



Title: Identity, Shame, and Humiliation: Psychosocial contributors to violence along the Tijuana-San Diego Border.

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Understanding and managing violence and other victim-based-crimes are significant components of planning, as these have the potential to compromise the economic sustainability of various communities. However, the dominant paradigms within which classical criminology and national development have emerged limit the ability of those interested in addressing issues of violence to explore and comprehend the underlying psychological and social factors that contribute to such acts. This essay analyzes arguments by proponents of national development in Latin America and challenges the conventional wisdom that 1) violence is a result of *social disorganization* that hinders *development* and 2) that *development*, as it is conventionally understood, described, and sought by international agencies such as the WB, IMF, and OECD is the singular, most beneficial, and desired end for all communities around the world. Lastly, this essay studies the case of the border city of Tijuana, Mexico in order to explore the relationship between neoliberal global development praxis and the psychosocial factors underlying violence in the region.

In the context of continually increasing militarization of security forces, which have contributed to documented cases of human rights violations on both sides of the US-Mexico border (Frey, 2013) and ongoing policy discussions regarding failing punitive approaches towards violent crime(1), it is evident that new and different ways of understanding the underlying causes of violence are necessary.

Differing Postures and Underlying Ethics of Research

The presence of victim-based-crime, and violence in particular, is a severe and undesirable condition because of its adverse physical, psychological, social, and economic effects on communities. However, the ethical principles underlying reasons for

addressing violence differ among various ideological groups; while some explore these issues from a humanistic approach, others manifest authoritative, patriarchal, and punitive paradigms that may actually contribute to the cognitive factors that motivate violence. For example, in the essay “Violence, Fear, and Insecurity among the Urban Poor in Latin America,” in a collection of works edited by Fay (2005), Moser and others describe a dichotomy between approaching violence from an economic perspective vs. a social one:

Indeed, it has been argued that the tendency to rely on data on the costs of violence has led to the neglect of the very factors that seem to be the principal consequences of violence, namely insecurity, fear, terror, and a deteriorating quality of life (Moser et al, 2005: 139).

However, the opus mentioned above is dominated per se by a tendency to focus on economic motives, succinctly characterized in the statement that, “the greatest advances have been made in measuring the direct economic costs of violence, the associated losses due to deaths and disabilities, and the income transfers from victims of property crime to the perpetrators, calculated as percentages of GNP or GDP” (Moser et al, 2005: 140). Technocratic postures of this type dominate current academic and policy discourse, and indicate a neoliberal perspective in which economic interests are the primary motivations for *progress*, measured by GDP(2).

An alternative notion of national development is described by Aitken and others (2007) in the work “Why Children? Why Now?” As Aitken explains, the neoliberal agenda and global corporate paradigm of national development function under a metaphor of child development, in which the *less-developed* nations are on their path to growing up and joining the ranks of the adult—and presumably more prosperous—*developed* nations. Neoliberal development teleology implies that their contexts and desires are no different from *ours* but also, as Aitken goes on to say, because of *development*, these nations are denied “their own trajectories, their own histories and futures that are different and perhaps better than ours” (Aitken et al, 2007: 5). The subjugation to structural geopolitical forces that underlie the regressive, if dominant,

paradigm of development criticized by Aitken and others is manifest in the various elements of the work by Moser and others.

Imaging the violent

Classical Criminology of the Chicago School develops largely out of *social disorganization theory* and the early work of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, who spatially correlated crime to areas with low-income, racial heterogeneity, and high residential turnover (Lersch et al, 2011). Within the *classical* criminological paradigm, secondary, quantitative crime data are used to generate an image, or *profile*, of violent offenders. Moser and others work within this paradigm in stating that “disparities in violence levels are based on neighborhood income levels...violent crime rates are particularly high in poor neighborhoods on the peripheries of cities...[and] violence rates also vary based on age and gender, with young men most likely to be both victims and perpetrators” (Moser et al, 2005: 131). The resulting image is that of a low-income, Latin American male.

