

Acting numbers: translating and quantifying death in El Salvador's gang truce

ABSTRACT

This work focuses on a truce established between criminal groups in El Salvador, commonly known as *pandillas*. Based on a specific conceptual framework and using a set of methods from the Actor-Network Theory, I intend to follow some controversies of this process regarding the fulfillment of the agreement, the stabilization of its beginning and closure, and the determination of its "success" or "failure". In order to do so, we shall first see how the monthly homicide numbers produced by the country's Institute of Legal Medicine act on these tensions, organizing and producing different versions of the truce. Next, we expect to shift our analyses towards actors that participate in the production of such numbers, influencing on the many narratives they create. Elements that usually remain unnoticed, or even forgotten, are the very focus of this work. Thus, this paper seeks to expand the literature on the truce period, while at the same time aiming to broaden discussions on the convergence between numbers, quantification, deaths and situations of violence.

KEYWORDS: Violence. Quantification. El Salvador. Truce. Tregua.

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INTRODUCTION

If this work were a movie, it would start in El Salvador, 2012, year that marks a truce between local criminal groups, understood as a security landmark for the Americas. The agreement consisted on a declaration between the country's government and a series of "gangs" involved in violent and criminal practices. Each side undertook different obligations. On the one hand, the *pandillas* would stop recruiting new members in schools and slowly reduce their violent activities, and on the other hand, the government would transfer criminal leaders to prisons in better conditions, and cease police operations during night-time (SANZ, 2014).

That said, this paper aims to analyze the truce process through the lens of an actor that, inspite its presence in several settings and assemblages associated to the event, remains under-analyzed: the homicide numbers. One of the main arguments of this work is that homicide numbers participated in the truce by taking part in several enactments of the process. They do so by associating themselves to the work of many other actors, such as forensic doctors, corpses and computer programs, translating and inscribing deaths into stable and sanitized numbers.

In order to develop its argument, this article is divided into three sessions. The first session will focus on some controversial points of the gang truce in El Salvador. Later, we shall see which theoretical and analytical repertoires enable our specific approach. After presenting our methods, the third and final session comprises the practices and actors involved in the production of homicide numbers, and how these actors enact controversies about the truce, namely its beginning, end, fulfillment, success and failure.

THE TRUCE AND ITS MILESTONES

As in many Latin American countries, El Salvador's history is marked by bloody stories and violent experiences. Apart from the colonization period and more than 10 years of Civil War, from 1980 to 1992 a "distinct" type of violence became part of the Salvadoran population's daily life: the so-called *maras*, a specific form of violent socialization between youth groups (CRUZ, 2014). In the past, the word *mara* designated in El Salvador groups of friends with certain affinities, such as their neighborhood or school. Today however, as Marcela Smutt and Lissette Miranda (1998, p.26) point out, the word gained a pejorative meaning, referring almost exclusively to organized groups of young people involved with violent and delinquent acts. For the young members of a *mara*, the grouping represents a lifestyle (SMUTT & MIRANDA, 1998, p.26). Today, this form of association can be treated as "*pandilla*" or "*mara*", two forms used in El Salvador and in other countries to refer to these organizations. Of the various gangs operating in the Central American country, three are worth mentioning: *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13), the *18 Sureños* and *18 Revolutionarios*, the latter two being part of the *Barrio 18*.

It can be said that the first historical record of a *mara* dates back to 1959 and deals with the student *maras*. However, this does not exclude the possibility of existing similar associations and practices in previous historical periods (SMUTT & MIRANDA, 1998, p.30). Therefore, it exists records and traces of shifting gang-related practices in El Salvador since the 1960s. In the 1990s, it is possible to monitor the recognition of the *pandillas* as a problem and a threat to the country's

stability and as criminal entities inserted in a series of illegal activities such as extortion, illicit drug trade and territorial disputes (GUERRERO, 2012). From the 1990's, this phenomenon transformed itself and reached its current configuration, where gangs are perceived and categorized by the state as an existential enemy, associated with terrorism, violence and crime (GUERRERO, 2012).

During the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, El Salvador's government implemented several policies and laws designed to combat these groups, as a response to the growing presence of the *maras* in the organization of violence in the country. In fact, it is curious that a truce could emerge between the criminal groups, in the midst of policies such as the *Plano Mano Dura* of 1999, which gave more flexibility to the judgement procedures of *pandilla's* members; the Anti-Maras Act of 2003, prohibiting gang membership; the Super Mano Dura Plan of 2004, employing the army in public safety; and the Law of Proscription of gangs and Extermination Groups of 2010, prohibiting the existence, financing and support of illegal groups.

Thus, the truce stands out as a process marked by tensions, nuances and idiosyncrasies, namely the disputes revolving around its beginning and end, and the great decrease in the homicide rate. Bearing in mind the particularities of each of these enactments, we will take these *controversies* as a starting point for our work. It is important to emphasize that adopting this form of organization is not the same as affirming the existence of only a single way of organizing the practices associated with the gang truce.

