



Tancitaro's *Autodefensa*: The Media Representation of Self-Defence Armed Groups in Mexico

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Karla Huici Yañez
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Bilge Sahin

Kees Biekart

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Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>
twitter: [@issnl](https://twitter.com/issnl)

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

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Abstract

The hereby research is focused on media representation of the *autodefensa* in Tancitaro by news sources in the United States and in Mexico. It explores the ways in which masculinity is portrayed, seeking to outline the gender narratives that media representation follows. The research provides visual analysis focusing on the *framing* of the six photographs featured in news articles from the US and six photographs used in news articles from Mexico. The United States and the Mexican news sources show a subaltern masculinity but use different strategies to portray masculinity. These visual strategies build specific relationships between the viewer and the subject, which show the power dynamics and hegemonic gender narratives in media.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research dissects the relationship between hegemonic gender narratives and media representation, widening the understanding of influence by social and political dynamics in media. The representation of media shapes the perception of security, as well as influences identity and power in regions that are affected by organized crime. This research paper highlights the relation between the Global North and Global South, while shaping the public understanding of security and *autodefensas* in Mexico, comparing the representation in US and Mexican newspapers. It also emphasizes the prevalence of hegemonic narratives about gender norms in media representation.

Keywords

Autodefensas, hegemonic masculinities, subaltern masculinities, militarization, machoism, media representation, self-defence armed groups.

1. Introduction to Michoacan's Autodefensas

Even though Mexico obtained its independence from Spain in 1821, the colonial influence from European and Western powers in the country are still prevalent. Colonialism introduced new socio-political inequalities throughout the country. Predominant consequences that need to be highlighted are the classicism, as well as the patriarchal practices and narratives fomented by Western values. During the time that Mexico was a colony, a caste system was put into place, which was a socio-racial classification system (Amuchastegui, et al., 2010). Within this system, the highest-ranking people were Spaniards; followed by people born in the colony but from Spaniard parents, known as *criollos*; then people born with Spaniard and Native ancestry, known as *mestizos*; then people born from European and African ancestry; then native indigenous people; and lastly, the black slaves. This system established what opportunities were available to people and created new practices of discrimination. It was a way to categorize people according to their skin colour and ancestry. It became a new system of injustices between classes and races in Mexico. More than 200 years after the independence of Mexico, the colonial heritage is still present.

In addition, current gender dynamics are rooted in the colonial legacy of the Spaniards. When Mexico was a colony, the Spanish monarchy enforced the conversion of indigenous people into Catholicism and established Western patriarchal norms (Amuchastegui, et al., 2010). Indigenous practices were repressed and Western social norms that followed the patriarchal order that was used in Europe. The implementation of European social norms transformed the indigenous communities and altered the gender dynamics. Mexican history is filled with the name of male heroes, such as Guerrero, Iturbide, Morelos, Juarez, Pancho Villa, Zapata, and many others. Especially Miguel Hidalgo Y Costilla, a *criollo* priest that became the leader of the early stages of the fight for Independence, one of the most important figures in Mexico. The history of Mexico is told through the experience of *criollo* and *mestizo* men and their brave acts, failing to recognize the contribution of women (Amuchastegui, et al., 2010). Therefore, the patriarchal and classist principles still have strong influence in Mexican society.

The role of men and the expectations they experience in Mexican society has shifted through the country's history (Gutmann, 2007). Masculinity in Mexico is often referred as *machoism* or *macho*. *Machoism* is associated with hegemonic Western masculine traits, such as

aggression, and dominance, but is supposed to relate to *caballerismo*, which includes emotional connectedness, and family-oriented behaviour (Valdez, et al., 2023). The stereotype of *macho* in Mexico originates from the Mexican Revolution, where working class men fought for their family and their community, demonstrating their bravery and strength. During the time the *macho* was away from home, the family had to grow without a father. When he returned, if he did, he would be an absent figure with lack of emotional capacities (Fernandez, 2012). This lack of emotional capacities later translated into intense efforts to prove one's manliness. *Machoism* is seen throughout Mexico, however the manifestation of it depends on numerous factors, which will be explained later.

One of the factors that determine the expectations set on a man is the place where he is raised. A man's experience differs greatly if he is raised in a large city, small city, town or rural area. The way settlements were arranged in Mexico was greatly dependant on the geographical configuration of the country. The largest settlements became the biggest cities in the country and have gone through intense industrialization processes. However, the settlements in remote and rural areas underwent different transformations. These settlements were composed of displaced indigenous communities that were pushed towards marginalized territory (Kay & Salazar, 2001). The settlements transformed to what are known as *rancherías*. They are described as rural settlements in Mexico that follow specific daily and economic practices (Barragan, et al., 1993). These settlements are known for having small, modest houses, cultivating in small plots of land, and raising domestic animals (Barragan, et al., 1993). Traditionally people who live in *rancherías* are depicted as having a simple way of living and as hardworking people, and they are commonly indigenous or of indigenous origin.

Indigenous people experience heighten discrimination in Mexican society due to the high levels of stigmatization (Flores and Telles, 2012). This discrimination is fuelled by the colonial legacy of the caste system implemented by the Spanish. In the book *Rancheros y sus rancherías* (1993) people from *rancherías* are portrayed as community driven individuals with strong family ties. These towns tend to be the most vulnerable towns as they are hard to access and are poorly connected to other towns and/or cities. This limited interaction with other towns and cities enables residents of *rancherías* to maintain traditional values and ways of living (Barragan, et al., 1993). The communities in rural Mexico experience structural inequalities that hinder the gender equality in the workforce, decision-making, and economic autonomy (Pagán and Sanchez, 2000). Thus, the economic growth and social development

of these communities is limited. Furthermore, due to their geographical remoteness, these communities are the ones that are most vulnerable to the violence and abuse of the cartels, such as the communities in the state of Michoacan.

Michoacan is one of Mexico's biggest agricultural states and it is the largest agricultural national exporter. The modern history of Michoacan has been tainted by violence by the drug cartels, which have started to form in the 70s. One of the first criminal organizations related to drug trafficking in Mexico was established in the 80s by Juan Garcia-Abergo. This cartel was called the Gulf Cartel (CDG). The operations of the Gulf Cartel's operations expanded to several states, including the state of Michoacan, and they functioned under the principle of *live and let live* (Kennedy, 2018). This meant that the cartels did not interfere or act against the rural communities that resided within Michoacan. There was a general agreement that the local communities should not be disturbed. During this time, the focus of the Cartel was to cultivate and sell drugs as that provided the greatest profit.

The leader of the CDG started to expand the Cartel's capacity by smuggling alcohol and drugs to the United States of America (US or USA), and by creating alliances with the Mexican government and other cartels (Sanchez, 2018). However, in the 90s, Garcia-Abergo was arrested by the US government, leaving his second in command, Osiel Cardenas-Gullien, as the new leader. During this period, the activity of the Gulf Cartel increased, and its operations became more confrontational against other cartels. This led to the recruitment of army commandos, known as *Los Zetas*, which were elite forces from the Mexican military that had been trained in France, Israel, and the US (Kennedy, 2018). They were hired to protect the CDG members and their activities from insurgencies and rival cartels (Sanchez, 2018). However, in the 2000s, *Los Zetas* created their own cartel and became a new rival in the region.

Los Zetas interacted under different standards with the rural communities in the region. The cartel conducts extortion and kidnaps; their goal was to obtain as much money possible from the local communities (Kennedy, 2018). There was an absolute disregard for the security, integrity and wellbeing of the people that lived in Michoacan. The violence and its consequences in the region were gendered as they affected differently each gender. The cartels employed sexual violence as an instrument of terror against women, which increased 183% from 2006 to 2013 (CNDH in Herrera, 2023). The economic activities of Michoacan increased significantly after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was

signed and went into effect in 1993. NAFTA increased economic relations between Mexico, the US, and Canada; significantly benefiting Michoacan as it allowed the exportation of agricultural goods, such as avocado. According to reports by Hernandez and Gonzalez (2022), the consumption of avocado in the US increases yearly; there is up to a 30% increase in exports towards the US. As the agricultural industry continued to flourish and grow, it became more attractive for organized crime and for the cartels to further exploit the inhabitants of Michoacan. This meant that every year the extortion and kidnapping by the drug cartels increased and the insecurity in the state worsened.

After insecurity and violence increased in the early 2000s, the then President of Mexico, Felipe Calderon, declared the so-called War on Drugs. In this period, the military action against the drug cartels failed, and caused the existing drug cartels to fracture into smaller cartels bringing new disputes and conflict over the territory (Kennedy, 2018). The new cartels implemented new schemes with the communities from the territory they occupied. Cartels like *La Familia Michoacana* and *Los Caballeros Templarios* imposed quotas schemes, where residents and farm owners would have to pay enormous amounts of money to keep their land and their people safe (Kennedy, 2018). It was during this complex setting that the *autodefensas* start to rise in the state in efforts to protect their territory. Herrera (2023) highlights that how complex class structures have been reflected in the internal structure of the *autodefensas*, where the larger farmers contribute as leaders and economically, while smaller farmers and workers go to the front of the lines of the conflict.

One of the towns in Michoacan that resisted against the cartels and founded its own *autodefensa* was Tancitaro, which contains the state's largest avocado production (Kennedy, 2018). The *autodefensa* in Tancitaro started in 2014 following other towns path of establishing their own defence mechanisms (Guerra Manzo, 2021). The model of the *autodefensa* formed in Tancitaro had unique characteristics that played a fundamental roll in the success of its operations. This *autodefensa* created citizen councils, merged professional and trustworthy police forces with the local self-defence group, and implemented a project to rebuild the social tissue (Guerra Mazon, 2021). Alvarez (2021) highlights the low participation of women from the community in the *autodefensas* and decision-making groups. The community operates within the hegemonic binary roles distributed between men and women. Men would participate and fight in the self-defence armed groups, and the women would take the role of care givers in their homes and communities.

