Abstract

The article argues that Surveillance Studies in Latin America should analyze violence and insecurity as the central elements in the dynamics of surveillance, but also demonstrates how surveillance acts as a major component on the dynamic of violence in the region. Taking Mexico as a point of reference, the article explores three surveillance regimes: state, social and criminal surveillance in order to identify how the dynamics of insecurity and violence have impacted each. The features of these surveillance regimes implies a particular way to collect information and data, while also suggesting methodological challenges and the need for a specific manner in which to do Surveillance Studies in Latin America.

Introduction

The stage of criminal violence in Latin America has intensified in recent years. Homicides, robberies, kidnappings and extortion have increased significantly in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela (Pereyra and Davis 2000). This has led to the proliferation and increased use of surveillance technologies in order to confront the problem (Melaço 2011; Valvarce 2011; Barreto and Ribeiro 2010; Lemos 2010; Bruno 2010; Kanashiro 2008). The expansion of the use of video surveillance systems, drones, ID cards, and other devices, to control population flows and spaces can readily be seen. However, government officials within these states are not the only actors who make use of these technologies. Although little work has been done in this area, the organized crime groups, that produce the largest amount of violent scenarios in the region, also make use of various surveillance technologies such as video surveillance, wiretapping phones and email, in order to target police, military, civilian authorities and populations (Cano 2008; Costa Vargas 2006). In the same way as state actors, these technologies allow for the identification, sorting and monitoring of people, institutions and social groups as targets for unfolding violence (Bauman and Lyon 2013). Against this background, one might venture the idea that the context of insecurity hides behind the different surveillance machinery in Latin America.

Surveillance Studies in Latin America accounts for, among other things, the relationship between insecurity and orchestrations of surveillance being implemented by the state, civil society and criminal
The aim of this article is to point out how, in methodological terms, the interest in exploring the relationship between insecurity and surveillance in the region as a form of territorial and population management within the convergence of state, social actors and criminal groups. This would allow for the exploration of insecurity as a space in which different actors establish surveillance orchestrations through “...processes of monitoring, collecting and maintaining information in files, systematic categorization, as well as classification and social sorting, typically connected with the management of behavior through sanctioning or exclusion” (Samatas 2005: 188). I believe this is relevant to the extent that in recent years in Latin America insecurity has become territorial in nature (Valenzuela 2013), in which state efforts, social groups and criminal gangs have focused on trying to watch and monitor territories and populations (Souza 2008; Wacquant 2008). An approach of this kind, of course, then impacts on the way Surveillance Studies researchers should collect and systematize information.

Certainly Latin America has political, economic and cultural features, which makes it difficult to define a single methodological approach to account for all the surveillance orchestrations developed within it. Although they differ in intensity and depth, countries in the region do share a number of formative social factors. In modern and contemporary Latin American history, for example, violence carries fundamental weight in the construction of social and institutional relationships (Davis 2010; Arias 2010). The government, the elite and other groups exercise different types of violence and apply it in such a way that has permitted the establishment of competing frameworks in how citizenship, justice and rights have been defined (Arias and Goldstein 2010). Currently, the violence and insecurity in Latin America is not the consequence of a defect in the institutional design of its democracies, or its strengths of order and justice systems, rather they exist more as a result of its social organization (Bobea 2010; Landman 2010). This has particularly been demonstrated in countries such as Colombia (Ramírez 2010), Argentina (Auyero 2010; Stanley 2010), Brazil (Gay 2010), Mexico (Guardino and Walker 1992), Peru and Bolivia (Maldonado 2010a).

In fact, violence “…affects lived political experience and is fundamentally inculcated in the production and maintenance of the ‘democratic transition,’ as well as in the operations of democratic states and civil societies in Latin America” (Arias and Goldstein 2010: 22). In the region various forms of violence are increasingly used; they are expressed as an instrument for political rule, criminal rationale, and social resistance (Kalmanowiecki 2000). In this sense,

…rather than understanding Latin America’s endemic violence as simply a failure of democratic governance and institutions, we call attention to violence as an element integral to the configuration of those institutions, as a necessary component of their maintenance, and as an instrument for popular challenges to their legitimacy […] Latin American democratic society can be conceptualized as “violently plural,” with states, social elites, [criminals], and subalterns employing violence in the quest to establish or contest regimes of citizenship, justices, rights, and democratic order.

