

BUILDING PEACE:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE CONTAINMENT
OF ORGANIZED CRIME IN CHICAGO,
SICILY, AND LA LAGUNA

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EL COLEGIO DE MÉXICO

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Abstract

Is there a universally valid model or formula for the containment of organized crime? This article addresses this key question by comparing three experiences of the containment of organized crime: Chicago (in the first half of the 20th Century), Sicily (in the last decades of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st), and La Laguna (since 2007). In all three, patterns of reaction and social coordination in the face of similar problems of violence and criminal governance are detected. The article begins by establishing a conceptual discussion of criminal governance and social capital. It then compares the three cases in light of the same variables, and finally compares the similarities to conclude with a discussion of the previously posed research question.

Keywords: Social capital, Chicago, Sicily, La Laguna, organized crime

1. Introduction

Is there a universally valid model for the containment of the violence produced by the phenomenon of organized crime? Yes, there is. To accede to it, it is necessary to transcend the myth of *The Untouchables*, reinforced by Hollywood in the movie of the same name (Brian De Palma, 1987). It is a captivating spectacle which, for 119 minutes, once and again wrings the neck of historical rigor. Those who have seen it will remember that it revolves around the conflict between Al Capone and Eliot Ness; the gangster and the cop. Never to appear is the lady or the diva that symbolizes Mrs. Civil Society, a key figure in Prohibition-era Chicago.

This omission was recalled by the poet Javier Sicilia one afternoon in May 2011 when, to the packed main plaza of Mexico City, he set out a challenge: “[W]e are here to tell ourselves and to tell you that we will transform this pain of the soul in the bodies [...] into a lever which will help us to restore love, peace, justice, dignity, and the stuttering democracy that we are losing.”¹ The movement Sicilia led put the topic of the victims on the national agenda, exactly as others affected by the violence in Sicily had done in earlier decades.

Excluding civil society is relatively common, despite the important role in limiting the ravages of violent criminal groups played by six social actors: businesspeople, independent media, victim collectives, civil society organizations, religious groups, and academics.² Their influence can become public policy when it connects with public officers who are committed to fighting criminals.

In the cases reviewed here, each one of these six social actors responded to impulses, interests, and narratives that were diverse but interconnected by the desire to stand up to the organized crime that had established criminal governance in the three aforementioned places. To confront this criminal governance, they reached out to federal, state, and local authorities and agreed upon successful strategies.

This text begins with a theoretical discussion of criminal governance and social capital. We then order the information on the three cases studied in three stages: coexistence with crime, the breaking point associated with a particularly violent act, and the successful application of public strategies agreed between the state and civil society. Finally, we close the text with a key question, which those of us who put our names to this article seek to respond to with investigations conducted by El Colegio de México's Seminar on Violence and Peace: Can this model be replicated in Mexico City and other urban centers?

2. Criminal Governance and Social Capital

Although this section should have started by discussing “social capital” because people first organize and then decide whether they will support organized crime, follow the rule of law, or become themselves passive observers, we started by discussing criminal governance because, in all three cases, organized society reacted against criminality when it exceeded an acceptable limit of violence, which, as we will see, vary according to the country and geographical region.

Defining organized crime is problematic.³ Let's look at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) definition:

[A]ny group of six or more people, where one of the six occupies a coordination role, and whose main objective is to make money through illegal activities. Such groups engage in the following activities to keep their power: physical violence, or the threat of violence, corruption of public officials, and infiltration or extortion, and their activities have in general an impact on the population, whether at the local, regional, or national level.⁴

This leaves the impression that they conceive of organized crime as an actor distinct from the rest of society and the official authorities. This is not the case. Mafias and drug cartels are part of their respective societies and are protected by part of the state. This is why we consider the term "criminal governance" to be more accurate: it gives prominence to these groups, both for their disruptive role and because they establish networks with legal and illegal actors and create governance from illegality over part of the population.

According to Enrique Desmond Arias, it is common for criminal groups in Latin America and the Caribbean "[to] operate in the context of functioning state institutions."⁵ In other words, legal and official authorities coexist with these criminal groups. This coexistence will depend, at the local level, on the type of criminal governance involved, the degree of criminal consolidation, and the use of violence.

For Benjamin Lessing, criminal governance is "the imposition of rules or restriction on behavior by a criminal organization"⁶ in a territory. This implies the imposition and superimposition of a new order in a territory that includes economic regulations and alternative justice apparatuses, among other factors. Lessing's definition is built on the idea that, more than an actor, organized crime is a complex social phenomenon that works on multiple dimensions. In a criminal governance scheme, criminal groups are equally involved in the provision of public goods and in the imposition of rules and behaviors. In short, they are an authority articulated around a system of relationships

that competes and/or coexists with the representatives of the state.⁷

Ana Arjona and Nelson Kasfir argue that, once a territory has been secured, these groups decide how they will interact with the population. “They can rob and rape them, they can recruit them, they can ignore them, or they can try to govern them.”⁸ There are different combinations, “ranging from creating minimal regulation and informal taxation to forming popular assemblies, elaborate bureaucracies, schools, courts, and health clinics.”⁹ Variations depend on the business model of the criminal organization, the type of relations established with the government authorities, the personality of the capo or head of area, and the social resistance.

