



As I write, there is a shoot-out in Matamoros that has been going on for hours and has already claimed the life of another local reporter. At the same time, they have blockaded the roads from Morelia and in the south, in Acapulco, they have unearthed another 18 bodies in a clandestine grave. This is not Iraq or Central Africa or the Balkans, it is 21st century Mexico.

I never imagined that in my country, we would descend into this everyday hell. When I began working as a photographer, in the 1990s, I had to use my passport and leave the country to portray pain and death in cities struck by civil war or a large-scale conflict. Today, all you have to do is drive along a highway in any direction and there it is: the highest expression of violence.

Over the past 5 years, this has got totally out of control, and is a somber reflection of earlier times. We have shifted from decapitated persons in Acapulco in 2006 through kidnappings and extortion, El Pozolero, Barbie and the Zetas to stories of criminals that leave their cells at night, with permission to kill and go back to bed as if nothing had happened.

And who is taking photographs? Where are they being published? When will this nightmare end?

What goes through the minds of corrupt, rogue policemen who kill at the slightest provocation? Where are the politicians and the authorities? What was President Calderón thinking when he dreamed up this adventure? Did his advisors know what would happen or has it all been improvised?

As you read me, we will probably have crossed 30,000 mark of those killed in 4 years: 10,000 in the first 10 months of this year alone. Do all those characters that now enjoy impunity and will

die tomorrow have any idea of what Pac Man's little yellow face is like? Don't they realize that no matter how many levels they advance, in the end they will always be eaten up by ghosts and that the "Game Over" sign will flash? Is it worth it? They will have a few years of money, jewels, women and cars before a photographer walks up to them and takes their final mug shot. That way they will know that they are dead.

And what are photographers doing to document what is happening to our society? Do we have a choice? Hardly. In a war, at least there are uniformed men, rules, territories and borders. You know who to talk to and what safe-conduct passes you need. You go in and come out with your photos and that's it. But what are the rules here? Who are the good guys and who are the bad guys? Who offers guarantees? Can we go beyond the current role of simply being witnesses to the last narco-message?

Just over a year ago, a couple of weeks before he was murdered in El Salvador, Christian Poveda, a French photographer and the author of "La Vida Loca" asked in San Luis Potosí, "Why haven't Mexican photographers tackled the subject of drug trafficking?" The answer never came...

It is impossible to explore, because it is essential to their survival Blending in with society is part of the game and the deception. Why use uniforms when mufti is perfect? In Juárez, a small army of women carrying babies extorted money from over 100 small shops. They just collected. Who is going to photograph that? No-one.

At the moment, Fernando Brito from Culiacán and Guillermo Arias in Tijuana are a couple of brave photographers who have won prizes as a result of the last chapter in this perverse game. The executed. But we haven't gone beyond that. And won't.

The closest a modern photographer has got to drug traffickers is Julio Scherer with his now famous interview with Mayo Zambada, although the photos were taken by one of the drug smuggler's bodyguards with his cell phone. They obviously don't want photographers. That's the way things are. So in the short term, we don't expect to see any more images than those we have seen so far.

This is certainly not intended as a criticism. I know that some of my colleagues in the Mexican provinces risk their lives every day. I know that they work under constant threat and in many cases, their employers don't even provide them with bullet-proof vests. So unless we assume that this is already "war coverage," it won't be done properly. Nowadays, Mexican journalists are war correspondents in their own country. Let's look at it like that, assume that that's the way things are. There are no two ways about it.

The dead are the only ones that will see the end of this war.

This "game," like Pac Man, will come to an end, regardless of how many levels we go past. This will stop when someone stops putting coins into the machine and ghosts eat you up. GAME OVER.

