

**Walking through a land of skulls: persisting with everyday uncertainty
in Mexico**

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Humanities

2019

Malgorzata M. Polanska

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

List of Contents

List of Figures.....	6
List of Tables	7
List of Maps	8
List of Photographs	9
List of Acronyms.....	10
Abstract.....	11
Declaration	12
Copyright Statement.....	13
Acknowledgements.....	15
Introduction	16
1. As a matter of introduction.....	16
2. Rationale 1: the unprivileged.....	17
2.1. Rationale 2: traces of the personal	19
3. The place where this study belongs and the literature it speaks to	21
3.1. From the personal to academic journey.....	24
4. The structure of the thesis.....	27
Chapter 1: Local community: living everyday grey zones	29
1. Introduction.....	29
2. The Local	31
3. Local community	41
3.1. Grey communities	49
4. Everyday ‘chaos as usual’	56
5. Conclusions	62
Chapter 2: Creative routes to survival: potential responses to <i>violences</i> in Mexico	64
1. Introduction.....	64
2. Rationale of (the use of) coping mechanisms	65
3. Creative routes to survival: potential responses to <i>violences</i>	69
3.1. The response	74
4. Communicating to survive: potential for coexistence.....	77
5. Conclusions	80

Chapter 3: From the motorways to unpaved roads: a methodology of exploring experiences of insecurity	82
1. Introduction.....	82
2. The overview of the chapter	83
3. The local context of insecurity.....	86
3.1. On <i>Violences</i>	87
3.2. The (un)recognised violent conflict(s) in Mexico and in Veracruz.....	89
3.3. Some indicators of insecurity.....	92
3.3.1 Homicides in Mexico and Veracruz	93
3.3.2. Militarisation.....	94
4. The local community: Paloxpan, Veracruz	96
4.1. How did I access ‘the field’: who chose whom?	100
4.2. The encounter with whom?	102
5. Methods.....	103
5.1. Translating: from motorways to unpaved roads.....	105
6. The researcher in the local context. Positionalities	110
7. Relational methodology of the encounter.....	113
8. Conclusions	117
Chapter 4: ‘Everyday uncertainty’ in Mexico: between the embodied and narrated silences	119
1. Introduction.....	119
2. Everyday uncertainty	121
2.1. ‘We are targeted’	121
2.2. Components of everyday uncertainty.....	123
3. Embracing the unknown (in search of a relative to ‘appear’)	127
4. Between embodied silence and narrated speech.....	133
4.1. Top-down silencing.....	134
4.2. Bottom-up silences as a response to the uncertain	137
4.2.1. Silence as reaffirmation.....	138
4.2.2. Silence as denial	140
4.2.3. Declared silence	142
4.3. Disrupting silence	142
5. Between the imagined and the real: subjunctive forms of dealing with uncertainty.....	146

6. Conclusions	151
Chapter 5: Communicating through the (in)visible: to show and tell in the face of silencing	153
1. Introduction.....	153
2. Communicating through everyday uncertainty	155
3. Why and how the (in)visible matters in communicating (about) danger.....	157
4. Interval.....	162
5. Communication through the uncertain: making people and objects (in)visible	164
5.1. Selective (in)visibility.....	166
5.2. Communication as presence	168
5.3. High-exposure communication	170
5.3.1. An amalgam of presence and exposure	175
5.4. Veiled visibility	178
5.5. Communication through safe spaces: not-so-grey zone?	180
6. Conclusions	186
Chapter 6: Improvising to persist: how informal communication navigates through uncertainty	189
1. Introduction.....	189
2. Defining persistence in relation to coping mechanisms	190
3. Spatial and subjunctive features of persistence	196
3.1. A place to live, a space of hope	198
3.2. The “Pure Place”	202
4. Tracing hope in persistence.....	204
5. Communicating to persist	207
5.1. ‘At the table’	207
5.2. “Communicating and conversing”: material objects in persistence.....	212
6. Persistence as ‘apparent acceptance’	215
7. Conclusions: to persist is to survive.....	220
Chapter 7: Conclusions	223
1. Synthesis of the research results	223
2. Room for improvement: what I could have done better	229
3. Possible future research	230
References	233
Appendix 1. Photographs	250

Appendix 2. Table 2. 253

Appendix 3. List of names of my interlocutors who appear in the thesis (all
changed)..... 256

List of Figures

Figure 1. Between adaptation and contestation: hypothetical types of community response to insecurity..... 69

Figure 2. Communicating to survive: potential responses (that could) lead to coexistence. 77

Figure 3. Everyday uncertainty: the components..... 124

List of Tables

Table 1. Table juxtaposing two sources of similar understanding of conflicts taking place in Mexico. Based on: (Aguayo Quezada and Benítez Manaut, 2012, p. 12; UCDP, 2017).	84
Table 2. Potential fieldwork sites in Paloxpan and its periphery (left in draft unedited condition except for names).	253

List of Maps

Map 1. State of Veracruz, Mexico. Official name: Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave (INEGI, 2018a).....	22
Map 2. Map of Paloxpan drawn by Eduardo. Paloxpan, August 2015.	98
Map 3. Map of Paloxpan drawn by Rebeca. Paloxpan, September 2015.....	99

List of Photographs

Photograph 1. “Alive they took them, alive we want them back” is the slogan of the relatives of Ayotzinapa students kidnapped in Iguala, Guerrero, September 2014. It has become a common reference all over the country to demand justice by the relatives of the disappeared. Paloxpan, December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko).....	76
Photograph 2. Urban spaces (1) captured while walking in Paloxpan. December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko)	107
Photograph 3. Urban spaces (2) captured while walking in Paloxpan. December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko)	108
Photograph 4. ‘Walking as a local’. Paloxpan, December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko).....	109
Photograph 5. The leaflet with the message accusing Veracruz governor Javier Duarte of killing journalists. The main message: “You cannot kill the truth while killing journalists”. Note that below is a separated leaflet about a room to let. Paloxpan, September 2015.	144
Photograph 6. The leaflet calls for the courage of those who search for their relatives. It says: “‘They got into something’ or ‘they had bad friendships’: These are excuses to avoid searching for your relatives! What we must do is to make the disappeared [note the female form] absence visible. We must demand justice together. Alive they took them [note the female form], alive we want them back!”. In Spanish ‘disappeared’, ‘them’, ‘we’ are female forms of the words (desaparecidas; cada una; vivas) thus explicitly refer to the disappeared women, as well as female relatives who search for the disappeared. In addition, the phrase “Alive they took them, alive we want them back!” is the slogan of the relatives of Ayotzinapa students. See also capture of the Photograph 1. Paloxpan, September 2015.	173
Photograph 7. Walking with Don Ángel on the edge of the Young Zone <i>colonia</i> (on a particularly beautiful day). Young Zone, September 2015.	201
Photograph 8. ‘At the table’ in Amalia’s family home. Here we de-kernelled ears of corn of different colours. Young Zone, October 2015.	209
Photograph 9. Tamales wrapped in banana leaves. Young Zone, October 2015.	211
Photograph 10. Fog in Paloxpan. On my way to the Youth Centre. January 2016.	148
Photograph 11. Collecting banana leaves for <i>tamales</i> . Young Zone, October 2015.	250
Photograph 12. Collecting and cutting banana leaves for <i>tamales</i> . Young Zone, October 2015.	251
Photograph 13. Cooking <i>tamales</i> . Patio of Amalia’s family home. Young Zone, October 2015.	252

List of Acronyms

CASEDE	(Sp.) <i>Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia</i> ; Association of Analysis of Security with Democracy
CEAV	(Sp.) <i>Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas</i> ; Executive Commission for Attention to Victims
CIDH	(Sp.) <i>Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos</i> ; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
DF	(Sp.) <i>Distrito Federal</i> ; Federal District (now Mexico City)
DTO	drug-trafficking organisations
ENVIPE	(Sp.) <i>Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública</i> ; National Survey on Victimisation and Public Security Perception
ENSI Insecurity	(Sp.) <i>Encuesta Nacional sobre Inseguridad</i> ; National Survey on
INEGI	(Sp.) <i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía</i> ; National Institute of Statistics and Geography
IR	International Relations
PAN	(Sp.) <i>Partido de Acción Nacional</i> ; National Action Party
PRD	(Sp.) <i>Partido de la Revolución Democrática</i> ; Party of the Democratic Revolution
PRI Party	(Sp.) <i>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</i> ; Institutional Revolutionary
Morena Movement	(Sp.) <i>Movimiento Regeneración Nacional</i> ; National Regeneration
SEDENA	(Sp.) <i>Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional</i> ; Ministry of Defence in Mexico
SEMAR	(Sp.) <i>Secretaría de Marina</i> ; Naval Ministry
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Programme
UN	United Nations
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
YC	(Sp.) Youth Centre

Abstract

This thesis examines how people respond to the possibility of violence on a daily basis. It is based on eight months of fieldwork in the periphery of Paloxpan (not a real name), in the state of Veracruz in central east Mexico. Rather than presenting an exhaustive list of the coping strategies of the *veracruzanos* (inhabitants of Veracruz), its purpose is to explore their everyday experiences of insecurity as a possibility and as a process, rather than any as a function of a particular event. To this end, this research engages with the mundane activities of the unprivileged who are exposed to everyday violence related to criminal activities. This study's main interest is twofold, in that it investigates how people navigate a context of violence and communicate within it. Early on in the fieldwork, the unknown aspect of living daily with potential violence connected these two main threads. I wondered how people got on with managing their local context of 'everyday uncertainty', understood by this research as a subjective and temporal possibility (here: potentiality) rather than the certainty that violence would occur. By 'people' I refer here to the inhabitants of Paloxpan: firstly, those identified as economically less privileged, living in the urban-rural periphery; secondly, those exposed to the risk of being targeted by violence, derived from the type of professional activity in which they were engaged. Given that most of the formal channels of communication – such as local media – were at the time of this study operating under the control of the state government, people used alternative ways to inform themselves about daily insecurities. Their creative approach emerged from their essential, everyday persistence. I have chosen to include the ambiguities and non-obvious aspects of living alongside everyday violence, as the uncertain was an important feature of everyday life in Paloxpan. Following extensive research in the field, this study slowly unfolds around silences and invisibilities, and the resulting forms in which people persist, within and despite adverse conditions. In this, I wonder how multiple silences speak on the one hand, and how people negotiate a spectrum of invisibilities which can be protecting or endangering, on the other. In my interpretation, their responses turn into the central category of persistence which this research identifies, and which includes continuity and insists on survival, thereby embracing traces of hope.

Declaration

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright Statement

- i.** The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and she has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.
- ii.** Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made **only** in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.
- iii.** The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.
- iv.** Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=24420>), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s regulations (see <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/>) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.

To Gael, my son and to Rodrigo, my husband.
Thank you for being my light.

To Babcia Marysia, my grandmother.
Thank you for your silent presence.

Acknowledgements

At the end of this journey, I cannot thank enough the people in Paloxpan, Veracruz in Mexico, and in particular, the Young Zone community: for accepting me as a family member, for your time, laughter and tears, for your trust and sharing our delicious meals. *¡Son unos amores!* Mateo, Xochitl, Amalia: I can't praise your effort and trust in me enough. Big thanks to all the families that made me feel at home during the weekly gathering at the Youth Centre: thank you for sharing, for including me. Thank you for your hope amid the darkest times. Jorge, massive thanks for your company, guidance, for our endless talks and for always being so responsive during my day-to-day life in Paloxpan. Itzel, you know how much I appreciate our friendship. Thank you for opening my eyes to so many details! Tonia and Elías, I can't thank you enough: you were the first to meet me upon my arrival to Paloxpan.

To all my interlocutors in Veracruz whom I cannot name here: thank you so much for sharing your time, for our conversations while walking, and your generosity. Also, many thanks to everyone who shaped my everyday over eight months in Paloxpan. To the corner shop sellers and to all the coffee growers, as well as to Arleta's family who always fed me so well: thank you for your effort, for your trust, for including me. It's been such a privilege. I wish I could do more in return.

Many thanks to Raúl and Armando, for forming our great team prior to my PhD, and to the whole *Colectivo* (CASEDE) who supported my first steps in Mexico. Raúl, thank you for throwing me into deep waters believing I could swim. Armando, *gracias partner*. To all who provided me with a space to learn about Mexico for the last ten years. And to so many others for receiving me in Puebla and in Mexico City as a friend and neighbour; thank you for letting me become 'the local'. Special thanks to all the wonderful women who kept me a company in this process in so many ways. Erika and Vanessa: thank you for everything. Mateja, Isabelle, Danielle, Hannah, Julieta, Carolina and Lucía for all your attention.

Of course, massive thanks to my parents: *Mamusiu i Tatku, dzięki za wszystko. Za to, że we mnie wierzyli w każdym momencie mojej drogi. Kocham Was bardzo*. Also, thanks to Piter, Karolina, Romuś, Kasia, Jonathan, Jimmy, Ciochia Gonia: *dzięki za wsparcie i cierpliwość*. Thank you so much to my Mexican family for being there for good and for all. Magos: *muchas gracias por todo, por su amor siempre y por aceptarme en su familia*. Don Concho: *gracias por nuestras pláticas infinitas, por su música y por ayudarme a encontrar mi voz*. Matea, Georgel, Santiago, Perico, Ju, and all whom I cannot name here: thank you for being there. Thank you for all your life lessons.

Finally, I cannot appreciate Roger Mac Ginty enough for being my supervisor, without whom, not only would I never have finished this project, I would not even have started: thank you for believing in me so much more than I believed in myself.

I am also grateful to the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute and the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester for all that enabled me to carry this project on.

Introduction

1. As a matter of introduction

I met Xochitl¹ in a similar way to nearly all my interlocutors in Paloxpan: she was introduced by another person, Rocío, who called me a ‘friend’ during the second minute after we met². That afternoon the rain was almost upon us: we sensed a dense wet air, although it was not raining yet. While walking on a hilly street of the neighbourhood to the nearby *tortillería* (a small business where corn tortillas are made)³, she suddenly told me, almost laughing:

Well, you know, sometimes these things are a question of luck. Not too long ago, I was ‘chased by’ shootings, without even being aware of them. To be precise, two shootings in one day. When I left home [in the Young Zone] to commute to Paloxpan early in the morning, it happened just outside a few houses away from ours. While on my way back home, there was another one closer to the centre of Paloxpan. So, literally, that day these shootings followed me – but I managed to escape them. In fact, I only knew they’d occurred upon my arrival home to the community, late in the afternoon⁴.

This study focuses on how people experience such potentiality of violence in their everyday. It traces nuanced and informal forms of communicating about and coping with the context of insecurity in Paloxpan, and in particular in its periphery. As a result of eight months of conversations while walking along these hilly streets, I interpreted this context in terms of ‘everyday uncertainty’, that is, that there was a possibility (here: potentiality) of violence to occur. These everyday responses, such as the one above described by Xochitl, are studied here in consideration of their messy, sometimes contradictory and non-obvious qualities. I do not shape them into firm categories of strategies of coping or survival. Instead, I include them as at times accidental, at other times purposeful, daily management of living with the very tangible potentiality of violence in Mexico.

¹ Given the type of research conducted during the fieldwork, together with the type of consent the research participants provided me with, the names of people and places have been changed (unless otherwise stated). This is mainly due to ethical reasons, elaborated upon in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, a few press references reveal some details of the location. The geographical location of Veracruz state in central east Mexico is real (see Map 1).

² Both Xochitl and Rocío are women in their late forties, living in the periphery of Paloxpan, Veracruz.

³ All translations unless otherwise stated are mine.

⁴ Conversation with Xochitl, the Young Zone neighbourhood, November 2015.

This introduction begins with a brief presentation of the central research questions while elaborating on the rationale of the main themes explored, including some indication of the local context in which the empirical part of this research was embedded. Before illustrating how this thesis is structured, I situate its findings within the relevant literature.

2. Rationale 1: the unprivileged

The main focus of this project is on people. In Mexico, people continue their everyday lives, despite nearly 250,000 having been killed and another 37,000 considered missing between 2007 and 2017, according to the official figures (INEGI, 2018b; SEGOB 2018)⁵. Without wanting to place individual depictions or life stories at the centre of the enquiry, my aim is to draw the reader's attention to the human and to the experience of insecurity in its multiplicity of suffering, coping with, and navigating the everyday. In this, and bearing in mind the imperfections of the translating and interpretative processes, I intend to honour the perspective of 'the researched' interlocutors, namely the neighbours of Paloxpan and the Young Zone *colonia*⁶ (Mex. Sp. neighbourhood): families of the youth 'at risk'⁷, local journalists and activists, academics and students, relatives of disappeared or assassinated persons, but also attendees of the local food market and coffee producers; in short, those on the lower rungs of the income ladder and/or exposed to higher risk. I explore what some might consider the mundane but nevertheless aspects of everyday experiences, instead of insisting upon any exhaustive or neat categorisations of coping strategies that the people of Paloxpan employ. Traditional security studies literature, and the narratives of the Mexican government and the media (which this introduction briefly presents later), usually focus on actual criminal or drug-related violence, and its state and non-state 'actors'. In contrast to these common approaches, my attempt is to illustrate multiple forms of how to live with the potentiality of *violences*⁸. In doing so, this study draws on people's stories and considers the sensory, embodied, and at times imagined (and

⁵ The quality of these numbers is questioned, for example by Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera (2017, p. 142); see also Chapter Three.

⁶ A neighbourhood of Paloxpan central to this study; the location of a significant part of my fieldwork.

⁷ As further elaborated in chapters three, four and five, I attended the Youth Centre (YC) in Paloxpan, which gathered relatives of young people reportedly at risk of drug and other addictions in regular group therapy sessions, led by a social worker, Mateo, one of my 'gatekeepers'.

⁸ In the literature about Mexico, the term (types of) violence in the plural (*violencias*) has been increasingly used to acknowledge continuity and intersectionality of everyday violence with criminal and/or institutional violence, as Elena Azaola notably observes (2012), as well as Sergio Aguayo Quezada and Raúl Benítez Manaut (2012, p. 11). This continuity is usually referred to in English as 'everyday violence' (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). However, I opt to use the unusual English form of *violences* to emphasise such continuity and multiplicity, a particularly neglected feature of the complex violent phenomenon in Mexico.

inconsistent) features of persisting despite the *violences*, as they mattered to the communities I had the privilege to work with. Informal forms of knowing and communicating about such insecurity guided the local lens that this study applies.

Although this research considers insecurity as its starting point, it is far from situating violence at the centre of its enquiry. Rather, the attempt is to seek to understand the context of the personal – sometimes individual, other times collective – forms of navigating the potentially violent everyday. In other words, people’s ‘ordinary’ experiences are at the centre of this research: the informal and non-spectacular, embedded in mundane routes of navigating their everyday activities, interests and needs. The following core research questions are thus central to this thesis:

- How do people respond to everyday *violences*?
- How do they communicate amid silence?

The process of responding to these questions started by suggesting particular coping mechanisms and concluded with the multiple ways in which people *persist* amid everyday violence. Over time, these responses transformed into ‘experiences’ and the ‘living through’, amid and despite of the violent context. While I was interested in how people respond to questions of insecurity, my concern was also with how they related to, and therefore ‘got to know’ *about* insecurities on a daily basis. On the one hand, limited information in the formal media coincided with consistent indications of the silencing of local journalists (Article 19, 2015, p. 35-39). As the non-governmental organisation guarding freedom of speech, Article 19 reports, out of 119 journalists murdered in relation to their profession since 2000, Veracruz registered 26 – the highest number in the whole republic. Of those, 17 were murdered over a six-year period when Javier Duarte, the former governor was in power, 2010-16 (Article 19, 2018)⁹. On the other hand, people still needed to find out somehow about episodes contributing to the atmosphere of insecurity as they unfolded around them – or at least this is what I thought prior to the research in ‘field’¹⁰ – in order to pursue their daily routines. Indeed, the communication which persisted despite the conditions of insecurity was essential to survival.

⁹ Javier Duarte was extradited from Guatemala and at the time of writing is being prosecuted for a number of crimes, included association with organised crime, forced disappearance, and money laundering; for the latter he was sentenced to nine years in prison.

¹⁰ The author is aware of the possible orientalist connotations of the terms ‘field’ and ‘fieldwork’ but uses them for the sake of clarity.

