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Transnational Organized Crime and Hybrid Governance in Latin America

The Case of Forced Disappearance in Mexico

Marcial A. G. Suarez

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Abstract

The present working paper aims to introduce the concept of hybrid governance as a form of mediation between tri-dimensional political actors: the state; violent non-state actors (VNSAs), and society. In the first instance, we create a virtual separation between the state, non-state actors, and society to clarify our analysis's core. Since the 1980s, Latin America has been experiencing the emergence of several VNSAs with governance capacities, originating from distinct factors among which are economic, political, and social crises, as well as intrastate conflicts. We propose a qualitative methodological approach through which we explore the strategies developed in Mexican civil society to confront forced disappearance perpetrated by both organized crime and the state. We explore this situation of conviviality, understood as a set of social practices created by individuals or social groups to live under severe high levels of violence. The research is based on interviews conducted using an open model to indicate the possible paths developed as a form of resistance to contexts of extreme violence.

Keywords: hybrid governance | violent non-state actors | Mexico | Brazil

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1. Introduction: What is Hybrid Governance?

In the last two and a half decades, there has been a robust production of theoretical works, mainly related to the phenomenon of communities of "long peace", negative peace, hybrid peace, and blockages to peace and security in South America (Holsti 1996; Kacowicz 1998; Mares 2001; Oelsner 2007; Battaglino 2012; Ferreira and Richmond 2021; Duarte Villa and Pimenta 2016; Buzan et al. 1998). These discussions relate to another important topic: formal and informal governance (including the lack of state control) in areas with high rates of violence. Even though much of this hybrid literature on governance examines empirical cases that occurred in urban settings (Willis 2014; Arias 2018; Lessing 2021; Davis 2020; Fahlberg 2018; Feltran 2020), other experts have focused on different spots in South America to understand better what is now labelled "hybrid governance" (Duarte Villa and Pimenta 2019; Pimenta and Rosero 2020; Duarte Villa et al. 2021).

Hybrid governance describes the situation where protection rackets are operated under an illicit relationship between state actors and non-state actors. So, what is the relationship between illegality and violence? Several authors (Snyder and Durán-Martinez 2009; Cruz and Durán-Martinez 2016; Garzón-Vergara 2016), argue that the dynamics of violence are influenced by several variables such as illicit market competition, fragile law enforcement, and corruption, to name a few.

We are not only dealing with formal governments in this study but rather with forms of governability and governance that move through space and time, that is, they occupy dimensions of state action but are not themselves configured as official state agents. We suggest that the added value of the hybridity approach lies in blurring the lines between the actors involved (Colona and Jaffe 2016).

John M. Hagedorn uses "institutionalized gangs" to denote several minimum characteristics for criminal organizations to consider how non-state violent actors usually present themselves to signify their relevance to the State in the environment of security (Hagedorn 2008):

- Institutionalization to the point that a particular gang continues despite leadership changes (killed, incarcerated, etc).
- Introduction of complexity to support multiple roles of its members (including roles for women and children).
- Adaptation to changing environments (police repression or civil war).
- Resolution of some community needs (economy, security, services).

- Development of a distinct identity for its members (symbols, rituals, traditions, sometimes called subculture).

The contextual and regional dimension of political choices indicates that crime is defined in the context of the action and perception of the actors who suffer violence, as proposed by David Rodgers and Adam Baird (Rodgers and Baird 2015). Violence and crime are from a relational perspective and must be considered depending on the new actors involved and the political contexts. The concept of hybrid governance has emerged widely in the literature since the 2000s as a derivation of developments made from studies on security sector reform (SSR). The analysis of how hybrid governance is structured presents different forms according to the security context in which it emerges:

> Hybrid governance arrangements can be defined as arrangements in which non-state actors take on functions classically attributed to the state and, in the process, become entangled with formal state actors and agencies to the extent that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between state and non-state (Colona and Jaffe 2016: 176).

We aim to underscore the intensity of the debate on hybrid governance and the different theoretical and empirical approaches related to the topic. One of the ways to distinguish among different forms of hybrid governance, which can also be understood as criminal governance, is to elaborate the superpositions of norms involved. In normative terms, post-Westphalian formal legitimacy has long been understood as originating from the sovereign state, which has the power to produce standards. However, in hybrid governance, we recognize non-state actors as also being producers of norms.

Globalization has, on the one hand, weakened sovereignty along classical lines (Sassen 1996, Strange 1996), and on the other, favored the emergence of subnational actors, and with them the erosion of state normative structures in a complex of the juxtaposition of norms (Beraldo 2022). In other words, we are not only in the universe of the classic state normative debate but beyond this in the realm of the debate on the juxtaposition between state and non-state norms and this intermezzo space is where we try to develop the concept of hybrid governance.

