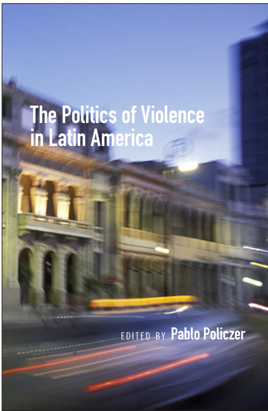
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Press



THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

Edited by Pablo Policzer

ISBN 978-1-55238-907-2

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this speci c work without breaching the artist s copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no nancial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain nancially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- pro t a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.

Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, re.press, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy http://www.re-press.org

3

Written in Black and Red: Murder as a Communicative Act in Mexico

Pablo Piccato

In the fourth part of his novel *2666*, Roberto Bolaño writes about the remains of women found dead in a northern border city. Page after page, he describes clothes, details from the place of discovery, bones. There is little else: only traces of victims' identities, no unfolding resolution of a mystery, no detective able to find the murderer. The problem with murder, Bolaño suggests, is not discovering the truth behind it, but understanding its meaning, as if killing was a public statement by an unknown speaker we must nevertheless acknowledge. The mystery is less who did it (impossible to know, most likely) as what they meant by it. Unlike other predatory crimes, homicide excludes the victim from any subsequent exchange about its consequences, whether that involves punishment or forgiveness. The living are left to deal with it.[1]

I will argue in this chapter that the living give meanings to criminal violence by talking about murder, and that this operation informs the uses of that violence: murder is committed not only as an instrument to obtain advantages in politics or drug trafficking, but also as a way to convey specific messages. This means considering murder not only as a public-health or criminal-justice problem but also as a communicative act intended to be received and decoded by an audience. Homicide is the center of a field of public discourse that, out of a strong sense of moral condemnation of the crime, makes explicit the ineptitude of the police

and judicial system, and is therefore critical of the government in ways in which other, more strictly "political" areas of debate, are not.

A similar approach was proposed by Thomas de Quincey in the fictional lectures of the Society of Connoisseurs in Murder. De Quincey provoked readers by assessing the aesthetic values of blood and crime scenes. What do killers intend to say? How should their act be interpreted? The answers to these questions in contemporary Mexico, I believe, are central to understanding the relationship between civil society and the state. We should remember that, already by De Quincey's time, aesthetic judgment was essential to the development of a modern public sphere as a space of critical debate. By proposing an amoral perspective on crime he stressed the artificiality of dividing debates about art from those about other matters of public interest. Contemporary scholars have explored the value of criminal acts and languages as communication across media and social groups.[2] A similar effect can be found in homicide in twentieth-century Mexico to the extent that it creates a field of public discussion, engaging audiences and transforming the rules for their critical exchanges with the state. Yet this story is not only about modernization. In the case of Mexico, the public use of homicide has contributed to an unprecedented increase of violence in recent years. Thus, in order to understand the changing rules of that public discussion and the weight of the past on contemporary circumstances, it is necessary to look at the meanings of murder in a historical framework.

It might seem redundant to defend the value of a historical perspective on crime, but in the case of present-day Mexico it is necessary. The rise in crime since the 1990s and the subsequent moral panic has generated a cottage industry of consultants, think tanks, research projects. It offers "consumable" advice to federal and local governments, which in turn pay for most of the research.[3] The result is the predominance of policy-oriented perspectives that seldom look at evidence older than the ten or so years available in surveys or statistical databases, some of them of dubious quality but strong public impact.[4] The problem is compounded by the fact that criminology in Mexico has not established itself as an academic discipline with its own standards and institutional support.[5] Paradoxically, the subject of "perceptions" of crime is increasingly important in the field of *seguridad pública* studies. Polls gather information about the public's

views on the problem of insecurity without serious questioning of the categories used, and yet it is assumed that their results should have policy implications because they faithfully reflect actual variations in criminal practices. Polls and independent studies are necessary, it is argued, because official statistics are not reliable.[6]

The questions raised by contemporary levels of violence seem so urgent that audiences have no reason to consider the relevance of the past: it has never been so bad, we hear; memory provides only a golden age to contrast against the present. I will argue, instead, that a historical approach shows that homicide in twentieth-century Mexico has been a key theme in the relationship between civil society and the state and in public discussions about justice and transgression.[7] Looking at changes in the meanings of murder during the twentieth century, I will suggest that the new modalities of violence, insofar as they respond to codes of meaning that are themselves the product of the historical evolution of murder as a communicative act, are in fact not so new.

This chapter will first examine that evolution in broad strokes: an overview of the trends in murder rates across the country will be contrasted with public views of increasing danger throughout the century. This will lead to an examination of the rules and media of public discourse defined around crime. The third section will suggest an explanation and a way to look at contemporary violence linked to drug trafficking. I will conclude by returning to the interpretations of murder in literary fiction and suggest ways in which they can be useful to understand the present.

Perceptions, Trends, and Practices

Murder has been too frequent in Mexico, but not to the extent that many people think. That is suggested by published judicial statistics since the late nineteenth century—the best long-term indicator, although by no means a complete accounting. Qualitative evidence indicates that murder was a concern during the nineteenth century, although not the national obsession it would become by the late twentieth. The paradox is that, even though the worry about murder has probably become more acute in the last hundred years, the statistical evidence shows that its frequency has been steadily declining. It is not clear yet how that long-term decline has

