Power in the streets of Cuauhtémoc

violence, public space, social capital and discrimination

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Final report of the project "Violence and Discrimination in Cuauhtémoc Delegation: An Investigation of Positive and Negative Social Capital"*

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INTRODUCTION

What is it like to live in Cuauhtémoc, the so-called heart of the country? Unlike major trends in general research, the analysis of specific cases allows us to understand more broadly social logics that include both the individual and society. Based on this perspective, we present an approach to problems of everyday life faced by the inhabitants of the borough of Cuauhtémoc in Mexico City. This research gathered and analyzed the stories of three people who live in situations that are different yet the same insofar as they are inhabitants of the same place and at the same time. It is not necessarily the case that the borough of Cuauhtémoc, as the symbolic and political center of both the city and the country, represents a microcosm of dynamics that are more widespread in Mexico City or Mexico as a whole. Nevertheless, in this urban space there occur expressions of sociability that help to understand how the frameworks of coexistence are built and operate.

This research focuses on understanding, based on three empirical cases, how this coexistence comes about, and how and why people in

situations of conflict relate to each other. We are also interested in learning what is and what is not negotiated in these relationships, and what role is played by formal authorities. These concerns are all connected to the notion of social capital. At the time of writing this report, the borough of Cuauhtémoc is among the least safe in Mexico City. According to data from the capital's Attorney General's Office, the rate of high-impact crimes in the borough surpassed 550 per 100,000 inhabitants, the highest among the 16 boroughs that make up the city (Díaz, 2018). It was followed in this roll of infamy by Miguel Hidalgo, Venustiano Carranza, Benito Juárez and Iztapalapa with 502, 360.8, 343 and 331 high-impact crimes per 100,000 inhabitants, respectively. This figure is significant if we consider that Cuauhtémoc is not among the most densely populated boroughs (see Annexes 1, 3 and 4). However, the relatively low resident population is compensated for by the intense, transitive and dense character of the floating population, together with the complex social relations that occur in its streets. In other words, we seek to understand how the streets of Cuauhtémoc function in situations of conflict.

Three cases serve to guide this research (Julia, Lorena and Iván[1]). This is a transversal exercises that makes it possible to compare three people who are apparently very different, but connected by the borough

[1] Names have been changed to respect privacy.

of Cuauhtémoc and by different dynamics. For this reason, we first present a reflection on the role of Cuauhtémoc and its characteristics, followed by the values and social capital of the borough. The investigation is accompanied by annexes which are available on the website of the Seminar on Peace and Violence. All this material is useful to understanding the importance of Cuauhtémoc in the context of Mexico City.

What does Cuauhtémoc represent and why does it matter?

The borough of Cuauhtémoc is frequently thought of as the heart of Mexico City and perhaps of the country, too. To a large extent this is true, since there is both historical weight and socio-demographic arguments to support this both romantic and compromising idea (see Annex 1). However, it is also a very small area in relation to the number of things that circulate through it: people, relations, money, communications, and many others. Cuauhtémoc is a borough of crowds: people go there without living there, build and create intensively, yet the space is qualitatively limited. (Quantitatively too, though this requires a study of its own.) As a result, there is an impact on the form, quality and intensity with which social relations take place here.

When both elements come together—the shortage of public space and the huge, recurring concurrence of residents, passers-by, visitors and in general itinerant people (the so-called floating population) the *breeding ground* becomes a special one. These people, in a myriad of ways, are related to each other in that limited public space. These relationships are defined by variable parameters that include the qualities of violence, discrimination, control, authority and legitimacy.[2] In this case, we treat the inhabitants the same as the residents, they are all itinerants because of the way in which their rootedness and constant presence in the area define their histories, scenarios, situations, relationships and reactions.

In Cuauhtémoc life is not homogeneous. Two people can live here just a few kilometers apart, and yet experience totally different forms of sociability and everyday life. It is not that they ignore each other, but that their social circuits rarely cross, even in their experience of relating to the government and the state. Nevertheless, they also live the same experience insofar as both individuals are subject to the same space, with all its historical, political, economic and social baggage, and therefore to the same dynamic: that of being the heart of the city, where space is limited and public space even more so. In summary, between the neighborhoods of Roma and La Lagunilla there are vast differences and

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[2] There will be more on these issues in the following pages, particularly in the light of the cases that guide this research.

also correlations. How are we to distinguish them? The response points to social capital, to public space, to violence and to discrimination. It is a question of understanding that those who seem remote from each other, yet are near and experience a specific point of similarity: they live in Cuauhtémoc.

Returning to the issue of limited public space, we note how it both enables and detonates dynamics of violence and discrimination. These two attitudes are in turn the result of social relationships that occur (among other possibilities) in a small, but disputed, public space. In this sense, the relationship between this characteristic of public space and the emergence of violence and discrimination was detected. These spaces are fundamental for life in the city, since they permit and enable community, generate and orient social relations, construct a sense of belonging, and permit mobility when they are well designed. They also generate places for the government to interact with citizens, in the sense of public safety, institutional trust, legitimacy of the authorities, dissuasion toward disruptive conduct and providing solutions to conflict, all of which depend on the harmonization of public space suitable for the prevailing conditions.

In Cuauhtémoc, public space becomes a valid tool for the exploitation of capital. This opens up the possibility for certain private entities to take advantage of this space for profit, and in this attempt to

capitalize on it they privatize it, even if only informally. This action gives rise t disputes in a place like Cuauhtémoc, where defending rights is a relatively well-developed activity and where there are cases in which the defense of what is public is a reality. This generates tensions that give rise to violence and/or discrimination, as we will see below.

