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A Mexican Autodefensa Facebook Group's use of binarity, legitimization strategies, and topoi of religion, family and struggle

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has expanded from its earlier focus on right-wing discourse to also examining discourses of resistance in grassroots political movements around the world. At the same time, CDA has begun to explore the role of social media in these alternative discourses. In this study, I combine a CDA framework with a social media focus to investigate the online discourse of the Mexican Autodefensa (self-defense) movement (2013 to present), an armed grassroots movement formed by citizens to fight against drug cartel control. I analyze one Autodefensa's Facebook page discourse, showing how their collective identity and ideology emerge in opposition to a cartel via the construction of binarity, which is developed through their increasingly explicit nomination and predication of themselves and the cartel. Also crucial to this ideology and identity construction is the use of topoi (argumentative shortcuts) regarding religion, family, and struggle, along with legitimization strategies of rationalization, altruism, reference to a hypothetical future, and appeal to emotions. This CDA study shows how an Autodefensa discursively constructs collective identity and ideology on Facebook as a righteous family-like unit with religious backing united in struggle to save their region from unjust cartel control.

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1. Introduction

On February 24, 2013, Mexican farmers, business owners, professionals, and other ordinary citizens in the state of Michoacán rose up to fight against the Knights Templar Cartel (Templars). The Templars controlled fertile farming area and urban areas in the western Mexican region known as Tierra Caliente (the 'Hot Land'). These citizen militias became known as 'Autodefensas' ('Self-defense groups'), and emerged in response to ongoing ineffective government action against the Templars. While the major action carried out by the Autodefensas was in person and on the ground, social media played a significant role in the movement. At the height of Autodefensa activity, there were Autodefensa Facebook pages and Twitter accounts with large followings posting information. There were also many smaller Facebook pages, groups, and Twitter accounts about the larger movement and local Autodefensa groups. This paper focuses on one such local Facebook group, 'Autodefensa Sahuayo Mich.'[1] posting news about the town

of Sahuayo's Autodefensa, located in the state of Michoacán. In the methods section I expand on the selection of this group.

Previous investigations have examined how resistance emerges in social/political, organizational or educational discourses (e.g. Wilson and Stapleton, 2007; Putnam et al., 2005). As Chiluwa (2012) writes, "...resistance occurs when people feel that change is desperately needed either gradually, or immediately or spontaneously...people...take their future into their own hands in their attempts to resist the dominant powers that oppress them" (p. 218). Individuals and groups increasingly resist dominant powers, create alternative discourses, and construct new resistance identities and ideologies facilitated and spread via social media. Protests in the Arab world brought forward the question regarding the role social media can play in social resistance and political protests (e.g. Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Unger et al., 2016). Idle and Nunns (2011) state that during the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Twitter was "...primarily used as an alternative press...a means for those on the ground to report what was happening for the benefit of their fellow Egyptians and the outside world, and a place for emancipating bursts of self-expression" (p. 19), while Facebook was used as an organizing tool which greatly increased attendance at protests on the first day of the Tahir square protests (Tufekci &

Wilson, 2012). Social media also played a notable role in the 'augmented reality' (Jurgenson, 2012) of protests in Iran in 2009, in Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen in 2011 (Chiluwa, 2012), and in the 2011 England riots as well as the Occupy Wall Street protests across the world in 2011 (Jurgenson, 2012).

However, Jurgenson (2012) cautions against a 'digital dualism' that views online activity as separate from offline life. As Blommaert (2017) observes, "the boundaries of online vs. offline social processes are porous" (p. 44). Additionally, Fuchs (2017) argues against the logic of technological determinism in understanding the role of social media in social movements, arguing that social movements happen without social media and that we should not view technology as a stimulus that results in rebellions. Still, recent studies have begun to examine how social media networks can be instrumental in resistance discourse, finding that social media discourse can defend and support discourses of resistance (e.g. Chiluwa, 2012; Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015; Harlow, 2012; Huang, 2017; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016; Jurgenson, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Unger et al., 2016). If researchers are to attempt to understand emergent alternative ideological discourses, identities, and actions in struggles for power, we ought to consider the social media texts used in such movements.

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze Autodefensa Sahuayo's ideology and collective identity construction on their Facebook page. I show how this identity emerges online in opposition to the Templars via binarity (Wodak, 2011), or positive self- and negative other-presentation. This binarity relies on increasingly explicit intensified nomination (naming) and predication (assigning actions and attributes) of themselves and the cartel. This collective identity also relies on topoi, or argumentative shortcuts, which support an ideology based in religion, family, and struggle against an unjust oppressor. Also crucial to this ideology are the legitimization strategies of rationalization, altruism, reference to a hypothetical future, and appeal to emotions, which function to legitimize their actions offline. This CDA study shows how an Autodefensa discursively constructs collective identity on Facebook based on an ideology that they are a righteous family-like unit with religious backing united in struggle to save their region from unjust cartel control.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Discourse studies and critical discourse analysis

Ainsworth & Hardy (2004) summarize that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) "involves the use of discourse analytic techniques, combined with a critical perspective, to interrogate social phenomena" (p. 236). This 'critical perspective' distinguishes CDA within discourse studies. As Fairclough (2009) writes, CDA "aims to contribute to addressing the social 'wrongs' of the day (in a broad sense – injustice, inequality, lack of freedom, etc.) by analyzing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them" (p. 163).

Chiluwa (2012) applies CDA to Nigerian social media networks, observing that one of the tasks of the analyst is to examine how certain vocabulary and grammar in texts reveal value judgements and ideological perspectives. Ideology in digital discourse includes the ways in which individuals or groups/identities represent themselves and others (Chiluwa, 2012). Chiluwa draws from Van Dijk's (2005) discussion of the cognitive structure of ideologies, which reveals that group attitudes often lead to positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Ideologies function socially for "the coordination of the social practices of group members for effective realization of the goals of a social group and the protection of their interest" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 24). However, this is not limited to the dominating social classes, as dominated groups also require an ideology as a basis for their resistance (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 25). In addition to more recent studies of resistance ideologies, CDA has also been used to study related identity construction. As Ainsworth & Hardy (2004) state, CDA is useful in examining identity precisely because of its combined critical and constructionist approach.