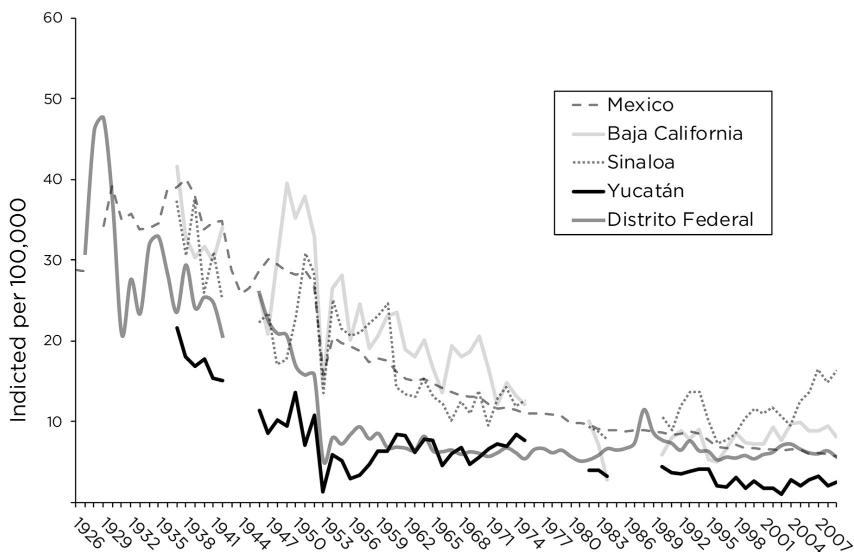


FIGURE 3.1
Homicide Indicted, Rates per 100,000 Population. Mexico, 1926–2009.
Source: Pablo Piccato, Sara Hidalgo, and Andrés Lajous, "Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series Históricas 1926–2008," https://ppiccato.shinyapps.io/judiciales/.

been affected by the recent spate of drug-related violence. Secretario de Seguridad Pública Genaro García Luna recognized the dissonance between decreasing rates of murder and increasing concerns about it, explaining it as a consequence of organized crime's goal of spreading fear and demonstrating its power.[8]

The difference between perception and actual trends is not new. Figure 3.1 shows national rates of persons indicted for homicide per total population, indicating a decline in homicide during most of the twentieth century.[9] Although rates are high today, they seem to be much smaller than in the years before and immediately after the 1910 revolution. In the Ciudad de México, where that information is available for persons sentenced, the rate of homicide per 100,000 inhabitants was 46, on average, between 1885

and 1871, 31 in 1909, and climbed to 37 in 1930, decreasing thereafter.[10] The decline corresponds with that of criminality in general in the country, as witnessed by the trends of other crimes.[11] Homicide seems to have continued a steady decline until the present. The number of homicides known to authorities (always larger than the number of people indicted, as many cases do not lead to arrests) has decreased in recent years, from a national rate of 37 per 100,000 inhabitants in 1997 to 33 in 2011.[12] Figure 3.1 also suggests that, even if homicide has been a stable problem throughout the twentieth century, it has changed its places and trends in recent years. The Ciudad de México now has rates higher than the national rate, as do states like Sinaloa and Baja California—both clearly impacted by the expansion of the drug business and correlated violence—all of them contrasting with the historically low levels of Yucatán. The problem is serious but not as bad as in other places: a recent UN comparison gives 18 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in Mexico, against 33 in Colombia, 66 in El Salvador, and 5 in the United States.[13]

Decreasing and relatively low rates of homicide in Mexico are counterintuitive. Although homicide is commonly held to be a crime that is easy to count, while other crimes like theft and rape can easily escape the attention of institutions, in the case of Mexico we have to take this certainty with a grain of salt. Today, undercounting of homicides is widespread, and is linked to broader institutional problems. The frequency of disappearances has increased significantly, according to anecdotal evidence but no formal count. If we compare the number of homicides identified as the cause of death by health authorities with the number of people indicted for homicide, the latter is consistently and amply higher. The difference—an average of 65 percent more for the country between 1926 and 2005, and 91 percent more for the Ciudad de México—suggests that justice only reaches a limited number of cases. According to the Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios Sobre la Seguridad, between 1997 and 2003 the number of persons sentenced for homicide was on average 20 percent of the number of investigations opened for the crime.[14] This is a greater problem in certain regions, such as the northern border in recent years. The work of other scholars suggests that the number of crimes never reported and prosecuted is very high, although it is not clear whether this situation has worsened in recent years due to the lack of long-term victimization

surveys.[15] There is no conclusive evidence, however, that the limited number of prosecutions for murder could explain the declining rates: most likely, if we consider the qualitative evidence described below, the problem of impunity has been constant throughout the century.

Public concern about murder has never diminished during the century. On the contrary, it grew as evidence of the corruption and ineptitude of the police and the judiciary was publicized and became a political issue. Famous cases of unsolved homicides and the evidence of impunity seem to have had more impact than any statistical analysis in creating concern among the general public. Another reason for this paradoxical difference between trends and fears are the patterns by which murder was committed and the ways in which civil society responded to it.

Civil society plays a central role in the prevention of crime and the resolution of the conflicts generated by it. My own work on Mexico City and that of other scholars shows that communities that often lack the institutional support of a reliable police or justice system have found ways to deal with transgression, sometimes through the use of collective violence, sometimes by ignoring domestic abuse, but more often through shaming and different modes of informal reintegrative justice that try to restore a sense of safety to victims. These mechanisms, invisible to official statistics and victimization surveys, are less effective when dealing with murder, particularly if violence includes powerful weapons or a weak state response. The increasing use of guns and the highly organized behavior of killers might explain part of the difference between trends and perceptions.[16]

The practices of murder in Mexico have changed during the century, with the increasing use of firearms over knives and blunt objects. Street-corner brawls were the most visible form of homicidal violence early in the twentieth century. A knife fight between two men, provided that certain basic rules were followed, expressed the courage of both rivals, independently of the outcome. Although the vocabulary was different, the rules of honor were the same as in elite duels. Guns modified these rules, as they made it harder to express equality or even deliberate coordination between fighters: fewer people owned a gun—which could kill from a distance without exposing the body of the shooter.[17] Guns, however, did not make homicidal violence random or arbitrary. After the revolution,

when many former revolutionaries came to respectable official positions, the image of the *pistolero* was associated with murder and impunity: he was the bodyguard and enforcer for politicians or criminals, close to if not a member of the police, an expert in violence always beyond the reach of justice. The use of *pistoleros* against political opposition, union leaders, or students constituted a kind of artisanal deployment of violence, yet a highly visible one, and thus symbolic of the informal monopoly on violence exercised by the Mexican state and the local ruling *camarillas*. The dapper *pistolero* used his gun to demonstrate his political clout, without any pretense of fair play but without shying away from his reputation. The gun in the waist was part of his outfit, a symbol of power similar to his badge.[18]