The heart of the city is not a place whose conflicts can be explained solely by overcrowding or the vast floating population. Everyday conflicts arise from the limited spaces of coexistence, the private bodies that dispute them and the inability of the authorities to harmonize the existence of these public spaces. Indeed, in the construction of these cases, at times the formal authorities are seen as just another party in the dispute, which therefore generates greater tension. In some cases, the formal authorities fail to play their role in these disputes, while in others they behave as organic, harmonious forms of government that do display practices aimed at reducing conflict or helping those suffering from such conflicts. The reduced and disputed public space is the first component to emerge from the findings of this research. The second is related to the form in which social capital exists and operates in Cuauhtémoc, and will be addressed next. These reflections provide a basis for understanding how and why public space is disputed, and what this dispute gives rise to.

Values and social capital in the borough of Cuauhtémoc

The idea of social capital has been explored with particular emphasis in the past thirty years. A number of social science disciplines have taken up this idea as a tool to explain, firstly, how social bonds are formed between agents. Secondly, the notion is employed to understand how and why the resulting social relations are used. Finally, the Colmex's Seminar on Peace and Violence has specialized in taking the debate further to evaluate the type of social capital in a sense that may be positive (associated with practices of respect for human rights and democratic values) or negative (related to consent to, permit or promote illegality, violence and authoritarian social relations). In the borough of Cuauhtémoc, social capital is operating as an intermediate mechanism for construction the legitimacy of authorities, though often these are not the legal authority.

According to a survey of social capital carried out in the borough in 2014 (see Annex 6), 48% of the population of Cuauhtémoc state they are open to the community organizing to deliver its own justice, although only 1 in 4 think there is any possibility of this happening. In addition, although this apparent openness to create community bonds, 3 in 4 say they would turn to a family member in case of needing immediate assistance. Only 0.3 % would turn to their neighbors. To this may be

added the fact that, while the inhabitants of Cuauhtémoc consider themselves to be compassionate people and opposed to discrimination, an enormous lack of trust towards the other prevails: 44.5 percent said that it is "very risky" to speak to people they don't know in the street.

Given that the area is defined by the tensions arising from the characteristics of its public space and the predominant fragility or frugality of the formal authorities, the borough's inhabitants do not see it as either unusual or unlikely to have recourse to their own forms of social capital when it comes to defending their rights, but also to exercise violence. In short, the construction of each individual's narrative is not grounded in the absolute trust in a formal authority that is just, legitimate and reliable; and given the need to employ resources to defend themselves from aggression, social capital becomes a viable option instead of recurring to the authorities. In addition, due to the social, economic, educational and labor-related characteristics of the community in the borough, it is frequently the case that much of the social capital built up by the inhabitants does not come from Cuauhtémoc itself. In some cases, former colleagues from their work or educational backgrounds are the source of social capital, while in others they are relationships built up since childhood. The source of social capital may also be found crossing the street. By contrast with the data from the abovementioned survey, in our case studies family relationships do not

appear as the first not most important resource, which feeds a novel perspective on major trends in Cuauhtémoc.

Those interviewed reveal the need—and sometimes the custom—of having recourse to their social capital in cases of urgency. It is a simple decision in light of the pointlessness of not doing so. It is worth acknowledging that, in one of the cases, the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination in Mexico City (Consejo para Prevenir y Eliminar la Discriminación de la Ciudad de México, COPRED) forms part of the social capital in question. Nevertheless, this seems to be an exception in the government apparatus, one in which other state institutions figure. It remains the norm that the authority is not always reliable and it is not a good idea to seek its help. After all, the de facto authorities are the ones who tend to control or exploit (also in a de facto manner) space that is supposedly public. As may be seen in Annexes 3 and 4 to this paper, conflict in Mexico City and in Cuauhtémoc in particular is being expressed in ever more violent crimes, including homicide. Part of the increase in this crime may be explained by the way disputes are resolved in public space, and how social capital enables or otherwise mechanisms of intermediation to resolve these conflicts.

Violence and discrimination alike stand out as instruments. They are resources that feed, nourish and open up a path for conflictive relationships that are invariably connected to a public space that is scarce

and disputed, whether real or imaginary. This instrumental function makes it possible to distinguish a new angle in both practices. In the case of violence, it appears as a radical but real and potential element, ready to hand when needed. The possibility arises of intensifying the dispute over scarce public space, where a private party may be seeking to privatize it, and this allows for violence to appear.

The rational use of violence is directly connected to the disputes that arise. However, it appears as a radical measure. By contrast, discrimination does not seem to be so extreme but rather an everyday occurrence, part and parcel of narratives about spatial disputes, although almost always implicitly rather than explicitly. Here an interesting paradox arises. In strict terms where rights are lacking (see Annex 2 on the concept of discrimination), the negation of public space is a veiled form of discrimination that people do not tend to be aware of, and as such do not denounce. In the chain of conflicts that arise, it is essential to observe the few options there are for resolving problems peacefully, together with the fact that the authorities fail to take the lead or attempt to mediate a solution.

Finally, we can say that on the basis of exploiting their social capital, the three individuals interviewed have managed to achieve and maintain a moral authority that allows them to relate to the hierarchy. This relationship functions as a defense mechanism. It is worth

emphasizing that the formal authorities appear perhaps as an alternative among the forms of social capital but not as the first, let alone the first port of call when help is required.

Who controls and regulates public space in Cuauhtémoc?