(Arias and Goldstein 2010: 24)

Violence, insecurity and surveillance are social processes which are linked in Latin America. Within the management of territories and populations their assemblage expresses the conflict between different social actors. Insecurity must be seen, therefore, as the space in which a series of material resources are conflicting, and where specific forms of domination and citizenship appear. Thanks to the various surveillance systems that are deployed by the state, society and criminal groups, these disputed areas and

---

1 There is significant literature on the subject that realizes these dynamics in different Latin American country contexts, but not necessarily focuses on how this relationship is established.
populations are precisely monitored. This means that doing Surveillance Studies in Latin America largely involves paying particular attention to the social and political content, characterizing insecurity and violence in the region.

This work focuses on the case of Mexico, with the backdrop of the Latin American context, as an invitation to think about methodological characteristics when understanding surveillance in this particular region of the global south. The paper shows that insecurity and violence in Mexico are linked to the operation of both state surveillance systems, communities and organized crime. This expresses, on the one hand, the tension between forms of domination and exercising of citizenship, justice and rights; secondly, the way that these regimes perform some functions of governance over territories and populations.

To the extent that these systems operate as power and violence mechanisms, doing Surveillance Studies in Mexico has its difficulties. There are no transparency mechanisms for accessing government information, as well as community distrust of researchers, makes it dangerous to try and explore beyond a certain point the forms of surveillance in which organized crime operates. This forces the development of methodologies and analysis models that appeal to a certain sociological imagination: building models of interpretation and explanation from limited or fragmented information that must be constantly contrasted to obtain plausible interpretations.

The article is divided into three parts. In the first, the emergence of three orchestrations of surveillance linked to the context of insecurity in Mexico is exposed: referred to here in very general terms as state, social and criminal surveillance. It is not intended to define a completed profile, but an outline of its general characteristics in terms of its relationship within the context of insecurity. The second part demonstrates how these surveillance orchestrations have emerged and met. In the third part, the question of how to generate consistent, clear and convincing explanations that can be applied to the larger context of Latin America from the limited, inadequate and incomplete data that are specific to a context of insecurity that exists in Mexico is addressed.

1. Three insecurity and surveillance dynamics in Mexico

Mexico has in recent years lived a complicated scenario of insecurity that involves: organized crime, linked to drug trafficking, state forces, including the police and army; civil society groups, including organized surveillance, auto defense groups; and social networks. These three spheres reflect the presence of surveillance systems that, in the background, function as social sorting machineries, which identify and monitor targeted groups. This section broadly draws the dynamic that links insecurity, violence and surveillance processes in Mexico in order to understand the context in which Surveillance Studies in this country are carried out.

During the 1960s, drug trafficking was an important activity in the country, but was confined to defined rural zones (Astorga 2005). From the middle of the 1990s it transformed into an activity that expanded...
both in the rural as well as urban communities, which was reflected into an increase in socio-technical surveillance devices directed at controlling the distribution of drugs, the administration of groups, and populations (Sung 2004). This problem was confronted by the government with a policy of “the war against drugs” (González 2009; Moloeznik 2007), whose main element has been the technical modernization of surveillance practices. The result is that many of these devices were used by the political regime against whom they considered their political enemies (Campesi 2011). In this context, society has become organized with the goal of generating “bubbles of protection” against organized crime, the political use of state surveillance, and the distrust of police work (Valenzuela 2013; Vilalta 2012). As a result, “neighborhood watch” strategies were established in the cities, and more recently, auto defense groups have proliferated in the countryside. In this way, the three surveillance regimes—state, social and criminal surveillance—have projected all of the tensions which have defined contemporary Mexico.

Criminal surveillance

The production of drugs from a vegetable origin in Mexico has been linked, as Maldonado (2010b) points out, to the creation of protection groups of large estate owners, and which serve as intermediaries between themselves and peasants. These types of armed brokers or bandits also developed functions uniting the city and the country. Their force lies in the knowledge, surveillance and control of a territory and its population, and has allowed them to model social behavior through the use of negotiation, coercion and violence (Yeh 2012). When the international modernization projects of the 1980s plunged the peasants into poverty, isolation and exclusion, these brokers were responsible for re-organizing an agricultural economy directed at the global drug market (Maldonado 2010b). However, the forms of criminal organization that emerged from these intermediaries can be differentiated by their manner of surveillance and violence over the population—that is, they worked not only in the trafficking of drugs, but to reorganize the entire social life of communities in order to extract more economic benefits. The groups are, on one hand, the organized crime figures that search, through the surveillance of communities, modifying the forms of social life in their more everyday aspects. On the other hand, they are also the organizations which define territories for the extraction of resources, either through extortion, kidnapping or the sale of “protection”—known as the “narco tax.”