In recent years, less individualistic and more efficient *sicarios*, usually working for organized crime, have come to represent the evolution and privatization of the *pistolero*. The gang known as Los Zetas is the best example: its founders came from an elite Mexican army unit trained in the United States. They still recruit new members from the armed forces, sometimes advertising with banners on city streets. They kill with overwhelming use of force and little concern about police obstruction. Drug lords are making increasing use of this new brand of professionals of violence. From the beginnings of their large-scale transnational business in the first half of the twentieth century, drug traffickers tried to isolate their commercial operations from bloodshed, which they saw as a cost that should be kept at a minimum; bribes were always preferred to outright violence. Some groups, like the Arellano Félix clan in Tijuana, began to use careless violence in minor transactions in the 1980s. This lack of discipline, and the more aggressive yet still disoriented enforcement by the state in the last decade, has given the experts in violence a power of their own: the Zetas started selling their services to the Gulf Cartel, in Tamaulipas, but now engage in other activities such as kidnapping, robbery, commissioned killings, and human trafficking. It was, in the words of one journalist, as if the organization of Don Corleone had been put in the hands of Luca Brasi.[19]

Murder and Publicity

This new brand of violent criminals can be defined not only by their use of powerful weapons, abundant funds, and a complex, military-like organization, but also by their deliberate use of the media to further their goals. Regardless of the number of crimes they commit, their impact on public debates about crime is very high.[20] This is possible because, as practices and practitioners of criminal violence evolved during the twentieth century, changing public interpretations of murder became the center of a distinct field of public discourse that found in the *nota roja* its best medium, first in the police section of newspapers, then through illustrated magazines and, in more recent years, on television. The genre got its name when an editor in Guadalajara had a hand smeared with red ink printed on the cover of his newspaper in the 1880s. Scholars and art critics have explained the great commercial success of police news in Mexico by the attraction of gore and sex, the modernization of traditional narrative forms, and its ability to popularize criminological knowledge. This analysis has stressed the visual elements of its language: lurid crime scenes satisfied readers' anxieties and other shameful pornographic needs and provided cues for direct, visceral responses to crime.[21]

Homicide was the center of the *nota roja* because its consequences could be depicted visually in a way impossible to emulate in other crimes. The twentieth century in Mexico, as in other places, saw the development of a graphic language that filled newspaper pages with naked or decomposed cadavers, suspects' mug shots, and the objects and traces of death. Illustrations echoed the stark contrasts and frontal framing of forensic shots, but added a sense of drama by their association with written narratives. Victims, even the ones who were alive, could not escape the public display of the humiliation to which they had been subjected.[22] In recent years the graphic imagery of death and murder has become an object of aesthetic and even commercial value, particularly through the work of photojournalists like Enrique Metinides and performance artists like SEMEFO and Teresa Margolles.[23]

Without disputing the attraction of images, I would argue that, during the middle decades of the twentieth century, the *nota roja* was meant to be read, not just looked at, and that reading it involved a critical consideration

FIGURE 3.2
Crime Scene Images. *La Prensa*, 8 January 1953. Courtesy of *La Prensa*, Fototeca, Hemeroteca y Biblioteca Mario Vásquez Raña, Organización Editorial Mexicana.

of the political impact of murder. Around or below the image, the headlines contain a pun, convey moral outrage, or synthesize the crime in the most direct words. They characterize victims or criminals in memorable ways: "The plumber who killed a cobbler in an absurd fight"; "He wanted to have fun and they destroyed his face with bottles"; or the famous "Violóla, matóla, enterróla" (He raped her, he killed her, he buried her).[24] The text of the article usually contains a wealth of detail that might contradict the moralizing bent of the photographs, captions, and headlines. When readers bought *Alarma!*, the most popular magazine in the country since the 1960s, we can assume that they planned to take some time to go through the abundant copy, coming to associate one shocking image with one complex story. Figure 3.2 exemplifies the combination of narrative and images in the *nota roja*. Closely cropped we see, clockwise from right, the female suspect, held by a police officer; the administrator and owner of the hotel where the events took place; the two other suspects, also surrounded by police agents; the exact place where the victim fell; and the body of the victim. The ensemble combines gore, the objectivity of crime scene investigation, and the shaming of mug shots. Events, consequences,

Reporteros de LA PRENSA Capturaron a un Matón

(INFORMACION EN LAS PAGINAS CENTRALES)

EN LA PARTE superior, el reportero de LA PRENSA [illegible] al agresor que acababa de dar tres [illegible] Remedios González. A la derecha, el dueño de la casa, señor Luis de la Torre, [illegible] a la tragedia. Abajo, los ambulantes [illegible] herido y, por último, [illegible] estado es grave.

FIGURE 3.3
Reporter Captures Suspect. *La Prensa*, 17 March 1959. Courtesy of *La Prensa*, Fototeca, Hemeroteca y Biblioteca Mario Vásquez Raña, Organización Editorial Mexicana.

and responsibility could not be depicted in a more economical way. The story explained the circumstances of the crime in considerable detail.[25]

A careful reading was in order because press accounts were the basic public testimony of crime. They tended to adopt the perspective of the police, which provided much circumstantial detail. Stories were tightly organized around shocking events and disturbing personalities; victims were defined in a few strokes, as were other less prominent witnesses or suspects. Detectives, prosecutors, and judges were praised or criticized. Police news highlighted the role of the reporter. The hotel staff in figure 3.2

were portrayed in such an unflattering way because they "obstructed the job of reporters." Although government agencies, sports, or social news were more desirable assignments for journalists, police reporters had a unique proximity to the story and some of them achieved some fame thanks to the sensational cases they covered. Reporters came to expect judges to give them unfettered access to suspects (which they could interview and photograph at will, often on the presumption of their guilt) and to the records and evidence of trials. *Nota roja* reporters were so closely identified with the police and suspects that sometimes people mistook them for detectives surveying the crime scene and interviewing witnesses.[26] In one case, documented in Figure 3.3, a reporter from *La Prensa* was portrayed subduing a suspect.