Curry and Ansems de Vries (2018) classify *autodefensas* as a phenomenon that reinforces hegemonic practices and codes that provide structure to the community's social life and interaction. Gutmann (2007) explains how gender dynamics especially, especially masculinity, is constructed through history and is dependant to specific contexts. Media representation has a key role to build and maintain narratives that influence how people experience and understand everyday life. These narratives are formed using symbols and language, which create shared meanings in specific contexts (Hall, 1997). The representation of the conflict in Mexico national and international media is filled with racism and stereotypes that promote prejudice and discrimination (Mitchell, 2011). Media representation contributes to build gendered narratives that influence how societies behave and interact.

1. Research Problem

The representation of Mexico and the vulnerable communities that reside in its territory face palpable differences between international and national media sources. The Western media, which enjoys high levels of popularity worldwide, heavily helps dictate the international narrative around conflict. The media sources coming from the Global North possess great influence worldwide. Their portrayal of events around the world has substantial effects on the global perception of the situation being reported, they can shape the ideas of the communities involved. One of the most influential countries is the United States of America. In her book, Sang Hea Kil (2020) explains how the news media coverage of Mexico by the United States media outlets creates a divide towards its southern neighbour, which incites gendered and racialized stereotypes. At the beginning of the XX century, Mexico threatened to ban movies produced in the US because they portrayed Mexico as an inferior country and culture (Mitchell, 2012). Despite the increase of general consciousness about the negative impact of stereotypes that has occurred in the last century, this issue is still relevant when discussing the representation of Mexicans in US media. Especially when dealing with topics of security, or lack thereof, in Mexico.

Since 2006, there has been an increase of violence within Mexico due to the military confrontations against the drug cartels. The media representation of Mexico, especially in international sources, in the last twenty years has been permeated by the rapid increase of non-state violence in the country. In 2013, numerous towns around the country created their own *autodefensas* to fight against the drug cartels that were taking over their territory. As it

was previously mentioned, one of the states that was intensely affected by conflict is Michoacan. The *rancheria* communities in Michoacan decided to take the security of their people into their own hands by establishing their own armed group. This self-defence armed groups have been reported on by national and international news articles. The news coverage of these self-defence groups is heavily influenced by gendered narratives.

Masculinity, in the context of conflict and self-defence armed groups, is frequently constructed as a response and in opposition to perceived threats. Self-defence armed groups emerge to protect their own communities from criminal groups when the police and other governmental bodies fail to ensure their safety (Fuentes, 2015). The *autodefensas* in Michoacan are described as *Community-Based Armed Groups*, which are informal armed groups with no political aim (Schubert, 2015). Thus, their primary role is to protect their community. Research by Alvarez (2021) highlights how the role of the men of the community is defined in Tancitaro as a duty to protect women from “dangerous” men. This argument underlines the gendered essence of the creation of *autodefensas*. Due to the importance and impact that media has in shaping narratives and shaping ideas, this research seeks to understand how the masculinities of the *autodefensas* are represented in media. It will focus and analyse the photographs used in news articles from Mexican and US based news outlets, breaking down the narratives of masculinities present in them.

2. Research Objectives

My research objective is to analyse the intersection between three spheres: masculinities, media representation, and *autodefensas* in Tancitaro. It merges three topics that I am passionate about. When I started my research, I found little research that delved into this specific intersection. It is important to highlight that there is research that talks about gender dynamics and masculinities of marginalized communities in Mexico, specifically on Tancitaro (Alvarez, 2021; Calahorrano, 2022, Curry & De Vries, 2018; Fuentes, 2015; and Roman Burgos & Alvarez, 2020). In addition, there is also research about media representation of marginalized communities and its impact (Ayisi & Brylla, 2013; Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Danielsen, et al, 2016; Fernandez 2012; Hall, 1973; Hall & Nixon, 1997; Kil, 2020; Rose, 2023; Schwalbe, 2026; Sontag, 2003; and Taylor, 1997). Also, there is research done on the *autodefensas* of Tancitaro (Alvarez, 2021; Guerra Manzo, 2022; Herrera, 2023; and Kennedy, 2018). Finally, there is research that merges the sphere of gender dynamics and media

representation (Baker, 2020; Butler, 2009; Danielsen, et al, 2016; Welland 2018; and Zarkov & Drezgic, 2019), but little research that combines the three spheres, focused on this specific community. Thus, my research seeks to reduce the gap and contribute to expand on the information and analysis available. This research is valuable as it will analyse the narratives in photographs used to cover news about the *autodefensas*. It seeks to explain how media has been a determinant factor to construct the role of masculinities in armed groups and the understand the politics behind the gendered representations of non-conventional armed groups.

3. Research Questions

To achieve the research objective, the central question that this paper seeks to answer is:

How are masculinities represented in Mexican and US news sources that cover *autodefensas* in Tancitaro?

The sub questions that derive from the principal question are the following:

- How does the media representation of masculinities in the *autodefensas* deviate from hegemonic masculinity?
- How does the media representation of masculinities in the Tancitaro *autodefensas* challenge or reproduce gender narratives?

To answer the questions, this research paper will be divided in the following chapters. First, I will conclude the introduction by giving my positionality statement and acknowledging the limitations of my research. Then, the second chapter will engage with the existing literature on media representation and gender. This chapter will introduce and define concepts that will be used later in the analysis. In the third chapter I will go through the methodological framework used in this research. I will explain the methodology used to analyse the media representation and the selection process to choose the news sources and the photographs for this research. The fourth chapter will contain the photographs with their analysis and will be divided in three sections. The first section will present the media representation in Mexico. The second section will present the photographs used in US news sources. And the third section will contain the discussion, which answers the research questions. Finally, the fifth chapter will present the conclusions reached by this research.

4. Positionality Statement

I acknowledge my personal background, how my academic, cultural, and social identity have influenced my research process. I was driven to write about the Michoacan's *autodefensa* because, as a Mexican woman, my childhood, teenage years, and adulthood elapsed as a parallel to the increase of violence in Mexico. Since I was 9 years old, the history of my life has occurred alongside the history of fighting, struggle, and the popularization of narcoculture. My interest in the groups of Michoacan started because I grew up listening to the violence and the fear people around the country faced, until they decided to rise against the rampage. Even though I have the same national identity and cultural background with the people of Tancitaro, I know that I am an outsider who will not be able to understand the community and its dynamics perfectly. My perception of the people, the events, and the decisions taken within the community will always be tainted by my distance from them. Not only the physical distance but the distance of how we experienced these events differently. I experienced it through articles, books, and the news, and they experienced it in their own body. I want to remain mindful and respectful of this difference.

Furthermore, despite my genuine interest, my motivation to investigate the *autodefensas* of Michoacan is to fulfil an academic requirement. I am conducting this research paper following Western epistemologies and methodologies; to conclude my Master Studies. My training and academic background have been predominantly in Eurocentric academic tradition. I recognize that my academic formation has given me theoretical tools and frameworks to understand and analyse media representation and gender dynamics. However, I cannot undermine the unequal power dynamics between the researcher and the community that is the subject of study, which are intrinsic to any research that follows Western methodologies. This is why I recognize that this research paper is not and cannot be considered objective. My initial goal was to create collaborative research with the people from Michoacan. However, the situation in the town is not stable currently and I have decided that the risk of visiting is high. The methodology I will be using as well as the lack of contact with the people from Michoacan, limits my possibilities of doing collective research.

Additionally, my positionality as a mestiza woman influences how I navigate gender related issues. I have been studying the gender dynamics in Mexico, how they are rooted in

complex historical, cultural, and social structures. My national identity and my gender identity presents both challenges and opportunities. My identity is an opportunity because I am familiar with the social norms, expectations, and gender dynamics present in Mexican society. I have experienced how gender is enforced through the people who are part of my community. Nevertheless, this is also a challenge because my closeness to how gender is understood and experienced in Mexico can make me overlook details that I take for granted. Some examples of this happened during the early stages of designing this research paper. I had a talk with Denisse Román Burgos, Ph. D. Social anthropologist, who accentuated the difference of gender dynamics between small cities and *rancherías*. A fact that I had not considered until I spoke with her, and it helped my research immensely. Another example was during the early stages research, where I took for granted the general understanding of what gender dynamics are like in Mexico. It was my peer reviewers and supervisor who highlighted what needed to be included. I am thankful for their contribution to my research and their valuable insights during my writing process. Thus, I acknowledge my closeness to the community, and I acknowledge my bias.

I think it is important to mention that I started my research there were assumptions of what I would find. I started being confident that there would be noticeable differences between one news source to the other and that the messages in the images would vary greatly. However, the differences between them were less evident than I expected. Some assumptions were met, and others were not which I will explain further in the conclusions of this research paper. As I acknowledge this bias, I have researched to enhance my understanding of gender and expand my ability to conduct research on media representation. I am conscious that my selection process is not random or objective; neither is my interpretation of them. However, I have worked intensely to mitigate my biases while conducting the analysis to the best of my abilities.

5. Limitations

I have encountered several limitations when conducting this research. The first important limitation was the lack of access to information and sources. When I started to research this topic and scoping for photographs, I reached out to the photographers to discuss the images and know the process through which they took the picture. I was not able to connect with the photographers and decided to remove that element from my analysis. During this initial

stage I reached out to journalist and academics to interview and discuss their publications, and I was only able to talk with Denisse Roman Burgos. In addition, several articles that were relevant to my research were not available through the EUR Library and increased the complexity of the research process. I tried using the library from my bachelor's degree, but still was unable to access all the articles and chapters that could enhanced my research.

