

# ON NORMALIZATION OF DEATH IN MEXICO IN TERMS OF EVIL AFTER THE OUTBURST OF THE “WAR ON DRUGS”

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## Abstract

On December 11th, 2006, the then Mexican president Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), through his Security Cabinet, announced the deployment of five thousand military in the Mexican State of Michoacán to fight organized crime, which marked the beginning of what has been termed as the Mexican Drug War or the Mexican War on Drugs, a warfare-style combat against Mexican drug syndicates. Allegedly, the war started as an effort to reduce Mexican drug cartels power, which increased in recent years both in terms of land control and violence, as well as intromission in state corruption and politics.

To this day, approximately, 150,000 persons have been killed, 28,000 have disappeared, and 280,000 have been displaced from its hometowns due the intensity of violence. In 2011, the homicide rate increased to reach a maximum of 62 killed people per day, and was the first cause of death among men between 15-44 years old. All these numbers equate the death toll of an average war, and in these regards the Mexican situation is not so different—actually, it has been defined as a low-intensity war. What has been different from a normal state of war (if there are any clear boundaries to define so) is the production of death, both as massive executions and kidnappings and as a legitimization of violence via narcocultura.

Death in Mexico, it is proposed, has been assimilated into the everyday life and has been taken for granted: violence is less a disruption and more an expectation; death is still grievable, but not surprising; criminals are tolerated, and sometimes praised. Hence, what is now at stake is not who will “win” the War on Drugs, but how death can be detached from the ordinary. When death has attained such a degree of integration into the social fabric, it is worth to speak about normalization of death.

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**A Philosophical Framework to Understand Evil and its Relation to Death. From Dostoyevsky to Levi.**

According to Simona Forti (2015), Fyodor Dostoevsky produced the new paradigm through which the radical evil could be re-thought: the evil as lacking roots, not as a failure. This claim is best represented by his *Demons* (1995) main character, Nikolai Stavrogin, who embodies the loss of meaning and the death of God. Stavrogin's actions are characterized by excess, through which he reaches the point of nothingness; but, at the same time, his actions attempt to imitate God. However, instead of create, his actions are oriented towards destruction. He embodies a rather will-to-nothingness. After Dostoevsky, following Forti's argument (15-54), evil achieves a mundane existence and loses its metaphysical prejudice. This way, evil can be found in everyone and everywhere, in the ordinary world as unchained freedom.

Nicolai Stavrogin is to be contrasted with other main character, Piotr Verkhovenski, who constantly follows Stavrogin's steps, although his actions are rather base and full of vileness. In opposition to Stavrogin, who by his sole presence produces other's subjugation, Verkhovenski is restlessly pursuing power and trying to impose his will. Stavrogin and Verkhovenski, can be claimed, are the two opposites of the same degree of evil: the former is rooted in seduction and power, while in the latter lies in cheating and violence; one is rather diabolic, while the other is of a mundane order; Stavrogin destroys life, while Verkhovenski destroys the world.

However, there is another striking feature in Dostoevsky's *Demons*, which also shed light over contemporary debates on evil. Not only Nicolai Stavrogin, with his mysterious and demonic aspect; and Piotr Verkhovenski, in his mundane pursuing of power; but town's population, in which Dostoevsky's novella takes place, are true representations of evil, yet in another sense. The population, seemingly, was always ready for scandal and concerned about anything else but of scoundrel and rumor. They not only served as mediums but also as agents of Verkhovenski's plans, but as rather aimless followers enchanted with their masters, who slightly gave them a little sense to their lives, however obscure and mystified it was for them.

It is through this type of subjects that Stavrogin's and Verkhovenski's deeds are possible. Moreover, Nicolai Stavrogin and Piotr Verkhovenski, can be also claimed, were, to some extent, just a sort of pretexts to symbolize and release town's malice. Notwithstanding, the difference between Stavrogin and Verkhovenski is that they seemed to know—or were at least conscious—of the moral quality of their acts and their aims, while the rest of the population were just trying to grant their lives with something

valuable. The demons are not only novel's protagonists, but, too, all the others which made protagonists' actions possible. It is in such unnoticed and unconscious nihilism that the modern possibility of evil lies. Western modern life has lost its grasp on a meaningful life, so anything is worth to be reached by any means.