Reporters were important because they expressed readers' right to have an informed opinion about a case, just like detectives or judges did. Reports included meaningful data that invited readers to produce hypotheses different from those put forth by the authorities. It is commonly argued that the *nota roja* is a genre in which moralistic opinion and morbid images hide the full political and social implications of crime, or where irrationality prevails. If we look at the coverage of some homicides during the golden years of the genre, however, we find detailed narratives that faithfully convey a diversity of voices and opinions. Police sections assumed, and required, a high level of engagement from readers. Small features in their pages revealed myriad interactions between readers and editors: letters denouncing daily problems of life in the city and trying to elicit official action; photographs of suspects or lost children, asking those who knew anything to call a telephone number. Press reports documented each crime, regardless of the official response to it. When relatives of victims wrote to presidents asking that murders be investigated, they added press clippings to prove that the case was real. Police news, in sum, conveyed a strong sense of urgency. It dealt with issues that, although not involving sovereignty or the overall political system, reflected directly on the issues of everyday life, such as security, urban services, and domestic relations.[27]

We should keep in mind that the regime that dominated Mexico between 1929 and the last decades of the century controlled political news in newspapers with little need for direct censorship, relying instead on

advertising, loans to companies or editors, and envelopes thick with cash distributed to reporters. As a result, the political sections of newspapers barely covered social movements like the railroad workers' strikes of the 1950s, or the student movements of the 1960s, and all but ignored the fierce repression these actions met. The *nota roja* could report on the crimes committed by powerful politicians or their relatives, and expand on the private vices that would turn them into victims. Police news was popular because it had pragmatic, engaged readers. It was a guide to the dangers of everyday life, from domestic violence to street delinquency, from brutal policemen to corrupt judges.[28] People dealt with government representatives through the roles of victims or suspects. In Mexico, this constant game (who got caught and who did not, who became a helpless victim and who avoided the danger) frames the reading of police news and the exercise of citizenship. The importance of the media in the context of contemporary violence is a consequence of the development of the *nota roja* as a prime scenario for political debate in twentieth-century Mexico.

The political meaning of murder is fully spelled out in presidential archives. A homicide's dramatic consequences and the fact that the perpetrator often enjoyed impunity prompted citizens to demand justice from authorities, and gave victims' relatives a political agency seldom associated with the victims of other crimes. Regardless of their social background, these indirect victims were not afraid to name corrupt or complicit officials and to argue that impunity meant loss of legitimacy for the government. Citizens' petitions to the president in relation to a homicide came from individuals and organizations such as unions or neighbors' associations. These petitions, part of a long tradition of public discourse in Mexico, asked for justice, and they seldom failed to refer to police news and to allude to the political implications of their demands. The archives of Mexican presidents, particularly from Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40) to Adolfo López Mateos (1958–64), at the National Archives, hold many of these letters—an average of 1,189 files per six-year presidential period. Considering the numbers of indicted persons provided by judicial sources, at least 3 percent of all homicides in the country found their way to the president's desk. Presidents took an active role, forwarding letters to the attorney general, following up on certain cases, and even offering security to relatives of victims threatened by freed murderers.[29] Nobody saw this as

a violation of due process. Sometimes it was necessary to take justice into one's own hands, or at least to give it a nudge.

These letters provide detailed narratives of the aftermath of a murder—in contrast with judicial records, which are only concerned with its causes, and with press reports, which seldom pay attention to the social cost of the crime. Petitioners tried to convey the impact of the crime on the lives of people beyond the courtroom and the crime scene. In doing so, they could not but express the uncomfortable fact that judicial authorities were helpless in front of the real power of *pistoleros*, *caciques*, or corrupt officials. Appealing to the president meant that lower authorities had caused "disappointments" to those who were seeking justice. Balentina Esquevel denounced the local bosses who killed her son and shot her in the leg yet escaped punishment because they offered "beer and a good lunch" to the prosecutor.[30] Murder gave some people enough courage to tell ugly realities to the president. In 1958, according to the relative of one of his victims, air force pilot Sergio García Núñez bragged that a judge was going to acquit him soon because the judge had received 50,000 pesos. Another suspect was paying 9,000 pesos a month to avoid indictment. All letters were more or less explicit about a basic political reasoning: eventually the legitimacy of the president himself depended on his handling of such cases. Or, in the words of one of these letter writers, "the people get tired, Mr. President, of so many García Nuñezes."[31]

Presidents were prompted to respond, we might speculate, by their sense of duty, but also by the fact that petitioners were not afraid to warn that their pursuit of justice would continue in front of the press. Such threats may sound strange given the extent of presidential power in Mexico during the twentieth century. But homicide opened up debates that were not easy to control. Murderers at large were a stain on the reputation of police and judges, all of them political appointees, and a symptom of authorities' limited power. Such revelations could have an impact on investigations: when a case of grievous impunity was mentioned in the pages of newspapers, the game shifted in favor of the complainants. Keeping homicides quiet was therefore useful for suspects. The above-mentioned García Núñez bragged that "by explicit orders of the Presidency newspapers remain silent about everything concerning his case."[32] He did not have an alibi, but he had political clout and a media strategy.

With the same basic language and themes, the field of public discourse centered on homicide continued to expand during the twentieth century. It has been the space, for example, of denunciations against human rights abuses by police agencies since the late 1970s; it has provided the context for perceptions of the weakening of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) regime, particularly the unity of the *familia revolucionaria*, following a string of high-profile murders in 1993 and 1994. While the *nota roja* continued as a popular print genre, TV shows emulated the same graphic resources and critical bent of the press—at least to the extent possible in the duopolistic and loyally pro-government television industry. President Ernesto Zedillo, who reached office precisely because of one of those murders (that of PRI candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio), and who would preside over the transition to the first post-PRI president, pressured a TV network to cancel a tabloid show (*Duro y directo*) in 1999. Videos of homicides had been broadcast even before they became common on the Internet.[33] Recent years have seen the continuity of the communicative uses of homicide, although now in a context that intersects with the booming economy of drug trafficking and the diversification of electronic media used to convey explanations of murder. Thanks to wide access to Internet video, television is no longer the privileged source for gruesome images associated with crime in Mexico.