Other limitations are relevant to my research methodology and my theoretical framework. First, I recognize the limitations of doing media representation analysis focused on photographs. I will be analysing the photographs through *framing* which is a methodology that looks at how and what information is presented and interpreted. This means that my analysis is tainted by subjectivity. I will be focusing on elements that might be important to me and might miss others. Also, this method focuses on the visual framing of the image and might overlook other elements that are important in the image; and it can simplify complex narratives that overlook nuances and broader narratives. Second, my theoretical framework will delve primarily into hegemonic and subaltern masculinities, and the impact of media representation. When discussing hegemonic and subaltern masculinities as a theoretical framework it is important to remember how intersectionality plays a role when understanding male identities. In addition, this context fails to acknowledge how masculinities evolve and adapt over time and in different contexts. This can lead to the overgeneralization of masculine identities and their experiences. Furthermore, as this framework is focused on the masculine identities, it disregards the experience of other gender identities and broader oppressive gender dynamics.

2. Theorizing Masculinities and Media Representation

This research dissects the relationship between masculinities and the *autodefensas* and analyses how they are represented distinctly through different media outlets. It seeks to explain how media has been a determinant factor to construct the role of masculinities in armed groups and to understand the politics behind the gendered representations of armed groups in media. The media representation of Mexico, especially in international sources, in the last twenty years has been permeated by the rapid increase of non-state violence in the country. Media representation has a key role to build and maintain narratives that influence how people experience and understand everyday life. These narratives are formed using symbols and language, which create shared meanings in specific contexts (Hall, 1997). Context is fundamental to the coding process through which people interpret and understand what is represented in media. Hall (1997) explains how narratives in media are encoded with meanings that are based on ideologies and values that can be interpreted according to their context.

Representation helps build the collective imagination of the world. Danielsen et al. (2016, p. 2) detail how gendered representation “allow for a reflection on rights, participation, entitlements and voice, as well as political economic and cultural processes of inclusion and exclusion, [and] it also evokes questions of belonging, language, identity, and the body”. So, gendered representation is controlled by power relations that aim to portray an essentialist and unitary idea of gender (Spivak, 1988, in Danielsen et al. 2016). Therefore, the representation of the *autodefensas* in Michoacan is deeply political. The hereby section will provide a literature review engaging with theory of representation, the representation of armed conflicts and armed groups. It will also address the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and militarization, linking them to the Mexican context.

1. Gender and Militarization

Conflict causes communities to go through a process of militarization, which Baker (2020, p. 1) explains as “how ideas about the military and who should (not) belong to it are made to become normal, natural, attractive and unquestioned”. This process occurs gradually, and it transforms societies’ perception of military needs as valuable, normal, and necessary (Enloe, 2020 in Baker, 2020). Thus, the process of militarization legitimizes the use and the

existence of armed groups. The militarization process feeds into traditional dominant ideas about masculinity, where notions of danger and adventure are emphasized and desired (Woodsword, 1998). Dyvik (2013, in Welland, 2018) highlights how the existence of the military is fuelled by the binary relationship of killing and caring, which causes the distinction and distribution of labour. This division orders social interaction during conflict and war depending on gender, creating discourses and practices in institutions that become written on the body (Baker, 2020). Enloe (2023) calls attention to the distinction between gender, which is not only being based on labour, but also on access to resources.

During conflict, the media aids in the reproduction of political projects to further promote the mainstream narrative related to the conflict and the communities involved. Ayisi and Brylla (2013) identify representation as a political act that can provide visibility or invisibility to actors and their lived experience. It is through representation that ideas about and identities in armed conflict are built, they “become part of history and a mainstream consciousness that speaks” (Ayisi and Brylla, 2013, p. 138). Thus, there are underlying politics of media representation that determine ideas and decide which ideas are projected, following a specific narrative to support a political intention. Enloe (2023) illustrates the relationship between militarism and masculinity, where manliness and soldiering are a social construct that reinforce a continuous supply of young men that believe that their participation in the armed conflict is a way to prove their manliness. Within this narrative and representation, young men are indirectly persuaded to take part in the armed forces and fulfil their role as protectors. These narratives are not maintained only by men, but women contribute to challenge or bolster the conflict status and advocating for men to actively participate in the armed conflict (Enloe, 2023). This generally happens by mothers and wives that push their sons and husbands to fight in the war/armed conflict. Thus, the gender roles in armed conflicts are deeply embedded in social constructs and are crucial to legitimize what type of participation and how the communities interact with the conflict.

Traditional media outlets, such as newspapers, are centralized knowledge production systems that contribute to the creation and fortification of mainstream narratives and ideas. As it was previously mentioned, representation permits people to make sense of the objects, events, and the world. In the case of gender, shared expectations on gender roles and power dynamics are formed and strengthened through media representation. It helps the production of meaning and provides common ground to understand the gender dynamics,

offering a distribution of labour and arrangement of communal responsibilities. Militarization uses media to push forward narratives that legitimize the actions taken by the military to the public. Media seeks to persuade the target audience to accept the participation of their community in a conflict through specific narratives, which justify the conflict and oversimplify causes of the conflict.

Media representation displays the relationship between gender and social hierarchy. Connell (2005, p. 832) proposed a matrix that explains how gender, specifically masculinity, is understood “as a pattern of practice (...) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue”. The patriarchal practices of modern societies provide masculinity with hierarchical benefits. Judith Butler (2009) introduced the concepts of performativity and precarity to explain how gender is embodied by people. Butler (2009) explains the term of performativity as the idea that gender is not inherent, but it is composed of a set of behaviours that are learned and reinforced by societal norms that perpetuate the binaries. Precarity linked to gender is a social, political, and economic condition that reinforces the marginalization of certain groups, specifically within state institutions. Butler (2009) links both concepts by explaining that they preserve and reinforce harmful gender norms that increase the risk of violence towards communities that deviate from gender norms, especially women, transgender people, queer people, poor people, and stateless people. This creates societal pressure for people to adhere towards gender norms and, in vulnerable settings, to over perform their role. These roles and expectations are heightened by militarization.

Enloe (2023) explains how men in the military and in conflict are forced to prove their manliness through different mechanisms to maintain and strengthen their gendered position. Enloe (2000, pg. 34) calls this process *militarization*, which is “a step-by-step process by which a person (...) gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its wellbeing on militaristic ideas (...) the ability to understand the dynamics of memory, marriage, hero-worship, cinematic imagery and the economics of commercial sex”. Lutz (in Baker, 2020, pg. 8) includes how militarization causes “less visible deformation of human potentials into the hierarchies of race, class, gender and sexuality, and to shaping the national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action”. It is fundamental to mention that men seek to replicate practices to be part of hegemonic masculinity, which legitimizes their dominant position, not only over women but over marginalized men (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is a concept used by Connell (2005) to identify attitudes and practices

from men and among men that conserve and strengthen gender inequality. This concept encompasses physical and personality traits that constitute the most dominant and venerated form of masculinity available. Men who are hegemonic are white, middle/upper class, cis, heteronormative, with capable bodies. Within the hegemonic gender narrative, being a man is linked to success and power.

However, gender power relations can also disempower men. Marginalized, or subaltern men are those who fail to fully comply with gender expectations due to factors such as sexuality, disability, class, and race (Coston and Kimmel, 2012). Thus, men can be marginalized if their masculinity does not adhere to the idea of hegemonic masculinity, which includes strength, courage, aggression, and the ability to provide and protect. In the case of masculinity representation in Michoacan's *autodefensas*, race and class are the factors that deviate the men from experiencing the benefits of hegemonic masculinity. Yet, men use different strategies to reduce or neutralize the marginalization and problematization of their masculinity. It is important to highlight masculinity needs to be understood as a spectrum. This way of understanding masculinity does not seek to create a binary within masculinity but explain how different factors affect the experience of men. For example, a middle-class black man faces different inequalities than a middle-class white gay man. Or, in the case of Mexico, a white man's experience is different to that of a brown¹ or indigenous man. None of them fit into the hegemonic masculinity but their experiences will differ greatly according to their sexuality and their race. In the case of Mexico, men are still hold into the standards of hegemonic masculinity. However, the idea of *machoism* is present, and it consists of additional criterion. As it was previously mentioned, *machoism* causes men to demonstrate their manhood by going through intense measures, such as showing no fear, being the strongest, having no emotions, and many others.

The media's representation of masculinity reflects hegemonic masculinity and disempowers those masculinities that are different. Media reproduces and reinforces the gender power relations that are dominant in the moment. De Dauw and Connell (2021, p. 1) recognize how "hegemonic forces determine who gets to tell their story, what kind of stories can be told, and the size of the platform on which these stories are delivered". Representation of communities can lead to stereotyping and contribute to exclusion and

¹ 'Brown' referring to an indicator of experiencing a unique social position and experiences as being perceived as racialized because of the Spanish colonial-imposed cast and race hierarchy

silencing of others. Representation is heavily influenced by power dynamics, which builds unequal relations between communities, leading to hegemony. Foucault (1963) and Gramsci (1987) emphasized the relation of power with knowledge, representation, ideas, and authority. Stuart Hall (1997) follows Foucault and Gramsci in the understanding that power is monopolized, but narratives need to be accepted by the audience of the message. Thus, the monopolization of knowledge production and the reproduction of gender power relations are not purely sustained by the hegemonic forces.

Hall (1973) challenges the traditional notion that implies that communication is a linear process; rather he explains communication through a complex structure that includes multiple elements- such as production, circulation, distribution, consumption, and reproduction. It is not only on the hands of those who produce knowledge and symbols, but those who interpret and accept the representation. There is a complex relationship between those who produce media and those who receive it. They interact through coding and decoding processes that depend on institutional and societal context so that the message can be interpreted. Consequently, the receivers are not passive actors in the creation process of narratives and ideas, on the contrary, they further advance the narrative awarding it recognition as traditional or the status quo. Stuart (1997) argues how media helps to build discourse that can replicate or question the status quo. This means that the producers and the receivers are responsible for the production of discourse and of knowledge.