Despite much of the hybrid governance literature examining empirical cases from urban settings (Arias 2018; Davis 2020; Fahlberg 2018; Feltran 2020; Lessing 2021; Willis 2014), other experts have focused on different locations in South America to better understand hybrid governance (Jimenez Aguilar and Thoene 2021; Duarte Villa and Pimenta 2019; Pimenta and Rosero 2020; Duarte Villa et al. 2021).

In places where violence is concentrated, criminal control is often found coexisting symbiotically with state legitimacy (Feltran 2020; Lessing 2021). In such an environment

"[of hybrid governance], the 'state' does not have a privileged position as the political framework that provides security, welfare, and representation; it must share authority, legitimacy, and capacity with other structures" (Boege et al. 2008: 10). The concept of hybrid governance allows a shift from the assumption that only the State can create norms and legitimacy in areas under political dispute, in which non-state actors, and more precisely criminal actors, create coexistence spaces for local populations.

Boege et al. propose an approach that dialogues with our proposed understanding of the interpenetration of different social spheres and their subsequent normative arrangements; "These hybrid orders are characterized by a plurality of overlapping rule systems which has a profound effect on politics and policies in these societies" (Boege et al. 2008: 11).

2. State-Sponsored Protection Rackets: Hybrid Governance in Mexico

In the Mexican case, as well as in the Brazilian one, an association between public power and violent non-state or criminal actors can be understood as having existed for a long time. Benjamin Smith reproduces the concept of protection rackets to understand the dynamics of organized crime in Mexico, especially linked to drug trafficking (Smith 2024).

The issue of protection rackets should not be viewed solely through the lens of state corruption, but rather as a rational choice made by local actors involved in the dynamics of illegal activities. Among the key characteristics is the fact that these relationships between the formal and informal, or legal and illegal, when understood at a more immediate level of analysis, reach the familial dimension.

Mexico became a significant player in the illegal drug trade as early as the beginning of the 20th century when the United States started establishing anti-drug policies and border controls. During the period of the 1920s and 1930s, key products like heroin and morphine originated from the Veracruz region and soon made their way to Ciudad Juárez, and from there to the U.S.

Although there were anti-drug policies during this early 20th-century period, in practice, what emerged was a long-lasting protection network involving state actors and segments of society that profited from the business in the region. At the immediate level, most local authorities established a direct relationship with traffickers and producers, where these authorities protected illegal activities in exchange for bribes.

An important distinction between the concept of corruption and that of protection rackets was made by Claudio Lomnitz (1996), and Alan Knight (2010) to highlight that there is

a pragmatic dimension to both non-state criminal actors and the state itself, through the actions of its sectors and agents linked to the production of anti-drug policies or the repression of drug production and trafficking. This pragmatic relationship involves understanding that the business of producing illegalities has a point of "equilibrium" or optimal tradeoff that directly ties the decision-making process beyond the moral analysis of illegality or crime.

However, from the 1970s onward, competition for the sale of protection emerged between local and state authorities and federal authorities, particularly the Federal Judicial Police. In this dynamic of jurisdictional control between previous state actors and new actors entering the business, the established pacts became imbalanced, creating new arrangements of protection for the drug trafficking business.

An interesting example for the proposed argument is the history of the origins of poppy production in the Sinaloa region in the 1940s. Then-Governor Pablo Macías Valenzuela, during his administration, charged around 30% of the harvest or its equivalent value in cash. In this structure, the police chief, Francisco de La Rocha, who already had close ties to the governor, had a brother in the Health Police, a cousin in the Badiraguato police force, and his sister was a morphine trafficker in the region.

The "Sinaloan" model would establish itself in Mexico over the following decades, reaching its most well-developed state under the leadership of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, who in the 1980s would be responsible for founding the Guadalajara Cartel, earning him the nickname *Jefe de los Jefes* (Boss of Bosses).

In the Mexican case, Nery Sólis Córdova discusses narco-culture and its symbolism as a form of transgression of the law, meaning that social relationships become defined and structured based on the proximity between actors, which can be of a familial, friendship, or other nature (Córdova 2012). On the other hand, the relationships established with state agents linked in one way or another to public security bodies are also structured:

> Since the early decades of the 20th century—we are located in northern Mexico, particularly in Sinaloa—, family, neighbourhood, street, barrio, ranchería, community groups, and other types of labour and economic ties, taking advantage of the social and political circumstances and the legal leniencies of their time, began to shape their paths and expectations for an emerging and undeveloped business they foresaw as profitable and highly lucrative (Córdova 2012: 210; author's translation).