2.2. Binarity: positive self- and negative other-presentation

As described above, 'us' vs. 'them' discourse contributes to the construction of ideology and identities, and manifests through positive self- and negative other-presentation (Van Dijk, 2005); this process is known as the construction of 'binarity' (Wodak, 2011). The questions Reisigl and Wodak (2001) propose to analyze binarity have mostly been applied to right-wing political texts. However, these can also be applied to analyze dominated groups, grassroots efforts, or activist discourse, in order to understand the ideologies and identities of such discourse. For example, Chiluwa (2012) finds that in Nigerian online blogs and discussion forums, the members of the Igbo ethnic group portray themselves as the 'us' with positive representations, and Nigeria/the Nigerian government as the negative 'them'. Thus binarity is also a prominent feature in online political discourse, including such discourse on Facebook. Reisigl & Wodak's (2001) five questions serve as a guideline in analyses of binarity (p. 44):

1) How are social actors—either individual persons or groups— linguistically constructed by being named (**nomination**)?
2) What positive or negative trains, qualities and features are attributed to the linguistically constructed social actors (**predication**)?
3) Through what arguments and **argumentation schemes** do specific persons or social groups try to justify or delegitimize claims containing specific nominations and predications (e.g. claims of discrimination of others)?
4) From what perspective or point of view are these nominations, predications and argumentations expressed (**perspectivation**)?
5) Are the respective utterances (nominations, predications and argumentations) articulated overtly, are they intensified or are they mitigated (**mitigation** versus **intensification**)?

The discursive strategies used in binarity are also presented, along with their objectives and devices used, in Table 1, originally developed by Wodak (2001) and modified in Wodak (2018).

Wodak (2011) explains that binarity requires persuasive justification. This justification can be seen in what Reisigl and Wodak (2001) define as *topoi*: "parts of argumentation that belong to the obligatory premises of an argument, whether explicit or tacit" (Wodak, 2011, p. 42). Wodak (2011) further expands, "*topoi* are the content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules' that connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion or the central claim" (p. 42). Thus, topoi justify the transition from the argument(s) to the conclusion, and are central to analyzing fallacious arguments in political discourse (Kienpointner, 1996, p. 562, as cited in Wodak, 2011, p. 42). Wodak (pers. comm.) summarizes that a topos is a condensed argument of the kind: if X, then Y, because Z. In other words, topoi express conclusions via a set of argumentative warrants, but without fully explaining those warrants. In examining emergent topoi in political discourse, we not only fully expose the justification of binarity, but more broadly we can come to understand the underlying ideologies and identities constructed by political actors.

Table 1

Wodak's (2018) Discursive strategies for positive self- and negative other-representation.

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Referential/nomination	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	• membership categorization • biological, naturalizing and depersonalizing metaphors and metonymies • synecdoches (whole for part, part for whole)
Predication	Labelling social actors positively or negatively	• stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits • implicit and explicit predicates
Argumentation	Justification of positive or negative attributions	• topoi used to justify inclusion or exclusion
Perspectivation, framing or discourse representation	Expressing involvement Positioning speaker's point of view	• reporting, description, narration or quotation of events and utterances
Intensification, mitigation	Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition	• intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of utterances

2.3. Legitimization

Legitimization is "the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behavior" (Reyes, 2011, p. 782). Cap (2008) considers legitimization as "a principal discourse goal sought by political actors" (p. 39). Van Leeuwen (2007) proposes four theoretical legitimation categories: authorization (reference to authority), moral evaluation (reference to value systems), rationalization (reference to socially validated actions), and mythopoesis (narratives that reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate ones) (p. 92). Reyes (2011) expands on these categories and proposes five legitimization strategies through which social actors justify social practices: appeal to emotions (particularly fear), reference to a hypothetical future (related to mythopoesis), rationality ('theoretical rationalization' under Van Leeuwen's 2007 model), voices of expertise (related to authorization) and altruism (related to moral evaluation) (p. 804). I show how all of these legitimization categories and strategies are used by this particular Autodefensa Facebook group at different points, functioning within broader topoi to both construct the Autodefensa's ideology and identity and to defend the actions they take based on that ideology and identity.

2.4. CDA online

In the early 21st century, Mautner (2005) observed that CDA scholars had been reluctant to engage with online texts, focusing instead on more traditional texts created by dominant institutions (e.g. political speeches, policy documents, and newspapers). However, in recent years, CDA scholars have increasingly turned to online media (e.g. Angouri & Wodak, 2014; Chiluwa, 2012; Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015; KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016; Unger et al., 2016; Wodak & Wright, 2006). In an early CDA study of online discourse, Wodak & Wright (2006) highlight the possibilities of engaged productive debate and discourse online, but also point out that this should not be perceived of or treated as separate from offline life. Speaking specifically to the strengths of CDA in analyzing online texts, Angouri & Wodak (2014) argue that applying a macro CDA approach in micro analysis of online interactions allows for capturing multiple layers of social and political context. The macro perspective and micro focus of CDA as a useful approach to analyzing social media discourse is echoed by KhosraviNik & Unger (2016). Additionally, CDA scholar Chiluwa (2012) examines online communities in social media campaigns and activism, finding evidence that such movements function in defending, supporting and mobilizing online social protests and resistance (see also Tsatsou, 2018).

Building on this foundation, researchers have begun to apply CDA to political discourse on Facebook, specifically. Ruzza &

Pejovic (2019) find that Facebook discourse can differ significantly from media and political discourse around political subjects, therefore making it an important site of discourse to consider. CDA Facebook researchers have primarily focused on how political discourse on this site can contribute to platformed antagonism and racism (Farkas et al., 2018), leading to radical othering and subsequent dehumanization of an enemy (Baysha, 2020), which is also relevant in the (re)-construction of nationalist identities on Facebook (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014). KhosraviNik & Zia (2014) find that such identities can be constructed and promoted as a form of (tacit) resistance against official discourses of identity, demonstrating a desire for recognition, respect, and representation. Moreover, they find that power, defiance and conflict are main components of the discursive representation of these identities. Similar findings around identity representation have been echoed in non-CDA discourse analytic and sociolinguistic studies on Facebook activism, where there seems to be a consensus around possibilities for representation of multiple and intersectional activist identities via the posting of images, sharing of alternative narratives, and identity construction in Facebook activism discourse more broadly (e.g. Ali, 2019; Cashman, 2019; Jones, 2015; Sinatora, 2019). Additionally, Chiluwa & Ifukor (2015) use CDA to study activism on Facebook, finding a great deal of negative affect in reaction to a political crisis but arguing that this discourse would have been fruitless if actions had not been taken offline.