That way, Stavrogin's evildoings are precisely powerful because of his well-focused aims, while population's deeds rather resemble gross violence, due to its lack of self-awareness. In a sense, power, as Stavrogin embodies it, is of an abstract sort and not as mundane as violence. Evil is rooted in lie and perversion, in emptying meaning and corrupting the senses—in a word, in the profanation of the sacred, not only as a crossing but as a breaching, as letting no ways of recovering, as Stavrogin ultimate actions shows. That is why existential void can be translated as evil: it not only means a vacuum, but the very ways to create and discern meaning has been destroyed as result—or manifestation—of such vacuum. If the ability to build and recognize what's valuable in life is lost, then the basic tools to make sense of own's existence are rather missed.

Martin Heidegger (2010), as an attempt to tackle evil from an ontological perspective and overcome the subjective idea of it, through a fictional dialogue, develops the idea that the will itself can be regarded as the source of evil, and evil as *devastating*, not as *devastation*: will-to-power is the only thing left "beyond good and evil". Devastation is thus the grounds on which think about evil is possible. "Devastation' [»Verwüstung«] means for us, after all, that everything—the world, the human, and the earth—will be transformed into a desert [*Wüste*]. [212]" (p. 136). The desert is already there, and it is just shown by the devastation. "Desert" in that later sense means the "wasteland", what brings about nothing and nothing springs from it, the place where abandonment has taken place.

Devastation is total and there is no qualitative difference within it. Consequently, evil devastates and turns being into nothing. It does not only destroy life, but the being: evil arises as an abandonment of being. Thus, devastation is not only a material condition yield by violence, but an essential trait of the being that springs even in peaceful moments, thus rendered into *destruction*: "Older Man: The devastation was already at work before the destruction began. Younger Man: Indeed; otherwise the destruction could not even begin." (p. 142) In the core of being lies an ambiguity that gives place to its own abandonment, and evil, as underlying devastation, appears.

Furthermore, Heidegger argues that what characterizes the human is not its capability of *logon* as such—that

means, as the “wordly animal”—, but that he is the *mortal* being, the one which can die; the one which knows that is mortal. Thus, if the essence of human is death, and if also life can be regarded as waiting, the human is, too, the being that waits, specifically, who waits for death, the only certainty humans have. However, the form of that waiting is reversed: death waits upon of us, we don’t wait for death, as it does upon our being.

Bearing on mind such characterization about the essence of being, does the definition of the mortal being as the being that is capable of death could be also translated as the being which is *able to die*? If so, I think, is in this trait that the possibility of devastation lies too: for the man is the being which can die, he is able to reverse meaning. The meaning of death is the reversal of all meaning. Devastation also takes place there where meaning has been overturned. Evil also takes place there where meaning has been misled. Hence, evil is a spiritual reality that goes against nature and creatures, which belongs to the very structure of being.

Evil, that way, is an event of being. It compels us to see our epoch of as one of devastation nurtured by malice, as an insurgency of the being: *des grimmige*, furiousness; *das aufzührauische*, which instigates. Thus, malice, has also a subjective dimension that is pushed forward as will to power, which furthermore creates the possibility for the display of evil. Malice, as an insurgency of being, is the ontological agent of devastation. It renders possible evil to take place as a worldly event.

Hannah Arendt (2005), in the quest of a basis to ground morality in something more than costumes, as can be derived from that word’s ancient roots, points out that Stalinism attempted to transform social relations from their roots in the long run, but was Nazism which altered morality upside-down, yet this transformation didn’t last so long. What is more striking about “Nazi morals” is that ordinary people from all social strata engaged in the transformation. This explains, partially, the inability of Germans to deal both morally and legally with war criminals among them: the speechlessness of the horror, on the one hand, was even unthinkable; and, on the other hand, it raised the possibility of moral judgment of one’s deeds.

