The Moving Border Industrial Complex

Securitarian Narratives from Gaza to Ciudad Juárez

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Introduction

On the night of January 31, 2010, what can be described as a paramilitary group killed 15 people, including 10 high school and university students, during a birthday party in the precarious Villas de Salvárcar neighborhood, located on the outskirts of the border city of Ciudad Juárez, in northern Mexico. This massacre, like many others in a country militarized after the U.S.-Mexico "war on drugs" since 2006, is exemplary of how security discourses and agendas operate at the global level and frames Ciudad Juárez within a transnational politics of extermination that takes place simultaneously in numerous regions of the planet. In all these sites of extreme violence, victimized populations have a constant profile: poor, racialized, disproportionately young bodies, killed with weapons produced by global powers and narrated as "wars" whose objectives have historically changed – communism, drug trafficking, terrorism – but which yield comparable effects.

At the U.S.-Mexico border, where I focus the attention of these pages, the securitarian narratives are constitutive of what U.S. journalist Todd Miller calls the "border industrial complex," the pernicious network of government agencies, politicians, and the transnational security industry that sustains a very lucrative sector of the global homeland security market that extends beyond the political border into the territories of both neighboring countries. In what follows, I will first refer to a critical

framework to problematize the militarist anti-drug policy as an extraterritorial platform that legitimizes the official administration of violence for social control. I will then discuss the deployment of armed forces as part of the profitable transnational border military-industrial complex that links Ciudad Juárez with other border areas of conflict, as in the specific case of Israel and Palestine. Finally, I will reflect on how the Villas de Salvárcar massacre has been mediatized by the authorities as a mistake perpetrated by "sicarios" who sought to eliminate a rival gang. I will show, instead, how the U.S.-led anti-drug militarization strategy for Latin America is in consequence with the murderous transnational politics of extermination experienced between Gaza and Ciudad Juárez.

Global Securocratic Violence

In late June of 2025, after President Donald Trump ordered bomb strikes on three nuclear sites in Iran, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in the state of California announced patrols "near places of worship, community gathering spaces and other sensitive sites" (Citi News Service, 2025). Responding to an unfounded expectation of terrorism, the city of Los Angeles, on the west coast of the country, was confronted with prejudiced policing at the same time it experienced demonstrations from the Mexican community against the violent deportation raids from Trump's extreme anti-immigrant agenda. While the LAPD was on alert for a potential attack despite having "no known credible threats," President Trump ordered U.S. Marines to contain the demonstrations, in many instances against peaceful protestors.

Let us notice how different security threats (terrorism, undocumented migration) are articulated by state agencies and converge in the same city on racialized and vulnerable communities (Mexicans, Muslims) exposed to state violence. At the same time, federal and local authorities blame those very communities for the unrest and even for nonexistent threats. This is, in sum, the recurrent expression of global and domestic security discourse weaponized to justify the deployment of armed soldiers to discipline dissident minority citizens.

The transborder militarist projects of the "war on drugs" and the "war on terrorism" are the byproducts of the securitarian agenda that began in 1947 with the passing of the National Security Act in the U.S. Congress that created the key institutions of this era, the Department of Defense, the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), among others. These institutions have since articulated the securitarian rationale that continuously configures external enemies of the U.S. hegemony since World War II. After the Cold War, the conventional enemy founded in the communist and the "red scare" was replaced in the mid-1980s by drug trafficking organizations during the Ronald Reagan presidency.[1]

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, global terrorism has added yet another layer to the general security discourses of Western countries. In the 21st century, undocumented migration joined the catalog of security threats to the U.S. and Western European allies. In 2025, the Trump administration officially designated undocumented immigrants as "significant threats to national security and public safety".[2] At the same time, his government designated Mexican "cartels" – and other organizations such as the "Tren de Aragua" and the Mara Salvatrucha – as "foreign terrorist organizations" following the lead of Texas governor Greg Abbot, who ordered a similar designation in 2022.[3] This is how Trump's executive order describes Mexican "cartels":

> The Cartels have engaged in a campaign of violence and terror throughout the Western Hemisphere that has not only destabilized countries with significant importance for our national interests but

1 See the second part of Oswaldo Zavala, *La guerra en las palabras. Una historia intelectual del "narco" en México (1975–2020)* (México: Debate, 2022).