As suggested in previous paragraphs, criminal governance does not entail the elimination or nullification of legally constituted authorities. Coexistence with them is quite common, under schemes of cooperation (fostered by corruption or complicity), mediation, or subordination, over which hangs the possibility of the use of violence. In other words, the construction of a criminal authority occurs in parallel and simultaneously with the official and legal authority, or concomitant with the same authority.¹⁰ In these situations, shades of gray are unavoidable.¹¹

We will now explain the criteria that led us to connect the cases of Sicilia, Chicago, and La Laguna. First, that there was criminal governance in all three places. Second, the participation of the same social groups (businesspeople, independent media, victim collec-

tives, civil society organizations, religious groups, and academics) willing to lobby the state with proposals of public policies to contain criminals. This entails the existence of officials willing to fight organized crime, which, in turn, opens the possibility of a considerable and sustained reduction in crime associated with criminal governance.

In subsequent investigations we will add other urban centers (e.g., New York; Medellin, Colombia; and Fortaleza, Brazil) to further refine the model developed here. We will also review how positive and negative social capital interacted in the three cases as we continue developing a methodology applicable to cities such as Mexico City.

The aforesaid leads us to the concept of “social capital,” present in social sciences literature for decades.¹² Logically, the concept has evolved. The original idea is from Pierre Bourdieu, who understood it as the actual and potential resources generated by an association of people that persists over time (with no minimum or maximum time limits that we are aware of).¹³ In his own words, social capital is a “durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group.”¹⁴

Years later, Robert Putnam used the concept to explain why northern Italy was more democratic than southern Italy. His argument made an impact because it showed that the difference resided in the presence or absence of social capital.¹⁵ Other theorists associated it with social networks,¹⁶ i.e., social capital is expressed

and can be studied in terms of social networks. It should be added that in this optimistic version social capital is characterized by horizontality and the pursuit of justice, respect for human rights, and condemnation of violence.

As often happens, killjoys like William Callahan appeared. Callahan argues that “social capital has its dark side: tightly knit groups that work to exclude as much as they seek to include.”¹⁷ Or like Alejandro Portes, for whom there are negative consequences to social capital, such as “the exclusion of non-members, [the] excessive demands to group members, [and the] restrictions to individual freedom.”¹⁸ We will differentiate them by calling them positive and negative social capital. The latter manifests itself in those relationships or networks (usually hierarchical) that facilitate and sustain illegality, violence, and authoritarian social relationships.

If Putnam used Italy to demonstrate the positive aspects of social capital, Mauricio Rubio poses Colombia and Central America as examples of “perverse” social capital, alluding to gangs characterized by their machismo and violent masculinity in general.¹⁹ For Eloiza Matos, the negative form is “exclusionary and creates public distrust, as happens in the case of clientelist and mafia-like relationships.” Following this author’s logic, the contexts of income inequality and power asymmetries favor and accentuate the negative social capital on which organized crime is based.²⁰

Hence, the need arises to categorize, contextualize, and typify social capital through this dichotomy, ac-

ording to which negative social capital promotes and strengthens the criminal governance described, and positive social capital underpins a social base for the rule of law and peace practices capable of containing violence. Of course, these are not exact formulas—shades of gray are quite frequent in this area.

In the next sections we will compare what happened in Chicago in the 1920s, in Sicily between the 1980s and the first years of the 21st century, and in La Laguna since 2007. We will put particular emphasis on the reaction of organized groups that lobbied the authorities with specific proposals that turned out to be successful. And we will leave for further research such central aspects as the way in which these groups organized themselves, the process that led them to participate in the fight against organized crime, and the way in which they interacted with negative social capital. We will also postpone a more detailed review of the way in which negative social capital is formed.

Even though we have been speaking about six organized groups (businesspeople, the media, victims, academics, civil organizations, and religious groups), space constraints force us to place more emphasis on the media (determinant in the formation of social consensuses on crime), businesspeople, and victims. All three are key in defining the problem and in the dialogue with the authorities.

We will divide the evolution of the process into three stages: the coexistence of a criminal group and the still incipient social response, the breaking point associated to a particularly violent event, and finally,

the implementation of public strategies agreed between the State and the civil society with a successful outcome that lasts over time. In none of these cases was the criminal presence completely eliminated, but there was a decrease in violence to levels acceptable to social groups and the government.

3. Coexistence

We reiterate the pattern: in all three cases, the criminal group appeared first and then came the reaction against it. We will start with the first stage: coexistence, which we will outline case by case.

Chicago

An advantage of starting with Chicago is that the presence of organized crime in the 1920s has been extensively studied, which allows a clear appreciation of the stages of coexistence, breaking point, and fight against gangs.

Scholars agree that Prohibition (1920–1933) weighed heavily in the rise of organized crime. Chicago was the second largest city in the United States, and most of its population was opposed to the Volstead Act or “dry law” (in the jargon of the time, Chicago was a “wet” city). This facilitated the acceptance and/or tolerance of gangsters. Although there were different criminal groups, the spotlight was on Al Capone’s organization. This was a logical consequence of the size of the organization and the charisma of Capone, who presented himself as a businessman and “benefactor”

who supplied society with "minor pleasures" (alcohol, prostitution, and gambling).²¹

For Eliot Ness, Capone had a "genius for organization" that made him the "criminal czar" of Chicago.²² In 2012, the Harvard Business School took Capone's organization as the subject of one of its famous case studies. According to it, by 1929 his gang was making \$100 million in annual revenue (\$1.49 billion adjusted for inflation as of December 2019). Of this, 60 million came from beer and liquor, 25 million from gambling, 10 million from prostitution and bars, and 5 million was miscellaneous income. We synthesize here the organizational structure of Capone's gang because it is a model that is still replicated by other criminal organizations. It had three main branches:

- a. To administer its various enterprises, the organization had managers, treasurers, accountants, and people responsible for liquor sales. Two people oversaw the administration of the hundred or so brothels owned by the Capone family. Then there were those in charge of the gambling parlors, and so on.
- b. Violence was essential, and the organization had goons, hitmen, and bomb specialists. It trained and prepared them to do well their peculiar craft. For example, competitors who dared to sell beer in its territories had their businesses destroyed and were often executed.
- c. Finally, the organization had a legal department in charge of getting them out of jail and providing other benefits commensurate with the capo's standard

of living and image: secretaries, drivers, doctors, valets, barbers, chefs, waiters, and so forth.²³

The organization's relationship with the authorities was based on the distribution of money in exchange for tolerance and protection. It spent a third of its income on bribing politicians and state and municipal police officers (it is estimated that half of Chicago's police officers were on its payroll). Infiltration was facilitated by the fact that the federal government did not prosecute organized crime in those years.