The beginning of the truce is the first point of controversy that we would like to tackle. For some, the truce would have begun in 2012, as indicated by the homicide numbers decrease in that year, going from an average of 354 homicides a month before the truce to 218 homicides after the truce, a drop of more than 100 homicides per month (AMAYA & MARTÍNEZ, 2016; VALENCIA, 2015; SANZ & MARTÍNEZ, 2012; RESEARCH UNIT, 2013; KATZ & AMAYA, 2015).

However, it is also possible to understand the beginning of the truce in the wake of a historical process marked by other negotiations or, at least, by attempted negotiations between the gangs, thus debunking the year of 2012 as the "origin" of the process (BLACKWELL, 2015; SANZ, 2013). The non-governmental organization *Homies Unidos*, for example, was founded in 1996 by a cease-fire between 22 members of *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18* (ZILBERG, 2011, p.37). In addition, the 2010 *Mesas de Esperanza* project also echoes the efforts of dialoguing with the members of *pandilla*, as it consisted of several talks between the prisoners and their relatives, the Human Rights Unit, the Attorney General's Office from El Salvador and the Subdivision of Legal Affairs. Their aim was to create a space for interaction between the direction of prisons, inmates and their families. Thus, the demarcation of the year 2012 as the beginning of the truce silences and erases from history these earlier dialogues and negotiations with the *pandillas*. As shown above, the beginning of 2012 is questioned and understood as a tension to the process. Similar to this point of contention, I believe that there are 3 other controversial aspects, as we will see below.

Regarding the end of the truce – our second controversy - some versions indicate the year of 2013 as one of the possible ends, since the main actors associate to the negotiation – such as General David Munguía Payés, Minister of Justice at the time – were removed from the government and from any attempt of

dialogue. Furthermore, an increasing homicide rate, after a period of significant drop, gave the “technical” confirmation of the truce’s end. In 2013, the number of homicides increased from 186 cases in June to 253 in July, according to the Institute of Legal Medicine (ILM) of El Salvador. This rise would point to the agreement’s collapse, as deaths returned to be once more the main way of resolving disputes between the *pandillas* (CARBALLO, 2015, p.7; EFRÁN, 2014; TAGER & UMAÑA, 2013, p.16).

Meanwhile, other voices argue for the truce’s end in 2015, with the arrival of Sánchez Cerén in the country’s presidency, stating that he would not continue with the process (NODAL, 2014). However, one could also argue that the truce did not come to an end, since in 2016 there were still a series of practices linked to this event. To illustrate this point, it worth remembering that in 2016 the Attorney General of El Salvador, Douglas Meléndez, issued 21 terms of imprisonment for people involved in the truce process, including mediators, police officers and members of civil society. The order resulted in the arrest of 18 people and 3 government officials with search and seizure orders (GARCÍA, 2017).

Furthermore, we can observe a third controversy rising from the disputes around the *pandilla’s* compliance or non-compliance to the agreement. Together with these groups, the numbers served as technical evidence “proving” that they were respecting or not respecting the terms (PANDILLAS, 2014a). If the numbers decreased, it was because the *pandillas* did so and if it increased is also because the *pandillas* did so. Nevertheless, some actors tried to problematize this relation between the homicide numbers and the *pandillas*, arguing that the truce terms were not being respected – in spite the decrease in homicide numbers - because the missing persons indicator increased during the gang truce. In 2012, the total number of disappeared persons, according to sources of the National Civil Police of El Salvador, was 545. In 2013, that number almost doubled, jumping to 1,070 victims of disappearance in the country (CRUZ & DURÍN-MARTÍNEZ, 2016; MONCHE, 2014).

Lastly, our fourth controversy draws on the arguments for and against the truce and relates to the acknowledgment of its success or failure. For those who believe that the truce was successful, the numbers “attest” so by showing a decrease in the homicide rate, a drop bigger than 100 homicides per month (Katz & Amaya, 2015). But for those against the process, the growth in homicide numbers represents the instability of the truce, and therefore, its failure (VALENCIA, 2015; WILKINSON, 2015; KATZ & AMAYA, 2015; MONCHE, 2014; AMAYA & MARTINEZ, 2016).

Thus, it is possible to notice how the homicide statistics fulfill the role of informing and affirming the beginning and end of the truce and whether the process is “on” or “off”, functioning as a thermometer of the agreement. Regardless of the function it performs, the homicide rate grants life to the truce process: defining its temporality; confirming the accomplishment of its terms; proving its effectiveness (decreasing the homicide number) or its failure (increasing the homicide number) (Ibid).

Therefore, it is possible to realize how the murder statistics enact putative truths about the agreement, operating as a tool helping us to analyze and evaluate the truce. By creating a comparative equivalence between a lifeless body and a

number, the statistics make it possible to explain the process and to validate different versions of it, which in turn justify divergent political positions.