Continuities

Since the 1980s drug traffickers, with their abundant cash and help from US gun suppliers, have introduced many and more powerful weapons into the practice of homicide. Again, as with the widespread use of guns after the revolution, the new tools did not result in uncontrolled and meaningless violence. Murder became instead the expression of organization: anonymous, targeted, even if increasingly frequent. Professional killings have developed codes meant to be interpreted in specific ways: the message is now conveyed by the violence inflicted on bodies (mutilations, usually decapitation) or the method used to dispose of them (wrapped in blankets, inside a trunk or a barrel); such are the consequences of failing to pay debts or show respect to those who control a territory. In some cases the crime scene is assembled in such a way as to convey a message,

usually a note on the body. According to *New York Times* correspondent Mark Lacey, "When Mexican homicide investigators pull up at the scene of the latest drug-related slaughter, they go through a mental checklist: How many corpses? What sort of wounds? And, finally, where is the note scrawled by the killers?"[34] In order to convey specific images, bodies are mutilated or disposed of in certain ways. The Zetas and other groups post banners to recruit soldiers, or to take or disclaim responsibility for specific attacks—the now famous *narcomantas*. Criminal organizations have even published ads in newspapers.[35]

The relationship between drug traffickers and journalists demonstrates the importance of these messages. Both money and threats are used to influence coverage and thus create the impression of control or, alternatively, of rivals' weakness. Murder is used against those who refuse to follow orders, and Mexico is today one of the most dangerous countries for journalists.[36] Drug traffickers might want journalists to cover a murder with ample visual resources, or not to cover it at all. In one case, a journalist was ordered by two rival gangs, under threat of death, to do both—to cover and ignore—the presence of a body dropped next to a highway. Criminal organizations might also use the press to put pressure on government officials.[37]

Impunity defines drug-related murder. A police officer in Culiacán, Sinaloa, told me in 2008 that as soon as detectives see any sign that a homicide is connected to drug trafficking they close the investigation. The novels of Elmer Mendoza, a writer from the same city, borrow this fact to give new intensity and verisimilitude to the murder genre. His detectives, in *Balas de plata* and other novels, are robbed of the very questions they are trying to answer by the more powerful narcotics agents or by the narcos themselves.[38] Public opinion sees policemen, prosecutors, and judges as corrupt—and evidence to the contrary is only anecdotal. A murdered cop is always thought to have been associated with criminals. There have been exposés of corruption in the press and dutiful reports of the purges and moralization campaigns within police institutions. Yet a large majority of self-reported victims of other crimes tell pollsters that they do not bother to present complaints or press charges. The women killed in Ciudad Juárez that inspired Bolaño only reinforce the skepticism. The growth of the drug

business and its use of violence in recent years now pose nothing less than a challenge for the political system to recover its legitimacy.[39]

Contemporary violence must therefore be examined in the context of the transformation of the Mexican public sphere during the twentieth century. This thesis is not intended to undermine other approaches to the problem of violence that emphasize socioeconomic or institutional factors. As with other aspects of the study of crime and violence, a multidisciplinary perspective is not a choice but a necessity. Yet looking at homicide as a communicative act should introduce a caveat that we could formulate, in simple terms, as the criminal imbrication of practices and public discourse: all crimes have explanations, yet explanations shape crimes.

In twentieth-century Mexico, murder created a field of public discourse, a space of debate that was open to diverse voices and not dominated by one particular authoritative perspective; it was inherently critical of state institutions and agents. Murder generated narratives full of stark characters and visually strong scenes. Through the press, literature, and radio, homicide attracted broad audiences and constituted them into vocal publics that addressed the media and political authorities.[40] Although the frequency of homicide decreased during the twentieth century, its visibility and impact on the public sphere only grew. This is the specific contribution of the approach presented here. Scholars have not been very good at reading the back sections of newspapers; looking for causes of crime, they have failed to explain consequences; their understanding of the *nota roja* has been biased by a view of crime reporters and readers as somewhat inferior intellectually. Criminals, however, have continued to produce narratives, using old and new media, and the public has kept on consuming them.

Recognizing the imbrication of discourses and practices of crime is a necessary operation in any comprehensive attempt to understand violence in Mexico today and in other contemporary societies where insecurity has become a central political theme. Placing crime in the public sphere means considering its dialogical aspects, the communicative effects of violence, and demands for justice. Clearly this implies a critique of models that see criminal violence merely as a social or psychological pathology, the effect of irrationality, or the object of policies intended to control its threat. A public-sphere approach requires an analysis that pays attention

to the reciprocal interactions between multiple variables, some of them cultural, others socioeconomic. Located in the public sphere, crime and violence can be considered part of the interactions between civil society and the state that shape policies.

A specific area in which this interaction is taking shape pertains to the problem of truth and justice vis-à-vis the tens of thousands of homicides associated with drug violence over the past couple of decades. Diverse voices have acquired prominence through their demand that the lack of investigations and the impunity that characterizes the contemporary situation be redressed. The lack of information about most murders suggests a degree of participation on the part of the armed forces and paramilitary groups that is already framing an agenda of memory, accountability, and the right to truth that will likely continue into the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The need for a truth commission has been mentioned by Olga Sánchez Cordero, López Obrador's choice for *secretaria de gobernación*.[41]

By the end of the fourth part of Bolaño's *2666*, a Mexican politician, frustrated by the lack of action on the murders of women, pleaded with journalist Sergio González Rodríguez to continue publishing about the murders. She sees no other option: she cannot give the information to US authorities because she is Mexican; and because the Mexican police will do nothing, she concludes that "I am left with the press." The journalist answers: "here nobody censors and nobody reads, but the press is a different thing. Newspapers are read, at least the headlines."[42] González Rodríguez was a real journalist who sent Bolaño, then writing in Spain, the information about the Ciudad Juárez killings he needed for his novel. González Rodríguez also wrote his own book about the case, *Huesos en el desierto*. It starts and ends with an old proverb that today we can read as a reflection on the meaning of murder for those who survive it: "Let others know what you remember; they will thus be able to read what is recorded in red ink in order to understand what is written in black."[43]

Notes

This paper was initially presented at Arms, Violence and Politics in Latin America: Past, Present, and Future, a conference held at the University of Calgary's Latin American Research Centre in May 2009. I thank all the participants for their comments, and in particular Pablo Policzer. I also thank Roberto Santamaría for his invaluable assistance in updating and improving the manuscript.