The criminal organizations had a strong social base in poor neighborhoods. Its assassins and a considerable part of the members of the complex intelligence system that surveyed all the city for them came from those neighborhoods. A high percentage of waiters, prostitutes, cab drivers, and newspaper vendors were at their service. Al Capone led a very well-informed organization.

We are aware of other traits of Chicago's mafias thanks to the work of John Landesco, a visionary academic whose most important book (*Organized Crime in Chicago*, from 1929) has been unjustly forgotten. "The gangster," Landesco wrote, "is a product of his surroundings in the same way in which the good citizen is the product of his environment."²⁴ In his study, Landesco also explains the impact of Prohibition. Before this law, he says, criminals and police officers held "friendly relationships" because they all came from the same neighborhoods. But when transporting, trading, or consuming alcoholic beverages became illegal, that

friendly relationship became a relationship based on money.²⁵ Corruption became professionalized.

Capone devoted time and resources to public relations and the promotion of his image. He loved being in the limelight and showing off his wealth. He attended boxing matches, the racetrack, and the opera escorted by eighteen bodyguards. For years, the city's major newspapers (the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Herald and Examiner*) treated him like a celebrity and "provided coverage of Capone's daily activities."²⁶ Tourists wandered in front of the hotel where he lived hoping to see him so they could report back home that they had seen an internationally famous character.²⁷ When the Great Depression began in 1929, he cultivated his philanthropic image by creating soup kitchens for the poor. He was the object of public fascination.

Sicily

In Sicily, Cosa Nostra precedes the *Risorgimento* (the establishment of the modern Italian state in 1861). One of the myths about its origin is the supposed arrival in Italy of three Spanish knights with rhyming surnames: Osso, Mastrosso, and Carcagnosso, who would have disembarked in Sicily. Osso would have stayed there to found Cosa Nostra, Mastrosso would have done the same in Naples with the Camorra, and Carcagnosso in Calabria with the 'Ndrangheta.²⁸

Cosa Nostra managed to take root in Sicily's territory, society, and culture. It established a criminal governance that dominated through violence and persuasion.²⁹ In the 1980s, Tomasso Buscetta, the first repentant (*pentito*),

confirmed that the structure of Cosa Nostra was based on respect for the hierarchy, allegiance to family bonds,³⁰ and loyalty to the organization, the ultimate manifestation of which was the *omertà* or code of silence.³¹

For Umberto Santino,³² the relationship between Cosa Nostra and the state and, in general, legal authority has two dimensions: as a criminal association and as an alternative governance in the Weberian sense. In other words, the organization had:

- a. A set of rules (a code)
- b. A territorial dimension
- c. The ability to use physical coercion
- d. An administrative apparatus capable of enforcing the rules. We will elaborate on this crucial element below.

Relations between Cosa Nostra and the society were based on a combination of intimidation, subordination, and persuasion. Through fear, this criminal group imposed an internal cohesion sufficiently broad and solid to establish itself territorially throughout the island. This cohesion was peddled as the making of a valid local authority capable of exerting power and controlling and administering violence and economic and commercial activities, as well as enforcing codes of conduct based on the recognized authority of the mafia. Finally, part of the society was convinced of the legitimacy of that criminal governance.

The power of Cosa Nostra reached its peak in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By then, it had achieved

overwhelming power and impunity based in its control of the legally constituted authorities. It had also managed to instill a fear of its criminal mandate in society. In short, it projected an image of omnipotence and omnipresence.

La Laguna

Coexistence took a different form in La Laguna, a city shared by the northern states of Coahuila and Durango. This area is of great strategic importance for drug trafficking because it is the main communication node between the Pacific and the northeastern Mexican border with the United States. To travel overland from Culiacan in Sinaloa to Ciudad Juarez, Nuevo Laredo, and Reynosa one passes through La Laguna. It is the shortest route. Therefore, society is accustomed to the presence of criminal organizations since the 1920s.

The Juarez Cartel controlled that territory for a long time. But when the alliance between the Juarez and Sinaloa cartels ended in the early years of the 21st century, the latter became the dominant organization. Society tolerated them because there was an implicit assumption that criminals and citizens lived separately, in a different world.

The appearance of the Zetas upset the balance. This group was distinguished by their systemic brutality. They resorted to unusual levels of violence: dismemberments, beheadings, and dissolving human remains in acid. They also established training camps to train their hit men in the use of all types of weapons, mili-

tary combat tactics, torture, counterintelligence techniques, and telecommunications. The founders of the organization adapted and spread what they had learned in the United States during their training as special forces.

The Zetas arrived in La Laguna between 2003 and 2004. They kept a low profile for two or three years, during which they laid the groundwork for controlling the territory, with a cadence rehearsed by criminals in other regions. Recruiting elements from different police forces and military units was the first step. They used the agents in charge of the legitimate use of force to gather information, kidnap and extort people, and control the territory.