In this sense, the idea of establishing pacts and protection networks was essential for keeping businesses organized and in constant flow. However, beyond this "negotiated peace", another underlying idea is crucial, which is to avoid provoking state action to

curb violent actions. Thus, a relationship of another nature emerges, one that seeks an unstable balance between competition for control of the territory and at the same time maximizing profits without entering into conflict. “Don’t fight here. Go fight outside. Here, just work and I won’t bother you” (Córdova 2012: 12). In this way, the governor of Sinaloa, Leopoldo Sánchez Celis (1963-1968), established the limits for competition over territory control and, consequently, the flow of illegal goods.

There is an important turning point in the relationship between criminal actors and state agents which occurred at the end of the 1960s. On the one hand, in Mexico, there was a change in the jurisdiction of operations related to the repression of drug trafficking. Starting in the 1970s, federal institutions begin to take control of protection strategies through the presence of the army, the Attorney General’s Office, and the Federal Judicial Police.

Another turning point occurred in 1969 when U.S. President Nixon launched “Operation Interception”, which had the primary objective of making it more difficult for illicit goods, especially narcotics, to enter the country. The measure began with the registration of all vehicles crossing the border, mainly targeting the reduction of marijuana trafficking through the southern border with Mexico and the entry of heroin, primarily through the northern border with Canada.

With the tightening of the anti-drug policy, the number of arrests made by the Mexican government increased to 1,603 in 1969, 2,595 in 1970, and 3,782 in 1974 (Kuri 2024):

> [...] Certain patterns began to emerge. Agents of the PJF [federal police force] would appear; a handful of major traffickers would end up imprisoned or dead, along with a few corrupt state police officers (Smith 2024: 150, author’s translation).

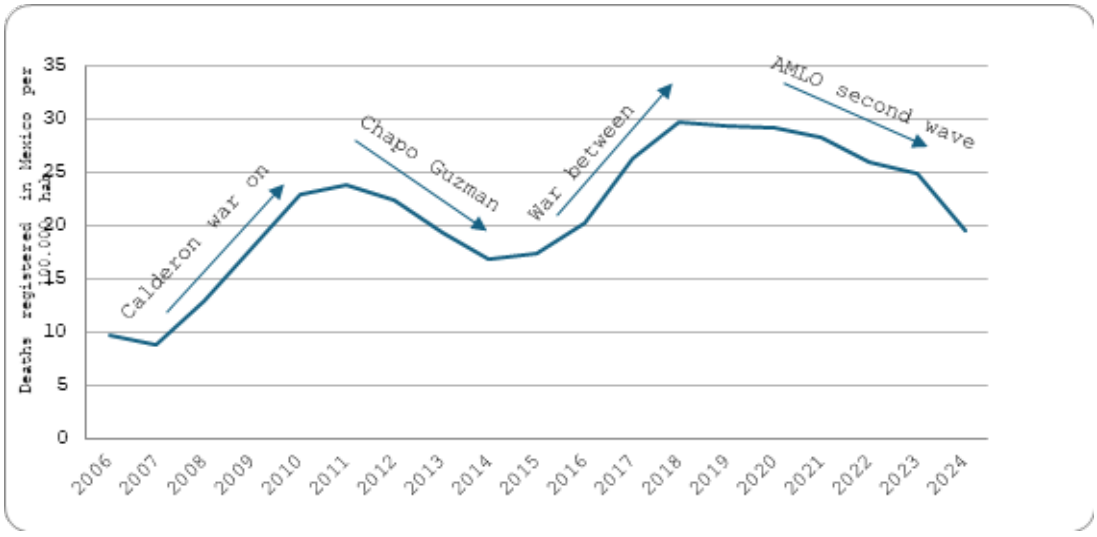
This dynamic of introducing a new actor into the equation of protection networks signifies a new arrangement of power and clientelist relations. The provision of security and stability to ensure the business operates at its optimal flow also creates space for the establishment of new local leadership. The reorganization model established at this moment would become a standard over time, and it can be characterized by the association of government actors with a specific local group. This aims to reduce the presence of competing groups vying for territorial control, leading to greater stability and a more favorable trade-off in negotiations. With only a limited set of actors selling the “commodity” of security and a limited number of actors purchasing this “commodity,” negotiations become more predictable:

> The locals and some journalists began whispering that Del Toro was taking money to protect Guerra and García Abrego while eliminating their competition. A decade later, most observers confirmed their suspicions: Juan García Abrego’s

> cousin took the position of mayor of Matamoros and appointed Del Toro as his head of security (Smith 2024: 151, author's translation).[1]

From the emergence of the Guadalajara Cartel onward, Mexico would witness periods of cartel control over pacts with government authorities, leading to a trend toward lower violence and homicide rates, and other periods when these pacts and protection networks were broken or shaken, either due to new market arrangements, competition for territorial control, or more direct public policies to combat organized crime. This correlation between disruptions or discontinuities in hybrid governance and increased violence becomes almost self-evident:

Figure 1. National Homicide Incidence Rate in Mexico, 2006-2024



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI).