In relation to that, “...our own experiences seem to affirm that the original name of these matters (*mores* and *ethos*), which imply that they are but matters, customs and habits, may in a sense more adequate than philosophers have thought.” (p. 75) Arendt claims that the core of ancient and modern morals seems to be the self: all moral maxims

are on the side of the self as the higher possible measure. However, as she notes, goodness has been traditionally associated with selflessness, while evil has been linked with egoism.

Moral thought has thus been associated with knowing oneself, as acquiring consciousness of oneself, which may serve as the grounds for ethical behavior. It is self-evident and self-compulsory, that means, it obvious what we ought to do in each case and, if we act in the opposite direction, the wrongness of our mistake appears promptly. However, what is of a modern fashion is the introduction of the *obligation* in relation to these matters, indicating that moral maxims are not self-evident and that punishment, even by consciousness, is on the other side of the coin.

As well, knowing oneself was identified by the classics as the true quality of human beings; as the animal who is capable of thinking and speaking, so the problem of make others suffer or be capable of suffering for others was not at the core of ancient morals: by knowing myself I can evaluate myself and have a moral stance about anything; by passing the world through the “filter” of my moral judgment I also recognize and acknowledge what I think and what happens to me, thus the possibility of remembrance is opened. This capacity of remembrance is of the outmost importance in relation to moral judgment. The possibility of moral thinking resides in the ability to be with oneself and to act in accordance to oneself. This is the only way to act without prearranged frameworks of morality. Hence, what creates the possibility of evil is the absence of a *self* that constitutes a person: a person who carries away his experiences and denies judgment to himself, a person with no self-grown roots, it’s at perils to cause evil. According to Arendt, henceforth, thinking is what restrains evil to be carried out, but it does not, in opposition to the latter, paves the way for goodness or kindness.

Hence, whenever we start thinking we stop acting, and thus the possibility of judgment raises. In political terms, this trait of judgment means that whenever we have company, we start to act and stop thinking, hence the possibility of action springs. Moreover, thinking and judging are beyond consciousness as activity, differentiated from mental states. Consciousness, that way, is not an instance that could brought about neither judgement nor action. Consciousness is rather a state of mind which shows how we are with ourselves, even in the case of evil.

That way, Arendt bring consciousness back to the fore, now as a *subjective* perception of evil, which does not contradict the claim that only through oneself morality

is possible. That way, *what* somebody does is transformed into who is the actor of such deed: "The greatest evil perpetrated is evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons. Within the conceptual framework of these considerations, we say that wrongdoers who refuse to think by themselves what they are doing and who also refuse in retrospect to think about it, that is, go back to remember what they did (which is *teshuvah* or repentance), have actually failed to constitute themselves into somebodies." (pp. 111-12). Hence, those who decide to forget are able to do anything—anything in a wider sense, not only morally speaking—, because they opt to avoid judgement on themselves and evaluate the world according to their own experience. They are ready to do anything to others and to themselves.

And here is where the *will* plays a role. The will is a human faculty which stands between reason and desire: "The will is the arbiter between reason and desire, and as such the will alone is free. Moreover, while reason reveals what is common to all men, and desire what is common to all living organisms, only the will is entirely my own." (p. 114), and "At this point it becomes clear that neither reason nor desire are free, properly speaking. . . . By willing I decide. And this is the faculty of freedom." (p. 281, note 16)

However, is thinking as a resort to avoid evil a rationalist claim? I mean, if the activity—or the act—thinking is the human way to restrain from being morally deprived, does this mean that whatever we may be able to pass through the filter of our judgment will, if it involves a possibility of evil-doing, be restrained? Does this mean that evil cannot be done *consciously*? If so, does this mean that evil-doers are unable to think or *decided* not to think? If the second question is right, then the possibility of evil does not rely on the presence of rationality but of will. Thus, is evil an "I-can" and no an "I-will"? I mean, is evil the result of mere action and not of deciding, the latter being, in this case, reason and will together? Is it possible evil as an act of the will? Primo Levi have developed some insights that may help to answer these latter questions.

Primo Levi (1989), in an attempt to elucidate about the reason why people regards fellow humans as if not belonging to human kind—specifically, in regards to what happened in Nazi concentrations camps, in one of which he was a prisoner—, points out that human understanding of the world and world's history is usually carried out through a binary code: us and them. That is why, he argues, not so difficult to understand what went on when human slaughters take place. Notwithstanding, it is not a simple justification. Levi criticizes as "willed stupidity" the way in which German people accepted Nazi atrocities: "Without

this cowardice [to speak up about Jewish extermination] the greatest excesses would not have been carried out, and Europe and the world would be different today." (p. 15)

Speaking about his own experience in a concentration camp, Levi says that the lager reproduced totalitarian state architecture's: as people's everyday life in a totalitarian regime are integrated into the state, prisoners were, too, taken as lager's workers. However, what is astonishing is that, it seemed to Levi, they were not totally forced to carry on their duty. They were rather taken into a machinery of oppression and turned them into pieces, and they ran that machinery until its last moment. This is what Levi has termed as the *grey zone*. The gray zone is the place where victims and perpetrators meet, the zone in which it is not so easy to identify each other, except from where each came from. As such, this area is neither fixed nor existent: is it created every time a state of general violence has been deployed, and thus is it difficult to recognize where it begins and where it ends, as well who is the victim and who the perpetrator. The gray zone is the place in which victims and perpetrators negotiate with their reality to adapt themselves. In that latter sense, German people normalization of violence, thus, was as terrible as Nazi mass murders, yet in other sense: the Nazis destroyed bodies, while the rest of the population erased meanings.

That way, strikingly enough, the grey zone is fulfilled, partly, by collaborators. (In the case of Nazi lagers, they were prisoners—the infamous *sonderkommandos*) They are usually regarded as traitors and they can always switch sides, so that is why they were never assigned to higher tasks but to the lower, as well as their duties were the most compromising ones. In such conditions, the harshest the oppression, the more willingness to collaborate to survive. In such conditions, paradoxically, the oppressed is also responsible of his oppression. They are "hybrid prisoners", as Levi called them. They stand amidst victims and perpetrators, but not as a link, but as a chain. They are, furthermore neither prisoners nor perpetrators anymore, and thus they are un-recognizable for them both. They are neither martyrs nor heroes.

Mammals, in general, seem to be beings able to get used to mistreatment and a deplorable environment, always trying to reach a point of ordinality, no matter in which conditions it may be attained. May this ability be regarded as derived from evolution? I mean, is this ability a byproduct of adaptability to the environment? Or is it simply a contingent or pragmatic capability to don't get physically or psychologically destroyed, to make sense of the world as it is, because otherwise it would be unbearable? It seems to be both at the same time, yet it implies different meanings

insofar such “adaptability” springs out from a generalized state of violence, rather than a strategy to survive when the environment is not favorable.

Thus, a question arises: are common men possible? I mean, doesn't every situation has its own contingencies and particularities? Of course, not all times are as violent and frightful as others, but it seems that there is no such a thing as a normal situation. Perhaps, the only normality is that of *normalization*, a continuous effort to normalize every situation; to tame reality to the best of our ability, even if such normalization is never fully attained.

Ultimately, it seems, there is no a moral law within us, as Kant claimed. We are victims of our desires and needs, and of our times. The way we morally behave is not a decision, but a compulsion. It not only lacks rationality but of will. We are dragged by circumstances, and we consciously do so. And this is where the problem lies: we are, at all times, capable of judgment, and thus responsible of our deeds. Thus, in opposition to Arendt, judgment, it seems, is rather a condemnation than a gift.