Once they had infiltrated the security institutions, the Zetas would start to threaten businesspeople, the media, and society. They used the same method. First, they recruited members of the target group to use them as informants and messengers. Once in place, the Zetas would give a pedagogical lecture on violence. They would kidnap and torture a member of the group to instill fear and demand obedience.³³ This was the logic behind the attack against businessman Carlos Herrera in 2007 and the murder of journalist Eliseo Barrón. To terrorize society, they would scatter human parts around the city and carry out massacres in crowded places.

The Zetas' hold over La Laguna became so oppressive that resistance from different social groups developed. As we will see in the next section, this was influenced by a massacre in Tamaulipas that changed the federal strategy.

4. The Breaking Point

We find as a pattern the existence of a limit to social and governmental tolerance of criminal violence. It's a variable threshold, but when it is crossed there is a reaction from one or more of the social actors already mentioned. Then begins the search for solutions and the approach to the authorities with concrete requests to reduce criminal governance to tolerable levels. Another observable pattern is the tacit acceptance by society and government of the impossibility of completely eradicate organized crime. Let us review the three cases in more detail.

Chicago

In 1924, the “Beer War” began in Chicago. Opposed criminal groups clashed with bullets and bombs to control the lucrative business. From that year on, explains Daniel McDonough, the opinion of part of the press shifted. Capone began to be seen as “a ruthless, vicious and sinister force.”³⁴ His demonization began, and Capone went from being the benefactor businessman to the “archvillain of the day.”³⁵

Capone and his gang had supplanted the government of Cicero (a conurbation of Chicago), where *The Cicero Tribune* appeared in 1924. Founded by Robert St. John at the age of 24, its editorial line was focused on the systematic and methodic denunciation of the outrages of Capone and his triggermen, the protection granted by the authority, and the defenselessness of the citizens.

Capone reacted ordering a beating so brutal that St. John was in the hospital for a week. But he didn't back down. He went ahead, but the capo defeated him with the methods of the market economy: he bought the majority of shares of *The Cicero Tribune*. The journalist gave up and left Cicero to pursue a brilliant career as a war correspondent.³⁶ He died at the age of 100 without ever returning to the city where he started his career. Despite his defeat, says Capone's biographer, St. John "had done more to assail the racketeers and expose their nefarious tactics to public scrutiny than all the police and politicians in the entire city of Chicago."³⁷ Other journalists followed his example and started creating the conditions for a change in attitudes that would lead to Capone's decline.

The violence did not abate in the following years, and the breaking point came with the murder of seven people on Valentine's Day 1929. On that February 14, a group of gangsters dressed as police officers arrived at the premises of an enemy of Capone's. When they saw the uniforms, six gunmen and an innocent bystander that was by accident on the premises obeyed the order to stand against the wall. They were ma-

chine-gunned. The scandal was national and overflowed the patience of the organized society, which had been denouncing the criminal presence for years.

Even the capos of the Families in other American cities were tired of Chicago's excessive violence. It was bad for businesses. After visiting the city, the famous New York gangster Charles "Lucky" Luciano described it as a "real goddam crazy place. Nobody's safe in the street."³⁸ After that Valentine's Day, the New York crime bosses met in May 1929 and concluded that violence was affecting everyone's business. "A sacrificial lamb was needed to ease the heat. Capone was to be the lamb."³⁹

A month after the Valentine's Day massacre, a group of business and civic leaders from Chicago traveled to Washington to meet with President Herbert Hoover. They complained that Capone was running the city. Hoover reacted by ordering "that all the Federal agencies concentrate upon Mr. Capone." They were to "put Capone in jail."⁴⁰ The presidential decision was important because the federal government did not fight organized crime until 1960; that was the responsibility of municipal and state authorities. It was an exceptional intervention. It would be many years before the federal government declared itself competent in the matter.

Sicily

The centuries-old roots of the Sicilian mafia were consolidated after the Second World War. The Cold War changed Washington's priorities, which empowered the Italian and French mafias to arrest the communist advance in Europe.

“In town after Italian town, the allies appointed mob-connected mayors”; the priority was to prevent “appointing communists.”⁴¹ In other words, due to its “postwar anticommunism [the United States] once again struck a deal with the devil.” The United States priority was to defend liberal democracy and the market economy in the world, and it left American addicts, who began to receive drugs from Sicily and Marseille, unprotected.⁴²

Against this background, let us look now at the two stages of the Sicilian anti-mafia movement. In the first stage, it was associated with the left represented by the Italian Communist Party. In the second, the movement became pluralistic after the appearance of the “excellent cadavers,” a term used to identify the emblematic victims of the mafia.⁴³ Once again, the violence created a backlash.

Among the “excellent cadavers” there were journalists, priests, public officers, military personnel, businesspeople and intellectuals, and finally, anti-mafia judges. In a way, the heterogeneity of the cases fed the plurality of a cause that, in the end, would be articulated around two axes: the rejection of the power of the mafia and the opposition to the social order promoted by Cosa Nostra. We will see now the most relevant cases.

Giuseppe “Peppino” Impastato, journalist and local activist. Born into a *mafioso* family, he broke with them to become a communist. In 1977, he established Radio Aut, from where he publicly condemned the activities of the mafia, which responded with a spectacular pedagogical assassination: they tied the journalist to

the rail tracks and then dynamited him. They wanted to educate people about what happened to those who challenged their governance. Impastato's dead moved his mother and brother, among others, to investigate the crime and prove the responsibility of the mafia.⁴⁴ Their efforts led to the creation of the Impastato Center, an important institution committed to documenting the mafia.

Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, Major General of the Carabinieri. In 1982, Dalla Chiesa became prefect of Palermo and coordinator of a national campaign against the mafia. He held the position for four months before being shot dead along with his wife. As his appointment symbolized "the state's desire to present a strong public anti-mafia posture," his assassination confirmed the criminal organizations' "utter disrespect" for government institutions.⁴⁵

Giuseppe "Pino" Puglisi, Catholic priest. He established an anti-mafia pastoral in Brancaccio, a Palermo neighborhood with a strong mafia presence. His most salient work was with homeless children, to whom he presented an alternative image of the *mafiosi*, considered successful role models.⁴⁶ The priest also criticized the mafia in his sermons. Pino was 56 years old when he was killed by a hit man. It is said that on seeing him he uttered, as his last words, "I was waiting for you." That readiness for martyrdom probably influenced his beatification in 2013 by Pope Francis. His tomb is in the cathedral of Palermo. He is a symbol for anti-mafia Catholics.

Libero Grassi, businessman. After receiving threats, as so many other merchants and local businesspeople,

Grassi refused to pay *pizzo* (extortion) and made his refusal public in a letter addressed to his *Caro estortore* (dear extortionist) published in the local press. His assassination triggered one of the most successful models of articulation between authorities and civil society organizations.

Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, anti-mafia judges. They both are, probably, the most important symbol of the anti-mafia movement. Therefore, 1992 would be the symbolic moment when the breaking point took place. Falcone and Borsellino led the first and emblematic Sicilian anti-mafia pool, that is, the group of magistrates in charge of criminally investigating Cosa Nostra in a coordinated and collective manner. Their main achievement was the *Maxiprocesso*, a trial unprecedented in Europe for its magnitude (we will discuss it in the third section). They were assassinated in spectacular attacks in May and July of 1992, respectively, and became a symbol that united almost all anti-mafia sectors around a thesis: the mafia violence and the system that made it possible had exceeded the tolerable limits. They had to be fought.

La Laguna

La Laguna has similarities and differences with Chicago and Sicily. It is similar because of the participation of businesspeople, victims, and the media and the way in which local and national events interacted. It is different because of the weight of the confrontation between two cartels and the national and international impact of a massacre carried out in a neighboring state.

The mobilization of people from La Laguna coincided with a radical shift in the strategy of the federal and state governments. In 2009, says Guillermo Valdés Castellanos (at the time director of the Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional [Center for Investigation and National Security]), “we realized that we could not win the war” against all the criminal organizations. “Consequently, we changed [our] objective to reducing violence and decided to go against the Zetas.”⁴⁷

An event of particular brutality accelerated this decision. The massacre of seventy-two migrants in San Fernando (August 2010) was the breaking point. The government's objective was redefined, says Valdés Castellanos, and the priority became “guaranteeing peace and the security of the population”. The purpose was to “reduce the violence instead of destroying drug trafficking or openly fighting the [criminal] organizations.” Valdés Castellanos boasts that, “in less than three weeks, we had around 90% of those involved in the San Fernando massacre.”⁴⁸

The Sinaloa Cartel had been in La Laguna for decades. It had reached a tacit understanding with the population: they trafficked drugs, granted, but they were careful not to bother civilians. The arrival of the Zetas, with their predatory and extremely violent business model, changed the situation. The clash between the two groups opened spaces for some sectors of society to start wondering what they could do to regain peace.

A warning: this section will be different from the previous ones in that we will reduce emphasis on violent events to place the accent on the social response,

based on an intangible: the collective identity of the people of La Laguna. Javier Garza—a prestigious journalist—defines it as an “identity of independence, a feeling that things are earned with work.” It is also influenced by a “sense of solidarity and mutual help.”⁴⁹

Businesspeople

The mobilization of businesspeople began in Mexico’s capital when, in 2008–2009, a group led by Alejandro Martí (the father of a victim) organized to promote security throughout the country. One of its first decisions was the creation in 2009 of the organization México Evalúa. Its current director, Edna Jaime, says that its “first task was to produce a system of indicators to monitor the criminal phenomenon,” creating observatories to “guide Mexican public opinion.” A distinctive trait of these observatories was the rejection of public funding.⁵⁰

La Laguna’s businesspeople were distinguished by their independence, and this was one of the first places to create an observatory. Edna Jaime attributes this to the fact that “they are somehow globalized businesspeople who do not depend on their relationship with the governor. They need the local government or the state government to be able to function, they need the provision of basic public services, but they do not owe them beyond that. There’s no clientelism.”⁵¹

The first measure adopted by local businesspeople was the creation of the Consejo Cívico de las Instituciones Laguna [Civic Counsel of Laguna Institutions], which developed “indicators that go beyond crime incidence.

They became the most innovative of all the observatories.” Among other aspects, Edna Jaime says that they “began to geo-reference crimes, to build heat maps, to elaborate hot spots.” Currently, “it is an observatory that, in addition to security issues, monitors public spending and public works.” It is an institution that “calls authority to account” and watches over it.⁵²

Simultaneously, a group of important businesspeople began to lobby the federal, state, and municipal governments. In 2011, they met with Jorge Tello Peón, advisor to President Enrique Peña Nieto and close to the Monterrey businesspeople. Tello says: “In the second half of 2011, a first meeting was held at the home of one of them. They invited the two governors; I would say all three, because the governor-elect was Rubén Moreira but Jorge Torres was [acting as] interim [governor] and Jorge Herrera from Durango had just taken office. The joint project was presented to them.”⁵³ Later on we will review the requests they made and the answers they received.

Victim Collectives

In 2009, victims created Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila (FUUNDEC) (United forces for Our Disappeared in Coahuila) in Saltillo, the capital of Coahuila. They also set up an office in La Laguna and had the support of the Diocese of Saltillo headed by Bishop Raúl Vera.