Figure 1 above presents some temporal aspects of the relationships between state actors and non-state actors, highlighting how the distinction between "legal" and "illegal" becomes blurred as protection relationships are established. On the other hand, this graph may also indicate the correlations between the breakdown of pacts and the increase in homicide rates. This allows us to consider that, to some extent, a project aimed at reducing violence involves understanding the depth of the relationship between criminal actors and the protection networks established with the state.

3. Violence, Hybrid Governance, and Conviviality

The paper will attempt to "touch the ground", to understand how this model of violence is organized with and by the state, influences people, and the ways of coexistence that

1 Salvador Del Toro Rosales, also known as El Fiscal de Hierro; Juan Nepomuceno Guerra, drug trafficker from Nuevo Laredo; Juan García Abrego, drug trafficker from Nuevo Laredo.

emerge through and by violence and by the local arrangements of societies and violent actors, whether they are state or not.

In this session, we will address the issue of forced disappearances and the strategies that emerge as a way of establishing a way of “living” under circumstances in which violence is not limited to non-state violent actors, but also actions involving the State.

As this is a working paper and the research is ongoing, we will develop the analysis of the events that took place during our stay in Mexico to conduct an exploratory study and interviews. Through interviews conducted in Mexico City with family members and social activists, we intend to extract some elements that will guide our analysis of these cases to understand these narratives.

The Mexican Constitution, in Article 21, defines the foundations of public security in Mexico. To this end, this article is divided into four main areas:

- the role of the Public Prosecutor’s Office as the entity responsible for investigating crimes, the authority that exercises criminal prosecution — except in cases where this is performed by a private individual before a court — and the situations in which, in exercising criminal prosecution, it may apply criteria of opportunity;
- the power of the Federal Executive, with the approval of the Senate and based on a case-by-case criterion, to recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court;
- the exclusive function of the judicial authority in the imposition, modification, and duration of sentences;
- the function of public security, which is the responsibility of the federation, federal entities, and municipalities.

The question that emerges from this introductory note on Article 21 of the Mexican Constitution guides us throughout the study: How should one act when the distinction between the State and the criminal is neither clear nor objective? Can they be both at the same time, in an ambivalent manner? In this space of (in)definition, we find the place of hybrid governance, which results from the juxtaposition of formal regulations and norms alongside informal ones. It is important to note that, in our argument, formality is linked to the State as the primary actor that holds the normative authority to create institutional norms.

3.1 Knowledge, Experiences, and Shared Understandings: Dimensions of Violence

The path of this preliminary study led us to encounter families and researchers involved with the issue of forced disappearance on one side, and on the other, in another dimension of the search for missing persons, which is translated into the concept of Busqueda en Vida (search while alive), developed through the accumulation of shared experiences among families, collectives, groups, and social entities of various kinds who find themselves in this moment of convergence.

The aspect that interests us as we enter this debate, albeit in a preliminary manner, lies in uncovering the strategies developed by these actors, mostly non-state actors, in establishing methods, logic, and accumulated knowledge, not within academia, but rather in ongoing and collective experience.

Thus, at this stage of the study, we aim to reproduce a shift that leads us into a dimension of dialogue between experience and theoretical analysis, with the imminently factual issue of violence, hybrid governance, and conviviality during its realization as a political and social fact:

> The research conducted with family members, representatives of social movements, collectives, and researchers sought to address the issue through an open interview method. The objective, beyond proposing objective and quantifiable questions, was to understand the language structures and how the interpretation of the phenomenon was constructed by the actors who lived through the experience: “To understand the disappearance of persons and the processes of searching, it was necessary to recognize that these events are constructed from the logic of those who narrate and live them, that is, from a great diversity of bodies, identities, positions, and contexts” (Silvestre et al. 2020: 90, author’s translation).

The account that emerges through the narratives of those affected by violence is the most powerful condition, in analytical terms, that our research was able to bring to the study.