#### **Towards an Explanation of Violence in Mexico in terms of Normalization of Death**

What is astonishing about Levi is that he left no room for definite positions when life is at perils in face of overwhelming violence. In opposition to Arendt, who claims that ultimate moral dilemmas produce heroes or martyrs, in the Nazi lagers, perpetrators were somehow victims of a regime that seized upon their lack of judgment, as well as victims, too, “took part” of violence when they were left out of options and were pushed to participate in concentration camps work. Hence, it seems, hybrid prisoners have been more common and less exemplary than heroes and martyrs, however they haven't been recorded in human history due they are rather infamous, or perhaps because they have been masses, not individuals. Morality's “negative virtue”—in an Arendtian sense—remains a virtue, of which hybrid prisoners have lacked. Yet they didn't lack of humanity.

Nonetheless, there is a basic differentiation among hybrid prisoners in the above-mentioned sense. There are those who took part of violence reproduction, whether as perpetrators or victims. In those regards, it is useful to recall Arendt's ideas about responsibility. She succinctly describes the link between judgment and morality: if I am capable of thinking, therefore I stop acting and judge my deeds, or my possible actions. Then, I am able to act consequently to what I regard as *moral*, in accord to my will—to what constitutes me as a person. Hence, those who, as well by an act of their will, refused to think—that

means, to judge—and act by will alone, are capable even to do what they would have regarded as wrongful.

As well, we can trace back the possibility of emergence of hybrid prisoners to what Heidegger terms as *devastation*. As Heidegger's “Old Man” notices—in relation to 1940's events—devastation was already at work before it showed up. And it was at work because it always has done so. Devastation is a trait of the being, and, as such, it is absolute. Man, defined not as *zoon logon* but as the *animal who awaits*, is waiting for death, the only certainty about being. That way, devastation is there along with the being, and when it erupts as an event of being, it does so as *malice*: the being is also manifested as evil. Nothingness is the necessary complement of being, and thus perpetrators can be turned into victims and victims can transform themselves as perpetrators.

Furthermore, it is also really striking that both in Dostoevsky and Levi accounts seem that the possibility of justice gets lost. In the case of Dostoevsky, how to redeem children suffering? Against children the most horrible crimes have been committed, without they even taking part of any misdeed. Moreover, they are incapable of understanding what is being done to them, so their suffering increases. In the case of Levi, the hybrid prisoner is not precisely “guilty” of its crimes, as well as the warders are intermeshed in a web of commands that easily miss their path. Any of these situations amounts to say that no one is to be blamed. The responsibility of causing suffering, both legal and moral, is to be found case by case.

But there are those who, in face of death, are left out of options and opt to “worship life”, as Simona Forti (2015) points out. Based on Levi's account of his experience as a concentration camp prisoner, Forti argues that the essential trait of power workings is the elementary desire to survive. The German lagers were possible because, on the one hand, prisoner's subjectivity was effectively erased and those imprisoned were devoid of their humanness; and, on the other hand, because prisoners “willed” to collaborate with camps waders in exchange for, at least, the minimum entitlement of privilege among other prisoners, which could keep them not alive, but *surviving*.

As these extreme examples shows, power as a relation is thus possible because what is tried to be preserved to its last instance is life, which lies at the core of biopolitical power. Nazi concentration camps were not aimed to kill Jews, but to make Germans live. Hybrid prisoners were not sadists, but ordinary people trying to survive. We are greed for life, as Forti remarks, of surviving at any cost; but not at the cost of life itself, of biological life, but at the



cost of life as something meaningful: at the end, what is left are our bodies, not ourselves. Hence the paradox: if we accept to be reduced to *zōē* to biological life, our life is striped out of any meaning, so there's maybe no point in preserving it.

#### **Mexican Narco-cultura as Thanatopolitics.**

Then, what is going on in Mexico? In recent years, the Mexican population has witnessed an increase of violence and death. As mentioned before, the numbers are striking themselves. Drug cartels presence in Mexico is old and profound. It was also intertwined with the Institutional Revolutionary Party, the quasi-state political organization that dominated politics in Mexico for more than seventy years, which let them sprung an even oversaw, as the authoritarian state it was, their activities (Rosen and Zepeda, 2016).<sup>2</sup>

Widespread corruption is also an obvious problem. In 2016, Mexico was ranked in the 106th position, among 177 countries, by the Corruption Perceptions Index. It jumped from the 47th and 105th position between 2002-2012, the period in which violence peaked and, according to the Mexican Human Rights Commission, impunity rate amounts 99%. Of all of this, police corruption is the most dangerous.