The journey this fieldwork led me on changed the focus of the research significantly. This is illustrated in the way the analytical framework is referred to in the latter empirical part of this thesis (namely, in chapters four, five and six). The main focus shifted from the mechanisms of coping which before actually living in Paloxpan I had calculated possibly existed, to more fluid modes of persistence and communication. I looked at the personal and non-spectacular, as well as creative and rather nuanced shades of how people embraced their experience of everyday uncertainty. In that sense, I followed Roger Mac Ginty, who recalled his father as the one who “fashioned his own existence that involved compliance and resistance, but a lot more too. Lots of other people do that too. ... They are wonderfully awkward and defy our neat academic categories” (2016, p. 15). As a consequence, I decided to leave behind the previous spectrum of potential coping mechanisms, ranging from acceptance to confrontation, and engage with forms by which people communicate and persist in their everyday, exploring silences and invisibilities, to name the most relevant.

2.1. Rationale 2: traces of the personal

This study has both an academic and a personal underpinning. Following five years of living and working in Mexico, I came to this research with the genuine concern of the practitioner, resident, friend and relative¹¹. I was wondering how those on low incomes react to and express their voice in the face of sometimes overwhelming, at other times normalised *violences* in their everyday. Bearing in mind the common public and national security narrative with which I had been familiar in Mexico, my reading before starting the fieldwork was that these people were either disregarded, or encapsulated in one of two categories: as either victims or perpetrators. Both types tend to fall into seemingly neat and unified groups, based on black-and-white and classist/racist foundations. Due to its dehumanising effect, my purpose was firstly to avoid such categorisation, and secondly to break and unpack these apparent binaries and explore their alternative, potentially rich forms of relating to everyday *violences*.

In addition, I wished to engage with the people around me in a manner different from that which I had adopted previously. Prior to this doctoral research, while living in Mexico, my

¹¹ Chapter Three elaborates on positionalities, as well as tackles how managing partial insider-outsider approach potentially influenced this research.

professional and research interest had centred on increasingly homicidal and mostly drug-related violence, from a public health perspective and in the non-governmental sector. During previous five years of work experience in Mexico, I had believed these ‘issues’ might one day be explained and somehow ‘solved’. Later, my focus shifted to the concept of freedom of expression, as I was associated with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), as well as with Freedom House, and working closely with local journalists in an attempt to assess the degree of risk their work incurred and suggest forms of resilience. I was disconcerted at how smoothly my consultant team moved from one state to another, taking note of our ‘findings’ and further, writing a report for the UNODC and the Mexican federal administration. Conversations with those exposed to danger in their localities were left behind with barely any follow-up. In contrast, my premise in pursuing this doctoral research was to engage ‘more deeply’ with ‘the local people’, whose lives were affected by the surrounding violence. My purpose was to approach their experiences in a more inclusive manner and, by bringing their perspective into the centre of the analysis, to challenge the usual narratives about security in Mexico¹².

Despite these personal aims, I have nevertheless written this thesis at the expense of other people’s lives and suffering, to paraphrase Elizabeth Dauphinée’s early work (2007). Rest assured, I acknowledge the inappropriateness of assuming that bringing human stories into the academic narrative would do some kind of justice to their loss, suffering and persisting ‘everyday uncertainty’ – that is, the condition in which I sense they live and which, in essence, consists of the possibility of violence, rather than any particular events which define their insecurity. Moreover, I recognise the ambiguous nature of the attempt to separate myself from the suffering other, as well as writing about ‘their’ experience of pain (for example, Wibben, 2016; Jacoby, 2006; Edkins, 2003). At the same time, my endeavour here is to write through the impossibility of adequately expressing not only their trauma, grief and fear, but also their wishes, hopes and imagined futures. Thus, the attempt of this messy and subjective enquiry is to *show* what it means to live with and communicate through the insecurity (Dauphinée, 2013b, p. 350).

¹² I chose the locality of Paloxpan in the state of Veracruz (officially called ‘Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave’) for a number of reasons given later on in this introduction. However, it is fair to admit that it was not included in my past consultancy for the UNODC. Despite evidence of journalists and photo-journalists being targeted in violent acts by the state, the United Nations agency at that time was unable to establish trusted links with the local government, a requisite to organising these sessions. This could be at least partially explained by the confirmed rumours that the former governor, Javier Duarte, colluded with one of the criminal organisations, as ongoing legal processes reveal.

3. The place where this study belongs and the literature it speaks to

This study is therefore not only immersed in ‘the local’ and ‘the everyday’, but it also draws the reader’s attention back to the human and personal experience, rather than the inefficiency of state institutions (Mac Ginty, 2013b; Edkins, 2011). It evolves in contrast to the common narrative of traditional security studies – which is dominated by Eurocentric and US-based rather than Latin American scholars – as well as in prevailing debates in Mexico on national and public security in terms of numbers, cartels, and the black-and-white narratives of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’, not to mention governmental strategies since the announcement of ‘war on drugs’ in the end of 2006. The following paragraphs briefly situate this study in the context of Mexico, followed by a summary of the current debates in the relevant literature.

Mexico is a country with high levels of violence, usually regarded as originating in criminal delinquency, at times recognised as having taken the form of a number of violent conflicts (UCDP, 2017)¹³. Despite the country not being at war, some of its citizens live in a constant state of danger. Some have become used to impersonal and seen-from-a-distance criminal violence, in contrast with others who, at least since 2006, have been affected by violent death, disappearances and a high perception of insecurity in some regions of the country. The socio-economic and regional divisions are recurrent and present as are the levels at which *violences* interfere with peoples’ lives. Following the militarisation of public security since the so-called ‘war on drugs’¹⁴ dating in Mexico from the end of 2006, a number of studies have been eager to explain why and how nearly 250,000 of the country’s citizens have died violently, and another 37,000 gone missing¹⁵ (for example, Lessing, 2015; Guerrero Gutiérrez, 2011; Bailey and Taylor, 2009). This (mostly Mexican and US-based) security studies literature seeks to explain criminal organisations – their transformations and their relationship with the state apparatus – and sometimes to predict their development in near future. Some of the literature turns its focus on people, and more rarely still, their personal, rather than institutionalised responses to this context (Schedler, 2015; Estévez López and Vázquez, 2017).

¹³ This is discussed in Chapter Three. However, this research does not aim at presenting a conflict analysis of the situation in Mexico.

¹⁴ This is explained in a more nuanced manner in the local context, see Chapter Three.

¹⁵ The official estimations state 242,086 killings between 2007 and 2017 (INEGI, 2018b) and 37,000 disappeared (SEGOB, 2018).



Map 1. State of Veracruz, Mexico. Official name: Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave (INEGI, 2018a).

Veracruz, the state where this research developed in the field between 2015 and 2016 (see Map 1 above), has been regarded as “emblematic of the challenges facing the country as a whole” (ICG, 2017, p. 3). The third most populous state in Mexico (among 32 federal entities including Mexico City), it “has become the site of crimes against humanity” (ICG, 2017, p. 4)¹⁶. Only uncovered since 2016, the estimated number of clandestine graves – just one among many of the symbols of the current state of atrocities – ranges from 300 to 600 in its 212 municipalities (Melimopoulos, 2018; Márquez Murrieta, 2018, respectively). With less than one per cent of the human remains found in these common graves identified, the everyday of the disappearances centres upon ‘the unknown’ aspect of whether the disappeared are alive. One of the most active local associations of relatives of the disappeared calculates there to be 20,000 cases in Veracruz alone, a number which contrasts sharply with the figure of 4,000 officially registered disappeared persons (Márquez Murrieta, 2018).

The above contrasting estimations support the premise of the messiness of violent conflicts and how they provide limited (or at least vague) evidence of the insecurity which people live through ‘on the ground’. This does not mean that the qualitative stance this

¹⁶ This was followed by the Mexican Senate’s request to the International Court of Justice to investigate the former governor of Veracruz, Javier Duarte, of crimes against humanity (Aristegui Noticias, 2018).

study takes is able to tackle such conditions in a more straightforward manner (for example, Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić, 2017). However, while acknowledging the subjective nature of any interpretation of the experience (particularly by an outsider) of the potentiality of violence, this research, embedded in the locality of Paloxpan, endeavours to utilise a more nuanced lens. Rather than quantifying human remains¹⁷, homicides or number of disappeared, mass graves, and drugs seized, my purpose is to write with sensitivity about the human experience of suffering. Without dismissing mass graves, the depersonalisation of violence and even the co-opting of both official authorities (by criminal organisations) and the ‘victims’ (by multiple authorities) (Márquez Murrieta, 2018), my focus is on how people experience personal loss on the one hand and a more distant insecurity on the other.

Instead of concentrating on the causes of the ongoing violence and measuring its extent, this research purposefully endeavours to take a less sensational approach. This entails focusing on people’s daily experiences, which matter both for them and for the scholarship in a number of fields mentioned below. The forms of everyday persistence represent a still relatively under-researched aspect of enquiry into violent conflict, in particular within the discipline of International Relations (IR). Although this work is located in a broadly conceived critical IR, it draws on different literature across disciplines, such as critical peace and conflict studies, critical security studies, anthropology of violence, and feminist IR. In that, rather than contributing to a disciplinary literature, this research endeavours to join conversations on the following topics across several fields. While seeking to contribute to a wider knowledge about navigating violent conflicts, it speaks to debates on ‘the everyday’, silences and communicating insecurity, and to the epistemology of the encounter; it adds to ‘the everyday’ and ‘the local’ in that it develops ‘everyday uncertainty’ as a relevant part of the local context, to which people respond on a daily basis (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2014). Secondly, it expands on multiple silences in the framework of top-down (briefly) and bottom-up (crucially) silences as denial, and as reaffirmation, to name but two (Das, 2007; Dauphinée, 2015; Mannergren Selimovic, 2018). It explores how people use the spectrum of (in)visibilities in facing and communicating about threat; however, unlike visual politics (Saugmann, 2018; Van Veeren, 2018) or in relation to artwork (J. Bennett, 2005), it engages with the standpoint of the person. It widely explores the epistemology of the encounter (K. Bennett et al., 2015;

¹⁷ For a recent example, see trailers with human remains (BBC World, 2018).

Jacoby, 2006; Pink et al., 2010; Sylvester et al., 2011), as well as engaging in how insecurity feels (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; McLeod, 2015) and by whom it is narrated (Stern, 2006).

This study is situated in parallel to the relatively few accounts of everyday living in violent contexts (Walker, 2013; Berents, 2018), while at the same time marking a thin distance from sociological or predominantly ethnographic accounts of violent *barrios*¹⁸, such as those presented in broadly defined urban studies (see, for example, Auyero and Berti, 2015; Hume, 2008; Rodgers, 2009; Wilding, 2010). It also draws widely on literature on ‘grey zones’ (Yiftachel, 2009; Auyero, 2007) and ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott, 1990; Shindo, 2016). In conversation with the anthropology of violence (Green, 1995; Nordstrom, 2004; Taussig, 2002; Scheper-Hughes, 1993; Han, 2016; Perera, 2001; Das, 2007), it pursues everyday experiences with a focus on human relationships, while living under the “state of terror” (ICG, 2017) present in Veracruz. In addition, it is significantly influenced by feminist IR (Stern, 2005; Sylvester, 2013; Daigle, 2015; Gordon, 2008; McLeod, 2016; Shepherd, 2013), particularly in regard to the epistemology of approaching the sensory, personal, embodied, non-spectacular, relational and emotional aspects of living with violence: in short, how it is *shown* and how it *feels*. Among others, Elizabeth Dauphinée (2013a), Veena Das (2007), Himadeep Muppiddi (2015), Carolyn Nordstrom (2004), and James Scott (1990) occupy a special place in inspiring the sensitive and modest approach that this research takes, in that, among others, the starting point was marked by an openness and ‘not knowing’ which led to the semi-inductive and slow mode that this study endeavours to adopt.

3.1. From the personal to academic journey

Without intending to neglect the multiple *violences* that people in Paloxpan endure both individually and collectively, the aim of this research is to trace their responses to everyday violence. Bearing this purpose in mind, I focus on these central research questions: How do people respond to everyday violence(s)? How do they communicate amid silence? In doing so, rather than forms of dying, it explores forms of living, while at the same time recognising their obvious intrinsic connection. As mentioned above, this speaks to the

¹⁸ In Mexico, *barrio* is a synonym of a deprived neighbourhood, frequently used as *barrio popular* (lit. working-class neighbourhood). Elsewhere in Latin America it tends to have a less negative connotation. In Mexico, *colonia* prevails as a synonym of neighbourhood.

literature about ‘grey zones’ across disciplines and localities, at the edge of the blurred lines in-between, as outlined by Dauphinée: “What we discover are the bleeds and overlaps between living and dead, victim and perpetrator, knower and known” (2013b, p. 351). In this sense, rather than attempting to force a neat and coherent story of survival, I acknowledge the ambiguity and ambivalent nature of this scholarship, drawing on the complexities of lived experiences. This study embraces the epistemologies of the encounter and the partiality of the stories selected, to trigger arguments throughout this thesis¹⁹. Nevertheless, it views them as part of a sincere effort to engage with the lives of those usually neglected in the research into violence, rather than undertaking a disruptive rhythm of ‘objective’ scholarship, detached from the voices that form its basis.

To acknowledge the ambiguities and ambivalences does not go as far as drifting towards the narrative turn in IR, that is, to pursue knowledge as “invention”, instead of discovery (Michael J. Shapiro, quoted by Dauphinée, 2015). Rather, it is an attempt to include the fragmented, non-coherent, fluid and further imagined stories and wishes, as well as dreams, rumours, legends and myths circulating around the researched communities. In this, this approach recognises its “openness to the worlds of the possible that shows us the partiality of our claims, the ubiquity of potentialities for victimhood or for guilt (or for both at once)” (Dauphinée, 2015, pp. 263-264). Thus, the purpose is to open up the research to ‘different kind of knowledges’ (note the plural) and to emphasise its messy creation under particular conditions of violent conflict (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić, 2017). Although the analysis is of my authorship and I am the only one accountable for its result and shape, this thesis would have not existed without the input of enormously generous people, who have had little left afterwards. My most basic wish at this final stage of writing is to make sure their stories are as widely included as possible.

As mentioned earlier, this research aims to engage with the complexities of violent conflict in a way which focuses more on the ‘human’. On the one hand, it endeavours to “bring humans back into social science” (Mac Ginty, 2013b, p. 429), in that it contributes to looking for epistemologies which bring together “the researcher and the researched ... to interact in more meaningful ways” (Mac Ginty, 2013b, p. 429). On the other, it draws particular attention to the sensory manner in which researched communities relate to violence and uncertainties. Following the call Christine Sylvester makes in her argument in

¹⁹ I elaborate on this more extensively in Chapter Three.

favour of creativity, this research takes the risk of engaging with the senses in a serious fashion, which for Sylvester means crafting a ‘creative’ scholarship: the one out of the comfort zone of traditionally rational sources and places of IR knowledge (2016, p. 66). In this line, Sylvester also follows the call of Mac Ginty – embedded in feminist, and peace and conflict studies – to bring the mundane back to the centre of IR interest, as “their [scholars’] creativity takes the esoteric field of IR to places where people live, work, read, write, struggle, shape and adjust to international relations around them” (Sylvester, 2016, p. 66). My endeavour is filled with hope to follow this call.

Leaving aside my previous experience of living and working in Mexico, this thesis depicts the journey this research has taken, starting with its interest in and concern with the different personal and political responses to the imminent possibility of violence encountered among the people of Paloxpan. Importantly, at the start of the thesis it is valid to recognise that, rather than pretending any objective or positivist form of scholarship (for example, Burton 1997, foreword by Jabri, pp. xi-xii), looming over my stake in this subject is a subjective interpretative approach. This writing stems from tireless walking through the hills of the periphery in-between Paloxpan and the neighbouring Young Zone *colonia*, from the smell of the coffee planted and roasted next door, from the noise of the corner shop and mobile vendor, slow conversations at the Sunday market and a kitchen full of afternoon rush. It also, however, writes on shared tears and hugs, hours of laughing and walking side-by-side, listening and nodding, with a degree of hopelessness and frustration, and at times accompanied by incoherent feelings about how to respond to fear and pain. It also reflects a deeply emotional journey of translating words and worlds, from the periphery to the city in Mexico, from Spanish to UK English (without forgetting the researcher’s Polish background), from the vernacular language of the *barrio* to the critical arguments of academia, from unpaved roads to transatlantic aeroplane routes, and from the noise of a familiar living room to the awkward silence of the conference room. Somehow I doubt that the wholeness of the research experience is being reflected here, in a way which does just a little in return for my generous interlocutors. Unlike ‘subjects’ on the ground, they have become friends, at times adopted family²⁰, part of one’s ‘everyday’, to an extent far beyond the academic purpose.

²⁰ This is further elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

4. The structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters. The first three chapters take a theoretical angle; chapters four, five and six, following the fieldwork, develop an analytical approach. Some concepts serve throughout the thesis, others are further transformed by the research in the field. The second, analytical part of the thesis is heavily embedded in the empirical study that ultimately shapes the results of this research. Following the introduction, Chapter One begins by defining the most relevant concepts, which are located within interdisciplinary literature, such as that which discusses the local and the community, the everyday and the grey zone. Chapter Two examines the analytical framework which suggests possible responses to the context of violence (such as co-optation, apparent acceptance or everyday resistance) along a spectrum between acceptance and confrontation. It draws on agency and action as a response, taking the latter as a central subject of the analysis. This framework assumes that coping mechanisms with everyday violence are supported by the communication on the one hand, and result in the coexistence and survival, on the other. The following methodology chapter, Chapter Three, explores how ‘data collection’²¹ took place during the fieldwork, together with the ways in which its findings are further analysed. It aims to address relational manners, through which the field conducts the researcher and the other way around, and considers fluent positionalities, as well as the research being *with* rather than *on* people. Its main purpose is to engage critically with the fieldwork. The further analytical part of the thesis – chapters four, five and six – examines the fieldwork findings, namely the responses to the violent context that the unprivileged interlocutors shared. Firstly, Chapter Four opens with a discussion of ‘everyday uncertainty’ as an alternative means of understanding violent contexts. The purpose is to engage with the space between silence and narrated speech. In doing so, it introduces a tentative division of recognised forms of silences, from top-down to bottom-up, concentrating on functions of silence amid violent surroundings. While concluding with discussion of the tentative forms of breaking the silence which people utilise, the chapter links to Chapter Five, which engages with the multiplicity of manners in which they approach the unknown in the uncertain everyday. It does so while discussing the communication which occurs on the spectrum of (in)visibilities; it aims to show how people communicate amid imposed silences. Finally, Chapter Six elaborates on forms of

²¹ By enclosing ‘data collection’ in quotation marks I aim to emphasise my issue with equalising people’s lives and experiences of violence with data, which sounds far from the sensitive and personal approach this research takes.

persistence with everyday uncertainty. While drawing on findings from the previous two analytical chapters, it distinguishes improvised everyday responses from those suggested by the analytical framework, as well as making connections between them. It concludes by examining the informal ways in which people persist amid potential and experienced violences.

While acknowledging the unprivileged at risk situated at the centre of this study, this research also focuses on the space where the encounter between the researcher and the ‘researched’ took place. I draw on the non-obvious impossibility of a complete separation between the two, while recognising the subjectivity of the interpretative approach that this research takes. While responding to the research questions: How do people respond to everyday *violences*? How do they communicate amid silence? this study does not pretend to speak for Mexican society or to represent the state of Veracruz as a whole, nor does it aim to ‘give voice’ to anyone (which makes the assumption that this, along with agency, is everyone’s attribute, regardless of the apparent power asymmetries). In this sense, I recognise this encounter as a meaningful space of engagement, from which standpoint this thesis is written. Despite the effort made, I am aware that my attempt at giving back might have not been sufficient for those at whose expense this research has been written. I thus acknowledge “my complicity in the violence I seek to ‘understand’ and ‘explain’, or in which I seek to intervene with my myriad good intentions and envisioned liberal futures” (Dauphinée, 2013b, p. 349).

Chapter 1: Local community: living everyday grey zones

The End and the Beginning

After every war
Someone has to clean up.
Things won't
Straighten themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble
To the side of the road,
So the corpse-filled wagons
Can pass.

...
Photogenic it's not,
And it takes years.
All the cameras have left
For another war.

...
Those who knew
What was going on here
Must make way for
Those who know little.
And less than a little.
And finally as little as nothing.

In the grass that has overgrown
Causes and effects,
Someone must be stretched out
Blade of grass in his mouth
Gazing at the clouds.