The first example that stands out is called the “Familia Michoacana,” a criminal organization that, in its origins, was characterized for deploying strategies of social protection. At first they developed surveillance mechanisms to protect the rural communities against robbery, kidnapping and the sale of drugs and alcohol to teens and children. Later, they started the monitoring of communities’ social conditions and worked to construct libraries, churches, medical centers and schools, while at the same time they financed the construction of infrastructure for the distribution of water, drainage and electric energy. In addition to these construction projects, they finished by supervising the behavior of people and families—identifying those who consumed alcohol in excess, men who beat their partners, and even chased and punished rapists. In this sense they assumed police and “social cleansing” functions within these communities. In some of the documents that were distributed to the population, the Familia Michoacana organization showed that the only way to avoid vices and delinquency was through the “adoption of surveillance strategies for returning order to society and the State”; for them it was the only path for maintaining the “…universal values of people.”

4 There can be identified ten important criminal organizations linked to drug trafficking: La Federación de Sinaloa, Los Z, El Cartel del Golfo, La Familia Michoacana, Los Caballeros Templarios, El Cartel Independiente de Acapulco, Jalisco Nueva Generación, El Cartel de Juárez, El Cartel del Pacífico Sur, El Cartel de Tijuana.
level of social backing in some communities. The penetration and relative legitimacy of this organization facing society can be explained because it functioned by relieving the conditions of exclusion and isolation that the processes of economic modernization and the absence of a state policy of social welfare had generated.

An example of the second type of organization is the group “Los Z.” The majority of the members of this group are deserters of the Mexican Army, specifically the Special Forces Air Transport Group, some of them with Kaibil training. These individuals were originally contracted by the Tamaulipas cartel as a strike force for gaining better positions in the drug market, while in their later years they functioned autonomously. Their military training allowed them to organize and manage urban and rural spaces in a particular manner. They spread out surveillance regimes in the cities from intervention quadrants, taking commercial censuses, establishing a sophisticated informant network, maintaining the monitoring of the main communication frequencies of the governmental and military authorities, as well as video surveillance systems, the same as GPS systems for monitoring the police, and army and social networks.

In fact, some analysts consider that the groups which traffic drugs in Mexico spend more money on technology and are more flexible at incorporating modern avant-garde technological designs than the military and intelligence institutions. This infrastructure of surveillance allows the designing of kidnapping plans, sabotaging urban services and communication networks. It is documented that from obtaining property information, the criminal groups set up a protection tax for zones, social groups and economic activities. In this way, the criminal surveillance de-structures the citizenry, fracturing the exercising of citizen rights, inserting on the population a predatory logic of protection, and imposing dominating asymmetric relationships which construct new forms of social and community coexistence.

State surveillance
Facing the uncontrolled violent surveillance by organized drug trafficking groups, the Mexican State implemented a series of security policies in different fields and distinct levels of government during the 1990s. At first in 1995 the “General Law that establishes the bases for a national public security system” was set out, whose objective was to create an integrated information and crime surveillance system in the country, where the municipal, state and federal government branches were all involved. With the publication of the law years later, a strategy that was known as the “National Crusade against Crime and Delinquency” was defined, focusing on settling the technological delay in the matter of surveillance and

---


anticrime intelligence.\textsuperscript{12} Since the first decade of this century, the “Integral Strategy of the Prevention of Crime and Combat of Delinquency” operated, its goal being “…to concentrate and harmonize all data, absolutely all of the data that the State has in its different orders of government and power as well as configuring a delinquency map of the entire country.”\textsuperscript{13} Finally, in recent years “Platform Mexico”\textsuperscript{14} was established whose objective is to face the “war against crime” with avant-garde surveillance technology. This platform was connected with the Plan Merida, with the idea of strengthening the capacity of “…intercepting electronic communications, surveillance and other espionage technologies,” within the national territory and connecting with the North American and Canadian surveillance systems (Fyke and Meyer 2008).\textsuperscript{15}