In Mexico City public space is one of the principal sites of conflict. This not only refers to the area that spatially contains the conflict, but also enables it, motivates it and even gives it meaning. According to the most recent National Survey of Urban Public Security (INEGI, 2018), 40 % of the population over the age of 18 had experienced at least one conflict or confrontation in their daily lives over the three months prior to the survey. The most frequent types of conflict mentioned in the survey are related to public space and coexistence, including: noise (13.5 %); trash thrown out or burned by neighbors (12.7 %); parking issues (10.7 %) and conflicts relating to public or private transport (8.7 %). Additionally, the survey includes references to other conflicts associated with public space such as harassment by drunks, drug addicts or gangs (6.8 %); problems with public security forces (5.7 %) or street vendors (2.9 %).

In the cases analyzed by this research, three different yet similar spaces are presented. Tepito, Tabacalera and Condesa may be

distinguished from countless viewpoints; that may be the easiest task of all. Our work consists, by contrast, of finding the similarities. The first is the most obvious but perhaps the most important: they are all located in the borough of Cuauhtémoc. This is not merely a banal affirmation or cartographic happenstance, and does not arise from the artificial demarcation of the borough, which automatically creates a shared space. To the contrary, it constructs this sense of community that is established practices, specific sociabilities and characteristics of the space. In this case, it refers to those characteristics associated with the use and abuse of public space, to the form in which social capital operates, with a particular interest in the violence and discrimination that arises from these potential tensions.

Returning to the social capital survey cited above, 70.3 % of those surveyed in Cuauhtémoc acknowledged in 2014 that public space is where violent incidents occur. This intuition is accurate, since although sources do not provide precise data, police records of complaints filed are dominated by robberies and other aggressions in the street (not always associated with criminal activities). More precise data is needed, but public opinion guides us for the purposes of this investigation. We may add that the same survey reveals that only 2.2 % of respondents said that security in parks and public spaces is “very good” (see Annex 6). At bottom lies the tension found in the questions: Who controls public

space? How is it regulated? The answers to these questions show how public these spaces really are, and in consequence how much the right to public space has been used in Cuauhtémoc.

The cases we present reveal that public space is disputed with violence and/or discrimination. It is a defensive and aggressive measure in the face of lack of definition. Both in places where gentrification is occurring, and on “dangerous” corners, there is always a component of discrimination that permits some to be present there while others are not. In both cases there are codes that reflect “who is in charge there” and how the power relations are structured in this micro-space, which in reality is broader. Discrimination establishes a kind of compass in people that encourages or inhibits them to move through a space or not. Very often, if the codes are not known this fosters fear, resentment and other forms of prejudice that feed discrimination. Sometimes, a person’s own knowledge of the codes is what nourishes the same phenomenon. A constant factor is that the authorities responsible for public safety are just another actor disputing control of these spaces. They are not a definitive authority in terms of either control or regulation, but act to dissuade potential conflicts.

AN EXPERIENCE OF SAVAGE URBANISM. LA CONDESA

Julia: A heliport seen from the window

Julia is a professional working in the field of communication. She is almost fifty years old and became a kind of anonymous activist on social networks when her commitment to denounce the irregularities that impede everyday life and coexistence in the Condesa neighborhood led her discover and document the unregulated construction of a heliport on the roof of a building in the district.[3] One ordinary Sunday morning regular hammering caught her attention. She began to ask her neighbors and workers in her building about the source of the noise. After a few

[3] The Condesa neighborhood, south-west of the center of Mexico City, is perhaps one of the most significant local examples of gentrification: a middle-class neighborhood that was severely damaged by the 1985 earthquake, that only gradually recovered and became an exclusive residential zone as well as one of the most important hubs of cultural activity and nightlife in the city. It combines a large number of formal businesses—restaurants, bars, cafés, concert halls, stores—with informal ones that function symbiotically with the former: people who watch cars, street food stalls and other street vendors.

conversations she identified a building that could just about be seen from her window. On top of it, a striking metal structure under construction immediately aroused her curiosity. What could it be? And why was it so urgent to finish it quickly? The workers and their supervisors were prepared to work at weekends and at hours that exceeded construction regulations.

Julia took some photos from the street and the information began to circulate on the internet. Other local residents who lived even closer to the building took an interest in the matter, asking questions and taking more photos. To their surprise, the construction was intended to be a heliport. Together with the noise, the trash, the traffic jams, and the lack of security suffered by those living in the neighborhood, they would have to put up with the noise of helicopters landing and taking off.

Naturally, this led to more questions relating to the construction regulations. The building hosting the heliport was not new, nor well-maintained, and it was surrounded by buildings that also showed the effects of the passage of time. Something about the situation led those involved to suspect that the matter was not legal. They soon consulted the authorities, and although sometimes the responses from officials seemed contradictory, the predominant view was that the construction lacked the necessary permits.

This led to a classic political action: the local residents began to organize and decided to take to the streets to protest an action that was, at least, going unpunished. If the construction wasn't permitted, why hadn't it been suspended? The protest that occupied the street of Nuevo León led to the symbolic shut down of the construction, followed a few days later by the official one. Despite the intervention of the authorities, the atmosphere of suspicion prevails until the present moment. Although the paper seals suspending the construction are in place, the heliport has not been dismantled, which has led the local residents to suspect that the construction firm may yet succeed with its plan by means of legal or illegal measures. They wonder if the large sums of money involved in a business like a heliport enable certain actors to ignore laws that others cannot, in an interesting form of class discrimination.