To summarize, it is through representation that individuals build narratives and belief systems that allow people to make sense of the world. Knowledge creation is not linear from media to viewers, there is a dynamic and bilateral relationship between them. The audience is not a passive player in the relationship, but it can interpret the content according to the gendered power relations. Hall (1997) used the *circuit of culture* by Du Gay (1997) to explain the dynamic relationship between representation, identity, regulation, production, and consumption. This entails that the producers and consumers of media interact constantly in the creation and solidification of representation. Representation is explained as “an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (Hall, 1997, p. 1). This dynamic allows the representation to be reinforced by the audience. However, it also opens the possibility to be questioned.

2. Visual Representation and Building a Relationship with the Subject

With the technological advancements in media, the news reportage ecosystem has changed, and the use of images and visuals has become fundamental in the creation of social reality. Despite the general conception that photography is objective, every product of media has an intention to not only reflect reality but to create reality and follow a narrative (Taylor, 1991). Kress and Leeuwen (2006, p. 1) explain visual images as “not a mirror of the world but an interpretation of it”. This means that photography in the media is a fundamental part of the knowledge production system and contributes to people following a narrative of the world and what is happening in it.

Photography contributes to building, establishing and reinforcing the idea of hegemonic masculinity and marginalized masculinities. Men are divided into different categories during conflict, which include “the elite special forces units might pride themselves on being selective (and, not coincidentally, being hyper-masculinized), the infantry and the below-deck navy usually will accept any young man in reasonably good physical condition, especially if there is a war on” (Enloe, 2023, p. 39). Thus, the hierarchies of different masculinities help determine the role of men in the society and the conflict. These hierarchies are visible in the visual coverage of the armed conflict. The hyper-masculinized special forces are the focus of the coverage, with their heroic capacity and patriotic values are greatly highlighted.

The media representation not only creates narratives about gender, but it also establishes the relationship the viewers have towards the topics being reported on. Wanta, Golan and Lee (2004) demonstrate how the media, especially through textual and visual content, helps build an idea of the world. In their article they demonstrate how media coverage helps shape public perceptions and understanding foreign nations, as well as their importance to the USA, where the study was conducted, and part of this research will be focused on. The factors that affect the public perception of foreign nations are the frequency of coverage, the type of coverage, the political and geographical proximity, and the valence of coverage. Thus, the frequency in which people are exposed to articles covering specific topics of a country will shape the perception of the country.

In her article, Chouliaraki (2004) calls attention to the ways in which the media creates a relationship between the spectator and the people in the media. Her article focuses on the *politics of pity*, which puts the spectator in moral and emotional relationships to people suffering to incite ethical reflection and action (ibid.). This demonstrates how the media can fabricate specific reactions from the spectators and viewers. The *politics of pity* is meant to generate emotional responses for certain events to fuel political agendas, but not others that are out of political interest. Susan Sontag (2004) proposes the concept of *ethics of seeing*, which she describes this as a process of desensitization caused by the constant exposure to suffering and violence. She explains that the desensitization reduces the spectator's emotional response and moral obligation towards the subjects of the photographs (ibid.). This alienates and detaches the spectator from the people that appear in the photograph and the reality they are facing. Furthermore, the media and representation have social and symbolic order that contribute to maintaining unequal power relations. The representation of women and men in conflict, demonstrating different vulnerabilities and narratives create unique responses in the viewers. There is a clear difference when men are used, compared to boys or girls; audiences relate differently to the image depending on the subject being photographed. When analysing the images it is possible to understand the political and social dynamics that are prevalent in the narratives.

3. Methodology

The research technique used in this Research Paper will analyse the photographs used by different media sources, such as newsletters and news reports. These pictures will be analysed from a constructivist approach, which examines the relationships that are used and created by the images. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) call attention to the interaction between producer and receiver, which enables the interpretation and constructing of the meanings of the images. Thus, photographs enable nonverbal communication between the producer, the receiver and the subject being photographed. Additionally, photographs in the press help build narratives, they serve as evidence and are seen as representations of reality (Taylor, 1991). This means that the pictures have an intention to create and strengthen the narrative about the subject.

Entman (1993) stresses how media content only reflects a perspective of reality, however, there are limitations to what a photograph can portray. Furthermore, he explains how “the notion of framing (...) implies that the frame has a common effect on large portions of the receiving audience, though it is not likely to have a universal effect on all” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). It is important to recall that the framing of images is always an intentional choice. By using this methodology, I will analyse the construction of masculinity for the *autodefensa* and the people in Michoacan. There are cultural codes that allow the reader to formulate the intended meaning of an image (Hall in Kress and Leeuwen, 2006). Therefore, to interpret the photographs correctly, they must be read from the correct context. In other words, it is fundamental to understand the context in which a visual image appears to understand the social relations between the producer, receiver and the subject being photographed.

1. Analysis Technique: *Framing*

I will be using the analytical technique of *framing*, which analyses how elements are organized and presented in an image to the viewer. Schwalbe (2006) highlights how patterns are present in how media organizes, presents, and ignores certain aspects of the subject. Thus, my analysis seeks to understand the types of images used by different media sources, Rose (2023) further emphasizes the importance of what the photographs include and exclude, what is included in the frame and what is left out. By analysing the images through framing, I will be

able to dissect the use and distribution of space in the images, on how this provides or deprives the subjects of the pictures of power. Powell et al. (2015) acknowledge that images have greater impact on the audience compared to text, pushing forward emotions and narratives around a subject.

Frames are cognitive structures that allow individuals to establish meaning in the world and communicate with others in understandable ways; it not only influences how people think, but how they remember (Schwalbe, 2006). For this research, I will focus on the creation of masculinities from media sources. The questions I will be trying to answer are the following: ²

1. How much space do men occupy in the image? Does it emphasize their dominance or marginality? How is the subject placed within the frame? Are they centralized, off center, positioned near the edges? How does this affect the viewer's perception of the subject's importance or power?
2. What is included in the frame and what is left out? What is centered or marginalized within the image?
3. How does the background, setting or surrounding environment contribute to the understanding of the subject? Is the individual isolated or integrated into a larger context? Is the background intentionally blurred or focused? How do the elements contribute to the narrative? Do the elements provide context, or does it shift attention exclusively to the subjects' individual qualities?
4. What elements, such as architecture, shadows, or other objects, can convey meanings of power? How are the boundaries of the image used? Is the subject physically or symbolically confined within the frame that might suggest limitation, marginalization, or vulnerability?
5. Are subjects framed individually or as part of a group? Does this framing influence the construction of their identity? Does individual focus suggest heroism or isolation, while group framing implies solidarity or anonymity? Are there distinct hierarchies or divisions visible within the group? Is one person more prominently framed than others, suggesting leadership or hegemonic status?
6. Does the framing suggest action or stillness? Is the subject captured in a moment of movement which might imply activity, agency, and strength? How is the action

² These questions were written with the help of Chat GPT.

framed? Is it action focused (gun, weapon, gesture) or is it in a more abstract, with the subject being lost in the larger context? Are they framed in a static pose and what does it mean?

7. Is the image symmetrically framed? Does the framing of the image emphasize structure or disorder in the representation of the subject? How does symmetry or asymmetry influence the viewer's interpretation of power dynamics within the image? Dominance or subordination?
8. Are there symbolic objects or elements within the frame? How do these symbols contribute to the construction of masculinity in the image? How does framing emphasize or downplay symbolic elements?
9. In what ways do the photographs of self-groups depict women? How do these portrayals contribute to or challenge hegemonic notions of masculinity? How does the presence or absence of women in these visual representations impact the social construction of masculinity within self-defense communities?

1. Key Concepts for Discussion

As I answer the questions that will guide my analysis, I will incorporate key concepts to strengthen the analysis of the photographs. It is important to highlight how media representation can reproduce or challenge dominant representations and power relations. The power relations are related to race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and/or sexuality. These relations contribute to building hierarchical structures and legitimize the marginalization of groups by the dominant narrative (Mazzei, 2009). Power relations fuel social practices that dictate the social dynamics and structure, which can be translated as practices of exclusion, exploitation, domination, resistance, or stereotyping. These social practices influence the narratives and form ideas about communities, countries, and entire regions.

Edward Said (1978) discussed how Western countries represent Eastern societies. He explained how the West offers a type of representation would be oversimplified and monotonous portrayals, neglecting to recognize the diversity of cultures and identities of the Eastern world. Thus, the representation by Western countries of the East would be essentialist and racist. This can also be applied to how the Global North has inaccurate and simplified representation of the Global South, for example the representation of Mexico. Essentialism is defined as “fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions

that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization (Grosz in Romens and Vianello, 2024, p. 685). Racialization can be understood as a type of essentialism that focuses on “the colour of the skin, the country of birth, culture or religion to justify superiority and privilege” (Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou in Romens and Vianello, 2024, p. 686). The essentialist media representation builds and reinforces social hierarchies, which leads to discrimination and inequality. It contributes to the creation of stereotypes and allows the process of othering.

Othering is a process through which dominant communities can create a collective understanding of what the other is by differentiating themselves. They create their identity according to the difference and contrast from others (Brons, 2015). Thus, they create an idea of who they are and what characterizes them based to the differences from others. This allows dominant groups to alienate other communities and serves as the foundation for victimization. Victimization can be understood as a political tool to build narratives regarding vulnerable communities as inferior and different, emphasizing their suffering without recognizing other factors, such as their strength and resilience (Osman, 2018). This reinforces narratives that mislead general perception, just as Zarkov and Drezgic (2019) explain how foreign media representation of a conflict tends to misrepresent nuances and complexities from the conflict and the communities involved.

Essentialism, racialization, othering, and victimization are practices that reinforce and perpetuate power dynamics in media representation. In the last 60 years, the USA has increased efforts against undocumented migration and the dominant political narrative is that Mexico is the source of many of the USA’s current problems (Felbab-Brown, 2020). This limits people from seeing the complexity and diversity of people from Mexico. The representation of Mexico and the conflict narrative is filled with social practices that foment discrimination, such as essentialism, othering, victimization, and racialization. This research paper will examine these social practices present in the photographs.