Collectives often arise from an individual initiative. In November 2004, Silvia Stephanie Sánchez-Viesca Ortiz disappeared. Her family, led by her mother, Sil-

via Ortiz, immediately mobilized and began to put up posters, hold marches, and organize masses and protests. During the first years, they were accompanied by family and friends. Later, they were left alone, but, as Doña Silvia remarks, they were “stubborn and tenacious.”⁵⁴ They filed complaints despite the obstacles imposed on them and gave interviews to the media. Their main allies were the media and religious groups, while businesspeople ignored them. In 2009, they created Grupo Vida.

This initiative coincided with the appearance of the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (MPJD) [Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity] in Mexico’s capital. It was a national mobilization led by the poet Javier Sicilia, father of a murdered young man. A caravan of the movement arrived in Torreon, Coahuila, in June 2011, and national and local events began to interact. Grupo Vida, for example, emulated the parents of the teachers-in-training (*normalistas*) from Ayotzinapa and went out into the countryside to search, themselves, for the remains of the disappeared. They began in January 2015, and by May 2019 had managed to identify twenty-four sites with skeletal remains.

Journalists

Journalists who decided to resist criminal attacks always started from one premise: they could not count on government support. Spontaneous processes were then generated from the protection measures adopted by each journalist.

Professional solidarity and unity revolved around one objective: to survive and inform as far as possible. In a profession characterized by the search for prominence, it was remarkable the clarity they had to put it aside. One of their first measures was to socialize information; no one went alone to the places of confrontations, and they were in permanent communication. Armando Moreno recalls: “I learned that death has to be respected, that there are no egos.”⁵⁵

Journalists became extremely cautious with language. They used neutral words: *naughty*, *bad*, *those*, “*those of the company*,” and so on. They also carefully followed the unwritten codes of the criminals and their behavioral patterns. Finally, there was a pragmatic formula synthesized by Javier Garza, then Editorial Director of *El Siglo de Torreón*: “A point of consensus among journalists was that they would only publish what was confirmed by the authorities through a bulletin, announcement, or press conference.”⁵⁶ In other words, if the government was infiltrated, then the information disseminated by an official would be acceptable to “them.” They also changed the content of their reports. During those years, *El Siglo de Torreón*

[a]dopted a very limited and basic way of reporting on organized crime. We stuck to official information without conducting our [own] investigations. We made up for it with stories that included crime statistics, the increase in armed robberies, the economic and social impact of violence, the testimonies of those who lived in

its shadow, and the links between poverty and unemployment and crime.⁵⁷

Finally, there was the support they sought and obtained from national and international media and journalist protection organizations. By going beyond the local ambit, they widened the margins of protection, and there was greater pressure on the three branches of government to put the fight against the most dangerous cartel, the Zetas, on the list of priorities.

5. Consensual Strategies

Reaching an agreement between society and government on a strategy required, first of all, that regardless of how the parties defined the risk, they agreed on the urgent need of stopping the criminals. Then came the need for convergence on concrete measures, which varied according to the way the problem was defined and the characteristics of each culture and political and legal system. The goal was quite clear: to reduce violence to tolerable limits, tacitly accepting the impossibility of completely eradicating organized crime.

Chicago

As mentioned earlier, after the Valentine's Day massacre in 1929, President Herbert Hoover ordered Al Capone's incarceration, thus initiating the federal government's involvement in the combat against organized crime.

Given the refusal of the director of the Bureau of Investigation (later to become the FBI) to acknowledge the existence of the Mafia, the president assigned the task to the Treasury Department, which followed two parallel routes. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) would deter-

mine whether Capone had paid taxes and the Bureau of Prohibition would investigate violations to the Volstead Act. In the former were accountants; in the latter, Eliot Ness and a small, incorruptible group which would become famous by their nickname of the “Untouchables” and immortalized by television and movies.⁵⁸

By December 1930, Ness had assembled a rather small group (it never had more than a dozen white, male members) to fight an organization engaged in bootlegging, extortion, labor racketeering, prostitution, and gambling. Ness had orders to document crimes and go against Capone’s sources of income. He chose to go after the underground breweries because they had the “most capital invested, [...] the most complete organization, the quickest turnover and the greatest income.”⁵⁹

To carry out his assignment, he relied on intelligence (processed information), and for this he had the group compile a list of all the gangsters in the region, ordered a permanent surveillance of the main speakeasies, and tapped the telephones of the rooms of the hotel where Capone lived and of his casinos and brothels. He was advised by the Forensic Crime Laboratory of Northwestern University in Chicago, financed by a semi-clandestine group of businesspeople (the Secret Six).

By the spring of 1931, the federal prosecutor had on his desk enough evidence to indict Capone for violating the Volstead Act (the work of Ness and his Untouchables) or evading taxes on one million dollars (\$14.5 million adjusted for inflation as of December 2018) of income earned between 1924 and 1929. On

June 5, he chose the second alternative. A jury of citizens affected by the Great Depression—the prosecutor reasoned—would be more likely to convict Capone of refusing to pay taxes. The case built by Ness and his team was put in reserve for the eventuality that the accountants' case failed. It was never used. In October 1931, Capone was sentenced to serve eleven years in prison for the prosaic crime of not paying the taxes he owed. Thanks to Hollywood and the media, the laurels and medals went to Ness and his Untouchables.⁶⁰

However, the authorities were mistaken if they believed that imprisoning Capone would put an end to organized crime. In 1931, the Godfathers of seven crime families—five from New York, one from Chicago, and one from Buffalo—met in a Chicago hotel. At that summit, presided over by “Lucky” Luciano, they created “the Commission,” a ruling council in charge of drawing broad strategic lines, peacefully settling conflicts between the *mafiosi*, and dividing up the markets throughout the country. It took decades for the US government and society to accept the existence of a national criminal organization and to design strategies and laws to fight it.

