



Violent images in Mexico's war on drugs. Exploitation and right to information: a look from the Visual Peace Research perspective

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PAGE | 53

Abstract

The constant violence that happens in the Mexico's war on drugs has produced an infamous archive of images full of human disgrace which circulates freely on the media. From the Visual Peace Research perspective, this paper engages with the discussion on the ways an individual may relate to the spectator position and its implications. The argument focuses on the process of exploitation when visual material depicting violence is produced and consumed. The availability of the material in certain Mexican media is linked with the exaltation of violence or right to information debate. Finally, the interest is to reflect the ways the Mexican society has developed own processes of relation to this conflict and its visual representation.

Key words: Mexico's war on drugs, violent visual material, exploitation, spectatorship

At dawn, a dead body hanging from a bridge located in a main street where thousands of people pass by every day is found; this situation was in the third most populated city of Mexico. The event is captured and reproduced; the visual testimony will transcend its location and spread a message. This situation is one of all kinds of shocking episodes that have been a constant reality affecting many places crucial for the criminal organizations (cartels) dedicated to drug trafficking and related criminal activities in Mexico. These cartels have been fighting each other in an extreme violent fashion to control routes, cities and regions in order to expand their dominions.

Violent acts committed day by day, one by one, the next with more brutality than the previous, and mostly all of these acts have their visual memoir. This conflict has produced an infamous graphic archive. The violent incident and its visual reproduction have consequences; collections of the absolute violence circulate in and by the media. From the front cover of local and national newspapers, to websites dedicated to all information reporting news about drug trafficking and related criminal violence, a toxic cloud of visual images on the media portraying all kinds of scenes is available for direct or indirect spectatorship.

The conflict was labelled as "war" since 2006; however, the public violence between cartels started in the early 2000's. Therefore, its exposition on the Mexican media has been constant and at some points has taken all the public attention. Images of suffering are used by the media to create an emotional and moral reaction, they are presented to appeal, and ultimately to commercialize the image of the victims. Locally and globally, the mediated experience of suffering conveys a double risk: its

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commodification, and when the cultural representation of the disgrace is thinned out and distorted (Kleinman and Kleinman 1996:1).

Considering this grim landscape, the discussion will be addressed from the peace studies field, particularly from the visual peace research perspective. The aims of this paper are, first, to review the debate regarding the possible ways a spectator may respond when confronted with images of human pain.

Afterwards, this paper ponders the way the violent acts have been reported on this conflict and particularly, two specific cases in the Mexican media and the visual material they offer regarding this conflict is reviewed. The discussion focuses on the process of exploitation when visual material depicting violence is produced and consumed. This part deals with the availability of the visual violent material around this conflict and with the exaltation of violence or right to information debate. Issues of politicization and depoliticization are also considered in the discussion. Finally, the interest is to reflect the ways the Mexican society has developed own processes of relation to this conflict and its visual representation. As an initial effort to study this conflict from the visual peace research perspective, this paper deals with the question: which are the ways to coexist and respond to the permanent acts of violence and its visual representation? My argument considers that the permanent status and constant presence on the media, the conflict has become an entertainment, and the circulation of the media's reports on the conflict has produced some kind of commodification of the violent visual material. This situation brings the possibility to reinforce the cultural violence phenomena.

The conflict and its implications

A maze of alliances, break ups, treasons inside the drug cartels and their armed disputes against the federal security enforcement have spread the violence into many regions and cities along the country; the violence has also affected other countries in Central America or southern states in the United States, where the Mexican cartels have gained presence. This is a continental problem. The criminal acts of these organizations do not have limits, when extortion, kidnapping and trafficking of persons are also a common activities for them.