The military presence in the police forces is a permanent central element in each of the phases, programs and strategies designed to combat criminal violence in the country. In the first place, members of the army, high authority and troops had directly intervened in security policies; in some cases, taking charge of patrolling the cities and municipalities in substitution of entire police corporations which had been dismantled by their links with drug traffickers,\textsuperscript{16} and in second place, because the intervention which the armed forces made resorted to using anti-guerrilla strategies of the 1960s and 1970s. Public security in Mexico has lived in this sense a militarization process with effects in the army of citizen rights and justice. One of the more harmful consequences of this scenario is the increase in the violation of human rights.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Social surveillance}

Facing criminal surveillance and state surveillance, the citizenry ended up establishing their own and this, in certain cases, is marked by violence—as is exemplified in the community auto-defense groups. The first actions of the citizenry during the 1980s and 1990s was to close their neighborhoods with walls and check points by private police, which was then accompanied by the installation of surveillance cameras (Giglia 2001). Other programs such as “neighborhood watch” underwent important growth during these years, at the same time as the growth of private police set up to protect financial and commercial districts (Müller 2010). It is important to mention that the gated communities protected by the security cameras, private police and other surveillance devices are inhabited mainly by the urban middle class, and considered to be a triumph of security and a guarantee of privacy which allows individuals to distance themselves from

\textsuperscript{12} The objective was to interrogate the National Information System which allowed the handling of 50 million fingerprints, as well as facial recognition and anthropomorphic of 5 million people.


\textsuperscript{14} The Platform Mexico is the National Criminal Information System. It aims to generate police intelligence through the exchange of information between the national government and states.

\textsuperscript{15} Also under consideration is an investment of 400 million dollars from the Mexican government for the acquisition of internet tracking systems, espionage of mobile telephones, as well as software for the control at a distance of computers and password directories, see: \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2012/08/120803_narcotrafico_mexico_espionaje_internet_ant.shtml}, Accessed July 3, 2014.


\textsuperscript{17} With respect to this point in particular see the report: In the Name of the War Against Delinquency: A Study of the Phenomena of the Torture in Mexico prepared by a group of civil social organizations that watch the development of military and police power in Mexico. The report can be found at: \url{http://www.equidad.scjn.gob.mx/IMG/pdf/En_nombre_de_la_guerra_contra_la_delincuenciasp.pdf}, Accessed July 3, 2014.
others (Arteaga Botello 2010). These forms of surveillance had been derived in the generation of dynamic social exclusion and urban segregation, generating social sorting, and worked to deepen social inequalities (Becker and Müller 2013). In the first decade of this century non-government organizations were directed toward the supervision of police and army activities.\(^{18}\)

During the last few years, civil defense groups have appeared called auto-defense communities, mostly in rural zones from the states of Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Morelos y Mexico.\(^{19}\) These organizations established armed surveillance mechanisms, set up to protect small agricultural villages from the presence of organized crime and from a state apparatus which is unable to guarantee the security and protection of the citizenry.\(^{20}\) The community auto-defense organizations are directed at monitoring the activities of people considered to be “foreign” to the community, regulating population flow, and establishing identification processes of individuals and social sorting. They also monitor surveillance that the army and police establish, paying attention to if they really are doing their work, and how this work is being done, but most importantly, if they respect the members of the communities, and their human rights.\(^{21}\) In this way, groups like auto-defense organizations work to enforce their own idea of justice and the protection of rights.

Within urban spaces, similar surveillance mechanisms have been crystallizing through the social networks of blogs, microblogs, Twitter and Facebook—including “Nuevo Laredo Live,” “Mexico Can,” “No More Blood” and “Forgive Me México.”\(^{22}\) These networks seek to build surveillance networks in order to cover the vacuum of security left by the state. Their presence speaks to forms of resistance and autonomy that society produces facing the attack of state and criminal surveillance, and have received support from companies, including Google, who have pushed a proposal that organizations from Mexican civil society present initiatives which take advantage of the satellite package that this company has in order to generate surveillance systems for constructing more secure cities.\(^{23}\) The response by organized crime has been the establishment of anti-surveillance devices in order to detect, threaten and assassinate the administrators of these networks.\(^{24}\)

Surveillance against violence which generates social organizations implies the formation of a citizenry that searches for protection in an environment considered hostile and dangerous. However, its results are variable with respect to the construction of social classifications. The surveillance of gated communities produces exclusion and urban segregation, sharpening the inequality in the social structure. Organizations

\(^{18}\) Some organizations are Causa en Común, Observatorio Nacional Ciudadano, Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad, México SOS, México Unido contra la Delincuencia, Consejo Cívico de Instituciones de Nuevo León y la Asociación de Consejos de Participación Cívica, México Evalúa y Alianza Cívica.