1 Roberto Bolaño, *2666* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2004).

2 Thomas De Quincey, *On Murder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). See Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Alarma!," *Poliester* (1993). Although the concept of the public sphere as formulated by Jürgen Habermas is central to my approach, there are several departures from his model. The most obvious is that, as I suggest, the rational exchanges that can take place in the public sphere do not exclude violence. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); and Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). For an analysis of communicative acts among criminals that focuses on understanding communications among criminals rather than more publicly, see Diego Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

3 See Arturo Alvarado, ed., *La reforma de la justicia en México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 2008); Wayne A. Cornelius and David A. Shirk, *Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). Systematic attempts to compile and expand data to contribute to informed decisions have been made by the Instituto para la Seguridad y la Democracia, AC, and the Project on the Administration of Justice at the Transborder Institute.

4 One extreme example of this superficial assessment is the counting of the "executed" in the recent wave of drug-related violence. There is no clear criterion against which to measure how executions are distinguished from other crimes. The periods used are presidential terms, suggesting that the violence started because of political causes but without providing a comparison with earlier periods. For an example of the confusion between the number of *muertes violentas* counted by official sources, and the number of *ejecuciones* committed by rival drug cartels, see "Ejecuciones en México equivalen a un tercio de muertes en Irak desde 2003," *El Universal* (Mexico City), 5 June 2007. The Secretaría de Seguridad Pública defines and counts *ejecuciones* as those crimes committed by narcotraffickers, or, in its words, "homicidio doloso efectuado con un alto grado de violencia, vinculado a la delincuencia organizada." The definition, admits the SSP, has no legal basis. See Gustavo Castillo, "Se logró "frenar y revertir" el número de *ejecuciones* en México durante 2007," *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 29 December 2007, http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/12/29/index.php?section=politica&article=014n1pol (accessed 27 October 2018). A criticism of the count can be found in Miguer Carbonell, "¿El gobierno es adivino?," *El Universal* (Mexico City), 24 January 2012. The government responded by suspending the official count. See David Luhnow, "Mexico Drug Violence Shows Decline," *Wall Street Journal* (New York), 13 June 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303822220

4577464821699025772.html?KEYWORDS=DAVID+LUHNOW (accessed 27 October 2018).

5 For recent efforts to systematize and share information about security and justice, it is worth mentioning the Instituto Igarapé (https://igarape.org.br/en/about/about-igarape/); see also Justice in Mexico (https://justiceinmexico.org/).

6 In a survey commissioned by México Unido contra la Delincuencia, an organization focused on impacting state policies, interviewees are asked if they fear being victims of crime and about their trust in state institutions. See "Encuesta Mitofsky de Percepción Ciudadana sobre la Seguridad en México," http://www.mucd.org.mx/Encuesta-Mitofsky-de-Percepci%C3%B3n-Ciudadana-sobre-la-Seguridad-en-M%C3%A9xico-c67i0.html (accessed 17 July 2012). For victimization surveys as corrective of official statistics, see Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad (ICESI), AC, "Encuestas Nacionales sobre Inseguridad, "El costo de la inseguridad en México," Cuadernos de ICESI, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Cuadernos%20del%20ICESI.pdf (accessed 27 October 2018).

7 Historical studies include Elisa Speckman, *Crimen y Castigo: Legislación Penal, Interpretaciones de la Criminalidad y Administración de Justicia (Ciudad de México, 1872–1910)* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2002); Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900–1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Robert Buffington, "Forging the Fatherland: Criminality and Citizenship in Modern Mexico" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 1994); Robert Buffington and Pablo Piccato, *True Stories of Crime in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009). On civil society and crime, see Heather Strang and John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). This is a basic argument of Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth and Justice in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

8 "Versión estenográfica de la participación del Secretario de Seguridad Pública, Ingeniero Genaro García Luna, durante la Novena Reunión Ordinaria de Trabajo de la Comisión de Seguridad Pública de la LX Legislatura de la Cámara de Diputados," 25 April 2007, http://www.pfp.gob.mx/portalWebApp/ShowBinary?nodeId=/BEA%20Repository/250008//archivo&pathImg=%2FBEA+Repository%2Fimport%2FSecretaria+de+Seguridad+Publica%2FDocumentos+de+Comparecencias (accessed 12 February 2009).

9 "Indicted," or *presunto*, means those suspects charged and imprisoned but not sentenced, and they represent the most reliable figures available to compile long-term series. Even though they may not represent the entire number of homicides, indicted suspects are more important in public perceptions of crime than those found guilty, and certainly more visible than those not arrested. Source: Pablo Piccato, Sara Hidalgo, and Andrés Lajous, "Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901–2008," https://ppiccato.shinyapps.io/judiciales/.

10 Piccato, *City of Suspects*, ch. 4; Dirección General de Estadística, *Estadística del ramo criminal en la República Mexicana que comprende un periodo de quince años, de 1871 a 1885* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Fomento, 1890); *Anuario Estadístico de la República Mexicana 1895* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Fomento, 1896).

11 For basic information and other crimes, see database at http://www.sandiego.edu/peacestudies/tbi/resources/data_portal.php, and Piccato, "Estadísticas del crimen."