Psychological and Social Perspectives

In contrast to classical understandings of violence, another, perhaps more sensible theory of the motives underlying aggressive behavior among violent male offenders is offered by James Gilligan (2003). In the work, “Shame, Guilt, and Violence,” qualitative data from over 1,000 institutionalized offenders were gathered and analyzed over the course of four decades. According to Gilligan, self-conscious feelings of shame and a deteriorated sense of self-worth are the causal factors underlying violence; humiliation, Gilligan argues, compromises one’s identity, i.e. the way one sees oneself, and leads to feelings conceptualized as a loss of cohesion of the self, or a conceptual death of the self. This leads one to become violent in order to restore pride, or a sense of self-worth (Gilligan, 2003). Subsequent empirical studies have been conducted and published to support this theory (Walker et al, 2009, 2011; Owen et al, 2011). Therefore, a comprehensive exploration of violence at the U.S.-Mexico border and elsewhere should include psychological and sociological research to address the factors that contribute to self-conscious feelings mentioned above.

Construction of cultural narratives and *common sense*

Imaging processes, such as the criminological profiling mentioned above, are explored in the cognitive and neurosciences in terms of linguistic frames and conceptual metaphors(3). Building on the work of Damasio and others, Lakoff describes the construction of cultural narratives in terms of physical neuronal structures, i.e. synaptic networks. The neuronal structures of cultural narratives are constructed (i.e. learned) early on and are strengthened through repetition (Lakoff, 2009).

Similarly, the myriad frames associated with violence along the San Diego-Tijuana border are understood societally in relation to cultural narratives that have a traceable history:

Velazquez García (2008) traces the construction in the U.S. of stereotypes and images of Mexicans as the *other*, from the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to the present; socially constructed images of Mexicans as *greasers*, contrabandists, immigrants who take jobs, use public services without paying taxes, and as contributors to an increase in criminality were largely produced and reproduced through film and other media. Further, the work of Valenzuela Arce (2000) describes the construction of stereotypes related to *la frontera*.

Repeated over and over and perceived by audiences through interfaces such as film, journalistic media, and public policy discussions, the associated narratives become physically embedded in neuronal networks that cause the physiological experiences described by Damasio and, as Lakoff (2008) explains, the narratives come to be understood socially as *common sense*. Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, Harvey (2005) elaborates on the notion of *common sense* in that it

is constructed out of longstanding practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional or national identities. It is not the same as the ‘good sense’ that can be constructed out of critical engagement with the issues of the day. Common sense can, therefore, be profoundly misleading, obfuscating or disguising real problems under cultural prejudices. Cultural and traditional values (such as belief in God and country or views on the position of women in society) and fears (of communists, immigrants, strangers, or ‘others’) can be mobilized to mask other

realities (Harvey, 2005: 39).

In policy discussions, as well as in academic discourse surrounding approaches to violence in the U.S.–Mexico border region, *common sense* notions of Mexican males invariably trigger instinctual action programmes, i.e. feelings, associated with pejorative cultural narratives, which in turn influence decisions regarded as most favorable.

Narrative of National Development as Child Development

Policy discussions and academic discourse surrounding violence along the U.S.-Mexico border both activate and are influenced by the cultural narratives surrounding Latino males and national development. Gagen (2007) traces the conceptualization in the U.S. of national development as child development to the work of G. Stanley Hall, a renowned psychologist during the early 1900s and president of Clark University. As Gagen notes, “prominent in Hall’s theories [was the] the belief that using scientific knowledge the ‘inferior races’ of the world could be improved in service of a more efficient and economically liberal world” (Gagen 2007: 23). In other words, nations which were considered to be more *developed*, i.e. more mature were to aid the younger, *less developed* nations.

Similarly, the notion of paternalism from the U.S. towards Mexico is described by Valenzuela Arce:

Para las perspectivas dominantes anglosajonas, la frontera ha significado una colindancia con la barbarie, el atraso, el otro lado del espejo, donde lo mexicano alude a la opacidad, al fracaso visible; es la referencia que amplifica las virtudes propias. La frontera es la trinchera donde tiene lugar la lucha contra la contaminación, la inmigración amenazante, la degradación racial, económica y moral. También ha sido el botín, el tesoro codiciado, disponible y evasivo de los sueños filibusteros, o el traspatio sobre el que se debe mantener orden y vigilancia. La frontera se percibe como fuente de problemas, como el sitio por donde fluyen enfermedades, cruzan los braceros que minan la oferta de trabajo, o las drogas que dañan a los jóvenes. Por ahí transitan rencores y frustraciones que

incrementan la violencia: candidatos para las cárceles o prospectos para las listas de asesinados legalmente mediante inyección letal. También proliferan posiciones paternalistas sobre la frontera, para las que el sur es una suerte de hermano menor a quien se debe tratar con paciencia y enseñarle el camino (Valenzuela Arce 2000: 135).

