

Drug War Capitalism from Central America to the United States: Examining the Militarization of Everyday Urban Life

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“When you live in Honduras, you quickly learn that anywhere and anything is better, but then you get to Mexico and you understand that hell extends beyond Honduras.”

– a migrant to a U.S. journalist at the Washington Office on Latin America (2014)¹

“[T]he drug circuit and its many wars—those openly declared and those that are silenced—are being fought in the streets of San Salvador, San Pedro Sula, Iguala, Tampico, Los Angeles and Hempstead. They are not a problem circumscribed to a small geographic area. The roots and reach of the current situation branch out across hemispheres and form a complex global network whose size and real reach we can’t even imagine. It’s urgent that we begin talking about the drug war as a hemispheric war, at least—one that begins in the Great Lake of the northern United States and ends in the mountains of Celaque in southern Honduras.”

- Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017)

On June 30th, 2014, former U.S. president Barack Obama made an unusual move of writing to congressional leaders during a summer session break, calling for \$3.7 billion in foreign aid to address an “urgent humanitarian situation” that had unfolded in the country’s southwestern border². For an administration midway through its second term, the sudden surge in refugee Central American children—including over 102,000 unaccompanied minors who had crossed into Texas’s Rio Grande Valley between April 2014 and August 2015³—was a source of international embarrassment and condemnation among elites from both sides of the political aisle, as much from conservative Republicans (who blamed years of lax border security) as his time-honed Democratic colleagues (many of whom adopted the militarist lingo of blaming local countries’ ‘institutional capacity’ and ‘weak rule of law’). It was, as a matter of speech, a classic case of chickens coming home to roost: the vast majority of these racialized ‘alien minors’ had come from the three contiguous ‘Northern Triangle’ nations of Honduras,

Guatemala, and El Salvador—all countries in which the U.S. military apparatus supported brutal authoritarian regimes towards the end of the Cold War.

Reflecting upon her time working as an interpreter at a New York immigration court during the height of the crisis, Mexican journalist Valeria Luiselli recently tries to connect the heart-wrenching stories of individual migrants' epic transits to the geopolitical context that gave rise to them in her book, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017). A searing critique of the United States and Mexico in their role in exacerbating what a well-respected Latin American policy organization described as 'one of the most severe humanitarian crises of the Western Hemisphere,' the book humanizes a 'situation' that briefly captured the international limelight, only to be quickly swept under the rug⁴. Buried, no doubt, by an Obama White House eager to preserve a veneer of democratic virtue and benevolence before an international audience, the child refugee crisis marked a brief moment of reckoning for the U.S. imagined community while querying the extent to which a compassionate reception of racialized foreigners fleeing violence was ever ethically imperative. Luiselli's account works against the Administration's own violent invisibilization and obfuscation strategy, documenting, for instance, the inner workings of a rushed response that included the seemingly benign creation of a 'priority juvenile docket.' Claimed as a humanitarian response that would quickly address and resolve individual cases, the docket in fact reduced the window of time child refugees had to secure legal representation—from twelve months to twenty-one days. Given that few asylum applicants were able to find a lawyer in such a short time frame (let alone while being underage and non-English speakers), over 90% were given orders for removal—hence accelerating the pace of deportations. It was a move that exemplified the

Administration's tendencies towards what Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) calls 'systemic violence'—violence that is characteristically *invisible* precisely because it is a catastrophic consequence of a smoothly functioning political and economic system.

Luiselli's account of what occurs behind the scenes, in the insular silos of immigration court, is illuminating: In one telling account, she describes her experience interpreting for one young migrant, a sixteen-year-old Honduran boy named Manú. After attempting to recruit him, members of the 18th Street gang came to him and a friend as they were leaving school; as they ran, they were pursued and shot down, and Manú's friend killed. At this point, Manú's aunt in Hempstead, Long Island (a dense, New York City exurb) fatefully arranges for a coyote that will transport Manú from Tegucigalpa to Guatemala by bus, then to southern Mexico to board a cargo train that will take him to the US border. Manú's case is supposed to be exemplary: the fact that he has a police report gives him the solid evidence he needs to successfully apply for asylum. Except that even in Manú's case, things are far from exemplary. Six months after adjusting to life in Hempstead, Luiselli once again finds herself interpreting for Manú. Upon asking him what he thinks of his new home, where he has recently enrolled in high school, he unexpectedly asserts that "Hempstead is a shithole full of pandilleros, just like Tegucigalpa⁵."

Initially shocked to have Manú's story of escape and asylum in the U.S. upturned, Luiselli goes on to describe what she realizes to be the historical and transnational continuities binding the two cities:

"Between Hempstead and Tegucigalpa there is long chain of causes and effects. Both cities can be drawn on the same map: the map of violence related to drug trafficking. This fact is ignored, however,

by almost all the official reports. The media won't put Hempstead, a city in New York, on the same plane as one in Honduras. What a scandal! Official accounts in the United States—what circulates in the newspaper or on the radio, the message from Washington, and public opinion in general—almost always locate the dividing line between 'civilization' and 'barbarity' just below the Río Grande (Luiselli, 2017)."

The unease Luiselli feels the moment Manú admits to being chased by gang members in New York highlights an inversion of a spatial imaginary that fixed violence and external threats as over *there*, far from the metropolitan north. By drawing our attention to the transnational connections tethering New York to Tegucigalpa, Luiselli and Manú complicate the Manichean spatial divisions that reify and naturalize the 'global north' as a site of development, security, and progress, above and against the unquestioned terror, savagery, and uncertainty of an endlessly warring global south. To borrow a phrase from Palestinian philosopher Edward Said, the 'imaginative geographies' of insecurity and terror typically ascribed to geopolitical regions like Central America—as made evident in the everyday representations of urban space in news, media, and film—come to expand and colonize the everyday spaces of the North American city in this re-mapping of drug war violence. Indeed, it is this unsettling re-territorialization of militarist violence across borders and transnational urban spaces—the unnerving recognition of ever-present terror that is a symptomatic condition of neoliberal urbanity today—that undergirds the affective orientation of my research.

I. Research Objectives

In examining the militarization of everyday life in interconnected cities linked through transnational networks and diasporic communities from Central America to the United States, one of my research objectives is aimed at visibilizing drug war violence and humanizing its refugees. Setting my sight on a geographic zone that begins in the Central American Northern Triangle and that proceeds as a migrant trajectory would north to Mexico and the United States, my research aims to examine how processes of militarization and securitization re-structure and re-articulate built urban landscapes and geographies, often to the detriment of quotidian life among its most precarious subalterns: the Mayan indigene, the stateless refugee, the 'extracontinental' migrant⁶, the amputated victim of the US-bound cargo trains. This research project builds from the premise that such violent geographies predicated on disciplinary technologies of everyday war, surveillance, and immobilization are increasingly salient features of a new urban counterinsurgent paradigm, or what geographer Stephen Graham calls the 'new military urbanism' (Graham, 2004; 2010). It also employs a critical geographical perspective that treats cities as more than simply locales where sociality unfolds: as social productions, they are agents in their own right, as well as meaning-filled *places* that shape and catalyze social events and transnational flows.⁷

This research project utilizes a number of analytical frameworks, building predominantly on work from critical human geography as well as ethnic, gender, refugee, border, and cultural studies. An interdisciplinary, multi-methods investigation that recognizes the numerous overlaps and divergences between the region's distinct historical geographies, it seeks to critically re-narrate, re-map, even re-envision a set of socially and economically polarized

geographies comprised of distinct diasporic and colonial legacies and imagined communities. In examining the crossover of everyday forms of militarism and urbanism in key sites of a hemispheric drug war, I borrow from recent critical, interdisciplinary and transnational projects that utilize critical *juxtaposition* as a method for foregrounding otherwise naturalized and invisibilized exercises of socio-spatial control (Espiritu, 2014; Vora, 2015). In placing together seemingly disparate locales, histories and cultural artifacts, a practice of ‘critical juxtaposing’ enables a reading of state violence, militarism, and war that is essential to a relational analysis across different cities and nation-states, as well as in grasping the mutually constitutive logics linking migration and displacement to violent securitization and neoliberal displacement.

This project would aim to juxtapose, on the one hand, 1) a cultural and discursive analysis of government and security-related documents, including legislation, newspaper articles, and police-military propaganda, with 2) ethnographic material from participant observation, interviews, and field notes in strategic cities along the migrant trail (in Honduras, Mexico, and the U.S.). In recognizing the numerous divergences and convergences between the region’s assorted historical geographies, urban structures, and border regimes, this investigation is committed to a relational analysis of (in)security and Central American migration in three urban nodes along a typically traversed migrant route: San Pedro Sula, Honduras; Tapachula, Chiapas; and San Diego, California⁸. Moreover, in jointly positioning these two modes of knowledge acquisition (i.e. cultural analysis of security documents with critical urban ethnography), the project aims to illuminate the back-and-forth relationships between urbanism, militarism, and neoliberalism in the built everyday landscape.

II. Drug War Capitalism in the Western Hemisphere

Since the ‘war on drugs’ was first declared by the Nixon Administration in 1971⁹, in the aftermath of worldwide insurrections and numerous urban insurgencies, it has become a normalized part of everyday discourse and culture in the Americas, deeply shaping political horizons and socio-spatial imaginaries. Not until the Reagan Administration’s revamped drug war in the 1980’s, however, did the drug war become mainstreamed into the parlance of average US American households, dominating popular culture in the form of newspaper headlines, films, and TV shows (Marez, 2004). As the drug war continued to shape popular conceptions of racially segregated cities and border towns—the types of ‘vulnerable’ geographies analyzed here—it arguably became one of the hemisphere’s greatest purveyors of racial capitalist violence, implicated in the expansion of the police state and the sweeping criminalization and incarceration of Black and Brown urban migrants and diasporic subjects (Alexander, 2011; Camp & Heatherton, 2016; Camp, 2016).

As some scholars have suggested, the drug war was also a form of ‘low-intensity’ counterinsurgency that paralleled the U.S. military establishment’s proxy wars in Central America, where it continued an over century-long legacy of imperial intervention, backing brutal, military regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador, destabilizing the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and training and supporting anti-Sandinista Contras and death squads in Honduras (Pine, 2008; Alexander, 2011). Built on lessons learned from open warfare in Southeast Asia (for which the televised spectacle of war was at least partly responsible for its domestic backlash), the Pentagon’s anti-communist containment strategy in the isthmus, known as the low-intensity conflict (LIC) doctrine, eventually developed into a blueprint for all

types of conflicts, including counternarcotics operations in cities and the border towns (Dunn, 1997). As a broadly defined geopolitical strategy aimed at dealing with a growing number of 'limited' conflicts involving guerrilla militants, urban insurgents, and other sub-state actors, LIC doctrine also encompassed issues not previously considered military domains, including antidrug operations, peacekeeping missions, and immigration enforcement. Indeed, when Reagan's 1986 National Security Decision Directive designated drug trafficking a threat to US national security, the drug war, in a sense, enabled a strategic approach originally 'battle-tested' in Central America to militarize more social and geographical corners of the hemisphere. As Timothy Dunn (1997) notes in his comprehensive monograph on the militarization of the US-Mexico border, the drug war provided ample cover for the repatriation of LIC doctrine, which in turn helped facilitate the militarization of everyday urban life by blurring the divisions between national defense operations and law enforcement. From its use in the rural highlands in Guatemala to the urban theater of San Salvador, and from the Honduras-Nicaragua border (where Contras were armed against the Sandinista government) to the US-Mexico border, it can be said that low-intensity counterinsurgency has always been applied to a wide range of 'unconventional' geographies of warfare.

To use a phrase famously attributed to Henry Kissinger, it's argued that the sort of "constructive blurring"¹⁰ low-intensity conflict doctrine helped mediate during the Reagan-era drug war continues to inform developments in the Western Hemisphere, even as international attention has shifted, yet again, to a different geopolitical war zone in Southwest Asia. As with the Central American refugee crisis, a politics of visibility is at play in determining what is seen as 'war,' defining which subjects are worthy of redressed grievances and incorporation into the

nation-state. In over fifteen years of wars against ‘terror’ in Afghanistan and Iraq, drug war-based counterinsurgency (what Dunn calls the ‘war for all seasons’) has only expanded the reach of narco-violence in the Americas, mediating war’s entry into everyday public domains in ways previously unimaginable. With war being declared against luminous specters such as terrorism, drugs, gangs, and immigration, the boundless, seemingly interminable nature of these contemporary wars also suggests that the very nature of warfare itself has been reconfigured, blurred, and made increasingly difficult to define. In the case of the drug war in the Western Hemisphere, its recent expansion within the Northern Triangle and Mexico in some ways evidences the flexible, mobile, and unfixed nature of the new forms of militarized conflict. My aim, however, isn’t simply to assert a statement such as “the drug war really *is* a war (in spite of the fact we’re made to think that it’s not),” but rather to draw attention to the various forms of socio-economic, spatial, and epistemic violence perpetrated in its name.