These scholars have shown how social media texts present a new challenge in CDA since they are generally more "fluid, changeable and non-static" than the top-down texts CDA has traditionally analyzed (KhosraviNik, 2018, p. 582). Online media texts flip the traditional CDA model on its head, forcing analysts to consider the ways in which ordinary people today might have more agency in creating their own powerful discourses in online contexts. At the same time, the analytical strengths of CDA in considering macro level socio-political contexts and combining this with micro analysis of interaction is well-suited to examining online discourse (Angouri & Wodak, 2014; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016).

3. Background

3.1. The Autodefensa movement

Since the official declaration of a militarized war on drugs by former Mexican president Felipe Calderón in 2006, there has been an ongoing conflict between the Mexican government and various drug cartels leading to over 150,000 murders s and 73,000 missing or disappeared (Biettel, 2020). Starting in 2011, the Knights Templar Cartel (Templars) established control over urban and fertile farming areas in the western Mexican region of Tierra Caliente ('Hot Land'), which includes some low-elevation areas in the states

of Michoacán, Guerrero and Mexico. Not only did the cartel control the drug trade there, but it also controlled businesses, engaged in extortion, robberies, kidnappings, sexual violence, and homicides (Althaus & Dudley, 2014; Fuentes-Díaz 2015). Following the Cherán Autodefensa's initial defensive organization against the previously dominant cartel The Michoacán Family in 2011, there was a more massive uprising across Michoacán of Autodefensas beginning in February 2013 to fight against the Templars in the face of ineffective government response.

The Autodefensas were militias organized by an estimated 20,000 citizens that took over communities in Michoacán, advancing into 47 out of 113 municipalities, disarming and detaining local police and cartel members (Felbab-Brown, 2015). During the period of intense conflict in the state in 2013–2014, there was a low intensity four-front battle: Autodefensas fighting Autodefensas; Autodefensas fighting cartels; Autodefensas fighting the federal security forces; and federal security forces versus cartels Atlt AltAlthaus & Dudley, 2014). At one point working alongside the Autodefensas, officials then changed their position, disbanding some groups by force, and attempting to formally incorporate militias into the state security apparatus as the Rural Defense Force. The Autodefensa's suppression has contributed in part to powerful crime groups resurging across Michoacán, as new spinoff groups or other cartels' fragments filled the void. At the time of writing, homicides in Mexico (many linked to cartels) have continued to exceed each prior year's record, although there was a slight decrease in 2020 potentially related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2. Social media in the Autodefensa movement

In 2014, at the Autodefensa movement's peak, only about 44.39% of the population across Mexico was using the internet (Statista, 2020). Nonetheless, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter functioned as an alternative news press for the movement, with more people going to social media sites for news about the Autodefensa movement than to official government pages (Aristegui Noticias, 2014). The largest and most popular Facebook and Twitter accounts were Valor por Michoacán ('Courage for Michoacán') and Valor por un Michoacán Libre ('Courage for a Free Michoacán'). However, there were also many smaller Facebook pages, groups, and Twitter accounts both about the larger movement, as well as some focused on local Autodefensas. In this paper, I focus my analysis on one such smaller Facebook group, utilized to post news about one town's Autodefensa.

4. Data and methods

The discourse analyzed here comes from the public Facebook page[2] (set up as a 'company' page) 'Autodefensa Sahuayo Mich.' ('Sahuayo Michoacán Self Defense Group'; homepage seen in Fig. 1). Sahuayo is a town in Michoacán state, which formed an Autodefensa in February 2014. By April, this page had around 4,000 'likes' (other accounts following the page), and closer to this study's publication, it has close to 17,000 'likes' (although the page has been defunct since November 2017). My interest in this particular Autodefensa and its Facebook page stems from my previous experience teaching in the neighboring town of Jiquilpan and frequently visiting Sahuayo. Jiquilpan itself is a small town and did not have an Autodefensa. Throughout my research I often consulted with contacts in both towns (via Facebook) for news updates, help

with translations, etc. My experience and contacts have been helpful in understanding the region and its residents' context.

Here I focus on the early formation of this group's ideology/ identity by closely examining four of their earliest posts, which were written within the span of a month. Examining more posts to add to this relatively small sample size was originally considered, but after conducting the analysis for the first three presented here, it became apparent that examining more posts would not contribute much new or different to the analysis (even the 3rd and 4th posts are very similar in content and structure). However, further research could be done on later posts examining separate topics such as stances of machismo in photo posts, and posts with intertextual ties to revolutionary figures like Che Guevara and Emiliano Zapata.

In this study, I also analyze some of the 16 available comments from Facebook users across the four posts analyzed, with 2–6 comments per post. 12 of these comments are posted by users with masculine usernames. There is only 1 comment posted by a user with a feminine name.[3] One of the primary functions of the comments is to express support for and solidarity with the Autodefensa, with the word 'ánimo' (translated as 'courage!' or 'come on!') appearing 4 times throughout the comments. There is also evidence of a recursive interplay between the posts, their comments, and the posts that follow. Certain nominations used in the comments (like 'organized crime') and legitimization strategies, such as reference to a hypothetical future, are used in subsequent posts.

Only posts and comments that contain a combination of person references, pronouns, topoi, and legitimization strategies are focused on here. There are many shorter posts with little content other than one sentence declaring that the group does not accept money from outside sources, or a post with one sentence simply telling people to denounce cartel activity, which I do not analyze here. I analyze the original Spanish text, and as mentioned, translated the discourse to English with Michoacán contacts' assistance. In sum, the aim is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of every post made by the Facebook group, but to analyze a few early illustrative online texts to examine the group's online emergent ideology and collective identity.