Wisława Szymborska (2001)

1. Introduction

This is the first of three chapters that formulate the conceptual (chapters one and two) and methodology part of this study (Chapter Three). All three aim at preparing for the further research in field, located in Paloxpan, Veracruz state in Mexico. This introductory chapter provides a preliminary understanding of the fundamental concepts of the thesis – namely the local, the everyday and local community, as well as grey zones – and locates them within a diverse range of literatures. It is mainly theoretical in character, as is Chapter Two. While introducing often contrasting interpretations embedded in the literature, this chapter offers a preliminary assessment of the concepts which further prepare the analytical framework (Chapter Two), as well as the empirical research in Paloxpan, Veracruz (chapters four to six).

This chapter unpacks the concept of ‘local community’ in a context of ongoing violence, with a purpose to provide a theoretical foundation to the process of responding to the central research questions:

- How do people respond to everyday *violences*?
- How do they communicate amid silence?

By examining notions of the ‘local’ and the ‘everyday’, this chapter considers community as its central concept, in order to contribute to understanding the ways in which local community members approach their everyday activities under violent circumstances. In this sense, it will provide an insight into the ‘local’ as an analytical level of inquiry within an interdisciplinary dialogue for the rest of the thesis. The ‘local’ is placed within the ‘transnational’, and hence beyond lineal divisions of global/international vs. local/traditional (Ley, 2004). In this way, a locality²² makes sense not only in a subjective and individual manner, but also collectively; experiencing violence provides a different understanding at the personal and community level (Gilligan, 2000).

To address the community perspective entails the attempt at including all possible members, despite the multiple roles they may be engaged in. At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge time and space limitations, and that it is unlikely that an understanding of the full spectrum of viewpoints in the community will emerge. Furthermore, the context-dependent perspective of one locality varies over time, as memories are usually affected by the notion of the present (Nordstrom and Martin, 1992). Finally, the community perspective, as a situated knowledge (Wibben, 2011), also assumes that violence is not by definition external to the local population. Rather, this research assumes that existing linkages among community members and external realities are co-constitutive within violent environments, forming what is referred to further in this chapter as ‘grey zones’. Thus, this chapter endeavours to use the local community as a lens to understand responses to violence which are based on interactions within and outside of the community.

The ‘local’, as the following section depicts, is examined in the context of local community as an area of further analysis of social and cultural practices as responses to criminalised

²² For the purpose of this research, the community and locality will be used indistinctively, despite the differences that might be distinguished in other cases. For example, Cooke (1989).

violences related to the presence of transnational criminal networks²³. Rather than a unified entity, the local community is seen as a relational space, where its members' reactions to chronic insecurity are the central objects of this study. In this sense, this chapter introduces the 'local' as the precursor to the analytical structure of the thesis (introduced in Chapter Two); it offers room for further contextualisation of the thesis within the analytical framework.

This theoretical chapter is structured as follows. The first section reviews the relevant literature, focusing on the reasons to study 'the local' in the area of International Relations, and examining whether the 'local community' may be understood at once as local and transnational. The second section conceptualises the local community as relevant for this study, asking by whom and by what it is constituted. In its subsection, it considers the grey zone as a central metaphor to understand the ambiguity and dynamic of the local community. The following section examines 'the everyday', exploring how the local community may be created and interpreted in the everyday of violent environments of uncertainty, embedded in diverse literature and contexts. It presents the ways in which the local may be studied through the prism of the everyday. Lastly, the above elements support an exploration of the ways in which local agency contributes to everyday informal practices as the reactions of the local community to the violent conflict environment. The elements of local agency connect this chapter with the potential community responses, examined in Chapter Two.

2. The Local

This section examines 'the local' dimension of this research in a predominantly conceptual manner and reviews the relevant literature. In recent years, through the 'local turn', the local has become a more prominent reference for international studies on peace and conflict (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013a). It is an interest of this research to add to the local dimension as essential to the study of a transnational phenomenon, together with the overlapping local-hybrid space of the local and transnational (Mac Ginty, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2010; AlSayyad, 2001). To put it differently, it is assumed the local is fundamental in understanding the transnational and international flows underpinning violent conditions.

²³ Their role will be further elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

Likewise, the meaning of the local has been influenced by the transnational, beyond the control of the state or inter-governmental level. As well as providing this study with a local level of analysis, exploring the ‘local’ challenges the rigid linkages between the ‘local’ and ‘place’, traditionally embedded within a physical location and often romanticised as ‘authentic’ (Mac Ginty, 2008; Bliesemann de Guevara, 2017; Dauphinée, 2010). Instead, and despite being immersed in a particular locality in Veracruz, this thesis attempts to shed light on a blurred notion of a ‘transnational-hybrid-local’ perspective of responses to violence. Thus, this section supports the thesis that the local is of interest to IR not only through the lens of the transnational activities embedded within it, but also due to its essentiality for a lived human experience of peace and conflict (Sylvester, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2013a). Prior to the exploration of the ways in which the local has been studied, followed by the presentation of its potential meanings, I introduce the subsequent premises this chapter follows.

- It is especially at the local level that peace and violence may coexist and that their elements are mutually constitutive (Steenkamp, 2005; Mac Ginty, 2006).
- Both violence and non-violence provide an inter-relational, collective and continuous experience formed within the local (Sponsel and Gregor, 1994).
- As with violent conflict, peace may be studied through the lens of the ‘experience’, together with an integrated ‘emotion’ (Sylvester, 2012).

The above premises shape the conceptual part this chapter initiates and links ‘the local’ with wider studies of violence. Further paragraphs explore the rationale of applying ‘the local’ as a dominant approach that this research follows. They do so in a predominantly theoretical manner, and then provide the empirical study in Paloxpan with the conceptual background of the local level. There are several reasons for which the local is worth approaching as a perspective of inquiry, as well as the physical fieldwork site, given that this research is conducted at the local level. First and foremost, it allows an exploration of the particularities of the “backyard front” of the violent conflict and its aftermath (Nordstrom and Martin, 1992, p. 260); to explore not only the context, but also the essence of the social reality within a violent conflict from a closer perspective. In other words, it is to try to get closer to the lens of the people who actually experience the situation of violent conflict (Gill, 2012; Hollis and Smith, 1990). The main purpose of applying the local lens is to attempt to understand a set of conditions and to generate a

meaning of experiencing violent conditions ‘from below’, while considering its inter- and transnational frame. To give importance to human-oriented and culture-embedded research is yet another reason to apply the local lens, as opposed to depersonalised studies of global, regional and international interlinks, which tend to be framed as black-and-white dichotomies.

This section reverses the traditional logic of explaining local tendencies through transnational flows and international links, and suggests a prominence of the local in understanding the consequences of violent conflict linked to transnational phenomena, such as flows of illicit substances and arms, to name a few.

Traditional IR only approaches the ‘local’ as a level of analysis in peace and conflict through political or criminal leaders at the national or supranational levels, whether legitimate or not (Dudouet, 2013; Buzan and Little, 2009). Conversely, a critical approach to international studies suggests that local actors possess an agency that is significant, even in an informal, or “hidden” way (Scott, 1992). Likewise, the local perspective, drawing on historic and ethnographic elements, recognises socio-cultural legacy of violent conflict circumstances. Therefore, “the localised” approach aims at providing a required contextual knowledge used in studies on violent conflict influenced by ethnographic method scholarship (Darby, 1986; Harris, 1972; Nordstrom and Martin, 1992).

Furthermore, the focus on the local also involves the so-called ‘return to a person’ (Jabri, 2013). The local and the international are mutually co-constitutive, hence they overlap in their meaning and essence (Mac Ginty, 2011). Vivienne Jabri’s interpretation of hybrid agency offers a political aspect of local action, which adds a relevant element to the collective dimension of this research (2013). The ‘local’ should not simply be a background function for international studies, neither limited to a tangible locality of either violent or non-violent action. Likewise, it should not presume to fully represent the ‘local people’s voice’. Rather, “it is to show how power circulates, and how legitimacy even in the most obscure local forums holds it to account” (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013a). As a consequence, the local lens in peace and conflict studies intends to build a bridge between both people and space, putting local relationships at the centre of this study. The ‘local’ as a tool for analysis has been explored by many disciplines outside of international relations, such as social anthropology, criminology, public security, sociology, human geography and

urban studies. Indeed, the 'local' remains in the domain of social psychology, specifically applied in conflict and 'post-conflict' areas, but also in studies on inter-personal violence (Shepard et al., 2002). Finally, the 'local' is inherently critical and is central to post-colonial studies. Nonetheless, it is beyond the scope of this research to demonstrate the full spectrum of applications of the local perspective from all of the scholarships mentioned above. Rather, while staying within boundaries of international studies and peace and conflict studies, this section attempts to draw on elements from a variety of disciplines of either critical or positivist approach towards the 'field' (Gill, 2012).

Therefore, it is sensible to turn to other scholarships, drawing on insights from sociology, anthropology, development and urban studies, and human geography, where the relational aspects of understanding the social world take place through social interactions. In particular, it is assumed that these relations are socially constructed, rather than objectively feasible to explore (Belsey, 2004). Put differently, critical scholarship takes a stance on subjective and plural, as well as interdisciplinary, forms of knowledge creation from below, despite attempts to involve multi-disciplinary discourse into IR having been widely criticised (Vrasti, 2008). Nonetheless, the existing 'local turn' becomes the main starting point for this study (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013a). If peace (amid ongoing violence, as in case of my fieldwork site in Paloxpan) can happen at the local level, which is simultaneously international, it provides the international with recognition and thus legitimacy within the local community (Richmond, 2009).

A critical approach, understood as a method of inquiry, aims to explore reality in order to understand rather than explain (Hollis and Smith, 1990), which acknowledges that social practices are not necessarily predictable. Instead, it goes beyond the cause-and-effect linkage and rational-choice logic, which is not always feasible in a social world, and rather than providing an insight into causes and consequences, acknowledges that "agency is everywhere" (Law, 2004, p. 134; also Salter and Mutlu, 2013). Critical theory explores possibilities and options which might occur eventually, and acknowledges limitations through reflexive inquiry (Lynch, 2008), in particular in collective terms (Eagleton-Pierce, 2011). In addition, critical enquiry is described as inherently subjective, as well as political, and as opposed to the objective reality claimed by traditional research (Jabri, 2013).

Some critical scholars develop their arguments in defining local agency as being not exclusive to humans. In this regard, one of the most influential is the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour, whose experimental approach towards social interactions combined “animate and inanimate objects and resources into a complex, ever-changing resilient heterogeneous network” (as commented by Eric Sheppard, 2002, p. 316). It is worth underlining some of the new perspectives of security and peace studies, located in opposition to the focus on social. Rather, considering the previous discussion as a monopoly for the social sciences, this perspective approaches the world as a unit and takes into account an ecological narrative. It offers a broad environmental perspective on post-conflict and security analysis (Mitchell, 2014). Likewise, in critical security studies, the ‘material turn’ expands the research focus to objects and their relationships with humans (Aradau, 2010). This brings to light a question on tracing objects and relations between their flows and human activities. In this sense, it recognises agency as embedded in both human and material worlds (Salter and Mutlu, 2013).

While being aware of other valid terms, from ‘assemblage’ to animated and material objects of actor-network systems, this study chooses an ‘old-fashioned’ position, using ‘community’ (see the following section on local community) and focusing on human-constructed social groups rather than on ‘things’ (Aradau, 2010; Salter and Mutlu, 2013). While recognising the above critical perspectives, this research does not engage in the debates on non-human agency. In turn, it benefits from elements of feminist as well as anthropological approaches to peace and conflict studies, recognising the embodiment of a violent environment experienced by people within spaces considered as local (Sylvester, 2012). It therefore emphasises the importance of emotions in dealing with violent environments. Although it appreciates the above-mentioned critical approaches, this study explores ways in which people relate with and experience violence in their surrounding community.

In policy-oriented scholarship, although seen from above, the local realm is also identified under broad public health approaches towards violence prevention (Kjaerulf and Barahona, 2010). These highlight an integrated framework towards different types of violence affecting a human population. The perspective of public health offers a broad, locally informed framework for preventing violence, together with a focus on victims and community cohesion (Kjaerulf and Barahona, 2010; Mercy et al., 2008). Likewise, the

crime-prevention framework, while intending to be locally informed, is universally driven by ‘good practices’ from diverse localities (UNODC and UN-HABITAT, 2009). Nonetheless, these collective approaches, though intended to be locally- and evidence-based, are founded on the problem-solving approach and rational-choice theory, with efficiency as a base for its predictive potential (Cox, 1981).

As mentioned above, in ‘traditional’ IR, as well as in security studies, the individual level of analysis has been focused on the decision-making processes of so called ‘high politics’ and traditionally understood political leaders. In the context of a contested state monopoly on the use of force, an interest in the leaders of criminal and other violent actors has been increasingly observed (Malešević, 2010; Bagley, 2012). In addition, the organisational level and internal dynamics, which shape both administrative governmental structures as well as non-state actors, has also been a focus of ‘traditional’ IR (Benítez Manaut, 2009; Garzón, 2008; Mazzitelli, 2011; Benítez Manaut, 2018). Although some studies show an interest in the ‘local’ in the context of nation-level changes, in the political economy of organised violence and criminal networks (Moser and Rodgers, 2005) it is global-local relations which give sense to the local in this case.

IR approaches to the local have a lot to acquire from other disciplines, most importantly from anthropology and sociology. Notwithstanding criticism among some IR scholars (Vrasti, 2008), ethnographic insights from within criminal groups, as well as in conflict zones, emphasise local power relations at the face-to-face level (Jütersonke et al., 2009; Nordstrom, 2004). Likewise, interdisciplinary studies on violence can benefit from ethnographic insight (Auyero et al., 2014), although some examples present rather descriptive micro-level histories of conflict “without enemies” (Vigh, 2006, p. 64). In this case, the author’s explanation of individual, collective and trans-generational motivations to participate in violent conflict between “friends” and “brothers” (Vigh, 2006, pp. 71-73) is based mainly on the ‘old’ vs. ‘new’ wars dichotomy (Kaldor, 2006; Duffield, 2001). As observed by its critics, this approach concentrates on distinguishing ‘old’ from ‘new’, instead of analysing the contemporary nature of violent conflict (Newman, 2004; also Booth, 2001). Vigh’s perspective on pragmatism replacing ideology as a driving force for the Guinea-Bissau conflict at a micro level (Vigh, 2006; also Malešević, 2010) demonstrates a tendency towards rational choice, rather than a deeply engaged theoretical and empirical reflection, as argued by Carling (2007).

In this context, it is worth emphasising that the 'local' as a stance varies significantly from some of the previous conflict analysis at the micro-level, which attempted to identify some tendencies and common elements of violent conflicts (Kalyvas, 2006; Malešević, 2010). On the contrary, while concerned about space, this study chooses neither to predict nor to explain the flow or level of conflict escalation in different localities, or to dilute it in explanations of violent dynamics. In contrast to some sociological examples of organised forms of violence (Malešević, 2010), this thesis takes social structure and social organisation of micro-groups as neither fixed nor deterministic, and the relational forms as particular rather than universal. In particular, the conceptualisation of the local in this research is opposed to definition of identity and social capital as foundations for any form of engagement other than the state-driven use of force (Malešević, 2010). This thesis also distinguishes itself from the legalistic approach; the micro-level quantitative and prediction-oriented type of study on the occupational conditions of the involvement of global organised crime as the main incentive for blurring boundaries between illicit and licit networks. According to this view, founded in the rational-choice paradigm, working opportunities, when perceived as attractive, provide strong enough motivation for potential involvement in organised forms of crime (Kleemans and Van de Bunt, 2008). Contrastingly, one interpretation of the use of violence as labour – in anthropological rather than criminal terms – consists of an interesting example of local level insight into spaces, communities and “assemblage” in violent conflicts (Hoffman, 2011, p. 193).

This study chooses to approach the 'local' in the context of transnational flows (of people, information, as well as licit and illicit goods), which recognises and involves their 'local' component. It intends to challenge the trend towards depersonalisation of criminal organisations (with an exception of their leaders) as the 'Other', and dehumanisation of their members, categorised as non-citizens. As a result of the militarisation²⁴ and further confusion between national and public security forces in Mexico, potential members of violent non-state groups are meant to be perceived as external forces not embedded in and not integrated with society. This research challenges such a perspective through examining the 'local' theoretically in this chapter, as well as taking this conceptualisation to the analytical framework and further to the research in the field. In this, this study attempts to critically engage with the statement that co-optation and co-operation are the only possible

²⁴ This is discussed further in Chapter Three.

forms of relationship building between criminals and so-called ‘ordinary people’ at the local level (Buscaglia and van Dijk, 2003; Albanese, 2009; Garay-Salamanca and Salcedo-Albarán, 2012). The local perspective, rather than searching for motivations of political engagement in favour of non-state organisations, enables an understanding of the potential coexistence between the criminal and ‘the ordinary’ without judgment (further seen in the section on grey zones in this chapter). It attempts to confront a functionalist argument of an absence or power transformation of state authorities and their replacement by non-state violent groups (Astorga and Shirk, 2010; Chabat, 2002; Benítez Manaut, 2010). At the same time, the local perspective is challenged by the threat of both becoming a victim and being perceived as a perpetrator, as an all-explanatory factor for the existing local chronic insecurity, rather than a nuanced understanding of the grey area in-between. Overall, these tend to be external and macro-level explanations rather than ones derived from a local reality. This research challenges such perspectives, and approaches the local seriously, while undertaking the fieldwork in the locality of Paloxpan²⁵.

The above conceptual reflection on the ‘local’ leads to the question of the intersection between the transnational, the global and the local. Several scholars have addressed this challenge through the concept of a network. In this context, ever more socially and economically connected places, in which “logic and meaning becomes absorbed into the network” (Castells, 1996, p. 412), conform to the widely discussed “spaces of flows”. These, led by the information revolution, provoke ever-increasing fluidity within ‘still’ places, which provide them with social (and cultural) meaning (Castells, 2000). However, a “spatial fixity” embedded within traditionally understood local place, is recognised as being created within and reshaped by the spatiality of flows (Smith, 1996). Furthermore, the interaction between spaces and places has been studied from at least two perspectives, namely within a framework of *glocalisation*, which emphasises, for example, migratory movements, and from within conflict studies, with a focus on local dynamics in relation to transnational threats (Robertson, 1994). In the first case, while considering the context of globalisation trends and forces, here the local is shaped by and simultaneously shapes global forces, as in the case of transnational flows of information, people and capital, as well as arms, information and so on. The second analytical direction is widely used by those interested in organised crime networks beyond the state and regional borders,

²⁵ This research emphasises a potential deception of ‘discovering local’ as in a context of post-colonial heritage and the legacy of Human Rights and development discourses, as well as in terms of romanticisation of the local (Chandler, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2008; Sabaratnam, 2013).

shaped both globally and locally (van Schendel and Abraham, 2005; Malešević, 2010).

While this interpretation of a “space of flows” reinforces its local connection, it is created through networked processes all over the globe (Hall, 2013, p. 317). Despite some successful examples of the network as an analytical tool to explain the relations of corruption and co-optation within spaces of criminal networks (Garay-Salamanca and Salcedo-Albarán, 2012), the challenge persists in linking locally informed empirical analysis with the global networked spaces of transnational flows (Hall, 2013). Furthermore, this research is likely to analyse the local as becoming a part of and absorbing some elements of the transnational, while still belonging to personal, informal and ‘local’ spheres of analysis. The local then may be studied in the context of (dis-)organised violence related to non-state criminalised groups which act both locally and globally (Benítez Manaut, 2018). Indeed, “it is at the local level that organized crime manifests itself as a tangible process of activity” (Hobbs, 1998, p. 408).

Following Sheppard’s reflexion on positionality, informed by both feminist, as well as critical and human geography scholarships (2002), it seems relevant to emphasise how ‘the local’, connected within the transnational, appears beyond network analysis, as well as within the “tyranny of distance and particularity of place” (Ley, 2004, p. 152). Drawing on the work of Castells and Latour on networks, Sheppard calls for a wider attention to the asymmetries of power within networked systems (2002, p. 323). He suggests that the geographical aspect of “positionality is a way of capturing the shifting, asymmetric, and path-dependent ways in which the futures of places depend on their interdependencies with other places” (2002, p. 308). In this deeply relational approach, as recognised by the author, he recalls the influence of Doreen Massey and her interconnectedness of places, as products of social interactions, as well as positionalities (after Sheppard, 2002, p. 319). As pointed to by Massey, a place “cannot be adequately understood without considering the complex positionalities that link people and places with one another and that create heterogeneity in a place because different residents are positioned differently” (quoted by Sheppard, 2002, p. 319). For this study, the local, through the lens of positionality, forms a bridge between localities (physical, networked and imagined), and the people located within them. The focus of the following section therefore will be placed in a ‘local community’.