In her exhaustive, journalistic exposé on the drug war in Mexico, Central America, and Colombia, journalist Dawn Paley coins the term “drug war capitalism” in order to draw our attention to the fact that the drug war is, and always has been, a political economic development inextricable from the forces of capitalist (post)modernity. I would argue that it’s also a juxtapositional coupling of terms meant to re-direct our gaze to what’s typically (dis)missed in the narratives of the drug war, even when scholars, at times, capture the transnational dimensions of drug trafficking, or the economic factors involved in drug consumption, or trafficking as a means of subsistence. Far from being a redundant emphasis of these factors, *drug war capitalism*, as a re-articulation of terms, underscores an understanding that the drug war *isn’t* merely the illicit underside of a normally-functioning market economy,

as implied by hegemonic drug war narratives. In fact, according to Paley, the drug war has hardly much to do with actual drug consumption and policy at all, being itself the 'fix' to the contradictions of late modern capitalism through a combination of terror and security-based policymaking, which altogether create the conditions for forcible displacement, land and resource expropriations, and neocolonial occupation by multinationals. To speak of drug war capitalism, then, is to speak of a particular, if not especially bloody, manifestation of a global neoliberal order that, as geographer David Harvey (2005) notes, was ascendant in the final decade of the Cold War. As a matter of fact, a point typically forgotten in drug war scholarships is the role trade liberalization and austerity politics played, not only in the polarization of wealth and the apartheid restructuring of U.S. and Latin American cities, but also in the immiseration that fueled migrant flows from Central America and southern Mexico in the years leading up to the 1994 enactment of NAFTA and Operation Gatekeeper (Brignoli, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Massey & Denton, 1998)¹¹. Then, as now, the drug war and LIC doctrine provided another means to police and manage the 'surplus' populations of the racialized neoliberal poor, a model tailored at the types of insurgencies that would define the post-socialist, new world order.

Rather than signifying an abrupt end to the nuclear, communist threats of a bygone era, the multiplicity of amorphous criminal networks operating in the Northern Triangle, Mexico, and the U.S. today suggest a more fragmented, decentralized, and unpredictable security landscape. As cross-border, black market trade continues to function within and across geographic scales of state, region, and municipality, many underground networks have also re-spatialized their operations in the face of diverse and overlapping security regimes, adapting their functions amid changing optics of (in)visibility and (il)legibility. More pointedly, one can

consider how counterinsurgent LIC doctrine was first tested through proxy warfare in Central America, disrupting and distorting modernist binaries, including differences between domestic and foreign, friend and foe, war and peace. These obfuscations, moreover, relied on ‘postmodernized’ technologies of war, with cultural knowledge being an increasingly indispensable arena for militarized engagements and the manufacturing of consent, fear, and paranoia (Dunn, 1996; Chomsky and Herman, 1988). Over time, as the isthmus receded into the background of geopolitics with the end of the Cold War and the signing of peace agreements, the U.S. would nevertheless continue to use the Northern Triangle and its civilians as part of the ‘empire’s workshop’—using structural adjustment programs, militarized deterrence policies, and the mass deportation of tens of thousands of MS-13 and Barrio 18 gang members (Grandin, 2007; Schivone, 2013).

In the post-9/11 period, these counterinsurgencies were deliberately blurred as militarized security became the ad hoc solution to most of the economic and political crises of the region. Interestingly, U.S. imperial influence and security presence expanded even amid the qualified absence of ‘war’ or a clearly-defined enemy. This is evidenced, for instance, in the ways low-intensity approaches were used against Central American *maras*, Colombian and Mexican cartels, and against migrants along the Mexico-U.S. border and racialized communities in North American cities. With the blurring of imprecise threats of narcotraffickers, gangs, immigrants, and terrorists, the same panacea of militarized security was offered, even against a different set of threats and landscapes—whether or not the goal was the pursuit of drug lords, gang leaders, or Othered immigrants, and whether or not these security operations were mobilized in Andean mountains, Mexican jungles, urban peripheries or transit infrastructure. In

the early 2000s, at a time when international attention was centered on imperialist engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, LIC doctrine—first used in the dirty wars, and repatriated through the U.S. drug war—was deployed again as a blueprint for *Mano Dura* (“iron fist”) laws in the Northern Triangle as the three countries attempted to deal with the insecurity that flourished under growing networks of gangs like the MS-13 and Barrio 18. Despite their adoption of legal rhetoric based on U.S. anti-terrorist and anti-crime law, including the 2001 PATRIOT Act and the 2005 ‘Gangbuster’ bill¹², *Mano Dura*’s controversial, strong-armed approach—which involved exploiting civilians’ everyday fears while empowering governments to terrorize, surveil, and punish with impunity criminalized youth—ultimately proved catastrophic to social cohesion, sewing distrust and rage as an arms race¹⁷ between authoritarian militarized security forces and the *maras* (gangs) escalated everyday violence (Pine, 2008; Zilberg, 2011; Paley, 2014; Camp & Heatherton, 2016).

At a time when international attention was centered on imperialist engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. also experimented with a new drug war strategy¹³ that consisted of paramilitarizing those regions dominated by cartels and the narcotics trade. Building on the Reagan Doctrine’s blueprint for ‘low-intensity’ warfare, the drug war in the Andes—turned into a U.S.-backed imperial conflict with the enshrinement of Plan Colombia (2000)—fine-tuned the art of psychological and cultural warfare first stealthily pioneered in the Central American dirty wars, effectively turning the moral crusade against ‘narco-terrorism’ into a pretext for expanding military influence under the banner of humanitarian and security cooperation aid. However, rather than stemming the flow of illicit drugs into the U.S., the ensuing cat-and-mouse game of securitization simply re-spatialized those activities, with cartels expanding their

foothold in post-NAFTA Mexico—and, later, post-CAFTA Central America—as they exploited the vulnerability and chaos of economic shocks. By 2006, following a hard-fisted security campaign, president Felipe Calderón co-opted the counter-narcotics discourse of the north and declared Mexico’s own drug war—a campaign that quickly accelerated the number of armed military personnel in burgeoning border cities like Tijuana and Juárez (Grayson, 2006). This was, in fact, only the beginning of a U.S.-led resurgence in the power of military and paramilitary forces as the U.S. took a leading role in pushing multilateral security agreements like the Mérida Initiative (a bilateral U.S.-Mexico security agreement first passed in 2007) and CARSI (the Central America Regional Security Initiative, passed 2010). Under the mantle of counternarcotics and ‘regional security,’ Mérida and CARSI have facilitated an unprecedented, southbound transfer of military-grade arms, equipment, and personnel. As a result, the last ten years have witnessed the proliferation of new military bases and installations, newly configured elite task forces, biometric tracking equipment, drones, watchtowers, and patrol boats all dispersed along sites of strategic interest for the security state. As the region became a central hub for more than two-thirds of cocaine trafficked to the U.S.¹⁴, CARSI opened up new avenues for an expanded U.S. military presence, and mediating a state-sanctioned flow of military-grade arms, technologies, and security training. Between CARSI’s implementation in 2008 and the 2014 child refugee crisis, U.S. Congress appropriated nearly \$1.2 billion for Central American security aid¹⁵—funds that helped equip, train, and develop special operations forces, elite battalions, military police, and border patrols, among other groups.

In spite of rhetoric emphasizing ‘citizen security’ and the ‘rule of law,’ these security-based initiatives have tremendously failed in stemming narco-based violence and bloodshed,

even as they've increased state, paramilitary, and corporate power. The ever-constant reconfigurations of flexible, mobile drug cartels, *maras*, and transnational criminal organizations continue to reproduce landscapes of terror and urban warfare through decapitations, dismemberments, car bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations of journalists, community organizers, and public leaders. In response, the security state's newly equipped task forces and U.S.-trained militarized forces use counterinsurgent tactics towards executing the extrajudicial killings of insurgent activists, dispossessed campesinos, and gang members. Yet such gory displays of spectacular violence hardly tell the full story of the realities faced by people in their everyday lives, as suggested by the mind-boggling statistics since the start of the Mexican and Central America drug wars. In Mexico, to date, the over decade-old drug war has claimed over 100,000 lives, with over 27,000 disappearances. In the Northern Triangle, the homicide rate of the mid-2010s is commensurate with, if not surpassing, the levels of the brutal 1980s civil wars, forcing at least 9% of the region's population to flee the region¹⁶. As always in a context of white supremacist racial capitalism, neocolonialism, and (cishetero)patriarchy, such dramatic rupture and violence has especially come at the expense of the region's most marginalized populations, overseeing the mass displacement of rural mestizo, Indigenous, and Afro-Caribbean communities, to say nothing of the drug war's heavily documented acceleration of femicides and minoritized gender and sexual groups (Luibheid,2002; Fregoso, 2003; Wright, 2011) .¹⁷ Additionally, all the across the region, a lethal mix of extractive industries, climate disasters, and private security subcontractors have manufactured new bio- and necropolitical regimes of precarity and risk, displacing an untold number of internal refugees into unplanned, and rapidly growing, urban peripheries.

Despite the undeniable and tremendously expensive failures of counternarcotics and *mano dura* programs in stemming the flow of violence across the hemisphere, an unquestioned faith in the coercive powers of the security state continues to drive ongoing policies. How, then, can one explain the iterative dance between manufactured ‘crime’ and discourses of ‘security,’ wherein crime begets more security begets more crime *ad infinitum*? An analytic of drug war capitalism suggests that, rather than being examples of ‘failed states’ and malfunctioning economies, these supposed failures of security in the region are part and parcel of structured capitalist and imperialist demands for the control of populations and resources. In other words, the terror, fear, and quotidian insecurity perpetuated by drug war and state and corporate aggression is structured strategy for the reinforcement of socio-spatial control—either by restricting mobility (thus dampening resistance) or compelling communities to flee (thus opening up new territories for capital accumulation).¹⁸

Working within a neoliberal framework of ‘creative destruction,’ which actively calls for the disaccumulation and subsequent reconstitution of new markets¹⁹, security initiatives like Mérida and CARSI work predominately to enforce counterinsurgent control in ways that benefit the interests of local elites and transnational capital, including foreign banks and extractive industries (e.g. oil, gas, and mining). Take, for instance, the case of the Northern Triangle states less than a decade after passage of the 2006 Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR)—time during which an explosion of CARSI-funded military and police forces escalated the number of disappearances and assassinations of community organizers, journalists, and virtually anyone willing to defend native territorial rights against militarized control²⁰. In Honduras, where a 2009 coup deposed center-left president Manuel Zelaya²¹, the newly

installed, U.S.-backed conservative government quickly proceeded to, on one end, dole out land and resource concessions to multinational extractive companies, while on the other, deploy military police throughout the country to quell the massive anti-coup resistance—using, of course, gang and drug violence as sources of legitimacy. What succeeded in the years following the post-coup shock in the quintessential ‘banana republic’²² was an unparalleled militarization of cities and the countryside, enabled in large part by CARSI funds, weapons, and training in collaboration with a panoply of different U.S. defense and security agencies.²³ As with disaster capitalism more generally, the militarization accompanying this ‘shock therapy’ complemented mass deregulation of social and environmental protections as well as privatization of the commons, with much of the land pilfered from sovereign indigenous territories.²⁴ Tellingly, the recurrent coupling of trade liberalization and militarized borders—from NAFTA and Operation Gatekeeper to CAFTA and CARSI today—underscores the neoliberal state’s prerogative in creating conditions for the relatively free circulation of capital while sorting out those deemed expendable nonpersons. In 2014, months after the spotlight from the refugee crisis had waned, the Northern Triangle states made explicit affirmations linking security with the integration of markets by signing another agreement with the U.S.—the ‘U.S. Strategy for Central America’—as well as an ‘Alliance for Prosperity’ agreement with multinational banks that included, among other things, institution-building programs to fight drug crimes, sections on border and infrastructure modernization, stipulations for foreign direct investment, even an initiative towards introducing natural gas pipelines.²⁵

III. The Post-9/11 Militarization of Urban Space and the ‘New’ Urban Counterinsurgency

On July 7, 2014, as the Mexican and U.S. governments struggled to contain the public relations nightmare engendered by the Central American refugee crisis, the Peña Nieto Administration quietly announced the inauguration of a new initiative in Mexico—*Plan Frontera Sur* (PFS), or the Southern Border Program—that had the putative goal of restoring ‘order’ and modernizing immigration controls along the infamously ‘porous’ Chiapas-Guatemala border²⁶. No city was as affected as the border town of Tapachula, which has, because of its proximity, served as a transit node for U.S.-bound migrants for decades, and in addition to being one of the state’s most populous and rich cities, also has the dishonorable distinction of hosting the largest detention facility south of the Río Grande²⁷. However, very little reporting was to emerge in the international media about this touchstone development in the Western Hemisphere; the following morning, the Israeli Air Force initiated a bombing campaign against the Gaza Strip and its densely populated urban districts, marking the beginning of a bloody, 50-day offensive dubbed “Operation Protective Edge.”²⁸ In the United States, this was overshadowed yet again a month later by the burning of yet another urban agglomeration—this time, in the St. Louis, Missouri suburb of Ferguson—following the shooting of an unarmed Black youth named Michael Brown²⁹.

As distant cities around the world from one another were conspicuously attacked by militarized state forces—swept into a hyper-visible, 24-hour spectacle of ‘live’ war—the refugee crisis of Central American children quickly receded into near-oblivion in the international press, its ‘resolution’ found not in the abatement of the original conditions of violence and immiseration that forced many migrants to flee, but in a re-militarization strategy that

accentuated the geographies of terror and insecurity that have come to define exclusionary borders. For those journalists who continued to cover the crisis, the months and years following the launch of PFS witnessed an escalation of a Mexican security forces throughout the diffuse roads and transit lines that connect the Mexican southern borderlands to the isthmus—including the infamous cargo train migrants had been taking for decades, and at such great risk to life that it has been known as “the Beast” (*la Bestia*), or the “death train” (*el tren de la muerte*) (Martínez, 2013). In flagrant violation of international human rights and refugee laws, migrants reported being ‘hunted like animals’³⁰ and many more have taken unconventional routes in perilous terrain, walking along dirt roads and jungle topography, even journeying on boats along the Pacific coast in order to evade Mexico’s growing carceral immigration apparatus³¹.