One moment that symbolizes success was the Mafia Commission trial, when the bosses of the five New York crime families were tried. What is relevant about the trial is that it was designed to reduce the power of the criminals, assuming from the very outset the impossibility of eradicating them. US Attorney Rudolph Giuliani's prosecutor, Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Chertoff, had an outburst of clarity when he

made plain that the Mafia Commission trial, “in its totality, was designed to break the economic power of the mob and really send them back to what they were when they were essentially street gangs.”⁶¹ They wanted to reduce criminal governance to acceptable levels. Given its complexity, we leave the logic behind this self-imposed limitation for another text.

Sicily

By one of those coincidences of history, the New York Mafia Commission trial overlapped with the Sicilian *Maxiprocesso*. Held between 1985 and 1986, the *Maxiprocesso* was able to gather legal evidence against *mafiosi* thanks in large part to the declarations of Tommaso Buscetta, the first *pentito* (repentant). With the information provided by Buscetta, Judge Falcone was able to thoroughly understand the structure of Cosa Nostra.

Led by Falcone, the anti-mafia pool of magistrates identified Cosa Nostra members involved in the so-called French Connection—a drug-smuggling scheme through which tons of heroine were smuggled from Turkey to the United States via France and Canada—and the Pizza Connection—a judicial investigation conducted in the United States by the DEA and the FBI found that millions of dollars from heroin sales were laundered in pizzerias owned by the Cosa Nostra members.⁶²

The pool eventually arrested 336 alleged criminals and, in December 1987, 19 *mafiosi* were convicted to serve life sentences; others received shorter penalties, and there were 114 acquittals.⁶³ However, the success of the *Maxiprocesso* was not only based on the penal-

ties, but also in the way in which the mafia structure was attacked.

In the *Manifesto dell'Antimafia*, Fernando dalla Chiesa, one of the most prominent anti-mafia leaders and minds (and the son of slain General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa), argues that, in Sicily, there were five *mafiosi* forces that the anti-mafia had to dismantle to succeed: legitimacy, material invisibility, conceptual invisibility, expansivity, and impunity. According to Dalla Chiesa, the fight against the mafia

- a. was not only, or mainly, a matter for magistrates and law enforcement agencies;
- b. was not a phenomenon that directly affected only three or four regions of Italy;
- c. could not be only a peaceful and painless process of legal education for future generations; and
- d. could not be exhausted in the mere denunciation.⁶⁴

However, it was not until the 21st century that joint strategies were consolidated within the Sicilian anti-mafia movement. In 2017, *The Guardian* described Palermo as a resilient city, the result of a convergence of forces between the civil society and the authorities that fostered a change in several conditions.⁶⁵ For example, the professionalization of the Sicilian civil society engaged in promoting the combat against the mafia. As a result, a constellation of professional and sustainable nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) emerged. Libera and Addiopizzo, both NGOs, are emblematic in this regard.

Libera, according to its website, was born “with the purpose of involving and supporting all stakeholders in the fight against the mafia and organized crime.”⁶⁶ Addiopizzo, on the other hand, has focused on helping victims of extortion by coordinating counseling, together with local police and judges, to report cases of *pizzo*, the practice of mafia extortion.

Another strategy is supporting the election of anti-mafia mayors. Leoluca Orlando is a paradigmatic case. He has been mayor of Palermo from 1985 to 1990, then from 1993 to 2000, and currently since 2012. He has also been elected to the Italian Chamber of Deputies and to the European Parliament. Since his first electoral victory, Orlando has always maintained an openly anti-mafia discourse in his various public offices. According to Orlando, 1999 was the first year without mafia-related murders (and with only eleven unrelated cases in total). That is why, he says, in the summer of that year he felt the “survivor’s unique responsibility: to tell the story as it happened.”⁶⁷ The topic gives room for another text.

The current pacification of Sicily is based, to a large extent, on the construction from heterogeneity of a unified bloc that has served as a platform to build strategies agreed upon with the authorities. The result has been a reduction in criminal governance.

La Laguna

The success of La Laguna depended on the convergence of federal, state, and municipal forces that paid

heed to the demands of social organizations, among them those of big businesspeople and victim collectives, supported by the media, the church, and universities. The former demanded a metropolitan police force and the fight against kidnappings; the latter, truth, justice, and specialized attention.

To combat the Zetas throughout the country, the federal government deployed new strategies. The main one was the creation of the Centros de Fusión de Inteligencia y Operatividad (Operative and Intelligence Fusion Centers), which, essentially, gathered information on the criminal organization from different Mexican government agencies and information provided by US authorities. The objective was to attack its sources of income and pursue its bosses.

The federal shift coincided with the change of governor in Coahuila. Rubén Moreira (who governed from December 1, 2011, to November 30, 2017) got involved and put together a strategy with specific objectives: recover the Piedras Negras penitentiary, tend to the victims, and capture criminal leaders Miguel Ángel and Omar Treviño Morales, aka Z40 and Z42, who were apprehended in Nuevo Laredo in July 2013 and March 2015, respectively. Simultaneously, the Moreira administration attacked the criminal organization, reducing its revenue and eroding its social and cultural bases. It was a case of success.