Rosen and Zepeda (2016) notice that drug trafficking organizations power have increased because of neoliberalism: "drug smuggling is performed using legal trade mechanisms, while money laundering is done by legal companies in the financial markets. The rise of drug trafficking as well as drug-related violence is related to the political system prevailing in a given country but is also linked to the characteristics of the economic model of development implemented." (p. 10). These aspects are not a unique reality of Mexico, as neither drug flows nor markets are. These also comprises another South American and Asian regions, where narcotics are produced and shipped (RAND, UN).

However, it is important to briefly consider two aspects about Mexico in contrast to other countries. On the one hand, Mexico has an exceptional relation to death. Ever since before the Spanish conquest, death has not only been respected but also celebrated. Death has a strong symbolic value in Mexico's culture. In that latter sense, death has been present in Mexico long time ago. On the other hand, Mexico is still as difficult to govern as has been since the

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, it is important to mention that the PRI did not control drug trafficking—which is rather part of global economy—but served as an arbiter between drug cartels.

great Mesoamerican civilizations times. Even before the Spanish conquest, harsh domination through violent means has been exerted over large segments of population in the lands that nowadays conform Mexico. The people in these territories been always immersed in an internal struggle against its dominators, whether domestic or foreigner.

Before the Spanish Conquest, death was considered as a stage in an infinite cycle of existence, as Eduardo Matos-Moctezuma (1971) points out. In contrast to the Christian binary and static conception of life and death<sup>3</sup>, in precolonial Mesoamerica, death and life were mythologically represented as an eternal fight between *Tezcatlipoca* and *Quetzalcoatl*, night and day, in which the Sun is feed by the blood of the Death. In this account, death is seminal for life. Moreover, "Let us remember that no other people had represented death so obsessively as the ancient cultures of Mexico. Worship of death? Not exactly. It can be defined better as worshipping life... through death." (p. 87).

Such kind of worshipping lies on a fundamental duality that Matos finds out in the roots of Mexica theology. *Ometéotl*—the "two-god"—, the god's breeder, was at a time female and masculine— "lord and lady"—, the representation of duality. He notices that Nahua peoples may have, by observing that nature is full of dualities, regarded an original dichotomy at the core of creation, and the most important of these dualities is that of life and death. The first of these dichotomies they observed was that of agriculture, where there is a rain season and a dry season. The Aztecs, moreover, created a calendar which regulated their social and political activities, also in accordance with collection of fruits and sow.

Even in contemporary Mexico, as Eduardo Lomnitz remarks (2005) traditions related to death ranges from the *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead), a world-famous festivity in which dead relatives are remembered and symbolic offerings are offered to them; the cult to *La Santa Muerte* (the Holy Death), an esoteric cult focused on worshipping death as a deity; to the way skeletons were depicted and channeled as a political protest in early 20th century, right before the Mexican Revolution, and which later served as the cornerstone for Mexican popular art. Death in Mexico has an astonishing cultural weight.

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<sup>3</sup> The most salient difference between Catholicism and the Mexica religion, Matos-Moctezuma points out, (1971) was that the final destiny of person was decided at the moment of his dead, not in relation to his deeds during life. For the Mexicas—a Mesoamerican ancient civilization which nurtured most of contemporary Mexican traditions—, we all are subject to death in despite our social position, so what matters is how one enters death's dominions. The criterion is factual and not moral.

On the other hand, the different cultures inhabiting in Mexico have been torn apart among warring factions, even before colonial times. More than any other, Aztec domination depicts how intricate relations among Mesoamerican civilizations were (Tuchman, 1984). In addition, as Frank Tannenbaum remarks (1968), after the Spaniards attained a certain degree of administrative centralization by coercive means, it was destroyed by the Independence war (1810-1821), which forced Mexico to a more of fifty years of government by violence, mostly lead by the military, that left its imprint in Mexican politics. This chaotic stage was partially overcoming, among other measures, according to Tannenbaum, only by forcing criminals to join government ranks and thus formalizing their status, now as rural police men, military or office holders.

Yet, all of these does not amount as an explanation about contemporary eruption of violence in Mexico. Neither it does for a normalization of death, of material death. Recent eruption of violence in Mexico is rather associated to the illegal drugs market, as John Gibler notes (2011). Contemporary violence in Mexico is to be explained rather in terms of a totally un-regulated and highly profitable market. Drug sales revenues are billionaire and have an impact in world's economy as well as in several countries' domestic economies.

Once again, the numbers are exemplary. Gibler, based on various world reports, remarks that world illegal drug markets generate 300-500 million dollars, of which Mexican cartels retrieve 25 billion from the US alone. The price of cocaine increases over 3,000% from its source of origin to the US streets. The US illegal drug market net worth ranges around 108.9 billion dollars, according to a RAND report (2012). Stephen D. Morris, (2012) also based on several reports, indicates that Mexican cartels employ an estimated 450,000 people and that the livelihood of some 3.2 million people in Mexico depends on drug markets.

One of the most arresting features of this widespread of normalization—here we are not only dealing with widespread violence, but normalization of certain social relationships—is what has been termed as *narco-cultura*. In Mexico, there is a long tradition of criminal romanticizing and praising, which notoriously arose during the revolution in the form of *corridos*, a popular and country-side music genre aimed to redeem bandits as heroes and convey revolutionaries' odysseys against the Mexican army, and which also depicted them as Robin Hood-like fictional characters coming from society's lower strata, supported by their community's population.

Decades after the Mexican Revolution, corrido music survived through the last century depicting drug dealers' clashes with police forces and drug traffickers' journeys to cross the US border, and who, almost in every case, ended up arrested or killed by the police or their enemies, thus turning them into a sort of martyr-hero. It was after the current war against drugs that such representations changed. In the nowadays *corridos*, drug traffickers started to win over the police, enjoyed their wealth, and lived a luxurious way of life. Moreover, they are now depicted as carrying heavy weapons and employing extreme violence against their enemies. Death risk was not regarded as a danger anymore, but as part of everyday life. This newly type of *corridos* has been termed as *narco-corridos*, which work as the broadest outlet for narco-culture (Simonett, 2004).

However, narco-cultura has now developed into a whole cultural industry which ranges from clothing that imitates drug lords wear; soup operas produced in Colombia, Mexico, and USA; architectural style, which resembles Mexican countryside haciendas but shaped and furnished lavishly (Cabañas, 2012). Most important, narco-cultura is also portrayed as assuming life as surrounded by organized crime and violence as a legit way of dealing with everyday life. In its outset narrowed to *narco-corridos*, the narco-cultura has emerged to include a comprehensive way of life allegedly experienced by drug kingpins and pursued and legitimized by common people.

Nonetheless, it is important to give a step forward about *narco-cultura* as a mere market niche and use the term in a more conceptual and theoretical meaning. This way, *narco-cultura* may not only mean a set paraphernalia and items, as well as values and attitudes, related to idealized drug-lords and their deeds, but as a more general regard of violence and death as integrated into everyday life. It does not amount for assimilation of violence, which is rather a state in which the difference between what violence is and what is not has been lost. In most parts of the country, silence is still a trait towards violence, so violence as disruption of ordinary life remains acknowledged.

If I use the term *narco-cultura*, yet in another sense, is because the type of violence that has been normalized is that related to illegal drugs market, not as violence as such. And if I don't use the term death culture is because the anthropological background of that latter term. Thus, *narco-cultura*, within the limits of this paper, means integration/silence toward contemporary violence derived from the illegal drug market and the

Mexican state’s war on drugs. Normalization is not mere assimilation, but also awareness and a “let it go” attitude towards it. As Levi notes, “willed stupidity”, or rather “willed acknowledging and shutting up”, is capable of the most atrocious crimes, as well as the survival drive does.