5. Analysis and discussion

The following analysis of the Sahuayo Autodefensa Facebook page's posts shows how the Autodefensa's ideology and collective identity gradually emerge online in opposition to a cartel via the construction of binary, or positive self- and negative other-presentation. This binary relies on increasingly explicit nomination and predication of the Autodefensa and the cartel against which they are fighting, as well as their topoi (argumentative shortcuts) regarding religion, family, and struggle. These function to legitimize their actions offline. For each post, the group perspectivation is first analyzed alongside the nomination and predication of the Autodefensa vs. the cartel, followed by the relevant topoi and legitimization strategies. Through the sequential analysis of the posts, I show how more explicit person references are crafted and used post by post, how the religious topos is initially used and then falls away in favor of topoi of family and struggle, and how diverse legitimization strategies are increasingly employed.

The first post (Post #1) was published on February 28th, 2014, the same day the Sahuayo Autodefensa Facebook page was created. This post relies heavily on a topos of religion, and also incorporates a topos of family and a topos of struggle.

Post #1

Fig. 1. Homepage of Autodefensa Sahuayo Mich. Facebook group.

'Damos gracias a Dios por permitirnos Defender y Cuidar nuestra ciudad de personas que solo saben hacer daño. Tenemos los mejores Padrinos en esta lucha! Nuestro Niño Joselito y Nuestro Patrón Santiago! Vamos hermanos Sahuayenses siempre adelante en el Nombre de Dios!' (28 February 2014)

'We give thanks to God for permitting us to Defend and Care for our city from people that only know how to do harm. We have the best Patron Saints in this fight! Our son Joselito and Our Patron Santiago! Lets go forward always Sahuayen brothers and sisters in the Name of God!' (translation)

This post is written from the collective Autodefensa's perspective, with the pronouns 'we', 'us', 'our' and corresponding verb forms. 'Sahuayen brothers and sisters' functions as a collective nomination. This nomination indicates all Sahuayens being addressed; the masculine 'hermanos' here is the plural form in Spanish for 'siblings.' Its use outside of an actual family, and especially in this context, also has a religious connotation. Chiluwa (2012) states that "ideological representations are more visible when certain propositions stress positive actions of the 'we' in-group and negative actions of the 'they' out-group" (231), and cites Van Dijk's 'ideological square': (i) emphasize our good properties/actions; (ii) emphasize their bad properties/actions; (iii) mitigate our bad properties/actions; (iv) mitigate their good properties/actions (Van Dijk, 1998:33). Thus the ideological representation is a group of religious family members who are thanking God for allowing them to "Defend and Care" (the capitalization here is indicative of this being used like a motto) for their city in contrast to 'people that only know how to hurt.' This vague mitigated reference represents cartel members, which becomes clearer in subsequent comments and posts. Nonetheless, even in this mitigated reference, the cartel members are portrayed in a negative light, making visible this negative ideological representation of cartel members.

In contrast, the Autodefensa presents their actions positively by using the religious topos as well as legitimization strategies of authorization and altruism. The references to God appearing at this post's beginning and end contribute to the religious topos. The implicit topos, or argumentative shortcut, of religion is: If we (the Autodefensa) are good, then God (religion) is on our side, because God is good. According to the 2010 census, 91.6% of all Michoacán residents at this point in time identified as Roman Catholic; Wolff (2020) argues that for mestizo Autodefensa members, a Catholic identity undergirded the movement. 'We give thanks to God for permitting us to Defend and Care for our city' also relates to Van Leeuwen's (2007) 'moral evaluation' and Reyes' (2011) legitimization strategy 'altruism' via the reference to the Roman Catholic value system. This functions as a positive moral evaluation to justify the Autodefensa's altruistic actions. As Reyes (2011) writes, "social actors…make sure their proposals do not appear driven only by personal interests…they legitimize proposals as a common good that will improve the conditions of a particular community" (p. 787). The Autodefensa's predication as 'Defending' and 'Caring' for 'our city' (Sahuayo), present the Autodefensa's proposal as a common good beneficial to improving Sahuayo.

Van Leeuwen (2007) observes that moral evaluations can be linked to rationalizations, in that "they function as commonsense knowledge" (p. 104), while Reyes (2011) writes "'rational' decisions are often based on morals and values that constitute recognizable variables within the community" (p. 798). Furthermore, Van Leeuwen (2007) states rationalizations include "systematic bodies of knowledge that are used to legitimate institutional practices, for instance religions." Thus Reyes' (2011) rationality is also present in this post; Catholic references, and even more specifically, echoes of Cristero War[4] discourse, are invoked as shared knowledge, acting to legitimize the Autodefensa's actions as good within that knowledge system. As Reyes (2011) observes, "rational-

ization needs to be understood as a modus operandi defended and shaped by and from a specific society" (p. 786), and that it is "a social construct within a cultural group, that is, something that 'makes sense' for the community and constitutes the 'right' thing to do" (p. 797). Thus, this appeal to Catholicism and the local history of the Cristero War alongside local patron saints to justify political actions is locally specific and unique in this Autodefensa's Facebook discourse. Furthermore, as Wodak (2011) observes, religious discourse might be intended to trigger an emotional response, particularly in audiences accustomed to the "hybrid interweaving of political and religious discourse" (p. 173). Thus, this post could also be using another legitimization strategy: an appeal to emotions.

The exclamation 'we have the best Patron Saints in this fight' invokes both a topos of religion and family at the same time. 'Sahauyen Brothers and Sisters' also reinforces the familial topos. The familial topos is implicitly expressed as: If we (the Autodefensas) are good, then we are a family, because families are good. Furthermore, here a 'fight' is mentioned, placing the Autodefensa in conflict with the previously mentioned 'people that only know how to hurt', and this contributes to a topos of struggle, expressed as: If criminals are bad, then we (the Autodefensas) must fight them, because we are good. This shows how the topoi of religion, family, and struggle are all used at once, acting to legitimize the Autodefensa's action and to portray itself in a positive moral light. 'Our son Joselito and Our Patron Santiago!', refers to the towns' patron saints, Saint José Luis Sánchez del Río (a Cristero martyr) and Saint James (Santiago, in Spanish). This further contributes to the topoi of religion and family, invoking a legitimization strategy I would call 'religious rationalization' by reference to these local religious and spiritual leaders. So here the topos of religion and of family are fused, constructing legitimization of the Autodefensa's actions via these topoi and their reliance on religious rationalization. In sum, in this post the topoi of religion, family, and struggle contribute to the Autodefensa's positive self-presentation in fighting against what is so far a vague and implied enemy, constructed to be the negative 'other'. These topoi work to justify the Autodefensa's actions and also to portray them as a collective group who is working as a family unit with authoritative religious, moral, and altruistic backing—this is their ideology.