2 See the full text of this executive ordered issued by the Trump White House on Jan. 20th, 2025: https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/protecting-the-american-people-against-invasion/.

3 See the full text of the Trump executive order for the designation of "drug cartels" as foreign terrorist organizations: https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/designating-cartels-and-other-organizations-as-foreign-terrorist-organizations-and-specially-designated-global-terrorists/.

> also flooded the United States with deadly drugs, violent criminals, and vicious gangs.

From this perspective, "cartels" are seen operating at the level of global terrorism, that is, as an imminent danger to Western civilization as a whole, threatening the very fabric of Western societies.

Israeli anthropologist Jeff Halper has pointed out that the nexus between terrorism, drug trafficking, and undocumented migration does not accurately describe these phenomena but emerges from a security model conceived in part by Israel in its decades of military occupation of Palestine. All of this makes possible what he calls a "global pacification system," which functions as a transnational platform for permanent war against enemies manufactured by the Global North (Halper, 2015, p. 14).

By "pacification," we must understand here a perverse rhetorical turn that names a violent military and police structure that has transformed the border region since the late 1980s. Halper explains that after World War II, global superpowers rarely confront each other directly and instead turn to third countries as proxy war sites. The conflict between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s was the last conventional war until Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. But the experience of violence has not decreased even if there are no national armies fighting each other in an explicit and rules-based war. What has changed is the place and the populations affected. According to Halper, in the early decades of the 20th century, between 85% and 90% of the victims were soldiers. By the end of the 1990s, 80% of the victims were already civilians. Since then, armed conflicts in countries damaged by unconventional wars have generated at least one million refugees and displaced persons around the globe (Halper, 2015, p. 21).

The research collective Costs of War at Brown University counted hundreds of U.S. military actions following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, including drone strikes, ground combat, training, and joint operations with foreign armed forces in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. As a direct result of these military actions, it is estimated that between 905,000 and 940,000 people have been killed, in addition to indirectly causing the death of be-

tween 4.5 and 4.7 million people. Collectively, U.S. militarism since 2001 has displaced some 38 million people and has had an economic cost of $8 trillion.[4] This process, far from attenuating, is exacerbated: between 2018 and 2020 alone, the Brown collective has registered U.S. military actions – supposedly against terrorism – in 85 countries around the world. The paradox of this shocking account of the militarism that the United States leads at the planetary level is that it often goes unnoticed. The few military actions that do make it to the media are narrated as part of the "national security" objectives of the U.S. and its allied countries.

Cultural anthropologist Allen Feldman coined a term useful for the general sense of this era of militarization and global extermination: "securocratic war." This is the name given to the "de-territorialized campaigns of public safety" that are carried out in numerous countries, including, of course, the border region between Mexico and the United States, where the objective is to rid the territory of the "invasion" of undesirable bodies narrated as threats to the security of those countries. Through a violent military and police biopolitics, "the Other ceases to be a colonial subject, a proletarian, a dispossessed but struggling racial minority, a communist and re-appears as the drug dealer, the person living with AIDS, the illegal immigrant, the asylum seeker, and the terrorist" (Feldman, 2004, p. 331). A double process of depoliticization and deterritorialization then occurs: the enemies that supposedly threaten the security of the Global North are denied a political subjectivity, and therefore, they become archetypes often conflated in the same person. The migrant is equal to the drug trafficker, who in turn is equivalent to the terrorist. The three are, repeatedly and extrapolated, poor and brown young people who live brief and redundant lives, sacrificed by a security drive produced as a state security policy that links them to the same process of extermination.