Neoliberalism and the causes of violence

Working from within the dominant notions of national development and the classical criminological paradigm of social disorganization, Moser and others lament that an adverse effect of *globalization* in Latin America has been the weakening of family structures; the argument is that violent crime occurs because of a deteriorated family control as a result of “precarious living conditions, excessive working hours of parents, the increased material and emotional responsibility of women, severe overcrowding, and the lack of recreational space” (Moser et al, 2005: 137). The same absence of patriarchal order mentioned above, it is argued, contributes to the existence of gangs. The authors use secondary data to offer, “an oft-cited reason for joining gangs is to find what is not available at home” (Moser et al, 2005: 137). A different, perhaps broader reading of the adverse effect that neoliberal praxis has had on social structures in Latin America is offered by David Harvey:

Stripped of the protective cover of lively democratic institutions and threatened with all manner of social dislocations, a disposable workforce inevitably turns to other institutional forms through which to construct social solidarities and express a collective will. Everything from gangs and criminal cartels, narco-trafficking networks, mini-mafias and favela bosses, through community, grassroots and non-governmental organizations, to secular cults and religious sects proliferate. These are the alternative social forms that fill the void left behind as state powers, political parties, and other institutional forms are actively dismantled or simply wither away as centres of collective endeavor and of social bonding (Harvey 2005: 171).

In other words, the neoliberal processes of privatization and dismantling of social democratic institutions have contributed to deteriorated social ties. Further, marginalization and social inequalities resulting from disparities in wealth concentration may further contribute to feelings of shame that motivate violence.

Multiple facets of Mexican identity at the border

Lya Margarita Contreras describes the process within Mexico of imaging the indigenous as lazy, dirty, indolent, torpid, miserable, ugly, unmanageable, and as traitors (Contreras, 2008). Also, the collection of essays published under the title *Migración, Fronteras e Identidades Étnicas Transnacionales* (Migration, Borders, and Transnational Ethnic Identities) edited by Laura Velasco-Ortiz (2008) explores the production of identities (of the self) and images (of the other) in relation to the push and pull of United States' immigration policy; border communities have evolved in the context of invitations as guest workers, such as the 1942 *Bracero* farmworker program on one hand, and xenophobic border defense missions, such as the 1954 *Operation Wetback* on the other. The tension, Velasco-Ortiz explains, between a racialized anti-immigrant sentiment and a need for inexpensive labor to compete in a globalized agricultural market has established an image of the Mexican as the criminally subhuman *illegal alien*, an invading force that is outside of the law, racially inferior, biologically apt for field labor, culturally and traditionally regressive, requiring supervision, and requiring programs for assimilation into an *American* identity (Velasco Ortiz, 2008). Further research is required to further understand the relationship between these components of identity, self-conscious feelings, and violence in the border region.

Identity in the border region of Tijuana has been shaped not only in the context of the stigmatized constructs of indigeneity, illegality, and dehumanization; Margath Walker explores the effects of neoliberal economic policy on identity and self-esteem in northern Mexican communities. The North American Free Trade Agreement, which Walker describes as one of the most imbalanced agreements in history, adversely affecting primarily regional microindustry, has contributed to a continued growth of marginalized communities in Tijuana (Walker, M 2011). Qualitative research by Luis Ongay, which gathers data from youth residing in the border city of Tijuana, notes the emotional stress

that results from a constant evaluation of the self in relation to *el otro lado* (the other side), which contributes to a loss of *Mexican* identity (Ongay, 2011). Marginalization, shame about one's self-worth, humiliation because of one's ethnicity, are similar to the elements that Gilligan (2003) describes as the factors that lead to feelings of a loss of cohesion of the self, a conceptual death of the self which triggers violence as a defensive response to regain a sense of self-worth.