There were five comments on this first post, mostly contributed by Facebook accounts with masculine names. The lengthiest comment received the most 'likes': 9.

Comment #1

'pues quien haya quedado Jose Sanchez, no existira lugar donde puedan esconderse, Bienvenidos Hermanos Comunitarios, esta Lucha No La Para Nadie!! Animo Pueblo Sahuayense, Denuncien por inbox Casas de Seguridad, Donde se ponen los Alcones, Pensiones Utilizadas para Guardar Vehiculos que Son Utilizados para Hacer tanto dano a los Nuestros, Denunciemos Por Un Sahuayo Libre de Crimen Organizado' (28 February 2014)
'well whoever is left, in the name José Sánchez, will have nowhere to hide. Welcome Community Brothers! This Fight Stops for Nobody! Come on Sahuayo folks, Denounce via inbox the Safe Houses, Where they post the Lookouts, the Places Used to Store Vehicles that Do so much harm to Ours, Let's Denounce For A Sahuayo Free of Organized Crime' (translation)

This user garners more likes than any other in their comments. Their comment here indicates that they might be an active member of the Autodefensa, since the encouragement to 'denounce' is repeated in later posts by the Autodefensa account. The familial topos is repeated here with 'Community Brothers' used like 'Sahauyen Brothers' in the original post, while 'organized crime' is presented as a more specific nomination of the other than 'people that only know how to hurt.' The religious topos and religious rationalization are also reinforced with the reference to José Sánchez, the child patron saint of Sahuayo who was referred to as Joselito in the original post. The topos of struggle is also invoked with 'This Fight Will Not Be Stopped!' There is also a desire expressed to see 'a sahuayo free of organized crime', which like the post, invokes altruism as legitimization as well as reference to a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011). These two legitimization strategies are repeated in another similarly lengthy comment (Comment #2) that decries the other in stark terms (8 likes).

Comment #2

'Mi mayor deseo es ver a todos los pueblos de Michoacán y de todo el país libres de todo tipo de organizaciones criminales para que todos podamos recorrer y disfrutar de toda la belleza de nuestro México sin temor a ser víctimas de toda esta clase de parásitos de la sociedad que han asolado a nuestro pueblo con tanta saña que tal parece que no fueran humanos.' (28 February 2014)
'My greatest wish is to see all the pueblos [i.e. communities] of Michoacán and across the country free from all kinds of criminal organizations so that we can all tour and enjoy all the beauty of our Mexico without fear of being victims of all this kind of parasites of society that have devastated our town with so much cruelty that they do not seem human. (translation)

Similar to the previous comment, there is a 'greatest wish' expressed here for 'all the pueblos [i.e. communities] of Michoacán' to be 'free...so that we can all tour and enjoy all the beauty of our Mexico...', once again invoking altruism and a reference to a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011). Here 'criminal organizations' are mentioned, similar to 'organized crime' in the previous comment, again making the enemy more explicit than the initial post. The enemy are also nominated as 'parasites' and predicated as so full of 'cruelty' that 'they do not seem human.' In addition to dehumanizing the Templars, this nomination and predication (Wodak, 2011) also conveys the poster's ideology (presumably shared with at least 8 others who 'liked' the post) that the Templars are unjustly 'feeding' off of the town. Across 5 of the comments from the four posts I analyze, the Templars are referred to with similar negative other-presentation: 'organized crime,' 'criminal organizations', 'the cursed templar knights', and 'Fucking Templar Pigs.' With the use of 'pigs' there is again a dehumanizing function in the nomination which is also associated with police, thus conveying an ideology that the Templars and the police are the same and that they are unjust. In contrast, here 'we' are presented as 'Michoacán folks' (reminiscent of 'Sahuayo folks' in the previous comment) who are 'victims.' Overall these comments function as uptake to the original post and aid in the construction of an ideology and a collective identity, with some more explicit naming of the 'other' alongside negative other-presentation (Wodak, 2011), reinforced topoi (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Wodak 2011) of religion, family and struggle, and legitimization strategies of altruism and reference to a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011).

The second post I analyze (Post #2) is from March 1st, 2014, just a few days after the first post. Before this, there was one brief post about the group not accepting outside money, and another short post urging people to denounce 'criminals.' 'Criminals' becomes a common negative nomination used in subsequent posts for the

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[4] The Cristero War, also known as the Cristero Rebellion or La Cristiada, was a widespread struggle in central and western Mexico in response to the imposition of secularist and anticlerical articles of the 1917 Constitution of Mexico, which were perceived by opponents as anti-Catholic measures aimed at imposing state atheism. Osorio et al. (2016) and Jose Manuel Mireles (2017), the Autodefensas' most well-known leader, argue that the Autodefensa movement has its roots in the Cristero Rebellion.

cartel members (and 'crime'/'criminal' is first seen in two of the comments on the first post). In the following post, the cartel members are referred to as 'organized crime', another nomination used in a comment on the first post. These nominations make clear the ideological underpinnings (Wodak, 2011) of the Autodefensa. Starting with this post, the religious topos is no longer present. However, there is a continued use of the familial topos, the topos of struggle, and the strategy of altruism (Reyes, 2011) to legitimize the Autodefensa's actions.