For the purpose of this research, the ‘local’, as opposed to the static and stable is considered in a two-fold manner; firstly, as a theoretical stance (presented in this section), and secondly, as a bond intuitively known by those belonging to the local in a physical or imagined sense (as seen in the case of local community further in this chapter, as well as in empirical research in field). Among others, Ley’s assessment of tangible spaces shares the perspective of the local and the global frameworks as useful for understanding the local and the global processes across the borders of the state and non-state (2004, p. 152). This perspective of the local embedded in and interconnected with the global supports the vision from the locality of Paloxpan, within a framework of transnational flows of illicit substances, people and arms, as mentioned in the local context examined in Chapter Three.

The presented perspective on the local intends to challenge the ‘traditional’ binary division between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’. In words of Ley, “... the local is communitarian, authentic, closed, static, nostalgic, defensive (but ultimately defenceless) and the site of ethnic, sexual, regional and other fragmentary identities. Culture is located in the locality, economy in the global” (2004, p. 155). To counter critiques regarding the ‘local’ vs. ‘international’ as a “Eurocentric” lens of analysis (Massey, 1999), the approach towards the ‘local’, employed here, may be constituted by a hybrid fusion of both at the local level, as well as deeply embedded in a non-Western scholarship (AlSayyad, 2001). In particular, it may be the local, contextual and subjective form of knowledge creation which provides the perspective ‘from below’, as it is shown in the further analytical part of this thesis, chapters four to six. Moreover, reflexive inquiry while conducting the research *with* local partners forms a central part of the local approach (Heron and Reason, 2006; Savin-Baden and Major, 2010). Ley concludes that the differences between the local and the global under the transnational paradigm become blurred, and his standpoint indicates that meanings (cultural, social and political) are settled in between the local and the global (2004, p. 155). In this sense, both Mac Ginty and Ley address the problematic risk of romanticisation of the local (Mac Ginty, 2008), with a view “to rescue locality from the communitarian, traditional and contained status it labours under” (Ley, 2004, p. 155). In the same tone, he opposes another dichotomy of the ‘universal global’ (“spaces of sameness”) and the local as inherently plural (“spaces of difference”) (p. 154). In sum, it is important to acknowledge that ‘the local’ is never purely ‘local’ and it is not only fragmented and mixed, but is also questioned by the local communities themselves.

Lastly, one may wonder whether there is still a 'place' for creating the 'local'. In the urban context, the meaning of local is often discussed in a context of movement, as a product of transnational flows of migration and displacement (Ley, 2004, p. 162). "Produc[ing] locality" through patterns of rural-urban migration (Scambary, 2013, p. 1947) provides an example of how macro-processes shape the local. James Scambary explains how rural migrants reproduce their conflicts within urban spaces (2013), drawing his macro-level analysis from the local urban complex "spaces of vulnerability" (a term owed to Neil Smith, 1996). While this knowledge production is focused on potential policy recommendations and tangible solutions, the approach concludes in terms of elusive macro-scale processes, in contrast to suggestions by Moxham and Carapic (2013). In the end, the moment one becomes 'local' often remains intangible as part of the process of arriving to a new place. This challenges problematic separation between the "local residents" and the newcomers (Harroff-Tavel, 2010, p. 338), yet it forms a part of community creation, which is central to the subsequent section of this chapter.

This opening section has introduced a preliminary understanding of the local dimension for both the community and the research. Rather than denying that place matters, it examined the intangible notion of a networked and relational local level of analysis. It showed that the local may be simultaneously immersed within the transnational. It also reviewed the local in the literature to prepare for future findings from the field and a transformative relationship between a researcher and the researched. Importantly, it forms a foundational stage to contribute to the construction of an analytical framework (see Chapter Two). It also provides a preliminary step to the conceptualising of 'local community', to which the following also theoretical section is dedicated.

3. Local community

The main purpose of this section is to introduce the notion of the 'local community' in order to provide the thesis with some definitional limits to the object of the study. The local community is interpreted here as a fluid, relational and dynamic entity, not automatically embedded in one 'place'. Among its main components is a shared understanding of the ways in which its members create relationships in the public sphere. In other words, a subjective, culturally and socially driven understanding of how people

relate one to another and what is actually appropriate or not in certain circumstances, may represent the core of a 'local community'. Yet it is relevant to remind the reader here that maintaining a flexibility of this shared interpretation is essential. This relational understanding of a local community remains the basis of a further interpretation of the object of this study, namely the interactions among its members and non-members, which will interest Chapter Two and in particular the analytical framework of this thesis.

The local community matters, in that the field research is embedded in the locality at the periphery of Paloxpan, Veracruz, yet its relational aspect is the core of the mechanisms people use to cope with the everyday violence surrounding them. A combined presentation of these types of possible strategies, from avoidance to everyday resistance, will be drawn along the spectrum between adaptation and contestation, and form the centre of the analytical framework (see Chapter Two). Yet it is assumed the coping strategies work thanks to, and are fuelled by communication, and in turn, create some sort of coexistence within the community. These forms of coping and communicating are further revised in analytical part of the thesis (chapters four to six), and in the end are brought together in a form of persistence (Chapter Six).

Prior to that, local community represents a relational entity whose members understand the ways in which they relate to each other without explicit acknowledgement of these rules. This study does not expect the community to act as a separated or unified entity, but understands it as a context for its members to act with their own agency. It matters as a site of further research in the field and predominantly, as a subjectively outlined entity, with self-defined boundaries. It is also created by a mutual (and thus not exclusive to the researcher) process of knowledge generation, where community's experiences are understood through a dialogue between the 'researched' community (*veracruzanos* living in the periphery of Paloxpan) and a scholar (me). Therefore, it is important to identify that rather than being fixed, the community boundaries are constantly being created and recreated in processes of negotiation and contestation. The ambivalence of their conceptualisation remains at the centre of a notion of 'greyness', used here as a main metaphor of imprecise community limits and further examined in a separated subsection.

In essence, the notion of a community is based on the collective, as opposed to individual empowerment. Thus, in the context of insecurity and uncertainty related to transnational

organised crime networks, (which will be elaborated upon in Chapter Three), both criminal/counter-illicit as well as violent/non-violent actions are rooted within communities and cannot be studied and comprehended out of them. A binary between ‘them’ as opposed to ‘others’, although essential for community creation, may be reshaped by experienced violent events, as shown in a following subsection on grey zones.

Although the process of defining ‘local community’ conceptually starts in the present section, it is open towards the research in field, which is expected to reshape the previous premises of this study. Chapter Three elaborates on the community members with whom this research in the field took place. At the same time, it is crucial to identify the community’s external and internal spheres, and hence its boundaries. In this, it seems a truism to acknowledge the basic pre-condition for the existence of the community, namely that it is different from the perspectives of an outsider and insider. Moreover, among its members are also differences in the perception of boundaries from within. In line with a reflexive inquiry, this study recognises the subjectivity of a researcher in acquiring a macro- and micro-level perspective on a community in a context of insecurity (Macbeth, 2001; Kurowska and Tallis, 2013; Cousin, 2010). It is vital to question the position of the researcher, in order to be aware of the range of limitations which studying the ‘local community’ provides. Hence it is anticipated that perceptions of defence mechanisms, ‘normality’ and actual meanings of silence and different forms of communication, are differently understood from the ‘local’ and ‘external’ perspectives. In sum, it is sensible to identify only a limited possibility of comprehending the local community, and that this interpretation remains influenced by the researcher’s own background and preconditions (Savin-Baden and Major, 2010). At the same time, an image of the insecure community from outside, and the way it is interpreted, is rarely constructed from inside. Conversely, a reading from outside often seems to predominate in violent conflict settings. It is crucial thus to study all possibly available forms of communication that come from within violent conflict zones, bearing in mind their plural and often contradictory qualities. These will be presented briefly as a part of framing this research analytically (Chapter Two) and explored in more detail in Chapter Five, following the fieldwork.

It is a challenge for an IR scholar to reflect on anything other than the ‘international’ community as a starting point from which to study reactions to organised violence. Traditionally, it has been an area of an interest for sociology, urban and migration studies,

as well as anthropology (for example, Malešević, 2010; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002), whereas in IR, the focus of inquiry has been placed on the ‘international’ rather than ‘local’ community²⁶. However, this research interest in addressing the local community stems from the recognition of the on-the-ground hybrid agency in a space between the local and international (Jabri, 2013), constituted in a context-dependent, yet only apparently narrow sense. It therefore employs elements from diverse disciplines to categorise the local sense of the researched community.

As mentioned above, rather than the ‘local’, ‘international communities’ have prevailed in a main focus of the discipline, and the on-the-ground approach has instead been heavily contested as either non-representative for IR theory and practice (Crawford, 2009) or, more recently, as embedded in the colonial, despite pretending to belong to post-liberal narrative (Chandler, 2015). It may also be argued that it seems to have become a tendency to analyse the local communities of the ‘Others’, to recall the inclination of early anthropological insight as a colonial approach (Cairns, 2013). At the same time, according to the critique of knowledge creation, “hidden transcripts” are unknown and not likely to be captured due to their element of informality and coded meaning which makes sense exclusively to the community members (Scott, 1990; Little, 1993; Scott, 1993).

For studies on conflict and violence, addressing the local community is far from intending to speak on behalf of their members (Jones and Rodgers, 2011). To the contrary, it is to make an attempt to speak *with* them through the reciprocal process of enquiry and then to better understand relations within the conflict environment from a bottom-up perspective (Parashar, 2013; Heron and Reason, 2006). For the purpose of this study, it is also valid to learn from community experiences, as it is assumed that the micro-dynamics of violent processes are of at least equal importance as the macro-flows and processes. Following John Darby, the “superstructural reasons for the decline in violence [exist]. The fundamental causes lie within the communities” (Darby, 1986, p. 168).

²⁶ For each appearance of the ‘local community’, the ‘international community’ appears ten times as a title of an article in selected eight academic journals on international studies, security and peace and conflict (Millennium: Journal of International Studies, Journal of Peace Research, Peacebuilding, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Global Change, Peace and Security, Cooperation and Conflict, Security Dialogue and Review of International Studies).

This study involves a variety of ways in which *emotions* and *experience* contribute to the scholarship interested in the relational sphere as a fundament of reactions to violence in overlapping peace and violent settings. However, prior to examining how people *know about* and *live in* violent settings, it is valid to ask who the subjects of these actions are. For this purpose, both anthropology and feminist scholarships are recognised in their emphasis on ‘ordinary people’ beyond collateral and “background” positions (Nordstrom and Martin, 1992; Sylvester, 2013).

Local communities therefore, while potentially both imagined and physically experienced, are symbolically constructed and understood (Green, 1995). Symbols, inter-subjectively understood, categorise people while considering their group belonging, hence their constitutive element of an identity, as a main element to define community boundaries (Nordstrom, 2004). This section of the research has no intention to recognise a community as a static entity, despite its identity or status in time-and-space continuity – quite the opposite. A symbol is ambiguous and flexible (Turner, 1967). Furthermore, transformation of symbols as agents distributing meanings, historically and culturally rooted, is crucial to collective identity development, hence the formation of community relationships.

Together with the subjective interpretation of symbolic community construction, it is central to recognise anthropological input to understanding community relationships in the context of violent conflicts (Harris, 1972). It becomes especially visible in ‘ethnographic turn’ in IR (Ratelle, 2013) as well as beyond it (Vrasti, 2008), in developing an empathic approach in IR and lastly, in rescuing a sense of empiricism for IR as a discipline, in line with Vrasti’s critique of the ethno-perspective in the field (2008). Indeed, for this research, an ethnographic element forms a relevant, participative method of inquiry from within a local community (see Chapter Three). Regardless of the rightly contested superficial application of ethnographic elements to IR scholarship, Vrasti’s article avoids suggesting more thoughtful (and thus deeper) engagement in the everyday community experience of violence (2008). To take this argument further, this study develops a perspective on and is embedded in the ‘community’; rather than ‘giving a voice’ to ‘ordinary’ people, as prominently questioned by Spivak (Landry and MacLean, 1996). To follow Vrasti again, such a reflexive tool of inquiry (2008, p. 291) raises a question on the political site of academic engagement in community settings, considering the

asymmetry of power relations within a research process (Jabri, 2013). Vrasti is right to detect limitations to the superficial engagement and the political, social and other responsibilities that it may imply for the community (2008). It is pertinent here to stress the methodological importance of the continuous, as opposed to superficial, engagement within the 'field' (which Chapter Three discusses). Bearing in mind the critique of the ethnographic elements in IR as inefficient and counter-productive to the discipline, this research approach is located at a distance from such intra-disciplinary debates. Unlike Vrasti's concluding request to carry on with the ethnography of the discipline (2008), this study implements ethnographic elements in its method, taking into consideration their potential challenges. Nonetheless, the hereby presented approach towards the 'local community' as a subject of analysis draws advantage from a range of inter-disciplinary insights.

Therefore, taking into consideration anthropological insights on embodiment, as a simultaneously emotional and rational reception of violent reality received both in physical and mental ways (for example, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002), it appears sensible to recall "affective communities" as entities, which take into consideration the political foundation of emotions in a subjective perception of security (Hutchison, 2013). In this sense, emotions as integrated elements of an embodiment of trauma and social suffering consist in important elements of the reflexive and relational understanding of community in violent contexts. Thus, an interpretation of emotion goes beyond that of perception, as the latter may be located under the purely subjective format of an individual's reception of reality (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008). In contrast, emotions are interpreted as formed through and in relation to thoughts (Cates, 2003). Following critical studies on security, emotions "not only represent a particular feeling or sensibility but also actively shape the world around us and the bodies of those that populate it" (Åhäll and Gregory, 2013, p. 117). To recall the feminist influence in IR, "to be politically meaningful a study would then need to demonstrate, empirically or conceptually, what exact role emotions play in the issues at stake" (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008, p. 134). Whether positive or negative, in this sense emotions are subjects of interest in relation to their effect on community relationships, and as reactions to experienced violence. As an example, the formation of an 'emotional glue' is provided, which may attach groups to a word, in a process of communicating words used in security discourses, in relation to their collective reception (Solomon, 2013).

As a closing reflection on emotions with reference to the ‘local community’, this study aims to add to the understanding of reactions to insecurity and uncertainty, insofar as they are affected by un- and conscious factors. The research demonstrates an interest in “what emotions do” (Åhäll and Gregory, 2013, p. 117) in communities within violent settings. In particular, it examines the role of fear, and silence as a potential reaction to it (Chapter Four), and the concept of ‘grey communities’ in a further subsection of this chapter. Nevertheless, this study does not focus exclusively on fear, but rather remains open to a range of different emotions to be discovered as having influence on reactions to violence.

Although with the following different meaning from the critical stance presented above, problem-solving and policy-oriented literature also uses the concept of local community widely. For example, a ‘community safety’ approach is a common one, especially among those in urban areas which are policy-oriented. As grounded in crime prevention and reduction paradigms, planning safer communities lie at the heart of urban policymaking discourse, which draws on potentially predictable circumstances (Marlow and Pitts, 1998). Such a “partnership approach to community safety” expresses an explicit purpose to become an applicable community safety agenda, as a suggestion for a government policy (Paylor, 1998, p. 176). This angle may be also situated in accordance with traditional criminology, as well as public health approaches to communities affected by insecurity and violence (Krug et al., 2002; UNODC and UN-HABITAT, 2009). In contrast to these examples, this research however does not pretend to solve the issue of community safety but rather, it adds to a further understanding in how community members, relationally embedded in the local community, respond to violence in their daily lives.

Local community also remains a consideration of urban and landscape planners, as well as architects, within a dialogue with social sciences, and sociology in particular. In this sense, the urban community might be considered in the geographic, physical terms of a ‘place’ or, conversely, as spaces which may be socially and politically created. For this reason, it is interesting to recall the concept of “communities of interest and attachment”, rather than of a “place” (Ziller, 2004, p. 465). The author’s definition of a community, influenced by Peter Willmot, involves its formation by “people who have things in common”, which may be “categorised as territory, interests and/or attachments” (Ziller, 2004, p. 467). Inspired by sociological thought, among others the influence of Robert Putnam, the

author introduces 'interest' as a dominant category in constructing people's identities within certain communities. This evokes Putnam's idea of creating cooperative links between people, which he famously called 'social capital', converting it into a common reference to linkages of interests and needs, which enhance community cooperation through collective action (Putnam, 1993), transforming it into a "social glue", otherwise critiqued for example by Radcliffe (2004, p. 517). This 'universalistic' view of "civic involvement and social solidarity" (Putnam, 1993, p. 3) finds the 'community of interests' located in the tradition of the Enlightenment, with a predictive purpose of widely applicable roles across a diversity of cultures and societies. Rather than interests or identities, this study views the common understanding of how to relate with each other and what is appropriate or not as a type of a "glue", functioning in public at a local level. However, this does not unify its members in terms of their needs or interests, neither does it assume their trust to each other (Radcliffe, 2004, p. 519).

In contrast, it can be interpreted that Petersen also employs the rational-choice approach towards 'local community' in a conflict environment (2001). He addresses a community as a predictable entity, considering a division between 'rebels' and 'non-rebels' as a form of "choice", and categorises individuals as those apt to "mov[e] across a set of multiple possible choices" (2001, p. 8). Despite an attempt to draw on the psychological factors having a role in a violent conflict, Peterson recognises the rational choice and game theory impact in his scholarship. Furthermore, his romanticised representation of a 'community' involves a spectrum of strong and weak groups, considering 'risk' and 'solidarity' as main incentives for involvement in violent action (2001, p. 18). In this sense, his perspective is nearer to the sociological insight of Malešević on social bonds, ideology and loyalty, as the most relevant elements of 'social glue' provoking involvement in organised violent action at the micro-group level (2010).

Given the diverse literature perspectives on local community, this study approaches the concept as a relational and process-oriented, fluid and dynamic entity. This enables further approximation to the 'real' community of the periphery of Paloxpan while in Mexico. The local community as understood here is the one formed by a common understanding of the ways in which its members relate to each other. Despite the predominant role of relationships, the empirical field is embedded in a particular place of Paloxpan, Veracruz, which Chapter Three will refer to in detail. In turn, the following subsection continues

with the conceptual approach and sheds light on ambiguities in delimiting community boundaries. It will explore possible meanings of ‘grey zones’, as metaphors of the local community border areas in violent surroundings. In this, it adds to the effort of framing this research analytically, as seen in Chapter Two.

3.1. Grey communities

This subsection elaborates on the notion of ‘greyness’ within a community under violent threat. It is again a theoretical approximation which guides the conceptual fundamentals of this study, but it was further encountered in the field, as a very real aspect of the community. The purpose of employing this ambiguous term stems from a premise of the plasticity of the local insecure communities. ‘Greyness’ is proposed as a metaphor of the rather blurred and unrecognised, somewhat non-obvious differences between community members through their interactions, especially from an outsider’s view. In this sense, it aims at challenging the external, usually rigid assessment of the inside-community under violent threat. It thus serves as a metaphor of non-absolutist differences between members and non-members of a community (hence community boundaries), comprehended as such from an outsider’s perspective. As a consequence, the ‘grey zone’ is used as a supplementary conceptual tool in further parts of the thesis, in particular in constructing the analytical framework, as well as a very empirical aspect of the local community. Prior to this, it supports a conceptual framing of the local community.

This subsection also connects with Chapter Two, where relational understanding of the local community entails exploring ‘actions’ – the daily practices in which community members take part – and therefore involves creation of ‘grey’ inter-actions between them and the exterior. ‘Greyness’, in addition to making a reference to the community blurred boundaries, explores the everydayness of emotions embodied in a violent context, as well as elaborating on coping mechanisms as reactions to them. In this, grey zones support responding to these study central research questions:

- How do people respond to everyday *violences*?
- How do they communicate amid silence?

in that this allows the non-obvious delineation of the lived, relational and everyday experiences of potential violence.

