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From the Editor: An Introduction to a Special Issue of Landscapes of Violence: Photo Essays on Policy and Violence

Keywords
photo, violence, Guatemala, Russia, P'urhépecha, landscapes, Central America

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Interdisciplinary studies of violence must reflect the broadening analytical horizons of the world in which we live, a world that prompts us to consider such large-scale phenomena as civil war, black-market human organ trade, neoliberal policies, and forced disappearances. In the inaugural photo edition of *Landscapes of Violence*, our contributors explore these issues across academic disciplines and institutional boundaries.

In this issue of *LoV*, our authors endeavor to create narrative linkages between policy issues and structural forms of violence through the visual medium of photography. The photographs in each of these articles are included as an integral component of the story being told through a combination of art, analysis, and interpretation. There is long and interesting history of photography’s relationship with violence, and specifically with war. Often, these photos were meant to capture a moment and convey a meaning in the way that only photography can.

In the same instance, there is morality paradox that comes into play. The decision to take a photograph creates a system of complicated relationships particularly when the image is capturing another person’s (or event’s) pain, vulnerability, or mortality. There is an obligation on behalf of the researcher, journalist, or photographer to understand this potential paradox, particularly when telling the stories of vulnerable populations embedded in systems of systemic violence.

Our contributors have taken the use of photography beyond the capturing of physical acts of violence from a single moment in time to connect the viewer/reader with the policy issues that create the normalization of institutionalized forms of violence that are hidden in plain sight by governments, economic policies, judicial systems, and cultural norms. These images are woven into a complex narrative that illuminates a range of complex systems of violence from all over the world:

Wendy Vogt’s essay, “The War on Drugs is a War on Migrants: Central Americans Navigate the Perilous Journey North,” examines the hundreds of thousands of people who leave Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala in search of a better future. As security tightens, migrants end up on more dangerous routes, which leads to the issue of the role of state and international bodies in securing human rights for unauthorized migrants in active transit.

The co-authored essay, “Suspended Life,” by Dalton Anthony Jones and Jacinthe Jacques, focuses on contemporary forms of spatial and interpersonal alienation under late capitalism. Their aim is to foster reflection and encourage debate by exposing the “post-social” landscape of global communities grappling with the consequences of neoliberal divestment strategies. Dislocations are often marked
as an absence that leaves only the outlines of the social relations they have displaced. They remind us that the promise of an American dream was always more horizon than reality.

Cassandra Hartblay’s essay, “Disabling structures: Perspectives on Marginalization in a Russian Cityscape,” looks at how people with mobility impairments in Russia are both physically and socially marginalized by the built environment in Russian cities, which is strikingly inaccessible. People with disabilities recognize the material structures of the city as socially produced, and as a key factor excluding them from public life.

Chantal Figueroa’s essay, “Violencia a flor de Piel,” is based on a photovoice project conducted in Guatemala City with Ladina women living in the most dangerous urban settlement of Guatemala City. Women living in urban spaces suffer disproportionately from diagnoses of mental illness and incidences of gender violence. This photo essay illustrates how a lack of policy enables feminicidal practices, making mental health a landscape of violence.

Ana Del Conde’s essay, “Illegal Logging and its Dynamics of Violence Within the P’urhépecha Plateau,” explores illegal logging in Mexico. In the P’urhépecha plateau of Michoacán, organized crime has found an additional trade in illegal logging. In response, the municipality of Cherán is developing unique political and social strategies to deal with this situation.

All of these essays speak to the promise of interdisciplinary violence studies and the powerful way that a photo essay can contribute to our understanding of such a complex subject. It is my hope that Landscapes of Violence will publish a photo essay edition each year on a specific theme. I feel strongly that this work lends itself to our philosophy of open access and our continued commitment to research in violence theory.

Ventura R. Pérez, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief