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Summary

In recent years, Mexican society has been involved in a spiral of social violence. Most regions had not experienced such a level of violence since the revolutionary period in the early twentieth century, likewise for other parts of the country this social phenomenon has been totally unprecedented. These daily events have dramatically disrupted both the public and private lives all over the country. The wave of violence has emerged following several decades of relative social stability. Indeed, in the period from 1960-1980 Mexico avoided the scenario of social violence, military dictatorships, and revolutionary movements which characterized most of Latin American countries in those days. During that period, Mexico represented a safe haven for political exiles coming from all over Latin America. However, this was not necessarily a period of peace and social tranquility. The Mexican post-revolutionary state was constructed during a long process of national consolidation, the so-called *pax-priísta*, named after the ruling party Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). For the consolidation of this *sui generis* political system, the creation of a single state party with strong clientelistic and authoritarian features was fundamental. However, the recent violence is not part of the conventional political type that preceded and affected Mexican society. It would be more convenient to define the current state of affairs in the plural, defining them as violence’s and linking their subjective correlations in figures of fear and insecurity. From this perspective, the epicenter registering the most shocking violence was Ciudad Juárez. By 2008 almost 30 percent of the deadly victims of this war occurred in this city. By the end of 2011 around 9,000 killings had been perpetrated, making death an everyday experience.

One of the aims of this book is to provide an academic analysis which can constitute an alternative to the interpretations and explanations given in a biased official discourse by the Mexican federal government. But also to give an interpretation which can be contrasted against the views provided by foreign politicians and officials who for almost a century have designed drug policies on the basis of prohibition. For this purpose, this study pays attention to the shocking and unexpected violent events that occur continuously in present-day Mexico. It also aims to contribute to the invention of an alternative discourse which adopts a critical stance...
towards the official discourse, by integrating new narratives and visions coming from civil society.

This study also wants to match the existing quantitative records of empirical information with a qualitative approach based on critical reflections on the nature of violence in present-day Mexico. I consider it extremely important to make simultaneous use of both types of methodological approaches in dealing with the subject. This book considers the language quantifier an important anchor for the symbolic and cultural development of a complex subject which acquires new nuances and directions every day. The quantitative dimension can be enriched by adding the value of the word, as expressed in the telling, the narrative, and in the oral testimony. It is therefore important to analyze the speech of its citizens, in which we find rumors, myths, sadness, humor, and even silence.

This study is based on different methodological perspectives. It has been primarily conceived from the point of view of a native who investigates his own society, as suggested by Teresa Pires do Rio. In other words, it represents a kind of work of ‘national sociology’ or to put in another way, a ‘sociology with an accent’ beyond the grammar and words. This means crossing the strictly methodological domain towards an epistemological positioning. These reflections on violence, fear, insecurity, public space and spatial segregation are marked by my own experience as a resident of this country and of Ciudad Juárez. As a result, an important part of the information was not deliberately gathered by me but it gradually came to me through daily interaction. For the past four years, I have had these experiences in everyday life, especially in the bi-national border region, but also in other parts of Mexico and abroad.

In addressing the issues of violence, fear and insecurity, this study makes use of theoretical reflections and fundamental empirical studies produced in different latitudes. Special attention has been given to those studies focusing on Latin America, particularly on the cases of Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Argentina. I carried out a comprehensive literature review with a broad interdisciplinary component. In the end, however, I privileged those studies which were conducted from my own academic field, i.e. the sociology of culture and cultural studies.

Furthermore, the book analyzes the ways in which an anti-drug strategy was built and organized since the late Nineteenth century. That was based on an official discourse that responded to the interests of conservative and Puritan groups. Although
this process primarily took place in the United States, over the twentieth century it was replicated in several other countries. This was the product of ideological affinity or the result of political and diplomatic coercion, in which several international agencies played a role. By the passing of time the anti-drugs discourse has turned out to become a hegemonic, political-military vision, even within the regulatory framework of the United Nations.

The border region between Mexico and the United States has been the scene where state authorities have experienced and implemented much of the policies based on those discourses. Also this area has suffered the negative consequences and the damage caused by the narrow-mindedness of those who have articulated this rhetorical discourse, particularly related to Prohibition. In contrast to this official discourse, several alternative discursive strategies have emerged from daily life, seeking to grasp the problem of expansion and growth of different forms of violence and the fear they generate.

This study also assesses from a theoretical perspective some key issues directly related to violence, such as fear, insecurity, public security and rule of law. It aims to deal with concepts which have been arbitrarily used in the official discourse. In the first part of the study, attention is given to key reflections of violence provided by both classic and contemporary scholars, to help understand the complexity of this phenomenon. One of the sections highlights the fact that in the 1990s it seemed the phenomenon was widespread violence. I tried to connect the state of the art regarding the general academic discussion to the national and regional contexts. So for instance, the study highlights the growing weakness of the Mexican state, particularly in the areas of increased levels of impunity, corruption, and the fragile rule of law. This dramatic scenario, according to several scholars, has brought the Mexican state closer to the characterization of a weak and failed state.

This dissertation also addresses the issue of organized crime. It provides a historical assessment on the subject of both a global and regional level in order to understand the current situation confronting Ciudad Juárez and the country at large. In addition to this, the rhetorical articulation of the official discourse is addressed. This discourse has evolved from an initial moralistic rhetoric towards a more sophisticated argumentation in which a series of pseudo-scientific explanations have been introduced. More recently, a legalistic and punitive approach has become dominant as the entire social phenomenon behind violence has become criminalized. A
sociological analysis is provided with several concepts which have been simplified between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. In short, this part of the book deals from a critical perspective with the discussion on drugs, crime and the way these issues are related to the state.

Moreover, this study analyzes a large body of empirical data on the consequences of violence and the increasing number of casualties at national, regional and local levels. Other types of criminal offences are reviewed such as robbery, kidnapping and extortion. Additionally, citizens' perceptions are collected about these issues and their assessment of the public policies against violence implemented by the authorities at the national, regional and local level. Furthermore, the study looks at the relationship between poverty and crime, and the ways the development discourse handles several forms of social anomie in urban environments.

The study also discusses the narratives, discourses and stories developed by common people who experience several expressions of violence daily. This includes the increasing fear for crime and the growing perception of insecurity. In addition, an ethnographic reading is provided about the different facets of urban violence, especially in the imaginary of the daily omnipresence of death and different forms of cruelty and sadism towards the bodies of the victims. On the other hand, the study shows the narratives on violence elaborated by the mass media, which play a crucial role in the design of the imaginaries of fear and insecurity. It has become clear that the mass media look at the current situation of violence as an opportunity to make profit. Attention is paid to the opinion and positioning of the most affected group as a result of the wave of violence: the young. On the basis of a series of personal accounts, the study explores the way in which the youth, from several social sectors in Ciudad Juárez, directly experience in their daily lives the phenomenon of violence. Most testimonies show the existence of a critical stance vis-à-vis the official policies to combat violence and the lack of confidence that their opinion will be taken into account by the authorities. These youngsters consider themselves as victims of repression, persecution and harassment by the police and the military forces. They are also very aware of the fact that they no longer enjoy the public spaces because of the lack of security on the streets, being forced to recluse themselves within the walls of their home.

Finally, the study addresses the question as to what an extent all the security problems affecting Mexico in general and Ciudad Juárez in particular are also part of
a hemispheric geopolitical scenario. In several parts of Latin America, a process of ‘securitization’ and militarization of society is underway, which could lead to the formation of a police state. Hence, a comparison is made between Mexico and Colombia. Special attention is paid to the cases of some Colombian cities that in the recent past have also experienced extremely high levels of violence and crime rates, leading to a rapid deterioration of public insecurity.

In order to address the phenomenon of violence, this study presented an exhaustive review of the literature on the subject, coming from different social disciplines. It started with some classical studies on the subject in order to stress the fact that in my view many of their findings continue to be valid for studying the current situation. Thus we can establish, after having done this analysis of the local dynamics of Ciudad Juárez and the national context, that the social contract (Rousseau, Hobbes) has been severely weakened. Moreover, the monopoly of legitimate violence by the state (Weber) is being seriously challenged by newly armed actors. This has resulted in the clear setback of the civilization process (Elias) and evidences of social anomie (Durkheim). The long maintained sacredness of death has in recent times become trivialized (Girard). All these phenomena operate within new forms of primitive accumulation (Marx), which characterize present-day capitalism. Also, the review of literature on contemporary violence allow us to observe that the ‘violence for violence’ (Imbert, Wieviorka, Sofsky), is ruled more by purely economic principles than by ethical or ideological values as it was the case in the past. Globalization and neoliberal policies have reduced the welfare state to a minimum, particularly in Latin America. This has had negative consequences for public safety and it has stimulated the culture of fear. This has resulted in a growing privatization of security and the self-reclusion of citizens in gated communities and retrenchment at home. Regarding the Mexican state, this city is showing latent progressive weakening of its hegemony in the monopoly of force, to consolidate the rule of law, the same characteristics that approximate the definition of so-called ‘failed states’.

For many decades the collusion and symbiosis of the state with criminal groups was consolidated. Following the end of the PRI hegemony, traffickers acquired a larger degree of relative autonomy of traffickers. Liberated from the control exercised by the former authoritarian regime, the criminal organizations began to explore and to control new spaces of power. In this scenario, the dispute involves different regions and cities where traffickers began to occupy some of the functions
that the Mexican government failed to perform due in part to the neoliberal policies
directed to the reduction of the size and functions of the state. This allowed the
expansion of a series of criminal activities such as the protection industry, auto theft,
kidnapping and human trafficking, among others.

Most analysts agree in recognizing a growing weakness of the Mexican state,
particularly in the dispute they have with the criminal groups. Indeed, the state has
shown no weakness when it comes to attacking social protest and political activism of
civil society organizations, as well as organized groups of students and human-rights
organizations. To that respect, the government's strategy seems to be more solid and
organized. However, there are several evidences that the state is following a trajectory
towards a police state.

Today several large Mexican cities (Ciudad Juárez, Torreón, Chihuahua,
Tijuana, Monterrey, Tampico, Morelia, Culiacán, and Mazatlán) are living in fear and
under virtual siege. There are also many rural and urban areas abandoned by their
inhabitants. Some federal roads have become impassable or risky. Thousands of
complaints have been brought to the National Human Rights Commissions (CNDH)
regarding rape, kidnapping, torture, blackmail, illegal raids, robberies and all kinds of
abuses by police forces, the Army and to a lesser extent the Navy. The federal
government decided to wage a war, which in principle should be carried out in the
country which exported its prohibitionist policies and is the largest consumer of drugs,
as well as being the largest exporter of weapons legally and illegally to Mexico.
Current state policies still lack an intelligence approach based on a long-term vision
and not on improvisation and biased views as it has been the case so far. For instance,
there is no well-designed strategy to follow the routes of money laundering, which
would make the connections visible between legitimate and illegal business activities
and unveil the nexus between the formal economy and the criminal organizations.

The frontal attack on corruption, impunity and the strengthening of the culture
of legality should be at the centre of a governmental strategy that seeks to reverse the
presence and growth of transnational crime in Mexico. Traffickers and other armed
groups have seriously challenged the state and put governance and the institutional
strength of the country at risk. To this respect, Ciudad Juárez constitutes the most
extreme example of this national challenge.