One of the main illustrations of greyness, that of blurred differences between victim–perpetrator–witness, is addressed by a broad scope of the literature. Given the dissimilarities overlapping these terms, this puzzle is tackled in the current, as well as in a further section of this chapter, focused on ‘everydayness’. On the one hand, Kaldor and Duffield situate the grey (rather than a black-and-white division) among distinctive indicators between the “new” and the “old” types of conflicts (Kaldor, 2006; Duffield, 2001), where the categories of “friend”, “brother” and “enemy” become similar or even interchangeable (Vigh, 2006). On the other hand, anthropology scholarship draws on ‘everyday violence’ and its continuity in peace times, as further exemplified in the next section (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002; Nordstrom, 2004). Whereas the continuum between ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ *violences* has been rightfully drawn, through unpacking connections among acts of symbolic, political and state violence, as shown in the example of sexual violence in a revolutionary account (Roy, 2008), this study moves beyond the connection between extraordinary-usual forms of violence in times of peace and conflict (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002; Bourgois, 2001). Instead, it contributes to an understanding of the complexities and dynamics of the continuity of peace within a violent environment (Darby, 1986; Mac Ginty, 2006).

In this sense, this research reflects on a number of grey zones, which form the main characteristic of an observed reality. Firstly, its philosophical origins are taken into account, recognising Primo Levi’s undefined distinction between victims and perpetrators under the dehumanising conditions of extreme violence (Levi, 2002; also Nordstrom and Martin, 1992). Further, blurred boundaries between the ‘legal’ and ‘illicit’ (of criminalised acts), and the ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ (of communities) translate into the ambiguity of greyness as the concept here employed. On the one hand, this subsection introduces grey collectives, living in the relativity of criminalised group boundaries. On the other, it presents greyness as spaces ‘in-between’ the dichotomies presented above. Greyness in this sense is neither an absolutist nor a relativist metaphor for a violent-peaceful reality. However, it engages in different-from-rational logic, offering an attempt at further understanding of collective and individual actions under conditions of extreme threat. As a result, grey zones of meanings are tackled in a third place in this subsection.

In this sense, simultaneous coexistence between violence and non-violence (and hence blurred boundaries between peace and conflict) form a relevant background for

understanding the ‘greyness’ of communities. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois emphasise, the identification of a connection between the “normal and abnormal times” is crucial for their understanding (2002, p. 20). Put differently, violent acts cross over conflict and peaceful times, making any dissimilarities between both ever more indistinctive. As already mentioned, through the lens of anthropology, this phenomenon is evoked as a ‘continuity of violence’ in post-conflict settings (Bourgois, 2001; Manz, 2009). In this sense, Franco Basaglia’s concept of “peacetime crimes” – *crimini di pace* – pictures a direct relationship between war- and peacetime violence (after Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002, p. 21). “Peacetime crimes suggests the controversial possibility that war crimes are merely ordinary, everyday crimes of public consent applied systematically and dramatically in the extreme context of war” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002, p. 20). It is worth reminding that, without pretending to relativise ‘war crimes’, their categorisation seems to depend on their recognition by the state authorities or international community, rather than actual harm to the population. Particular forms of violence do not need to be labelled as a part of violent conflict to become extreme. Both organised crime and terrorist violent actions exemplify the above statement in various regions of Mexico, as Chapter Three depicts.

Again in accordance with anthropological scholarship, it is the ‘normalisation’ of violence that contributes to the coexistence of “hidden links” between war- and peacetime (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002, p. 21). It is pertinent to emphasise that both violent and peaceful acts, whether systematic or not institutionalised, are rooted in everyday routine – in their somehow ‘known’ character and potential repetitiveness. In this sense, a starting point for a researcher as a community outsider is shaped by an intention to understand the simultaneous coexistence between violence and peace, and thus conflict and cooperation as not always mutually exclusive categories (Martin et al., 2011). Finally, it is the presence of organised criminalised networks which provokes ambiguity in terms of the greyness between the ‘licit’ and the ‘illicit’, together with peace and violence (Nordstrom, 2004). The uncertainty of living under criminalised threat leads to the grey spaces of coexistence and potential survival in between violent and peaceful times. Chapter Four alludes to these in further detail, which emerged following the fieldwork.

In sum, the coexistence between conflict and cooperation sheds important light on the understanding of the grey community. Though it is neither exclusive nor unique to

genocide, the ambiguity of fundamental values (as a structural aspect of genocide) contributes to the awareness of limitations in understanding its extreme conditions. As a philosophical base, Primo Levi's essay on the 'Grey Zone' focuses on the extreme living conditions of Nazi concentration camp prisoners as a structural condition (2002). The author provokes the reader to reveal their external position in front of the community. He divides insiders and outsiders of the community according to awareness of the existence of a 'grey zone'. For those living inside the camp, frontiers between community members are different to those who view it from the outside, from which perspective the victim/perpetrator distinction appears well-defined. Levi points out that an outsider's desire strictly to categorise prisoners (that is, community members) responds to the expectation of every newcomer to the Lager to unpack the inside cohort and categorise them into enemies or friends. Levi challenges this judgmental process while revealing problematic frontiers within the communities, where the black-and-white categories overlap (also, Ingelaere et al., 2013; Nordstrom and Martin, 1992). Again, these circumstances are not unique to genocide, whose structural conditions incite fundamental values being relativised in other violent conflicts and conditions of extreme insecurity (Ingelaere et al., 2013).

For Levi, the systematic dehumanising of the work camp translates into extremely unequal power asymmetries of interpersonal relations inside the community (2002). He argues that human dignity is affected both inside and outside the extreme conditions of work and concentration camp. "The ascent of the privileged, not only in the Lager but in all human coexistence, is an anguishing but unending phenomenon: only in utopias is it absent" (2002, p. 85). This leads to the problematic concept of dignity of human existence, challenged by not only violent, but also unequal power relations (Bauman, 2004; Raphael and Cervantes, 2011). The concept of dehumanisation may thus shed light on a situation of those whose dignity is denied. This remains a central point of Levi's essay, as he challenges the judgmental position of 'outsiders':

...the hybrid class of the prisoner-functionary constitutes its armature and at the same time its most disquieting feature. It is a grey zone, poorly defined, where the two camps of masters and servants both diverge and converge. This grey zone possesses an incredibly complicated internal structure and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge. (Levi, 2002, p. 83).

In this context, the notion of greyness challenges the common statement found in the holocaust and genocide literature that those privileged to be able to stare in from the outside are unlikely to comprehend the extreme choices to be made inside. Yet being insiders does not guarantee understanding of their condition. In fact, the notion of a 'grey zone' of members and non-members of a community suggests that both insiders and outsiders may exist among community members. Faced with the choice to save one life or another, a dignified death becomes the only apparent option (Milosz, 1946). From a distance, the most explicit (yet not static) division seen from outside may be one of guilt, thus between a murderer and victim. This is possibly the most critical illustration of Levi's 'grey zone', where dehumanised conditions transform the victims into perpetrators at once²⁷.

The grey zone concept adds to the understanding of blurred lines between victim and perpetrator within the grey community boundaries encountered in my fieldwork in Paloxpan, Mexico. The term challenges the usual state authority and media narrative, which normalises the dehumanisation of *barrios*' inhabitants as well as the criminalisation of victims, in particular since the declaration of 'war on drugs' in 2006. The following paragraphs tackle the use of the term in diverse literatures embedded in Latin American contexts.

Unlike Auyero's account of the grey zones between state authorities and victims vs. the agents of collective violence in a context of food looting in Argentina, 2001 (2007), this research draws on the blurred boundaries between government officials, criminal organisations, and 'ordinary' society members (see the local context, Chapter Three). It acknowledges a broad literature on relationships between the 'licit' and the 'illicit' (Hall, 2013), particularly the intersections between criminal organisations and state authorities in Latin American contexts (for example, Garay-Salamanca and Salcedo-Albarán, 2012), which Auyero recognises as "grey zones of politics" (2007, p. 36). In this sense, used here, 'grey zone' as a concept is applied to too rigid dichotomies existing under violent circumstances, and "highlights ambiguity and the lack of clear-cut boundaries between

²⁷ Levi draws on the example of 'Special Squads': those prisoners of the concentration camp, victims themselves, whose simultaneous position of perpetrators provided them with extra food, enough for short-term survival. In very different circumstances, a similar power inequality translated into a system of privileges, transforms former informal immigrants into border officers, who cruelly prevent future migrants from crossing the frontier between two states (Levi, 2002).

different areas of the social space” (Auyero, 2007, p. 32). This conceptual chapter interprets grey zones as those manifested between the rigid categories of perpetrator, victim and witness. Whereas I acknowledge the possibility of state officials possessing the role of criminal agent, its focus is on local, not-organised people, rather than on state authorities²⁸. Together with the grey communities, the grey zones of meaning may be found; when behind silence appears a disturbing noise. As further seen in Chapter Four, silence has the potential to capture the grey zone between reaction and apparent indifference; under the ambiguity of induced fear and everyday uncertainty.

Greyness is exemplified by the insecure context involving silence. Firstly, Linda Green examines ways in which systematic violence alters the everyday routines of a local community through the infliction of “fear, the arbiter of power: invisible, indeterminate and silent” (1995, p. 105). Her study of how people actually understand, perceive, make sense of and finally ‘live through’ fear sheds light on its consequences for community life. Here, ‘grey silence’ is in my view, an ambivalent reaction to fear, the one hidden behind the curtain of apparent everyday calm. To Green, silence is understood as an inter-individual strategy to cope with everyday fear, “yet silencing is a powerful mechanism of control enforced through fear” (1995, p. 118). Such top-down silencing is analysed further to the fieldwork in Paloxpan, in Chapter Four.

Another exemplification of an enigmatic silent community under fear is found in Michael Taussig’s account of isolation in a crowd, fear-induced imagination, providing a paralysis and obsession with survival (2002). His grey zone is situated in the middle of silence and screams, where nothing happened but at any moment there is a possibility that something may occur. This likelihood is what makes a difference for day-to-day human existence, demonstrated within the grey zone of “silent isolation of unknowable or ambiguous significance” (Taussig, 2002, p. 172). The author presents common circumstances for journalists who cover accounts of state or non-state violence, facing a contradictory requirement to remain visible in a public sphere, while hiding themselves and their families in order to survive (Taussig, 2002; Becerra, 2013; Article 19, 2014). His account influences my frame of invisibilities, as shown further to the research in the field in Chapter Five.

²⁸ This was confirmed by the post-fieldwork reality in Veracruz, to which a further analytical part of this thesis alludes (chapters four to six).

This subsection also recognises the contribution of a body of literature on greyness in relation to socially and politically created spaces, in particular those embedded in urban environments. This is a case of ‘grey spacing’, introduced by Yiftachel in a context of the construction of ‘illegal’ houses as a response to Israeli state repression of the nomadic community of Palestinian Bedouins (2012). This process is identified by the author in terms of the creation of informal urban power relations, and provides an illustration of an action emerging “from below”, although paradoxically induced by the central authorities (Yiftachel, 2012, p. 152). “Grey spacing” means, therefore, “‘producing’ social relations, [and] by-passes the false modernist dichotomy between ‘legal’ and ‘criminal’, ‘oppressed’ and ‘subordinated’, ‘fixed’ and ‘temporary’” (Yiftachel, 2012, p. 153).

The author only appears to have the spatial aspect of greyness as his central concern. While using acts of Bedouin resistance to Israeli authorities as an exemplification of grey spacing in constructing ‘illegal’ houses or maintaining collective memory, in the centre of his analysis remains the human, as an object of deliberate grey spacing in the urban margins. Thus, he alerts the reader to the main purpose of such “spacing”: to render marginalised people ‘invisible’ under the grey curtain of uncertainty and “permanent temporariness” (Yiftachel, 2009, p. 90; see also: Alsayyad and Roy, 2006). This making of less privileged people grey, and as a result less visible, remains a convenient practice of the authorities or other elites. On a different scale, these dynamics recall the “wasted” people of Bauman (2004), the excluded, impoverished growing mass of those outside the current forms of capitalism, “unnecessary” for profit production. Grey spacing does not have to refer to physical places. To the contrary, three resistant actions, identified by Yiftachel, refer to creating some form of autonomy while preserving collective memory as a part of officially denied identity; developing a mental attitude of patience and survival; and finally, creating some form of autonomous “political organization and mobilization” (2012, p. 164). As seen also in Chapter Five, people may (informally) use the spectrum of invisibilities at their convenience, which add to their ability to persist with adverse living conditions.

Drawing on the intersections between community members – their actions – and places they act in, grey spaces are shaped by the interpretation people provide them with. Contrary to their paradoxical nomenclature of “gap spaces” (Hoffman, 2011), they are filled with the meaning given through the interactions between local and other – national

and global – actors. They also represent an example of urban creativity of the apparently powerless, who “make the spaces work” under conditions of continuous uncertainty caused by occasional conflict and chronic violence, seen in Hoffman’s account as a form of labour (2011). In addition to the illustration of how local communities are formed, grey spaces represent crucial examples of the power relations in the intersection between apparently obvious demarcations. In the end, the ‘grey spacing’ reflection on making people invisible goes hand in hand with making them silent²⁹. Nonetheless, in the greyness of the process, they manage to accomplish some elements of self-created autonomy (Yiftachel, 2012).

Although the above-explored ambiguity functions as an explanatory instrument, comprehending the grey zone from outside remains challenging. Considering a range of historical examples to learn from, local community as an initial concept supports the construction of this study’s analytical framework which aims at obtaining an insight from within. To employ a grey community as a perspective entails recognising the ambivalence, flexibility and fluctuation of the roles that people enact under violent conflict, as well as the pluralism of interpretations that they provide the violence with (Nordstrom, 2004, pp. 29-30). Although the ‘local community’ is seen here through a lens of relational structure, it also represents a culturally driven understanding of various symbols of communication, which has an impact on the interactions among its members³⁰.

Following the above examination of ‘greyness’ applied to the potentially violent locality, the subsequent section introduces an everyday lens to the relational interpretation of the local community. The everyday dimension of the local community forms a basis for further construction of the analytical framework (Chapter Two). As the forthcoming section reveals, the central subject for this research, namely relational responses to potential and real *violences*, actually happen in the everyday, where they are embedded and examined in the local community.

4. Everyday ‘chaos as usual’³¹

²⁹ Chapter Four addresses three forms of top-down silencing identified during the fieldwork.

³⁰ Chapter Three briefly elaborates on this.

³¹ Inspired by Taussig, ‘Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of History as a State of Siege’ (1989), together with Nordstrom, ‘Creativity and Chaos. War on the Front Lines’ (1995, p. 145).

This section examines relational aspects of the ‘everyday’ as a crucial dimension for further understanding of the informal daily practices of community members in a context of chronic insecurity. The central puzzle of this section is to unpack the ‘normalised’ daily routine which continues despite and amid ongoing violence, using the literature across disciplines. In this, this section challenges whether change forms a necessary aspect of the everyday, or violence remains a normalised part of the daily life of the less privileged social groups. While in the field, I trace everyday responses to the potentiality of violence, bearing in mind the possibility of such normalisation. Two categories central to this research – the ‘local’ and the ‘everyday’ – overlap along the way, where everyday practices shape local networks formed by people, spaces and flows. In this, this section prepares to apply the prism of the everyday to study local reactions to *violences*, which formulate the central subject of this inquiry and respond to the core research questions:

- How do people respond to everyday *violences*?
- How do they communicate amid silence?

As the lens of the ‘local community’ (formed by its members, namely for the purpose of this study, unprivileged people at risk) is fundamental to an examination of this relational context, so is the ‘everyday’ routine crucial to understanding the ‘on-the-ground’ interfaces between violence and peace. While the ‘local’ forms a hybrid yet contextual condition connected with place and space, the everyday brings an idea of repetition and regularity, not to say routine. However, it is worth emphasising a potential romanticisation of not only the ‘local’, but also the everydayness of the activities of ‘ordinary’ community members (Mac Ginty, 2008). This study is aware of the challenge of avoiding the idealisation of ‘authentic’ interactions at a day-to-day level; these categories are therefore not interpreted in an absolutist manner.

Studying everyday informal practices in terms of the notion of a response conceived as an action entails the empowerment of a local community as a human collective. In this sense, community reactions to a violent environment are, to use de Certeau’s phrase, “anything but passive” (de Certeau, 1984, p. XXII). To the contrary, hybrid agency is given to them (Jabri, 2013), though not always recognised. The engagement of this thesis with a local community involves its focus on community daily activities, instead of on the phenomenon of violence as such. Chapter Two further explores such response as ‘action’ in relation to coexistence and survival.

While identifying that violence is not automatically followed by change, and that it can represent different meanings to local community members, this section is challenged by the question of how to distinguish 'normality' from 'normalisation', in a sense close to indifference as a reaction to surrounding violence. Put differently, it remains an open question whether the day-to-day routine of unpredictability of a violent environment differs from the local (thus known and 'usual') chaos of a plurality of meanings, within the everydayness of peacetime. Furthermore, potential changes in 'ordinary' people's lives may extend to the aftermath of a conflict, involving the continuity of violent acts; this is recognised by a number of anthropological and other insights (Steenkamp, 2005). Likewise, routine remains present (although unstable) in settings of violent conflict.

Change is neither unusual to everyday practices, nor assumes that violence involves a change to local dynamics (Moser and Rodgers, 2005). Although the intersection between conflict and cooperation, and peace and conflict has been already widely discussed (Mac Ginty, 2006), it is possible that conflict alters the everyday routine of a local community through the infliction of fear. Yet what remains a daily constant is the routine known by local community members, who define it as an element of 'normality'. Routine does not therefore necessarily mean repetitiveness of identical actions. Rather, it involves a regularity of assimilated activities, which may change over time, hence the flexibility of a day-to-day routine. In fact, daily sequences, prompt to respond to dynamic changes, are far from being rigid models. Indeed, it is within this dynamic and fluctuant attitude where the foundation for daily adaptation to changes which violent conflict may represent to the community lies. In this sense again, local everydayness and "everyday transnationality" do not necessarily refer to stability or order – quite the opposite (van Schendel and Abraham, 2005, p. 57). They may involve an apparent unpredictability and 'chaos' in a daily existence of either conflict or non-conflict violent scenarios.

Both culturally specific and universal in a broader sense of human experience, is the sense of 'normality' within a violent environment. As this section suggests, it may be that the 'everyday', as a core element of the inter-subjectively understood 'normality' of usual (and hence known) activities, makes coping with everyday insecurity bearable. Moreover, daily mechanisms and practices created and carried out from below, while overcoming the attempted destruction of normality, become the everyday basis for survival (Darby, 1986).

Furthermore, the routinising by a particular community of commonly acknowledged informal actions for the purposes of survival, is central to the interest of this section. Rather than taking violence as its starting point (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2002; Jütersonke et al., 2009; Beall et al., 2013), this research views these daily practices as interactions among community members, based on flow of information, which potentially allows them to survive and maintain their everyday ‘normality’. Nonetheless, the above statement remains problematic. While the role of information is central within violent settings (Nordstrom, 2004; Levi, 2002), its flow, due to its possible distortion, misunderstanding and manipulation, may not provide either adequate means of communication or forms of survival for those under threat, as “... no barrier is ever without a flaw: information, possibly incomplete or distorted, has a tremendous power of penetration, and some of it always does filter through” (Levi, 2017, p. 41). However, the rumour, joke, silence, and double sense, as well as sometimes purposefully avoiding new sensitive information to be revealed, may affect its value (see chapters four and five).

Whereas IR wonders “what if we think of war [or violent conflict] as experience, as something ordinary people observe and suffer physically and emotionally depending on their locations?” (Sylvester, 2012, p. 483), in areas where no conflict is recognised, the ways in which ‘ordinary’ people face a potentially violent reality have been broadly analysed by criminologists in the ‘traditional’ context of fear of becoming a victim of a violent crime (for example, Stanko, 1990). This potential for violence to occur is understood as an inherent element of reality, contrary to the abnormality that it may represent in terms of violent conflict. Hence the ‘everyday’ is derived from the fact that not only does a stranger become a potential source of fear, but also that closer environments, such as home, neighbourhood or workplace, contribute to the everydayness of spaces where ‘normalised’ violence persists (Stanko, 1990). Rather than known environment as a source of fear, and experience of violence in regular social activities, in other studies the everydayness stems from the overwhelming character of a daily experience of organised crime activities (Taussig, 2002). On the one hand, the presence of organised crime may be both internalised and normalised on a daily basis. On the other, it simultaneously involves the effects of shock as a reaction (Green, 1995). Through their exercise of violence, criminal networks become more visible, exercising brutality and

spreading major fear and terror within the communities. Nordstrom approximates such everyday experiencing of violence in a particularly clear and direct way:

And how does violence feel? As we will see, it feels like existential crisis, like hopelessness, like the loss of the future. It feels like impossible contradictions of resistance with oppression, like the struggle of humanity within terror. Violence is about im/possibility, about the human condition and the meaning of survival. This is why wars are fought with bloodletting, why torture takes place, and why neither violence nor war is limited to the physical carnage of the battlefield. (Nordstrom, 2004, p. 59).