4 See the website of the Costs of War collective at Brown University's Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, which convenes the work of about sixty academics from different fields, experts in international affairs, human rights activists, and doctors from around the world: https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/.

The deployment of the U.S. Marines and National Guard troops in Los Angeles to contain protesters that, in Trump's own words, were "insurrectionists", mobilized the securitarian language in full circle (Bowman, 2025). Mexicans and Muslims were no longer considered legitimate U.S. citizens: they were, in fact, symbolically transformed into the enemy in a state of war. In such conditions, soldiers were called to occupy Los Angeles. They cross the city borders to pacify it, that is, to conduct a securocratic war on U.S. territory.

The Border is the Infrastructure

A federal law in the United States designates an expanded border region within 100 miles of any territorial or maritime boundary. This places two-thirds of the U.S. population, about 200 million people, as border residents, including those in most of the country's largest cities (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York) and even entire states like Florida.[5] The two major federal agencies operating in the border region, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), have seen their budget dramatically increase to $30.2 billion in 2024, nearly double from 2012. Federal contracts for the major security companies providing border security infrastructure – Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Accenture, CoreCivic, Boeing, among others – amounted to over $28 billion during the presidency of Joe Biden alone, while those same companies favored Biden with three times the campaign contributions gifted to Trump during the 2020 presidential election (Miller, 2024). Altogether, the global homeland security market is projected to escalate from $661.98 billion in 2024 to $1,108.94 billion by 2033 (Rai, 2023).

Rephrasing President Dwight Eisenhower's warning against the "military-industrial complex," journalist Todd Miller has investigated

5 See the explanation of the American Civil Liberties Union about the 100-mile border zone: https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/border-zone.

what he calls the "border industrial complex".[6] Within the U.S. defense budget, border infrastructure has become an extraordinary dimension of the imbricated relation between the federal government and national and transnational defense contractors. A yearly display of the border industrial complex takes place during the "Border Security Expo," a two-day event in Phoenix, where the most influential government leaders, law enforcement officials, and industry innovators gather to tackle the most pressing challenges in border security.[7] The expo, hosted for nearly two decades in El Paso, Texas – the city where the Border Patrol was established in 1924 –, and other cities in the southwest, convenes more than 200 exhibitors from the defense industry with security equipment such as drones, "smart" towers, robodogs, AI-driven surveillance tools, biometric data analysis, and other military-grade technology. Among other attendees are high-ranking federal officials from CBP, ICE, DEA, Homeland Security, and the White House. Among the hundreds of military and surveillance technology companies present in 2025, there was Caci International, involved in the torture of Iraqi men in the infamous Abu Graib prison in 2004; the GEO Group, an ICE contractor that refused to pay immigrant detainees more than $1 a day for cleaning facilities; Triple Canopy, which was created by U.S. Army Special Forces veterans who founded the mercenary group Blackwater; and Anduril Industries, which is linked to Palantir, which provides surveillance and facial recognition software for the federal government (Macdonald-Evoy, 2025).

6 See the complete President Eisenhower's 1961 farewell address, in which he argued: "This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. […] Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. […] In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist." Available at the National Archives website: https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address.

7 See the official website of the Border Security Expo: https://www.bordersecuritytexpo.com/why-attend. The expo began in 2007.

"The border, one might presume by the looks of the exhibition hall," writes Todd Miller, "is a never-ending war" (Miller, 2024).

The U.S. defense system – the largest on the planet – had a budget of $877 billion in 2022, larger than that of the next ten countries combined, including China and Russia.[8] The Border Patrol, the largest security institution of the U.S. federal government, doubled in size from 2003, when it was incorporated into Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as an agency of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Since then, the latter has allocated $333 billion to reinforce the border. CBP's budget also increased exponentially from $5.9 billion in 2003 to $17.7 billion in 2021 (American Immigration Council, 2021).

