

Intimacy and Extortion in Medellin

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29 September 2023



FONDS NATIONAL SUISSE
DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE



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The intimacy of criminal governance

how *intimacies* shape criminal governance
(and extortion)

- (1) Interpersonal relationships
- (2) Local knowledge
- (3) Individual and collective memories

The intimacy of criminal governance

how *intimacies* shape criminal governance
(and extortion)

- (1) Conflict management (to rule)
- (2) *La Vacuna* (to protect)
- (3) Social activities (to provide)

Memories of extortion

Lately I started to ask myself... At the time, I did not know... “This man, who does he take orders from?” “Why does this man come by every week to collect a fee?” Today we would say a *vacuna*. But at the time, we **did not consider it a *vacuna* or extortion, nor something illegal.** The man would drop in and we would take out the *aguapanela* (local sweet drink), the chocolate and a *café con leche* (milk coffee). The man would ride through the whole neighborhood on his bicycle with a two-shot rifle on his back. And every night we would hear the whistle... “Here comes the watchman”. We felt safe.

Memories of extortion

No, no, no, no, no it was not a *vacuna*. We would go from house to house... They were the *cuchitos* of our barrio. They all saw how things had changed in the barrio. Everything was now *bacano* (cool). We asked for support for ammunition and the safety of the barrio. People would give 1'000 or 2'000 pesos. There was no obligation.

When the others [the militias] were there, they organized *fiestas*: they would raid soda trucks and give them to the community. In some ways, they were more educated people. They were trained by the guerrilla and they came with more tactics. They would look for *marijuaneros* or thieves; they would round them up and make them clean up the neighborhood. In that sense, **the barrio was better, because they punished those who did bad things. Nowadays, they are the ones [in charge] who do these [bad] things.**

Extortion, beyond protection

We have an agreement [stating] that each guide is limited to one tour a day. But there are a lot of us guides ... There are people who always want more, who do not want to share and who do not understand that everybody needs to work ... We did not make this agreement, it was made by the *combos*. They want to charge everybody. They do not want to charge the *vacuna* at the end of the week and be told that they [the guides] could not work.

The owner refused to pay but he was *muy querido* (much loved) in the barrio. The chiefs of the combo didn't want to harm him so they made a deal. They organized a big Christmas party in December and he had to pay for everything.