\(^{22}\) See: http://nuevolaredoenvivo.blogspot.mx, @sipuedomexico, @nomassangre, @perdonamemexico. Accessed July 3, 2014.


that supervise security policies, for example, tend to adopt the classifications of the military and police institutions; on the other side, social networks work to stigmatize zones and urban spaces, identifying them as dangerous and violent; finally the armed auto-defense groups function through extra-legal processes of persecution and detention of presumed criminals on their own initiative. In each one of the regimens of citizen surveillance the construction of another as a target is put into play, and the will to construct a singular understanding of citizenry in a state blurred.

2. Surveillance struggles and assemblages

The Mexican scenario demonstrates the presence of distinct regimes of surveillance and violence. On one side, criminal organizations have significant capacity for maintaining territories, routes, social control sectors, tax payments, population flow, and in some cases they even function as regulators of social relations, having support and social legitimacy in some territories. On the other extreme, there is the surveillance established by the state for the purpose of the “war against drug traffickers” and “insecurity,” carrying with it authoritarian tendencies, directives to satisfy the interests of specific groups and political factions, which has little transparency, and works to weaken its democratic institutions. In the middle of these surveillance regimes, diverse sectors of society prepare other systems that allow the monitoring of organized crime activities. In the zones where they are present, and in the dangerous situations they generate, they exist in confrontations with the army and the police, but also work to develop forms of sousveillance (Mann, Nolan and Wellman 2003) of police and military performance, as well as lateral surveillance (Andrejevic 2005; Albrechtslund 2008). The other point of this scenario is that of armed community guards, establish surveillance to monitor territories, control borders, and identify people and groups. This section shows that, in Mexico, surveillance schemes linked to insecurity are a way of managing the population and territory by the state, social actors and criminal groups, from which mechanisms of domination and forms of exercising citizenship are constructed.

Among these distinct surveillance regimes are also established, on one side, struggles, and on the other, assemblages. The first types include the cases of criminal organizations that monitor the surveillance of civil society groups with the goal of sabotage or executing their administrators. The second relates to the articulation between police and lateral surveillance for increasing the capacity of territorial control and the prevention of crime. It also includes, however, an alliance between the world of delinquency and society, as there are data that suggest that some defense communities are being armed by groups of drug traffickers.25 In each one of these surveillance regimes, their struggles and assemblages, there is the assertion of particular forms of citizenry and the redefinition of legal and illegal logics. If the citizenry is defined within these systems as different groups fighting to gain autonomy and control over their lives, facing certain forms of stratification and domination (Held 1989), the question would be what type of citizens are constructed in the logics of surveillance that are seen here and, above all, within these struggles and assemblages, what types of social sorting are being established?

Framing the surveillance theme in the context that has just been analyzed implies the recognition that its expansion is linked to the context of insecurity and criminal violence that today exists in Mexico, and that functions as a real factor of power (Sánchez 2006). Given that the protection facing violence and insecurity is not considered as a universal right within a legal framework, but a property acquired by those that can make of it (Arteaga Botello 2010), the construction of the Other, which potentially represents a danger—strengthens and legitimizes the noticeable inequalities in the social hierarchy. In this sense, those social groups that have a greater capacity to provide for themselves security and surveillance mechanisms,

