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A Historical Perspective on Crime in Twentieth-Century Mexico City

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ABSTRACT: This paper is an overview of perceptions of crime in Mexico City during the twentieth century. After a brief review of quantitative evidence and the main sources on crime, the paper surveys police and judicial corruption as the common denominator of public perceptions of crime, punishment, and the judiciary. The paper then discusses gender violence and juvenile delinquency as two criminal practices that have characterized the impact of crime in everyday life. Based on a review of evidence about areas of the city commonly associated with crime, the paper concludes with a discussion of the reactions of urban communities and civil society against crime.

A Historical Perspective on Crime in Twentieth-Century Mexico City

By Pablo Piccato
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A historical perspective of crime in twentieth-century Mexico City must start by addressing an apparent contradiction between the qualitative and quantitative evidence. Multiple testimonies collected throughout the century show that crime (particularly violence, theft, and corruption) was a permanent concern for the inhabitants of the city, and was always thought to be too common. Yet, statistical evidence shows decreasing criminal rates after the Revolution until the 1980s. Are these rates the product of the state's preferences and limitations, rather than objective facts? Or are there other factors, invisible to quantitative sources, that explain the contradiction? After a brief examination of the statistical data, this paper will focus on other kind of evidence to attempt a satisfactory explanation and present an overview of criminal practices during the twentieth century. Rather than singling out one factor, I will advance two arguments: 1) crime was indeed frequent and disruptive, but was not always registered by statistics because of police and judicial corruption; furthermore, corruption encouraged crime by lowering the chances of punishment; 2) the inhabitants of the city and its urban communities maintained a degree of control over crime by channeling conflict through informal negotiations and patterns of violence. Those negotiations involved policemen and judicial representatives, but they became less effective in the last decades of the century because of an apparent expansion of corruption, violence, and drug trafficking. Urban communities also chose to ignore certain kinds of crimes, such as violence against women and children. Thus, rather than privileging a political explanation, this paper will explore the combination of circumstances, attitudes, institutions, and practices that converge in the problem of crime.

Two photographs taken at *delegaciones* (police stations) define the ambiguity of the relationship between the inhabitants of Mexico City, and the representatives of the state. In Figure 1, from the mid-fifties, by photojournalist Nacho López, shows a suspect making a point, with his eloquent hand and eyes, to the broad-shouldered *agente del ministerio público* (judicial police prosecutor) facing away from the camera. Next to the suspect, a policeman raises his finger, probably to correct the suspect's story. In the Figure 2, probably from Ciudad Netzahualcóyotl in the early 1970s, two men are also seen across the *delegación* desk. One is arguing, on the right, while the other is simply handing some crumpled bills to an official out of frame. The two images portray something that is easily forgotten in official, journalistic, and scientific views of the problem of crime and justice in Mexico City: defining an act as a crime was always the product of public discussions and, often, of informal arrangements. This essay, however, will try to shift the point of view from the official side (where the two photographers placed themselves) to the other side of the desk, and understand crime as a problematic category. To do so, I will benefit from several kinds of sources. One is the *nota roja*, the journalistic genre of crime news that became a feature of Mexico City newspapers during the twentieth century. Criminological views will be used, too, but an important source of

information will come from testimonies and anthropological studies of life in Mexico City.

Trends

The statistical evidence shows clear general trends in crime rates in the Federal District during the twentieth century: an increase, reaching the highest levels, during the last decade of the Porfiriato, a decrease beginning in the 1920s, when compilation of data resumed after the Revolution, up to the 1980s, and then a new and steep increase until the present day. Breaking down these trends by type of crime we identify some nuances: sexual violence increased steadily throughout the century, theft had clear peaks after 1929, WWII, and in the last couple of decades, homicide has decreased steadily, and the proportion of violent crimes to crimes against property has decreased gradually during the century.¹

These statistics have serious biases. One is that they reflect the attitudes of police and judicial authorities regarding crimes they believed deserved to be prosecuted (for example theft before the Revolution, drugs consumption since the 1940s), as well as their lack of interest in persecuting other crimes (arguably, rape, which had a low ratio of guilty sentences). Furthermore, police chiefs could demand agents to increase their activity, arguing that the obvious increase in criminality did not fit with the decreasing numbers of arrests.² A second problem is that, since they come from judicial sources, they suffer from courts' and the police's chronic scarcity of resources to deal with all complaints. Coupled with this, a third problem is that not all crimes resulted in complaints and arrests. Contemporary studies show that in most cases victims decided not to bring crimes to the attention of the police.³ Although we cannot estimate the percentage of unreported crimes throughout the century, we can explore the reasons why people decided that seeking the help of the police and judiciary was not a good idea.

Having said this, however, statistical information can be considered reliable in demonstrating long-term trends. The Federal District trends are similar to those in the country, and the administrative biases that affect the accuracy of the numbers seem to be constant throughout the period. A preliminary analysis of the factors that may be related to changes in crime rates suggested that multiple variables are important: literacy, income, state expenditure—to name those for which we found consistent statistical series

¹ A detailed analysis of judicial data in Pablo Piccato and Ira Beltrán, "Crimen en el siglo XX: Fragmentos de análisis sobre la evidencia cuantitativa," in *Ciudad de México: Los últimos cien años, los próximos cien años*, ed. Ariel Rodríguez Kuri and Sergio Tamayo (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, forthcoming)—available at <http://www.columbia.edu/~pp143/fragme~1>. See also Rafael Ruiz Harrell, *Criminalidad y mal gobierno* (Mexico City: Sansores y Aljure, 1998). I am in debt with Ira Beltrán for her comments to this paper, with the participants of the Conference "Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico," particularly David Shirk and Wayne Cornelius, and with the suggestions of John Mraz.

² Carlos Franco Sodi, *Don Juan Delincuente y otros ensayos* (Mexico City: Botas, 1951), 215.

³ Leopoldo Borrás, *A mano armada: la delincuencia en la ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987), 12; Norman S. Hayner, "Criminogenic zones in Mexico City," *American Sociological Review* 11, no. 4 (1946): 436. On lack of police resources after the Revolution, *El Universal*, 14 Oct. 1920, 9. On political manipulation of rates, Eugenio Aguirre, Gerardo de la Torre, and Rafael Ramirez Heredia, *Cronicas de una ciudad ganada*, 1. ed. ed. (Mexico: Diana, 1999), 90.

to correlate with crime rates. The improvement in social indicators like literacy (which in itself reflects state welfare strategies), explains in part decreasing rates. The strongest correlation, however, was that between the lagged ratio of persons charged (*consignados*) against the sentenced (in other words, the gap between complaints and guilty convictions, a measure of the effectiveness of prosecutions), and *consignado* rates. This suggests that, in addition to socioeconomic variables, trends should also be explained as the result of victims' and offenders' perception of the efficacy of the police and judicial system. In other words: if crime was less likely to be punished, offenders had greater incentives to commit a crime, and victims fewer reasons to press charges. In other words: the state can have an impact on crime rates but not always in the intended direction. More specifically, rates will go up, as they did during the Porfiriato because and in the last decades of the twentieth century, when socioeconomic pressures coincide with a regime that emphasizes repressive police measures against crimes, yet does not pay the same attention to the inefficacy of the judicial system. Between the "judicial" and the "social" hypotheses, this interpretation of historical trends combines multiple socioeconomic factors with an effort to understand popular and institutional definitions of crime, and reconstruct patterns of criminal practices that probably respond to those perceptions but also to other factors that are specific to each kind of practice.⁴

Perceptions of crime

The clearest challenge to the statistical evidence of decreasing rates comes from police news, particularly the *nota roja*. Gruesome, sometimes voyeuristic descriptions reached thousands of readers through newspapers, magazines, comics, books and, more recently, television shows. Since the late nineteenth century, murderers and professional criminals became a legitimate object of attention, particularly when involved in *casos célebres* that attracted widespread attention—to the extent that specialists blamed the *nota roja* for the immorality and increase of crime, and officials considered censoring it. Shocking photographs, as in weekly *Alarma!*, lured many readers, but it was the genre's effort to make narrative sense of crime and punishment that made it a staple of newsstands, and a valuable historical source. The *nota roja* reporter was always close to his police sources, to the extent that witnesses and suspects could have him for a police officer. The skillful and scientific police detective (exemplified most notably by Alfonso Quiróz Cuarón) was the center of the reports because he knew very well, from a close distance, the culture and the world of criminals.⁵ Taking cues from Mexican criminology (where Quiróz Cuarón was a well-known author), the *nota roja* presented chronicles of criminal practices as a

⁴ For a full discussion see Piccato and Beltrán, "Crimen en el siglo XX," Evidence about national trends is drawn from on a compilation of police and judicial statistics made possible with the support of the Project on the Administration of Justice. Pablo Piccato, "Estadísticas del crimen en México: Series históricas, 1901-2001" (manuscript).