Without overstating the similarities linking the securitization of Ferguson, Gaza, and Tapachula, it is not unfitting to draw connections between these otherwise distinct urban geographies. For one thing, what can be gleaned about these near-simultaneous events across national boundaries are not only the typical demonizing, racist and hyper-masculinist tropes mapped onto built terrain, but also a politics of vision and visibility regulating what is seen as violence and, hence, worthy of state remediation³². While the similarities sketched out between Black and Brown activists in the U.S. and Palestine were known, in real time, during the height of the Ferguson rebellion through the use of social media³³, a somewhat similar narrative can be drawn to Chiapas, a state known to have hosted Israeli and U.S. counter-insurgency trainings since the Indigenous-led Zapatista rebellion, and whose precarious, racialized populations have been infamously scapegoated as subhuman perpetrators of

violence³⁴. As strategic nodes of insurgency and counter-insurgency that are ever more connected within a neoliberal global order, obfuscation and deflection also played a pivotal role in the state's monopolization of violence and concomitant engineering of hegemonic security narratives.

Fortress Cities: Global Neoliberalism and the Politics of Urban (In)security

At a world historical juncture in which most of humanity now resides in cities (Davis, 2007; Graham, 2010), the importance of examining the intersections of urbanization, militarism, and neoliberalism has never been more urgent. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, an accelerated convergence of these three systems of biopolitical governmentality³⁵ has imposed new demands on people, capital, natural resources, and territories—radically reconfiguring not only the visible built landscapes, but the very *processes* of human settlement and the dynamics of sociospatial relations writ large. As it is understood here, the spatial articulations of this convergence of urbanism, militarism, and neoliberalism are both cause and effect of the breathtaking inequalities we typically associate with late capitalist globalization: from the gated communities, military bases, and export-processing centers of the elite, to the maximum-security prisons and detention centers meant to contain the criminalized poor, the discordant geographies visible in the Western Hemisphere today maintain a mutually recursive relationship with social and economic polarization. Stated differently, the geographies of uneven development visible in Central and North American cities today reflect and reinforce the tensions and contradictions wrought by what Jordan Camp and Christina Heatherton dub the 'global crisis of profitability and governance' (Camp & Heatherton, 2016).

In the context of a resurgent drug war capitalism, it's noteworthy that concerns over economic and citizen 'security' have come to take on militarist (and hyper-masculinist) undertones while simultaneously dominating the political economies of cities like San Pedro Sula, Tapachula, and San Diego. As numerous critical geographers and urbanists describe it (Davis, 1990; Wacquant, 2007; Weizman, 2007; Mbembe, 2003, 2001), one of the profound consequences of this development—the militarization of urban space—is manifest in the 'hardening' of the city surface and the production of polarized topographies consisting of, on the one hand, securitized enclaves and cordoned-off, consumerist paradises for the affluent, and on the other, disinvested barrios, slums, 'gray zones' and 'zones of abandonment' for the racialized and criminalized poor. Increasingly, efforts toward upholding urban security and socio-spatial control in the Western Hemisphere in putative wars against drug- and gang-fueled violence are marked by the liberal deployment of military-grade barricades, partitions, carceral facilities, surveillance equipment, checkpoints and roadblocks, in addition to the use of military command-and-control techniques now integrated within the functions of day-to-day policing.

Of course, these developments hardly occurred overnight, and in fact trace their origins to a transitional historical moment between the final decade of the Cold War and September 11th, 2001—a time of significant global, economic, and political re-structuring that has been associated with the experimentation and hybridization of state and corporate institutions. Indeed, urban scholar Mike Davis first presciently illuminated the intersections of urbanism and militarism in *City of Quartz* (1990), a book on the restructuring of Los Angeles published between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, during a moment of an ascendant 'new world order.' In that text, Davis described an 'unprecedented [convergence of]

urban design, architecture, and the police apparatus,' and elaborated on the ways in which security dogmas reinforced the apartheid divisions between 'fortress cities' and 'places of terror.' Undeniably, the convergences and trends he described in that pivotal moment have only accelerated, with many scholars now highlighting a number of interrelated trends and themes, including: the blurring of the military/police dichotomy and the convergence of 'high intensity policing' and 'low intensity warfare'; the increased use of zero-tolerance/Mano Dura policing models and the attendant logics of punitive containment and carcerality; the increased reliance on surveillance, tracking, and data mining systems and centralized intelligence gathering; and, in accordance with the latter, the pervasive 'technophilia' and fantasies of technological omniscience that are operative in contemporary urban security regimes (Camp & Heatherton, 2016; Graham, 2010; Wacquant, 2007).

The Security State and the Deconstruction of Modernist Binaries

Since the inauguration of LIC doctrine, the militarist spatiotemporal grammars used by security states in North America and the isthmus have arguably worked to structure and manipulate perception and visual fields—whether framed in terms of displacement, detention, deferral, or deterrence³⁶. In conjunction with a psychological warfare meant to obfuscate, disguise, contest, or invisibilize, the transitive motion and settlement of these security practices across borders also highlights an unsettling trend: a fusion of war and urban growth machines³⁷. Altogether, these trends underscore a common security-centric spatial grammar that relies on newly emergent technologies to contain, surveil, and externalize threats to national and urban imagined communities.

Following the works of scholars of border militarization, neoliberal urban policing, and critical security studies, we can outline the contours of a distinctly post-9/11 urban counterinsurgency strategy in the Western Hemisphere, one that disrupts the bifurcated strategies of socio-spatial control of the past (Dunn, 1996; Palafox, 2000; Weizman, 2007; Zilberg, 2011). Rather than constituting a seamless, monolithic 'doctrine' of security, the heterogeneous elements proposed here as part of the 'new' urban counterinsurgency suggest, instead, a hybridization of modernist binaries (e.g. foreign-domestic, military-police, internal-external) and a concomitant deconstruction and re-articulation of state security strategies. To make sense of (i.e. 'see') how these rhizomatic (postsocialist, postwar, post-9/11) security apparatuses are manifest today, we can first re-examine the dichotomous, military-police division of state security practices and paradigms from the immediate past.

In regards to military power, the U.S. military-industrial complex had, by the final decade of the Cold War, undergone various notable transformations evidenced in security documents, media representations, and public discourses. Indeed, as Dunn (1996) and subsequent scholars of border militarization and US-Central American policy have noted, much of what has been integrated into urban counterinsurgency was first battle-tested in the asymmetric, low intensity conflicts waged in Central America during the 1980's civil wars. Military strategies of low-intensity conflict (LIC) doctrine were repatriated into law enforcement operations during Reagan's revamped drug war, for instance, and a militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border negatively impacted criminalized border communities. In being tested through obscured and invisibilized 'proxy' wars, LIC doctrine also used the isthmus as a laboratory for testing new strategies of obfuscation, including downplaying the role of U.S. military

involvement in televised news outlets or using the cover of ‘humanitarianism’ to mislead the public (Chomsky and Herman, 1988). Indeed, even the phrase ‘low intensity conflict’ was arguably a public relations ploy meant to hide the brutalities of war. With the demise of the bipolar Cold War geopolitical system, a U.S national security doctrine shift known as the Revolution in Military Affairs came to encompass the newly unleashed threats of unbridled neoliberalism, including numerous non-state adversaries, informal fighters, and deterritorialized affinities and networks battling in unconventional battlespaces such as isolated border zones and densely populated cities (e.g. the Los Angeles riots, Zapatista insurgency in Chiapas, US military interventions in Sarajevo and Mogadishu)³⁸.

In the realm of ‘domestic’ policing, one can trace a set of urban policing strategies and policies in the aftermath of Nixon’s drug war declaration³⁹, including the development of ‘zero-tolerance’ policing strategies that were direct precursors to *manodurismo* in Central America, as well as the development of benign-sounding, ‘quality of life’ policing strategies reliant on indiscriminate surveillance of criminalized neighborhoods. Between its engagement in the bloody civil wars in the isthmus, and the accelerated drug war being fought at the border and the racialized ‘inner city,’ the Reagan and Clinton years also witnessed the implementation of low-intensity tactics of warfare being repatriated within the largest U.S. metropolitan centers, prompting the use of new surveillant technologies such as COMPSTAT, a geographical statistical software deployed in New York City to trace and track criminal ‘hot spots’ (Dunn, 1997; Vitale, 2008). Under mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Police Commissioner William Bratton, the deceptive appeal of James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling’s (1982) ‘broken windows’ theory of criminology was joined to neoliberal mantras of freedoms, resulting in a punitive security policy

that sought to sanitize the unsavory elements of urban street life at all costs—dramatically escalating homelessness and mass incarceration outside the protected bastions of gated shopping malls and glitzy urban centers. By the late 1990's, the purported—and now debunked—success of predictive policing had grown in tandem with a growing carceral and immigration apparatus that witnessed the deportation of Central American gang members en masse. Pressured into austerity-based restructuring of their economies, the recently established civilian democracies of Central America were poorly equipped to handle the growing influx of deportees, leading to a rapid-fire escalation of gang and drug-based violence.

After 9/11 and the beginning of the U.S.'s militarized drug war in Colombia, Giuliani and Bratton would continue to work as security consultants south of the U.S.-Mexico border, effectively exporting zero-tolerance approaches⁴⁰ and the development of a U.S.-style carcerality to the Northern Triangle (Pine, 2008; Zilberg, 2011; Paley, 2014; Camp & Heatherton, 2016). In the span of a few years, a fatigued and desperate Central American public turned to iron-fisted approaches to handle the resurgence in violence, prompting the institutionalization of *manodurismo* as the region's hegemonic security framework—albeit with bloodier and more pervasive effects. In blurring the lines between *marero* [gang member] and *terrorista* [terrorist]⁴¹, *mano dura* programs not only aggravated the long-term stability of communities in a context of rampant corruption and impunity, but also set the stage for re-militarization and further rounds of extraction, pillage, and dispossession.

Redefining the Parameters of Everyday Urbanism and War

Although cities have long been sites of military influence, intervention, and warfare⁴², according to scholar Stephen Graham (2010), what distinguishes the new political economic entanglements of militarism and urbanism today is the extent to which military ideas have been interwoven into the affairs of day-to-day metropolitan life. From the use of military technologies, strategies, and logics in the governing of daily urban affairs, to the “widespread use of war as a dominant metaphor in describing the perpetual and boundless condition of urban societies,” what’s new is the extent to which militarized techniques of tracking and targeting have come to “permanently colonize the city landscape and the spaces of everyday life in both the ‘homelands’ and domestic cities of the West as well as the world’s neo-colonial frontiers” (Graham, 2010). At a time when the meaning of warfare is itself being redefined, wars against drugs, crime, terrorism and insecurity have rendered cities across the global north-south divide battlespaces and war zones against amorphous and unbounded threats.

The militarist domination of security concerns in transnationalized urban spaces like L.A. and San Salvador creates, for Elana Zilberg, a form of ‘neoliberal securityscape’ that attempts to coerce the mobility of subjects considered ‘dangerous’ under the panoptic state. As such, there is a simultaneous blurring and reinforcement of socio-spatial boundaries: as the lines are aggressively blurred between military-police and public-private security—as with the lines between ‘terrorist,’ ‘immigrant,’ and ‘gang member’ (Paley, 2014)—there is a simultaneous reinforcement of other social and geographic hierarchies and borders that sort out distinct populations as inherently criminal (e.g. Central Americans, Muslims, Black diasporic migrants).

Just as growing female recruitment in security state agencies and gangs both unsettles *and* reifies modernist codings of military power as a site of hyper-masculinity, the fortification of urban fortresses in so-called ‘vulnerable’ landscapes and ‘inferior’ (read: racialized, feminized) urban barrios highlights another recalibration of binarized spatial norms. The deliberate muddying of the lines between military, police, and private security forces is also evidenced in the post-9/11 introduction and re-introduction of anti-delinquency *manodurista* policies and anti-terrorism legislation—including a 2013 Salvadoran law that defined *maras* as terrorist organizations, or the violent treatment of land and water protectors as threats to national security⁴³. Moreover, it is also notable in the normalized implementation of militarist command and control policing systems, biometric technologies, and data tracking software in today’s securitized urban landscapes from the U.S. to Central America⁴⁴.

***New Urban (B)orders*¹**

In terms of geopolitics, perhaps nothing spotlights the contradictory impulse of these blurred boundaries and interests as much as border cities, which straddle the intersection of local and federal interests⁴⁵. In fact, one could reasonably argue that no discussion of urban counterinsurgency would be sufficient without an examination of the fungibility of borders across a multitude of scales⁴⁶. Without question, the post-9/11 expansion of a homeland security industry has led to a proliferation of militarized borders around the planet as states attempt to control circulations of capital and people, even as urban development has

¹ The subtitle is meant to draw attention to recursive strategies of spatial organization: the placing of borders *within* cities, urbanization *along* border zones, as well as the enactment of ‘order’ in urban space through policing, surveillance, risk management, urban planning, and mapping.

stubbornly crisscrossed municipal and national boundaries under neoliberal globalization (Klein, 2007; Brown, 2010). At the level of the nation-state, security-driven paranoia has prompted a build-up of new lines of defense in protection of the U.S. security state—a ‘pushing out,’ or externalization, of a militarized border that, according to Richard Dyer (2005), that can be read as emblematic of white masculinity and efforts to exert control over the presumed, vulnerable permeability of the (feminized) landscape. Such example of what Harsha Walia (2013) calls ‘border imperialism’ is evidenced, moreover, in the untrammled build-up of newer, smaller (and less visible) military bases and the ongoing usurpation and dispossession of indigenous territories.