Post #2

'Buen Día! Herman@s Sahuayenses queremos informarles que en los hechos ocurridos del día de ayer por la noche en la Calzada Revolución fue un enfrentamiento entre nosotros y el crimen organizado. Los invitamos a Denunciar ya no están solos! Manden cualquier dato que pueda ayudar por mensaje privado!' (4 March 2014)

'Good Day! Sahuayen Brothers/Sisters we want to inform you all that what happened last night at Revolution Avenue was a confrontation between us and organized crime. We invite you all to Denounce you all are not alone anymore! Send any information that can help via private message!' (translation)

The nomination 'Herman@s Sahuayenses', can be translated as 'Sahuayen Brothers/Sisters'. 'Herman@s' uses the @ symbol in this digital context to be gender inclusive since this symbol visually encompasses both the feminine -a and masculine -o suffixes (the masculine -o suffix is typically used for a mixed gender group) (Bengoechea, 2008). This constructs a positive collective identity for all Sahuayen citizen readers and an 'ideological self-interest' (Chiluwa, 2012:231). Again, the plural first-person verb form 'we want' invokes the Autodefensa's perspective. There is also a split here between the 'we' who are informing 'you all', the 'Herman@s Sahuayenses', as the audience. 'We invite you all to Denounce you all are not alone anymore!' might be analyzed as reinstating a divide between 'we' (the Autodefensa) and 'you all' (the Sahuayen brothers/sisters). At the same time, it again positions the Autodefensa as the authoritative source, who have the power to invite the community to action. This message informs of a 'confrontation between us and organized crime', where 'us' refers to the Autodefensa, and 'organized crime' is a clear reference to the enemy. Although 'organized crime' is still a relatively vague nomination, it is more explicit than the previous 'people who only know how to hurt' in the first post, and this nomination becomes more explicit in the next post analyzed. In the present example, there is again a clear split between the Autodefensa and the negative other being presented, and this binarity (Wodak, 2011) is prioritized here in service of the ideological representations of the group.

The Autodefensa and 'organized crime' are situated as opponents within a topos of struggle, with the reference to a 'confrontation' (a mitigated form referring to a street shoot-out). In addition to the topos of struggle, this post again activates the familial topos with 'Sahuayen Brothers/Sisters' and 'you all are not alone anymore!'. This is a family fighting against organized crime, and as family members, Sahuayen citizens should 'denounce' others who are outside the family: organized crime members. In addition, 'you all are not alone anymore' relates again to altruism as legitimization (Reyes, 2011), in the proposition that this proposal to denounce organized crime will benefit the community by uniting them. In sum, in this post, positive nomination and collective identity are again constructed for the community from the Autodefensa's perspective, while there is also a clearer indicator of the enemy: 'organized crime'. These contribute to the Autodefensa's ideological self-interest. The religious topos and its function as authorization has fallen away, but the topoi of family and struggle are still used, and altruism is again invoked within these topoi. This

indicates the Autodefensa's identification as a 'family' in both ideological and actual opposition/struggle against the criminal enemy for a common good.

There were three comments on this post. One comment is made by the same user who garnered the most likes for their comment on the group's first post. Here they receive 18 likes, the most of any comment on these posts.

Comment #3

'Y al referirse a Crimen Organizado, esta hablando del May Hijo de la Huilota, quien por cierto Salio huyendo como Alma q lleva El Diablo, jeje, no que muy de a huevo May?? solo topas con amarrados Puerco HDTPM, ayer topaste en Cantera Cabron.. y va para todos Los Alcones, aun estan a tiempo, denuncien × este medio y asi mas rapido le damos fin a estas Lacraz.. todo tu barrio May, ayer se entero lo Cobarde que eres con todos los Templas.. Pero aqui en Sahuayo ya se les acabo su Corrido.. Mata un Templa y Haras Patria!!!' (4 March 2014)

'And when referring to Organized Crime, are you talking about Mr. Son of the Huilota, who by the way came out fleeing like a bat out of hell, hehe, not much guts Mr.? You'll only run into men armed to the teeth you Pig SOB, yesterday you ran into a brick wall man.. and that goes for all The Lookouts, there is still time, denounce by this medium and we'll end these disgraces faster.. your whole neighborhood Mr., yesterday found out how Cowardly you are with all the Templars.. But here in Sahuayo their Run is over.. Kill a Templa and You Will Be a Patriot!' (translation)

Like this user's comment on the first post, this comment also draws on shared community knowledge, particularly about "Mr." Son of the Huilota, an aid to the Templars, and his movements. It questions the post's use of 'organized crime', attempting to make this nomination much more specific. "Mr." is described and narrated from this individual's perspective with negative nomination and predication that fit into the Autodefensa's ideological representations of the cartel members, as having fled like 'a bat out of hell', with 'not much guts', and as 'Cowardly.' This use of specific insider knowledge, adherence to the group's ideological representations of the enemy, plus the encouragement to 'Kill a Templa and You Will Be a Patriot!' likely contribute to the high number of likes. The topos of struggle is again present, as well as reference to a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011), where one will be a patriot by killing a Templar. Comment #4 explicitly names the 'cursed templars' with negative nomination.

Comment #4

'Animo sahuayo a denunciar entre mas pronto manden sus mensajes para denunciar Mas pronto se limpiara el pueblo de estas lacras templarias, de noce dejen es hora de que paguen' (4 March 2014)

'I encourage sahuayo to denounce [them] the sooner you send your messages to denounce [them] the Sooner the town will be cleansed of this Templar scourge, don't let them do this it's time for them to pay' (translation)

Like the previous one, this comment also encourages readers to 'denounce' the Templars, and it also uses the legitimization strategy of reference to a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011) where the town will be cleansed. This strategy, used in various comments by this point, is taken up in a different way in the next post.

In the following post (Post #3), from March 23rd, both the Autodefensa itself and the other they are positioning themselves against become explicitly labeled, as the comments preceding this post have already done. These actors are situated again within the topoi of family and struggle. Altruism is invoked again as a legit-

imization strategy (Reyes, 2011), and here appears a new legitimization strategy from the Autodefensa account: reference to a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011), which is also present in previous post comments.