⁵ See José Alvarado, "La ciudad de México," in Sergio González Rodríguez, "Prólogo," in *Crimen, terror y páginas: antología*, ed. Patricia Ortega Ramírez (México: El Nacional, 1990), 11; Carlos Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta: Antología de la crónica en México* (Mexico City: ERA, 1980); E. Téllez Vargas and J. R. Garmabella, *¡Reportero de policía!: El Güero Téllez* (México: Ediciones Océano, 1982). Censorship of specific true crime magazines failed. Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 152. On reporters passing as police officers, Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta*, 336; Téllez Vargas and Garmabella, *¡Reportero de policía!*, 9, 38.

public service that uncovered the habits of a well-defined sector of society, the “criminal population,” to unaware citizens.⁶ From the premise that only the police really knew about the world of crime, the *nota roja* often presented little more than a description of the horrors and tragedy witnessed at the police station or the crime scene, and reproduced the speculations of officials as to motivations (usually involving passion or greed), that explained crimes.⁷

This proximity to the police perspective contrasts with a relative detachment of the *nota roja* from the judicial process. Trials took many months and were dull affairs conducted by judges and bureaucrats inside unappealing offices. Until 1929, when it was abrogated, the popular jury was the scene of famous cases that brought together notorious or well-liked suspects, skilful lawyers, and avid audiences. The press and even the radio reproduced trials that took place in the lapse of a few days or hours (yet months after the events), conveying all the drama of debates and interrogations lacking in written processes.⁸ But in most cases, particularly after the abolition of the jury, police news showed little interest in following proceedings after the police made an arrest or the *ministerio público* presented a suspect to the judge. For reporters, guilt was not problematic, as it was the product of detective skill and the suspect’s obvious psychological and moral features. In the perspective of readers, this detachment also expressed a widespread, yet tacit assumption: preventive detention was usually long and painful, and in itself constituted punishment. Formalizing guilt with a sentence was of little import, therefore, as justice was made when the suspect was indicted.⁹

Starting in the 1970s, however, police news became ambivalent about the police. While established reporters like Téllez considered the Mexican corps one of the best in the world, and praised Federal District chief Arturo Durazo Moreno (1976-1982), others like

⁶ For example, *Gaceta de policía*, published in the 1900s with the support of the Department of Police. See González Rodríguez, "Crimen, terror y páginas," 11 and passim; Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta*, 362; Alberto del Castillo, "Prensa, poder y criminalidad a finales del siglo XIX en la Ciudad de México," in *Habitos, normas y escandalo : prensa, criminalidad y drogas durante el porfiriato tardío*, ed. Ricardo Perez Montfort (Mexico City: Ciesas--Plaza y Valdes Editores, 1997).

⁷ On the police’s need to intimately know the world of crime, see Carlos Roumagnac, *Elementos de policía científica: Obra de texto para la Escuela Científica de Policía de México* (Mexico City: Botas, 1923), 148-49; Jose Raul Aguilar, *Los métodos criminales en Mexico, cómo defendernos* (Mexico City: Ediciones Lux, 1941), 99-102.

⁸ Victor Manuel Macías González, "El caso de una beldad asesina: La construcción narrativa, los concursos de belleza y el mito nacional posrevolucionario (1921-1931)," *Historia y Grafía*, no. 13 (1999); Patricia Ortega Ramírez, *Crimen, terror y páginas: antología* (Mexico City: El Nacional, 1990), 27-64.

⁹ According to a judge during the Porfirian period, a rule of thumb was that “Culpable debe ser el individuo cuando me lo han traído a la cárcel.” Carlos Roumagnac, “Mis recuerdos de Belem,” *El Nacional*, 24 Sep. 1933, sup. 2. Inmates were allowed by prison officials to “punish” suspects of despicable crimes. Elena Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer: Hombres y mujeres homicidas en la ciudad de México: Historias de vida* (Mexico City: CIESAS-Plaza y Valdés, 1996), 76, 91. A critical view of the shortcomings of police investigations would emerge later on, as the *nota roja* gave place in a few newspapers to more systematic reporting. Yet even the irregularities in processes were less interesting as months passed, leaving only “preguntas que quizá nunca sean respondidas; preguntas que se perderán, tal vez, en ese mundo de papeles y papeles.” Ramón Márquez, “Yoko: historia de un impune crimen policial,” in Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta*, 341, 45-46.

Ramón Márquez portrayed corruption and ineptitude.¹⁰ Interpreted under this light, the popular interest in *nota roja* does not contradict a critical view of police institutions expressed in Nacho López's photo essays—the context of Figure 1. The figure of Durazo crystallized public opinion's perceptions of the police as corrupt and involved in political repression—clearly after the 1968 student movement but already in previous years. *Lo negro del negro Durazo*, a book written by his bodyguard, was an editorial success in the 1980s. It described the corruption and violence of a police chief that had been directly appointed by president José López Portillo, and remained close to him during his administration. The accusations in the book underlined the connections between Durazo and persons linked with cabarets and prostitution. According to author Jorge González González, partners of the police chief were also involved in criminal activities such as kidnapping and drug trafficking, and benefited from the illegal use of public resources.¹¹ In words of Sergio González Rodríguez, the book continued the *nota roja* tradition but also described “nepotism, the symbiotic nexus between underground and formal businesses, official criminality and vulgar picaresque.”¹² Those symbiotic links were the key of popular perceptions of the police and judicial system in Mexico City: not a state apparatus designed to prevent or fight against crime but a “mafia” tied together by a code of silence, corruption, and the use of violence. In breaking with that silence, González González confessed fifty murders that he had committed following instructions of president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and other officials.¹³

Not surprisingly, many of González González's claims are difficult to substantiate, yet they point to continuities in police practices. Testimonies of corruption and abuses in the higher ranks of the police date back to the Porfirian period, becoming very visible in the early 1920s. During the high years of political stability under the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) in the mid-century, police chiefs seem to have been adept at cultivating a favorable press. Durazo, by contrast, was the object of critical reporting and judicial prosecution after the end of López Portillo's government. His tenure as police chief marks a historic shift because, critics alleged years later, it systematized long-standing connections between the Federal District's police and diverse illegal businesses. The resulting “criminal organization” in the institution's ranks survived as “la

¹⁰ Ramón Márquez, “Yoko: historia de un impune crimen policial,” in Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta*, 345; Téllez Vargas and Garmabella, *¡Reportero de policía!*, 235, 57. Yet even Téllez acknowledged that, in the past, police stations were “verdaderas cuevas de maleantes,” and the police was accused of violence and corruption—which was a problem only at the lower levels of the institution. Téllez Vargas and Garmabella, *¡Reportero de policía!*, 258, 61. See also John Mraz, *Nacho López, Mexican Photographer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 129.

¹¹ Jorge González González, *Lo negro del Negro Durazo* (Mexico City: Editorial Posada, 1983), 32, 17, 45-6, 192. For examples of police intervention in politics, see Inspector General de Policía to President, 9 Aug. 1924, Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Presidentes Obregón-Calles (hereafter AGN, POC), 104-P-106; González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 42, 110. Another import source of income for Durazo was the sale of police jobs and uniforms, and the padding of police *nómina*. González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 75-76, 104, 10, 23, 50, 67, 91.

¹² González Rodríguez, “Crimen, terror y páginas,” 10. The book was the object of civil suits by Durazo and López Portillo.

¹³ The confession was followed by a disarming expression of patriotism: “También los gatilleros amamos a México a nuestra manera.” González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 17.

Hermandad”—a system that resisted control attempts from higher political officials and even Army officers.¹⁴

Rather than demonstrating the existence of a criminal organization in within the city’s police, the following pages will explore how the belief in such an organization shaped public perceptions of criminal practices as defined by police and official involvement, and perpetuated by impunity. As one reconstructs public evidence of these practices during the twentieth century it becomes clear that Durazo’s work was exceptional for its scale and notoriety, rather than by its contents and structure.

At the lowest level of the connection between crime and the police in twentieth-century Mexico City, graft nevertheless occupied a visible place. It would be redundant to describe in detail the widespread use of the *mordida* throughout the twentieth century. Police officers and other representatives of the government in the street (such as health inspectors) extracted different amounts of money from people in many forms: from car drivers, established and ambulant merchants, suspects of diverse infractions. Since the first years of the twentieth century, if not earlier, bribes were expected to complement policemen’s low salaries, and to support a pyramidal system that, through quotas and the lease of jobs, corners, guns, identifications, and tow trucks, funneled the income up to the higher ranks of the institution.¹⁵ The unfairness of policemen and *ministerio público*