The violence related to the drug cartels in Mexico has different particularities. It is a permanent situation in many cities with a daily amount of executions, and with very specific episodes of many casualties and confrontation, and then moving to other cities. Unfortunately, a real complicated web of interrelated problems has grown together. In the political sphere, the incapacity of the Mexican state to give effective solutions in security condemns the whole political system. The participation of politicians, high ranked members of the Mexican army and police officers with the drug cartels is a fact. The corruption of politicians and members of the law enforcement forces have weakened the institutional life. The desertion of soldiers and former police officials to join the cartels has increased the difficulty to control the violence. The legal system also suffers from the corruption and menaces from the crime organizations; impunity becomes a routine for the committed crimes. The capacity of the cartels to corrupt the political, legal and economic system in the country is one of the biggest challenges that the Mexican authorities have to face. On the social side many problems are consequences of the conflict: executed civilians, the increasing involvement of youngsters in drug trade activities as *sicarios* (hired killer), displaced people, human rights violations, and the assassination of journalist, human rights promoters, politicians and federal law enforcement forces.



In this dramatic scenario, all the violent acts have profound impact and consequences on the people that directly or indirectly have suffered insecurity or violence. The political and social spheres have been under permanent siege. In Mexico violence is measured with dead bodies. This conflict has produced thousands of casualties and the number grows day by day².

Ways, reasons and consequences of looking: spectatorship and visual peace research

Being a spectator of human suffering is a daring experience. The suffering of the others depicted in images demands an action from the spectator; the exercise of looking conveys a responsibility. However, responding as spectator is not an easy task. Engaged with the ways images may construct knowledge to recover a peaceful setting, the visual peace research perspective reviews different issues on the subject's own circumstance, its engagement with images, and the agency of the visual material within the social sphere.

The implications of being spectator and the ways to respond to it deserve careful attention. When Susan Sontag brings back Virginia Wolf's commitment to condemn the horrors of war using photographs as means to denounce and raise awareness about the misery and human suffering as consequence of a violent context (Sontag 2003), the experience and responsibility of looking human pain captured in a image the state of affairs seems one sided. Being a spectator of suffering³ or disgrace should be a definitive *raison d'être* to reject the violent act and the issues involved. However, images are open to interpretations, objectivity is out of question; the visual and emotional impact of an image of pain depends on the spectator's subjectivity and the context of the image. There is a duality within the reaction and position of the viewer.

Since Sontag engaged with the relation about photography, the ethic responsibility, and the negative effects (anaesthetic) of it into the open spectatorship (Sontag 1973, 2005), diverse arguments have debated the topic. The looking-not looking dilemma surrounds our spectatorship experience, when there are two understandings in confrontation. First, the looking stance considers that being a spectator of images of human pain prolongs the victimization of the subject and it may create complicity that develops an exploitation stance. On the other hand, the not looking position also implies a problem; we are obligated morally to respond from our position of spectators. In a culture dominated by images, the individual can exert its political influence when the act of viewing is transferred to the collective sphere. Therefore, the not looking stance would diminish the political participation of the individual ((Möller 2009: 781-3). Not looking seems to facilitate the non viewer's position, but still, it may imply complicity when the images of pain have been produced on purpose as the Abu Ghraib photographs (Möller 2012: 21).

For instance, on the question regarding the agency of the images, there are arguments that condemn war photography and its potential action to aestheticize

² There is a dispute between the official amount considered by the Federal Government, social organizations and the media. In the period of 2006-2012 the reports of casualties range from 45,000 to 80,000. For a report on the media see: Rafael López (2012, December 1) 'Las ejecuciones del sexenio 2006-2012' in *Milenio* *Diario* <http://edomex.milenio.com/cdb/doc/noticias2011/7d97ccec10baf5f29e3d096cff54a3ea> Accessed :18 December 2012 (in Spanish)

³ I make it extensive to animals' suffering, and specifically for "human" entertainment.



and desensitize the spectator's experience. This argument would imply that some characteristics of the photography would direct the attention of the viewer out of the disgrace depicted. This way to engage with the images then would lead to a posture where depolitization or desensitization attitude can be experienced by the spectator (Möller 2009: 783). However, there is no causal connection between the spectatorship experience and further reaction of the subject when confronted with images of suffering, the same image can be interpreted in contradictory ways, and it may lead to a politization or depolitization stance depending on the viewer's perception.