As we can see, the homicide numbers act on the truce process in various ways. Further on this work, we will try to understand its agency, the ways it is produced, and how it enacts these multiple versions of the truce. However, first I would like to make the reader aware of the different theoretical approaches and set of methods that will help us understand the agency of these numbers, which is our next session's goal.

ACTING NUMBERS

This session presents the methodological repertoire as well as the theoretical components that support our argument about the homicide figures in El Salvador's gang truce. As stated earlier, homicide numbers are crucial actors in the organization, compliance, and evaluation of the truce, as they translate the work and practices associated with the workings and reworkings in the transformation of homicides into a single and accessible number.

Through interviews and the analyze of manuals of conduct, we shall figure out how a homicide is declared, acknowledging a long chain of actors who turn corpses and injuries into a murder statistic. We will see that in order to manufacture the homicide rate, these actors stabilize, contain, and inscribe murders in a numerical and statistical format. Through this process, the differences and particularities of each death are erased and translated into quantity.

To understand the role played by homicide numbers in the truce process, we will use a series of conceptual tools such as assemblage, territorialization and deterritorialization, and translation. In the three following sub-sessions, we shall see how the literature understands these concepts and how they can be applied on our subject of research.

How to understand the agency of a homicide number?

One way to approach this question is trying to apprehend a number as an actor, understanding the agency of this material element. The concept of assemblage, as presented by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, is a strong ally in the exercise of seeking to understand the agency of numbers. In that work, the concept is defined as the "act or effect of bringing together different parts and forming a new object" (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1995). In this process:

"Semiotic chains of every natures are connected to vary diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.), that brings into play not only different regimes of signs, but also states of things of different status" (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 2004: 26).

D&G draw attention to the ways actors and things – with the most distinguished characteristics and histories – end up associating, organizing and bringing to life different political, economic and biological arrangements. Assemblages end up being supported by chains of meaning, built through the

participation of several actors that, through their actions, can form something new (DELEUZE & GUATARRI, 2004, p.27). In this assembling process, we are invited to think about deterritorialization, always present in what seems territorialized. An example used to illustrate this movement is that of the orchid and the wasp. As argued by the authors, the orchid territorializes as it is planted in some territory and established there. Despite this, from the action of a wasp, it is deterritorialized through the transport of its pollen to another location, being taken to another place (DELEUZE & GUATARRI, 2004, pp. 65 and 66).

In a nutshell, the work of D&G invites us to take more seriously the participation of non-human elements in the process of assembling and formulating practices and institutions that participate in what we call society. In the case of El Salvador's murder statistics, as we shall see further, the assemblage would be formed by forensic doctors, computer programs, receptionists and corpses, transposing territorialized deaths in crime scenes to autopsies and laboratories, inscribing them in numbers and statistics through computers and then territorializing them through the filling of protocols and other bureaucratic procedures, thus making them able to travel and be transposed beyond the walls of the Institute of Legal Medicine. In this sense, they become important in our attempt to understand how homicide numbers have acted in the truce between gangs in El Salvador.

Understanding homicide numbers as the effect of actors and practices in assemblage processes resonates with the theoretical and methodological proposal of Bruno Latour. He is concerned with the establishment of a sociology sensitive to associations, concerned with the functioning of networks, focused on agencies of non-human actors in the formation and organization of the world (LATOURE, 2012). Thus, in order to understand how a certain process of organization has taken place, it is necessary to "follow the actors", concentrating on the associations they establish and the constitution of socio-technical networks, keeping together elements that are traditionally apart (LATOURE, 2012, pp. 17-38).

Echoing Latour, John Law (1999) states that the actor-network theory is, first and foremost, a merciless application of semiotics. That is to say that the entities acquire their characteristics and attributes in relation with each other. In this way of organizing things, entities have no inherent quality or identity; there are only the effects of relationality and associations. However, in the case of the actor-network theory, semiotics is material. In other words, the semiotic insight that the meaning of things is constructed through relations applies both to linguistic and material elements. Therefore, if we are concerned with the involvement of non-human actors in meaning-making processes (LAW, 1999, p.3), Law's reflections help us think of numbers as both producing and being produced through relational effects. In this sense, numbers are the stabilization of a series of practices and actors in a numerical format that organizes the truce through its materiality. After seeing a way to understand those quantification assemblages as an actor endowed with agency, we will now question how to study some of the effects of this stabilization process.

How to study the assemblages' effects?

There are many points in Law's methodological approach that can be useful to the object of this paper. As he states (LAW, 2004, p. 2), clear descriptions do not work for things that are not very coherent, the very task of trying to force events or fluid arrangements into a well-delimited and supposedly logical organization is a decision that can result in more mess than originally intended. In this respect, the truce's inconsistencies, particularities and blurs sound more attractive to this essay, than the well-defined cuts of the homicide rates.