2. Media selection process

During the initial scoping process, I noticed multiple challenges to find photographs of the *autodefensas* in Tancitaro. First, several articles that talked about Tancitaro but, either had no photographs or used images of the military, rather than showing the *autodefensas*; or used

images of other communities when talking about Tancitaro.³ The lack of images showing the *autodefensas* can be interpreted as an attempt of erasure. The latter is a practice that demonstrates the essentialist narrative used in media when referring to the *autodefensas* in Mexico. This suggests that the narrative around self-defence groups is that they are all the same. Thus, to select appropriate images for this research I decided to devise a criterion of what the images and the article I found them in should include. The article needs to mention specifically about Tancitaro, and the caption of the photographs should include information about the location it was taken in. As a bilingual speaking person, my selection process was enriched because I can access and understand both English and Spanish. Preferably the article needs to be focused only in Tancitaro, but in some cases it was not possible to find such articles with photographs. The image should include members from the self-defence group in Tancitaro, it could be people that engage in the armed confrontations, leaders of the group or any other person who affiliates with the group.

This research is focused on the representation of the *autodefensas* in media. It is focused on media from Mexico and the US. I decided to use these countries to explore the difference in representation between sources from the Global North and the Global South. Furthermore, as it was previously explained, the US and Mexico have strong political, social, and historical ties. Additionally, the influence of media from United States on the international arena is undeniable. Being aware that media representation is not only dependant on where the news outlet is from, I decided to create another axis of analysis. I assumed there would be enough differences between Mexican and US news outlets but decided to include additional criteria to enhance my research and seek other possibilities in my analysis. I selected three news sources from each country, each one of them with different political inclination. Thus, one of the Mexican news sources is left-wing, one is centre, and one is right-wing. The same criteria were applied while selecting the US news sources. From each news source I selected two photographs, which I analysed with the question written previously.

The news outlets selected from Mexico are: *La Jornada*, left-wing; *El Universal*, centre; and *El Economista*, right-wing. The three newspapers are recognized in Mexico and are known internationally. *La Jornada* started publishing articles in 1984 and had 110,238 printed copies sold in 2019, meaning it was the third bestselling daily newspaper in Mexico (IECM, 2019).

³ Full citations of images in Annex.

It is recognized as the leading left-wing newspaper that reports on inequality and power dynamics in the country, and had 5.5 million users in 2019, which translates to 146,500 daily viewers (La Jornada, 2020). The newspaper *El Universal* started printing stories in 1918 and sold 176,712 in 2019, the second bestselling in Mexico (IECM, 2019). It is one of the oldest and most reputable newspapers in Mexico, covering political and social issues without aligning strongly with any ideology. The reputation of *El Universal* translates to it having 199,282 daily readers in 2019 (La Jornada, 2020). And last, *El Economista* started publishing stories in 1988 and sold 91,923 copies in 2019 (ICEM, 2019). It focuses on fiscal responsibility, economic growth and supports market-oriented policies; it offers a more security-oriented view in power dynamics. In 2022, *El Economista* got the sixth position as the most trust-worthy newspaper in Mexico (Reuters Institute in Soto Galindo, 2022). best ranking newspaper and had more than 300,000 readers in the month of July 2021 (El Financiero, 2021). The three newspapers are influential and have considerable reach for the Spanish speaking audience, especially in Mexico.

On the other hand, the selected newspapers from the US are: *The New York Times*, left-wing; *The Atlantic*, centrist; and *Fox News*, right-wing. *The New York Times* is the second leading global English language news websites in the US, receiving 385,7 million monthly visits in 2024 (Statista, 2024). Followed by *Fox News*, with 336.7 million visits (Statista, 2024). *The New York Times* advocates for civil rights, equality and government intervention in the economy, which means its stance is usually progressive and left leaning. On the other hand, *Fox News* is known for its conservative views regarding social issues, government regulation, and the role of the military. *Fox News* is right-leaning and reports with perspectives on security and law enforcement, which means it emphasizes protection, order and security. Last, *The Atlantic* had over 800,000 circulations in 2021 and continues to grow yearly (The Atlantic, 2022). It is a news source that refrains from reporting with overt political commentary.

4. Analysis and Discussion

1. National Media

1. Left leaning: La Jornada



Figure 1. (Daniel Fernandez, 2013).

The first image, *figure 1*, was published by *La Jornada* in 2013. The article is titled “*Agoniza Tancitaro por la delincuencia organizada*”, and it talks about the struggles the municipality faced due to the drug cartels and the inadequate response by the military. The caption of the picture reads “*Guardias comunitarias y militares vigilan la entrada al municipio*”, which translates to community guards and the military watch the entrance of the municipality. The photograph shows two groups of people, one is composed of military personnel and the other is composed of members of the *autodefensas*. The military group occupies a small portion of the frame and is positioned near the upper-left edge. They are dispersed and walking around, outnumbering the self-defence group. The *autodefensa* is near the upper-right corner of the image but it occupies a quarter of the image. The lack of symmetry in the image suggests a level of tension between the people in the image.

The members of the *autodefensa* are placed directly behind the military and their gazes are focused on them. The centre-most element in the image is the pick-truck that is being used by the self-defence group. The image shows one person is driving and four people are in the pick-up bed. Three of them are entirely part of the frame and the viewer can see they are brown men. Two of the men are looking away from the camera and one is looking directly into it. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) explain the concept of offer and demand, which relates to the interaction created between the viewer and the subject. When the subject is not looking into the camera it does provides an offer for contemplation or reflection. But when the subject looks into the camera, it requires a response, creating a demand for the viewer. In this image, only one man is creating a sense of demand. The demand is relatively weak because the man is far away from the camera, increasing the distance between the viewer and the subject.

The background and setting of the image contribute to understand the dynamic between both groups, in which the *autodefensas* were supervising the work carried out by the military. In this image, the members of the *autodefensas* are integrated in the larger context and there is a sense of unity between them, as they share the same space and task. The pick-up truck serves as a boundary that confines the *autodefensas* in their actions and agency. This suggests limitation in the power they hold within the dynamic. Furthermore, the framing suggest action by the military members, as they are walking around, while the self-defence members suggest stillness, only one member is standing, and the rest are sitting. This difference implies a different level of agency and strength between the military and the *autodefensas*. There is only one member of the self-defence that has a different stance than the rest, this calls the viewers' attention as it suggests hierarchies and leadership within the group.

This image only shows the participation of men in the self-defence group. This depiction essentializes the role of men in society as the protectors of the land and the community. The pick-up truck serves as a symbolic element in the image because it is a mode transportation that is used to transport everything, from people to construction material. It is a vehicle that is closely linked with land workers, who normally seat in the back of the pick-up (Canejo & Sherard, 2022). Thus, the position taken by people in a pick-up has to do with leadership, or lack thereof, and, in many cases, class. The pick-up's box/bed is known as the most vulnerable and dangerous places of the vehicle (Long, *et al.*, 1996). This talks to the power dynamics that push the marginalized men to seat in the back.



Figure 2. (Foto Ap, 2014).

The second image, *figure 2*, was published in 2014 by *La Jornada*. The article narrates the efforts put by the *autodefensas* to liberate the municipality of Tancitaro from the cartels. The caption of the image states that the coordinator of the *autodefensas* Estanislao Beltran Torres (with beard) greets the farmers after their land was liberated from the cartels. The image was taken in the main square of the municipality, a place that holds public life. Men occupy most of the space in the frame, with special attention given to the regional leader of the self-defence. He is situated at the centre right side of the photograph, which speaks to his importance within the community. The frame suggests he is engaging with the crowd as he walks and talks around. He is holding his hand up and the people around him are imitating his gesture, further demonstrating his importance and influence in the community. The subject is wearing a wedding ring, which hints towards his role as also a husband and probably a father. It is important to highlight that the leader of the *autodefensas* is perceived as an old, brown man. Additionally, he is wearing glasses, which suggest he is not completely able-bodied, highlighting the age and race of the subject.

The people in the image contribute to the narrative and help understand that the leader is supported by the community. The way that Estanislao is placed within the frame

does not suggest boundaries or limitations. On the contrary, he is framed in a way that further constructs his identity as leader and hero of the community. The people standing behind him, especially the women who are smiling towards him, legitimize his work by copying his gesture. This links to Enloe's argument that women contribute to the distribution of labour by encouraging men to comply with the gender roles. It essentializes men as the active participants of the conflict, and women as supporters. Furthermore, the photograph's composition is asymmetrical, which suggests a lack of order and control. It suggests chaos and lack of formal structure within the community. This alludes to the subordination of the community.

The photograph, as it was previously mentioned, depicts women in a supportive role towards the self-defence group. There are five women shown in the picture, compared to more than seven men. This talks towards the reduced presence of women in public spaces. In addition, there are two girls standing next to the regional leader of the *autodefensa*. They are considerably smaller than him, occupying a smaller portion of the frame compared to the man. One of them, is looking directly up towards the camera. The angle of the image creates a visual effect that suggests the girls are vulnerable. Thus, the image integrates women and girls as the vulnerable group in the community. This representation follows the traditional gender narratives.

2. Centre: El Universal



Figure 3. (Carlos Arrieta, 2015).

The first image, *figure 3*, used by *El Universal* was published in an article that reports about the death of the *autodefensas* leader in Tancitaro. His name was Jesus Bucio Cortes, and he was caught in the crossfire while he was crossing to another town. The image does not include a caption. The photograph was taken from the side and Jesus occupies around a quarter of the frame. He is placed close to the centre, which seems a hint towards his importance, but the shadows cast to his face tell a different story. The viewer can see the background of the image, which includes trees and land. There is a large tree close by Jesus's body, which casts large shadows all throughout the photograph.