While the investigation team of the Seminar on Peace and Violence at El Colegio de México documented this incident in May 2017 the problems date back to November 2016, and the closure (both symbolic and official) took place four months before our arrival, in January 2017. However, no one expected that another severe earthquake would hit Mexico City on September 19, 2017, and as a consequence the case of the heliport would reach the headlines of some newspapers. It was not until November 2017, following renewed protests and reports on the damage to the building hosting the heliport and to two adjacent buildings, that the

city's Department of Works and Services carried out the dismantling of the structure.

The Condesa: between gentrification and irregularities

The story told by Julia about the heliport is embedded in the process of gentrification of the Condesa neighborhood, characterized by the continual appearance of new luxury buildings and the arrival of occupants for these, together with the tensions, resistance and often departure of the original inhabitants of the area. Our interviewee is one of the pioneers in the explosion of popularity of the Condesa, having purchased a brand new apartment there in 2006. Over the past 11 years, Julia has witnessed a series of social and cultural changes that are worthy of analysis.

With respect to this kind o process of "creative destruction"[4] that has multiplied the number of buildings in the neighborhood, Julia can

[4] "Creative destruction" is a concept defined by economist Joseph Schumpeter and refers to the processes of modernization. Although in Schumpeter's case he uses it to talk about the modernization of the economy (how the old circuits of local producers and consumers were destroyed when forced to compete with the new, efficient and more productive market economy), today it is a widely used concept in the field of social sciences to refer to similar processes. Thus phenomena such as the

give first-hand examples: at the corner of her street a recently-built five-story building stands that replaced a traditional tenement that wasn't just "falling down" but also caused discomfort among local residents for its poor state of repair in an area that saw itself as exclusive. It contained food restaurants that were dirty as well as half-empty, and occupants made noise and drank alcohol in the street. In reality, Julia explains, these seemed to be the vestiges of a Condesa with an atmosphere typical of more working-class areas.

Despite the fact that the gradual departure of the former residents has helped the Condesa to maintain its image as an attractive neighborhood, the question of the behavior of the residents and the difficulties of coexistence does not seem to have disappeared. This gives rise to new practices of discrimination—above all class-based—which are not static or unidirectional. Julia defines many of her new neighbors as "juniors" a term used to define young people given money by their parents to rent or buy a new department in the Condesa, but who lack the culture or education to get along with the other residents, who they startle with loud music, all-night parties and even hanging out clothes on their balconies, which damages the image of the building and of public space.

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gentrification of the Condesa neighborhood destroy the former milieu of the local residents and their practices, to be replaced by a "better version" of the neighborhood; however, the question of who the change benefits is what gives rise to its ethical implications.

Julia's anger appears to be rooted in the sense of outrage produced by many of those neighbors who feel more entitled than she does to live at their ease in the Condesa, thanks to their purchasing power. Something similar occurs with the construction companies, who are at the front of a vast moneymaking business they have no desire to slow down, and constantly tread on habitant' rights. Examples include the noise and contamination produced by their machinery, as well as the difficulty of driving around the narrow streets that normal-size cars can barely navigate. Now they must share the space with dump trucks, cement mixers, electricity generators, which has neutered the work of the local residents' organizations, though they have succeeded in shutting down works, even if only momentarily. This is a novel commitment to enforce, as far as possible, the regulations with respect to schedules and other regulations stipulated by the state.

Julia as mediator: citizenship and local powers

It is hard to address Julia's role as mediator in the conflicts in her neighborhood without taking into account her professional and personal experience. It is evident that her expertise in the use of social networks can be linked to her career as a social communications manager for

different companies, including a state agency. What is not so clear is where her strong commitment to "the difficult causes" comes from. She asserts that it is a personal trait that has accompanied her from very early in her life, and, moreover, has led her family to joke about the fact that she was mistaken in her choice of profession, since with her temperament she could have been a top lawyer.

Julia firmly believes that some of the country's main problems stem from the apathy and lack of demands made by citizens: whether in simple exchanges of products and services or in relations with all types of state authorities, the large majority of the population is not used to making their voices heard. However, she acknowledges that there are limitations to this exercise, and in her particular case she accepts that time is an important resource for engaging in politics and that not everyone is able to do this, she—and many of her neighbors—have to delegate responsibilities and participation to residents with less demanding agendas, simply because they have to work to earn a living. It is worth considering that these are people with relatively privileged social positions.

At the same time, she acknowledges that the climate of violence and insecurity in the country is another obstacle when it comes to demonstrating in the street to demand the laws be applied, and together with the prevalence of corruption and impunity the overall panorama is

frankly disheartening. For this reason Julia preferred to remain anonymous in this paper, just as she did in the case of the heliport, seeing it as risky on two fronts: firstly the construction company that raised suspicion by engaging in illegal activities that remain unpunished, and secondly the state officials who in cases like the heliport give rise to all kind of suspicions about their acts and omissions, whether they be lack of care, negligence, or frank collusion.

In any case, Julia recognizes the heterogeneous character of the state officials, and even if they are not all the same it is no less a cause for concern. She fears the professional politicians who have a lot to lose in the major leagues of politics and who she believes could seek revenge if necessary; but she is much more worried about the reaction of lower-level officials, who have little or nothing to lose and could carry out reprisals from the anonymity of their position and in the public space itself. The stories shared by our interviewee reveal other tensions between the residents of the Condesa and the state officials who work on public space. For example, the constant confrontation between the projects for the modernization of the city and the everyday practices by which people appropriate public space. Julia recalls how the appearance of the second Metrobús bus rapid transit line, which runs along the southern edge of the neighborhood, changed the direction of certain streets and therefore how they are accessed. This altered the daily routines and routes of her and her

neighbors, giving rise to discontent and public protest, although at bottom it was about precisely the tension between the comfort and benefit of a few or of a larger sector of the population.