One possible way of dealing with the actor-networks and the socio-material dimensions of their associations is through the concept of translation. Drawing from sources such as Algirdas Greimas and Michel Serres, Law states that translation is the work of making "two worlds equivalent" (2007, p.5) while also changing them. In this sense, translating is a semiotic task, since it seeks to create meaning from previously separated entities, establishing a network of agents, creating bridges between worlds previously separated and enabling comparison (CALLON, 1980, BROWN and CAPDEVILLA, 1999, 32). For example, we can compare the number of homicides occurred between May and June 2012 in El Salvador precisely because those numbers can create a similarity between murders, bodies and deaths that occurred at different times and places. This task is possible by the association of a wide range of entities that are summarized, transposed and translated into a single homicide figure.

In the (1999), Callon divided the translation process into four moments: (a) problematization; (b) interessement; c) enrollment and; d) mobilization of spokespersons. The first moment deals with the definition of actors, their identities and the stabilization of certain obligatory points of passage. The following step has to do with devices responsible for locking these identities in certain positions and places, in other words, this moment is related to the type of action that needs to happen. When the second moment of maintaining interest and fixing certain ways of acting works successfully, we have the third moment, the process of enrollment, where actors are defined, coordinated and assigned to specific roles. Finally, the fourth stage deals with the mobilization of allies and the so-called spokespersons, forming a chain of intermediaries and equivalencies, resulting in a spokesman whose credibility and unquestionable posture comes from previously formed alliances.

The ramifications of Callon's concept of translation enable us to understand how the process of translating corpses and deaths into murder statistics depends on the performance of several actors. As we will see further on this essay, forensic doctors are responsible for stipulating the type of death, the autopsy table becomes the obligatory point for defining the cause of death, cold rooms need to function properly and ensure that the corpses remain "fresh" and able to act in the determination of death, and the computer program needs to function properly to generate statistics. As a result of this chain of actors, a series of elements, such as blood, wounds and deaths, are objectified, stabilized, converted, translated and inscribed into a number. From that moment on, the number associates itself with other actors, starting to enact the truce as in the Salvadoran president speech at the UN General Assembly in 2012 (FUNES, 2012, page 7):

"El Salvador was the second most violent country on the American continent until a few months ago. Violence, crime and the dispute

between delinquent organizations generated an average of 15 murders per day. This September the average is 3.8 murders a day. "

What remains of this translation process is a numerical trace that can only exist due to the transformation of "matter into written documents", making deaths something mobile, combinable and usable (LATOURE & WOOLGAR 1986: 51). Therefore, quantifying becomes a strategy of control, turning certain natural or social elements into countable and manipulative objects (TURNER, 1996, pp. 74 and 77). In this sense, this session sought to show a way of apprehending the actions that bring numbers to life, and how the translation helps to understand the stabilization and containment of certain phenomena in numbers. But the question remains: why study numbers like this?

Why study numbers like this?

Since we hope to analyze the truce with the help of homicide numbers, what is the possible contribution of this work to the reader interested in the *pandillas'* agreement? Besides, why should a person interested in this object of study bother about such a thing?

Getting in contact with the literature regarding the truce, one may be surprised to notice that despite the use of the homicide death rate in several analyses, the numbers are simply taken for granted, accepted as unproblematic. But if we start questioning the statistics, we can easily see a shift of the common places and actors commonly associated with the event. Although unrecognized by the bibliography, these agents are part of the truce's production. As they translate deaths into numbers, they enact versions and milestones for the El Salvador's gang truce. It is not the deaths reported by relatives, family or social organizations that count, but rather statistical death, organized as the effect of a translation process.

We hope that this dialogue may enable new conceptions of the truce, attentive to other forms of enactment and to a different way of thinking about who acts in situations of violence and peace, embracing the "mess" proposed by Mol (2003) and Law (2004). In other words, this research seeks not only to highlight the limits of studies focused on negotiations and peace processes, but also to address other political dimensions, possible only due to the engagement with nonhuman actors.

Given the translation process, the numbers need to be stabilized in order to act. Therefore, it is necessary to move backwards, following the associations that result in the production of the homicide rate. To do so, it will be necessary to go through the Institute of Legal Medicine of San Salvador, focus of our next session.

ACTING NUMBERS AND DEATHS

As we have previously seen, the concepts of translation, assemblage, deterritorialization and nonhuman agency are strong allies in understanding how homicide numbers act. Therefore, in the present session we will analyze practices and actors involved in the production of homicide numbers, perceiving how they can enact the beginning, end, compliance, success or failure of the gang truce. To fulfill this purpose, I will present an illustration of such practices by means of a

process of translation and inscription of murders into numbers, seeking to retrace some associations behind the numbers' production, and how they produce the truce.

The analysis is based mostly on formal documents such as the Manual of Organization and Job Description¹ (CORTE SUPREMA DE JUSTICIA, 2014), the Manual of Procedures² (Ibid, 2014) and the Manual for Crime Scene Processing³ (FISCALÍA GENERAL DE LA REPÚBLICA, 2011). In addition, a series of information relevant to this work was obtained through interviews with a person from the Pathology Department of the Institute of Legal Medicine. To protect the anonymity, this person will be treated as "M". Two interview sessions were held, one on September 15, 2017 and the other on February 7, 2018.