3.2 (In)Visibility and Violence

Among the cases we examined as elements to approach the theme of organizational methods, action strategies, and coexistence with both state and non-state violence, we present as a moment of analysis the testimonies of Family X, whose child was disappeared by police forces working for criminal organizations known to be part of the Mexican cartels. For ethical reasons, we will not discuss characteristics that could

identify the family, but it is important to understand the logic of hybrid governance established in this case, which, importantly, also exists in other forced disappearance cases.

In this interview, the father's first sentence about the disappearance of his son sharply cuts through the air: "*Ya son trece años con nuestra desgracia*" (It's been thirteen years with our misfortune) (Interviewee X). It is not only about understanding the pain felt, as that is unfathomable, but trying to delve deeper into the testimony and understand how, after 13 years of the son's disappearance, nothing was more than just a statistic.

The question begins to unfold as the account of the events emerges, such as when the father, during the search process, tells about the first search: "And the message burning. Then he says: 'I just passed the booth. The booth. There was a toll booth from Monterrey in Nuevo Laredo, and the booth is in Sabinas Hidalgo, at kilometer 100. And the coordinate was at 113 plus 500'" (Interviewee X).

At this moment, when the son passes through the toll booth, we find the initial combination of the elements we sought in our research: the encounter of another type of arrangement, which is not just formal but also informal, not only legal but also illegal, and the juxtaposition of these conditions of formality and legality with their opposites, or at least their supposed opposites.

In this search process, the emergence of agreements between the State and non-state actors becomes more apparent with each move:

> And my wife stays with the commander talking, and he tells her: 'Ma'am, don't worry, your son will be returned in three months. The organized crime, which was the Zetas, holds him and sees what qualities he has—doctor, accountant, engineer, and so on—and they look for where they can use them. The migrants who come and have no education were made to produce drug bricks' (Interviewee X).

An "economy of violence" emerges within the narrative, leading to the consideration of the existence not only of kidnapping for ransom or disappearance through violence and murder but also of an economy that demands a flow of specialized labor, as the clerk said to the mother: "And he tells her: 'Ma'am, don't worry, your son will be returned in three months'" (Interviewee X).

The time of use for these disappeared individuals is not limited to the time of a ransom, but to the time they are used as subjects performing a function in a formal capacity within the condition of informality and illegality, while simultaneously doing a specific and specialized job.

The selectivity of the state's action in repressing crime becomes evident in another passage of the interview when the father says: "In our case, it was Commander Chávez. When he was detained. Why was he detained? They kill federal police officers, and that's when they get angry. If they go after Stuart, they do so with force. The civilian population doesn't matter to them" (Interviewee X).

What catches our attention is the father's understanding of the dynamics of the arrangements and the consequences of breaking these arrangements between the State and non-state actors. When we look back at the historical context of the Mexican case, as discussed earlier, moments of intensification in the state's actions against organized crime create moments of instability and violence.

At this point, we touch on one of the central concepts of our study, which is hybrid governance, as we examine the father's account of the differential treatment of "crimes". The state mobilizes its repressive apparatus when there are disruptions, such as the murder of police officers, in the context of a public security management model in which crime also plays a role.

In the continuation of the interview, the issue of kidnapping for the performance of technical functions arises once again. The issue of the social capital of the disappeared emerges—that is, if the victim possesses technical qualifications, they perform and have value for their work, which may not be the case with other victim profiles. In this specific case, the police had dismantled illegal cell towers built by drug traffickers, and the strategy was to find substitutes for the workforce to replace them:

> The telephone technicians who came from Mexico City to work in Nuevo Laredo. They disappeared from where we were with all the success, and it was like two years […] They brought down the telecom towers the narcos had. In that area, over there in Nuevo León and Tamaulipas. So, the *chinito* would say. So, they find people to do specific work, like a phone system, something parallel or specific (Interviewee X).

The economic dynamics structured around drug trafficking are complex and multifaceted, in terms of incorporating social, economic, and political roles. The search for professionals who can be useful as a labor force implies considering that these individuals, victims of violent actions, possess specific value related to the needs of the criminal organization, and therefore its complexity and territorial management.

What we want to point out as an indication of this relationship between kidnapping and professional profile is the fact that it is only possible when there is control over territorial management and, beyond that, direct influence on the economic and political dynamics.

It is unlikely that a particular activity, such as the construction of telecommunications towers, would be carried out without the acquisition of materials, supplies, food, medication, etc. In other words, a whole range of economic, social, and political services becomes necessarily interconnected.

This case, briefly presented, offers us an image of the process in which social actors, state agents, criminal actors, and economic actors are involved. It is not about understanding the process of invisibility of the disappeared subject, but rather the dynamics of this process, which, beyond the disappearance, involves the persistence of the actors who systematically practice forced disappearance.