Post #3
'Herman@s buenas tardes! Los templarios están ofreciendo $100 por adulto y $50 por niño para que asistan a aurrera a manifestarse en contra de las Autodefensas! NO asistan, no vendan su libertad y la de sus hijos piensen en el futuro, El dinero que les ofrecen no es un regalo, es Dinero que ya les an ROBADO!!! Piensen en cuantos inocentes an muerto, la persona que acepte ese dinero será cómplice de estos criminales!' (23 March 2014)
'Brothers/sisters good afternoon! The Templars are offering $100 to adults and $50 to children that attend a rally at aurrera (i.e. walmart) against the Autodefensas! DON'T show up, DON'T sell your freedom and that of your children think of the future, The money that they offer you is not a gift its Money that they have STOLEN from you!!!! Think of how many innocents have died, the person that accepts that money will be an accomplice of these criminals!' (translation)

Again, this post has 'Herman@s' in the greeting, continuing with this positive nomination (Wodak, 2011). 'The Templars' finally receive explicit nomination, and they are predicated as 'offering $100 to adults and $50 to children that attend a rally at aurrera (i.e. walmart) against the Autodefensas!' This sentence is intensified with an exclamation point, and the Templars are predicated as bribing adults as well as children, standing in contrast to the Autodefensa's earlier post which made appeals to their own moral goodness and altruism. Here, 'Autodefensas' are also explicitly named (as opposed to the earlier, vague 'we') and are positioned as being fought 'against' by the Templars, in their attempts to sabotage the Autodefensas. This underscores the group's ideological representations of themselves vs. the other and continues the topos of struggle.

With the directive 'DON'T show up, DON'T sell your freedom and that of your children…', intensified by the all caps text, the familial topos is again invoked (also with 'Herman@s'). The proposition that those who do not give in to the Templars will have a better hypothetical 'future' for them and their children relates to altruism as a legitimization strategy and also to the legitimation category mythopoesis. Mythopoesis refers to narratives that reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate ones (Van Leeuwen, 2007). In the narrative implicit within this post, those who resist the Templars will have a better hypothetical future for them and their children. Then, a cautionary tale is provided: 'Think of how many innocents have died, the person that accepts that money will be an accomplice of these criminals!' It is implied that innocent people have been killed by such criminals, a negative act attributed to the Templars. The cautionary tale is that those who take money from the Templars will be an accomplice to criminals responsible for murdering innocent people.

To summarize, this post explicitly names both the Autodefensas as well as the oppressor they are fighting, the Templars, and these are portrayed in an ideological topos of struggle of good vs. bad. Once again, the familial topos is invoked in constructing the Autodefensa collective identity as a united front against the criminal Templars, as well as in the discussion of children. Altruism is also invoked within this topos. A new legitimization category, reference to a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011), is present within the mythopoesis (Van Leeuwen, 2007) that those who resist the Templars will be rewarded with a better future, and those who assist them will be punished for being associated with criminals and murder.

There were six comments on this post. The only comment (Comment #5) from a feminine username appears here:

Comment #5
'Dios sane a este lindo pueblo de tanta maldad k a florecido enel,' (23 March 2014)
'God heal this beautiful town from so much evil that's flourished in it' (translation)

This is also the only comment referencing God in a religious topos as seen in the first post. God is contrasted to 'evil' here, which is associated with the Templars. This comment contrasts starkly with the other five profanity-laced comments on the post.

Comment #6
'pues que chinge a su madre el que asista' (23 March 2014)
'well fuck his mother whoever helps them' (translation)
Comment #7
'maldita raza inferior. unirnos hasta desaparecerlos' (23 March 2014)
'damn inferior race. unite until we disappear them' (translation)
Profanity is also used in the most popular commenter's statements here, in nomination of the Templars.
Comment #8
'Pinches Puercos Templarios, se aprovechan de La Necesidad de Nuestro Pueblo para lograr sus Obscuras Intenciones, Animo Paisanos,"Por La Libertad, La Muerte que es el Ultimo de los Males, No Debe Temerse"' (23 March 2014)
'Fucking Templar Pigs, they take advantage of The Need of Our Town to achieve their Dark Intentions, Courage countrymen, "For Freedom, Death is the End of Evil, It Must Not Be Feared"' (translation)

Here the negative nomination is followed by negative predications (Wodak, 2011) of the Templars as those who 'take advantage' in order 'to achieve their Dark Intentions.' This is contrasted with the positive in-group nomination (Wodak, 2011) of 'countrymen'. The intertextual quote cited here appears to be attributed to the Roman statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero, and functions to reinforce the topos of struggle.

The final post I analyze (Post #3) from 10 April 2014 is the most explicitly violent post yet. In this post, the two groups are again explicitly labeled and the topoi of family and struggle are reiterated. Three legitimization strategies are used here: altruism, reference to a hypothetical future, and an appeal to emotions (Reyes, 2011). The heavy use of legitimization strategies might be made relevant by the escalating tensions and open discussion of violence.

Post #3
'Buenas Noches Herman@s en estos días y en especial hoy se estuvieron suscitando enfrentamientos de miembros de Autodefensa contra Criminales, a modo de sugerencia les pedimos tratar de no salir a altas horas de la noche para evitar cualquier daño colateral, así como estar unidos y comunicados. No deben temer! Mientras No sean CRIMINALES,' (10 April 2014)
'Good evening Brothers/Sisters in recent days and especially today there were confrontations between Autodefensa members against Criminals, by way of suggestion we ask you to try not to go out at late hours of the night to avoid any collateral damage, and also to be connected and in communication. You shouldn't be afraid! As long as you are not CRIMINALS,' (translation)

As seen in posts 2 and 3, this fourth post begins with a greeting to 'Herman@s' (brothers/sisters), once again providing positive group nomination (Wodak, 2011) while reinforcing a familial

topos. 'Autodefensa members', again reifies the familial topos, in that the Autodefensa members are like family members (more specifically, brothers and sisters). This topos (Wodak, 2011) is reiterated at the post's end with the suggestion to 'be connected and in communication.' There is also a clear binary (Wodak, 2011) between the Autodefensa members and their supporters in contrast to the capitalized 'CRIMINALS', once again highlighting their ideological representations.