Let us insert La Laguna in this context. The demands of the businesspeople came true in 2014 when the Gabinete de Seguridad Nacional (National Security Cabinet) pledged to establish a Special Command

for La Laguna, headed by the Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional (National Defense Secretary). This ended the fragmentation of the structure of command. The Fuerza Metropolitana (Metropolitan Force), a security body commanded by a military officer and integrated by police officers from Coahuila, Durango, and the federation, was also created. The Special Command has worked because it solved the problems caused by jurisdictional conflicts between municipalities of those two states. And the Unidad Metropolitana Antisecuestros (Metropolitan Antikidnapping Unit) was also created. The result has been a notable drop in the number of intentional homicides and missing persons. We reiterate that one reason behind this success is the permanence of the Consejo Cívico de las Instituciones Laguna, which constantly monitors crime incidence.

Victim collectives also achieved progress emulated in other parts of Mexico. They have pioneered campaigns to disseminate information on the disappeared, lobbying authorities, searches in extermination camps and zones, analysis forums, proposals for legal instruments, and so on. A concrete example is the creation, in September 2012, of the Grupo Autónomo de Trabajo (GAT) (Autonomous Working Group), a meeting space for victim collectives and state government officials that has facilitated collaboration on different issues. In short, Coahuila has become a national example for dialogue between victims and authorities and for the creation of legislation and public policy.

The Zetas were fragmented and left without leadership, and violence in the state of Coahuila was re-

duced. However, the Sinaloa Cartel, which conducts itself much more discretely, is still present in La Laguna. Anyhow, by mid-2021, the criminal governance remains under control.

6. Conclusions. Comparing Chicago, Sicily, and La Laguna

In the three cases discussed in this article, a communion of visions and will from the civil society and the authorities to dispute the local political legitimacy to the criminal groups stands out. Moreover, they share some similitudes in the way they reduced violence and criminal governance.

First, in all three cases there was a dominant criminal group engaged in illicit activities that had the support of part of the organized society to create a de facto criminal authority. In other words, at the local level there was criminal governance.

The second resemblance is that the hegemony of the local criminal group implied the existence of a system that determined the type and form of local social relations. That said, national and global factors that we have only touched in passing also played a role.

Finally, there was a social movement that, in alliance with the legal authority, counteracted criminal governance. In other words, in all three cases there was a construction, densification, and consolidation of positive social capital, inspired and designed to diminish

the dominant criminal governance and the negative social capital it produced in each case. How can we describe this positive social capital?

Despite the heterogeneity in latitudes, contexts, and time frames, the constellation of social actors that made up this movement is similar. In all three cases, journalists, academics, businesspeople, religious organizations, civil society organizations, and individual victims or victims grouped in collectives, were involved. Each sector participated according to its own narrative, interests, and leadership, but sharing the desire to reduce criminal governance and the willingness to approach public officials committed to combating the local criminal group.

This confluence of actors made possible the creation of islands of peace: geographical polygons where social relations are based on respect of human rights and the rule of law. In other words, positive social capital. These spaces produce a legitimacy of their own that expands itself and creates geographies of peace where a broader resistance to criminal governance is built and includes the extremely complex relationship with those individuals and groups in the community that sympathize with or support the criminals.

The successful reduction of criminal violence is undoubtable in all three cases. In Chicago, they accomplished the limited goal of incarcerating Capone, and then began the construction of ever more elaborate formulas to confront criminality. In Sicily, the number of homicides by mafia-like organizations diminished by almost 80% between 1992 and 2012.⁶⁸ According to

Monica Massari, murders perpetrated by Cosa Nostra went from 152 in 1992 to only 10 in 2010.⁶⁹ The reduction in this case is 93.4%. In no other case did the scale of violence perpetrated by a mafia criminal group decrease so much in that period. Finally, in La Laguna, the number of homicides and disappearances has fallen since 2012. In 2011, there were 1,060 intentional homicides and in 2018, 139.

Even though the violence associated with local criminal governance dynamics decreased drastically in all three cases, the recovery of memory, reparations, and access to justice still face challenges. In addition, the criminal groups were not permanently eradicated, but the conviction that illegal markets are not necessarily and inevitably violent was strengthened.

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Can this successful model be replicated in other urban centers? In Chicago, Sicily, and La Laguna, convergence and lobbying had a spontaneous logic. Could this process be induced “from outside”?

On March 11, 2019, Mexico City’s Secretaría de Educación, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación (SECTEI) (Secretary of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation) launched the project Red ECOs, whose purpose is to convene public and private higher education institutions, government agencies, public research centers, civil society organizations, and different actors of the productive sector to form interdisciplinary and interinstitutional coalitions that, after studying a

problem, present public policies to the capital's government.

Shortly thereafter, SECTEI invited El Colegio de México to coordinate the effort to study the violence in the capital in order to propound solutions. The president of the institution, Silvia Giorguli, proposed to the Seminar on Violence and Peace of El Colegio de México to coordinate the project. This is how the authors of this text began to explore the possibility that the model described above could be replicated in Mexico City. In May 2021, thirteen institutions submitted a three-year proposal to the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (Conacyt) (National Council of Science and Technology).⁷⁰

Among the first objectives are the construction of trust and working methods among the thirteen institutions involved, the understanding of the social fabric at a macro level (city halls and the city) and micro level (the ability of Puntos de Innovación Libertad, Arte, Educación y Saberes—PILARES—in Mexico City to become islands of peace), and the preparation of a proposal that will allow us to approach the leaders of the six social actors mentioned in this text to work out a minimal security agenda. In the background is the formulation of a flexible and rigorous theoretical framework that will allow us to solve step by step the multiple theoretical and practical problems of a gigantic city.

In forthcoming texts, we will analyze the way in which we solved these challenges, which we approach from a central thesis: to conquer peace we must understand the logic of criminal violence.

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y Paz (Seminar on Violence and Peace) of El Colegio de México, coordinating body; and Universidad Iberoamericana (UIA) (Iberoamerican University).