Hariman and Lucaites consider that certain images from photojournalism become cultural icons when common recognition develops into a veneration exercise, where complex emotional responses take place. These icons represent and give coherence to a possible collective identity giving to the individual connotations of obligation and power. However, this kind of "sacred status" that certain iconic images have, project an accessibility to construct a mass-mediated collective memory (Hariman and Lucaites 1-2: 2007). Has the visual aspect of the Mexico's war on drugs developed an iconic status? Not one picture, but the sum of the daily tragedies just meters in front of us, at the newspapers stand, or at home through the screens. All the images connected by the nature of the conflict, all the images creating the collective visual recollection of this conflict exposed everyday to the Mexican society. The extensive reproduction of visual commonplaces produces an incorporation of these images to the ordinary daily routine.

In this sense, François Debrix⁴ finds that in order to make acceptable the unacceptable in regards of how war as mediated spectacle is presented to the viewers, the sublime spectatorship is created. This kind of spectatorship gives the spectator an ideological shield (or sunglasses) to go through shocking images and transcend the initial painful experience (Debrix 2006). This exercise needs a main co-protagonist: "the other". The enemy and villain working as the antagonist of the play; *the other* will die and suffer while the protagonist reach a hero status; moreover, the images of the other suffering or dying are justified because it has been framed to the spectator as the enemy. Finally, the ending of this mediated play comes when the sublime spectator accepts the political message behind the exercise. Some images of suffering find justification with this judgment. On the other hand, Sharon Sliwinski engaged with Sontag's diverse arguments on photography and suffering traces a path. When confronting an image of suffering the recognition and tie with the other must be preserved. Sliwinski makes a proposition about adequacy when responding to an image and its content: the aim of the viewer is to alleviate the suffering depicted (Sliwinski 2004:154).

Reporting the daily horror, this is for real, isn't it?

We are living an era where death and suffering became a spectacle. The *horreour-réalité* is here (Marzano 2010). Or better said, it has always been here, or out there, but now it circulates freely, even in high definition. Grotesque visions started to be common in many regions of Mexico, when the cartels decided to leave messages on the streets full of blood and dismay. The more brutal, the better. The violent act is itself a communicative element; then the image is the permanent reminder of the perpetrator's clear and straightforward intention: *fear to us, we have the power to do*

⁴ This author applies this concept into the context of the military interventions of the United States and the way it is presented to the audience of this country. See Debrix 2006.



this. In this conflict, the specific recipients of the message are the rival gang; however, the message also goes to the security forces and the final recipient is the society. For the cartels, violence is a means to an end, a form of social control⁵. The public exposition of a dead body as a message and as a consequence: A final display of power.

Media generated images is one way to construct meaning about the world we experience, they are used to show the reality from the political and social spheres. Facts and images make sense when they are inserted within a system of meaning (Gamson et al, 1992: 374-5). Nevertheless, how do we make sense of reality when violent acts are the message? How many messages are embedded on mutilated bodies dumped on the street? It seems that the tendency in the mass media is to offer only impact images to attract the attention, but at the same time when reporting violent conflicts certain social or politic contexts are not presented, giving to the audience a biased view of the conflict (Penalva 2002:405).

Different academic fields analyze violence and the mediated experience of it. Diverse theories try to explain the consequences in the audience of fictional or real violent content (Carter and Weaver 2003). The relation between violent content in mass media, types of violence (Jensen 2002), the manner is represented in media (Penalva 2002), the ways the audience relates to this content (Fernández et al. 2008), and the uses and gratifications of violent genres of media violence (Kremar and Godbold 2005) stand as the most recurrent topics along with this subject. For instance, in cultural studies, the audience's understanding of messages in mass media has been a central topic within this discipline. One of the main references in this field is Stuart Hall; he proposed that the response of the audience to media's content (in his case focused on TV) is not lineal or predictable. Audiences (readers, viewers or listeners) engage to the stimulus in own ways. Hall proposes the coding-encoding process and three different types of readings made by audiences. Any kind of text is polysemic, even an image depicting suffering or disgrace. This scholar finds that the *preferred reading* goes with the hegemonic stance, where a dominant meaning imposes its message and the spectator assumes it (Hall 1980). Fixed meanings have different understandings, but the context is determinant.