Between 2008 and 2020, the U.S. government awarded 105,997 contracts to transnational companies that, in addition to military drones, offer the most up-to-date surveillance technology with a value of $55.1 billion (Miller and Buxton, 2021). In contrast, the DEA could only offer partial evidence that Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán generated some $14 billion as the alleged leader of the "Sinaloa Cartel" between 1989 and 2017. Spending on border security between 2008 and 2020 alone was almost four times greater than the estimated profits generated by "El Chapo" in his entire criminal career (The United States Department of Justice, 2017).

The investment by the United States and Mexico in Israeli surveillance technology and weapons is very significant for conducting the securocratic war at the border in the context of the Israeli "laboratory" in Palestine, as a general of the Israel Defense Forces publicly called it during the Border Security Expo in El Paso, Texas (Miller, 2019, p. 75). The production of weapons and equipment for surveillance and social control of occupied spaces is, in fact, the niche market of Israeli companies such as Elbit Systems, the builder of the wall that separates the West Bank from Israel. Its "Hermes" drones were the first Unmanned Aerial

8 The list of the top 15 countries on the planet with the largest annual military budget is available on the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) website: <https://www.sipri.org/research/armament-and-disarmament/arms-and-military-expenditure/military-expenditure>.

Vehicles (UAVs) to fly over the U.S.-Mexico border in 2004, after monitoring the skies over Gaza. It is no coincidence that the Trump administration launched a covert program that expands secret drone incursions over Mexican territory under the pretext of a "more aggressive campaign against drug cartels" (Barnes et al., 2025).

The same company was awarded a $145 million contract in 2014 to build smart towers with motion sensors and cameras in Nogales, Arizona, with a range of more than seven miles (Dawson, 2018). By 2016, Elbit Systems was already partnering with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the U.S. government to develop anti-tunnel technology for the Mexican border (Viva Sarah Press, 2016).

Then there's NICE Systems, a company created by former IDF soldiers who won contracts from controversial anti-immigrant sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County, Arizona, accused of violating immigrants' human rights and due process while promoting racist and prejudiced policing since he was elected in 1993 until he lost reelection in 2016 (Miller & Schivone, 2015). Or the Golan Group, also founded by former Israeli military officers who trained Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to use Krav Maga, the Israeli martial art for hand-to-hand combat (Miller, 2019b). Between 1946 and 2022, the United States gave Israel a total of $317 billion in aid packages, of which $225 billion went to military operations (USA Facts, 2023). In 2023 alone, $1.934 billion was allocated to develop more tunnel detection technology (United States Government Accountability Office, 2023).

On the Mexican side, Elbit Systems won another $22.5 million contract from the Mexican Air Force in 2008 that included the same Hermes drone now used in anti-drug operations. In 2009, Mexico's Federal Judicial Police paid another multimillion-dollar contract for drones manufactured by the Israeli firm Aeronautics Defense Systems. In 2011, the Israeli company NSO exported to Mexico the cyberespionage software known as "Pegasus" (Scott-Railton et al., 2018), which the Ministry of National Defense continues to use illegally against journalists, activists, and human rights defenders (Kitroeff & Bergman, 2023).

The creator of the West Bank wall himself, Israeli Colonel Dany Tirza – who for years has claimed without any evidence that there is a link

between Hamas terrorists and Mexican traffickers – is the CEO of Yozmot Ltd, a security firm that is seeking contracts with U.S. and Mexican authorities to implement controversial body cameras with facial recognition capabilities for police officers to scan crowds, a technology first tested on Palestinians as a form of social control (Cheslow, 2022).