Despite Jesus being the centre of the image, the shadows make his body and face merge with the background. This limits the viewer from seeing Jesus's physical and facial features, which anonymises him and integrates his body to the land. This effect causes the viewer to perceive the man as different through the process of othering, which creates a sense of vulnerability and marginalization for the man. Furthermore, he is framed individually, which hints to isolation. The frame suggests movement, it seems to capture a moment in which the man is walking slowly. This type of movement implies agency but does not suggest strength. The action is lost in the larger context of the image, making the movement and agency of Jesus abstract. There is no clear intention of his actions and does not convey leadership.

The image is framed asymmetrically, meaning there is no control or authority from the man towards his surroundings. This symmetry influences the viewers interpretation of the image by alluding to subordination from the man towards his surroundings. The tree casting the shadow on Jesus is a symbolic object that help to construct the masculinity in the image. Femininity is normally associated with connectedness to nature (Öztürk, 2020). In this photograph, as Jesus merges with the background, there is a sense of connection between him and nature. This contributes to building a different idea of masculinity, which does not comply with hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity would conquer nature, not blend with it.



Figure 4. (Raul Tinoco, 2015).

The second image, *figure 4*, used in a news article of by *El Universal* shows a man sitting at the back of a pick-up truck holding a gun. The article that used this image was posted weeks after the previous one, clarifying that the death of the leader of Tancitaro had been an accident. The image has a caption that reads "*Tras la muerte de Bucio, elementos de la fuerza rural blindan Tancitaro,*" this states that after the leader's death, members of the rural defense protect Tancitaro. Behind the subject there is an old-looking truck which has a sign that says that avocados are sold there. The man in the picture is holding a shotgun in his hands and he is looking backward, with his face completely covered by a balaclava. The way the weapon rests

on his thighs shows a relaxed posture. There are no signs of alertness or danger that make him engage with his surroundings. Due to his covered face, the subject in the image is being anonymized to the viewer. The man takes up a third of the frame, and his sitting posture, with the legs spread, occupies a substantial portion of the image. His position gives the illusion of power.

The background of the image contributes to understanding the role of the subject. The man is sitting at the back of a pick-up truck, which, as it was previously mentioned, alludes to the subordination of the subject. His posture suggests physical confinement within the frame, which speaks to his role as an observer, limiting his actions. The lack of movement in the image further pushes the notion that he lacks agency because he seems to be waiting for orders. The surrounding elements contribute to the narrative of men being protectors as he is overlooking towards the land, specifically towards the sign that mentions the agricultural products they harvest and sell. He is a spectator, waiting to react to threats, making his presence passive within the image.

The shotgun shown in the photograph serves as a symbolic element in the frame because it is a sign of violence and resistance. The shotgun is known for its ability to cause considerable harm. It is a close-range firearm that can cause more lethal damage compared to others as it shoots multiple small-size projectiles at the target (Russotti & Sim, 1985). The wounds caused by shotguns are like those of a hand grenade. Thus, the weapon is less precise, but the wounds are more deadly. Shotguns are not normally associated with the military but are normally used in civil armed confrontations (Vogel & Dootz, 2007). Due to the lack of precision and gruesome aftermath, it is a sign of ruthlessness. This image erases identifiable features from the subject and anonymizes him from the viewer; and it includes a militarizing element, the shotgun, which takes considerable space in the frame. However, the gun is not the focus of the image. It is important to highlight that there are no women present in this image, which alludes to the gender narrative. It essentializes the duties of men, which are linked with violence, fighting, and protecting.

3. Right leaning: El Economista



Figure 5. (Unknown, 2013).

The first image, *figure 5*, used by *El Economista* shows several members of the *autodefensa*. The article narrates the return of the mayor of Tancitaro to the town after a period of absence due to insecurity. The image has no captions. The men in the picture are all standing with their backs to the camera, except one. The man in the middle is looking towards the camera and is raising his hat with a welcoming gesture to the viewer. This is the first image in which the subject directly addresses the viewer. There are several men in the frame, which occupy most of the space in the image. There are five men who are placed in the center most of the image. This highlights the importance of the men within the situation and the photograph. Each man is holding a rifle, which are more precise weapons than the shotguns displayed in the previous photograph, and each rifle occupies a small fraction of the image.

The background of the photo contributes to understand the relationship between the men, and between the men and the surrounding environment. The man who is standing in the middle of the image is standing as part of the group, which creates a sense of solidarity and comradery. There are no clear distinctions of hierarchies in the image, thus, there is no suggestion of leadership or subordinates within the group. The image lacks symmetry, which

conveys a sense of chaos and disorder within the *autodefensas*. This contributes to building a masculinity that is subordinate within the image.

The framing of the image suggests action as the man in the middle is moving his arm upward. The movement it is suggesting does not relate to action or violence, but rather to recognition of the photographer. This motion, in addition to the facial expression of the man, humanizes the subject by demonstrating a charismatic element. The image shows a side of the man that is not seen in the other photographs, a glimpse of the subject's personality. Weber (1978, in Joose and Willey, 2020) explains the role of charisma as a temporary, powerful force that can disturb established structures before being absorbed by the orderly society. In the picture, this gesture challenges the perceived notion of men being entirely absorbed by violence in conflict settings. This photograph breaks the notion of the way that men participate in armed conflict.



Figure 6. (Unknown, 2014).

The second image, *figure 6*, used by *El Economista* was taken from a lower angle looking up towards the sky. A man is sitting on a fence holding a rifle close to his chest as he looks downwards to the camera. This direct contact between the viewer and the subject creates a strong demand. This demand is heightened because the background does not provide any hint or distraction for the viewer. The background does not contribute to the general

narrative of the image, leaving the individual to be isolated from the larger context. There are no additional elements that contribute to the narrative or provide context. Therefore, the attention shifts to the physical qualities of the subject. He is wearing a cap, which casts strong shadows on his face. This makes it hard to identify facial features. Nevertheless, the viewer can see the brown color of the skin, his denim jeans are color washed, and he is wearing worn out sandals.

The subject is sitting on top of a fence, which is generally used as boundaries. This interaction between the fence and the subject implies that he is above limitations and confinement. It hints towards his power. The photograph is framed symmetrically, which alludes to power and authority, further portraying the power of the subject. He is framed in a static pose that implies a reactive state. This means that the subject does not have agency but his action towards the viewer depends on the nature of the interaction. The subject is waiting and observing before acting.

Despite the elements that contribute to the power narrative within the photo, the masculinity that is portrayed in this image is not hegemonic. The subject is a brown man; thus, he does not comply with the hegemonic whiteness. Furthermore, the clothes he wears hint towards his low socio-economic status. Nevertheless, he conveys power because he portrays an aggressive and menacing image that has an intense demand for the viewer.

2. US based Media

1. Left leaning: New York Times



Figure 7. (Brett Gundlock, 2018).

The first image, *figure 7*, used by the *New York Times* shows a man who is holding a shotgun and is sitting in a metal chair in his land. This photograph was used in an article that narrated how three towns (Tancitaro, Monterrey and Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl) dealt with the insecurity due to the lack of trust to the government. The caption of the picture reads: “José Santos at a checkpoint near the entrance to Tancitaro. Fed up with both the cartels and the government, the people of Tancitaro pushed out both” (Fisher, Taub & Martinez, 2018). The subject of the photograph is José Santos, an old, brown man. In the background of the picture, we can see the tree line and the silhouette of mountains. The man shown in the photo is a skinny elder with white hair. He is placed in the center of the image and takes a small portion of the photograph. The background of the image shows an extended piece of land, which features trees and mountains. This background contributes to understanding the subject as a person who lives in an isolated community. It talks to the connection between the man in the photograph and the land, hinting towards their shared history and existence. The elements in the frame provide context and make the man seem small in the photograph,

where the focus element is the land. The majority the land is green, but the section near where the man is seating is brown. This section of land is surrounded by a wired fence, which suggests a limitation for the man's capacity and reach. The man is framed individually in the image, which points to isolation. Both these features in the frame build a sense of marginalization for the man in the image.

The frame of the image does not suggest movement or action. The subject of the image is captured in a static pose, limiting his agency. The framing of this image does not show action, but indicates the man remains expectant of the situation and how it will unfold. Thus, what he does depends on the events that happen in the land. He is not an active element within the image but has the possibility of being a reactive element to the situation. In addition, the image lacks symmetry, which alludes to the lack of order and structure within the situation. It suggests that the man will not act according to rules or mandates but will follow his own principles. The image shows the man's face, where you can see he has a mustache and is wearing a *sombrero*. The mustache and *sombrero* are two features that are commonly linked towards Mexico due to the stereotypical representation of the people (Rivas, 2024).

The man in the image portrays a mix between subaltern masculinity and macho masculinity because of several elements. First, he is an older man, which speaks directly to two elements that are used to define subaltern masculinities, age and physical abilities. According to Cuddy, Norton and Fiske (2005) there is an emotional reaction towards elders mixing admiration and pity. Following the *politics of pity* by Chouliaraki (2004), elder, this picture creates an emotional connection that translates to a sense of responsibility for the subject of the image and what they represent. Furthermore, the man in the picture is a farmer who belongs to the working class of the community. He is a racialized man who does not comply with the white hegemony. These characteristics are things that the subject of the image does not comply towards hegemonic masculinity, making him portray a subaltern masculinity. In addition, the symbolic relationship between him and the land, and the *sombrero* he is using, alludes to the Mexican stereotype of what a man is. This causes him to represent a macho masculinity as well.



Figure 8. (Alan Ortega, 2014).