'Confrontations between Autodefensa members against Criminals' reiterates the topos of struggle. The mitigated 'confrontations' (likely street shoot-outs, per my informants on the ground) and the suggestion 'to try not to go out at late hours of the night to avoid any collateral damage' (also a mitigation which might refer to property damage, being shot, or even death) function as an appeal to emotions (fear) as a legitimization strategy (Reyes, 2011). One of the comments (Comment #9) on this post is also from the Autodefensa account and repeats the euphemism 'collateral damage' and the post's warning, perhaps in response to a user who had deleted their original comment.

Comment #9

'Lo bueno que fue casi! Jesus Perez sabemos que el daño colateral puede surgir por eso diles a tus familiares si ya saben como están las cosas extremen precauciones!' (10 April 2014)

'How well it almost went! [username] we know that collateral damage can arise that's why tell your relatives if they already know how things are they will take extreme precautions!' (translation)

The warning against being 'CRIMINALS' draws on a few legitimization strategies. There is an implicit moral evaluation (Van Leeuwen, 2011) here: criminals are bad people. This is reinforced by the binary construction (Wodak, 2011) of an altruistic family of brothers/sisters (the Autodefensa members) vs. CRIMINALS. Mythopoesis (Van Leeuwen, 2007) is also relevant here, in the implicit narrative that readers have no reason to be afraid (appeal to fear, see Reyes, 2011), unless they are criminals, in which case they will face a hypothetical future (Reyes, 2011) where they will be judged as immoral and punished. Thus altruism, reference to a hypothetical future, and the appeal to emotions (fear) are all present here.

This fourth post repeats a similar structure as the third. 'Herman@s' is repeated, and there is a binary distinction (Wodak, 2011) made between the Autodefensa members and their supporters in contrast to the 'Criminals'. The advice to 'stay connected and in communication' contribute to the familial topos, while mentioning 'confrontations' reiterates the topos of struggle. However, there is an expansion of legitimization strategies (Reyes, 2011) in this post—altruism, reference to a hypothetical future, and an appeal to emotions are all used within this post. At this point in the Facebook posts, not only has this group expanded its use of legitimization strategies, but it has also shifted away from invoking a religious topos, while maintaining the topoi of family and struggle. They have also become more explicit in naming themselves and in naming the enemy they are fighting. The final comment on the fourth post, "Cheer up and with everything we will clean up the ranch" (1 like) reinforces the sense of enthusiastic removal of the enemy from the town and the prospect of a better hypothetical future.

This analysis of this Autodefensa's early Facebook posts has shown how the group crafts an increasingly clearer and coherent collective identity by constructing binary (Wodak, 2011) between them and their enemy with increasingly specific nominations, invoking certain topoi (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2011) to craft their arguments, and using increasingly more legitimization strategies (Reyes, 2011) which all contribute to their ideology.

The comments on the posts demonstrate that explicit nominations and reference to a hypothetical future are used by commenters prior to the Autodefensa group page itself using these. They also reflect the shift away from a religious topos, while the topos of struggle is consistent. The commenters do not use the familial topos, which along with the topos of struggle, is persistent throughout the Autodefensa's posts.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I have shown how an Autodefensa's ideology and collective identity emerge in opposition to a cartel on their Facebook page. This group constructs binarity, developed via their increasingly explicit intensified nomination and predication of themselves and the cartel. Regarding nomination, early vague references are clarified in subsequent comments and then posts. These references construct the Autodefensa as an inclusive altruistic family who have been victims of inhumane murderers. Predication also plays an important role in the group's ideology, portraying the Autodefensa in a positive light, while negative actions are attributed to the Templars. Mitigation was rarely used in these posts (except for when writing of violence); instead, exclamation points and all caps writing functioned for intensification of the group's ideology.

The nomination and predication of the Autodefensa and the Templars are placed in various argumentation schemes. Thus I have also shown how the Autodefensa employs topoi regarding religion, family, and struggle to legitimize their actions offline. The original post by the Facebook page used topoi of religion, family, and struggle in an implicit argumentation scheme to justify the Autodefensa's actions. In the subsequent posts, the religious topos does not emerge again (but see comment #5), but the topoi of family and struggle are constant in the Autodefensa's posts, and are further developed with clearer nomination, predication, and claim intensifications. The familial topos functions as a unifying mechanism. This may be related to the significance placed on family unity in Mexican culture, although the familial topos is barely taken up by the commenters. However, the topos of struggle is consistently and increasingly legitimized. This topos of struggle, like the familial and religious topoi, may also relate to broader Mexican culture and history. The Cristero War is still relatively recent in the historical memory of Michoacán and is specifically invoked in this Autodefensa's discourse. As Reyes (2011) observes, legitimization strategies are effective precisely due to "shared values and visions of the world" (p. 787).

Thus, legitimization strategies embedded within topoi also played an important role in this Autodefensa's digital discourse. What I refer to as 'religious rationalization' was used in the first Facebook post and one of its comments (as well as in one later comment), within the religious topos. This was localized and unique to this group, with its references to Sahuayo's specific patron saints (and this relates to the significance of Catholicism in Mexican culture). However, along with the religious topos, this legitimization strategy mostly disappeared after the first post. Yet altruism, also linked to religion in the first post, is the prevailing legitimization strategy throughout all of the discourse, constructing the Autodefensa as working for the common good, defending and caring for the community. Indeed, legitimization via altruism might be common more broadly in grassroots leftist political discourse (see also Tsatsou, 2018). In early comments and in subsequent posts, reference to a hypothetical future was also used frequently, and eventually, a clear appeal to emotions also appeared. Thus in these posts, religion, altruism, reference to a hypothetical future, and appeals to emotions all function together to legitimize violent struggle.

By analyzing one Autodefensa Facebook group's early digital discourse in the context of a broader social movement, this study has shown how collective activist identity emerges in a social media context as an ideology in opposition to an oppressor. While this study has focused on Facebook discourse, we must remember that the real-life struggle of the Autodefensas happened on the ground, and the texts I examined here are a small slice of the discourse produced by the movement. In sum, this CDA study shows how an armed Mexican resistance group discursively constructs and legitimizes their ideology and collective identity on Facebook as a righteous family with religious backing united in struggle to save their region from cartel control.

Declaration of Competing Interest

Acknowledgements

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