The Institute of Legal Medicine Dr. Roberto Masferrer, better known as "The Institute" (EL SALVADOR, pp. 28-34, 1990), was created in 1990 in accordance with the Article 98 of the Judicial Organic Law of El Salvador. Among the Institute's functions are providing expert services, organizing and compiling data and statistics of its activities, ensuring the training and updating of its technical and scientific personnel, performing autopsies, exhumation and expert recognition on corpses, and recognizing violent deaths. In this respect, the Institute becomes the space for the determination of aggressions, declarations of invalidity, death certificates, recognition of violent deaths and, in connection with our work, construction of homicide statistics.

In terms of spatial organization, the Institute is divided into regional offices and sub-offices. Amidst this division, we will focus our analysis on the departments of Forensic Clinic, Forensic Pathology and Statistics. These places are crucial for the production of homicide numbers, as they host a series of imperative practices for the calculation of murder statistics, such as autopsies and examinations, who organize and construct information, deaths and numbers.

From murders to statistics

When a corpse is found and the police called, the General Prosecutor's Office contacts the closest ILM office or sub-office through the telephone, requesting the presence of its staff on the crime scene. Thus, a homicide, as well as its statistic, start with a phone call. The call can be the beginning of a chain composed by several institute's employees, such as the doctor on duty, the prosecutor on shift and the autopsy assistants. Throughout this process, the murder also has its information – such as the type of death and the homicide location – transposed to the Corpse's Report Sheet and to the Control Book of Violent Death (CORTE SUPREMA DE JUSTICIA, 2014, volume II, 311-317; FISCALÍA GENERAL DE LA REPÚBLICA, 2011, pp. 91-96).

To keep on "doing" the homicide, we have to go to the murder site. There, ILM's employees begin the *levantamiento* process, which consists of an investigation of the body and of the crime scene, searching for medical and legal evidence such as blood marks and projectiles. According to the Manual of Procedures, this work has the function of searching for clues that help in the determination of antecedents and circumstances for the death in question (CORTE SUPREMA DE JUSTICIA, 2014, volume II, 311-317; FISCALÍA GENERAL DE LA REPÚBLICA, 2011, pp. 91-96). As stated by M, the *levantamiento* tries to establish

what injuries should be analyzed and, therefore, to determine "footprints" that will guide the autopsy process.

After the work of the ILM team and the final inspection of the crime scene, the site is cleared. Subsequently, the body resulting from violent death is sent to the ILM nearest office and, if there is space and availability, the corpse is taken directly to the autopsy room. If there is no space, the corpse is stored in the refrigerator while waiting for procedure (CORTE SUPREMA DE JUSTICIA, 2014, volume II, page 12). One might notice that if the process is formally organized through documents and regulation that stipulates linear and well-ordered procedures, but it can also be described in a simpler way, as I heard from M "the physician removes the corpse, which later becomes evidence and [the body] is taken to the Institute of Legal Medicine to proceed with the autopsy".

In the search for the cause of death, physicians associate themselves with medical tools and medical knowledges to perform the necessary exams for the autopsy. It is at this stage that a final version of death is organized through the "determination of the cause of death", as M. affirms. Even so, this enactment of death is not yet the end: in order to conclude the autopsy process, certain information regarding the death must be transposed as written traces into the autopsy protocol. Until protocol inscription, one can only affirm that the death was a violent one. The protocol is thus crucial to establish the cause of death and to describe it in detail. In the course of these associations, death goes through a process of cleansing, where the marks of violence, blood and aggression are transformed into traces on the autopsy protocol (CORTE SUPREMA DE JUSTICIA, 2014, tome II, pp. 413- 415; FISCALIA GENERAL DE LA REPÚBLICA, 2011, p. 53).

Upon completing the autopsy and filling the necessary protocols, the process is recorded in the Institute's database. The registration is done by transposing the written protocol into the EPI-INFO program. To that end, it is necessary not only to know how to properly fill the protocols, but also to transcribe the information into the EPI-INFO system: without these actions, it is impossible to make a homicide statistic. Statistics effectiveness relies on the transposition of death protocols into the Institute's database.

Performing an essential role in the process of transposing written information to the EPI-INFO system, the computer is also an actor to be remembered. With the information correctly inscribed in the database, homicide becomes mobile and can be associated with murders perpetrated in other times and places, giving life to a monthly homicide statistic. Consequently, to speak of the truce as a success, for instance, is an action affected by and associated with machines, regulations, documents, protocols, medical tools and computer programs. The process of filling database categories and powering the system properly can be a way of comprehending the construction of the link between homicide and statistics

In light of these arguments, we can question ourselves if homicide numbers – and the truce milestones related to them – would actually exist without the Department of Statistics. After all, the compilation of all homicides occurred in the country takes place in the department's dependencies. By accessing the database, responsible for storing procedural information from all ILM offices, department employees bring the murder statistics to life, among huge amounts of data about corpses, wounds and forensic protocols.