The second picture, *figure 8*, was used by the *New York Times* in an article that covers the futile efforts put forward by the government to dissolve the *autodefensas*. The caption of the image says, “Vigilante forces trying to defend against drug violence paused their convoy on Friday after hearing rumours of an ambush” (Malkin & Villegas, 2014). The image shows six trucks on a highway. The photograph was taken from the back side of the vehicles, and it shows people seating at the bed. The image is focused onto the last vehicle, which is a pick-up truck, and two brown men are sitting in the back. The men of the image occupy around a fourth of the frame and they are placed close to the lower right corner. This position influences the perception of the viewer into considering that the people in the frame are not powerful. The surrounding elements of the image let the viewer understand that the people in the image are part of a surveillance operation to protect the land from outsiders. The background of the image is intentionally blurred, which allows the viewer to focus especially on the last two men. Both are holding their weapons, looking to opposite directions. The back of the truck is filled with bags and boxes, which led to the door of the pick-up bed to be opened. As it was previously mentioned, the pick-up trucks hint towards power structures within a community, normally being associated with the vulnerable and marginalized

members of the community. As the back of the pick-up truck is the most vulnerable spot in the vehicle, the door being open further accentuates their vulnerability.

There are several men in the picture, but the groups are framed separately. This stops the image from constructing a sense of community and unity between the members. In other words, it causes a sense of fragmentation and division between the *autodefensas*. The men that are the focus of the image are sitting at different heights. One is lower than the other, which hints to the different hierarchies within the group. None of them are framed more prominently than the other, but the height difference suggests different status. The brake lights of all the cars are turned on, which suggest that there is no movement in the image. The subjects of the image are not captured in a moment of movement or action, which causes the same sensation of expectation, waiting for something to occur. The position of the men in the frame and their sitting posture does not suggest power or dominance towards the viewer or between them. There is no clear demonstration of agency or strength that contribute to building a narrative of dominance. Furthermore, the additional elements, such as the guns, are slightly lost in the frame, especially for the man that is positioned lower. The image lacks symmetry but the space distribution between the vehicles suggests a level of order and organization between the *autodefensas*.

2. Centre: The Atlantic



Figure 9. (Felix Marquez, 2014).

Both images from *The Atlantic* were found in an article that has 34 images covering the *autodefensas* in Mexico. Not all the photos are from the same people, the same town, or the same moment in time; thus, the photographs selected were the ones that mentioned Tancitaro. The first image, *figure 9*, used by *The Atlantic* features a brown infant boy holding with both hands a fire weapon. The caption of the image mentions that he is helping his father to arrange weapons in the *autodefensa* checkpoint. The image is taken from a higher angle than the boy. His eyes are looking up to the man who is assumed to be his father. The boy takes a small portion of the image, and his small size emphasizes his marginality. There is an arm that is placed directly on top of him, which further accentuates his vulnerability. The boy is centralized in the image, causing the viewer to perceive the boy as an important element within the situation.

The background of the image isolates him from a larger context. The weapons that are placed around him creates a narrative of defencelessness in a violent context. The image is focused on the boy, especially his eyes. The image allows the viewer to be drawn exclusively to the subject's individual qualities and physical characteristics. The wall behind the boy

suggests that he is trapped, which means he is physically confirmed within the frame. He is isolated.

The way the boy is framed does not convey any action or movement. The image suggest that the subject is still, waiting for instructions and for permission to act. The photograph is asymmetric, which contributes to increase the tension of the situation. The frame suggests confusion, which resonates with the look of the boy. The symmetry in the image further underlines the unequal power structure where the boy is vulnerable. He is a subordinate in this context. The weapons are symbolic elements that represent the fight, struggle and violence that the communities are facing. The boy being surrounded by the guns shows his vulnerability to the situation, while also essentialising his participation in the conflict as a man. Despite being a boy with limited capacity to participate in the conflict, he is 'helping' his father be prepared for the armed confrontations. This follows the narrative that boys are never too young to fight because it is in their nature (Rosen & Nofziger, 2019).

Furthermore, using a boy in the picture causes a reaction of the viewer that the rest of the images fail to do. People can connect differently with the boy because he is a vulnerable section of the population. Hutchison (2014) explains the perception of vulnerability is differently shaped by racialized children. It causes a reaction where the viewers can situate themselves in relation to others, fomenting empathy and solidarity. In addition, this photograph featuring a boy follows the idea mentioned by Enloe (2023) that states that young boys become the infinite source of fighting power.



Figure 10. (Eduardo Verdugo, 2014).

The second image, *figure 10*, used by *The Atlantic* shows what seems like a heterosexual couple sharing an intimate moment. They are centralized in the frame, sitting in a bench as they press their foreheads onto each other's. The man is a member of the *autodefensas* and is wearing an anti-bullet vest. The woman is wearing casual clothes. The man in the image occupies a larger space of the frame compared to the woman, hinting towards the dominance of the man. The caption mentions that they are sitting in the main square of the town, which is the background of the image. The background of the image is blurred intentionally to shift the attention to the couple.

There are two elements that talk to the power relation between the subjects in the image. As it was previously mentioned, the man is wearing an anti-bullet vest and, behind him, the viewer can see the stock of a rifle. The man also has a walkie-talkie hanging from his waist. In comparison, the woman is entirely unprotected, unarmed and uncommunicated. This hints towards the power dynamics between genders, where the man is powerful and in charge of protection, while the woman remains helpless. It essentialises both genders and further perpetuates traditional gender roles. Furthermore, the image shows a heteronormative couple interacting with each other. It promotes the notion that heterosexual relationships are the normalized while other relationships remain invisible.

The frame of the image suggests stillness, showing the lack of activity and hustle during the moment. This frame insinuates a level of subordination among the couple, as they are both closing their eyes and not engaging with their surroundings. The relationship between them is a symbolic element that helps construct the masculinity in the image. It shows the responsibility of the man to participate in the *autodefensa* to protect and provide safety for his partner. The way the woman is portrayed in this image is subordinate, contributing to the hegemonic notions of masculinity and femineity.

3. Right leaning: FOX News



Figure 11. (Dario Lopez-Mills, 2014).

The first image, *figure 11*, used by *Fox News* was used in an article that outlines the formation of the *autodefensas* in Mexico and their fight against drug cartels. The caption also contains information about the origin of the *autodefensas*, and it mentions that the image was not taken in Tancitaro, but in another town called Las Colonias. This photograph shows four brown men who occupy most of the frame. Three of the men are wearing a white shirt and holding weapons, while standing a few steps behind the only man wearing a black shirt, which is the focus of the image. None of the men are centralized in the image, all being placed in different places in the image. The picture is taken from the same height as the man wearing the black shirt, who seems to be kneeling or standing. The men behind him are standing and are looking downward towards the camera.

The background of the photo does not contribute to understand the subject of the image. The man is not isolated within the photo but does not integrate into the larger context either. The man in black is the only person focused on the image, which causes all the viewer to concentrate in his individual qualities. He is wearing two ammo belts in his chest, which creates an X on his chest. This way of carrying the ammo belt is a reference to Pancho Villa, a revolutionary man in Mexico's history, who fought for the right of indigenous people to have land (Buchenau & Henderson, 2022). The focus on this man, as well as the difference in the color of the shirts, which hints towards an abstract hierarchy within the group.

The man in the black becomes the central element within the group, suggesting he holds a leadership in the group. Furthermore, despite the man having the weapons, he is holding the ammunition, which seems to hint towards his importance in the group. They cannot act without his contribution or permission. The image does not imply activity, or any action being taken. The subjects were photographed in a moment of stillness. Additionally, the image lacks symmetry, which refers to a chaotic environment and dynamic that lacks order. The photograph hints towards a macho masculinity because it alludes to Mexican symbols.



Figure 12. (Eduardo Verdugo, II, 2014).

The second image, *figure 12*, was used by *Fox News* in an article that cover the pressure imposed to *autodefensas* by the government to disband and give control back to the rural police force shows a brown man holding and aiming a rifle. The article mentions several towns, including Tancitaro. The caption mentions that the image was not taken in Tancitaro, but in a town called Nueva Italia. The subject of the image is a brown man. This man occupies a third of the frame and is placed in the middle of the image. The face of the subject is hidden from the viewer. The background of the image shows he is standing inside building, looking outside. The walls of the building are not covered with paint and there are elements that hint that it is still under construction. The image shows what seems like cement tiles lying around

the house, as well as a broom and bags. The building does not have doors or windows, and the floor seems to be covered in dust.

The man is framed on his own and in a relatively dark setting, creating a sense of isolation. The focus is on his body and in the light outside. The subject is holding the rifle and aiming towards an unknown target located outside the building. The background of the image is slightly blurred, which further causes the viewer to focus on the man holding the rifle and his actions. The position of the subject and the action he is portraying creates tension in the image. This frame suggests the power of the subject to commit violent acts. The photograph does not hint towards immediate movement by the subject but shows the possibility for action. The frame is asymmetric, and several elements hint toward the disorder and chaos that surrounds the subject.

3. Discussion

How are masculinities represented in Mexican and US news sources that cover *autodefensas* in Tancitaro?

The media representation of the masculinities in the *autodefensas* from Tancitaro shows an essentialist narrative of gender dynamics and responsibilities. The images used by both the US and Mexican newspapers portray men as the protectors of their community. They are the members of the community who oversee the conflict and combat the drug cartels. Despite this similarity, there are noticeable differences in how the US and Mexico portray the men.

In the case of Mexico, the representation given in *La Jornada* puts a special emphasis in the relationship built between the members of the community. Both images show a group of people, most of them being men. On the other hand, the images used by *El Universal* highlight the connection between the men from the *autodefensa* and the land. Both images show the man engaging with the land and their surroundings. Last, *El Economista* shows a more evident and heavier presence of weapons. The images used by *El Economista* integrates larger militarizing elements to the pictures used. It is important to mention that four out of the six images used in Mexican newspapers hide or cover the face of the subject in the image. By obscuring or obstructing the face of the subject, the image causes a sense of otherness. This stylistic choice presents the subject as distant, preventing the viewer from creating relationships with them (Brons, 2015). Facial features are fundamental to recognize and give

identity to individuals, thus, hiding their faces anonymizes and dehumanizes the subject of the photographs. Furthermore, most of the images show subjects that are not looking into the camera, which means they offer the opportunity for contemplation and reflection from the viewer, as previously explained. Three photographs also provide an offer to the viewer, two offer a weak demand, and only one provide a strong demand.