Legitimized under the mantle of counter-narcotic efforts, the buildup of so-called ‘interagency task force’ military bases at major border crossing points between Mexico and the Northern Triangle states also highlights the role of security for the neoliberal state in the purportedly *postwar* period. Just as demonized barrios have become testing grounds for necropolitical warfare against criminalized youth, state and economic violence in the form of mass sell-offs and evictions (often of ancestral, indigenous lands) have driven new circuits of motion that disrupt hitherto linear narratives of rural-to-urban migration—even challenging any notion of the drug war as a fundamentally urban problem with ties to illicit cross-border circulations. With this re-calibration of crime and security, motion and stasis, also comes a polarization of built landscapes as resource-based conflicts and bloodshed spill over into new territories—a neoliberal reality that has given rise to a kaleidoscopic fragmentation of fortified enclaves with the tacit encouragement of one of Mesoamerica’s few legal growth industries, private security. This ‘pushing in’ of visible and invisible walls within the cityscape also takes

place at a time local and global elites have sought new (dis)accumulation schemes in the form of economic development zones, or so-called ‘model cities,’ envisioned as blank slates for the testing of libertarian fantasies⁴⁷.

Altogether, the expansion and modulation of bio- and necropolitical borders across the interior of binational conurbations (e.g. San Diego-Tijuana and Tapachula-Ciudad Hidalgo-Tecún Umán) and other postmodern urban assemblages re-directs our attention to the uneven geographical economies of drug war capitalism. To truly tackle the question of insurgent and counter-insurgent cities thus requires a robustly critical theorization of unjust geographies.

IV. Race, Space, Power and Difference: Critical Human Geography and the (Re)production of Militarized Urban Spaces

In critical social theory, to suggest a correlation between race, space, gender, and class is to suggest something that has become a nearly universally accepted tautology—if for no other reason than that it’s everywhere *observable*. From determining the proximity of subaltern bodies to environmental contaminants and quality health care and educational services, to determining where one is able to raise children, amass wealth, and build transgenerational futures, markers of human difference structure life chances and belongingness in place, and both race and space have a palpable physicality that can make essentialist, a-historic readings of the world quite seductive (see Lipsitz, 2011; Razack, 2002). In endeavoring to understand how the new urban counterinsurgency defines and reproduces geographies of violence and domination under twenty-first century drug war capitalism, my research conscientiously builds on a long genealogy of Marxist, feminist, post-structuralist literatures that denaturalize dominant, post-Enlightenment understandings of place, race, and

gender as static, self-evident signifiers. In turning to the varied scholarship of academics and writers examining the intersections of race, space, gender, nationality, and other categories of human difference—scholarship that includes works by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Laura Pulido, Katherine McKittrick, and Sherene Razack—my aim is to use an intersectional politics of heterogeneity⁴⁸ to (re)articulate an insurgent counter-space to geographies of violence and domination.

Rethinking Spatial Epistemology

It is undeniable that the increased centrality of geography and spatial matters across a wide terrain of disciplines and subject matters—part of the so-called '*spatial turn*' in the social sciences (Soja, 2007)—has provided new openings for rethinking state violence, warcraft, and the everyday workings of racism, sexism, and classism. In recent decades, critical human geographers have advocated a rethinking of space as a product of interrelations, politics, and history; as a site of everyday practices, meaning-making, and boundary-construction; as the sphere of possibility, plurality, and heterogeneity; and as an open-ended and un-determined locus of relationality (Massey, 2005; Hart, 2002). The opening of spatial and disciplinary boundaries both catalyzed and represented by *critical* human geography also defines it precisely by what it's not—a recapitulation of dominant forms of spatial knowledge, epitomized by the maps, globes, urban grids, and regional studies approaches of a dominant, institutionalized Geography.

In the late 1960's, at a moment when decolonization struggles were reaching their boiling point and galvanizing numerous urban insurgencies around the world, French

poststructuralists like Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault began promoting constructivist models of space that highlighted, among other things, the importance of subjectivity, ideology, and power/knowledge. While notably lacking in analyses of race, gender, colonialism, and imperialism, the constructivist models they developed nevertheless re-invigorated discussions of space as not only the site of physical materiality—the static, ‘dead’ background upon which social life unfolds—but also as a site of movement, permeability, and change, amenable to novel reorganizations and representations. In unsettling the fixed, ecological models expounded by the Chicago school of urban sociology⁴⁹, the paradigm of space-as-social production also suggested that not only did geography reference a *physical* location in Cartesian spatial grid, but that it was also an arena for the contestation of meanings, even the raw material for the production, accumulation, and reconfiguration of capital, power, and knowledge. Their preoccupations with subject formation, ideology, and everyday life also demanded engagement with the banal workings of state and corporate power in the same way bureaucratized, invisibilized violence foreclosed possibilities for insurgent futures and counter-geographies.

For his part, Lefebvre advanced a dialectical socio-spatial analysis⁵⁰ that treated the urban environment as an *oeuvre* and susceptible to forces of materialist change⁵¹. Moreover, while his writings on space are ambiguous at best (Soja, 1989), Foucault nevertheless provided a useful rubric through which to make sense of space in relation to power/knowledge and the decentralized forms of governmentality and territorial control emerging in the form of, and in response to, neoliberal security regimes⁵². In particular, Foucault’s concept of *heterotopia*⁵³—defined as a heterogeneous space “capable of *juxtaposing* in a single real place several spaces,

several sites that are in themselves incompatible” [emphasis mine]—represented a concern with the workings of power/knowledge *in* and *through* space. Identified among such varied sites as the cemetery, the church, the theater, the barracks, the prison, and the colony, heterotopias are contrasted with the ‘fundamentally unreal geographical spaces’ of utopias, and as such are capable of exposing the reproduction of power and coercion through space. For Foucault, space is produced within and *through* discourse; space does not exist outside of discourse and the meanings ascribed to it, which includes politics. As such, militarized borders and urban spaces can also be thought of as heterotopias.

(Post)coloniality and The Production of Socio-Spatial Knowledges

As a bio- and necropolitical ‘abstraction’ weaponized against human difference (Gilmore, 2002), racism is a central framework through which we know and understand certain geographies, making violence against marginal spaces easier to dismiss, ignore, or conveniently forget. From the punitive containment of migrants as ‘invaders’ to the nation-state, to the necropolitical strategies of ‘deterrence’ that have attempted to absolve any state responsibility along the desert terrain of the US-Mexico border zone—now widened to include the body counts along the Mexican territorial gauntlet currently being paramilitarized under Mérida Initiative and Plan Frontera Sur⁵⁴—a deadly logic of externalization continues to underpin today’s Manicheanism, which divides the (neo)colonial world between securitized and technologized enclaves of the ‘haves,’ and the zones of liminality, peril, and confusion of the ‘have-nots.’ To understand where these dichotomous constructions of space originate, I turn to the postcolonial writings of Frantz Fanon, Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, and María Lugones.

Notably, in an early chapter *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon aptly describes the nature of violence in the colonial world, highlighting the recursive relationship between bordered space, policing, and militarism in noting that “[the] dividing line, the border, is represented by the barracks and the police stations.” In describing the features of violence upon which the entire colonial edifice is structured, Fanon’s work suggests that monopolized state violence in the form of the police and military is needed to define and enforce the Manichean divisions of the colonial world, with its numerous binaries of colonizer and colonized, ‘East’ and ‘West,’ urban and rural. Within this (b)ordering system, colonial, racial, and gender difference marked principles by which humanity was known, classified, and managed, actualizing imagined cartographies that split the barbarity of ‘over there’ from the security and civility of spaces more intimately known (Mbembe, 2001; Mudimbe, 1988; Said, 1979). This deceptively simple insight—that violence coalesces at sites of racial and spatial disjuncture, at the bordered divides between powerful and disempowered—also confirms geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s assertion that one cannot study the complexities of geography, gender, and race without attending to the “fatal couplings of power and difference” (Gilmore, 2002)⁵⁵.

To understand how racism becomes, in Foucault’s terms, a technology of *biopower*—a right exercised by the territorial sovereign towards the disciplinary control, and engineered targeting, of denigrated bodies marked for injury, exploitation, and premature death—one need also understand how geography and categories of social identification and difference are mutually constructed in ways that render one or the other as illegible when dis-articulated as standalone concepts. According to Latin American postcolonial theorists Aníbal Quijano, Walter

Mignolo, María Lugones, this apparently irreducible pairing of place, race, and gender has modern origins in the post-fifteenth century restructuring of systems of knowledge under Western European imperial expansion. For Quijano, Mignolo, Lugones, and their acolytes, the transformative force of this world historical moment was underpinned by an explosion of violent engagements with human difference—not least of which included colonial and metropolitan prerogatives to surveil, define, control, and exploit such difference. At a global level, the coerced collisions and entanglements of imperial ventures not only catalyzed a seismic re-organization of traditional and mercantile economies, but also induced, through the so-called ‘coloniality of power,’ the enclosure and flattening of heterogenous life-worlds, landscapes, and meaning-making structures of knowledge (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2003, 2011, 2012; Lugones, 2007). Through the limited optics of a Eurocentric cosmology, classificatory schemes of race, gender, and nation were universalized across the planet, (re)producing inflexible, hierarchical, and often binarist conceptions of humanity and territory as the ‘natural’ order of things⁵⁶.

With the birth of the colonial/modern system, apparatuses and technologies of control—not least of which included experimentations and advancements in navigation, cartography, empirical sciences, and urban planning—also helped re-inscribe spatial structures of white supremacist patriarchy and obligatory heterosexuality. Across colonial environments, a spatial separation of the workplace and home was enforced through articulations of gender, sexuality, and race, drawing upon a broader lexicon of spatial practices predicated on forcible enclosure, separation, confinement, and (im)mobilization. Whereas white masculinity was associated with transcontinental freedoms of movement and the domineering control of

distant landscapes, femininity was bound to oppressive logics of spatial restriction and mandates for reproduction. Within a post-Westphalian organization of bordered states, such dichotomous, gendered spatialization was perhaps nowhere more stridently articulated than within fortified boundaries and enclosures, which marked some of the dominant spatial structures used to regulate people and landscapes across multiple scales, and which reinscribed the superiority of white masculinity (Dyer, 2005).

Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality and the Study of Violence

One cannot, of course, comprehensively grasp geographies of violence in the U.S.-Mexico-Central America region today without explicitly engaging the multiplicity and heterogeneity of lived experiences and everyday socio-spatial practices. Indeed, whether speaking of San Pedro Sula or San Diego, neoliberal securitiscapes highlight ostensible differences in capital, resources, and structured opportunities, with one's social and spatial positioning and access to capital determining one's relationship to violence and subordination. Different forms of embodiment, moreover, encapsulate different forms of risk and precarity that interface differently with structures of security. Here, an intersectional and interdisciplinary framework is proposed to illuminate material and ideological practices used within and through securitized urban space.

In her paradigm-shifting essays on intersectionality (1989, 1990), legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw used a spatial metaphor of urban traffic to illuminate the particularities of violence faced by women of color. In acknowledging the marginalization of Black women as something "greater than the sum of racism and sexism," Crenshaw introduced an intersectional

framework to address the limitations, erasures, and elisions emanating from mutually exclusive constructions of race and gender. As such, a theory of intersectionality not only sheds light on violence left out of mainstream narratives and discourses, but evidences the ways single-axis analyses flatten and obscure the lived realities of multiply-burdened subjects. Through its critical engagement of identity politics, an intersectional framework can productively engage with lived realities and everyday subjectivities, understanding identifications not as *static* features of bodies but as dynamic *events* susceptible to change and motion. As such, intersectionality can be useful in tackling the types of simultaneities and multiplicities of spatial existence, analyzing interlocking oppressions faced by marginalized subjects in their three-dimensional environs. Moreover, it can illuminate the symbolic and epistemic features that collude to invisibilize, discredit, or dislodge varied forms of violence enacted upon bodies and geographies marked as ‘other.’