¹⁴ Aguirre, Torre, and Ramirez Heredia, *Cronicas de una ciudad ganada*, 60-61; “Durazo, de cruel jefe policiaco a benefactor de alcohólicos,” *La Jornada*, 6 Aug. 2000, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2000/ago00/000806/010n1gen.html>; Téllez Vargas and Garmabella, *¡Reportero de policía!*, 286. Recurrent purges and reforms of the police suggest that public officials shared this critical view. These have included attempts to militarize the police or give higher positions to military officers, thus creating a long-standing animosity between the capital’s police and the military. See for example Obregón to Governor of the Federal District, 21 Nov. 1921, hereafter AGN, POC, 122-D2-P-4; Obregón decree, 2 Jan. 1922, AGN, POC, 731-P-14; *El Universal*, 16 Sep. 1929, 5a. sec., 1; Jefe del Cuerpo de las Fuerzas de Resguardo del Ferrocarril Mexicano, Leobardo Cruz, to Presidente Municipal, 27 Dec. 1917, Archivo Histórico del Ayuntamiento de la Ciudad de México (hereafter AHA), Policía Presos Penitenciaria, 3664, 2; *El Universal*, 12 Jan. 1918, p. 1; *Excelsior*, 2 Oct. 1929, 2a. sec., 1; González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 63; Aguirre, Torre, and Ramirez Heredia, *Cronicas de una ciudad ganada*, 61, 66-67, 68. For attitudes toward the police, Francisco Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México durante la revolución constitucionalista* (Mexico City: Botas, 1941), 560-61; Jacinto Barrera Bassols, *El caso Villavicencio: Violencia y poder en el porfiriato* (Mexico City: Alfaguara, 1997); Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México*, 53. For police involvement in prostitution, gambling and car theft under chief Pedro Almada, appointed by president Álvaro Obregón, see Almada to Obregón, 24 Aug. 1923, AGN, POC, 122-D2-P-14; González to Obregón, 4 Apr. 1922, AGN, POC 307-14-16. For evidence during *alemanismo*, see John Mraz, “Today, Tomorrow and Always: The Golden Age of Illustrated Magazines in Mexico, 1937-1960,” in *Fragments of a golden age : the politics of culture in Mexico since 1940*, ed. G. M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ When an unidentified police chief requested more budget from the chief of the Departamento Central he responded that *mordidas* gave policemen enough to survive. Téllez Vargas and Garmabella, *¡Reportero de policía!*, 262. On the pyramidal system and the profits expected from police work see González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 104, 20. Earlier evidence of the same patterns in *Excelsior*, 24 Nov. 1921, 2 sec., p. 1; Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 143; Hayner, “Criminogenic zones,” 429. Knowing “la conducta que hay que seguir con los empleados de los Juzgados” in Mexico City, money was required to expedite civil cases. Toribio Esquivel Obregón to Manuel Macías, 16 May 1907, Archivo Toribio Esquivel Obregón, Universidad Iberoamericana, Caja 21, exp. 1, f. 320. See also Luis Cabrera to Rafael Nieto, 13 Jun. 1922, Archivo Calles Torreblanca, Fondo Fernando Torreblanca, ser. 010203, exp. 1/2: Cabrera, Luis, inv. 142. On distribution of police identifications *El Universal*, 7 Jun. 1930, 1; Aurora Muñoz Martínez, “Seguridad

corruption was obvious to the many suspects or victims who, like the men in the pictures cited earlier, had to pay or negotiate their way out of *delegaciones*. Beatings and torture by policemen increased the cost of failing to pay a bribe after arrest.¹⁶ Although graft was probably not restricted to delegaciones, its impact on crime in general was greater when it occurred among police, judicial, and penitentiary officials who victimized the poor and let affluent suspects go free.¹⁷ Car accidents were an aggravating example of this as the number of people killed or wounded by car and bus drivers increased through the century, while offenders could count on multiple ways to avoid incarceration.

Illegal but non-violent practices (punished by the law yet not perceived as criminal by the majority of the population), were the object of profitable police protection. That was the case of abortion, which provided the police with a stable source of income from doctors and midwives.¹⁸ More prominent was gambling, a growing business in the 1920s, both in Mexico City and in the country's northern border, where prohibition in the United States attracted increasing numbers of tourists. Although the practice was regulated and supervised by president Obregón, the press published accusations of police involvement in gambling operations.¹⁹ Similar patterns around prostitution will be examined below.

Police protection was more integrated with criminal activities when it involved complicity with car thieves, kidnapers, and robbers. Auto theft began with the century,

pública y derechos humanos de los capitalinos," in *Los derechos humanos en México durante la transición sexenal*, ed. David Fernández (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana-Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, 1995), 127.

¹⁶ For eloquent evidence of the negotiations and suffering in *delegaciones* see the photoessay by Nacho López analyzed in Mraz, *Nacho López*, 129, 39. On car accidents, Sodi, *Don Juan Delincuente y otros ensayos*, 118. For abuse and theft to suspects in *delegaciones* see Mauricio Nelligan, *Mujeres que matan: Prostitución y homicidio femeníl en México* (Mexico City: Edamex, 1988), 111. For demands of payments to suspects, Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 77. For the need to increase penalties against theft, *El Universal*, 28 Sep. 1929, 3a. sec., 3. On beatings, see Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 83; Borrás, *A mano armada*, 69; Muñoz Martínez, "Seguridad pública," 123; Carlos G. Vélez-Ibañez, *Rituals of Marginality: Politics, Process, and Culture Change in Urban Central Mexico, 1969-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 83. For the definition of these irregularities as human rights-abuses, see *Procuración de justicia y derechos humanos: Análisis de recomendaciones de la Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos*, (Mexico City: Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 1997), 21. In Azaola's sample of 400 homicide convicts in Distrito Federal prisons, 13% are former policemen. Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 39; Oscar Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1961), 390, 419. Earlier examples of police criminals in *El Demócrata*, 25 Sep. 1914, sec. 1, p. 3-5; Barrera Bassols, *El caso Villavicencio*

¹⁷ An exposé in *El Universal*, 19 Jan. 1918, p. 1. The cost for an early release from the *delegación* could range from 10 to 100 pesos. Reports by Abogado Visitador to comisaría de la Cuarta Demarcación, 23 Jul. 1919, AHA, Justicia Comisarias, 2717, expedientes 11, 13, 15. On money demanded from prisoners in exchange for their release, María Luisa Mena to President Calles, 17 May 1926, AGN, POC, 811-G-186; Nelligan, *Mujeres que matan*, 30.

¹⁸ Ortega Ramírez, *Crimen, terror y páginas*; González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 191.

¹⁹ Inspector General de Policía to Presidente Municipal, 13 Aug. 1917, AHA, Policía Presos Penitenciaria, 3664, 2; Álvaro Obregón to Governor of the Federal District, 11 Apr. 1921, AGN, POC, 425-R-1. On Chinese nationals caught gambling without a license, *El Universal*, 7 Oct. 1920, p. 12. On official involvement in gambling, Jean Meyer, *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana. Periodo 1924-1928 vol. 11 Estado y Sociedad con Calles* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1977), 304; González to president Obregón, 4 Apr. 1922, AGN, POC 307-14-16. On the mild penalties against gambling, Sodi, *Don Juan Delincuente y otros ensayos*, 216.

but it became very common during the Revolution, as the civil war justified the taking of private property. Later, car theft became connected with other serious criminal practices requiring organization and protection. The Banda del Automóvil Gris, operating during the revolutionary years, became a famous case and an example of a new trend in criminal practices: a sophisticated gang, including educated men and even foreigners, who robbed wealthy homes or government funds, and in all likelihood operated with the complicity of revolutionary generals.²⁰ In a smaller scale, larceny and street commerce of stolen goods also required connections and bribes to the police.²¹

The sale of smuggled goods was another business that thrived during the twentieth century. In the early 1940s, smugglers brought products of small volume but high value, such as jewels or certain drugs, and some of them were linked with respectable import-export houses and stores. Yet contraband soon came to be associated with peddling, particularly in *barrio* Tepito—where the sale of stolen goods was also common.²² Peddlers had been the object of police harassment and extortion since the Porfirian period; when they traded imported goods, they were also persecuted by Secretaría de Hacienda inspectors.²³ In Tepito, the open sale of contraband followed an expansion of street commerce in general in the second half of the century as an important source of employment in the area. Its stability as such was made possible by clientelistic relations between the neighborhood's merchants' associations and the PRI. The strength of these organizations was directly related to street merchant's vulnerability to inspectors and policemen: due to the lack of specific regulations, most street sales were, in one way or another, illegal. Organizations worked, according to Guadalupe Reyes Domínguez and Ana Rosas Mantecón, as "mafias" that sold protection to illegal, yet public businesses. The complicity of authorities was, of course, a requirement in this relationship. They benefited, among other things, with the mobilization of *tepiteños* in PRI demonstrations.²⁴

²⁰ González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 150, 91; Juan Mérido, *La banda del automóvil gris y yo!* (Mexico City: N.p., 1959); Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001). For the famous case of the robbery of the train to Laredo, and the pardon to one of its authors, see *Excelsior*, 25 Oct. 1921, p. 1; Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 123-24. On other forms of car theft during the revolution and later, see *La Nación*, 30 Jul. 1912, p. 6. For insecurity and illegality, involving the police, judiciary, and revolutionary armies AHA, Justicia Juzgados, 2745, Luis G. Vázquez, Inspector de Juzgados Correccionales, to Ayuntamiento, 20 Jul. 1917; Martín Luis Guzmán, *El Águila y la Serpiente* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984), 1:482-83; Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México*, 51-52; José Vasconcelos, *La tormenta: Segunda parte del Ulises criollo* (Mexico City: Jus, 1983), 88; Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 125-27; Borrás, *A mano armada*, 121-22. In 1930, a trial against a gang of car thieves recorded the participation of police officers, in Pachuca, Hidalgo, involved in the "legalization" of stolen cars or the release of suspects, *Excelsior*, 1 Oct. 1929, p. 1; AJ-RS, 23196, 1.

²¹ Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 230-31, 350-52, 56.

²² Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 127-28. For the traditional "thieves' market," Eaton Smith, *Flying Visits to the City of Mexico and the Pacific Coast* (Liverpool: Henry Young and sons, 1903), 72-73.

²³ Isabel Reza and 12 signatures to Presidente del Ayuntamiento, 25 Jan. 1901, AHA, Policía en general, 3642, 1342; Tomasa Pérez and 7 signatures to Presidente del Ayuntamiento, 3 Jul. 1915, AHA, Policía en general, 3645, 1768. On street vendors as petty criminals, *El Universal*, 10 Jan. 1917, p. 1; Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 30; Piccato, *City of Suspects*, chap. 1 and 2; González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 166.