The representation given to *autodefensas* in the US shows larger militarising elements throughout all the pictures. In comparison to the Mexican newspapers, where three out of six images show weapons explicitly, all the images used by US newspapers included weapons. The representation used in *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic* created a different reaction on the viewer. Going back to Krees and Leewen (2006), the images used create a different relation between the viewer and the subject when vulnerable groups are portrayed. Using a child, a couple, and an old man creates a specific reaction in the viewers, which can be defined by the politics of pity explained by Chouliaraki (2004). Visualizing vulnerable subjects, causes the viewer to feel compassion and tenderness towards the subjects. This creates victimizing narratives that contribute to conceive communities as defenceless or weak. It straps them from their agency and enables discrimination against them (Osman, 2018). In addition, the visual representation put forward by *Fox News* suggests a narrative in which all *autodefensas* are the same. They used images from one self-defence group for a news article that was talking about another. This demonstrates the lack of recognition of nuances and differences from communities and their experiences, creating simplified narratives about the self-defence groups, as proposed by Zarkov & Drezgi (2019).

How does media representation of masculinities of the *autodefensas* deviate from hegemonic masculinity?

The media representation of the masculinities of the *autodefensas* in Mexico deviate from the hegemonic masculinity in two major ways. First, the men shown in the photographs used by the US and by Mexican newspapers are racialized farmers. Both race and class are characteristics that are used to distinguish between a hegemonic masculinity and others (Coston & Kimmel, 2012). Both Mexico and the US are countries with colonial heritage and a history of discrimination against racialized communities. The representation given to *autodefensa* as subaltern masculinities constructs a masculinity that does not align with hegemonic ideals, which impacts the public perception. The racialization of the subjects

causes the public perception to shift towards a stereotypical narrative. It creates a division between the viewer, who might not share the experience and the physical attributes from the subject, which feeds to a process of othering.

Second, hegemonic masculinity is related to the agency and leadership (Connell, 2005). The subjects of the images share a sense of expectation. There is an overall feeling of apprehension and suspense, waiting to act. This portrayal limits, and can even strip entirely, the subjects from their agency, which goes against the idea of hegemonic masculinity. There is only one picture that suggests leadership between the *autodefensa*, which was used by *La Jornada*, but the rest of the photographs put forward images that propose disorder and lack of hierarchies. It is important to highlight that despite the leadership shown in the picture, the subject does not fall into the hegemonic category as it he is not white, or middle class.

How does the media representation of masculinities in the Tancitaro *autodefensas* challenge or reproduce gender narratives?

The media representation of masculinities of *autodefensa* in Tancitaro reproduce gender narratives that are associated with responsibility of men being the protectors. The pictures demonstrate a level of militarization in which the men are engaging in armed conflict to protect their land. However, there is no clear order, hierarchies, or strong leadership, which does not show a militarized masculinity, only certain aspects related to it. Furthermore, there are two pictures that hint towards the gender narratives related to men's responsibility to their family. One picture shows a wedding ring and the other a couple. These pictures reproduce the heteronormative expectation of them as providers for their families, as Curry and Ansmes de Vries (2018) mention in their research.

On the other hand, the representation challenges the gender narratives by showing the connection between the men and the land. As it was previously mentioned, nature is often linked to femininity and women, so showing a relation between men and nature goes against hegemonic gender narratives. The men in the pictures are seen interacting and protecting the land, still complying to their role as protectors but by defending their territory.

5. Conclusions

The media representation of masculinities in the *autodefensa* of Tancitaro bear significant implications for the understanding of gender, and power. By examining the media representation of masculinities when covering news of the *autodefensa* in Tancitaro, this research has highlighted how photographs contribute narratives that reinforces traditional notions of masculinity. It is important to emphasize the importance of remaining critical of media representation and the narratives they put forward. This research proposes that media representation of *autodefensas* put forward a subaltern masculinity to perpetuate power and social narratives that continue to victimize, essentialize, and dehumanize the communities. The strategies and focus used by each newspaper differ from one another, but the overarching pattern shows limitations within the *autodefensa* masculinity. The framing used changes the way subjects are perceived in terms of power, agency, vulnerability and marginalization. The photographs have an intention to further push a narrative. The representation influences real-world gender expectations by promoting ideas and principles that follow hegemonic gender dynamics.

This research highlights the erasure of women in media representation. It puts forward male dominated narratives and expectations. Future research could focus on the media representation of women in the communities and in the *autodefensas*. Additionally, research focused on textual analysing to understand the impact of the language used in the news articles. Also, carrying out collaborative research with the community to understand the internal gender dynamics that are present in their everyday life.

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7. Annex

Image		Source	Caption & Photographer	Reference
	Figure 1	La Jornada	<i>Guardias comunitarias y militares vigilan la entrada al municipio.</i> Photo by : Daniel Hernandez	Martinez Elorriaga, E. (2013) Agoniza Tancitaro, agobiado por la delincuencia organizada, <i>La Jornada</i> . 25 November. Available at: La Jornada: Agoniza Tancitaro, agobiado por la delincuencia organizada (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 2		<i>El coordinador del Consejo de Autodefensas de Michoacán, Estanislao Beltrán Torres (con barba), saluda a agricultores de Tancitaro durante el acto de devolución de tierras que estaban en poder de delincuentes.</i> Photo by: Photo AP	Martinez Elorriaga, E. (2014) Autodefensas entregan huertas que estaban en poder de los <i>templarios</i> , <i>La Jornada</i> . 17 January. Available at: La Jornada: Autodefensas entregan huertas que estaban en poder de los templarios (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 3	El Universal	N.A. Photo by: Carlos Arrieta.	Arrieta, C. (2015). Asesinan a fundador de autodefensas de Tancitaro. <i>El Universal</i> . 30 August. Available at: Asesinan a fundador de autodefensas de Tancitaro El Universal (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 4		<i>Tras la muerte de Bucio, elementos de la Fuerza Rural blindaron Tancitaro.</i> Photo by: Raul Tinoco	Arrieta, C. (2015). Ataque no iba dirigido a Bucio. <i>El Universal</i> 1 September. Available at: “Ataque no iba dirigido a Bucio” El Universal (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 5	El Economista	N.A. Photographer unknown	Macias, V. (2013). Torres retoma la alcaldía de Tancitaro Michoacan. <i>El Economista</i> 20 November. Available at https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/Torres-retoma-la-alcaldia-de-Tancitaro-Michoacan-20131119-0014.html (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 6		N.A. Photographer unknown	Macias, V. (2014). Autodefensas se financian con limones y aguacate. <i>El Economista</i> , 20 January. Available at: https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/Autodefensas-se-financian-

				con-limones-y-aguacate-20140120-0061.html (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 7	The New York Times	BY THE GUN José Santos at a checkpoint near the entrance to Tancitaro. Fed up with both the cartels and the government, the people of Tancitaro pushed out both. Photo by: Brett Gundlock	Fisher, M., Taub, A., and Martinez, D. (2018). Losing Faith in the State, Some Mexican towns Quietly Break Away. The New York Times. January 07, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/07/world/americas/mexico-state-corruption.html (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 8		Vigilante forces trying to defend against drug violence paused their convoy on Friday after hearing rumors of an ambush. Photo by: Alan Ortega	Malkin, E., and Paulina Villegas, P. (2018). Mexico Faces Obstacle in Curbing Vigilantes Fighting Drug Gang. The New York Times, January 14. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/15/world/americas/mexico-faces-obstacle-in-curbing-vigilantes-fighting-drug-gang.html (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 9	The Atlantic	A child tries to help his father arrange weapons at a checkpoint set up by the Self-Defense Council of Michoacan, (CAM), in Tancitaro, Mexico, on January 16, 2014. Authorities fear self-defense groups could turn into the very sort of organized crime forces they're fighting, while citizens who had been kidnapped, beaten and had land confiscated by the Knight Templar drug cartel praise the vigilantes for providing security. Photo by: Felix Marquez	Taylor, A. (2014). Mexico's Vigilantes. The Atlantic, May 14. Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/05/mexicos-vigilantes/100734/ (Accessed: 5 June 2024).
	Figure 10		A man belonging to the Self-Defense Council of Michoacan kisses a woman in the main square of the town, on January 13, 2014. Photo by: Eduardo Verdugo	Ebid.
	Figure 11	Fox News	Men belonging to a self-defense group stand at a checkpoint in the town of Las Colonias, Mexico, Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2013. Two leaders of the main vigilante groups in western Michoacan state said	(2013). Mexican 'Self-Defense' Vigilantes Take Over Town In Fight Against Cartel. Fox News, November 17. Available at https://www.foxnews.com/world/mexican-self-defense-vigilantes-take-over-

			<p><i>Tuesday that they are pulling back from confronting the Knights Templar drug cartel because the Mexican government has promised to oust traffickers from the area. Photo by: Dario Lopez-Mills.</i></p>	<p><u>town-in-fight-against-cartel</u> (Accessed: 5 June 2024).</p>
	<p>Figure 12</p>		<p><i>A man belonging to the Self-Defense Council of Michoacan, (CAM), peers through the sight of his weapon at a checkpoint in Nueva Italia, Mexico, Monday, Jan. 13, 2014. A day earlier the self-defenses encountered resistance as they tried to rid the town of the Knights Templar drug cartel while the government announced today that federal forces will take over security in a large swath of a western Mexico that has been hard hit by violence. Photo by: Eduardo Verdugo (II).</i></p>	<p>(2014). Mexican Vigilantes Agree to Disband, Allowed To Keep Weapons And Join Rural Police Force. Fox News, April 17. Available at: https://www.foxnews.com/world/mexican-vigilantes-agree-to-disband-allowed-to-keep-weapons-and-join-rural-police-force (Accessed: 5 June 2024).</p>