass" in the US, see Wacquant, 2004).

To sum up, this dissertation examines the impact of a wave of gruesome criminal violence on everyday life and on the struggle for *la plaza* in Monterrey, Mexico. While most research on violence and everyday life focuses on the living conditions and experiences of the urban poor, this project began as an ethnographic examination of upper class responses to sudden, explosive, spectacular criminality and the attendant collective outbursts of fear. Drawing on two years of fieldwork conducted at both ends of the class spectrum in my hometown, I counter the dominant narrative of fear as a destroyer of the social fabric with evidence of how fear both tears and tightens the social fabric; it both destroys and creates new forms of social life. Yet this “tightening” of the social fabric did not cut across social classes and contribute to binding the social whole. On the contrary, increased violence and fear lead to the fortification and reorganization of upper class living within Mexico’s wealthiest municipality San Pedro Garza García, while impoverishing the rest of the Monterrey Metropolitan Area. The relative pacification of San Pedro, the formation of a state within a state, in relation to its metropolitan area exemplifies how extreme violence and criminality may exacerbate urban inequality.
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