²⁴ Guadalupe Reyes Domínguez and Ana Rosas Mantecón, *Los usos de la identidad barrial: Una mirada antropológica a la lucha por la vivienda. Tepito 1970-1984* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1993), 38-39, 41, 67, 69. See also Susan Eckstein, "The Poverty of Revolution: A Study of

Although it was an old illegal practice and most people did not regard it as a crime, prostitution developed in the twentieth century in a grey area that encouraged police extortion and often involved violence against workers. Citing public health reasons, prostitution had been regulated and supervised since the 1860s. Forcing them to register and undergo periodic examinations, the regulation exposed prostitutes to extortion and pushed them either to the margins of the city or to enter brothels, where the relationship with health inspectors and policemen was mediated by madams. There, women could find also gave a measure of protection against anonymous violence in the streets. Police harassment of isolated prostitutes played into this process, as did some famous episodes of violence against women. During the 1930s, prostitution was de-regulated and law began to punish pimping—considered a practice of male exploitation over working-class women. Yet the business of prostitution, and its connections with cabarets, dance-halls, and hotels continued to thrive and be a feature of Mexico City night life. Young women were recruited through deception and often coerced to work by brothel owners. Multiple sources document the causal chain that lead girls from domestic violence, through rape and coerced labor, to prostitution. Young women from the interior found themselves alone and helpless in a city that was as large as it seemed indifferent to their plight. Even among women for whom prostitution had become a source of some financial autonomy, the stigma of “*la vida*” on their honor was costly in terms of social capital, and a powerful factor to keep them in the business.²⁵ Neighbors denounced cabarets and cantinas as centers of vice that the government had to attack, yet the illegality of the practice and the violence it involved from madams and customers did not prompt systematic police campaigns or public scandals similar to those seen in other countries.²⁶

As with prostitution, drug trafficking expanded during the twentieth century and involved the complicity of officials in different levels and from different institutions. Drugs like marihuana, cocaine, opium, heroine, and morphine had been used since the late nineteenth century but were criminalized in the early decades of the twentieth, largely due to pressure from the United States.²⁷ These drugs were connected to different social

Social, Economic and Political Inequity in a Center City Area, a Squatter Settlement and a Low Cost Housing Project in Mexico City" (Ph. D., Columbia University, 1972), 60. Examples in Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 349. Commerce brings to the neighborhood many times the number of its inhabitants every day. Borrás, *A mano armada*, 32.

²⁵ Nelligan, *Mujeres que matan*, 26, 103-109; Carlos Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México. Ensayo de psicología criminal. Seguido de dos casos de hermafroditismo observado por los señores doctores Ricardo Egea . . . Ignacio Ocampo* (Mexico City: n.e., 1904), 181, 96. On police participation Hayner, "Criminogenic zones," 429. For bribes against brothel owners, Subinspector 4a. dem. to Ayuntamiento, 24 Jan. 1920, AHA, Presos penitenciaria, 3665, 12; Eckstein, "The Poverty of Revolution", 56. On prostitution, see Katherine Elaine Bliss, *Compromised positions : prostitution, public health, and gender politics in revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). For violence against women at night, *El Universal*, 7 Jun. 1930, 1; Monsiváis, *A ustedes les consta*, 198-99, 327.

²⁶ *El Universal*, 18 Jun. 1930, p. 5; Nelligan, *Mujeres que matan*, 9, 16, 17. Raids in cabarets focused on their connections with criminals rather than prostitution: in 1917, AHA, Gobernación, 1110, 43; *Excelsior*, 10 Oct. 1929, 2nd sec., p. 1. Contrast with Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

²⁷ Luis Astorga, "Traficantes de drogas, políticos y policías en el siglo XX mexicano," in *Vicios públicos, virtudes privadas: La corrupción en México*, ed. Claudio Lomnitz (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2000), 172;

groups and cultural attributes: marihuana was used by soldiers and prisoners, although early in the twentieth century it was also consumed by “many ‘señoritos’ who belong to the elite,” and openly sold in dance rooms²⁸—before it became associated with the 1960s counter-culture; cocaine went from miracle drug to upper class vice; opium prohibition was first enforced against Chinese immigrants. Yet these culturally and socially diverse practices were unified as a “social problem” and a crime by the increasing persecution from police authorities, both local and federal. The result was the development of an underground distribution network associated with official protection.²⁹ Commerce expanded in a de-centralized pattern from market stalls and drug stores (where sale of some narcotics was legal), early in the century. Violence among national and international gangs vying for control of the market and official protection since the 1930s characterized the network’s expansion thereafter.³⁰ In addition to protection and/or harassment of rival organizations, policemen, from the highest to lowest levels, participated directly in the sale of seized drugs.³¹

Traffic into the U.S. through Mexico’s southern border seems to have increased the emphasis on prosecution at the federal level, as well as the profitability of the business and the availability of substances in the internal market. Since the 1940s, according to Luis Astorga, the public record shows fewer politicians and more policemen involved in drug-trafficking scandals. In his view, this is not a sign of an increasing autonomy of the

Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México*, 107, 09, 13. For arrests against marihuana and opium users see Police Chief to Presidente Municipal, 23 and 28 Aug. 1918, AHA, Presos penitenciaria, 3664, 5. For the lack of prosecution against an opium importer in *El Universal*, 7 Oct. 1920, 8. See also Luis Alejandro Astorga Almanza, *El siglo de las drogas*, 1. ed. (Mexico, D.F.: Espasa-Calpe Mexicana, 1996); Ricardo Pérez Montfort, "El veneno "faradisiaco" o el olor a tortilla tostada: Fragmentos de historia de las "drogas" en México 1870-1920," in *Habitos, normas y escandalo: Prensa, criminalidad y drogas durante el porfiriato tardío*, ed. Ricardo Perez Montfort (Mexico City: Ciesas - Plaza y Valdes Editores, 1997).

²⁸ *El Universal*, 9 Oct. 1916, p. 4. On its use by prisoners, and the homicidal lunacy it was thought to produce, Federico Gamboa, *La llaga* (Mexico City: Eusebio Gómez de la Puente, 1922), 211; Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México*, 210. See also J. Peón del Valle, "La lucha contra la toxicomanía en México," in *Memoria del Primer Congreso nacional Penitenciario celebrado e la Ciudad de México del 24 de noviembre al 3 de diciembre de 1932, convocado por la Dirección Antialcohólica*, (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1935).

²⁹ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, "De vicios populares, corruptelas, y toxicomanías," in *Juntos y medio revueltos* (Mexico City: Sones-Unios, 2000), 114. For persecution by policemen to street vendors of marihuana, Concepción Flores to Presidente Municipal, 18 Mar. 1916, AHA, Policía en general, 3645, 1777; Insp. Gral. de Policía to Presidente Ayuntamiento, 23 Jan. 1919, AHA, Presos penitenciaria, 3665, 13. Against consumers in public places, Ins. Gral. Pol. a Pres. Mun., 23 Aug. 1918, AHA, Presos penitenciaria, 3664, 5; Comisario 8a. dem a Ayuntamiento, 11 Jan. 1918, AHA, Presos penitenciaria, 3665, 10.

³⁰ Astorga, "Traficantes de drogas," 174; Pérez Montfort, "De vicios populares," 115. On increasing consumption of heroine, even among the Americanized upper classes, see Benjamín Argüelles, "La delincuencia de los toxicomanos y su tratamiento en las prisiones," in *Memoria del Primer Congreso*, 322, 26; *El Universal*, 16 Sep. 1929, p. 1.

³¹ Examples since the 1910s, in Astorga, "Traficantes de drogas," 174; Pérez Montfort, "De vicios populares," 124, 30; González González, *Lo negro del Negro*, 123; Aguirre, Torre, and Ramirez Heredia, *Cronicas de una ciudad ganada*, 61. On gangs, Hayner, "Criminogenic zones," 429. On increasing profitability of drugs Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 128. The growing market of illegal drugs in these years further established the reputation of Tepito as an area of danger and crime in the city. Reyes Domínguez and Rosas Mantecón, *Los usos de la identidad*, 36, 47; J. Peón del Valle, "La lucha contra la toxicomanía en México," in *Memoria del Primer Congreso*, 140; Eckstein, "The Poverty of Revolution", 56.

police but a consequence of the centralization of drug prosecution in the Procuraduría General de la República, and the interest of the political class in a highly profitable business. The last three decades of the century have seen several well-publicized cases of complicity between federal, state, and local officers, and drug traffickers nation-wide. Meanwhile, consumption of the substances cited above and cheaper alternatives (particularly solvents) has added another factor to the violent and legally ambiguous interactions between the police and the inhabitants of Mexico City.³²

Authors like Astorga describe the links between police and criminals behind the drug traffic referring to a code of silence similar to that of the Sicilian mafia's *omertá*.³³ The police, in this interpretation, would not be simply a source of protection for powerful criminals, but the main factor of crime itself, as the center of a comprehensive and secretive network of illegal activities developed during the twentieth century, and often referred to as *el hampa*. A general evaluation cannot be supported by available evidence, as there are also testimonies of police actions (perhaps sporadic and unsystematic but no less risky) against illegal businesses. In the capital's public opinion, however, *el hampa* codified perceptions of police and judicial corruption guaranteeing the impunity of law-breakers, both high and low in the scale of crime.³⁴

Yet a strictly moral or legalistic interpretation would lead to an erroneous view of police corruption as the only cause of high crime with low criminal rates. After all, for centuries Mexico City has been characterized by intense street commerce, pawning, and the existence of an informal sector of the economy placed in the margins of the law yet tolerated by the representatives of the state.³⁵ Corruption, defined as the private use of public resources for personal gain, was nothing new in independent Mexico. The twentieth century became the century of corruption as the Porfiriato (a time of order and propriety, in the collective memory of the post-revolutionary era) gave place to a "new bourgeoisie" suddenly enriched by the Revolution.³⁶ Even then, judging by the statistical evidence, corruption remained a manageable aspect of the relationship between the state and civil society. It is during the latter decades of the twentieth century (hence Durazo's

³² *Procuración de justicia*, 255; Astorga, "Traficantes de drogas," 167, 69, 87. On the diversity of distributors and consumers, Astorga, "Traficantes de drogas," 173. For a recent case of policemen involved in the sale of drugs to Mexico City school children see "Mexico: Officers Held In School Drug Sales," *New York Times*, 12 Apr. 2003, <http://query.nytimes.com/search/full-page?res=9801E5D7153BF931A25757C0A9659C8B63>.