The speed and amount of (des)information and images that flows nowadays represent also a challenge to the spectator (Campbell 2003:72) The availability of all kind of visual discourses is a characteristic of this conflict. Thus, the spectator of this "war" has also to deal with antagonist postures and the limited time to contemplate and react to it, the permanent status of the conflict and its presence in the media challenges the citizen at its position, and to all the related situations of the conflict. When the number of executed people was rising in a constant rate since 2006, and reaching a peak in 2010 with almost 12,000 casualties documented by the media in this year, the Mexican government felt uncomfortable with the situation. The government was accusing certain media that the information and depiction of the violence was creating a "social paranoid" and was an exaltation of violence. In 2011, more than 700 media signed a pact⁶ to consider the ways news related with violent

⁵ Even criminal violence is not included as a recurrent situation; I consider that it can be included in the collective and organized violence category with terrorism. See Roberta Senechal de la Roche (1996), 'Collective Violence as Social Control', *Sociological Forum*, 11(1):97-128.

⁶See Greenslade, Roy (2011, March 25) "Mexican media sign drug reporting pact", *The Guardian* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2011/mar/25/press-freedom-mexico> Accessed: 15 December 2012



acts should be reported. Even in main TV channels or national newspapers explicit images were avoided, the daily report of shootings and executions were the main topic. Main Mexican media conglomerates signed the pact. Popular images reproduced by large-scale corporations may imply the promotion of certain ideology reinforcing dominant narratives (Hariman and Lucaites 2: 2007). The use of the iconic images in mass media then implies a struggle.

Two cases

Twenty first century continues the tradition, consummates the era of violence and tragedy, and pushes forward the ethical responsibility for the ones dedicated to give documentary evidence (Keith et al, 2006). The conflict has pushed to the limits the society, government and media regarding the violence and the way has been presented to the society. Images in mass media are not neutral (Gamson et al, 1992, Hariman and Lucaites 2007); they have passed a filter of ideology or interests in the process of production and reproduction. At the beginning, the conflict was visually presented with the reports and images generated by the media. All the main enterprises of Mexican media followed an ethical treatment of the images avoiding explicit ones. The conflict reached a new level when three “producers” of visual material joined the experience: the cartels, the government and the civilians. The horror path was wide open when the cartels recorded their own criminal acts (mostly on video) and uploading them on the internet⁷. The Mexican government bet on a mediated massive campaign showing its strategy of deploying thousands of security forces and reporting the achievements against the cartels to regain the support of the public opinion. On the other hand, the duration and expansion of the conflict let the civilians be more than spectators, and they recorded their own experiences of events related to this conflict⁸.

The cases I want to reflect on will be used as examples to bring up the right to information and exploitation/exaltation of violence discussion. Firstly, I will comment on two photos presenting the same crime. Both reports were on the respective websites of a national newspaper and a local newspaper. The second example is regarding the websites that were specifically created to “inform” about this conflict.

As commented before, the way the conflict has been presented to the society depended on the editorial guidelines of the specific medium. In the case of these newspapers, the graphic violence of the pictures shows two faces. On the first image taken from a national newspaper, a soldier (as main figure of the photo) was standing to the direction the photo was taken, many meters behind him, a crashed SUV car⁹ with heavy damaged caused by shooting, and other soldiers are standing near the vehicle. On the second one, taken from a local newspaper, the angle was exactly the same as the previous one; the difference was that the soldier standing was not there. Then, the main figure of the photo was a dead body lying outside the vehicle. The focus was close enough to see the body with some detail. Both images

⁷ Youtube was the first website where one cartel uploaded the executions. It was until many hours after the personnel of this website realized the content and blocked it. This situation happened many times when other cartel retailed with the same procedure recording the execution and uploading it. There are hundreds of videos of this conflict on this website.