In 2025, the U.S. Congress passed what the Trump administration called a "big, beautiful bill" that cut taxes benefiting those with the highest incomes while dramatically increasing spending on border security: $170 billion for immigration enforcement and $75 billion in additional funding for ICE, now the law enforcement agency with the largest budget (Montoya-Galvez, 2025). Also in 2025, Trump ordered the Department of Defense to seize a 273-kilometer, 18-meter-wide strip along the U.S.-Mexico border from El Paso, Texas, to San Diego, California, known as the Roosevelt Reservation, along with an area stretching 101 kilometers in Texas, from El Paso to Fort Hancock (Del Bosque, 2025). What Trump now calls "national defense areas" are the result of a gradual process of border militarization operating since the 1980s in which both Democratic and Republican presidents have collaborated, from the presidency of Ronald Regan to that of Bill Clinton (Dunn, 1996).

The border is now made of security infrastructure, or as philosopher Huub Dijstelbloem argues, the borders must be understood as infrastructure, "composed of myriad linkages between states and people, public and private, connectivity and collectivity" (Dijstelbloem, 2021, p. 26). Border security infrastructure builds large-scale networks with profound local implications, transforming communities and their environment, enabling violent exclusion practices, denying citizenship, and even basic humanity status. Let us consider, in the final section, how border security and its infrastructure have intimately transformed life at the Juárez-El Paso border.

Gaza in Ciudad Juárez

The transnational violence of the securocratic war against Mexican "narcos" was expressed that night of January 31, 2010, with the murder of

15 people, including 10 high school and university students, during that birthday party in the Villas de Salvárcar neighborhood, a precarious residential area on the outskirts of the city. The killers arrived in at least four SUVs and closed all access to the narrow street. According to Ricardo C. Ainslie's *The Fight to Save Juárez: Life in the Heart of Mexico's Drug War* (2013), one of the armed men, carrying an AK-47, ordered one of the parents to move away from the street because they were conducting an "operation" (Ainslie, 2013, p. 184). In the narrative of the book, there is a tension between the information that the reporter collects and the powerful media narrativization of the "war on drugs" as a totalizing hegemonic discourse, mainly guided by DEA agents consulted by the reporter. We see here the configuration of what I have called elsewhere the official *narconarrative* as a process that transforms the possibility of an illegal "operation" probably conducted by state or para-state agents, and the way in which the same event was later reintegrated into the logic of organized crime, as I will now discuss.

The massacre as an expression of a violent transnational anti-drug policy, propelled by criminal militarism, was erased by the narconarrative through two simultaneous processes: first it was framed as one more shootout between rival traffickers, assuming that the victims "were up to something," as President Felipe Calderón said a few hours after the murders based on initial intelligence reports he said he received during an official visit to Japan (Sin Embargo, 2020). And second, and most importantly, by building a public perception of the perpetrators of the crime. As it happened in 2014 with the disappearance of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa rural normal school, the parents of the Villas de Salvárcar students refuted President Calderón's initial statement by demonstrating their children were not involved in any illegal activities at all. But while the innocent victims escaped the government's attempt at criminalization, the massacre remained within the official narrative when the DEA and Mexican federal police told the media that the students were killed by "sicarios" from the "Barrio Azteca" gang in the service of the "Juarez Cartel" who mistakenly assumed the students were members of a local gang working for the rival "Sinaloa Cartel" (Granados, 2010).

National and international media play a key role in constructing the dominant imaginary of the so-called "war on drugs" by reproducing the racist and classist narratives of powerful and bloodlust Mexican "narcos" that, in turn, justify police and military violence in numerous regions of the country. The narrative of drug organizations exerting some form of criminal governance is derivative of the U.S. national security agenda, as I argued before, and it deploys through the coherent and consistent work of media propaganda. Media coverage provides a context for academic work analyzing the drug trade, for policy reports from non-governmental organizations, and for a proliferation of cultural products that validate the explanation of violence in Mexico as a "war" between criminal groups and against the State. At the same time, it erases the context of global militarism in which transnational anti-drug policy is historically inscribed. Exactly that story was validated by most of the media and repeated as fact, even without specific sources to corroborate it, in books such as *El Chapo: The Untold Story of the World's Most Infamous Drug Lord* (2021) by journalist Noah Hurowitz, who even reproduces an imagined dialogue between the alleged murderous gang members (Hurowitz, 2021, p. 201).