These apparently contradictory feelings about living in violent surroundings provide insight into the everyday. In this, everydayness as a perspective used to view violent settings involves problematic engagement with an *experience* of the local community going through violent conflict (Sylvester, 2013). Instead of suggesting a potentially complete understanding of on-the-ground informal practices, as well as their chronic violent context, this perspective involves a sensitive openness towards community experiences. Thus, while considering a full understanding of ‘the Other’s’ experience an impossible task, I regard it as an open-enough notion of reality reception by the local population.

Consequently, this study focuses on both the emotional and physical reactions to a violent context, employing the notion of embodiment and experience. As mentioned before however, everyday practices are neither stable nor static. Their regular character is what provides them with the everyday realm. Therefore, a process of making a routine out of change consists in everydayness under conditions of chronic violence.

The embodiment of a violent experience refers to integrated physical and psychological internalisation of the effects of violence on an individual. While the human body is a usual target of any violent conflict, their public destruction and disembodiment, spread as a message of terror, may undermine the significance of a person and demonstrate a drive to control the most “human” element (Scheper-Hughes, 2004, pp. 175, 177; also Williams, 2012; Nordstrom, 2004). The way in which human bodies are perceived within violent settings draws on the fundamentals of feminist scholarship, “rejecting the separation of mind and body, reason and emotion” (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008, pp. 126-127), as well as on elements of anthropology where, broadly speaking, embodiment involves “all issues that turn on the interconnections between social relations, institutions, and bodily processes” (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1994, p. 710).

It remains an open question whether violence may become routinised and internalised to the extent of being a norm rather than an aberration (Scheper-Hughes, 2004, p. 175). The author poses a valid question, namely, to whom is 'usual' terror extraordinary? It is suggested that violence becomes everyday and 'normal' to those 'collectively invisible', Bauman's "wasted lives" (2004), those usual and 'ordinary', the poor and less attractive, or simply accidental (Hernández and Smith, 2009).

It is a truism to remember that a process of creating and absorbing the meaning of everyday action is culturally and historically embedded over time. This cultural consciousness is again widely recognised by anthropology, yet similarly present in other scholarships. Thus, bearing in mind the contemporary character of violent forms, it is also important to look at everyday mechanisms from a historical perspective, as the traditional reactions of community members to the violence affecting them hold different meanings when put in a long-term perspective. Finally, it is again worth noting that what the everyday makes 'normal' is different to diverse collectives and individuals.

In this sense, while discussing the sense of 'normality', the purpose of this section is neither to make the notion of violent crime ambiguous, nor to dissolve the responsibility of the perpetrator for their acts. Rather, it is to emphasise that as misrecognised 'normal' social practices form a part of the 'hidden' everyday violence, likewise they create a fundamental part of building peace. Put differently, this research acknowledges the existence of the "hidden transcripts" (Scott, 1990; Mac Ginty and Sanghera, 2012) of non-obvious elements of peace, constructed on an everyday basis in the reality of violent conflict.

Whether it refers to the 'local everyday' or "everyday transnationality" (van Schendel and Abraham, 2005), a day-to-day prism entitles a closer, more tangible perspective by which to understand an apparent chaotic, violent state of affairs. Rather than finding order in 'chaos', the 'everyday' notion allows more detailed and plural understanding of reactions to violence embedded in a context of the 'local' (Nordstrom and Martin, 1992, pp. 261, 269). At the same time, it looks beyond the interpretation of exercising violence as form of communicating and spreading threats. Thus, together with non-Western perspective of understanding, everydayness forms an attempt to gain an insight into usual but 'creative'

peace creation within violent conditions (Nordstrom, 2002). Likewise, this approach to the everyday intends to challenge the twofold narratives on violence, namely, those reinforcing a violent message on the one hand, and presenting resistance on the other (Nordstrom and Martin, 1992, p. 265). As seen in Chapter Two, and in the post-fieldwork analytical part of this thesis (chapters four to six), the aim of this research is to unpack such a dichotomy and look for its alternatives. Furthermore, the everyday perspective stands for an integrated understanding of the present and contextual, taking into account the cultural, historical and social relational structure of the local community. Finally, while linking the emotional, physical and mental aspects of experiencing violence and conflict, it sheds light on the embodiment of suffering, which consists in a starting point from which to analyse the actual reactions and interpretations of violence.

5. Conclusions

This chapter presented a preliminary understanding of the fundamental thesis terms, among them the 'local', the 'community' and the 'everyday' that form a basis for the set of coping mechanisms, presented in Chapter Two, as a part of the analytical framework. These interpretations will be challenged by the future fieldwork and its findings, as the further analytical part of this research examines (chapters four, five and six). The 'local' serves as the foundational perspective that this study acquires, together with the 'everyday' as its specific dimension. Everyday practices as relational responses to the potentiality of violence are embedded in the local community, which is neither unified nor static. Whether violence is normalised or seen as such from the community exterior, remains an open-ended question, as is whether violence may be simultaneously accepted and rejected within the everyday.

In conclusion, this thesis presents the local community as a relational and process-driven entity. As an essentially subjective unit of analysis, it is self-defined and context dependent, known by those who form its part. As a consequence, by *whom* it is constituted is more relevant than *where*. In other words, the relational understanding of 'local community' is formed by the notion of the 'known', and is thus linked with 'normality' as a constitutive subjective state of mind. Moreover, the local community is constructed through relations among its members and non-members, and it forms a not necessarily tangible space among their interactions and relationships. Regardless of this understanding, this space

may be of symbolic character, codified, unspoken and unnoticeable to outsiders. As its meaning is provided by the community members, it is still under question whether communication is a key constituent of the relational character of the space defined within the community limits. In addition, the fact that the community is established within its boundaries implies they are porous, blurred and not precisely defined – in short, grey. It remains an open question whether a sense of belonging to an organised group constitutes a crucial element of its existence. Paradoxically, it is this ambiguity that provides the community with a sense, within its fluid and alterable, yet tangible everydayness, of fear within violent surroundings. The above initial conceptualisation drives the research development towards further exploration of the main object of this study: everyday actions as community response, which are central to the analytical framework, introduced in the following Chapter Two. Also, the above conceptualisation will shape the basis for the empirical research in the locality of Paloxpan, as well as the post-fieldwork part of this study, examined in chapters four to six.

Chapter 2: Creative routes to survival: potential responses to *violences* in Mexico

People find innovative responses to impossible situations not because they are well-trained professionals or particularly gifted. Innovative responses arise because this is their context, their place. The essence of the response is not found so much in what they do but in who they are and how they see themselves in relationship with others. They speak with their lives.

John Paul Lederach (2005)

1. Introduction

This second conceptual chapter introduces an analytical framework which provides the basis for the empirical research in field. This framework's main components consist of hypothetical ways in which people respond to violent context. Referred to as mechanisms of coping, these responses are observed in forms of daily interaction among community members in Paloxpan, Mexico. The framework assumes particular types of everyday strategies which potentially fuel coexistence, and thus survival amid adversity. It draws on Chapter One by using the concepts central to this study, such as the local, the everyday, and the local and grey community. Although this chapter continues framing this thesis conceptually, it also connects with the local community in Veracruz, the empirical context (of insecurity) which will be introduced in Chapter Three. Whereas an everyday response to criminalised violence in a local community is often a matter of urgency, this chapter turns the reader's focus to the creative, conscious and unconscious, and visible and hidden forms of dealing with such 'normality' (see Chapter One). This research is driven by a challenge to learn about forms of navigating potential *violences* – personal, familiar, collective and individual – which have survival as their aim.

These hypothetical coping mechanisms were thus formulated prior to the research in field and function as suppositions to guide the process of responding to the main research questions:

- How do people respond to everyday *violences*?
- How do they communicate amid silence?

Their usefulness, however, will be examined by the fieldwork findings, thereby ensuring the framework remains flexible and open enough to absorb possible shifts according to the future evolution of the empirical work. The framework thus works as an initial formulation of how people *may* respond to the violent everyday, to be verified by the fieldwork as shown in the analytical part of this study (chapters four to six). In this, this

chapter includes a set of hypothetical responses to violence, while remaining open to the process of ‘listening to the field’. This analytical framework supports a dialogic relation between the researcher and ‘the researched’. It also acknowledges the set of biases this study carries to the field, which stems from both the literature it is located in (identified in the current chapter and Chapter One), and the former professional and personal observations and experiences in Mexico³².

This chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, following the introduction, the second section focuses on a brief rationale of the use of coping mechanisms. Section 3 presents the hypothetical coping mechanisms and how they are located in-between contestation and adaptation (Figure 1), as types of response to the violent context. It also briefly defines a conceptual response to violent contexts. The fourth section introduces the framework (Figure 2), which places these categories of response in relation to communication, coexistence and survival. Figures 1 and 2 should be read together, given that they correspond to the same categorisations of response. Occasionally I allude to the ways in which this framework is used in the field, while making reference to the further post-fieldwork chapters four to six of this thesis. However, this chapter remains predominantly conceptual.

2. Rationale of (the use of) coping mechanisms

This section introduces the reasons why mechanisms of coping are essential to this study: in a nutshell, their purpose is to provide the main research questions with hypothetical responses prior to the fieldwork. These main research questions ask, on the one hand, how people respond to ongoing everyday *violences*, and how they communicate amid silence, on the other.

This research investigates possible outcomes for the Mexican population living in a violent climate of uncertainty, built jointly by armed non-state actors and authorities at different government levels³³ (as chapters three and four will examine). Following Chapter One, the

³² As much as I wanted them to disappear by following the path of ‘unlearning’ (Knott, 2014), they remain visible within the framework and in my positionalities (see Chapter Three).

³³ In Mexico, there are three parallel levels at which government operates: federal, state and municipal. Hence the majority of state institutions operate alongside their corresponding, often competing representatives at other levels of authority. In addition, it is worth distinguishing ‘common’ from ‘federal’ jurisprudence, for different types of crime, under the rules of state and federation, respectively.

present chapter continues referring to the local community in a conceptual sense, while preparing the reader for the introduction of the particular fieldwork site, Paloxpan in Veracruz, Mexico in Chapter Three. Nonetheless, this study neither aims to reach a conclusion on a society scale, nor to make an effort towards universalisation of the ways in which Mexicans are resilient. This project stems from the disturbing enquiry into how silenced communities respond to the violent control which interrupts their everyday existence in particular conditions and time: in the urban-rural periphery of Paloxpan, Veracruz, between 2015 and 2016. At the same time, while presenting this framework this study recognises its limitations, thereby following Nordstrom (2002) who asks the vital question: “How responsible, how representation, can any generalisation about death, suffering, and survival, be?” (p. 277).

This section unpacks potential responses to violent criminalised contexts through the dynamic notion of response as an action. In this sense, everyday ‘action’ centres this study on humans and their capacity to re-act and perform a variety of informal practices, while creating a distance from uncompromising labels of perpetrators, victims and witnesses. Within this greyness of overlapping and subjective interpretations of types of actions, survival is acknowledged as their implicit goal in reacting to violent context. Ultimately, this chapter contributes to an alternative to dominant black-and-white discourses focused on violence, criminalised actors and their combat, as well as human rights and preventive approaches operating within rigid notions under legalistic frameworks (see Chapter One).

People ‘on the ground’ are often perceived as current (or potential) victims or perpetrators³⁴. The vast number remaining (and, to use the words of Mexican journalist Marcela Turati, mostly ‘invisible’, after Aristegui, 2014), under a constant risk of becoming the former or latter, are often perceived as being indifferent or co-opted. This research, as seen in Chapter One, stems from the supposition that the scale of greyness – in grey zones – is much wider than the black-and-white dichotomy of victim vs. perpetrator. It challenges such forceful locating of society into these opposing categories. The idea is not that everyone is co-opted or corrupted, or actively resists the use of force derived from the asymmetric power relations frequently enforced on them. Rather, that unprivileged people constantly adapt and negotiate with the current contexts they live in, and lack one unified

³⁴ This dualism is not only particularly visible within government institutions, but is also understandably enhanced by human rights discourses, for example, the human rights civil organisation ‘Centro Prodh’ campaign, ‘Breaking the silence: all together against the sexual torture’ (Centro Prodh, 2014).

strategy to terror-inflicting fear and surrounding uncertainty. Without pretending to undermine the relevance of the scale of harm done to those who inhabit Mexico, this enquiry examines forms of coping with potential and occurring violence in the context of their cultural traditions and as a part of a larger historical context. After Douglas Fry and Carolyn Nordstrom among many, it denies the *inevitability* of use of violence as a reaction or tool (Fry, 2007; Nordstrom, 2004). In this sense, it challenges the violent response as inevitable or automatic, and instead transfers people from the margins to the foreground of interest. Thus, the community's creative routes towards survival represent a predominant focus to this research, offering an alternative to the numerous traditionally used narratives of accounts of violence in Mexico.

Instead of following traditional problem-solving literature which explores requests for improving the rule of law, as well as law enforcement, widening participation, or enhancing institutional performance in Mexico (for example, ICG, 2013; Chabat, 2002), informal coping mechanisms address the way in which people survive, live and continue with their everyday tasks surrounded by violent threat. They provide an alternative to the picture that may be drawn from statistics, surveys or mass media, which despite claiming the universality of the findings, remain incomplete. This derives from a question of representativeness: on the one hand, the numbers offered by a variety of government and non-government institutions are far from trustworthy, and on the other, they aim to capture the national or state-level viewpoint, which remains too broad to gain an insight into a local community perspective (for example, ENVIPE, 2018a; Atlas, 2016)³⁵. Also, the dominant analysis tends to drive their optics towards the 'attractive' society sectors. Yet the informal, everyday, irregular, ambiguous reactions remain insufficiently explored, in particular when displayed by those labelled as unprivileged.

Why does this study centre its focus on responses within *interactions* among community members? Firstly, most people live *by interacting* with others and their local context,

³⁵ National level survey data is often insufficient on what has actually changed through the violence experienced by Mexicans. One example is the nationwide attempt to measure a level of 'fear of becoming a victim' or victimisation itself (through nation- and state-level surveys) by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, INEGI), which was proclaimed as autonomous from the government since 2008. This effort, in form of the national victimisation surveys (*Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública*, ENVIPE), attempts to gain an insight into changes of routine among Mexicans in their daily life, as a result of fear of violent crime or actual aggression. One of the most problematic defects of the surveys is their coverage of places where data is deficient, difficult or insecure to collect. I owe this observation to Mario Arroyo, who collaborated in former surveys prior to ENVIPE, namely *Encuesta Nacional sobre Inseguridad* (ENSI).

whether their relationships are built on proximity or distance, are casual or profound. In the context of *violences*, some look for support from others; others concentrate on close family members. However, a community's eventual recovery from violent episodes takes place within interaction (or while interacting) among its members, which also at times includes a refusal of such contact. This explains the importance of creating meanings, telling stories, and symbolic and ritual coping mechanisms, which even on a small scale may be of significance to people 'on the ground' (Nordstrom, 2002). Likewise, it might be that, subject to traditional and cultural understandings, people may search for collective forms of healing in the aftermath of episodes of physical violence; they may also look for information from others. This is revealed in the forms in which communities get to know about the potentially violent context in which they live. The ways they communicate with each other arguably build the networked relationships which eventually form the basis for mechanisms of coping. This leads to the second part of the rationale of using coping mechanisms as interactive responses to violent context.

The second reason to examine people's interactions is the relational understanding of communication in a particular context and time. Nordstrom rightfully describes how past legends and stories are used in a contemporary violent context as mechanisms critical to survival. They consist in examples, thanks to which, a population experienced in collective organised violence derives an opportunity to "construct social order out of chaos" (Nordstrom, 1995, p. 145). This is one of the main reasons to study formal and informal channels of information within local communities, which may be – as this chapter assumes in the fourth section presenting the analytical framework – critical to survival. The ways in which people gather together and manage information about accounts of violence among community members are the interest of this study. It also asks how they deal with misinformation, and silence as a result of the threat and exercise of brutality. Ultimately, this research wonders how the flow of information becomes lost or misled in communicating under violent conditions³⁶.

³⁶ As I assumed in the pre-fieldwork stage, local level journalism remains vital for public opinion in estimating 'what's known' and how people feel about it. Also, national media gathers information from colleagues 'on the ground', among others. Nonetheless, in Mexico professionals working in local media are among the most vulnerable to abuses of power exercised by authorities and other violent groups. For the rare examples that revealed a case of journalists directly instructed by criminalised organisation on what and what not to cover, see Resillas (2014).

The above section elaborated on mechanisms are central to an examination of the responses to violent context this study focuses on. Further, it provided the rationale by which to consider these everyday forms of coping through interactive relations within a local community. The following section introduces the categories that I suggest are central to framing this research analytically, namely types of hypothetical responses to *violences* which may be encountered in the field.

3. Creative routes to survival: potential responses to *violences*

This section presents potential types of mechanisms by which to cope with the violent context which may be encountered in the field. These categories will be used in the framework for analysis (Section 4 of this chapter) and are here illustrated as negotiated practices, situated between diverse forms of adaptation and contestation, as Figure 1 illustrates below. A separate subsection discusses their conceptual borders (3.1.).

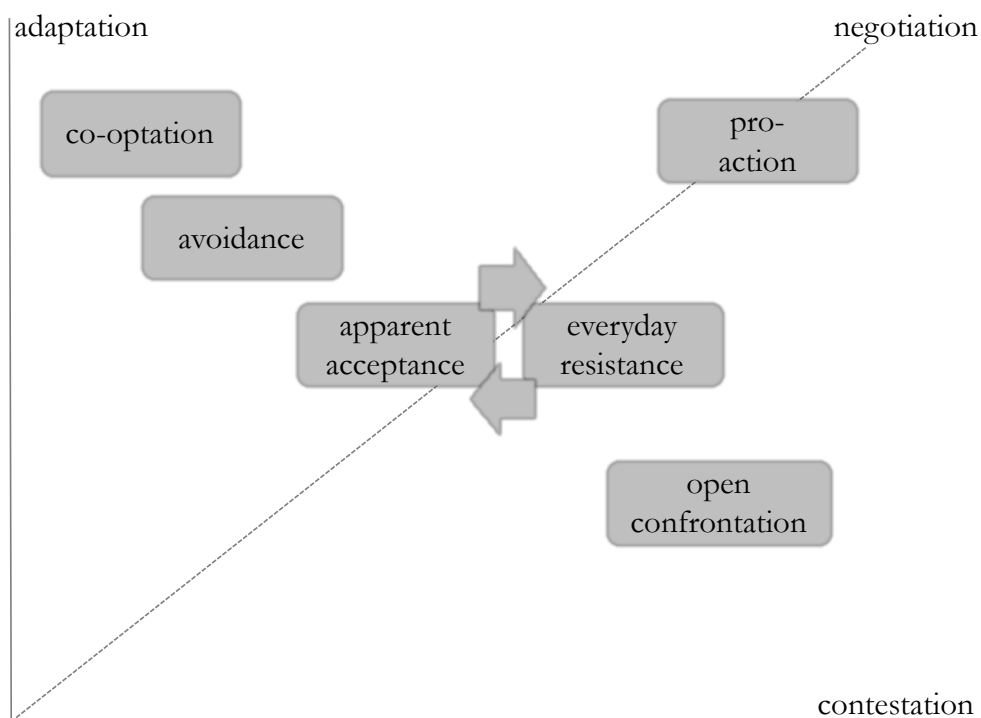


Figure 1. Between adaptation and contestation: hypothetical types of community response to insecurity.

The division between ‘adaptation’ and ‘contestation’ consists in the non-absolutistic difference between the acceptance of violent circumstances as the essence for adaptation,

and opposition to them as the core of contestation. In other words, the adaptation *to* dynamic violent conditions entails a certain degree of accepting them, whereas reaction *against* them denotes their contestation. However, rather than being exclusive these categories overlap (hence the negotiation, illustrated along the dotted line on the above Figure 1). Also, both are active rather than passive, as both adaptation and contestation of power relations – hidden within violent conditions – stem from different forms of local agency, thus peoples’ capacity to act³⁷.