ALL AGAINST ALL. LA TABACALERA

Lorena, the murder, the denunciation

Lorena is a transsexual prostitute of almost fifty years of age who has become a political activist as a result of the situations she has experienced. She was the one who denounced the murder of Susana, one of her best friends. One ordinary night on the corner where she worked—at the junction of Guerrero and Puente de Alvarado avenues—a car pulled up to pick someone up. The driver was a private security guard who worked in the State of Mexico. For the girls, there was something suspicious about his imprudence and insistence, so several rejected him, including Lorena. However, Susana had not had a good working day and agreed to enter the vehicle. Soon, their worst suspicions were confirmed. Lorena heard Susana shouting her name and crying for help, and as she ran towards the vehicle she heard a couple of shots that—at point blank range since Susana was sitting crouched over her attacker—killed her. Despite everything, Lorena reacted quickly and began to record

everything on her cellphone. The reactions were immediate, from the police officers who ordered her to stop recording, to her colleagues who begged her not to cause problems ("don't make a big story out of it"), in the knowledge that what they were witnessing was something unusual and that there could be reprisals, because in that space full of aggression and violence "nobody had ever recorded anything."

"I don't care!" Lorena responded categorically in response to the calls to an order that is always complicit, "if I have the evidence, I'm going to raise my voice with all the more reason, it's already been too many years of violence." With the help of the Center for the Support of Transgender Identities her recording reached the Internet, and despite the public attention it received (to date it has been viewed more than 330,000 times on YouTube), it was only a small step in the long march for justice that continues until this day. Something that seemed to be an open-and-shut case was complicated for reasons that are still difficult to explain today, and Susana's alleged murderer—who had been detained in the car, beside the body and with the murder weapon—was set free and remains on the loose today.

In a gesture of protest against an act that was seen not only as discretionary but discriminatory by the authorities, transgender women decided to organize and take to the streets to demand recognition of the conditions of systematic violence in which they have to live and work.

They demanded the resolution of the case of Susana, which had become the focus of the movement, after the group carried Susana's coffin to the site of her murder. At the junction of Insurgentes and Puente de Alvarado avenues they briefly halted the traffic with the funerary cortege carrying the one who had been their friend and companion.

Puente de Alvarado, a space for trade in sex

According to a study published in 2015 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Mexico (IACHR), between January 2013 and March 2014 at least 594 people from the LGBT community or who were perceived as such "were murdered in attacks apparently related to the perception of their sexual orientation or their identity and gender expression." This number, the report adds, "includes 283 murders of gay men or men perceived as gay, and 282 murders of trans women or trans persons with a female gender expression" (CIDH Report, file 91). As part of its case review, the CIDH found a significant difference between the types of case. While the murders of gay men or those perceived as gay tended to occur in private spaces (such as the home) and with knives, in the case of trans women and people with a female gender expression, the tendency was to be killed "with firearms, and their bodies tend to be

found in the streets or other public spaces, and sometimes in situations related to sex work."

The murder of Susana matches the representation given by the statistical data: a trans woman who loses her life in a violent manner with a firearm in the street. The intersection between public space, firearms and gender expressions constitute an unavoidable atmosphere of risk and violence for trans women like Lorena and Susana, which seems worthy of investigation in other spaces where prostitution is practiced both in Mexico City, in general, and in the borough of Cuauhtémoc, in particular.

The principal area where Lorena works is the Puente de Alvarado avenue, in the Tabacalera neighborhood, the hub of a zone of tolerance towards prostitution that extends over the adjacent blocks to the outskirts of the borough of Cuauhtémoc. It is a key point of the city, due to its proximity to other emblematic spaces such as the Historic Center, Plaza Garibaldi, or James Sullivan Street (another red light area), and even to popular neighborhoods such as Guerrero or Morelos which are known for their illegal activities and violence. In her testimony, Lorena has shown she is familiar with many of these spaces thanks to her continuous movement through the city, and it would be naive to imagine that this type of displacement does not include other actors or merchandise, especially related to the informal and illegal sector.

When Lorena explains how prostitution functions in the city, it is possible to observe a heavily regulated space, though not for all that free from disputes and tensions between the different actors (prostitutes, clients, police officials, local residents, civil associations).[5] The principal practices of production of order are the responsibility of the prostitutes themselves, which clearly shows how a social network can also become a network for the exercise of power. The street corners that to the gaze of an ordinary passerby are completely free spaces that belong to all the city's inhabitants, are in reality managed by the hierarchy of prostitutes.

This authority is built up on the basis of time in the business. In other words, it is a legitimacy that is stipulated, almost always, in function of the length of time they have worked (which could easily be translated into the experience and knowledge that they have of the business). It can also be stipulated according to some other kind of reputation. In this way, given her current work and her past as inmate, Lorena was able to introduce herself as a strong woman, hard to control or extort.