The official investigation was questioned from the beginning when the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice found that one of the alleged "sicarios" arrested days after the massacre had confessed under torture (Aranda et al., 2013). A second person implicated, José Antonio Acosta Hernández, alias "El Diego," allegedly the leader of "La Linea," the "armed wing" of the Juárez Cartel, as the DEA called it, was arrested on July 29, 2011, and charged with ordering the Villas de Salvárcar massacre (Hinojos, 2011). This time, before processing his extradition, the federal police released a video with Acosta Hernández confessing to the massacre, but also accused him of 1,500 other murders, the shooting of a U.S. consulate employee and her husband, and even a car bomb attack that killed four more people in Juárez.[9] "El Diego," according to authorities, would have exponentially surpassed the historical record

9 The video of "El Diego" confessing is available on YouTube: https://youtu.be/BM7yEvNb52E.

set by the "most prolific serial killer in American history," a man named Samuel Little, who confessed to 93 murders in a 35-year criminal career, although the FBI only verified 50 cases (Ximénez de Sandoval, 2019).

Let us consider the weapons used in the Villas de Salvárcar massacre. The automatic Kalashnikov that was first produced in 1947 – the same year the U.S. passed its National Security Act – known as the AK-47 rifle, has an almost ontological link in Mexico with the mythological figure of the "narco", but its global popularity exceeds criminal organizations. There are more than 100 million units of AK-47s in official use in 106 countries around the world, and among armed insurgencies and paramilitary groups due to their simplicity and durability. Every year, some 250,000 people die because of its wounds. In most countries, each rifle costs between $100 and $300 (The Globalist, 2013). At least three of the weapons used in the Villas de Salvárcar massacre came from the failed "Fast and Furious" operation, conducted during the Barack Obama presidency, which illegally introduced over 2,000 weapons into Mexico to investigate their circulation among traffickers, but whose trail they lost until they reappeared in crimes throughout the country (Animal Político 2012). It is estimated that between 200,000 and 500,000 guns are smuggled into Mexico from the northern border. 70% of those recovered at crime scenes were purchased in the United States (Lemus, 2024).

The media has been a collaborator of the narco-narrative under the exhausted liberal and neoliberal conceptualization of the "free press." Recalling the media's influence on coverage prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, scholar Philip Seib argues that "how the public perceives war depends nowadays on the particular relationship that the media has with the government," so the "resulting imbalance of influence is intrinsically undemocratic and removes an important check on government power, which in turn alters the political dynamics of the public sphere" (Seib, 2013, p. 12).

Generating a mediatic consensus, the authorities prevailed by reinserting the massacre into the narconarrative: it was "sicarios" – perhaps accidentally – who killed the students in a "cartel war" for the Juárez

"plaza" (Zavala, 2022).[10] I maintain, however, that what happened to the students of Villas de Salvárcar and their families was not another episode of collateral violence in the "war on drugs." Juárez journalist Ignacio Alvarado says that the militarization of the border has been an opportunity to carry out a strategy of "massive social cleansing against poor young people in marginalized communities. The perpetrators were often police and soldiers, and the killings served as proof that something was being done to fight crime" (Paley, 2018, p. 123).

Ciudad Juárez has indeed become a contested source of representation, constituted by powerful metaphors that insist on narrating the city as the site of a "war" led by criminal groups that defy the State and that cruelly and indifferently harm the civilian population. "The border is not only a system of representations, but a space of geopolitical interest that has historically produced militaristic perspectives," writes Juárez scholar Willivaldo Delgadillo in his book *Fabular Juárez* (2020, p.18). This system of metaphors and narratives is the essential tool for the expanding securitarian agenda, as we have seen.