3.3 Resilience, Resistance, and Struggles

The study also allowed for the discussion and introduction of how social actors, victims of violence, establish dynamics of resilience in the face of extreme violence and often employ resistance strategies.

In another interview, the aim was to understand the economic dynamics behind forced displacement, as well as forced disappearances. In this specific case, we spoke with a visual artist and human rights activist from the Tamaulipas region, in northeastern Mexico, along the Gulf of Mexico. A significant part of the illegal market is driven by the sale of *huachicol*, which enters the commercial fuel market through the pressure exerted by organized crime on the owners of gas stations (Hernández-Hernández and Sumano Rodriguez 2023). [2]

This activity is not new, but the dynamic is, as it involves territorial control and the expulsion of families who own the land through which the fuel transport pipelines pass. The account of this dynamic is clear, as it openly presents the dynamics of this criminal governance on one hand, with no form of organization yet existing among the social actors who suffer from this violence:

> And what we started to see is that these places, which were, let's say, isolated, isolated from the drug trafficking routes, that were quite controlled, began to move and started to be reached. For example, to my city, which was well-managed, they started arriving to demand quotas, and extortion money, no, the *huachicol* had never happened. If you know what *huachicol* is, it's the theft of gasoline, gasoline siphoning, this also began to explode (Interviewee Y).

From the interviewee's speech, it is evident how the spread of organized crime through new criminal dynamics affects local communities, including charges for occupying land,

2 *Huachicol* generally refers to stolen and often adulterated fuel, typically gasoline or diesel, that has been siphoned from pipelines.

selling security, and more. In this sense, violence becomes a commodity with value, and insecurity becomes the means through which this commodity acquires meaning and price:

> And to seek tools, also from there. In a collective way, but also to unveil yourself. You can look for tools for some properties, in this case, for this problem of violence, well, the first thing is to report it. That is to say, we don't want this. What is happening with the government? What position do they take? Who defends them? Where is justice? And who is searching for the disappeared? Where are they? Or what didn't happen? And who is protecting ordinary citizens?" (Interviewee Y).

In this passage, the perception of the participation of state government sectors, allied with economic interests, emerges very clearly. This objectively implies the need to reflect on the relationship between formal power and informal power, or the thin barriers between legality and illegality:

> What happened during the governments of Calderón and Peña Nieto, let's say these more neoliberal governments, is that we understand the war on drugs as very closely linked to the dispossession of natural resources. And what part of the criminal groups have allied with these mega-corporations they have created? Well, this corner. I'm corrupt. What is it they do? What they want is a mining concession. To dispossess the peasants of their land (Interviewee Y).

The territory, in its multiple designations and meanings, can be understood, as Hassner (1997) proposes, as a multiplicity of possibilities—such as a piece of land, a sacred inheritance with a history of belonging, a space of power, or a space that creates identities. In this study, the territory is not treated as a dimension of state sovereignty, but rather as a space that is given meaning and redefined by the subjects and actors within the life-and-death circuit of this land.

Thus, the territory is understood in the sense of Anssi Paasi as a space of social processes, in which social action and social space are inseparable: "Territories are not frozen frameworks where social life occurs. Rather, they are made, given meanings, and destroyed in social and individual action. Hence, they are typically contested and actively negotiated" (Paasi 2007: 110).

4. Strategies for Searching for Life

Through dialogue with another social activist and artist from Mexico City, whom we will refer to as Z, the work developed with the Grupo de Investigaciones en Antropología Social y Forense (GIASFI) and Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (SERAPAZ) presents

dynamics developed by social groups, composed of family members, non-governmental organizations, social activists, and other categories of Mexican society. These dynamics focus on proposing ways to create strategies that enable investigations of disappearances, and not only through official channels.

This proposal interacts with what we call hybrid governance in this work, meaning responses to the immediate life context that incorporate both formal and informal norms in a model of juxtaposed interactions between them. In the text “Busqueda en Vida: Saberes y Experiencias de Familias y Colectivos” (Silvestre et al. 2020), some of these strategies can be found. A set of definitions emerges, such as: what does it mean to search, what does this movement demand, and which actors are involved?

> Above all, it is important to understand the context as it was previously presented, or in the words of interviewee Z: “These disappearances [...] all of them have been, everyone has been military, everyone has been police, everyone has worked for organized crime, and they are all family” (Interviewee Z).