When used appropriately as a heuristic device, the importance of an intersectional approach can everywhere be *seen*, from the increased vulnerability of women and children in their northward journey to Mexico and the U.S., to surges in femicidal and anti-queer violence in border cities under drug war capitalism, to the threadbare services available to stateless ‘Afro-descendant’⁵⁷ and Indigenous populations. As many scholars and journalists have also noted, the problem with *maras* has a particular history tracing back to the prejudicial treatment of Salvadoran refugees in 1980’s Los Angeles—many of whom were the same refugees later deported in higher concentrations in forthcoming years⁵⁸. Yet, the dual visibility-invisibility of relatively small number of stateless refugees in the U.S. often (but not always) comes at the expense of the wholesale invisibilization of Central Americans, who first come into contact

with U.S. and U.S.-style militarism, policing, and carceral systems at home. The impacts of *mara* culture, the security state, U.S. imperialism, and multinational industries and banks on refugee women and children, moreover, has been discussed at length in numerous accounts since the 1980's, both in the Northern Triangle and among displaced diasporic populations, and represents an indispensable viewpoint that an intersectional framework would seek to map (Manz, 1988; Wolf, 2017)⁵⁹. Turning around the colonialist, white supremacist, and patriarchal military gaze from below and to the left (as the Zapatistas would say) could help us see beyond the distortive smokescreens used by state propaganda and the so-called 'military-industrial-communications complex' (Schiller, 1991; Mirrless, 2016)⁶⁰

As suggested by Rosaura Sánchez's (1995) analysis of the California missions, which treats these sites as heteropic spaces of social reproduction, a thoroughly intersectional and interdisciplinary use of poststructural, Marxist, and feminist geographies can also facilitate a more rigorously nuanced engagement with simultaneous displays of racial capitalist and patriarchal violence. Putting such works in conversation with those of Latin American postcolonial theorists, one could even suggest that the advent of the modern-colonial system was co-produced with a naturalized and violently organized coding system, defining how we come to read, value, and appraise differentially marked bodies and territories. As with other dialectical binaries that are everywhere within discourses of (post)modernity—including freedom and unfreedom, motion and stasis, certainty and doubt, visibility and invisibility—scrutinizing the entanglements of geography, gender, race, and other axes of social difference reveals the contradictions of studying visual cultures and the politics of (in)visibility and representation.

Without question, the equivalences drawn between an immutable *a priori* space, on the one end, and reified concepts of race, gender, class on the other, are so routinized as to seem incontestable. So ingrained is our widely-held belief in the transparency and credibility of our visual faculties that we overrepresent 'seeing' (a perceptual faculty) as a form of 'knowing,' rarely questioning the veracity of what we see 'out there.' Yet, as Michael Taussig (1986) aptly noted in his study of colonial terror and so-called 'spaces of death,' in a "world of control, clarity itself [is] deceptive." Moreover, as geographer Katherine McKittrick (2006) suggests, it is our faith in the transparency of vision that ironically leads us to make erroneous assumptions about the socio-spatiality of the world around us, for it through an ideological belief that space simply 'just is' (i.e. seemingly static and immutable) that ironically leads us to fail to see our own blind spots and susceptibility to manipulation. Consider, for instance, how LIC doctrine was initially deployed in San Salvador under a U.S.-backed military regime, only later to be re-applied to the Reagan-era drug and gang wars of Los Angeles. One could easily argue that the U.S.-style counterinsurgencies we see today under disaster capitalism have roots in the selective 'pawning' of Central American bodies--bodies that U.S. and international audiences are often unable to see not only due to media censorship and 'blackouts,' but also because of manufactured dehumanization and the racialized coding of bodies ⁶¹. There also the oft-unperceived historical continuities between the Reagan-Bush and Obama-Trump years with regards to the treatment of Central American refugees, who have been rendered biopolitical pawns throughout the hemisphere, not only in the sense of being de-valued objects played for the purposes of national, border, and urban security policy, but also in near-literal terms of being invisible (or hyper-visible) testing instruments for technologized, counterinsurgent war

games. To understand how ideologies of race, territory, and nation become habitually inscribed and camouflaged within landscapes of violence, I also turn to an analytical framework that offers a nuanced approach to the material-ideological import of culture and ideology in obfuscating and invisibilizing counterinsurgent necro- and narcopolitics.

V. Culture, Ideology, and Everyday Life: A Critical Cultural Analysis of Urban Militarism

From Central America and Mexico to the United States, media representations and pro-war security culture have played as integral a role in the proliferation of drug war capitalism as the material invasion of military arms, capital, and human ‘undesirables’ in three-dimensional space. It’s assumed that the brutalities of guns, bombs, and technologies of surveillance are mutually constituted by a hegemonic ‘security theology’ and ‘politics of fear’ that reify and reinforce racialized, gendered socio-spatial stratifications throughout the U.S. and Mesoamerica (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015). The high physical stakes embedded in the *representations* of (in)security and violence—evidenced in the escalated, yet largely invisibilized, number of disappearances, assassinations, and other forms of state and non-state violence in the aftermath of Mexico’s drug war declaration (2006), the Honduran coup (2009), even in the coordinated, counterinsurgent tactics deployed against Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter protestors in the U.S. in the early 2010s—underscores the significance of a dialectical approach that also deeply engages cultural politics and the so-called ‘problem of ideology’ (Hall, 1983). To be sure, while it is imperative that we attend to the material, “death-dealing displacement[s]” that govern places across a plurality of scales, from nation-states to metropolitan centers to racialized and gendered bodies-in-place, any such analysis would be

lacking without engaging the discursive framings of security and militarization as catch-all panaceas to the crises of neoliberal governance. In other words, a critical cultural studies analytic enables scholars and ethnographers of drug war violence to make sense of how ideological state apparatuses perpetuate bio- and necropower by fixing certain meanings and values to particular bodies and places.

Taking cue from previous urban ethnographies (Dávila, 2004; Wacquant, 2007; Duneier, 2000) and drug war accounts, I employ a critical cultural studies paradigm whose genealogy can be traced to the twentieth century works of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and scholars of the Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools of cultural thought. It takes for granted an understanding of culture as both a *process* and set of *practices* involved in the production and exchange of meanings, working relatively autonomously from the political economy (Hall, 1997). According to Gramsci, who rejected a reductive, economistic reading off Marx that treated culture and ideology as superstructural byproducts of the political economy, *cultural hegemony* is distinct from more generalized attempts at, say, state or military dominance and leadership in that it plays out in the realm of warring ideas and beliefs. The struggle for cultural hegemony is thus a historically contingent, ideological struggle—one fought in the terrain of what he termed a *war of position*—that seeks to gain mastery over dominated social groups through the manufacture of mass consent⁶². Unlike previous Marxist formulations that referred to bourgeois ideology and everyday ‘false consciousness’ as fixed effects of a ruling capitalist class, the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony allows the marginalized to exercise agency, however minimal or invisible, in what cultural critic Stuart Hall called a ‘marxism without final guarantees’ (Hall, 1983; Marez, 2004; Wright, 2011).

My analytical and methodological paradigms also align with Lefebvre's, whose interest in the social production of space also comprises a deep-seated inquiry into the everyday workings of hegemony. The influence of Gramsci and Frankfurt school theorists is notable, for instance, in his dialectical appreciation of socially produced space as not only a "tool of thought and of action," but also, in addition to being a means of production, being "*a means of control, and hence of domination, of power*" [emphasis mine]. Lefebvre's tripartite division of space—which included *lived space* (the space of experience and tactile physicality), *conceived space* (the space represented through maps, grids, texts), and *perceived space* (phenomenological space, the space of fear, terror, hope, and imagination)—further underscores the impossibility of divorcing the materiality of walls and cages from sociality, culture, and everyday interactions. Within this critical cultural and geographic rubric, we can re-read geographies of violence, terror, and domination as being irrevocably intertwined with security discourses and their production of criminality, illegality, and subhuman Otherization.

Building from the work of Frankfurt school theorists such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin, one strand of cultural analysis focuses on the political economy of mass media and communications, particularly highlighting the ways a modern capitalist power structure has steered the development of culture industries and its impact on consumption, spectatorship, and subjectivity. In the 'propaganda model' espoused by Chomsky and Herman (2002 [1988]), mass media's function in the domestication and management of the consuming populace was meant, especially during a time of nascent neoliberalism and 'structural adjustment,' to inculcate the values, beliefs, and norms that would further advance the polarization of wealth while drumming up support for (or, at bare minimum, downplaying

dissent against) U.S. invasions and interventions. During the 1980s Central American civil wars, for instance, efforts to censure, sanitize, and selectively curate televised news broadcasting of U.S. Cold War proxy warfare in the region were done alongside efforts to foreground negative media portrayals of the Sandinistas and the urban and rural guerrilla insurgents in Guatemala and El Salvador. Since then, the collapse of a bipolar world system and the unbundling of Keynesian welfare states has also coincided with the development of even larger, more consolidated mass media monopolies with the power to manage public perception of war, militarism, and resistance through news journals, television networks, and film industries. In mediating responses to shocking events like coups, terrorist attacks, and financial and climatic disasters, news media organizations also wield unprecedented powers in legitimating and normalizing the incursion of market fundamentalism and the security state. From the Pentagon's investments in, and partnerships with, Hollywood film studios and video game manufacturers (Marez, 2004; Mirrless, 2016), to private security mercenaries protecting the spoils of war, to the 24-hour news spectacle of 'live' warfare, the perverse profit motives of the 'military-media-industrial complex' and drug war capitalism underscore a different type of culture war⁶³ being waged within the domestic(ated) living spaces of interpellated national subjects.

A critical cultural studies analysis also allows one to dissect and analyze the texts, images, videos, and other modes of coded communication disseminated through popular media (Hall, 1983), in this case informing us of their role in bolstering security theology through strategies of (in)visibilization, naturalization, obfuscation, and coding. To understand how these mechanisms work together in the production of visible and invisible architectures of power

undergirding drug war capitalism, I turn to cultural critic Stuart Hall's theory of articulation as a means for both decoding and re-reading naturalized, and politically-laden, terms like 'security' and 'war.' Since, for Hall, different ideologies, discourses, and cultural modes of living and seeing the world operate relatively autonomously from the class structure, cultural formations are necessarily historically (and geographically) contingent and susceptible to re-configuration. As opposed to a strictly discursive approach that analyzes the *function* of discourses and truth regimes in the service of power/knowledge, Hall's cultural and semiotic analytic leads us to a differently nuanced engagement with how everyday cultural codes, such as those enforced through everyday militarism and 'security theology,' are produced, circulated, and distributed in ways that reinforce their use as currency of common sense. In analyzing the ideologies of drug war capitalism, moreover, a theory of articulation provides a strategy for re-reading what Paley (2015) calls *cartel wars discourse*—the hegemonic narrative of the drug war that emphasizes state-sanctioned journalistic and televisual accounts of feuding drug cartels and organized transnational criminal networks. As Paley writes, some of the notable features of this news-related discourse includes an almost exclusive reliance on government sources for information; the idea that state forces are out to disrupt narco-trafficking; a bias that turns against victims of violence as guilty co-conspirators in the drug trade; and a "foundational belief that cops involved in criminal activity are the exception, not the rule, and that more policing improves security."

By shaping public imaginaries around drug war violence, popular cultural and news media representations—including cartel war discourse—have considerable sway in regulating the meaning, legibility, and visibility of different bodies, geographies, and socio-spatial

practices—often in ways that deliberately obscure internal structures of power, and that foreclose possibilities for alternative knowledges. Read through an optic of cultural articulation, security culture under drug war capitalism could be understood as a set of contingent, contestable knowledges and ideologies pertaining to criminality and the paternal state. The ideology—or what Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2015) calls the ‘theology’ of security—is also notably predicated on discursive strategies of obfuscation that facilitate climates of paranoia and uncertainty. This is done, for instance, through the conflating and blurring of criminalized, racialized tropes, embodied in the figures of the ‘narcotrafficker,’ ‘gang member,’ and ‘terrorist.’ On the other hand, these hegemonic depictions of ambiguous threats also provide sufficient justification for the invasion and reconfiguration of the security state, evidenced today in the panoply of police, military, and surveillance regimes and cross-border networks.

During the height of the Central American proxy wars, an increased investment in propaganda formed a critical part of the U.S.’s low-intensity doctrine, with the primary aims being the invisibilization, minimization, or obfuscation of news that would lead to domestic or international support for pro-communist guerrillas. In fact, this strategy of diversion is also deployed in the re-inscription of war as ‘low-intensity’ conflict or even as a humanitarian mission, and has endless examples in U.S., Mexican, and Central American public cultures (Turse, 2008). Today, critics of the anti-*mara* and anti-narcotic security apparatuses in the isthmus also write of the *opposite* paradox, of ‘violent peace’ or ‘war by other means,’ as a way to draw attention to the everyday pervasion of war on the ground and along city streets (Visweswaran, 2013; McAllister & Nelson, 2013). As a matter of fact, local and international news media have played a significant part in downplaying the constant violence and human

rights violations perpetrated by military states that have ballooned in recent years, thanks in large part to the security and anti-narcotics funds from the U.S. State and Defense Departments⁶⁴. In the meantime, insurrectionary activists, journalists, campesinos, and indigenous communities have been assassinated and disappeared at unprecedented rates, even in the purported absence of war. Under a climate of media-generated misinformation and the politics of fear, discrete, singular events such as terror attacks and coups may also be co-opted and articulated as legitimations for permanent states of exception, leading to the deployment of military police in urban spaces or the creation of border zone military bases and benign-sounding ‘forward operating locations’ (Vine, 2015; RAND, 2013). A critical cultural lens with a theory of articulation could also help uncover and decode insinuated meanings and subtexts of fictional representations—such as when aestheticized, spectacular depictions of narco-violence in racially coded ‘inner-city’ terrain and border zones insinuate criminality and individual moral failures for drug war violence. By minimizing and invisibilizing systemic and institutional histories of state repression and dispossession, myopic cultural representations ultimately deflect culpability away from structural causes (e.g. poverty, corruption, impunity, or even the *long durée* of U.S. imperialism) while highlighting individualized ones (e.g. scapegoating members of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and migrant communities). In a post-9/11 epoch wherein everyday branding of certain bodies as ‘security risks’ legitimizes different forms of state intervention, these representations integrate, and are integral to, a “politics of everydayness” that normalizes and obscures daily forms of violence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015).