On the other hand, the Mexican state and drug syndicates are rather exerting *thanatopolitics*. In the first case, is it obvious that Mexican armed forces, as belonging to the Mexican state, considers the population as subject to biological safeguarding. In relation to that, the Mexican state is doing no more of what its expected from it. It is merely exerting “state racism”: on the basis of population’s preservation, it is destroying a group to preserve the other. In the second case, the problem is less complex but more profound. Drug cartels reduce the population to simple and useful categories over which they work upon; whether as enemies, friends—rather servants—, or as simply subject of their activities, they are all subject to death.

But not only the wider population is subject to the state and organized crime violence. Drug cartels workers are a better described as hybrid prisoners: by no means they are privileged people; they are rather slaves. Peasants see themselves forced to work for drug cartels whether due their economic situation or coercion; the *sicarios*, the term given to drug syndicates’ assassins, serve as mere instruments for killings and kidnappings, and disposable if no longer needed. The same goes for all the other low-profile workers, from informants to street-level drug dealers. They are clogs of a machine and not members of an organization. Somewhere nearby, death is also waiting for them (Gibler, 2011; Grillo, 2012).

Normalization of violence often renders a sort of bureaucratization that paves the way for its reproduction. Moral judgment comes to a halt or is transformed. In Mexico, during the first years of the war, it was common to hear police authorities referring to murders as “settlings of accounts” or that criminals “killed among themselves”, as Gibler points out (2011). Moreover, population often said of those who had been murdered that were “doing bad things” or that they were in the “wrong place”. It was a common practice to allocate a certain degree of fault to war “casualties” in order to separate them from the society, as if being killed was a signal of being engaged in criminal activities or misbehavior.

After the escalate of violence, the Mexican Government started to refer civilian murders as “collateral casualties” (Turati, 2011), no matter if they victims died in crossfire or by militia initiative. The official discourse categorized

these crimes as a resulting of actions against drug trafficking, in which, they claimed, there are unexpected victims. However, they were neither heroes nor martyrs. State officials dubbed to refer them as *victims* and grouped all the victims in the same category. Again, the mark of their “fault” was their own death. For government’s discourse, no one who is part of the “good society” gets killed.

#### As a conclusion

What gets lost when death is normalized? I mean, what is sacrificed in order to include death into the ordinary? Which essential trait of life is thrown away or left aside? What changed, so violence was embraced and integrated? It is not only acceptance but praising of violence. And this is the nothingness that evil unveils. It does not amount for a total destruction of social relationships, but a shift in ordinary interaction. Despite *autodefensas*—or self-defenses, community’s armed groups organized against drug lord’s seizure of their region’s productive activities, and which were rapidly dismantled not by drug cartels but by the very state forces—notable exception, compliance to the current balance of power is the rule. And it is not so difficult to understand why.

*Narco-culture*, in that latter sense, it is also related to political power insofar it produces domination; however raw and meaningless it could be. In that regard, the role of the state is also loosened, due to domination is exerted by organized crime as well as the state in almost similar terms. What I’m trying to say is power is anyhow exerted and the state is turned into a mere violence perpetrator, not so much different from the organized crime. In all those matters, the problem is that violence has been taken for granted, and thus it has lost its meaning.

The problem of evil is related to power in regards of domination. Evil is thus a subject of political philosophy. When domination is turned into suffering and moral judgment is stopped, it is then when we are talking about evil. The most outstanding trait of this form of political domination its bureaucratization and the creation of a *grey zone*. Hence, evil is rendered “mediocre” and the possibility of justice is rather lost. Evil is no more a matter of a diabolic being who obtains pleasure from causing pain to others, from suffering and destruction, but as a meaningless and systematic deployment of violence and devastation, made possible by our basic drive to remain alive, even at the cost of life itself.



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