The task of accessing the database and extracting information in order to construct statistics evokes practices and actors away from the common images of the truce. Therefore, depending on how the autopsy is performed, the protocol completed, the information transposed to the EPI-INFO and the statistics constructed, there may or may not be a truce between the gangs in El Salvador. It is only possible to think about these scenarios and, for instance, the very fulfillment of the truce agreements because there are networks and assemblages constantly put into action to ensure the equivalence between numbers and murders.

Now that the homicide statistic has been worked out, we realize how a homicide is processed by the ILM and how the equivalence between a corpse and a number on the monthly homicide worksheet is established. So far, our purpose was to unravel some of the practices and actors involved in the production of homicide numbers, and to follow how they come into existence and how the agency of that "number" is established. In the next session, we will try to associate the theoretical framework previously seen with the processes and routines of the Institute.

WORKING NUMBERS

Bearing in mind the scope of this research and the repertoire of methods proposed, in this segment I will try to follow the homicide numbers as they came to life in the year 2012, trying to understand how, starting from their organization, they overcome the barriers of the ILM – leaving territorialization marks such as written protocols – in order to enact El Salvador's gang truce. In the following session, we will try to establish a convergence between non-human associations and some of the participating agencies in El Salvador's gang truce.

Where and with whom to pass?

This particular moment of the translation process is preoccupied with the determination of a group of important actors for the homicide numbers or, in other words, with the formation of movements, paths and alliances that *need* to be followed, formed and accepted for a particular order to exist. In other words, it deals with obligatory points of passage which actors are required to pass by (CALLON, 70, 1999). In the case of the truce, we can only speak of homicide numbers because the ILM's department of telephony received and passed on the demand of forensic personnel to the Department of Medical Clinic. This department's employees, in turn, depart to the crime scene and proceed with the *levantamiento* process, succeeded by the autopsy's work and the work of determining the cause of death. Later, the information resulting from this process pass by the EPI-INFO located at the Statistics Department. Following these practices, one is taken far away from formal negotiation between gangs towards questioning what is commonly overlooked. At the same time, this movement highlights certain elements, such as computer programs and certain knowledges without which there would not be a number able of representing the murders that occurred in the country.

Thus, as Callon proposes, we may perceive how these actors become indispensable for the homicide statistics, as well as for the enactment of the truce

as an event that can be evaluated through the categories of failure and success. In fact, we can already see the stabilization of crucial places for the translation of murders in numbers. As such, we have a double movement: first, the definition of the actors involved in the homicide statistic's life; and second, the establishment of identities and the associations that, if inactive, put in check the existence of the numbers themselves (CALLON, pp. 69 and 70, 1999).

Some examples that illustrate this case are: the forensic doctors who need to define the cause and type of death; the auxiliaries who need to complete the bureaucratic procedures; and the EPI-INFO that needs to function properly, store the protocol information and compile the data as expected. This procedure of defining the necessary actors for statistics and establishing ways of acting and their identities is a way of ensuring that corpses and deaths are adequately "represented" in murder statistics, rendering deaths into numbers in a mobile and combinable way. However, if this topic emphasizes the joint work existing on a homicide number, that is not enough if we are to understand the whole process of statistical enactment. Rather than determining who and how and where to act, it is also necessary to ensure the proper action to be taken.

How to create interest?

Locking identities in specific places, determining essential places and practices and ensuring that the necessary action is taken would be a much more difficult task without the interestment devices used by Callon (p.71 – 74, 1999). Understood by the author as part of the second moment of translation, these devices act by creating reports, filling protocols, generating information about death, determining homicides and constructing statistics. The execution such tasks requires a body of knowledge which comprises forensic medicine, acting as a device capable of guaranteeing the necessary action by the doctors. For example, the medical knowledge acquired by these professionals enables them to distinguish a bullet wound from a knife wound. In turn, this knowledge gives credibility to the determination of the cause of death, stamping medical action with the seal of truth and qualifying physicians to correctly fill the protocols. Thus, knowing how to distinguish the type of death "correctly" equals filling the protocols "correctly". When this information is inscribed into the EPI-INFO, the death is already adequate to the program's categories and spaces. Medical and protocol knowledge make homicides and deaths suitable for the "right" organization. Without technical expertise, the actors might not act as expected, being thus recognizable as interestment devices.

Without this set of technical qualification, it would be much more difficult to look at the wounds and signs on a corpse or to stipulate trajectories of bullets and injuries. Proper formation acts in the production of homicides and their statistics, organizing the truce's timeframe, compliance and result. Otherwise, to produce a credible murder statistic without adequate technical knowledge would be an arduous quest (CALLON, p.71 - 74, 1999). Thus, the technical background of ILM's employees allocate the necessary actors at determined points in the homicide statistics line of production, stipulating positions and ways to act. Though, since the actors are not fixed to just one or two assemblages, you need to minimize the effects of these other "undesired" assemblages. ILM's cold room, for instance, tries to contain the action of the assemblage established between the corpse and the

forces of nature that participate in the body's putrefaction, for the purpose of keeping its freshness and ensuring that their identity remains analyzable. As such, the corpse is locked in a certain position and in a specific place.