12 See Secretaría de Gobernación, "Incidencia Delictiva Nacional, Fuero Común," http://www.secretariadoejecutivosnsp.gob.mx/es/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Incidencia_Delictiva_Nacional_fuero_comun (accessed 17 July 2012); for 2011 population, INEGI, "Mexico en Cifras," http://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/mexicocifras/default.aspx (accessed 17 July 2012). According to United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) statistics, the homicide rate in Mexico has decreased to 16.35 in 2015 from a recent peak of 22.61 in 2011. UNODC statistics, https://data.unodc.org/#state:1 (accessed 6 July 2018). 2018, however, is on course to be the year with more homicides in Mexican history.

13 See "2011 Global Study on Homicide," UNODC, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/global-study-on-homicide-2011.html (accessed 6 July 2018). Latin America has six countries among the ten countries with the highest levels of homicide in the world. National rates, however, hide important intranational variations. See also UNDOC, "Global Study on Homocide," 2013, https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf (accessed 6 July 2018).

14 See ICESI, "Estadísticas ENSI," http://www.icesi.org.mx/documentos/estadisticas/estadisticasOfi/sentenciados_por_homicidios_1997_2003.pdf (accessed 17 July 2012). We develop some of these points in Andrés Lajous and Pablo Piccato, "Tendencias históricas del crimen en México," *Nexos*, 1 April 2018, https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=36958.

15 Guillermo Zepeda Lecuona, *Crimen sin castigo: Procuración de justicia penal y ministerio público en México* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica-Cidac, 2004).

16 Piccato, *City of Suspects*; Pablo Piccato, "Communities and Crime in Mexico City," *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005), http://www.udel.edu/LAS/Vol6-1Piccato.html, (accessed 28 October 2018); John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón, José Gómez Robleda, and Benjamín Argüelles, *Tendencia y ritmo de la criminalidad en México, D.F.* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estadísticas, 1939).

17 Piccato, *City of Suspects*, ch. 5. See for example *El Universal* (Mexico City), 1 October 1920, 6.

18 Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Alan Knight, "Habitus and Homicide: Political Culture in Revolutionary Mexico," in *Citizens of the Pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture*, ed. Wil G. Pansters (Amsterdam: Thela Publishers, 1997); Piccato, *A History of Infamy*, ch. 5. According to a newspaper, the *pistolero* "Su función es la de asesinar y cuando su jefe les dice que eliminen a determinada persona, van y con toda tranquilidad lo hacen; y luego vuelven a repetir el crimen cuando se les ordena otra vez." See *Ultimas Noticias* (Mexico City), 22 September 1942, 1.

19 Jon Sistiaga, "Narcoméxico: Corrido para un degollado," (video, nCuatro, 2008). On the Arellano Félix family, see Jesús Blancornelas, *El cártel: Los Arellano Félix, la mafia más*

poderosa en la historia de América Latina (Mexico City: Debolsillo, 2004). On the Zetas' origins as US-trained special forces in the Mexican army co-opted by the Gulf Cartel, see "Reinica EU capacitación de soldados mexicanos," *Milenio* (Mexico City), 6 August 2009, http://impreso.milenio.com/node/8620045 (accessed 28 August 2018). Luca Brasi is the inarticulate but fearsome enforcer for Vito Corleone in Mario Puzo's novel and Francis Ford Coppola's movie *The Godfather.*

20 See for example a video distributed by an organization, and dutifully broadcast by national television station, in which a captured rival speaks about organization, business, murders, and the relations of his organization with journalists: "Matando Zetas," 29 March 20097 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvF0zSSEXzk (accessed 5 September 2009). See also, "Gente Nueva ejecutaron a los dos ensabanados del Puerto de Veracruz," *Enlace Veracruz 212*, 29 March 2007, http://archivo.vazquezchagoya.com/?p=2202 (accessed 28 August 2018).

21 Francesc Barata and Marco Lara Klahr, *Nota(n) roja: La vibrante historia de un género y una nueva manera de informar* (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2009), 32; Jesse Lerner, *The Shock of Modernity: Crime Photography in Mexico City* (Mexico City: Turner, 2007); Piccato, *A History of Infamy*, ch. 2.

22 For the most successful magazines since the 1930s, see Carlos Monsiváis, *Los mil y un velorios: Crónica de la nota roja* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 30–1. Another list, including detective fiction series, can be found in Ilan Stavans, *Antihéroes: México y su novela policial* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1993), 76–8. Eduardo Téllez Vargas and José Ramón Garmabella, ¡Reportero de policía!: El Güero Téllez (Mexico City: Ediciones Océano, 1982).

23 Enrique Metinides, Geoff Dyer, Néstor García Canclini, Gabriel Kuri, and Photographers' Gallery, *Enrique Metinides* (London: Ridinghouse, 2003).

24 *El universal gráfico*, January 1947, 5; *El Universal Gráfico*, January 1955, 5; Monsiváis, *Los mil y un velorios*, 31; Medina, "Alarma!"

25 The caption reads: "TRAGEDIA—Lugar donde cayó Humberto Reyes Rivera después de reñir con María Hernandez Prieto, José Antonio Cruz Rivera y Ramón Flores Duarte (abajo), en el hotelucho 'Ideal'. El dueño y administrador obstruccionaron la labor reporteril." See *La Prensa* (Mexico City), 8 January 1953, 1.

26 Téllez Vargas and Garmabella, ¡Reportero de policía!

27 *La Prensa* (Mexico City), 4 March 1959, 26. Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho (hereafter AGN, MAC), 13 January 1941, 541/57. This characterization runs counter much of the current literature about (or against) police news. For a view of *nota roja* as irrational and "que apela al subsonsciente colectivo," see Barata and Lara Klahr, *Nota(n) roja*, 58.