³³ Astorga, "Traficantes de drogas," 192.

³⁴ *El Universal*, 30 Jun. 1930, 3; Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 145; Hayner, "Criminogenic zones," 429. In contrast with other societies, Mexico has not seen yet an increasing involvement of "the institutions of criminal justice. . . in regulating public life." Stanley Cohen, "Crime and Politics: Spot the Difference," *The British Journal of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (1996): 11.

³⁵ Guillermo de la Peña, "Corrupción e informalidad," in *Vicios públicos, virtudes privadas: La corrupción en México*, ed. Claudio Lomnitz (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2000), 114-15. On the important tradition of pawning in Mexico City, see Marie Eileen Francois, "When Pawnshops Talk: Popular Credit and Material Culture in Mexico City, 1775-1916" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1998).

³⁶ On the "nueva burguesía" and the corruption of the revolutionary elites, Friedrich Katz, "La corrupción y la Revolución mexicana," in *Vicios públicos, virtudes privadas: La corrupción en México*, ed. Claudio Lomnitz (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2000), 94, 96; Meyer, *Historia de la Revolución vol. 11*, 304-05; Alfonso Taracena, *La verdadera revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: Jus, 1960), 5:98-99.

paradigmatic importance) that public perceptions reflect corruption in a new scale: penetrating all levels of government, fostering violence, and escaping citizens' ability to negotiate it to their advantage.

The distinction between illegality and crime is very important here. According to Guillermo de la Peña's research in Guadalajara, payment of bribes in exchange for official protection made possible the survival of a large informal sector of the economy. This sector became more important as industrialization gave place to a decentralization of economic activity, and more people became available for temporary jobs. Bribes and protection, moreover, were part of a "network of exchanges of favors" that involved different sectors within the official party machinery and, through the protection of corporative groups, relied on traditional patronage.³⁷ Such conditions were similar to those studied in Tepito by Reyes and Mantecón.³⁸ If corruption in general cannot be treated as a predatory crime and forms part of larger networks of reciprocity, a more productive question, from the point of view of our enquiry, would be What was the impact of police and judicial corruption on more common patterns of crime?

Most likely, it encouraged them. We have discussed so far public perceptions of police involvement in criminal activities, from drug trafficking to sexual abuse. It is hard to evaluate the direct impact of this involvement on crime rates, as crimes committed by those in charge of protecting them are, by definition, exceptionally punished.³⁹ However, if we focus on people's experience of police and judicial intervention against the most common kinds of predatory offenses, we can venture a different hypothesis: prosecution and punishment were so uncertain that, for the majority of the lower-class population of the city, the state was not a reliable partner in dealing with crime, and justice was biased in favor of the rich. In the case of theft, for example, evidence from the first three decades of the century points to the negotiations, parallel to prosecution, between victims and neighbors, on one side, and suspects, on the other, with the goal of restoring property rather than obtaining punishment.⁴⁰ Given the uncertainty of judicial outcomes for those who lacked the means to influence them, some suspects and their families hoped that long judicial cases would be helped by religious or magical means. Others patronized seers to recover stolen property.⁴¹ Conversely, for criminologists José Angel Cenicerros and Luis Garrido, impunity and corruption in courts and the police generated many ways to avoid punishment (escape, flight, bribes, etcetera), in what they aptly called a "lottery

³⁷ de la Peña, "Corrupción e informalidad," 118, 22, 23. For early bribes, Trinidad González to Presidente Municipal, 28 Sep. 1917, AHA, Policía Presos Penitenciaria, 3664, 1.

³⁸ Reyes Domínguez and Rosas Mantecón, *Los usos de la identidad*; Carlos Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México. Ensayo de psicología criminal. Seguido de dos casos de hermafroditismo observado por los señores doctores Ricardo Egea . . . Ignacio Ocampo*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Tip. El Fénix, 1912), 290.

³⁹ An exhaustive review of illegal practices in everyday life in Aguilar, *Los metodos*. For narcotics policemen, some of them trained by the DEA, involved in rape and robbery, Sara Lovera, *Policías violadores, violadores policías* (Mexico City: Editorial Majo, 1990), 13.

⁴⁰ Piccato, *City of Suspects*, chap. 6. For the role of concierges and neighbors in preventing theft, AJ-RS, 1074694, 8; AJ-RS, 1067902, 8.

⁴¹ Elena Azaola Garrido, *Los niños de la correccional: Fragmentos de vida* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1993), 40, 37; Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 308.

of impunity.”⁴² From the perspective of suspects, since punishment was not likely and most victims belonged to the lower classes, the cost of committing a crime seemed relatively low.⁴³ This is further supported by the strong correlation, noted above, between indicted rates and the lagged ratio of indicted to sentenced. In the rest of this paper, I will examine two criminal practices that seem to distinguish twentieth century Mexico City, domestic abuse and juvenile delinquency, in order to understand the impact of crime beyond the public evidence of corruption and statistics.

Criminal practices

Domestic abuse, or more accurately gender violence (for it is structured by gender inequality and not necessarily contained within the intimate space of the household), is one of the most damaging and less investigated aspects of crime in twentieth-century Mexico City. The public-health costs of drug addiction, the wages of corruption, and the loss of property and labor caused by transgression and punishment have been object of multiple studies.⁴⁴ Yet we are still to evaluate the impact on society at large of the violence exercised by men on women, adults on children and, in general, offenders defined by their masculinity against victims who, as a result of the attack, become “femine” (weak and passive) in the eyes of other actors. There is convincing evidence from twentieth-century Mexico City to describe certain patterns: coercion linked to domestic labor and prostitution; violence by husbands, lovers and fathers; rape, committed by relatives or friends, that further dishonored women and pushed them into prostitution or other activities where their sexual integrity was no longer a valuable asset; harassment, robbery and sexual violence in nightly streets, undermining women’s ability to use the public spaces of the city.⁴⁵ Diverse testimonies explain women’s violence

⁴² José Angel Cenicerros and Luis Garrido, *La delincuencia infantil en México* (Mexico City: Botas, 1936), 93.

⁴³ See for example Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 121; Borrás, *A mano armada*, 48. That is the opinion of Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón, José Gómez Robleda, and Benjamín Argüelles, *Tendencia y ritmo de la criminalidad en México, D.F.* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estadísticas, 1939), 104. For perceptions of biased justice, *El Diablito Bromista*, 13 Oct. 1907, p. 3; H.J. Teufert to Porfirio Díaz, 8 Feb. 1911, Archivo Porfirio Díaz, Universidad Iberoamericana, 36, 2216-7. For the police’s reluctance to enter *vecindades* (tenement houses) and dangerous neighborhoods see *Nueva Era*, 9 Jul. 1912, p. 4; *El Universal*, 5 Aug. 1929, p. 5; Borrás, *A mano armada*, 159.

⁴⁴ See for example Alfonso Quiroz Cuaron, *La criminalidad en la República Mexicana y el costo social del homicidio* (Mexico: UNAM, 1958); Alfonso Quiroz Cuarón and Raúl Quiroz Cuarón, *El costo social del delito en México: Symposium sobre el costo social del crimen y la defensa social contra el mismo* (Mexico City: Botas, 1970). For a very rough estimate of the profits from corruption, González González, *Lo negro del Negro* For one of the few journalistic mentions of the consequences of gender violence Mraz, *Nacho López*, 140. An exception to the lack of interest are recent cases of great public impact such as the hundreds of women raped, murdered or disappeared in Ciudad Juárez in recent years. For a view of the impact of violence on everyday life, Carlos Monsiváis, "Notas sobre la violencia urbana," *Letras Libres*, May 1999. Paradoxically, there are several studies of women criminals, interesting for their exceptionality (they are a minority of suspects): Nelligan, *Mujeres que matan* ; Elisa Speckman, "Las flores del mal: Mujeres criminales en el porfiriato," *Historia Mexicana* 47, no. 1 (1997). Path-breaking studies, however, are Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer* ; Matthew Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 15. For an early study of “Don Juan,” blaming tradition and women “de escasa . . . feminidad.” Sodi, *Don Juan Delincuente y otros ensayos*, 9.