deploy in turn a greater capacity to objectify and monitor those social groups that are considered a threat or risk to their security. The intensity of the surveillance over the Other varies, clearly, in the function of the organizational sphere from where it is constructed. For example, in the case of gated communities, centers and commercial districts, with their cameras and biometric identification devices, these gated communities produce exclusion and urban segregation. The most affected are particularly those considered as potential criminals: the poor, indigenous, inhabitants of marginal neighborhoods. The state and governmental security policies introduce elements that emphasize the classification of “suspicious” targets, in addition to criminalization. With military interventions in urban zones—the new urban militarism (Graham 2011)—and rural, the surveillance tends to distinguish, according to Lyon (2011), between those whose rights as citizens are fully recognized and those who are only partially accorded their rights as citizens. This sorting of the population then intensifies the forms of exclusion that derive from social sorting. In addition, surveillance functions under a logic of internal colonialism among groups and territories in marginalized urban zones and in a deeper form in rural zones (González 1979). This means that the state establishes security policies where political and social rights are suspended or partially guaranteed on a discretionary basis, under the principle of protecting the security of the population. Thus, forms of local self-government, deemed “unfit” or “insufficient,” are dissolved, being replaced by mechanisms of control and management from the central government.

On the other side, it is certain that criminal organizations cannot be understood in the same way as pre-politic expressions of social struggle, in spite of the fact that certain drug traffickers are perceived sometimes as community or social group benefactors. However, their presence allows the realization of deep sociopolitical conflict. Surveillance related drug trafficking allows the construction of a social order that grows in the margins of the order of the state. Yet, its articulation is not certain with other surveillance regimes—the army and governmental authorities such as the police, or with auto-defense social organization forms—that the future could convert it into a complex link in which the demands of a political and social character are mixed with a criminal logic. But at this moment, certainly, Mexican State has become overflowed by the current violence which has extended across different social fields. This is radically transforming the lifestyle of the people. The process of separation expands and contracts depending on the surveillance to which people are subjected to—organized bands, the army, police, gated community cameras, armed community auto-defense, and risk prevention social media—defining who is a citizen or in which way they are a citizen.

3. Data and information in contexts of insecurity

Insecurity and violence in specific populations and territories is what unites these three types of surveillance. However, these areas correspond to different scales of social organization, involving different densities, structures and forms of articulation of social actors, and they define a particular social organization from the categorization of groups and individuals, through the identification of individuals, computation of their behavior and the monitoring their mobility, in order to influence, manage, care and control a given population or part of it.

What this ultimately defines, is a specific project of society, individuals and citizens. The three surveillance schemes show how groups and their goals are made visible within a given space. I believe this is a particular element that is necessary to highlight when Surveillance Studies are done in Latin America.

The three regimes of surveillance in Mexico are linked to the context of insecurity, which is not a minor issue in the country. Trying to understand surveillance in Mexico involves taking into account real factors of power and the social processes that come into play (Sánchez 2006). Where the state seeks to halt the
spread of organized crime; where society seeks to guarantee a living space; and where organized crime seeks to expand its influence at all costs. Surveillance, like processes of monitoring, collecting and maintaining information connected with the management of behavior through sanctioning or exclusion becomes, in this sense, a difficult topic to address.

First, there is not easy access to information on surveillance strategies that are developed by the government. The state in Mexico, at different levels of action tends to hide information—and even in the best cases, provide it in a fragmented and partial manner with respect to how and who is monitored. As a result, this is a topic barred from the general public and similarly for academics. It is argued by government authorities that to provide information on the different surveillance orchestrations could then be used by organized crime to expand its area of operations or to sabotage government security measures. When accessed, state agencies make you sign agreements which specify that researchers cannot post this information—even within research journals, so as to not place “at risk” areas under government surveillance. The ambiguity of what “placing at risk” means, places the researcher in a position that requires them to be careful about the type of information that is written in their research reports intended for publication. Thus, in many cases studies of surveillance must collect the information that is needed from the press, television and the internet. However, it is necessary to maintain a criterion of selection of information, with a view to ensure the accuracy of the latter.

The same thing happens when research on developed surveillance systems from different social groups is done. Here we must first face the distrust of the researcher by communities and social groups. Usually there is a suspicion that someone is interested in how a surveillance orchestration works in order to sabotage it. In many cases this represents a danger to the researcher, who can really be considered a threat. There are experiences of researchers who have been kidnapped by neighboring communities and delivered to the police as suspects suspected of belonging to a criminal gang. Recall that in Mexico there is already a warning of the Mexican Council of Social Sciences, on the danger today of conducting field research in different disciplines, not just in terms of public safety, all thanks to the context of insecurity. Therefore, the analysis of the press is converted into a key element: through this means, one can obtain information on innovative surveillance strategies that are deployed in urban neighborhoods and rural communities. Even the appearance of a particular form of surveillance in the press may be the key to approaching their promoters in order to perform a deeper investigation.