The women with more experience, who hold authority, become "mamas" for the newcomers and usually offer them both guidance and

[5] However, prostitution itself is considered an administrative offense, as its regulation can be seen as a form of pimping and it is well known that many of those involved are drug users.

protection in the business, as well as regulating the activities that take place in the corners. In this sense it seems to have a greater similarity with the hierarchical structure of the prison. It is a form of social capital, a network built on the satisfaction of specific needs, many of which are perfectly legal, for example: guaranteeing food, a place to stay or the clothing they need to ply their trade. These coexist with other activities that are not illegal; all these elements establish a scenario full of ambiguities. Therefore, the phenomenon has three aspects that are worth analyzing in detail:

a) Protection from clients. The prostitutes are continually keeping watch over each other to ensure their personal safety. More than once they have had to defend themselves from direct attacks that are driven by transphobia.

b) Protection from the authorities. The "mamas" have to negotiate with the police officers (as the most direct representatives of the state authority) and here too the key characteristic is ambiguity, since the officials who can help them by looking out for their security can also arrest them, attack them or seek to extort money from them on the basis that they are breaking the law.

c) Protection from other prostitutes. A single space brings together practices of solidarity between co-workers and predatory practices: in an activity that often involves the consumption of alcohol or

drugs, robberies of personal belongings or money are common and Lorena notes that they are frequently perpetrated by colleagues through violent practices such as gossip, quarrels and aggressions. After all, the prostitutes are competing for clientele and on more than one occasion they have come to blows to defend their source of income. Meanwhile, the exercise of authority and negotiation—both among the prostitutes and with the authorities—are separated by a thin line from pimping, which sometimes they cross.

Lorena as mediator: health, gender identity and non-discrimination

As well as her role as a "mama" in the prostitution scene, Lorena holds other positions as a mediator and a figure of authority that overlap with her work on the streets, as well as with her recent commitment to resolving the murder of Susana. It is worth observing these other networks that also involve struggles for human rights and that seek to protect the transgender population. These are positive uses of social capital that this investigation is interested in analyzing, though they could well receive institutional support and be replicated in other areas.

Lorena accumulated extensive bureaucratic experience in relation to changing gender identity. She must be one of the very first to emerge

triumphant from the institutional twists and turns to change her legal identity—and it seems no coincidence that she associates it with the experience she accumulated confronting the Kafkaesque Mexican criminal system to gain her freedom. Currently, Lorena offers information to other trans women who are in different states around Mexico (where the change is not yet legal) and who move to Mexico City to assert their right to self-determination. Social networks—the electronic version—play an interesting role in these exercises of cyber-activism that culminate in political practices of organization and mobilization.

The relationship that Lorena has developed with the formal authorities is quite interesting. An example of this is the link she has with Clínica Condesa, which is specialized in caring for people with HIV. She, as a carrier, is not only sensitized to the problems that accompany the disease, but also with the fact that retrovirals and, in general, the necessary medications are, precisely, a necessity. It's a question of survival. Consequently, the voluntary work that she undertakes at the clinic has been capitalized in favor of the clinic itself and, perhaps more importantly, with the female sex workers. Lorena literally places her social networks, knowledge, experience and legitimacy among her colleagues at the service of the clinic in order to distribute condoms or rapid HIV tests.

It is reasonable to acknowledge that it was because of her experience as a carrier of HIV and because of her fragile economic position that Lorena had to learn to work with state and civil associations in order to survive—and here the expression goes beyond economic aspects—allowing her access to antiretroviral drugs and condoms, which became essential for continuing to carry out her job, as well as tests to detect HIV. What at first was a set of practices for personal benefit would later become a service that could be provided to other colleagues and that over time helped to build up a position of legitimate authority inside and outside her own community.

ILLEGALITY, EXCLUSION AND EVERYDAY LIFE. TEPITO

Iván, survival as a small-time drugs dealer

Iván is a native of the Tepito neighborhood who is almost fifty years old and who, like many of his fellow people in the district, earns his living from multiple sources. He states it in a simple way: “I dedicate myself to running errands for people,” a formula that encompasses his work looking after cars, undertaking commissions for neighbors and merchants, and selling drugs on a local corner. It all started almost two decades ago, when Iván had served a long sentence for homicide. His mother—his main family bond—had passed away and he had taken refuge in the streets of the neighborhood, consuming drugs and alcohol.

Seeking to guarantee his subsistence, Iván began to perform favors in exchange for modest tips. He had on his side at least a couple of factors: the first was the trust of the neighbors and local merchants, who knew him (and recognized him) whether because (despite his long absence) he had always been a native of the area or because of continuous

contact in everyday life. The second was the incessant flow of objects, messages and people in a place whose core is formed by the most important commercial spaces in the history of Mexico City. Iván swelled the ranks of those hundreds of informal and floating workers that the *tianguis* or street market of Tepito brings together day after day: people who sell, transport merchandise, pick up trash, deliver errands.

At the same time, Iván's work took on a different character. Prison, he admits, had left a mark on him and had changed his form of thinking and acting; it had endowed him with new knowledge and new contacts too. Leaving the prison he met again a number of figures, "people who imposed respect in the neighborhood," who although they operated in a different sector, also needed those small favors. The logic was the same, it was about taking money, merchandise and messages throughout Tepito and even beyond its borders. In return, he had the possibility of a better payment and to continue with "the party": "What do you want," they asked Iván about the payment for his work, "money or drugs?" At present, Iván is just one more of the dozens of men and women, some surprisingly young, who act as links between the *narcotienditas* ("drug stores") and the consumers, and who are scattered along streets that seem precarious and insecure, in spite of the government's intervention plans and heavy investment. "In all this street they sell," our informant affirms while making a gesture that extends almost until the edge of the

neighborhood, “it’s a red zone, it’s already been identified by the delegation.” Everything seems to indicate that for those involved, as well as for the local residents, who have learned to coexist with the consumption and sale of narcotics or with the violence that it entails, it is a reality that is accepted and is little questioned. It is a reality open to a limited or even no possibility of change.