In *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone* (2015), critical feminist scholar Gil Hochberg de-naturalizes the presumed transparency of vision using a critical cultural analytical framework for engaging and interrogating the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Through its exploration of cinematic, photographic, and literary texts, *Visual Occupations* uses a cultural studies framework to deconstruct the presumed transparency of vision, giving credence to Donna Haraway's claim that vision "is always a question of the power to see." Using the example of a Palestinian art collective that transformed a military water tower into an open-air cinema, Hochberg describes how the project "redirected the gaze from top-down (the perspective of the soldiers) to bottom-up (the perspective of the city dwellers turned cinema spectators)," thus temporarily re-shifting the visual politics of Israeli occupation and rendering visible its settler colonial mode of military domination. The partitioning of visual fields is evidenced, for instance, in the manner through which Israel manages to make certain forms of militarized violence *invisible* even though militarism is, technically speaking, everywhere to be seen—from security guards at shopping centers to young soldiers in streets, beaches, cafés, and checkpoints. Even as militarism is "embedded into the habitus of every Israeli citizen," and an undeniable feature of the contemporary everyday landscape, it is paradoxically both visible *and* invisible—a differentially experienced reality determined by one's subject positioning on either side of the Israeli/Palestinian border.

With the majority of spectacular images of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict known to the public trafficking in displays of violent geographies and stereotypically depicted Palestinian victims, Hochberg's work is significant in its interrogation of all-too-natural representations of cruelty's everyday banality. (Indeed, similar parallels can be drawn with respect to the visual

politics of violence of militarized police shootings and criminalized immigration enforcement, with the contrastive *invisibility* or *hypervisibility* of their victims positioned against spectacularized border fortifications, carceral fortresses, and military technologies). Examining a combination of films, photographic images, even Israeli texts, Hochberg's work crucially highlights the varied mechanisms by which Israeli state violence works to enforce a certain politics of visibility, executed not only through dispossessive practices of spatial and population control, but also through panoptic strategies normalizing colonialist tropes and militarist ideologies. My argument here draws a similar connection with respect to the drug war in the Western Hemisphere and the encroaching militarization of everyday life: through a diversity of strategies that are both subtle and ostentatious, from militarized police units and watchtowers to the increasing proliferation of surveillant technologies and computational tracking systems, there's a similarly uneven distribution of seeing and knowing that a juxtapositional reading could productively highlight.

In bringing forth Shalhoub-Kevorkian's formulation of 'security theology' to an analysis of Central American politics, my hope is to explicitly tackle what I understand as a cascade effect of security and insecurity that, once initiated, can become difficult to undo—particularly within the limited field of 'moves' available to agents at any point in time. To do this, I turn to critical insights and frameworks from cultural studies to re-view the discursive ploys used to sustain ongoing rounds of extraction, plunder, and violence—the very strategies meant to manipulate our understanding of untenable political situations too difficult to uphold using rational argumentation or moral persuasion.

VI. Critical Indigenous and Third World Feminist Methodologies

As sites for all types of literal and figurative border-crossings, as well as the residence of diasporic communities, refugees-in-transit, the forcibly detained as well as powerful elites, cities situate simultaneous forms of multiplicity, hybridity, and motion. As such, they are also sites of heterogeneous forms of living and learning; symbols of power and capital accumulation; and potential instruments of war-making. In recent decades, the infusion of critical perspectives on geography across fields such as ethnic, urban, gender, migration and border studies has also shaken many of the twentieth century's foundational schemas vis-à-vis our understanding of cities⁶⁵. By employing a politics of vision and visibility to critically evaluate a counterinsurgent politics of fear, the hope is that new, generative forms of seeing and understanding can emerge that may help us critically re-read the engineered normalcy of the militarized everyday.

Intended as a re-mapping project suturing otherwise fragmented discourses around geography, capitalism, imperialism, war, migration, and violence, my focus on the militarization of everyday life formatively relies on cultural studies practices of *articulation* and *juxtaposition* to re-read and re-write everyday urban culture and hegemonic encroachment of security theology. As I understand it, such techniques will also enable me to read within, between, and across cities in the Americas, as well as enable a critical reading of everyday military urbanism from the social margins, at the very interstices of dominant geographies and fields of power, and at sites where possibilities of rupture are most promising. In turning to these places of liminality, abandonment, and erasure as sites of un-learning and re-creating—and understood here in a manner *opposite* sheer military destruction or neoliberal 'creative destruction'—my research approach deliberately centers a politics of (human, spatial, colonial) *difference* as both

a rubric for deconstructing grammars of power as well as a methodological principle for acquiring and reorganizing knowledge. Towards this aim, my project turns to critical indigenous and women of color feminist methodologies as a way of foregrounding—through critical juxtaposition and re-articulation—non-dominant perspectives, knowledges, geographies, and modalities of being and living. I have also intentionally looked to other, less intuitive bodies of scholarship to find alternative sites of new imaginings—sites that more explicitly embody the oppositional, decolonial consciousness necessary for the re-structuring of power.

In the latter half of the twentieth-century, criticisms waged against dominant research methods and methodologies by feminists, poststructuralists, and other critical studies scholars deeply re-shaped the nature of the social scientific investigational enterprise—not only in terms of the tools, techniques, and strategies used, but also, quite expectedly, in the forms of knowledge produced. Decades of poststructuralist challenges to modernist epistemologies and ontologies have problematized *a priori* claims to authority and impartiality while also denaturalizing traditional, research-related hierarchies and power relations. Moreover, a normalized focus on research ethics and accountability has also catalyzed a methodological trend towards multi-vocality, self-reflexivity, and embodiment (Ortner, 1995; Conquergood 1991).

In recent years, one salient example of this approach could be found in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's research opus, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999). In this groundbreaking text, Smith attempts to navigate the ethical conundrums of doing research in one's hometown as a Native anthropologist—an entanglement harkening back to the precocious, ethnographic works of another woman of color researcher, Zora Neale Hurston⁶⁶.

Emphasizing the importance of the ‘position from which [she] write[s],’ *Decolonizing Methodologies* begins with a transparent reflection on the exploitative legacies of anthropological research and the need to hold researchers accountable to indigenous communities and their demands for sovereignty. For Smith, moreover, this imperative to honor national sovereignty is inseparable from a deconstructive feminist re-reading of ‘objectivity’ and the accompanying expectation of an authoritative, detached, and disembodied voice. Suggesting a feminist framework that recalls Donna Haraway’s work in ‘standpoint’ epistemologies⁶⁷, Smith’s decolonial methodology also treats knowledge as a production shaped by one’s positionality and relationship to dominant Western structures, institutions, and epistemes. In other words, it is Smith’s positionality as a Native researcher writing from the margins that allows her to “see” through the illusory claims of empirical objectivity and apolitical neutrality that have been used time and again to justify imperial projects across historical geographies. Importantly for our discussion here, Smith also points to the indispensable function of ideology in weaponizing information about indigenous peoples under colonial regimes (i.e. in being a useful source of knowledge, one can claim research aims serve some greater good). Related to attempts at reclaiming subaltern knowledge(s) and humanizing the oppressed, *decolonizing methodologies* can be understood as a set of approaches that seeks not only to address uneven power relations in research design and implementation, but also (re)create, (re)frame, and (re)center indigenous knowledges, approaches, aspirations, and needs.

In a similar vein, Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) explicitly works within the realm of intersectional thinking, distilling and re-articulating concepts from

feminism, Marxism, and poststructuralism to build a “hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world.” Utilizing what she calls a “postcolonial U.S. third world feminist criticism” to critically undermine so-called ‘grammars of supremacy,’ Sandoval’s methodology is, like Smith’s, powerful in its flexible applicability as a mode of textual analysis and form of knowledge production. According to Sandoval, one need only look to the oppositional reading practices of U.S. feminists of color to find hopeful groundwork for a meaningful resistance aimed at collective liberation. Through their varied writings of multiply Othered subjectivities—writings that illuminate the ways hegemonic power structures define and control marginalized segments of the world’s stratified humanity—U.S. third world feminists have highlighted the importance of *difference* as a site for engaging liberatory consciousness and resisting against a cultural politics of fear, repression, and everyday violence. Sandoval underlines the *differential* as both a site of resistive consciousness as well as a *strategy*⁶⁸ for maneuvering between social positions and advancing profound cultural transformation.

Altogether, the third world feminist and indigenous methodologies represented in the works of Smith and Sandoval provide an overarching blueprint for ethically collaborating with communities while articulating new forms and relations of power/knowledge. I also see these methodological rubrics as building upon work in *critical ethnography* and the latter’s focus on physicality, performance, movement and intersubjectivity. Through a focus on multiplicity, simultaneity, and ideology, critical ethnography has the potential to facilitate a nuanced engagement with built environments as they’re understood within a dialectical geographical framework. Nevertheless, while there exists a rich literature of urban ethnographic projects examining racial politics in the neoliberal city (Wacquant, 2007; Dávila, 2004; Duneier, 2000),

many of these works lack explicit engagement with space as a site of social reproduction, to say nothing of potential resistance to dominant maps undergirding oppression and dispossession. In contemplating alternative approaches to reading and writing the city, moreover, one could even argue the importance of radically destabilizing the urban *ouvre*, re-articulating it not as mere theater to social performance but as an active producer of the ethnographic narrative, a material-cultural token of postmodern conflict and cosmopolitanism, unity and discord. Given Lefebvre's dialectical understanding of urban space—one that treats space as inextricable from human ontology—a nuanced, ethnographic and geographical framework can also be especially useful as a mode of scrutiny and knowledge-formation, helping avoid an ambiguous or reductionist hermeneutic. This analytical coupling of critical ethnography and critical geography is also meant to help one “read” and “decode” the city through a practice analogous to what Jodi Melamed (2005) refers to as “learning to read the signs”⁶⁹, a literary strategy she describes as necessary for the survival of racialized communities under neoliberal apartheid regimes. It is also an embodied relationship of (un)learning and (un)doing that allows for the articulation of new countergeographies—the in-between, differential *borderland* spaces that theorists like Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Sandoval see as generative for counterhegemonic subject formations and modes of ‘seeing.’

As a practice I see related to communication approaches of encoding and decoding, articulation and re-articulation, critical juxtaposition can be helpful as a means of identifying the gaps, fissures, disjunctures, and liminal spaces of a contemporary urban environment. As such, juxtaposition has the potential to reproduce, in the ‘terrain’ of literacy, culture, and ideology, the everyday spatial ‘tactics’ de Certeau (2011, [1984]) saw as imperative to

undermining the imposed, top-down disciplinary structures ('strategies') of dominant institutions and urban governance regimes. Through its jarring linkage of times, places, and events we have otherwise been told are disparate, unconnected, and uncertain, juxtaposition also capitalizes on the difference (and Derridean *differánce*) between concepts, images, bodies, city streets, or even nation-states to render new types of (in)visibility and (il)legibility. Furthermore, as a communication tactic aimed at bridging the cultural-economic, ideological-material divide, juxtaposition can be a useful aid towards recalibrating the politics of visibility and undermining rational spatial colonization.

How might a differential consciousness rooted in a feminist and decolonial analytic advance a critical cultural analysis of everyday militarism and urban domination? As a starting point, one can turn to cases where juxtaposition and articulation are used as part of a flexible repertoire of interdisciplinary practices. As such, they unsettle the hegemonic codes and codings of empirical constructs, while also enabling the articulation of new terms and knowledges⁷⁰. Such use of juxtaposition is seen, for example, in Yen Le Espiritu's informative analysis on the linkages between U.S. militarism and refugee livelihood. By deploying a critical juxtaposing of "*militarized* refuge(es)" to highlight the mutually constitutive relationship between *refuge*, *refugees*, and U.S. war-marking, Espiritu's work in *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (2014) crucially intervenes in historical discourses of the Vietnam War that forget and negate the Vietnamese subjects. As a critical refugee studies project, Espiritu's research also highlights how discursive formations of the grateful refugee serve to reconcile the numerous contradictions of U.S. imperialism and nationhood, citizenship and belonging, and 'humanitarian' intervention. The critical juxtaposing of diverse texts and

methods—including an examination of refugee policy documents, digital archives, and interviews with post-war refugees and second-generation Vietnamese Americans—is thus indispensable to a reconceptualization of imperial warfare and its influence on Vietnamese subject and memory formation.

By critically engaging discussions violence and militarism as they are constructed *through* discourses of liberal humanitarianism, *Body Counts* provides ample evidence for how material violence is not only legitimated through security ideology—the speech acts of militarism are understood as forms of violence unto themselves. In considering this, Espiritu recasts the liberal re-narration of U.S. militarist and imperialist discourse that renders certain truths from being unspeakable or unknowable—illuminating the very means through which knowledge production and ideology, censure and forgetting, become integral to the state’s hegemonic appropriation of the war machine. In its insistence on the re-telling of “ghost stories”⁷¹—to capture what has been rendered spectral by imperialist violence—Espiritu’s work also provides a means through which to productively engage contradictions and dislocations of militarism, imperialism and war. As such, by engaging the question of how to write about *produced* negations, absences, and silences, *Body Counts* also underscores the possibilities enabled by thinking within, and through, liminal spaces—spaces where one *must* imagine and build a home.