How to enroll actors?

The third moment of translation deals with the enrollment of actors and can be understood as a theoretical complement to the devices of interessement. According to Callon, this process occurs when the movement of locking the actor in one position and compelling him to act works successfully. In other words, it is a process where the devices of interessement work properly (CALLON, pp. 74 and 75, 1999). For example, when Callon deals with the scallops in the Saint-Brieuc Bay, he says there is an interest on the part of certain actors that the scallops anchor themselves to the bay's coast. But it is not enough just to lock the scallops and expect them to act accordingly, one must negotiate that fixation with scallops and other elements. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that the sea's behavior and that the visitors to the area do not interfere with this fixation. It is not enough to call the scallops to act; it is necessary to negotiate their fixation through different apparatuses and knowledges. Thus, when the scallops are fixed, a process of enrollment took place, since the summoning of the scallops worked, and it was enabled by the generation of certain apparatuses of interest fixing them to the coast.

Similarly, I see homicide statistics as the effect of a succession of enrollments. For example, the existence of a corpse as the result of a murder is not enough: it must participate in the autopsy process and be associated to a specific cause of death, thereby demanding the maintenance of the physical conditions of the hour of death through the use of air conditioning. This is an illustration of some actors and actions that need to be fixed in order to enact a homicide statistic. In this respect, it is necessary to ensure the proper performance, and then the enrollment devices.

Writing and the numbers

The aspect of writing, filling in protocols and maintaining the database deserves a little more attention. The work of transposing information seen at the crime scene or through a corpse's examination onto a sheet of paper or into a digital system is concerned with converting a number of entities, such as blood and lacerations, into a written trace. A forensic doctor's job of looking at a body without biological life, examining his wounds and lacerations and then transcribing them to a protocol sheet can be understood as the task of transforming matter from one state to another.

This activity is a very important part of assembling the homicide statistics, because in this stage the particularities and differences between one death and another are erased, and all these experiences become manifested in a numerical format. Thus, it is this process of transposing death and its characteristics from the coroner's desk into the paper and then into a computer program that enables the existence of the truce's milestones, because, without these knowledges and practices, it would be much more difficult to access the number of murders

occurred in the country, rendering impossible to draw conclusions from it. In this regard, the numbers and their traces become the access point to the ILM while they give a numerical visualization to the murders occurred in the country, translating deaths into a monthly homicide statistic.

This numerical edition is a stabilized "version" of death, as the conditions and cause of death are already determined and inscribed in a number. It is also a mobile version of death, since homicide numbers carry within their traces the murders and the practices involved in their organization. Once summarized in a numerical format, those numbers associate with other actors in different ways, being able to dislocate to various places. As previously seen, these murders are simultaneously territorialized in the ILM – when the numbers are being produced – and de-territorialized, since the number as inscriptions are mobile. Thus, one way of understanding El Salvador's truce is through deterritorializations, since it is due to the numbers mobility that several actors associate to them and enact different versions of the agreement (LATOIR & WOOLGAR, 1986, p.51).

Quantifying deaths

In the process of transposing and inscribing deaths into paper, one is faced with the task of quantifying, which is a way of objectifying associations and creating more stable relationships (CALLON, 2002, pp. 194-19). When we consider the numbers of homicide from this theoretical point-of-view, we notice how these inscription – besides assigning mobility and stability to the deaths, to the knowledge and the actors involved in their manufacture – also objectify the process of death, translating, summarizing and inscribing autopsies, medical examiners and computer programs into a number. This number, in turn, begins to act by carrying these actors with them and also erasing them. When we look at a homicide statistic, we do not think directly of the work of cataloging a cadaver, much less the centrality of the EPI-INFO.

Quantifying is a work that goes beyond understanding homicide statistics as mere depictions of the murders occurred in the country. Quantifying is a way of reconfiguring the social and developing new meanings and understandings of and for the world (PORTER, 1994). Quantification tools do so through the disciplining of bodies and objects to act in the necessary way. When creating protocols and bureaucratic procedures, one stipulates ways of acting and portraying certain circumstance. For example, the *levantamiento* protocol instructs the person who will fill it to search for certain elements, such as blood spatters, and ignore others, such as those located outside the crime scene. Thus, the protocol begins to enact a version of death with certain specific framings, exercising control over this death, choosing what deserves to be understood as a participant element of death and what should be discarded.

However, reflecting on the elimination of processes and practices, we can perceive the limits of quantification, and hence the limits of the truce itself. Focusing only on homicide numbers, we close our eyes to a whole network of feelings and affections, such as the suffering of the murder victim's mothers and beloved ones. Essentially, many other associations escape this quantifying and protocolary logic. Truce enactments that relent heavily on this type of actor

become limited and one-dimensional, as they lose the human and affective experience that orbits around death and violence.