⁴⁵ On prostitution and violence against women in public spaces, see Pablo Piccato, "El Chalequero, or "the Mexican Jack the Ripper": The Meanings of Sexual Violence in Turn-of-the-Century Mexico City," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81, no. 3-4 (2001). Testimonies in Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez* ;

against children or other members of the family as the direct result of husbands' abuse.⁴⁶ The gendered structure of the aggressions is clear, as the control of labor and sexuality of women through the exercise of masculine attributes (physical strength, aggressiveness, domination of public spaces) extends through the spheres of public life, work, and the household.⁴⁷

Masculine violence is an unintended consequence of modernization and the resulting new role of women in the labor market and the household economy. Blaming violence on the disruption of traditional values has been a simple and frequent explanation.⁴⁸ Mediterranean notions of honor studied by anthropologists and applied by researchers of modern Mexico describe a system where men were in charge of protecting and increasing the family's honor, while women only risked losing it. Evidence about man-versus-man violence in twentieth-century Mexico City strongly suggests that honor remained a paramount, if often implicit concern for all the inhabitants of the city, particularly those of the lower classes.⁴⁹ The clearest evidence of this lies in the way in which same-sex fights took place: stressing the equality of the adversaries, applying rules similar to those of dueling (such as using the common weapon of the knife), and avoiding authorities. Guns, more common since the Revolution, increased the lethality of these fights, and probably discouraged many of them, yet did not eliminate concerns about reputation as a

Nelligan, *Mujeres que matan*. A case of rape and indifference of witnesses in AJ-RS, 781387. For a more recent and publicized case, involving police officers, see Lovera, *Policías violadores, violadores policías*. On the deep historical roots of these practices, see Lee Michael Penyak, "Criminal sexuality in Central Mexico, 1750-1850" (Ph.D., University of Connecticut, 1993); Steve Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Wen, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); John Tutino, "El desarrollo liberal, el patriarcado y la involución de la violencia social en el México Porfirista: El crimen y la muerte infantil en el altiplano central," in *Don Porfirio presidente..., nunca omnipotente: Hallazgos, reflexiones y debates, 1876-1911*, ed. Romana Falcón and Raymond Buve (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1998). For an analysis linking sexual violence (in Ciudad Juárez) and labor conditions, Shae Barwood, "Working to Death: Gender, Labour, and Violence in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico,"

⁴⁶ Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 72, 102; Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 200, 08. In her sample of women convicted of homicide, 70% had suffered "diversas formas de maltrato, negligencia, abuso o abandono por parte de su familia," 66% of them from their husbands, and 60% from the police. Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 129. Also, although closer to *nota roja*, Nelligan, *Mujeres que matan*, 52.

⁴⁷ For example Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 99, 101; Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 209; Henry A. Selby, Arthur D. Murphy, and Stephen A. Lorenzen, *The Mexican Urban Household: Organizing for Self-Defense* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 175-76. See Pierre Bourdieu, *La dominación masculina*, trans. Joaquín Jordá (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2000); Susan Brownmiller, *Against our will : men, women and rape* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976).

⁴⁸ *Excelsior*, 11 Oct. 1929, p. 5; Julio Guerrero, *La génesis del crimen en México; estudio de psiquiatría social* (Paris: Vda. de Ch. Bouret, 1901), 111, 57-58; Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México*, 282.

⁴⁹ Women, although less frequently, also fought over their reputation. See *El Universal*, 1 Feb. 1917, p. 9. Criminologists have explained "delinuencia proletaria" as a specific cultural trait of lower-class Mexicans. Quiroz Cuarón, Gómez Robleda, and Argüelles, *Tendencia y ritmo*, 135. See also Paul Friederich, *Agrarian Revolt in a Mexican Village* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), 76, 119; Marvin E. Wolfgang and Ferracuti Franco, *The Subculture of Violence* (London: Tavistock, 1967), 280. Although traditional views have interpreted the fact that many fights took place in and around *pulquerías* as a result of alcohol's influence, an alternative explanation is the importance of public drinking as a focus of sociability. *El Universal*, 14 Dec. 1916, p. 3; Hayner, "Criminogenic zones," 436. For more recent concerns about violence against women, yet the survival of the cultural value of fighting, Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 200.

factor of violence.⁵⁰ However, the practices associated with gendered violence in Mexico City, described in the previous paragraph, recommend a caveat to the classic model. Several stories collected by anthropologist Oscar Lewis reveal a paradox, in Mexico City's men concern about honor, which further explains the prevalence of abuse against wives, daughters or lovers: while men could fight for any small reason concerning their reputation, it was not always right for them to fight over the love of a woman. The consequences could be unnecessarily costly, according to informant Marta Sánchez, or simply not worth the love of a fickle lady, according to Roberto, who, in spite of his skill with the knife, preferred to forget about a former lover rather than fight her husband. In any case, calculation of the cost of violence is in these contexts more visible than in response to insults to the man.⁵¹ The reluctance to fight over women is not so surprising if placed in the socioeconomic context of the domestic abuse, also documented by Lewis's interviews: the respect afforded a woman, and the value of her work, diminished with every instance of abuse or "dishonorable" behavior, and reduced the cost of gender violence.

Gender violence was more common than public evidence suggests because of social and institutional reluctance to deal with it. During the twentieth century, and against the trends of most other crimes, the rate of sexual offenses (rape, abduction, statutory rape) showed a steady but slow increase.⁵² Again: this information should be used with caution, as women who had suffered attacks faced multiple obstacles when they decided to press charges against their attackers: skepticism by policemen and judges, humiliating medical examinations at police stations, the negotiation of parents with suspects seeking a promise of marriage in exchange for dropping the charges.⁵³ In addition, the law gave husbands and parents lesser punishment for using violence, even homicidal, against their adulterous wives or disobedient children.⁵⁴ More importantly, perhaps, social attitudes

⁵⁰ See for example AJ-RS, 781394, Battery, 1901. Guns as more "noble" weapons than lower-class knives in Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 22-23. A full discussion in Piccato, *City of Suspects*, chap. 5?. On the sense of insecurity brought by revolutionary troops to the capital, Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México*, 550.

⁵¹ Roberto took offense when an adversary told him about his sister: "one shouldn't fight for a woman. It is not worth the trouble." Yet, regarding a lover, he thought "I would be acting the fool if I fought for her." Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 205, 400-01, 293, but see 310-11. On women mediating male relations, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁵² For qualitative evidence of the rapid increase and greater violence of rape in recent years Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 214; Lovera, *Policías violadores, violadores policías*, 10.

⁵³ Mraz, *Nacho López*, 137; Piccato, *City of Suspects* Battery and homicide also victimized women. An example of homicide prompted by concern about gossip in Carlos Roumagnac, *Matadores de mujeres (Segunda parte de "Crímenes Sexuales y Pasionales")* (Mexico City: Ch. Bouret, 1910), 81-96. Eight percent of the homicide inmates in Mexico City jails in a study by Elena Azaola had murdered members of their families, half of them wives, lovers or girlfriends. Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 39. A common case of battery because dinner was not ready in AJ-RS, 1067905, 2v-3.

⁵⁴ For a parent's assertion of the right to punish a daughter with imprisonment at home, AJ-RS, 596559. Antonio Martínez de Castro, *Código penal para el Distrito Federal y Territorio de la Baja-California sobre delitos del fuero común y para toda la República Mexicana sobre delitos contra la Federación [1871]. Edición correcta, sacada de la oficial, precedida de la Exposición de motivos dirigida al Supremo Gobierno por el C. Lic. . . . Presidente de la comisión encargada de formar el Código* (Veracruz and Puebla: La Ilustración, 1891), 531, 534, 535, 544, 555. See also *Código Penal para el Distrito y Territorios Federales*, (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1929), 956; *Código penal para el Distrito y*

(embraced by women themselves) discouraged the intervention of state representatives in the intimacy of the home, and placed an additional burden on victims who dared bringing private affairs into the open. For female victims, love or isolation were strong reasons to decide against denouncing abusive husbands, or to forgive lovers who abandoned or punished them for their pregnancy.⁵⁵ In recent years, however, evidence indicates that the increase in rates of sexual offenses may also express women's greater willingness to challenge those attitudes, to talk openly about rape, and to use penal institutions and community networks to negotiate conflict with men.⁵⁶

Equally widespread in Mexico City, juvenile delinquency began to be articulated and studied as a specific social problem early in the twentieth century, and increased its importance in social perceptions in recent years.⁵⁷ In the capital, the problem was made evident by children sleeping or spending their lives in the streets; thus, it came to be identified with urban growth and modernization—just as violence against women did. The post-revolutionary period saw a proliferation of studies and regulations dedicated to the treatment and readaptation of young offenders.⁵⁸ Descriptions emphasized the specificity of crimes committed by children and adolescents (vandalism and theft more often than violence against persons), and the tragedy of innocent lives lost to vice and degeneration—both moral and biological.⁵⁹ Specialists explained juvenile delinquency as an over determined urban phenomenon, the product of poverty, disrupted families, crowded homes, promiscuity, lack of good schools and parks, the influence of movies and “unhealthy literature,” the easy availability of drugs and alcohol, and, in general, “urbanism”—an “artificial” state that breaks down the natural ties between generations.⁶⁰

Territorios Federales y para toda la República en Materia de Fuero Federal [1931] (Mexico City: Botas, 1938), 294.