Figure 1 illustrates hypothetical categories which sum up diverse types of response along two axes: adaptation and contestation, with negotiation as a potential between them. These categories describe how people might respond to a violent context, namely through ‘co-optation’, ‘avoidance’, ‘apparent acceptance’, ‘everyday resistance’, ‘open confrontation’ and ‘pro-action’. Their location indicates the type of action they tend to include. They are categorised as more ‘adaptive’ on the vertical, contrary to those of a rather non-conformist character on the horizontal axis, closer to ‘contestation’. Nonetheless, and to reiterate, this artificial visualisation only approximates hypothetically fluctuating categories of reactions to uncertain surroundings and was open to further shifts which occurred in the aftermath of the fieldwork in Paloxpan, Veracruz.

This section identifies types of potential response in order to structure the research in the field, drawing on the selected literature, as well as personal and professional experience in Mexico prior to this study. In particular, I recognise the influence of Scott (1990), Nordstrom (2004), Mac Ginty (2014), John Paul Lederach (2005), Mo Hume (2008), Rosemary Harris (1972) and Linda Green (1995). Although hereby identified as separated categories, these types overlap within a co-constitutive grey area of interactions. The subsequently listed categories (below) are followed by the examples of responses they describe.

- Co-optation: (the act of) subordination, corruption, complicity, co-operation, collusion.
- Avoidance: evasive action undertaken given anticipated threat, such as displacement, pervasive use of or non-use of law, non-performance of expected role.

³⁷ I will come back to the notion of agency in further section 3.1. of this chapter.

- ‘Apparent acceptance’: a non-action derived from resignation, apathy, indifference, passivity encoded in ambivalent expressions of double meaning.
- ‘Everyday resistance’: ‘civil disobedience’, non-conformist behaviour hidden but demonstrated, behind the mundane and cultural-specific everyday practices.
- Open confrontation: explicitly expressed forms of opposition and manifested protest, such as verbally expressed in public through micro-messages, or organised self-defence groups.
- Pro-action: the least explored creative approach, neither accepting nor resisting dominant violence, yet involving an innovative component to reality. Potential Mexican ‘way around’.

This brief exemplification of actions as potential responses is purposefully succinct and simplified in order to emphasise their hypothetical and preliminary character. In other words, I presume that community members on the ground may respond in such ways to *violences* or to the potentiality of violence, but I do not exclude other ways. These responses as coping mechanisms are considered *in motion* or as in a process, thus far from fixed and enclosed categories, and rather, they overlap and travel from one to another. In addition, they lack corresponding to a particular actor. Instead, a number of considered actors may actually exercise a particular response, and perhaps, following the grey community principle from Chapter One, they may be co-produced by diverse actors within the local communities.

The subsequent paragraphs describe two of these types of responses, namely ‘apparent acceptance’ and ‘everyday resistance’. Whereas the former tends to be integrated in the context of Mexico, the latter is widely defined and contested by diverse resistance-related literatures.

Some Mexican literature mentions a type of apathy with which people tend to react to the increasing presence of violence in their surroundings (Sefchovich, 2014). I identify such an attitude at the heart of the ‘apparent acceptance’, in the middle of a graph between adaptation and contestation (Figure 1). This apparent acceptance of adverse conditions connects to the Mexican ways of bearing their everyday, yet only appears as a passive acceptance. Beyond an apparent disregard, refusal and even desire for comfort, this form

of acceptance is further developed in the analytical part of the thesis³⁸. Such an attitude entails a strange amalgam of ‘doing everything and doing nothing’ at the same time. In contrast, common Western categories tend to label such a state of affairs as co-optation (as used in the above types of response), collusion and, more often, corruption. These terms superficially imply a moral disagreement with and disengagement from ‘the acceptable social’ and apparently ‘correct’ form of participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). One of the popular Mexican expressions, which depicts an attitude of apparent agreement, tolerance towards seemingly contradictory phenomenon or some non-legitimate actions, tend to be formulated as “Well, that’s how it is; nothing can be done”³⁹. In contrast to Javier Sicilia’s (2014) critique of apathy and failure of indignation in Mexican society, such expression conveys neither apathy nor resistance. Instead, it may represent a response in-between the dichotomy of acceptance and contestation. In that, far from exemplifying a passive response, it forms an active way of adaptation to changing circumstances, derived from traditional and historical backgrounds, often coded in a double sense of the words’ meaning.

‘Doing everything and doing nothing’ at once, as mentioned in the above example of ‘apparent acceptance’ further questions the differentiation between adapting to and contesting an adversary violent context. Such non-action is not necessarily a passive one, given its active meaning. Examples from the literature of resistance and civil disobedience (Roberts and Ash, 2009), as well as peacebuilding (Visoka, 2015), together with historical examples from other cultural contexts⁴⁰, show its analytical potential. Indeed, although María Bertely Busquets emphasises the dichotomies between resisting and adapting, she draws on a hybrid ‘Other Mexico’ in the world of indigenous resistance.

³⁸ Chapter Six takes a closer look at apparent acceptance as a type of response identified during the research in the field.

³⁹ (Sp.) “ni modo/asi es la vida/el lo que hay/qué le vamos a hacer”.

⁴⁰ Among the examples from Polish society under the authoritarian regime before 1989, some of which centres on humour, three such non-actions can be distinguished. I juxtapose them with ‘pro-active’ daily activities, many of which are located in an intangible sphere of ‘pretending’ (showing that reality is different from what it is):

- Not-going to the fake protests organised by government vs. participating in double-sense sarcastic mobilisations ‘in favour’ of communist ideology;
- Not-listening to the official media vs. printing and distributing censored books and articles, and listening to a forbidden radio station;
- Not-signing the one-party membership list to obtain ‘privileges’ vs. inventing new informal and social ways of obtaining basic goods, through networks of friends, home production, rural-urban barter exchange.

There is no unique formula for resisting these processes, in those regions marked most by poverty and structural, political, and social exclusion, the relationship between citizenship and intercultural education moves between two contrasting alternatives: ... *top-down*, meant to adapt indigenous peoples to confront the demands of the global marketplace, or, on the contrary, to contribute to the construction *from the bottom up* of actively democratic and participatory models that prioritize solidarity. (Bertely Busquets, 2010, p. 149).

The second alternative mentioned in the above quotation demonstrates that ‘more straightforward’ or traditional resistance is easier to identify in organised, larger mobilisations, clearly defined ‘in opposition to’ certain authority representations, as numerous examples from history show, such as (Mexican or Latin American) street protests and indigenous people’s everyday resistance (Meyer and Maldonado Alvarado, 2010; Roberts and Ash, 2009). In turn, ‘everyday resistance’ rightfully differentiates local, micro-level reactions from national and other macro-level collective mobilisations, whether popular, top-down or somehow organised. However nuanced, context-dependent and less visible, or even hidden (Scott, 1990), resistance remains in opposition to a dominant force, hence in an implicitly conflictive situation (Haynes and Prakash, 1991). In reading everyday resistance, it is important to avoid overestimation of the potential of people to resist, counter-act, and consciously react *against*, as Asef Bayat (2000) and Daniel Little (1993) warn in their critiques of everyday resistance. However, without romanticising, resistance does act at the everyday level, where, as Oliver Richmond observes, “the constant everyday forms of resistance through which local agency may be expressed despite overwhelming authority” (2010, p. 685). In his examination which both critiques and justifies everyday resistance, Bayat spotted that “the possibility of co-optation is absent in almost all accounts of resistance” (2004, p. 89). This common attribute of resistance is derived, according to the author, from a particular understanding of power relations, namely that circulating power belongs to everyone, but rests in different actors to different degrees and extent (Bayat, 2000, p. 544). In other words, Bayat warns the reader about the danger of “reading too much into ordinary behaviour, interpreting it as involving necessarily conscious, or contentious, acts of defiance” (2004, p. 89). In Bayat’s proposal on cumulative “quiet encroaching”, the subalterns’ actions, gaining new spaces little-by-little, are far from being defensive or reactive (2000). Rather than “a deliberate political act, [...] they [the urban unprivileged inhabitants] are driven by the force of necessity – the necessity to survive and improve a dignified life” (Bayat, 2000, p. 547). The author examines actions of the urban subaltern in terms of ‘basic’ needs, such as autonomy and security. These last two remain particularly problematic, when generalised

across diverse cultural contexts. In fact, ‘quiet encroaching’ may be problematised in a similar way to a general everyday resistance. It assumes existence of an inner conflict, drawing its lines as obvious and somehow predictable to appear. Further, given its foundation in essential needs, it may be seen as even more ubiquitous than everyday resistance.

3.1. The response

This section briefly demarcates the response as practice, an action differentiated from reaction, embedded in a potentially violent, context-driven everyday. This conceptualisation remains theoretical and is located in the relevant literature. It aims to delineate the boundaries of the main object of this study, namely, the relational mechanisms of coping with potential violence. The following conceptualisation of ‘response’ prepares further elaboration of the analytical frame for this study and will support the structure of the exploration while in the field.

Of course, a response to the possibility of violence in the midst of ongoing violent events remains problematic. Such actions and non-actions can be highly ambiguous. At times, “it is not that simple that the world, culture and customs are re-created through interpersonal interaction” (Nordstrom, 1995, p. 147). They may actually result in disruption. As Nordstrom emphasises, violent destruction may reach so far that even the imagination is affected. Despite apparent resignation and indifference, or beyond what is immediately visible, further mechanisms are also worth investigating, in order to reconstruct the complex processes of community recovery, not only after but even within a state of insecurity. Thus, a response as action, as a main object of this study, cannot be artificially extracted from its subjective social and cultural contexts (Gergen and Zielke, 2006). “The meaning of all action – discursive and otherwise – is generated within communities, and derives from its use within relationships” (Gergen and Zielke, 2006, p. 307). The action does not have to be removed from its environment to be examined, as if forming a part of an experiment. Das and Spivak are both vocal in that such actions may be non-tangible, and as a result not straightforward, but that this quality does not have to be negative: “When we act we don’t act out of thinking through details; ... That is the way in which her action was inscribed in her body” (Landry and MacLean, 1993, p. 289; also Das, 2007).

The responses at stake are embedded in everyday practices, subjective and not necessarily conscious, present in “recognisable procedures of everyday practices” (de Certeau, 1984, p. XXII). They appear somewhat hidden and less obvious at first, due to their disorganised, informal character and the daily context in which they are embedded; this explains their on-going and dynamically changing character, far away from a daily routine (See Chapter One). To Richmond, the everyday “is a site of resistance, assimilation, adaptation and of hidden agencies” (2010, p. 677). Although this study focuses on actions as practice, it aims at including emotional and cultural baggage to their interpretation. These responses are also categorised as forms of coping, in psychological terms understood as responses to emotions, rather than live events. They represent capacities of the individual and the collective to deal with and continue living.

The potential difficulty is that such responses are not necessarily ‘responsive’ or ‘reactive’ to the phenomena. Taking into consideration the creativity and agency of people under violent conditions, their responses may in fact be pro-active, not only to defend their dignity but also to provide them with everyday needs and, little-by-little, to construct their everyday (Bayat, 2000). However, such creativity may result significantly limited under violent circumstances (Hoffman, 2014). People’s possession of agency, understood as ability and will to act, forms a main component of such a collective yet individual response. Leaving theorising about whether agency is local, critical or hybrid out of the scope of this research (see for example Richmond, 2011), this study acknowledges local agency in that it assumes that community members have an actual voice and are able to pursue their own actions, despite being surrounded by at times extreme conditions of experienced *violences*. At the same time, it draws a distance from conceptualising agency under the framework of resilience (after Jabri, 2013). This is not to neglect the urgent sense of fear induced in communities through the violent actions of the ‘powerful’, or to reduce the importance of the limitations that continuous uncertainties impose upon their daily lives. In recognising implicit agency in their responses, I aim to explore peoples’ creativity (Nordstrom, 2002) as an illustration of the resilient “ways out” and “innovative responses” (Lederach, 2005, p. 165) they find under everyday conditions of violence and insecurity.

Instead of enumerating particular characteristics (such as conscious, reactive or intended) that these responses-actions came to acquire in the field, I aim to leave them open to

further exploration. Without assuming any fixed features regarding whether and to what extent these responses would be purposeful or visible in ‘public’ spaces, they might acquire a collective or individual, yet disorganised character, consisting in daily practices, processes, and perhaps tendencies, which this research aims to capture. These responses-practices are also instances, perhaps momentous and invisible at first glance, embedded in social-cultural contexts. These are often hidden behind a ‘double-meaning’ of different verbal and non-verbal expressions, able to be explored only ‘from within’ in a particular cultural setting (also, Scott, 1990). This research is therefore interested in those coping mechanisms, reflected in small-scale actions, which arguably make co-existence feasible (Brewer, 2013).

The context of insecurity in Mexico is further elaborated in Chapter Three. The Ayotzinapa tragedy, an “emblematic case of human rights abuses” and unresolved case of collusion between the local (and possibly federal) authorities and criminal agents, resulted in disappearance of 43 students of a rural college in Iguala, Guerrero state in September 2014 (Benítez Manaut, 2018, p. 105; also Chinas Salazar and Preciado Coronado, 2017). In its aftermath, Turati asked, “What is *broken* in the community when something like this occurs again?” (Aristegui Noticias, 2014, emphasis mine)⁴¹. Although I agree with the author in researching with those who are made “invisible” (2014) to the elites (i.e. the families of the disappeared), this study’s focus is on the reverse question: what *remains* within the community, despite the apparent rupture originated in violent uncertainties? In that, it takes people’s creativity and their active response seriously.



Photograph 1. “Alive they took them, alive we want them back” is the slogan of the relatives of Ayotzinapa students kidnapped in Iguala, Guerrero, September 2014. It has become a common reference all over the country to demand justice by the relatives of the disappeared. Paloxpan, December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko)

⁴¹ “Qué se quiebra en la comunidad cuando vuelve a pasar esto?” – Marcela Turati’s question posed in the interview with Carmen Aristegui, (Aristegui Noticias, 2014).

Such response to the surrounding violence which is at the centre of this research does not necessarily imply a reaction against experienced or potential violence. Instead, and as seen in this section's elaboration of possible coping mechanisms, it entails a whole spectrum of responses to the forces creating a violent environment, from open confrontation and resistance to co-optation and collaboration in their diverse forms. It is in this sense that the use of violence does not implicitly provide a violent response. In order to survive however, people cope in different ways within a violent environment, enabling their potential to coexistence. This basic premise is elaborated in the subsequent section four, which also reveals components of the analytical framework. The latter brings together potential types of response, namely coping mechanisms, and situates them in relation to communication, coexistence and survival, as Figure 2 demonstrates.

4. Communicating to survive: potential for coexistence

This section introduces the framework for further analysis, used in the empirical research in Mexico and posits that the relational understanding of interactions among community members enables a basic form of coexistence. This framework, represented by Figure 2 (see below), places the types of coping mechanism at its centre, introduced in the previous section as responses to the violent context and illustrated in Figure 1.

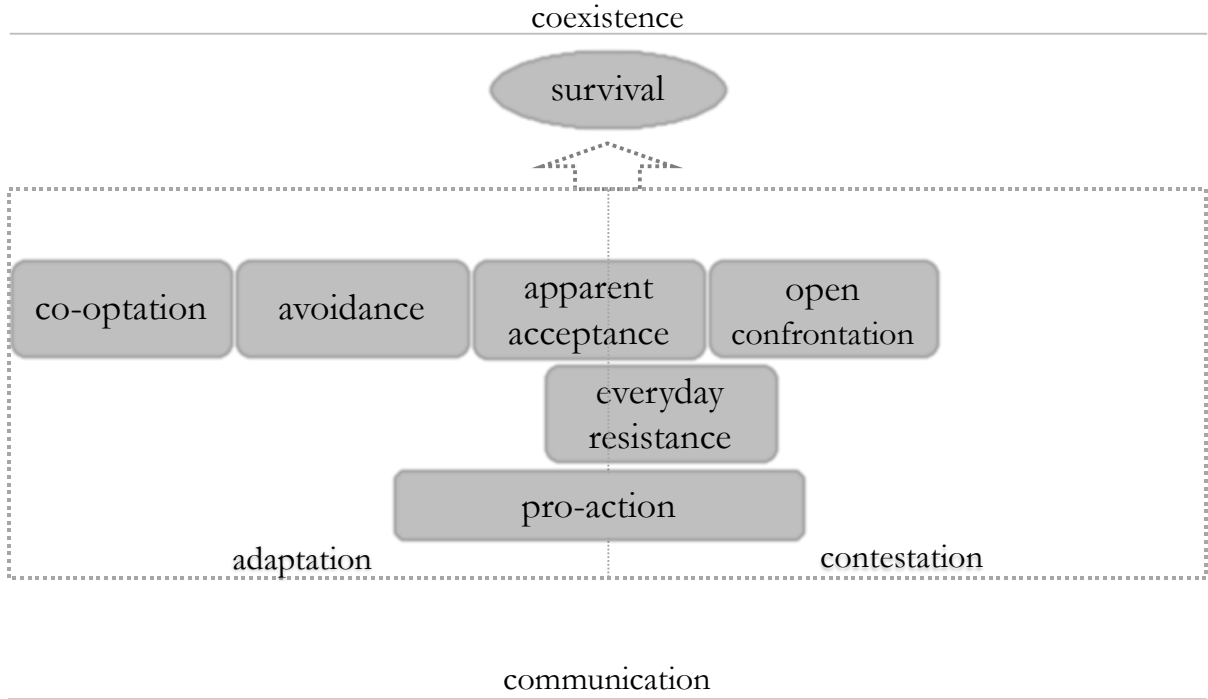


Figure 2. Communicating to survive: potential responses (that could) lead to coexistence.

Figure 2 illustrates the ways in which potential mechanisms of coping enable coexistence and thus survival. It consists therefore in a set of simple assumptions that drives this analytical framework. The ultimate result of these interactions as mechanisms of coping with violence is survival. In this, the elementary continuation of the community regardless of the adversary conditions, exemplifies a form of resilience, collectively but individually generated among its members.

In Figure 2, communication is a fundament of the five types of action (hence its location at the bottom), and understood as a basic form of exchanging information about the state of insecurity within a local community. This framework supposes that diverse communication channels fuel responses on the spectrum between contestation and adaptation, which in the end aim at survival. These types (co-optation, avoidance, apparent acceptance, everyday resistance, forms of open confrontation) provide general guidance for observing potential reactions in the field (Figure 1). Communication is framed here as a potential glue for inter-community relations. The informal ways of notifying, alerting and communicating despite, from within and due to insecure surroundings are assumed to provide a basis for the responses to violence (Nordstrom, 2004). In order to respond, community members first need to know not necessarily each other in person, but the particular unwritten ways that information about violence circulates on a daily basis (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 554). They are immersed in a surrounding constant flow of information about direct and indirect violent acts. This does not however imply they automatically react in order to oppose or transform a received ‘message’. People live day-to-day within the violent environment (sometimes perceived as inescapable) by the sole fact of experiencing it, absorbing it in a particular way that may or may not be common to other communities. Under the particular conditions of Paloxpan, as seen in the fieldwork (see Chapter Five), people communicate despite the constant control over traditional communication channels. Thus, this framework assumes they cope while constantly adapting, negotiating and perhaps finally resisting the process of silencing which has affected the Mexican locality at stake.

Such coexistence amid the ongoing possibility and experience of violence results in a form of “everyday peace”, according to Mac Ginty (2014, pp. 553-556). Whereas this framework may be construed as an effort towards some sort of temporary negative peace amid ongoing violence, there are nonetheless significant differences between this and ‘everyday

peace'. Firstly, the framework is designed to work in a particular locality affected by criminal violence, rather than in deeply divided societies largely in the aftermath of violent conflict (although there are examples of such use in the peacebuilding literature, see for example, Berents, 2018). Secondly, the framework does not exclude confrontative practices (such as disguised protest or messages of confrontation and resistance) which at times may well expose community members at risk. In this, open actions aimed at contesting dominant forces which may turn violent, may enable long-term survival or the survival of others (for example, relatives), as the post-fieldwork example of Irma's case in Chapter Four demonstrates. This framework argues therefore that the unprivileged inhabitants of the urban-rural periphery in Paloxpan, rather than avoiding the risk of violence, may well expose themselves to it. In essence, people do not necessarily act as if the conflict was "restrained" (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 557). This may nevertheless form a part of coexistence and is further discussed in the analytical part of this thesis (chapters four to six), where diverse forms of persisting bring such coexistence closer to what Rebecca Walker called the "constant *endurance* of the everyday" amid ongoing violence (2013, p. xii).