The official explanation of the Villas de Salvárcar massacre has become a kind of perverse reference to justify crimes against humanity. One of its most recent reappearances occurred in the early hours of December 17, 2023, in the municipality of Salvatierra, Guanajuato, when an armed group broke into a Christmas party and murdered 11 young people between the ages of 16 and 36 (Vázquez, 2023). A process of fabulation like the one that operated in Juárez was deployed to narrate the Salvatierra massacre. The killers, according to the Guanajuato prosecutor's office, were members of a "cell of the Santa Rosa de Lima Cartel, which is fighting for the plaza with the Jalisco New Generation Cartel and keeping the area under fire" (Vázquez, 2024). They murdered the young people because they were forced to leave the party, and in revenge, they returned, accompanied by other armed men, to kill them. The banality

10 The concept of the "plaza" or drug trafficking hotbed was introduced in the 1970s. See the section "Who Controls the Plaza? The City, the State, and Organized Crime" in my book: *Drug Cartels Do Not Exist. Narcotrafficking in US and Mexican Culture*.

of this evil is something much more naturalistic than the concept coined by Hannah Arendt to describe the Nazis' crimes during World War II: it is the irrational contempt for life attributed to lower-class youth and the reactive violence between criminal groups that supposedly adopt strategies of terror to intimidate the population without any functional logic or business profit.

But the shared experience of the global "pacification" system of transnational militarism, applied to countries of the Global South, links massacres such as those of Villas de Salvárcar and Salvatierra, Guanajuato, with the horror of any military occupation. It is here that Ciudad Juárez, "the laboratory of our future," as journalist Charles Bowden called it in 1998, is intertwined with the "Palestinian laboratory" of Israeli technology of military occupation, as described by journalist Antony Loewenstein in 2023. He writes: "The Global South has been controlled and pacified with (principally) Israeli and U.S. weapons. Neither anti-Semitism nor extremism has been an impediment to collaboration with states that plunder assets or people. […] A historical reckoning of Israel's involvement with some of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' most depraved regimes is required" (Loewenstein, 2023, p. 37).

This is the link established by the parallel military occupations between Gaza and Ciudad Juárez. That is the 69,000 people killed in Gaza during the Israel-Hamas conflict at the time of writing (Shurafa, 2025). Two-thirds of the victims have been women and children. In 2010, the peak year of the anti-drug militarization in Ciudad Juárez, more than 3,500 homicides were registered with a rate of more than 250 murders per 100,000 inhabitants (Asmann & Alvarado, 2023). This represented an increase of more than 1,000% compared to 2007, the year before the start of the deployment of the armed forces in the city ordered by then-President Felipe Calderón. In the middle, there are the young victims, poor and brown, between Mexico and Palestine, narrated by their executioners as criminals or as terrorists. Far from a "cartel war", the demographics of the affected population in Mexico echo the extermination of civilians in Gaza: between 2007 and 2022, young people between 15 and 29 years made up 36% of the 420,000 victims of the so-called "drug war".

Between 2006 and 2022, of nearly 250,000 people reported missing, over 109,000, or 44%, were also between the ages of 15 and 29 (Arista, 2023).

In a conference in Mexico City in 2012, Achille Mbembe defined his concept of necropolitics as the expression of armed conflicts in which the most vulnerable citizens are sacrificed as part of redundant populations through a practice of extermination that appeals "to a fictionalized or phantasmatic notion of the enemy" (Mbembe, 2012, pp. 130–39), always about to strike. It is the state logic claiming that "we can kill without distinction whoever we deemed to be our enemy" (Ibid.). What is known in social science as "redundant" or "surplus" populations, defined "as a bloc of humanity rendered as structurally unnecessary to a capital-intensive economy", has become "an emerging target for the post-welfare security state" (Shaw, 2016, p. 19).