Narcissistic Consumerism

Contrary to the theory of social disorganization in classical criminology, violence, such as that resulting from narcotrafficking in Mexico, and Tijuana in particular, is not limited to those with modest incomes. The *Narcojunior* phenomenon in Mexico is a common example of affluent young men from areas with cohesive social structures and institutions, children of *empresarios* and *políticos*, who participate in drug-trafficking and the violence with which it is associated. What does social disorganization theory fail to capture? Gilligan (2003) shares that his own intuitive misconceptions about the motivations underlying robberies and other crimes were challenged when he determined that narcissism masking an inferior sense-of-self, coupled with the socially constructed masculine gender, leads some to engage in violent and risky behavior in order to socially prove their worth and mask their shame. In the context of what Michael Dear (2000) refers to as Mexico's national inferiority complex and an ideal-identity evaluated through consumer status symbols, it is not surprising that even the son of an *empresario* would harbor self-conscious feelings of inferiority for never achieving an unattainable ideal. In the context of narcissistic consumerism, Harvey describes a similar search for a sense of self:

For those who successfully negotiate the labour market there are seemingly abundant rewards in the world of a capitalist consumer culture. Unfortunately, that culture, however spectacular, glamorous, and beguiling, perpetually plays with desires without ever conferring satisfactions beyond the limited identity of the shopping mall and the anxieties of status by way of good looks...or of material possessions. 'I shop therefore I am' and possessive individualism

together construct a world of pseudo-satisfactions that is superficially exciting but hollow at its core (Harvey, 2005: 170).

In this sense, the ideal-self proffered by neoliberal consumerism is forever elusive; a version of the self which will always exist *del otro lado*, i.e beyond a conceptual border that can never fully be crossed. The continual dissatisfaction that narcissistic consumerism intends to mask and the failure to achieve a healthy sense of self worth may contribute to the self conscious feelings of shame that underlie violence in the border region.

Towards new and different approaches:

This essay is written from outside of the dominant patriarchal paradigms that are commonly accepted as conventional wisdom. Socially constructed narratives influence academic discourse and policy decisions surrounding approaches towards violence. Within dominant narratives, violence at the border is a product of social disorganization, which contributes to a perpetual state of underdevelopment. However, conventional punitive approaches towards violence and paternalistic notions of national development are by various measures failing to produce the desired outcomes. Therefore different and new approaches towards violence are required.

In exploring violence, it is imperative that one focus on the psychological and social factors that contribute to self-conscious feelings of alienation, marginalization, and humiliation. The oft-cited images that emerge from quantitative research, though they may be representative of actual data, also reproduce cultural narratives and their associated negative frames. Rather than reinforcing socially constructed pejorative images, a focus on understating the causes of violence through qualitative research could provide richer data, perhaps better approaches, and more effective and humane results.

(1) Since the beginning of the presidency of Calderón and in concert with implementation of the *Merida Initiative*, the U.S. Congress has delivered \$1.2 billion dollars to México, mainly for aircraft, helicopters, training and equipment for security forces; during the

same time, homicide rates have tripled, up to 65,000 people have been killed, thousands more disappeared, military responses have been documented to be excessive, including extrajudicial executions of suspects or civilians (U.S. House of Representatives, 2013).

(2) Cognitive scientist and linguist George Lakoff describes neoliberal mode of thought as focused on statistical data. Applied to public policy, Lakoff notes limitations of the neoliberal rational actor model in that it “takes empathy and responsibility toward people out of foreign policy, replacing it with state self-interest and [replaces] the interests of our individual citizens with the ‘national interest’-GDP growth, corporate interests, military advantage” (Lakoff, 2009: 54).

(3) Recent work by neuroscientists Antonio Damasio and others describes cognition in terms of action programmes, which are instinctual cognitive preferences to exteroceptive stimuli. As Damasio explains, “action programmes do not require deliberation. They are instinctual — that is, biologically pre-set and largely stereotypical. For example, in the case of pressure from a sharp object, the ensuing action programmes include retraction of the affected area away from the stimulus and facial muscle contraction to form an expression of pain. However, their deployment can be influenced by learning (conditioning), which also allows the extension and transfer of homeostatic goals to objects and situations that become imbued with biological value: for example, money, power or drugs” (Damasio 2013:145). Further, Damasio describes *feelings* in physiological terms: action programmes cause changes in body state, which are sensed by the interoceptive system; these changes are experienced consciously as feelings, which in turn influence cognition.

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