⁸ See for example short video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6inHI9OVw8> Accessed: 21 December 2012

⁹ Small Utilitarian Vehicle is the typical vehicle used by the cartel’s ‘sicarios’ to move on the streets. Normally there are four or more heavily armed men in each vehicle moving in convoys of many units at the same time.



were with the written report of the incident. The reports explained the case and how many casualties were involved, and even in the local newspaper, the identities of some of them were published. As Sontag explains, photography and death have kept company ever since the invention of the former (Sontag 2002: 6). Looks of complicity will always exist along with media's economic and political interests.

The second case is related with one of the most debated issues in the media that has been following and presenting the violence in Mexico. Since 2010, a proliferation of websites dedicated to compile all kinds of stories and reports about drug lords, cartels and violence took place. The "argument" of these websites is clear and simple: *'it is better to show how terrible are things out there rather than live in ignorance'*¹⁰. At the beginning the content of these websites was information or visual material submitted by civilians, then the media's report and finally the cartels. As commented before, the criminal organizations recorded videos of executions of members of the rival cartel and uploaded them on the internet; when the videos on other websites were banned, the perpetrators sent them as exclusive footage to these "narco information" websites making them available without restrictions. The "informative" duty that these websites claim to offer is open to debate¹¹. However, the video is not used to incriminate the perpetrator or as evidence to denounce the crime.

When Michela Marzano reviewed the diffusion of diverse violent material on the internet, she asks herself: is it really necessary to show all this? (Marzano 2010: 34).

I consider that in the local newspaper and the websites cases, the reproduction of visual material containing explicit content makes exploitation as main guideline. The right to information is clearly abused and offering access to the cartels' propaganda develops an exaltation of violent acts. The availability and easy accessibility of visual material containing extreme violence does not have any regulation. In the local newspaper's online version¹², the material (mostly pictures) has open access as part of the reports of the paper version. In the case of the websites, the reports are not contextualized; the content (pictures and videos) depicting extreme violent acts only contain a written warning of "real explicit".

These examples challenge in certain way Jacques Rancière's argument about the dominant media and its treatment of images of suffering (Rancière 2009). Even the local newspapers that publish these images and the websites could not be considered as major media, their audience is massive¹³. For instance, many journalists have been killed during the conflict; these professionals were working in

¹⁰ I translated this declaration from an interview with one person in charge of one of the most visited sites: www.blogdelnarco.com. For the interview see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVcJ8WrjUBM (in Spanish) Accessed: 28 December 2012

¹¹ For example see: Manuel Mora y Araujo (2010 August 21) 'El blog del narco' in *Un Mundo Hiperconectado* http://www.perfil.com/contenidos/2010/08/21/noticia_0032.html Accessed: 29 December 2012

¹² See <http://www.oem.com.mx/laprensa/>

¹³ The number of visitors to the most visited website www.blogdelnarco.com is estimated between 3 and 5 millions monthly according to media reports. See <http://www.hispanicallyspeakingnews.com/authors/elblogdelnarco/> Accessed: 15 December 2012

La Prensa newspaper daily paper edition is 250,000 in Mexico City. It is part of one of the largest media company with 70 newspapers, 44 websites, 24 radio stations, and 1 TV channel. See <http://www.oem.com.mx/laprensa/estaticas/quienessomos.aspx> (in Spanish) Dozens of newspapers of this group show explicit photos in their content.



local newspapers or TV channels that denounced the corruption of the police or activities of the cartels. There are no reports of people from these websites harmed by the cartels.