⁵⁵ For female victims reluctance to police intervention, Sentence against Antonio Castellanos Navarrete, Jan. 1914, AGN, Fondo Secretaría de Justicia (hereafter SJ), vol. 892, exp. 3961; Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 95, 101; Piccato, *City of Suspects*, chap. 5.

⁵⁶ Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 206, 10, 14, 20. A specialized branch of the *ministerio público* devoted to sexual crimes was established in 1990. Lovera, *Policías violadores, violadores policías*, 16, 17. On a “more democratic” Mexican family as a result of economic crisis, Selby, Murphy, and Lorenzen, *The Mexican Urban Household*, 176. A woman who “wasn’t the kind to just stand there and let herself get beaten up” in Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 299, also 432-33 for the intervention of state agencies. For colonial antecedents, see Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Wen, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico*

⁵⁷ See for example Michael Willrich, *City of Courts: Socializing Justice in Progressive Era Chicago* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For growing concerns in the 1890s, *La Voz de México*, 18 Jan. 1890, p. 2; Miguel Macedo, *La criminalidad en México: Medios de combatirla* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Fomento, 1897), 29. Public debates on the theme in *El Universal*, 15 Oct. 1923, 7.

⁵⁸ Syntheses in Elena Azaola Garrido, *La institución correccional en México: Una mirada extraviada* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1990); Ceniceros and Garrido, *La delincuencia infantil*, first part. An early description in Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México*, 41-46. See also Borrás, *A mano armada*, 13.

⁵⁹ Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza, “Los Olvidados,” ed. Luis Buñuel (Mexico City: 1950); Hayner, “Criminogenic zones,” 436. See also Macedo, *La criminalidad en México: Medios de combatirla*, 30.

⁶⁰ Ceniceros and Garrido, *La delincuencia infantil*, 65. Parents’ alcoholism, genetic degeneration, and other stock criminological explanations were also added to the list. Ceniceros and Garrido, *La delincuencia infantil*, 62, 63, 75. See also Macedo, *La criminalidad en México: Medios de combatirla*, 14-15.

Youth gangs have indeed been a defining feature of criminality in twentieth-century Mexico City. Particularly since the 1970s, the *chavos banda* in the poor suburbs of the city, such as the western hills of Santa Fé, represented a threat of violence and theft associated with drugs and rock and roll. The state seemed helpless: minors' sections in the city jails, and then correctional institutions, exhibited violence, precocious and coercive sexual activities, and drug consumption that mirrored adults' institutions, and further demonstrated long-standing views about prisons as schools of crime rather than places of regeneration.⁶¹ Reformist ideas about juvenile delinquency introduced other professionals, besides lawyers, into the institutional setting of punishment, but the change only created an additional factor of uncertainty for those mentioned earlier.

Yet, seen from inside, these gangs could have positive functions, thus suggesting caution in defining them simply as criminals. For Lewis's informants, membership in their Tepito *vecindad* gang was a matter of local pride: fighting boys' gangs from nearby streets, keeping local girls protected at dances, sharing jokes and stories. Ranks in the gang were based on strength and the skill to fight. Girls also had their gangs, similar to those of boys in their ambivalent combination of intimidation and solidarity.⁶² Many practices associated with juvenile delinquency are convincingly explained as the result of strategies of survival in an unstable labor market where the street was an extension of sociability and economic activities ideally set at home or the workshop. Informal activities, such as commerce and services offered by porters or journeymen, provided ready access to short-term income. For minors in particular, street commerce of newspapers, lottery tickets, stolen goods, and even drugs was common.⁶³

As causes of juvenile delinquency, these economic factors were mediated by accommodations within working-class households. Testimonies and studies contend that the crimes committed by minors were the end result of abuses and neglect at home. Children were pushed out of their house by younger siblings, by fathers abandoning one household to move to another, and by frequent use of violence, including sexual abuse, by parents or other family member.⁶⁴ Poor children's visible presence in the urban labor market reflected the demands over their work: for the older ones, particularly boys, bringing home money from work in the street was an imperative of the household

⁶¹ Guillermo Mellado, *Belén por Dentro y por Fuera* (Mexico City: Cuadernos Criminalia, 1959); Roumagnac, *Los criminales en México* A more recent, still negative review of correctional institutions in Azaola Garrido, *La institución correccional*; Azaola Garrido, *Los niños de la correccional* According to the 1871 Penal Code, "correctional prison" could be applied to nine-year-olds if they acted "con discernimiento." Martínez de Castro, *Código penal 1871*, art. 127, 257.

⁶² Borrás, *A mano armada*, 126-27, 63. For the multiple illegal activities engaged by gangs, Aguilar, *Los metodos*, 15; Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 37, 73, 144-45, 384, 29, 84. For early testimonies of youth gangs *El Imparcial*, 1 Jul. 1908, p. 7.

⁶³ Reyes Domínguez and Rosas Mantecón, *Los usos de la identidad*, 46, 56; *El Imparcial*, 8 Jan. 1900, p. 3; Azaola Garrido, *Los niños de la correccional*, 35; Ceniceros and Garrido, *La delincuencia infantil*, 113-18. On the informal sector see de la Peña, "Corrupción e informalidad," On the negative impact of industrialization on juvenile delinquency, Eric H. Monkkonen, *The Dangerous Class: Crime and Poverty in Columbus, Ohio, 1860-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1975), 84.

⁶⁴ Azaola Garrido, *Los niños de la correccional*, 40-41; Ceniceros and Garrido, *La delincuencia infantil*, 98-100, 09, 21. A family narrative in Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez* An example in AJ-RS, 281, 596570, 19v, 1909.

economy; for girls, domestic labor, particularly child care, imposed hard conditions and generated conflicts over the legitimacy of step-parents demands on their labor.⁶⁵

The social impact of juvenile delinquency, and its connection with gender violence, can be best examined, therefore, in a specific locale. Certain zones of the city have been well-known for its gangs, but *barrio* Tepito stands out as one where literary and ethnographic testimony make a closer look possible. Such research provides a useful balance against the temptation to identify poverty with disrupted families and crime, documenting instead the urban poor's efforts to maintain strong social and affective networks in spite of adverse economic and political circumstances.⁶⁶

Product of irregular settlements in the then northern outskirts of the city, Tepito has maintained its bad reputation as "the cradle of crime" throughout the century.⁶⁷ The *barrio* shared several features with other lower-class areas of the city, notably scarcity of housing, lack of urban infrastructure, and insecurity.⁶⁸ Against stereotypes, two interconnected strands of evidence, found throughout the century, become clear: First, the inhabitants of Tepito have waged a permanent struggle to obtain the infrastructure and security that the city afforded other areas of the capital, and maintained a special, informal relationship with authorities who alternatively harassed and turned a blind eye to street commerce and ancillary economic activities.⁶⁹ I mentioned above how illegality,

⁶⁵ Azaola Garrido, *La institución correccional*, 34; Hayner, "Criminogenic zones," 436-37; Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*; Azaola Garrido, *El delito de ser mujer*, 136. This was expressed in a larger number of girls defying parental authority at home, while boys committed the majority of crimes outside. Hayner, "Criminogenic zones," 433n. See also Tutino, "El desarrollo liberal,"

⁶⁶ Other areas were the *colonias* Buenos Aires, Prolongación Atlampa, *El Imparcial*, 1 Jul. 1908, p. 7; Hayner, "Criminogenic zones," These areas were simultaneously described as the poorest. But see on the conflation of poverty and crime Keith A. Bottomley, *Crime and Punishment: Interpreting the Data* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), 138. For studies of social networks see Mercedes González de la Rocha, *The Resources of Poverty: Women and Survival in a Mexican City* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994); Larissa Lomnitz, *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown* (New York: Academic Press, 1977). For paradigmatic studies on Tepito, see Oscar Lewis, *Antropología de la pobreza: cinco familias* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1969); Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez* Yet Lewis himself defined its object of study as "the culture of poverty . . . a subculture of its own" resembling in the mechanisms of its perpetuation the criminal subcultures studied by criminologists. Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, xxiv. See also Wolfgang and Franco, *The Subculture of Violence*. For a critique of Lewis based on the experience of Tepito, see Reyes Domínguez and Rosas Mantecón, *Los usos de la identidad*, 49. See also Matthew C. Gutmann, "Los hijos de Lewis: la sensibilidad antropológica y el caso de los pobres machos," *Alteridades* 4, no. 7 (1994). On the empirical weaknesses of subcultural explanations in criminology, John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21-27. See also Ian Taylor, "The Political Economy of Crime," in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, ed. Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan, and Robert Reiner (New York: Clarendon Press, 1994), 479-80. A valuable literary document is Armando Ramírez Rodríguez, *Chin-chin el teporocho*, 8. ed. ed. (Mexico: Organización Editorial Novaro, 1972).

⁶⁷ *El Imparcial*, 6 Jul. 1908, p. 4. Formerly known as Colonia de la Bolsa, the area was already considered dangerous during the Porfiriato. *El Imparcial*, 3 Jul. 1908, p. 1. For the lack of services, including policing, since its inception, *El Universal*, 28 Oct. 1920, 4; Jose Lorenzo Cossio, "Algunas noticias sobre las colonias de esta capital," *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* 47, no. 1 (1937): 31. On "criminal organizations," Appeal by Antonio Rodríguez, 11 Apr. 1914, AGN, SJ, vol. 893, exp. 4337.