Finally, perhaps the most difficult to understand is the surveillance developed by criminal groups. In this case, the main source of information is collected from different news media, official statements from the Mexican government, but also by social media reporting on monitoring mechanisms with which organized crime operates. Of course it is also possible to detect this through fieldwork, however it is complicated and in most cases dangerous. However, there are experiences of this (Maldonado 2014). These limitations, typical within a context of insecurity, put into consideration the limits of research on surveillance in the country. While there is not an insurmountable wall, the truth is that these factors nonetheless limit the collection of information and analysis of surveillance processes.

In this regard, an important part of the work on surveillance hangs on data which is collected from different sources, with different detail, forming a kind of “bricolage” which is not easy to articulate. Different authors have noticed this problem as they approach any subject linked to insecurity and violence. In the case of Mexico, being much more marked than in Latin America, there is a fragmentation and opacity of information at all levels of society, which requires an analysis that must take information from journalist sources, social networks, fieldwork, what little information contained in official sources, and the academic literature, which infer forms of surveillance. It is important to recognize the clear limitations that involve mixing this information to build understanding and causal arguments in the social
Arteaga Botello: Doing Surveillance Studies in Latin America

sciences. However, these limitations can be circumvented, particularly if, as Davis (2007) suggests, the information is compared, if inferences of materials and facts that one confronts are achieved, and it is analyzed from models of interpretation which are tested for consistency and contrast so as to obtain the most comprehensive explanatory and plausible interpretations as possible.

4. Conclusions

This article has argued that the study of surveillance in Latin America requires the analysis of insecurity through the management of population and territorial spaces. Emphasis was placed on the three orchestrations of surveillance—state, social and criminal surveillance—by their overall presence in the whole region; although in each country they are expressed differently. This paper was tailored to the case of Mexico in order to sketch a little more detail of the conditions that have led to the emergence of these surveillance orchestrations. The intention has been to expose the conditions of insecurity and its impact on accompanying forms of surveillance.

It highlights the importance of uncertainty in the formation of societies and the configuration of its state formation within in the countries of the region. Without wishing to hide the differences that characterize each country, it was suggested that insecurity expresses its own tensions in shaping a sense of justice, rights and citizenship. From these considerations, it subsequently addressed the issue of the forms of state, social and criminal surveillance in the case of Mexico. Treated in this way, it characterizes the relevance of thinking about the connection between insecurity and violence as two sides of the same coin through which various actors, such as the state, society and organized crime gangs, perform some functions of governance over territories and populations.

This work stresses the usually forgotten or overlooked importance of insecurity within the study of surveillance. Regularly Surveillance Studies in the region consider that this is just the answer to a context of insecurity. Here I have worked to show that surveillance is not only that, but it is also the central key in its production. This means doing Surveillance Studies in Latin America means, among other things, establishing a methodological strategy that allows the location of the deepness, feeling and trends of insecurity to be taken into account. This has become, in the region, a variable that requires particular methodological attention, because it is centered around which other fields of study, that try to account for democratic dynamics, human rights, passed through cultural studies and poverty, are drawn.

The final part of this paper demonstrates the complications that the context of insecurity poses to the analysis of surveillance, that is, its need to work with fragmented information from federal, state and municipal authorities, in communities and neighborhoods that have implemented surveillance systems to protect against crime as well as the military and police. Finally, I have tried to show how difficult and dangerous it is to explore the surveillance orchestrations of organized crime groups.

Under these conditions some sociological imagination is required, as Mills suggested, connecting and building models of interpretation and explanation “in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on” (1959: 5). This represents a particular challenge to the extent that Latin America has peculiarities that give a specific meaning to the development of surveillance. In this article only a general background that frames the orchestrations of surveillance in the context of insecurity in Latin America has been presented. However it is necessary to consider that surveillance regimens respond in each country and even each territory to a particular logic rooted in socio-defined historical processes (Murakami 2012). Therefore, it is always a challenge to imagine methodologies to account for the place where they are exercised and applied, the social context in which they emerge and the articulation logic displayed.
References


Maldonado, Salvador. 2014. ‘You don’t see any violence here but it leads to very ugly things’: forced solidarity and silent violence in Michoacán, Mexico. Dialectical Anthropology 38: 143-171.