28 See, for example, the case of Ema Martínez, who killed Senator Rafael Altamirano and revealed some seedy practices among the federal bureaucracy: *La Prensa* (Mexico City), 7 March 1959, 2. On journalism and politics, see Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis, *Tiempo de saber: Prensa y poder en México* (Mexico City: Aguilar, 2003). Studies of crime and punishment in Mexico City and other modern Latin America societies show that the police and judiciary have long been the agents of the most

frequent and direct relationships between citizens and the state. See, for example, Osvaldo Barreneche, *Dentro de la ley, todo: La justicia criminal de Buenos Aires en la etapa formativa del sistema penal moderno de la Argentina* (La Plata, AR: Ediciones al Margen, 2001); Amy Chazkel, *Laws of Chance: Brazil's Clandestine Lottery and the Making of Urban Public Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

29 Manuel Ávila Camacho instructed the Mexico City chief of police to tell suspect Manuel Sáenz de Miera to stop bothering the mother of a homicide victim,12 January 1942, AGN, MAC, 541/430. A mother denouncing a police officer freed after killing her son in Macrina Estrada Aguirre a presidente Adolfo López Mateos, DF, 11 June 1959, Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Presidentes, Adolfo López Mateos (hereafter AGN, ALM), 541/93. Taxi drivers in telegrama José González a presidente López Mateos, DF, 28 April 1959, AGN, ALM, 541/79. Chauffeurs in Francisco Macario Lucero, Confederación de Inquilinos y colonos de la República Mexicana a Presidente de la Rep. Mexico, 11 August 1955; Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Presidentes, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (hereafter AGN, ARC), 541/254. Trabajadores de Caminos to Cárdenas, 11 March 1936, Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Presidentes, Lázaro Cárdenas (hereafter AGN LC), 444.92/42.

30 Balentina Esquivel al "Jefe de la Defensa Nacional" Agustin Castro, Mexico DF, 22 Sep. 1940, Archivo General de la Nación, Dirección General de Gobierno, 2/012.2 (29)/5, caja 78 exp. 6. For another mother demanding justice in the murder of her son by a policeman, see 24 Apr. 1945, AGN MAC, -549.44/149, 24.abr.45: aguilar rivera guadalupe. See also, for a son killed by the police, AGN, ALM, 541/93, Macrina Estrada Aguirre a presidente ADLM, DF, 11 Jun. 1959.

31 Lic. Javier Torres Pérez, Mexico DF, a presidente, 28 Ago. 1958, AGN, ARC, 541/1003; Jorge Vélez to president Alemán, Port Isabel, 26 Sep. 1948, Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Presidentes, Miguel Ávila Camacho, 541/50.

32 Lic. Antonio Gómez Pérez to Lic. José Aguilar y Maya, DF, 7 Ago. 1958, AGN, ARC, 541/1003.

33 For assassinations, see the murder of Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo, in May 1993, of presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, in March 1994, and of PRI Secretary General José Francisco Ruiz Massieu in September of the same year. All of them were characterized by much debate about the true culprits. On the cancellation of the show, see Mary Beth Sheridan, "Mexico's Reality TV Presses Some Hot Buttons," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 1999, http://articles.latimes.com/1999/jul/10/news/mn-54663 (accessed 28 October 2018). On "muerte en directo," see Barata and Lara Klahr, *Nota(n) roja*, 42–3.

34 Marc Lacey, "Grenade Attack in Mexico Breaks From Deadly Script," *New York Times*, 24 September 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/25/world/americas/25mexico.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=crime%20mexico%20drugs&st=cse&oref=slogin (accessed 28 October 2018).

35 Alejandro Jiménez, "Estrategia de cárteles: difusión y propaganda: Mediante un empírico manejo de crisis, los narcotraficantes mexicanos ganaron los primeros espacios comunicativos," *El Universal* (Mexico City), 26 September 2008, http://www.

eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/162611.html (accessed 28 August 2009); see also Sistiaga, "Corrido para un degollado."

36 See *Attacks on the Press in 2008: A Worldwide Survey by the Committee to Protect Journalists* (New York: Committee To Protect Journalists, 2009). Again, the phenomenon is not entirely new. For one 1977 example, see Luis Alejandro Astorga Almanza, *El siglo de las drogas: el narcotráfico, del Porfiriato al nuevo milenio*, 1st ed. (Mexico City: Plaza y Janés, 2005), 116–17. An overview can be found in Pablo Piccato, " 'Ya Saben Quién': Journalism, Crime and Impunity in Mexico Today," in *Mexico's Struggle for Public Security: Organized Crime and State Responses*, edited by Susana Berruecos and George Philip (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

37 José Carreño Carlón, "El crimen, medios y motivos de Calderón," *El Universal* (Mexico City), 15 May 2008, http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/columnas/71411.html (accessed 28 August 2009); Alejandro Jiménez, "Estrategia de cárteles: difusión y propaganda," *El Universal* (Mexico City), 26 September 2008, http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/162611.html (accessed 30 September 2009).

38 Élmer Mendoza, *Balas de plata*, 1a. ed. (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2008).

39 Zepeda Lecuona, *Crimen sin castigo*., 9, 19, 45. Before being approved by the Senate as Federal Attorney General, Arturo Chávez was questioned by multiple organizations because of his lack of support for the resolution of the Juárez murders while Chihuahua state attorney. Andrea Becerril and Víctor Ballinas, "Hay clamor general de rechazo a la ratificación de Arturo Chávez," *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 24 September 2009, http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2009/09/24/index.php?section=politica&article=009n2pol (accessed 28 October 2018).

40 On the construction of publics, see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

41 "Comisiones de la verdad estarían constituidas por sociedad civil: Sánchez Cordero," *El Financiero* (Mexico City), 21 June 2018, http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/elecciones-2018/comisiones-de-la-verdad-estarian-constituidas-por-sociedad-civil-y-expertos-sanchez-cordero (accessed 16 July 2018). See the movement lead by poet Javier Sicilia and the editorial effort of the website *Nuestra Aparente Rendición*, http://nuestraaparenterendicion.com/. On the right to truth, in the context of the transition out of authoritarian regimes, see Carlos Santiago Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

42 Bolaño, *2666*, 789.

43 Sergio González Rodríguez, *Huesos en el desierto* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2002), 286.