To be sure, a methodology grounded in the experiences of the marginalized can be powerful when it comes to deconstructing hegemonic discourses that have justified, and continue to justify, the violent brutalities of U.S.-led militarism, imperialism, and market fundamentalism. In my opinion, however, the emancipatory projects referenced by critical

indigenous and women of color methodologies go beyond simply advocating for a re-telling of otherwise familiar narratives from a nominally different vantage point (i.e. narratives that only cosmetically re-organize a story's linear sequence of events, and with a re-placement of central characters); rather, they would also illuminate new modes of seeing, thinking, and knowing that *restructure the very terrains* on which maps are made. In fact, by providing clearer, more sophisticated optics through which we can 'see' physical and social space, such re-mappings from the margins would hopefully move us away from opaque geographies of violence, fear, and insecurity, and offer, in their place, three-dimensional blueprints for a world that can fit multiple worlds. Through reading and writing strategies involving deconstruction, re-articulation, juxtaposition, and much more, movements in this direction would refuse age-old entanglements with geographies of domination, and instead chart sustainable landscapes predicated on decolonial modes of being and knowing. In bringing us closer to a veritable dismantling of colonial epistemologies and subjectivities, these new maps could exemplify what Katherine McKittrick beautifully describes as the 'poetics of landscape'⁷²—an alternate means of unearthing, and building on, once foreclosed spaces of exclusion, liminality, and fracture.

¹ Isacson, Adam, Maureen Meyer, and Gabriela Morales. June 2014. *Washington Office on Latin America*. “Mexico’s Other Border: Security, Migration, and Humanitarian Crisis at the Line with Central America.” <https://www.wola.org/files/mxgt/report/>.

² “Letter from the President – Efforts to Address the Humanitarian in the Rio Grande Valley Areas of Our Nation’s Southwest Border.” [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/30/letter-president-efforts-address-humanitarian-situation-rio-grande-valle)

² “Letter from the President – Efforts to Address the Humanitarian in the Rio Grande Valley Areas of Our Nation’s Southwest Border.” <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/30/letter-president-efforts-address-humanitarian-situation-rio-grande-valle>.

³ Luiselli, Valeria. 2017. *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.

⁴ A first draft of this paper was finished in October 2017, months before national media coverage of the Trump Administration’s ‘zero tolerance’ border policy brought this issue back into the limelight. That said, the point around visibility applies just as much today as ever, given how mainstream news circuits have resoundingly failed to illuminate the real causes of involuntary migration. To date, Central Americans have also been afforded few opportunities to truly speak for themselves before U.S. and international audiences.

⁵ Dawsey, Josh. “Trump derides protections for immigrants from ‘shithole’ countries.” *Washington Post*. Jan 12 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-attacks-protections-for-immigrants-from-shithole-countries-in-oval-office-meeting/2018/01/11/bfc0725c-f711-11e7-91af-31ac729add94_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9ca1afc829f6.

⁶ *Extrac Continentales* is a term commonly used by Mexican newspapers to refer to migrants from outside the Americas.

⁷ For instance, the southern Mexican border city of Tapachula, Chiapas has a long cosmopolitan history hosting numerous migrant and refugee communities. Strategically situated near the Guatemalan border along a Pacific coast transit corridor that links Mexico to Central America, Tapachula became a critical transit node when late 19th century coffee production linked the city, and the rest of Chiapas, to the international political economy.

⁸ These three cities are chosen because they are nodes along one of the main migrant trajectories from Central America to the United States. Indeed, as recently as October, 2018 a migrant caravan beginning from San Pedro Sula, Honduras traversed a well-known route through Tapachula, Chiapas. Four years ago, San Pedro Sula—the Honduran ‘industrial capital’ known for its dense concentration of maquilas—was also dubbed the ‘murder capital of the world’ for its high murder rate in a locale ‘not actively at war.’ Unsurprisingly, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection Apprehensions Statistics, San Pedro Sula also led the region’s urban zones as a place of origin for unaccompanied refugee children picked up along the Mexico-U.S. border that summer (see Pew Research Center’s July 1, 2014 summary, “DHS: Violence, poverty are driving children to flee Central America to U.S” at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/01/dhs-violence-poverty-is-driving-children-to-flee-central-america-to-u-s/>). For its part, Tapachula, Chiapas is a significant transit point along Mexico’s southern border, and to this day continues to be a convergence point for numerous migrants making their way to the U.S. through Mexico.

⁹ In the June 17, 1971 congressional address that formally launched the American drug war, former president Nixon emphasized a coordinated federal response to the “grave national problem [of drug abuse]” that was, even then, largely seen as an ‘urban’ menace. Declared more than two years after Nixon’s victory in the 1968 presidential election, amid a maelstrom of race riots and anti-war protests, the drug war has long been understood as the Administration’s hallmark form of counterinsurgency, legitimating ‘New Jim Crow’-era carcerality. In recent years, this observation was further validated by the published remarks of John Ehrlichman (<https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/>), Nixon’s

domestic-policy adviser, who claimed that the drug war was introduced as a means to control and criminalize anti-war leftists and African American communities.

¹⁰ Refers to the use of ambiguous language on a politically sensitive issue for advancing certain prerogatives, and is also known as ‘constructive ambiguity.’ See: Weizman, Eyal. 2012. *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation*.

¹¹ While the 1980’s civil wars are typically considered the first significant source for Central American refugees—inducing a diaspora that drove thousands into Mexico, the U.S., and other parts of Latin America—Central American refugee flows were also notable throughout the 20th century, particularly with each successive anti-communist military regime that took power in the Northern Triangle and Nicaragua (see: Lesser, Gabriel and Jeanne Batalova. “Central American Immigrants in the United States.” *Migration Policy Institute*. April 5, 2017. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>). Even so, some evidence suggests that neoliberal destabilization in the form of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) administered by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund were *more* to blame for the migration streams pushing Central Americans and southern Mexicans from their homes than armed conflict, which tended to be concentrated in lower density areas and had, by the late 1980’s, been substantially reduced from its zenith earlier in the decade (Brignoli, 2000).

¹² A copy of the USA PATRIOT Act—signed into law on October 26, 2001—can be found on the website of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) here: <https://www.aclu.org/other/text-usa-patriot-act>. A summary of the ‘Gangbusters Bill,’ or the Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act of 2005, can be found at *NPR* (Apr 2005): <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4606837>. A complete copy of the latter bill, which was re-introduced before the 110th Congress in 2007 as H.R. 880, can also be found here: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/880/text>.

¹³ Paley, Dawn. 2012. “Colombia and Mexico: Drug War Capitalism.” *Upside Down World*. <http://upsidedownworld.org/archives/mexico/colombia-and-mexico-drug-war-capitalism/>

¹⁴ Meyer, Peter and Clare Ribando Seelke. 2015. “Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress.” *Congressional Research Service*.

¹⁵ Congressional Research Service. 2015. “Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress.”

¹⁶ Inter-American Development Bank, 2014. “Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle: A Road Map.”

¹⁷ The conversion of ‘minorities’ into a verb here draws attention to the jarring, matter-of-fact use of a statistical, empirical term to describe populations inscribed as variant and different. In a way, it suggests another example of the onto-epistemological politics of vision and visibility, highlighting the far-from-evident transparency of what is ‘seen,’ ‘calculated,’ or ‘mapped’ when it comes to human populations, and particularly vis-à-vis the ever-shifting rubrics of everyday self-identification and subjectivity. Of course, this is not meant to minimize or discredit self-identifications, but instead to re-direct our attention to the inflexible, schematic ordering of the human within and through a ‘coloniality of power/knowledge’ (Quijano, 2000).

¹⁸ In October, 2018, these punitive spatial strategies of forcible flight or restraint were evident in the migrant caravans that began in Honduras and El Salvador. Extending the border militarization and externalization policies of its predecessors, pressure from the Trump regime onto the Mexican and Northern Triangle states resulted in an unprecedented restriction of cross-border movement. For years, citizens of the Northern Triangle and Nicaragua—signatories to the 2006 Central America-4 (C-4) Border Control Agreement—have been able to cross the internal borders of the region with their state IDs. In addition to deploying thousands of U.S. military personnel to the border for purposes of ‘national

security,' the Trump Administration also pressured the Honduran, Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Mexican security states into restricting cross-border movement of migrants, causing unprecedented showdowns and encampments (particularly at the key border city of Tapachula, Chiapas). See news coverage: BBC (Oct 19 2018) "[Migrant caravan: Mexico sends police to southern border](#)"; Reuters (Oct 19 2018) "[Migrant caravan halted on Mexico-Guatemala border, pressure to turn back mounts](#)"; Guardian (Oct 20 2018) "[Trapped at the border: forlorn Hondurans hoping to reach US](#)"; Al Jazeera (Oct 23 2018) "[Crackdown on Honduran migrant caravan 'against international law'](#)".

¹⁹ The Marxian concept of 'creative destruction' derives from the work of Austrian-American economist Joseph Schumpeter, and popularized by geographer David Harvey. Creative destruction also forms an integral part of Naomi Klein's formulation of 'disaster capitalism,' through which military and private security industries stand to profit from the exploitation of economic crises, natural disasters, and sociopolitical upheavals. For this reason, Paley (2014) also considers drug war capitalism to be a constitutive part of the disaster capitalism complex.

²⁰ Lakhani, Nina. 2016. "Surge in Central American migrants at US border threatens repeat of 2014 crisis." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/13/central-american-migration-family-children-detention-at-us-border>.

²¹ The military official in charge of the June 28, 2009 coup in Honduras was Honduran General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, a trainee of the infamous School of the Americas (now, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). The coup, which resulted in the kidnapping and excommunication of then-president Manuel Zelaya, was given tacit endorsement by the Obama administration when Hilary Clinton served as Secretary of State. See also: Sarah Kinosian's piece, "Crisis of Honduras democracy has roots in US tacit support for the 2009 coup." Dec 7 2017. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/07/crisis-of-honduras-democracy-has-roots-in-us-tacit-support-for-2009-coup>.

²² The term "banana republic" was originally penned by the writer O. Henry, who in the late 19th century spent time in Honduras. As the term implies today, the term was used in reference to the puppet government installed by the United Fruit Company, and reinforced through ongoing U.S. military invasions. In a sense, Honduras has long been a site for military organization around private interests.

²³ Beyond just the Defense Department and the Northern and Southern Commands, security forces in Honduras have been trained by the Marines, FBI, Border Patrol. See: Isacson, Adam and Sarah Kinosian.. "Which Central American Military and Police Units Get The Most U.S. Aid?" *Washington Office on Latin America*. Apr 15 2016. <https://www.wola.org/analysis/which-central-american-military-and-police-units-get-the-most-u-s-aid/>.

²⁴ According to the Center for Justice and International Law (2017), it is estimated that around 110 hydroelectric and 350 mining projects have been approved in Honduras in the eight years after the coup. "La militarización de Honduras se lleva el presupuesto de los derechos humanos." *Center for Justice and International Law*. Mar 20 2017. <https://www.cejil.org/es/militarizacion-honduras-se-lleva-presupuesto-derechos-humanos>.

²⁵ In the English-language version from the IADB (2014), the "Plan for the Alliance for Prosperity" includes, in Annex 1:3-4, two lines discussing an interest in building a natural gas supply for the entire Northern Triangle, as well as building up a pipeline from Salina Cruz, Mexico to Escuintla, Guatemala.

²⁶ Isacson, Meyer, and Morales. June 2014. *Washington Office on Latin America*. "Mexico's Other Border: Security, Migration, and Humanitarian Crisis at the Line with Central America." <https://www.wola.org/files/mxgt/report/>.

²⁷ The name of the facility—the Twenty-first Century Detention Center—insinuates the importance of modernization and technology in discussions of border and urban security.

²⁸ According to Al Jazeera, “A Twitter statement from the Israeli army said the offensive, dubbed “Operation Protective Edge,” is intended to “stop the terror Israel’s citizens face on a daily basis.” See: *Al Jazeera*. Jul 7 2014. “Israel launches military offensive in Gaza.” <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/7/7/israel-launched-deadlyairstrikesingaza.html>.

²⁹ “From Gaza to Ferguson: Exposing the Toolbox of Racist Repression.” *Foreign Policy in Focus*. Aug 21 2014. <https://fpif.org/gaza-ferguson-exposing-toolbox-racist-repression/>.

³⁰ See: “Programa Frontera Sur: Una Cacería de Migrantes” (“The Southern Border Program: Hunting Migrants”). *Animal Político*. 2014. <https://pajaropolitico.com/caceria-de-migrantes/>.

³¹ Nina Lakhani, a reporter on Mexico and Central America for *The Guardian*, has written a number of recent reports on the securitization of Mexico’s southern border and its amplification of migrant precarity. See “Central America’s rampant violence fuels an invisible refugee” (Oct 13 2016) and “Passage through Mexico: the global migration to the U.S.” (Sep 6 2016).

³² In his influential opus, *Vision and Visuality* (1988), Hal Foster dichotomizes the two terms of his book’s title more or less along the same lines of the nature/culture divide. Although, to Foster, “vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visuality sight as a social fact,” he goes on to accede that these concepts are more heavily intermeshed than originally presupposed by the modernist nature/culture binary. For an insightful genealogy of the term ‘visuality,’ see Nicholas Mirzoeff’s contribution to the *Journal of Visual Culture*, “On Visuality” (2006).