Thus, the final way to engage with the conflict is to consume it. Consequently, when this material has reached a stable consumption the vicious circle is completed. On the internet the exaltation and saturation of reports and images of the conflict's violence is overwhelming, a desensitising stance where the objectification of a human being portrayed in distress takes place. Red-yellow "journalism" eager to show whatever it takes to sell it; then the bloodthirsty audience eager to buy a front page with dead bodies or watch videos of real executions. A marriage made in hell. The violent acts continue as well as the availability of the material, when some violence is accepted and tolerated, the process of consumption becomes a sign of trivialization. I think that this last position of consuming is close to be on the desensitization and depolitization side.

Horst Bredekamp's argument of spectator's complicity¹⁴ with the perpetrators comes true with these cases. I consider that the entire tragedy comes when the commodification of violence becomes a routine. However, in the case of the videos, these websites have been growing and became the perfect showcase for the cartels to show their brutality and threats to the others. Marzano makes the question: is it really being informed the purpose of the ones who look this material? (Marzano 2010: 34).

Ways to relate to the violence and its visual sphere

This conflict has more than ten years, the intensity has changed during this time, after reaching a record of reported casualties in 2010, and almost repeated in 2011 and 2012, the expected tendency is to decline in the next two or three years. Nevertheless, the gallery of this conflict will have enough material to fill dozens of albums full of disgrace. This conflict has been full of violence and visual evidence. As presented before, one way to relate to the conflict and its visual sphere has been the consumption of it, however, it is necessary to differentiate that people relate with the conflict depending on their own experience within the environment. The experience diverge with the one who lives in a city affected by the conflict and have been involved in a violent act, or have been witness of it, and the others that have followed the conflict through the media. In both circumstances the majority of people reject the conflict and the exploitation of it, their position promotes a constant political participation. However, living in a city or region where the presence of the organized crime is permanent, the context develops toleration and even a trivialization of it, as seen in the videos uploaded by civilians.

Inside all the problematic that surround this conflict, it is necessary to think about the process when some violence is legitimated as well as its cultural representation. This justification involves a consolidation of what Johan Galtung considers the cultural violence (Galtung 1990). Part of the symbolic sphere of the society gets materialized and portrayed. Nowadays, violence is glamorized as part of the mediated experience, starting from TV programmes for children, videogames and related "entertaining" activities (Wilson et al. 2002).

¹⁴ See Bredekamp, Horst (2004, May 28), 'Wir sind befremdete Komplizen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Quoted in Möller 2012:20



This situation is experimented when drug trafficking and other expressions coming from the *narco-culture* have also reached the cultural consideration. A new *narco-terminology*¹⁵ has been added to the daily lexicon in Colombia or Mexico. Specific genre of music describing *narco-lifestyles* or honouring arrested or assassinated important drug lords is followed by an audience near to these phenomena. Soap operas¹⁶ presenting different stories around the drug cartels and their leaders as the protagonists of the show have been the new narratives in the Latin American and even European productions of these TV shows.

The interest of this paper was to reflect on the ways the Mexican society could coexist with all the visual legacy of the conflict and respond to it. When Sontag engaged again on the effects of photographs of pain, she recognized the concrete problem of the subjects to identify themselves with the *pain of the others* (Sontag 2003). It can be argued that the consumption of this conflict with the saturation of images, but mostly with the lack of perspective to diminish violence from the politics and social perspectives brings the compassion fatigue stance. I consider that the fatigue consolidates with the duration of the conflict and the feeling of insecurity and desperation of constant violence. The permanent status of the conflict may have altered the compassion fatigue position, where the compassion fades and mercilessness rises. In this way to experience the conflict, the spectatorship proposed by Debrix makes sense, when the protagonist and antagonist are in battle, and the images of it find acceptance and support.

Regarding the circulation of the images and their consumption, for instance, Sontag suggests a way out: 'Let the atrocious images haunt us' (Sontag 2003: 83). However, for how long the visual material of this conflict will haunt the Mexican society when drug trafficking is there, and it will be at least in the near future? I consider that the whole dimension has become an iconic memoir of the *narco-violence*, a permanent reminder of this entire distress.