Tepito, a space of illegal activities

Although Tepito has traditionally been a space associated with various illegal practices, linked to its emblematic *tianguis*—such as contraband, piracy or theft—it was not until the last two decades that it took a leading role in the debate about the sale of drugs and the violence that accompanies it. To take an example, while the current government of the capital tried to deny that the main drug cartels had a presence in Mexico City, the media reported that in the “Barrio Bravo” of Tepito there operated between ten and twenty-five groups linked to the distribution of narcotics and other crimes such as theft of vehicles, kidnapping and extortion; which leads us to ask where the drugs and the weapons that were central to their transactions came from (Cruz y Servín, 2010; Jiménez, 2013; De Mauleón, 2016.).

The data also report a considerable and alarming increase in the crime of homicide in Tepito, which in just one year rose 70%: it went from 17 murders in 2016, to 29 in 2017, of which twenty involved firearms, in a context that the capital city's police admit concerns disputes over the control of the neighborhood and in which five criminal organizations are involved (SDP Noticias, 2018). In the words of Iván himself, in regard to drug dealing "everything is controlled," but he admits that in recent times the violence among the different groups operating in the locality may have worsened, above all, "due to greed, due to the perception that: 'you're selling more than me and I'm not putting up with that.'"

The statistics only serve to put the finger on the sore spot at the "heart of the city." It is worth recalling that Tepito does not even occupy a complete district, showing just how small it is. It is a portion of the Morelos neighborhood that officially extends from the avenue Eje 2 Norte to the avenue Eje 1 Norte at its northern and southern limits, and from Reforma to Avenida del Trabajo in its western and eastern limits, respectively. It comprises some 56 streets that are home to around 60,000 inhabitants. The "Barrio Bravo" of Tepito is only separated from the Historic Center by an avenue and shares its boundaries with other emblematic parts of Mexico City that are similarly famous for their

culture and lack of safety such as Plaza Garibaldi, the Guerrero neighborhood and the La Lagunilla district.

Spending time with Iván, the regulation of his activities becomes clear. The small groups or one-on-one encounters are circumscribed by their spaces: street corners, stores, entrances to apartment blocks, and although they are always on high alert at the same time they appear relaxed. They seem to share cordial relations, sharing jokes, food, and perhaps a drag of a joint, but over the course of the day the consumption builds up and the atmosphere takes a grimmer turn. When work activities come to an end, it also gives rise to quarrels and adjustments of accounts. The following morning the headlines of some newspapers announce a new *"tepicrime*," with new, anonymous victims.

In the Barrio Bravo transactions are quick and casual. A passer-by who doesn't know about these activities might note something odd about these brief encounters, and perhaps suspect that something illegal is happening, but wouldn't easily understand their logic. Customers approach in their cars or on foot, generally with an amount of money already prepared—a 50 peso bill, for example, which is the minimum amount for a transaction—and casually chat with the liaison, who takes the money, enters and leaves the store with the product and delivers it while keeping up the conversation, then he and the buyer say goodbye amiably.

Although rumors say that everything is for sale in drug dealers' stores in Tepito, on Iván's corner the deals seem to be limited to cocaine in its two forms, powder and crack, and marihuana, which is a substance consumed on a daily basis in the neighborhood and which is available in numerous varieties and presentations. All the transactions between buyer and seller take place in an atmosphere of trust (which Iván admits is one of his main tools). Of course, all these activities are illegal, and another aspect that is exploited is the security that the transaction will be carried out smoothly. That is to say, without the police turning up. Iván's admission is lapidary: "the police have always been paid off." As a result, the aim is not to make big sales for high values, but lots of small deals that build up. Each week Iván pays a modest sum for the police foot patrols, with a *chesco* or 100 pesos. This obliges us to ask ourselves how many Iváns there are in the neighborhood, and the total amount handed over in this way. No one in Tepito is surprised that in the old days, when informal trading was still discouraged, deals were done in the same way.

Another issue that has given cause for concern in public debate is the young age of those involved in drug-dealing in Tepito (De Mauleón, 2016). While it is true that Iván is an old hand in this sense, of those who are constantly seen on his corner most are young, and at least a couple lead us to ask why they are not in school, or where there immediate family are. The stories they tell are of disaster they treat as personal: they

like “partying” or became addicted to drugs early on, they were never any good at school, or they like the easy money. All the possible responses that may reflect the social problems of a class of young people with few opportunities and serious deficiencies.

In this regard, Iván’s own life story is similar. At the age of 18 he had already been sentenced to a long spell in jail and the possibility of re-entering society after two decades were almost zero. He makes no comments or give no details about attempts to return to formal work to even to family life. The tough streets of the neighborhood became a refuge that provided with a means of survival that is sometimes even decent, yet always carries risk. It is also a kind of bubble that protects the identity of these young people from an outside they find hard to deal with, and where they would undoubtedly be discriminated against for their form of dress and of talking, for their lack of education, and for their drug addiction.

Iván as part of a network: community practices between legality and illegality

Iván’s role as a drug-dealer is strongly rooted in the logic of his mode of survival, what he calls “errands.” If we take this practice into account as

an element for analyzing Iván's social capital, we will see how it notably involves networks for legal and illegal ends. We are interested in the illegal networks, since many of these activities may be categorized as services for the community, which give them a series of characteristics that local residents find desirable, and lead them to acquire charisma and authority, and most notably trustworthiness.