³³ When it was discovered that the tear gas used by Israel against Palestinians was the same as that used by militarized police forces against predominantly Black protestors in Ferguson, manufactured by a security firm in Pennsylvania, journalists commented on the back-and-forth exchanges that held together a transnational security apparatus that insisted on the protection of imagined communities. See: “Palestinians tweet support for Ferguson protestors.” *Times of Israel*. http://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-tweet-support-for-ferguson-protesters/?fb_comment_id=941536039205755_941658509193508#f1e652fb6407d4e.

³⁴ The theme of *animality* vis-à-vis Central American migrants has resurfaced a number of times. After the launch of Mexico’s Southern Border Program, increased security around the notorious ‘Beast’ trains led to a veritable migrant ‘hunt’ not unlike anti-migrant vigilante groups along the U.S.-Mexico border. One Central American migrant interviewed by the Mexican journal *Animal Político* (2014) was quoted describing security forces as “hunting us like animals.” This, moreover, is not unlike the Trump Administration’s recent portrayal of MS-13 gang members—many of whom have roots in the Northern Triangle—as ‘animals.’ See: “Programa Frontera Sur: Una Cacería de Migrantes” (“The Southern Border Program: Hunting Migrants”). *Animal Político*. 2014. <https://pajaropolitico.com/caceria-de-migrantes/>; “Trump defends ‘animals’ remark, saying it refers to MS-13 gang members.” *New York Times*. May 17 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/17/us/trump-animals-ms-13-gangs.html>; White House Statement. May 21 2018. “What You Need To Know About the Violent Animals of MS-13.” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/need-know-violent-animals-ms-13/>.

³⁵ In a series of lectures given at the Collège de France between 1977 and 1978—now published in English as *Security, Territory, and Population* (2007)—Foucault defines governmentality as an assemblage of ‘institutions, procedures, analyses, reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of....power” and with ‘the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (2007, p. 144). Corroborating his theory of power/knowledge, governmentality references not only technologies and techniques of power (including those used by state bureaucracies), but also the epistemic structures underpinning them.

³⁶ deterrence border policy; zero-tolerance border policy

³⁷ The ‘war machine’ originally described by French poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) referenced the assemblage of tools and practices used by nomadic societies against centralized state control. As such, they were separate from, and irreducible to, the state apparatus, and what we now call the military-industrial complex is, in fact, really a state appropriation of a fundamentally ‘nomadic’ war machine. Around the same time, in a 1976 paper titled “The City As A Growth Machine,” urban Marxist scholar Harvey Molotch developed the concept of the ‘urban growth machine’ to refer to the ways place-based urban politics have been driven by elite interests and capitalist prerogatives of expansion and accumulation. The concept of urban growth machines was later further elaborated in a book co-written with John Logan, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (1987).

³⁸ In 1992, when the Los Angeles riots drew the attention of the international media, President George H.W. Bush mobilized military troops on U.S. soil. The following year, when the U.S. military establishment faced off against urban militias in the Battle of Mogadishu, the heavy tolls exacted against elite U.S. special forces prompted a re-orientation of national security priority. This shift in national security, focused on engaging unconventional battlespaces through urban warfare, is highlighted in the U.S. Marine Corp’s 1998 handbook “Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT).” Available at <https://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/MCWP%203-35.3.pdf>.

³⁹ See transcript of President Nixon’s June 1971 speech—“Special Message to the Congress on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control”—at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3048>.

⁴⁰ As with many of the benign-sounding criminological theories deployed by the state against ‘internalized external threats’ (i.e. racial others), ‘zero tolerance’ has its roots in the U.S. metropolitan drug war. See also: Swanson, Kate. 2013. “Zero Tolerance in Latin America: Punitive Paradox in Urban Policy Mobilities.” *Urban Geography*. Vol 34, Issue 7: 972-988.

⁴¹ In *Working Hard, Drinking Hard: On Violence and Survival in Honduras* (2008), Adrienne Pine writes how Honduran Congress passed an anti-terror legislation mimicking the PATRIOT Act.

⁴² The famous Haussmannization of Paris is typically brought in as an example of how military and urban designs often melded together (i.e. Haussmann’s creation of wider boulevards as necessary interventions against riots and protest barricades). Graham (2010) notes that Haussmann’s designs were originally influenced by the French occupation of colonial cities in Algeria, as they were by the writings and urban designs of military commander Bugeaud.

⁴³ Daugherty, Arron. Aug 26 2015. “El Salvador Supreme Court Labels Street Gangs as Terrorist Organizations.” *Insight Crime*. <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-supreme-court-labels-street-gangs-as-terrorist-groups/>; Pearce, Fred. Mar 22 2017. “Honduras, where defending nature is a deadly business.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/mar/22/honduras-berta-caceres-activism-defending-nature-deadly-business>.

⁴⁴ In cities like Tapachula and Mexico City, command-and-control policing systems imported from the U.S. have become central features of urban security regimes. The emphasis on surveillant technologies to manage and regulate populations is also notable in the increased purchase and use of biometric technologies and data tracking software, including an FBI-developed program known as the Central American Fingerprinting Exploitation Initiative (CAFÉ). See: <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/testimony/combating-international-gangs-through-the-merida-initiative>.

⁴⁵ This is evidenced, too, in the graphic representation of such cities as lines and points (national borders and cities, respectively) in dominant cartography.

⁴⁶ The increased securitization of Mexico as a dangerous transit zone for Central American migrants and global refugees has led some scholars and activists to refer to Mexico as a ‘vertical border.’ See: Brady,

Mary Pat. 2000. "The Fungibility of Borders." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.1 (2000): 171-190; Yee Quintero, José Carlos and Eduardo Torre Cantalapiedra. 2016. "Dealing with the vertical border: migration strategimes of Hondurans in transit through Mexico." *REMHU - Rev. Interdiscip. Mobil. Hum.*, Brasília, Ano XXIV, n. 47, p. 97-114, May/Aug 2016; and Instituto para las mujeres en la migración. 2015. *Derribando Muros: Boletín del Observatorio de Migración*. "La frontera vertical de México." Oct 2015. No. 5: 1-2.

⁴⁷ See Greg Grandin's article in *The Nation*, "The Clinton-Backed Honduran Regime Is Picking Off Indigenous Leaders" (March 2016), as well as Annie Bird's post for the non-profit Alliance for Global Justice ("The World's First Charter Cities In Honduras: From Neo-liberalism to Neo-colonialism," September 2012). The libertarian impulse of these utopian 'model cities' can also be read at length in two articles in *The Economist*—"Honduras shrugged" (<https://www.economist.com/international/2011/12/10/honduras-shrugged>) and "Honduras experiments with charter cities" (<https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2017/08/12/honduras-experiments-with-charter-cities>).

⁴⁸ Given the role heterogeneity, simultaneity, and everydayness play in critical human geography (e.g. Certeau, 1984; Massey, 2005; Massey, 2005), I also see this as relating to Elana Zilberg's (2011) conception of the 'politics of simultaneity' and Shalhoub-Kevorkian's discussion on the 'politics of everydayness.'

⁴⁹ The Chicago school was an influential school of urban sociology that came into prominence in the 1920's and 1930's, when the city was a center for international and domestic migration. The school included notable urban thinkers such as Robert Park and William Burgess, and has been criticized for promoting a reductionist, ecological analysis of city environments. See: Hess A. 2001. "The City and Human Ecology: the Urban Sociology of the Chicago School (Robert Park and William Burgess)" in *Concepts of Social Stratification*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁵⁰ Early examples of a materialist analysis of space can be found in Marx's early writings, in which he discusses an "antagonism between town and country" (*The German Ideology*) and "the annihilation of space by time" (*Grundrisse*).

⁵¹ In his groundbreaking book, *Right to the City (Le Droit à la ville)*, Lefebvre famously called for transforming cities into "a meeting point for building collective life." It helped launch critical geography as a Marxist and poststructuralist school of thought, and was known for catalyzing the student mobilizations and labor strikes that convulsed Paris in May 1968.

⁵² Foucault, Michel. 2009. *Security, Territory, and Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Edited by Michel Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁵³ Foucault first described this notion of heterotopia in a lecture given to architects in March 1967. This was later printed by the French architecture journal in 1984. An English translation can be found at: Foucault, Michel. Translated by Jay Miskowiec. 1986. "Of Other Spaces" ("Des Espaces Autres"). *Diacritics*. vol 16, no. 1: 22-27. See also: Harvey, D., 2000. "Cosmopolitanism and the banality of geographical evils." *Public culture*, 12(2), pp.529-564.

⁵⁴ To be sure, descriptions of Mexico as a territorial gauntlet for US-bound migrants have a long history. For instance, see: Frelick, Bill. 1991. "Running the Gauntlet: The Central American Journey in Mexico," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 3, no. 7 (April 1991): 208-42.

⁵⁵ Gilmore adapts this from the late cultural critic Stuart Hall.

⁵⁶ In *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study of Terror and Healing* (1986), Michael T. Taussig points to Walter Benjamin's observation around how classical historical narratives--histories that showed things "as they really were"--were the strongest narcotic of our era. Taussig, moreover, uses this framework to highlight how a 'politics of epistemic murk and the fiction of the real' to critically examine so-called 'spaces of death,' cultures of terror, and historical narratives-as-truth.

⁵⁷ The term *afrodescendiente* is commonly used in Latin America.

⁵⁸ See: Zilberg, Elana. 2011. *Space of Detention: The Making of a Transnational Gang Crisis Between Los Angeles and San Salvador*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Martinez, Oscar. Translated by John Washington and Daniela Ugaz. 2016. *A History of Violence: Living and Working in Central America*. New York, NY: Verso; and Bruneau, Thomas, Lucia Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner. Eds. 2011. *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

⁵⁹ Although this paper primarily highlights the importance of vision and visual economies, we can also think of this in relation to written and verbal *testimonios*, such as that of Indigenous Mayan K'iche' writer and activist Rigoberta Menchú.

⁶⁰ According to Herbert I. Schiller, the so-called “military-industrial-communications complex” (1991) was a subsector of Dwight Eisenhower’s “military-industrial complex,” and represented an “institutional edifice of communications, electronics, and/or cultural industries” linking defense departments and media corporate power (Cited in Mirreless, 2016).

⁶¹ According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word ‘pawn’ comes from the the Old French *pan* (‘pledge, security’) and the medieval Latin *pedo* (‘foot soldier’), and in contemporary usage, usually refers to a “chess piece of the smallest size and value.” As a verb, however, pawning indicates the act of depositing an object as ‘security’ for money lent; to pledge, stake, risk; and can be used to mean ‘pawn[ing] someone/something off’ or to ‘pass off someone or something unwanted.’ In thinking of how Central American refugees are thrust into bloody ‘war’ games in urban terrain both locally and abroad, it’s worth wondering how the politics of vision and visuality interacts with the state’s security apparatus.

⁶² In her discussion of narco- and necropolitics, Melissa Wright also refers to competing interpretations of femicides by the media and state-corporate elites as a ‘war of interpretations.’

⁶³ The ‘culture wars’ (or what Hazel Carby referred to as the ‘multicultural wars’) refer to a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s—during the twilight years of Cold War geopolitics—in which battles over multicultural inclusion and identity erupted. See also: Melamed, Jodi. 2011. *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

⁶⁴ Congressional Research Service. 2017. “U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress.”

⁶⁵ Urban scholar Neil Brenner (2014) refers to this academic engagement of cities as discrete, irreducible units as “methodological cityism.”

⁶⁶ Hurston, a Black anthropologist from Florida who studied under the renowned Frantz Boas, introduced the latter’s cultural relativism to an ethnographic approach in which she returned to, and studied, her hometown (*Mules and Men*, 1936). As such, her works are considered to be some of the first examples of “native” anthropology. There, she wrote: “...I couldn’t see it [culture] for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had the spyglass of Anthropology to look through at that.”

⁶⁷ Donna Haraway’s theory around ‘standpoint’ knowledges rejects the notion of monolithic truths as self-evident and objective claims, and suggest, among other things, that knowledge is socially situated.

⁶⁸ While beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth considering that Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, defines ‘strategy’ in contradistinction to ‘tactics’ as “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed.”

⁶⁹ According to Melamed (2005), ‘learning to read the signs’ is a form of counter-hegemonic analysis that “requires both a recalibration of self as reader and the constitution of communities of interpretation that sustain practices of reading...” Melamed describes this revolutionary sign-reading practice in the context of literature (Toni Cade Bambara’s *Those Bones Are Not My Child*), wherein urban neoliberal apartheid provided the context for the ravaging of Atlanta’s black community in the late 1970s/early 1980s. Learning to read the signs was integral to not just a survival politics in an age of austerity, but also a means of engaging critical questions of ontology, epistemology, and blackness in the striving for everyday liberation.

⁷⁰ Another, albeit different, example of critical juxtaposition can be found in Kalindi Vora’s (2015) reconstruction of ‘biocapital,’ which she distinguishes from Foucauldian biopower.

⁷¹ Drawn from Avery Gordon’s (2008) work, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Relevant to the topic at hand, Espiritu also quotes Toni Morrison in reminding us that “invisible things are not necessarily not-there.”

⁷² McKittrick draws ‘poetics of landscape’ from Édouard Glissant. As she notes in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggles* (2006), the poetics of landscape “awakens” language, “offering intelligible and visible black struggles” and “creates a way to enter into, and challenge, traditional geographic formulations without the familiar tools of maps, charts, official records, and figures.”