In the cruelty of hemispheric necropolitics, the concept of a "war on drugs" appears only as a fable that distorts our understanding of violence. As an interpretative framework, the notions of "the war" and "the drugs" reach a point of exhaustion. Do we speak of "war" if militarized groups carry out "operations" of indiscriminate extermination of innocent civilians? How are "drugs" the main object of criminal organizations that, according to the authorities of Mexico and the U.S., now perpetrate "a host of crimes" that have little or nothing to do with narcotics? Journalistic work is conflated with the hundreds of films and television series intervened by the Pentagon, the State Department, the FBI, the DEA, and the CIA, from the conceptualization of scripts to the approval of technology, equipment, and weapons used in those productions. It's what Matthew Alford and Tom Secker call the "national security" entertainment industry. "National security entertainment promotes violent, self-regarding, American-centric solutions to international problems based on twisted readings of history," the researchers explain. From government declassified records, they have surveyed 814 films and 1,113 television titles that were directly intervened by U.S. security agencies to align them with a favorable message for that country's national security agenda (Alford & Secker, 2017, p. 8).

The Securitarian and the Securitized Subject

There are, nonetheless, at least two fascinating types of political subjectivities that emerge from both the "war on drugs" and the "war on terrorism." First, through the discourse articulators, there is what I would venture to call the "securitarian subject," that is, the one that actively engages with the political objectives of the narconarrative: the elected official, the police agent, the soldier, the reporter of most media outlets. And second, a type of disciplined consumer of the narconarrative that we may call the "securitized subject," the one that internalizes the coordinates of enunciation and performs literal and symbolic actions in response. These are shifting subjectivities, and a person may move from one to the other, oscillating between the securitarian and the securitized, between the narrator and the narrated persona of the narconarrative.

The construction of our understanding of drug trafficking continues to be anchored on the epistemic boundary, reinforcing the prevalence of the hegemonic narrative of the "war on drugs" exploited in turn by a proliferation of cultural products. Strongly mediated by what Pierre Bourdieu termed the state's "monopoly of symbolic violence," journalism and the entertainment industry frame drug trafficking within the ideological terms of the "war on drugs" sometimes narrated as a detective noir novel, as a western where the sheriff fights the outlaws, and as the terrifying conflict between powerful organizations that surpass state power (Bourdieu, 2014). This tendency is due to a politics of knowledge production in line with the habitus of interpretation constructed by security institutions that simultaneously condition leaks to the journalistic mainstream but limit public access to their archives and military anti-drug operations.

Ultimately, academic histories of drugs run the risk of falling trap to the same epistemic mediation of the "war on drugs" narrative. Following the pioneering work of Mexican sociologist Luis Astorga (2007), to the more recent investigations by Dawn Paley (2020), Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera (2017), and Alexander Aviña (2016), among others, we must assess an epistemological and practical break between our work and the implanted logic of the "drug war." The latter is a symbolic platform

that creates its discursive objects ("narcos", "cartels", "sicarios", and the "wars" between them) that feed a securitarian language justifying the violent incursion of armed forces in the Global South. More than another history of the drug trade, I investigate then a history of the "war on drugs" weaponizing the drug trade. A permanent journalistic and academic agenda for the Global South is to instigate a critical understanding of the security state, its monopoly of physical and symbolic violence, and its continuous necropolitics against redundant populations.

Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato observes that the violence experienced in Ciudad Juárez and Gaza signals a new global order based on the exhibition of impunity and the extermination that dissolves the rule of law and legitimizes the power of death. It is the Western democracies that express it. Segato explains: "In Ciudad Juárez they are telling us that they have power, they are telling us that they are not to be punished for their crimes, and that, on a global scale, is Gaza. It is the definitive spectacle of impunity and jurisdictional power" (Guillén, 2024).

And although the efforts to try to understand what happened that night in Villas de Salvárcar are interrupted or fail, let us look for a double process of signification to deconstruct the perverse propaganda agenda of the securocratic war against the most vulnerable populations and to at least reconstruct the history of this military occupation in the name of national security. This may be a possibility to desecuritize public life and to recover the legitimacy of our communities excluded from global citizenship, beyond any metaphor that criminalizes vulnerable youth, oblivious to any fable that distorts our present.

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