The act of searching carries a duplicity that involves discussing the failure or complicity of the state and its public security apparatus, and on the other hand, the people who are trying to recover the bodies of the disappeared. This duplicity becomes evident when people no longer seek justice, but rather, simply the return of the disappeared body so that the family can begin their mourning process. This sense of discouragement with official channels, which should offer resources to the population, is clearly reflected in Z’s words:

> And it’s very sad because at first I used to say – my forgiveness is forgetting and punishing the guilty – but when you’re in that situation and you see the risk that exists […] but I no longer care about what they’re doing, the only thing that matters to me is that they give me the body […] to know what happened to him, to know if he’s really dead or not (Interviewee Z).

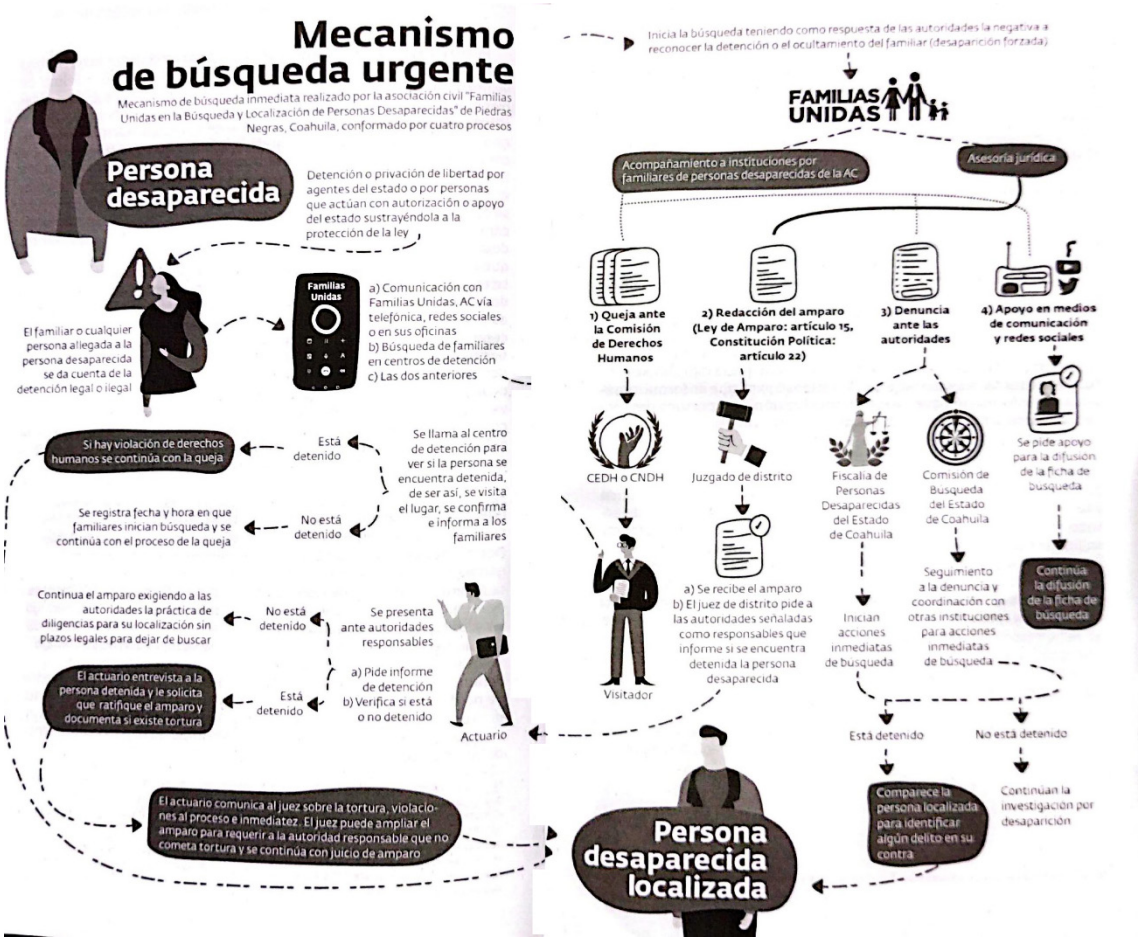
Throughout the interview, the issue of disorganization and the intensification of competition between the cartels emerges, particularly with the arrival of Felipe Calderón to the presidency in 2006, when a War on Cartels or a War on Drugs was “inaugurated”, in a broader scope akin to the War on Terror initiated by G. W. Bush after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

The collateral effect of this interventionist policy was the disruption of the agreements established between the cartels, leading to an unprecedented wave of violence, which, to some extent, continues to the present day through the fragmentation of groups and factions. The nationalization of the cartels’ presence, which was once more localized, becomes, from that moment on, dispersed. This phenomenon is translated by Z in the following way:

> It also has to do with this right-wing cut, you talk to right-wing people, and they will tell you that they think it's very good that they are out in the streets, but they fail to recognize that the army has disappeared people [...] (Interviewee Z).