Since their activity requires them to spend much of the day in the same space, Iván is well apprised of the various movements that take place on the streets in the immediate area. This means that he can keep watch over illegal activities, as well as legal ones. The local residents turn to him regularly for news of service providers from outside the area—such as LP gas sellers—who are always anxious not to spend to much time on these streets. The same happens if they want to find out if a friend, family member or other local resident has been past. Most tend to greet Iván and hold brief conversations with him. Both Iván and his colleagues provide a series of favors that are much less abstract for the local residents and merchants. These may range from carrying trash to the designated collection points in the street to be picked up by the garbage trucks (for obvious safety reasons the borough's garbage collection personnel don't enter the residential buildings in the neighborhood and stay on the streets for their work) to carrying out small repairs to homes

and stores, when there are no specialists to hand or money to cover their fees.

More recently, the media have noted that stalls selling drugs in broad daylight have appeared in Tepito, though they are quickly removed (Ortiz, 2017); however spending time with Iván it becomes clear that in the collective imagination they are part of the local trade along with the rest of the merchants. In Tepito there is a secondary market of those who make a living from the merchants themselves, selling food, water, newspapers, who operate public washrooms, who look after cars. It is not at all surprising that they include clients such as Iván and others who sell drugs on the streets. At the microscopic level, money moves from legality to illegality and back again in the blink of an eye. It is plain to see that Iván and the rest form part of the community, that they are friends, neighbors, family and clients of countless local inhabitants.

FINAL REFLECTION. THREE LIVES, ONE BOROUGH

Sometimes major cities seem to be made up like giant jigsaws. Between two small pieces that fit together there can be significant similarities, like the continuation of a line, or vast differences in a limited space. These disparities, however small, are meaningful, since they give detail and sense to the larger picture, the one that is only made up of each and every one of these pieces put together. Mexico City fits this metaphor: as a place that is full of all the differences, nuances and contrasts that its scale and its history allow. Within this vast jigsaw, the Cuauhtémoc borough is a zone of many and very diverse pieces. Between the Condesa and the Roma neighborhoods there are connections and continuities that are more or less obvious, just as there are between the neighborhoods of Tepito and La Lagunilla. But are there any between Condesa and Tepito? This research suggests that there are, even despite the variation in crime figures between each zone (see Table 1) emphasizing how to identify them.

Table 1

Culpable homicide and robbery in the three study areas

	Culpable homicide		Robbery			
			With violence		Without violence	
	Rate	Total	Rate	Total	Rate	Total
Revolución Alameda (Tabacalera)	40.9	14	376.6	129	55.5	19
Roma (Condesa)	11.4	8	237.1	167	28.4	20
Morelos (Tepito)	78.5	28	260.8	93	8.4	3
CDMX	13.4	1180	75.7	6650	7.1	620

Source: Valle, D. (2016). Hoyo del Crimen. January 2018. https://hoyodecrimen.com

The three stories told here all take place in Cuauhtémoc. In this regard, they show that these three apparently distinctive spaces have significantly similar features when seen from a sociological perspective of how the street in particular and public spaces in general function. In this context, the three stories set out the conflict that arises from the clash between the defense of rights by some and the privileges of others as the result of the use of a space that, in theory, is not private. Three analytical features tie together the thread between these three cases.

The first element is the need to shift between legality and illegality in the context of conflict over public space. Here, the role of the formal or legal authority is revelatory. It is not the case that police, judges and other forms of authority are absent; rather, they appear as agents of variable

rationality, and generally participate in the conflict, though they do not always act wholly legally or illegally. The authority does not appear as a primary resource to which an injured party may have recourse to defend their rights, but it is not wholly ignored either. In reality, it is just another actor that participates directly or indirectly in conflicts within the limited public space. In the cases analyzed, there is a constant need to act in complex combinations that oscillate between attitudes and practices of legality (sometimes) and illegality (other times). Their defense involves an aspect of resignation: having recourse to the authorities tends to be neither the best nor the first option to solve their problems or to perpetuate their privileges.

In the absence of the authority as first point of recourse, what is notable is that people's social capital is a viable option for constructing a defense or dealing with a conflict. This social capital is not always associated with democratic values or the rule of law. In the last instance, people know who they can rely on, which is not the same as who they are supposed to be able to rely on either legally or as citizens of a "democratic" society. Social capital as a resource triggers and orients the sense of conflict, as on this basis other types of economic, social, cultural and other resources are involve, which serve to activate or deactivate conflicts and violence.

Finally, the third element is the ambivalence in the perception of the public character of public space. It is true that its discourse is a more or less conscious element in the social imagination of the citizen. However, in the cases studied in Cuauhtémoc it is notable that, while there is a notion of the right to this space, there is also an acknowledgement that it is often in dispute, or has been taken over by someone else. In these cases defending the right to this space is a guarantee of conflict. If Cuauhtémoc is the heart of the city, the cases detailed here are three readings of its pulse, which represent a significant step in forming a cardiogram to provide clarity in this regard.

One of the lines of research of El Colegio de México's Seminar on Violence and Peace (SVyP) is the role played by citizens and society in constructing dynamics that foster peace or violence. As part of this approach, this text examines three case studies in the borough of Cuauhtémoc in Mexico City: a resident of the Condesa neighborhood who confronts raw urbanism, a defender of transsexual sex workers, and a drugs vendor. The results enable us to move towards a better understanding of motives that lead people to organize in favor of the democratic rule of law, or of delinquency.

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