Concerning the issue about the responsibility of being witness of images of distress, I find that the situation in Mexico involves even more problems for the appropriate response of the individual witness. The viewer finds a way to exert its political power within a collective exercise, where the entire affected find the possibility the act politically (Möller 2009: 783). This situation happened in Mexico when civilians made public demonstrations against the conflict and the crime problem. However, all the violence has also produced a *terrorification* stance, when people have withdrawn from the politic and social sphere due to the constant presence of criminal acts.

Conclusion

Images understood as narratives show and hide something¹⁷ at the same time (Campbell 2003:73). In Mexico, all these years of conflict, the violence has been a hegemonic narrative with images of human disgrace and destruction; it has taken the spotlight leaving other stories in the shadow. In the media cases commented, publishing and consuming violence is raw exploitation; a sadist complicity profitable for the implicated when vulture journalism and vile spectatorship are mutual. All the

¹⁵ See <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-narco-glossary28-2009oct28,0,1009690.story> Accessed: 22December2012

¹⁶ See <http://www.fronterasdesk.org/news/2011/may/26/narco-culture-becoming-popular-north-border/> Accessed: 22 December 2012

¹⁷ A good example is described by Debrix referring to the control of images with casualties in recent military interventions (invasions) by the US and allies in Western Media. See Debrix 2006:779.



photos in the front covers and crimes documented by video and reproduced on these websites are an evidence of it. The human factor of the conflict has been forgotten by some part of the media, when the interests of these have been determined by the violence and the statistics of the daily casualties. The privacy and dignity of the human beings that have been executed as part of the conflict, or in other situation of disgrace are not respected. Families in grief are also not considered.

One of the most shocking episodes in this conflict was the execution of 72 immigrants from different countries of Central America¹⁸. This situation prompted a different way¹⁹ to deal with the conflict. Many Mexican journalist and social organizations tried to honour these immigrants following their path way back to their hometowns and their families. They are trying to bring back the *human condition* to all this distressing cruelty. In this conflict, violence is measured with dead bodies, these bodies are only statistics; their faces, names, and personal stories have been covered by stains of blood. They have been forgotten and consumed by the spiral of violence and images.

Images operate on different levels at the same time. They may prolong subject's victimization, but simultaneously they can give back the human condition to an objectivised subject (Möller 2009:787). In photojournalism²⁰, very good examples of commitment against the violence and its exploitation come with Alfredo Jaar's work refusing to utilize the despair of Rwanda's tragedy (op. cit.:788-93), or the way Jonathan Torgovnik presented the tragedy of raped women and their children in the same conflict (Möller 2010).

The 72 *inmigrantes* effort or the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity²¹ go with this logic. They are remembering the humans behind the statistics and giving comfort for the ones who has lost relatives in this conflict. I think this is the genuine way to overcome the violence and its legacy that this conflict has brought to the Mexican society. The visual archive of this conflict is a reminder that behind the bloody covers of the newspapers, there are human beings. We the spectators must conserve their integrity and dignity, taking an initial step to overcome the violence and its visual horror. We the spectators must act and look in order to diminish the violence. Looking in a way that links us to the perpetrators' intention, it only continues the legacy of the vile action.

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¹⁸ They were trying to reach the Mexico-USA border to start their personal "American Dream" as illegal workers, and they were killed in the "Mexican Nightmare". See http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/09/world/americas/mexican-drug-leader-salvador-alfonso-martinez-escobedo-arrested.html?_r=0 Accessed: 26 December 2012

¹⁹ See: <http://72migrantes.com/> (in Spanish)

²⁰ An excellent book on this topic see: Michelle Bogre (2012), *Photography as Activism*. Oxford: Focal Press.

²¹ After the assassination of his son the poet Javier Sicilia founded the Movement. Their activities include "caravanas" (convoys) to the most violent cities in Mexico and organizing reunions with the victims' families. See: <http://movimientoporlapaz.mx/> (in Spanish)



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