The issue of the intertwining between organized crime and the state implies thinking that, beyond the usual forms through public institutions, other forms of search are structured in a down-top model and in networks, as seen in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Paths for the Search for Life



Source: (Silvestre et al. 2020: 5).

What this model translates is the involvement of at least three spheres: individuals, collectives, and public institutions. What is of interest in this work is to understand how the "search for life" strategy differs from a search for the disappeared. The first variable is time. In a search for life, formal and legal waiting periods to report a disappearance are not followed. Instead, a series of alerts and notices are quickly spread through networks to make the disappearance public. From that moment on, a range of actors enter the scene to play their respective roles.

This approach emphasizes the immediacy and urgency of the "search for life", which involves bypassing the bureaucratic delays typically associated with official

processes. It highlights the active and rapid mobilization of social networks, where different actors—family members, community organizations, activists, and sometimes even individuals with specialized knowledge—collaborate in response to the crisis. In contrast, the state's response is often slow, formal, and bureaucratic, while the "search for life" operates in a more flexible, dynamic, and decentralized way:

> The first hours in the search for a missing person are crucial to finding them alive. Do not wait 12, 24, or 72 hours to mobilize and file a report. Every minute counts [...] In this immediate action, both the experience of the families in search and all the manuals coincide [...] (Silvestre et al. 2020: 17).

The citizen search manuals contain fundamental elements to understand components of the strategies, such as:

- description;
- history;
- occurrence;
- routines.

These first four movements, according to *Caminos para la Búsqueda en Vida* (2020), indicate, beyond the formal organs of the State, a model of action based on indicative analysis (Silvestre et al. 2020). In other words, it produces a compilation of information that will allow for the creation of an initial framework, which will assist both non-state groups and official bodies.

The description translates into the narrative of who the missing person was, their physical characteristics, what clothes they were wearing, etc. In the second movement, history refers to what the person was doing, and their social connections, in other words, translating the person's daily routines. The occurrence refers to the event itself, what happened, when it happened, and how it happened. Did the disappearance occur with violence? Was the person taken by someone? Were there phone calls or messages? The case related to routines refers to the person's routine situation, work situation, emotional state, personal problems, and routes taken, among others.

This compilation will enable searchers to create hypotheses about what might have happened to the missing person, and this process of compiling information allows for the creation of the necessary conditions for both the search network and public security bodies.

What the interviews with social actors in Mexico City allow is the development of research in a comparative context with Brazil, a task that will be developed in a future project. What is currently intended through this approach to the Mexican case is to

identify clues that can help find elements in the cases, relating to the concept brought to this study. In other words, the idea of hybrid governance as a contextual reality implies, dimensions, formal and informal linkages, and structures of possible relationships among actors in societal, economic, political, religious, and other life dimensions.

5. Conclusion

The text presented is part of the research that began during the Mecila studies in 2024 and constitutes a research agenda focused on the comparative analysis of the relationships between criminal actors and the protection networks provided by the state and society, something we define here as hybrid governance.

The space of interaction between state agents and criminal actors is the immediate social space, where relationships based on kinship, economic interests, and practical rationality form the foundation of the entire structure of hybrid governance. On the other hand, the comparison allows us to analyze how transnational organizations apply or reproduce similar governance modes, enabling us to comparatively examine how sociability or conviviality is constructed in these distinct scenarios.

The Mexican case is exemplary for the purpose of this study in that it allows for the understanding of the relationship between different actors in a process of conflict and extreme violence. The history used to analyze the genesis of Mexican criminal organizations aims to indicate how the formation of these groups is, to some extent, parochial, familial, and closely tied to everyday life. Over time, through economic expansion and growth, they find new ways to use violence as the State becomes a fundamental actor in the existence of crime as a transnational business.

The cases analyzed, as well as the interviews included in this study, aim to provide some meaning to the argument presented in this work. In a direct line and in an attempt to sustain a coherent internal logic, the study proposed a key concept, a history of criminal groups, a change in the model of exercising violence, and finally, the strategies developed by social actors. These strategies help to understand how conviviality finds informal ways to establish itself in an environment marked by high levels of both violence and corruption.

The study presented at this moment does not yet capture the completeness of the research conducted, but it aims to highlight research elements and analytical paths being followed that hold considerable explanatory potential.

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