⁶⁸ On housing, AHA, Policía en general, 3643, 1600, clipping from *El Imparcial*, 11 Aug. 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 350.

harassment, and corruption shaped the interactions between the *barrio* and the state. The consequence of such exchanges was an acute perception among Tepiteños of the police and judiciary as brutal, dishonest, and ineffective.⁷⁰ Second, Tepiteños have spent considerable energy trying to dispel the reputation of its neighborhood as a place of crime, and have dealt themselves with the disruptive consequences of theft and violence in their midst. Their testimonies tend to describe violence and criminality as something of the past, even as they acknowledge that the inhabitants of certain streets or tenements in the *barrio* “were all crooks, the flower of the underworld.”⁷¹

Two patterns in their responses to the problem of crime stand out. On the one hand, neighbors have organized. In addition to the issues of street commerce, public health, and housing that prompted their mobilization (particularly after the 1985 earthquake), street security has been a concern for neighborhood organizations. Their approach, in contrast with the police’s blanket treatment of the *barrio* as a criminals’ den, emphasized the need to offer treatment and alternatives to the young people who have been pushed to commit crimes because of drug addiction.⁷² On the other hand, the inhabitants of Tepito (and other areas of the city) have developed dispositions toward violence that, although feeding the bad reputation of the neighborhood, helped them structure conflict and contain crime through the use of shame. As noted above, the concern about honor seems to better explain violence between men than criminological explanations of the poor as innately violent. While Tepiteños, particularly young men, frequently fought each other, they did so to reestablish loyalties and hierarchies that strengthened, rather than undermined, the social networks embodied in gangs. The concern about the fair rules of fighting and the social value of skill in combat were symbolized and further formalized by the flourishing of boxing in the *barrio*. Against Lewis’s own interpretation (and standard views of the psychology of “the Mexican”), men and women criticized machismo and gratuitous violence.⁷³ Fighting could express local pride (when a street’s gang faced another, or the police) but also the fear of shaming. Petty theft was

⁷⁰ The animosity toward the police could lead to attacks against agents. AJ-RS, 781323; AJ-RS, 1074715, 1-2; AJ-RS, 518295; AJ-RS, 430159; AGN, SJ, vol. 891, exp. 3691 [1914]; Borrás, *A mano armada*, 160; Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 215; Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 216. Among multiple examples of neighbors responding to theft and detaining suspects, AJ-RS, 434207. Early responses against the *barrio*’s reputation in *El Imparcial*, 4 Jul. 1908, p. 8.

⁷¹ Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 145, 397; Reyes Domínguez and Rosas Mantecón, *Los usos de la identidad*, 34. For the local pride of Tepiteños, Borrás, *A mano armada*, 33.

⁷² Reyes Domínguez and Rosas Mantecón, *Los usos de la identidad*, 118-19, 27; Vélez-Ibañez, *Rituals of Marginality*, 88. For early examples of organizations of neighbors to prevent crime see 27 signatures to Consejo Superior de Salubridad, 13 Apr. 1901, AHA, Policía en general, 3642, 1420; and AHA, Policía en general, 3644, 1686. For neighbors’ reluctance to involve the police AJ-RS, 281, 596570. Other examples, including the use of violence or private security, in Borrás, *A mano armada*, 18, 40-41, 160, 65; Patricia Safa Barraza, *Vecinos y vecindarios en la ciudad de México: Un estudio sobre la construcción de las identidades vecinales en Coyoacán, D.F.* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1998), 233, 37. For the routine absence and periodic aggressiveness of the police in lower-class colonias, and neighbors organization Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 215-16.

⁷³ A bad temper was not a sign of criminality, but a resource that could be channeled in boxing. Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 174-75. See also, Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 203, 385. Against machismo Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 233, 390. For critical views of the category, by scholars and informants, see Gutmann, *The Meaning of Macho*, 25. On boxing replacing other forms of violence, Salvador Novo, *Viajes y ensayos*, 1. ed. ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 1:33.

condemned by neighbors and could mean, for transgressors, the loss of social capital. Shaming, in any case, was more effective than the police in restoring the property and safety challenged by crimes.⁷⁴

Conclusions

Instead of a grand narrative of crime in twentieth-century Mexico City, this paper has emphasized continuities in criminal practices and social perceptions. Juvenile delinquency and gender violence present considerable stability in spite of much public attention, at least in the case of the first problem. Even more politically charged problems, such as drugs and police corruption, have existed since at least the early post-revolutionary period, if not before—thus challenging the apparent novelty suggested by crime rates.

Throughout this paper I have tried to be quite explicit about the sources that constitute “crime” in contemporary eyes: official statistics, the *nota roja*, word-of-mouth information, and the testimonies of prisoners and inhabitants of the city.⁷⁵ In spite of their biases, it has been my premise that, if interrogated critically, these sources talk about a single object. Out of this reading emerge several features of crime in twentieth-century Mexico City:

- the police and judiciary have been perceived by the population as sources of insecurity and unfair harassment rather than protection;
- corruption among the different representatives of the state involved with crime prevention and punishment have become a factor of crime by reducing the perceived cost of transgression, offering several ways to escape prosecution, and discouraging victims and their communities from denouncing crimes;
- gendered violence against women and children remains a widespread pattern although one that has not been fully addressed in its impact on other, more visible criminal practices, such as juvenile delinquency;
- urban communities have dealt with crime through informal mechanisms, such as shaming, that avoid or make a selective use of penal institutions.

As tentative as these hypotheses are, certain trends that can be deduced from the previous analysis. At the cost of being labeled an optimist (a grave accusation against a historian), I contend that civil society in Mexico City will continue to find multiple and increasingly effective ways to deal with the problem of crime, including but not limited to prompting the state to fulfill its obligation to afford security and justice to citizens. Victims, particularly women, seem increasingly willing to face prejudice and institutional

⁷⁴ For the “bad reputation” of thieves, Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 296. Lewis’s informants showed how this sense of shame was internalized: stealing from “a high-society lady” could be legitimate, but the habit of stealing and squandering the money turned one into a “bad egg”; spending “hot money” at home was sinful Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 206, 199, 209, 382. Prison caused shame, even if it did not correspond to actual crimes. Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 231-32. On the importance of gossip, and the respect of the community, Lewis, *The Children of Sánchez*, 313, 94. On shaming see Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*; John Braithwaite, “Shame and Modernity,” *The British Journal of Criminology* 33, no. 1 (1993).

⁷⁵ On the importance of word-of-mouth knowledge in shaping attitudes toward crime see Borrás, *A mano armada*, 12.

inertia to fight against abuse. One reason for optimism is the resilience of urban communities that have dealt with crime and other social problems through more than a century, without falling into a state of anomie, as sociologists used to expect from modernization, or succumbing to the temptation of rioting and other forms of unfocused collective violence.⁷⁶ In spite of all their problems, Tepiteños seem to still be strongly identified with the *barrio*. Urban communities, of course, are not impervious to change, but the evidence thus far suggests that they can adapt their organizations and relations with the state to changing criminal practices.

The recent increase in crime rates had the positive effect of placing the problem of crime at the center of public debate, thus attracting multiple actors to talk about the state's obvious failure to deal with it. This could lead to electoral success for supporters of "strong hand" or "zero tolerance" approaches against criminals. Such views, paradoxically, often coexist with strategies that encourage a managerial approach, through privatization of security services, and a more specialized intervention of the state against certain crimes.⁷⁷ Yet, since the majority of the inhabitants of the city risk themselves becoming suspects on an everyday basis, and are aware of the inequalities of privatized security, we can expect a skeptical attitude from civil society—one indirectly portrayed in the photographs of negotiations at *delegaciones*. Building a perspective between a state that is less powerful than it is willing to recognize, and criminal practices that make violence an inevitable part of everyday life, a historical perspective can help civil society find more inclusive responses to crime.

⁷⁶ But for food riots during the hardest years of the Revolution, see Report to Inspección General de Policía, 18 Jul. 1915, AHA, Policía en general, 3645, 176; John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Ramírez Plancarte, *La ciudad de México*, 427, 525; Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, "Desabasto, hambre y respuesta política, 1915," in *Instituciones y ciudad. Ocho estudios históricos sobre la ciudad de México*, ed. Carlos Illades and Kuri Ariel Rodríguez (Mexico City: FP-SONES-Unios, 2000).

⁷⁷ For the changing relationship between crime and politics, see Cohen, "Crime and Politics," An early formulation of the dilemma in Mexico, and an argument for social participation against stigmatization, speech of Lic. Medellín Ostos to the Primer Congreso Criminológico y Penitenciario Mexicano, *El Universal*, 12 Oct. 1923, 4. An analysis of managerial approaches in David Garland, "The Limits of the Sovereign State: Strategies of Crime Control in Contemporary Society," *British Journal of Criminology* 36, no. 4 (1996).

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Figure 1:



Nacho López, “Man and police in delegación,” Mexico City, 1954, in .John Mraz, *Nacho López, Mexican Photographer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 134.

Figure 2:



Carlos G. Vélez-Ibañez, *Rituals of Marginality: Politics, Process, and Culture Change in Urban Central Mexico, 1969-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 83.