Nevertheless, it is precisely from the cancellation of these chains of affection that homicide numbers acquire their sense of objectivity, scientific precision and credibility. It is important to highlight the chain of transformation of a murder in a number and the actors that integrate this chain of production. Through the technical and accurate hands of all qualified personnel, such as physicians and auxiliaries, and the application of medical-forensic and statistical knowledge, deaths are transformed into numbers and the experiences of death are homogenized. If they are homogeneous, they are all equal. If they are equal, they are comparable.

The numbers and their spokespersons

Even though the numbers do exist, they cannot act by themselves, requiring allies and representatives to do so. Thus, the numbers manipulate certain actors to become their spokesperson, making these messengers speak for the statistics. This is the fourth and last moment of translation: for instance, when journalists and academics engage with homicide numbers and use their information, they are not the ones speaking, but rather they are speaking with and for the homicide numbers. This aspect of the translation process points to the agency of homicide numbers, evidencing a very interesting dynamic which shows how the numbers speak through spokesmen such as journalists, academics and politicians (CALLON, 1999, p. 71 – 74).

In this process, when the conditions of translation are met, practices and actors apparently aside from the formal image of the truce become as important as any other mediator or government agent. Without them, the statement made by the regional delegate of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2014 that the truce "experience in El Salvador has produced a significant reduction in homicides" (BARROS, 2014) would not be possible.

Thus, as we attempt to argue in this work, debates and discussions about the truce, as consolidated in the dominant specialized literature, can only exist after turning deaths into statistics. Consequently, the numbers can be seen as starting points for analysis that question the success or failure of the truce. In this sense, it is understood that whoever controls the deaths in a panorama marked by violence and homicide also controls the ways of organizing this scenario.

CONCLUSION

What I tried to show in this work was how the truce can be worked together with theoretical concepts and approaches that are still underexplored among disciplines concerned with the study of violence, conflict and peace. Once stabilized in a numerical format, the deaths and their numbers become actors that articulate key moments of the truce, nominally: the beginning, success and compliance to the agreements – as enacted by the decrease in the death rate –; and its end, failure and the disrespect to the agreements, as enacted by the increase in the homicide figures. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the

numbers are actors who deserve attention and analytical care like any other participant of this process.

Following this actor, it caught my attention how through the translation process, homicides are passed through a line of adequacy and production, where they are analyzed and tested by forensic doctors, transposed to pieces of paper and computer screens and converted into statistics. The effect of this network is a number marked with credibility, objectivity and mobility, since the very work deposited in the statistics guarantees them the ability to convert corpses, bloods and death into a mobile, stable and combinable actor. A material-semiotic network is created to ensure the durability, strength and accuracy of homicide statistics and the truce itself. In this respect, these inscriptions begin to organize practices and enact control upon the murders that occurred in the country under the truce register. They transpose worlds and reorganize ways of producing knowledge about the event in question, enacting the truce's beginning, end, failure, success, and even the very fulfillment of its agreements.

Ultimately, these figures not only measure the number of homicides committed in the country in a given month, but also impact on how we organize the murders in the country and how we speak and produce knowledge about what happened. From this reflection, we can think of how they have the strength to establish what is acceptable in terms of conflict management mechanisms and violence treatment. Apart from that, I believe we can extrapolate the theoretical and methodological discussion present here and think about the role of homicide numbers and what they do in other situations of violence. This procedure enables us to dislocate the knowledge production about peace processes and conflict resolution, moving away from the common discussions and interpretations regarding these numbers, in order to understand how these actors directly affect the organization of El Salvador's truce.

Números em ação: traduzindo e quantificando mortes na trégua entre as gangues de El Salvador

RESUMO

Esse trabalho aborda um processo de trégua estabelecido entre grupos criminosos em El Salvador, comumente chamados de *pandillas*. A partir de um arcabouço conceitual específico e um repositório de métodos ligados à abordagem da Teoria Ator-Rede, esse trabalho seguirá algumas controvérsias desse processo da trégua associadas ao cumprimento do acordo, à estabilização do seu começo, final e à determinação de seu “sucesso” ou “fracasso”. Para tanto, seguiremos como os números mensais de homicídio, produzidos pelo Instituto Médico Legal do país, participam dessas tensões e atuam organizando versões distintas desse evento. Ao fazer isso, somos deslocados para caminhos, agências e atores que participam da vida dos números e, dessa forma, da encenação das versões da trégua. Nesse sentido, elementos que acabam sendo naturalizados, e até esquecidos, se tornam o foco da minha análise. Assim, essa dissertação busca expandir o corpo da literatura sobre a trégua, ao mesmo tempo em que visa ampliar os horizontes dos conhecimentos disciplinares atentos para a convergência entre números e situações de violência.

NOTES

¹ Translation from the original: Manual de Organización y Descripción de Puestos.

² Translation from the original: Manual de Procedimientos.

³ Translation from the original: Manual de procesamiento de la escena del delito.

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