The micro-level actions which aim at avoidance, sometimes resistance and perhaps some forms of acceptance of *violences*, form part of a larger condition of 'coexistence'. Rather than co-operation, which implies voluntary actions from involved parties, this contextualised state of affairs may be translated via some flexible elements of co-optation, within coexistence, not exclusive to resistance or confrontation. In other words, it is a grey, rather than black-and-white scope of community practices as responses to a violent environment which interests this research.

Coexistence is derived from the conceptualisation of the local community, as presented in Chapter One, based on the common, implicit understanding of what is appropriate or not, and how to relate in the 'public' sphere. Such coexistence, depicted in the Figure 2 as resulting from potential responses to violent context, is based on the following premises:

- Peoples' positions to deal with violent uncertainties are unequal. Power relations which affect their individual and collective potential are present in a variety of configurations.

- Local communities are inherently plural and fluid: every community member is different and has a separate back story; thus their collective and individual agencies vary⁴².
- Instead of belonging to a traditionally understood, fixed place, community relationships shape the living space. The significance of the relationships that people maintain extend beyond the importance of a physical place. Yet in Mexican communities, face-to-face relationships matter and remain alive, and as such are central to this study.
- Though seen as problematic in Western epistemologies, hope may be of a fundamental relevance for a local community, based again on a relational place, as presented by Massey (1994, p. 27).

Massey's definition of place (1994, p. 27) resonates with the notion of local community depicted in Chapter One and hereby assembled forms of coexistence. In her words:

[E]ach 'place' can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection. It is, indeed, a meeting place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. (Massey, 1994, p. 27).

This framework remains open to the possibility that what may be found 'on the ground' is messy, apparently contradictory and somewhere in-between the earlier proposed categories of avoidance, co-optation, apparent acceptance, everyday resistance and open confrontation. This potential result is not only learnt from practice, but also remains within a dialogue between practice and theory, further analysed in chapters four to six. This study learns from practice and constitutes a process of exploration of the possible and contextualised actions that will eventually assemble a pattern, which may relate to a previously established set of hypotheses, as seen in this framework.

5. Conclusions

⁴² According to Jabri, Burton in his early work on conflict resolution, brought the individual into the centre of his holistic study (Burton, 1997; foreword by Jabri, p. xi).

This chapter conceptually prepares the research in the field and should be considered together with the definitional Chapter One, which locates this study in the relevant literatures. In that, presented here framework is based on the literature and was developed prior the actual research in the field. As a consequence, its components will be further revised in the analytical part of the thesis that follows the fieldwork, in chapters four to six. I suggested here a set of mechanisms of coping with (here, responses to) *violences*, which are situated in relation to communication, coexistence and survival. My premise is that they are learnt with my interlocutors, namely local community members, in the context of potential and experienced *violences* that were part of further research in the field in Paloxpan, Mexico. In this, the analytical framework presented here reflects the core research interest of this study, namely, it designs possible responses that the unprivileged and people at risk may give when faced with a context of violence. They are embedded both in the local community and in their relational everyday, and acknowledge the local agency people possess despite their deprived, apparently powerless status. Although I mentioned some of the ways of applying these responses in the empirical study undertaken in Paloxpan, Veracruz between 2015 and 2016, this chapter remains predominantly conceptual. In this, it connects with the following Chapter Three, which introduces the methodology this thesis employs.

Chapter 3: From the motorways to unpaved roads: a methodology of exploring experiences of insecurity

- So it was this regular day in our cafe, and we received this call. They asked for a manager, for names, saying that they were calling from the local government institution, and yes, I gave them those. So they called again, approximately a week later. I immediately recognised the voice. This time he asked for a bandage, no money, basic hospital equipment as there was an accident on the street nearby.
- Was there a shooting?
- That's what I thought. They requested urgent help, no money, only to take care of an injured person.
- Wasn't it weirdly incongruent to receive a call from the very same voice?
- Well, I went there, as it was only a few blocks away (a few steps really), with the bandage, to the indicated place. And of course, no one was there. I rushed back quickly, running. So they were on the phone again, with another employee: the other guy almost gave them all the money they requested. My heart was in my throat⁴³.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological approach that this research applies, including the methods used in the fieldwork. The chapter situates this research in relation to the field study on the one hand, and the analytical framework (see Chapter Two) on the other. In this, it constructs a bridge between the conceptual part (chapters one and two) and the following analytical part (chapters four to six). I examine here how relational responses towards a context of violent uncertainty were studied in the locality of Paloxpan, a mid-sized city situated in Veracruz state, central east Mexico. The chapter discusses methods by which hypothetical reactions in the form of daily interactions among community members were examined in the field. Thus, the initial version of this methodological chapter prepared for the research in the field, as well as contributing to the further analysis of 'collected data'.

Although inspired by experiences of living in Mexico over five years prior to the PhD, this study developed through the following main phases:

1. A conceptual desk-based review of the literature (Chapter One) resulted in the analytical framework introduced in Chapter Two.
2. Further to establishing some major components of the methods and assessing the ethics of the study (Chapter Three), the empirical part was conducted over eight months of field research in Paloxpan.

⁴³ An example of an attempt to extort a small business over the phone. Conversation with Juan, a local coffeemaker and seller. Paloxpan, September 2015.

3. Following the fieldwork, the writing-up process included analysis of the empirical findings and review of the analytical framework (chapters four to six).

This chapter situates this research in the actual place of the fieldwork, at the periphery of Paloxpan in central east Mexico (see Map 1). Its main purpose is twofold. Firstly, following this brief introduction, the local context is presented with its ambiguities and panorama of insecurity at the national, as well as the state level. Secondly, the chapter captures the nuanced form of slow and non-linear discovery which this study follows while in the field. This methodology unfolds ways by which to unpack everyday coping mechanisms, often disguised within the context of insecurity in Mexico. In particular, it looks at how access to the ‘field’ was enabled, with whom I conducted the fieldwork, as well as the particularities of the research embedded in the locality at stake, and its potential pitfalls.

2. The overview of the chapter

“In Mexico everything is happening and... nothing happens” (Solano Abadia, 2011). Since December 2006, when former president Felipe Calderón declared a so-called ‘war on drugs’, the explosion and scale of suffering of the Mexican population has simultaneously shocked public opinion at the national level and worldwide and provided its normalisation. Since then, increasingly cruel criminalised violence has been affecting the inhabitants of some regions in Mexico⁴⁴ (these change over time; for example, Atlas, 2016). Despite the recognised ongoing confrontation between state forces and armed groups occupied with, among other disputes, the traffic of illicit goods, according to official discourse no civil conflict has been acknowledged. However, some analysts in Mexico do identify three ongoing conflicts (here denominated as “wars”, after Aguayo Quezada and Benítez Manaut, 2012, p. 12; and Benítez Manaut, 2015, p. 133). Table 1 juxtaposes these with the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP, 2017); the basic categorisation of each mirrors the other:

	Aguayo Quezada and Benítez Manaut, 2012, p. 12	UCDP, 2017
1.	‘War on drugs’: state forces against drug-trafficking organisations, accelerated since 2006	State-based violence: government vs. cartels

⁴⁴ Also, those from other countries, who cross the territory in search for better living conditions in the North.

2.	War between ‘cartels’: more violent than the first and also since 2006	Non-state violence, provoking the vast majority of deaths
3.	War conducted by criminal organisations against civilians with significant peaks from 2009-10 onwards	‘Cartels’ vs. civilians

Table 1. Table juxtaposing two sources of similar understanding of conflicts taking place in Mexico. Based on: (Aguayo Quezada and Benítez Manaut, 2012, p. 12; UCDP, 2017).

Since 2006 and even before⁴⁵, federal police, military and navy forces in Mexico have been constantly employed to combat numerous organised crime groups, focusing on capturing their chiefs and seizing their property, without any preparation for protecting civilians and fulfil tasks corresponding to public security (see Table 1, first conflict). Meanwhile, criminalised organisations have become ever more harmful for society, affecting ever more civilians through extortion, assault, kidnapping, and the threat of accidental shootings (See Table 1, third conflict). Official estimates of increasing human loss have become widely accepted, whereas their misinterpretation and sources remain problematic (for example, Correa-Cabrera, 2017, p. 142). Re-victimisation has become a constant: when asking *who* the victims are, the following answer persists: they were criminals, responsible for the increasing violence in the country (Guevara Rosas, 2018; Lessing, 2015). Such black-and-white dehumanisation of those labelled as perpetrators, as opposed to victims and rarely mentioned witnesses, leaves a very small space for a paradoxically on-going coexistence. However, people live, eat, go to work, visit family, have fun and make jokes, observe life passing by, raise children, and take care of their parents and relatives⁴⁶. In this context, this study asks the following main research questions:

- How do people respond to everyday *violences*?
- How do they communicate amid silence?

This chapter adds to the process of responding to these questions by showing how the empirical field study was undertaken, presenting the particular methods designed to tackle the problematic of the safety and security of the ‘researched’ and the researcher. In order to explore the possibilities of carrying out the work in the local community in Paloxpan, central east Mexico, this chapter focuses on the following three main purposes:

⁴⁵ See further subsection on militarisation.

⁴⁶ As reaffirmed in a number of studies, family remains the central informal institution around which Mexican society evolves (e.g. Sefchovich, 2014).

- to briefly reconstruct the local context affected by complex insecurities at the national, state and local levels;
- to introduce the research participants;
- to discuss the methodology of this study.

This chapter presents a reflexive integrated approach towards potential local responses to violent uncertainty, as identified in the analytical framework in Chapter Two. It shows how the interpretative study of informal everyday interactions – that is, possible survival strategies – took place empirically, and thereby how the analytical framework was used in the field and afterwards. For this purpose, it introduces the methodology by which the researcher addressed the creative ways of living despite a context of chronic violence. I suggest here a *slow* journey of socially and culturally shaped elements of enquiry which sheds light on ways in which the research will follow elements of discovery. To this effect, this methodology decodes diverse and contradictory forms of togetherness and coexistence which persist despite the on-going insecure environment.

While recognising other approaches to living with daily insecurities (such as public health, preventive and human rights approaches), and perceptions of insecurity elaborated upon in Chapter One, this chapter introduces a more nuanced perspective of the local community. Principally, it supports the capture of embodied emotions and experiences of *violences*. Building on ethnographically informed methods used in other cultural settings (for example, Linda Green, 1995 in Guatemala; Javier Auyero and María Fernanda Berti, 2015 in Argentina; Rebecca Walker, 2013 in Sri Lanka, or Laurent Gayer, 2014 in Pakistan), it offers an alternative to victimisation surveys⁴⁷ as a principal source of insight into peoples' reaction to the fear of becoming a victim or potential perpetrator (Barakat et. al., 2002). Leaving the unpacking of the micro-level dynamics of armed conflict to others (Kalyvas, 2006; Lessing 2015), this study sheds light on informal, and culturally and socially shaped reactions to experiencing *violences*, without assuming that they constitute an implicit rupture to community life.

The following three elements shed light on the researcher's motivations for employing this inter-disciplinary methodological approach. Firstly, the focus of this research remains at the local (and beyond the national or regional) level, as it concentrates on the local

⁴⁷ For example in Mexico, ENVIPE (2018a).

community (presented in Chapter One). Secondly, the purpose is to listen to and research *with* rather than *on* (after Heron and Reason, 2006; Savin-Baden and Major, 2010) the local people, beyond the usual perspective on state- and other formal institutions. To conduct the research with local community members, I approached them as partners rather than objects of study. This addresses people on the ground humbly and with due respect, despite any perceived postcolonial burden and asymmetrical power relations, further explored in the section on positionalities in this chapter. Thirdly, this study constructs an alternative to the dominant version of criminalised conflict and the society it affects. It stretches and challenges the orthodox paradigms of interpreting crime and violence. It also challenges the notion that local actors in precarious situations are ‘powerless victims’ and instead focuses on the various ways in which they demonstrate agency. Using ethnographically informed research methods, the research connects with live academic and policy debates on community mobilisation and agency (for example, Bayat, 2000; Richmond, 2011). It hopes that the research methodology will provide a break from much of the top-down policy language that at times seems unwilling or unable to take seriously the perspective of the local.

The next section reconstructs the local context of insecurity at the national, state and – to a certain extent – the local level in Mexico and Veracruz. In this, it introduces the reader to the local context of the precarious Mexican urban zone of Paloxpan, where this empirical research took place.

3. The local context of insecurity

This section elaborates upon the general context of insecurity in Mexico, as well as in Veracruz, where the locality of Paloxpan is situated. Firstly, the local context brings to the reader’s attention the physical *place* where this research was carried out, revealing only a glimpse of its complexity and multiplicity. My aim here is to provide a brief overview of the context of insecurity at both national and state levels. Secondly, I introduce research participants: some of the people with whom I had the privilege to work in the ‘field’. The focus of the next section moves towards the relational way this study develops while in the field, mostly through dialogue with research participants, embedded in the particularisms of Veracruz, Mexico(s) and fragments of its culture (see Olivos Santoyo and Cuadriello Olivos, 2012; Bartra, 1987). The above contributes to understanding the way this study

evolved, which is contextualised in this chapter. This locates responses to potential violence within a context of ongoing insecurity.

3.1. On *Violences*⁴⁸

In expanding on the local context, this section neither pretends to elaborate any form of conflict analysis, nor to define the state of insecurity at of the moment of writing (2017-18) or the period of the fieldwork in Veracruz (2015-16). Instead I emphasise what is in my view a perceived shift in perspective regarding the increasing violence in Mexico (at the time of writing, official sources confirmed 242,086 killings over a decade⁴⁹ and 37,000 disappeared (SEGOB, 2018). To say that this study provides these depersonalised numbers with meaning would be too great to claim. However, this chapter prepares the reader for the forthcoming analytical chapters (namely, four to six), which explore the particular approach to everyday responses which challenge that depersonalisation of violence. This section also addresses a further shift that this research evolves around: the firm change in focus towards the local, rather than the national level. It begins therefore with an overview of insecurity conceived at the national level; secondly, it dives into and connects with the local-and-state-level of the federal entity Veracruz,⁵⁰ the third most populous among the 32 in the country, with just over eight million inhabitants as of 2015 (INEGI, 2015). This is illustrated in my personal shift “from driving the motorways, to walking the unpaved streets”, hence the title of this chapter. Thirdly, a significant change regarding the state of insecurity in Paloxpan and Veracruz connects directly to a further developed ‘everyday uncertainty’ with its central component of the ‘unknown’ (see Chapter Four). Many of the rumours which appeared over the fieldwork have, during the years which followed, been confirmed, converting Veracruz into another ‘hot spot’ of violence and insecurity in Mexico (Proceso, 2018). The emphasis here is that the shift in public narrative only confirmed what has been spoken of – mostly whispered – among local people in private, as well as discreetly in public for many years before that⁵¹. In short, knowledge has transited from the informal to the officially recognised over time. This

⁴⁸ There is no intention to refer to Hannah Arendt’s *On Violence* (1970) but I need to make a statement of awareness here.

⁴⁹ Between 2007 and 2017. As of December 2018, INEGI (2018b).

⁵⁰ In the formal (official) language in particular, it is actually more common in Mexico to use ‘entidad federativa’ (federal entity) rather than ‘estado’ (state).

⁵¹ Since at least 2011, when the ‘peak’ of violent deaths was registered at the state level in Veracruz. See Section 3.3.1 in this chapter.

chapter shows how the people of Paloxpan gathered and co-generated this informal knowledge, through and despite silences, rumours, jokes and imagined scenarios.

This research addresses the context of violence in a holistic and inclusive manner. It identifies the inter-relational character of types of violence, and exemplifies a blurred continuity between contexts of peace and violence (e. g. Mac Ginty, 2006; Steenkamp, 2014), well-discussed in peace and conflict studies. It therefore explores an interpretation of violence and non-violence as non-exclusive categories and assesses relative insecurity in collective terms. This is not to equalise peace and violence, but to acknowledge the possibility of the existence of violence while in an official state of ‘peace’, of which contemporary Mexico is an example, as indicated by Krause as the case of “hybrid violence” (Krause, 2012). Put differently, the transition from violence to non-violence is ever blurrier and more non-linear. This assumption involves a non-absolutist approach towards different *violences*. It recognises that, for example, social expressions of violence (such as some forms of vigilantism) may provoke a satisfaction which is collective and at the same time outside the state⁵². While recognising its controversial character, in some cases, it also provides a sense of justice having been done that a community would otherwise be deprived of.

I refer to people living despite *violences* or everyday violence (and thereby their persistence, as this study concludes) in twofold manner. Firstly, while speaking about insecurity, the people of Paloxpan often referred to a more distant context of violence (as a process, a general impression about the state, or the climate, or particular violent events, which may occur in another state (distant) or in their city (less distant but still not in the immediate neighbourhood), for example a shooting or mining extraction. Secondly, the closely-related events affected my interlocutors directly as persons or their close family members. I mostly refer to crime-related (or criminalised) violence, emphasising however its ‘everyday’ or plural quality (*violences*), as referred in the Introduction, in order to mark my awareness of its intersectionality and the existence of grey zones (Chapter One). The intersection and interrelation of ‘extreme’ and everyday violence is succinctly depicted by

⁵² Although this study avoids occupying itself with the notion of legitimacy of violent accounts, it recognises the possibility of informal legitimacy of the use of violence. However, unlike Steenkamp, this study does not follow a culture-related explanation: in short, the ‘culture of violence’ over time involves its wide acceptance (that is, its public support) and the people’s long-term exposure to violence in the dimension of their everyday life (Steenkamp, 2014, pp. 145-146).

Das: “Again, to say that the extreme violence was continuous with everyday life is not to say that it was the same, but rather that the everyday provided the grounds from which the event could be grown” (2007, p. 149)⁵³. In this, my aim is neither to analyse existing conflict(s) in Mexico, nor to list the types of violence people are affected by. In the end, *violences* in this study have a contextual function, which are nevertheless of high importance, as people respond to them on an everyday basis and suffer because of them. Despite the context of this study being among the central interests of this present chapter, its elements are further reframed through the concept of ‘everyday uncertainty’ as a possibility (and further, potentiality) of violence, and elaborated in post-field findings (see Chapter Four).

3.2. The (un)recognised violent conflict(s) in Mexico and in Veracruz

Although my predominant interest in this research evolved around the ways people responded to *violences*, rather than violence itself, these responses need to be situated in context. This subsection gives a brief overview of the situation of *violences* in Mexico and in Veracruz, arguing that a significant shift in public narrative about violence has unfolded in recent years. This is particularly true of the situation to Veracruz subsequent to the research in the field, 2016-18. The move, from the interpersonal to collective forms of violence, has only recently been partially acknowledged in Mexico (see Table 1; also: Correa-Cabrera, 2017, pp. 126-153 and to a more limited extent earlier, Atlas, 2012).

The timeframe of this brief overview of insecurity is 2006-18, with most data available until 2017; the majority of the post-field writing took place in 2018. My particular focus is the period of the fieldwork 2015-16 and the years immediately subsequent to it. This purposefully omits elaboration of the obvious: Mexico has been perceived and understood as violent in many aspects at least since the Revolution 1917; however, these multiple dimensions are out of the scope of this study⁵⁴. This deliberate choice stems from the change in character of the *violences* which affect the Mexican population in general and in particular, people living in certain geographical regions which shift over time. It also

⁵³ This refers to the author’s account of the aftermath of the riots against Sikhs in the low-income urban neighbourhoods of Delhi, supposedly as a collective punishment for Indira Ghandi’s assassination by her Sikh bodyguard (Das, 2007, p. 149).

⁵⁴ For example, the highest registered rate of violent deaths was in 1940, with over 67 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. This, however, according to unofficial recompilation of official data, includes that not yet digitalised (Aguirre Botello, 2018).

considers the changes to the Mexican political system of the 1990s (particularly from 2000 onwards), when the institutional and patrician transformation at the federal and local levels changed the power dynamics and therefore the ways in which criminal organisations have been operating since (Astorga and Shirk, 2010)⁵⁵. The multiple, interconnected *violences* this research relates to are therefore the partial consequence of both the presence and activity of drug-trafficking organisations, and their relationship with state structures⁵⁶. However, I argue here that an urban insecurity approach is unsatisfactory to describe such tendencies, and that the dynamics of violence therefore require a broader context in relation to ongoing conflicts. Among the factors triggering violence is the militarisation of public security, which intensified particularly from 2006 onwards. There are three main reasons for this choice of date from which to start the insecurity overview: the exponential intensification of state-led militarisation of public security (2006 onwards); the reconfiguration and changing dynamics of activities of drug-trafficking organisations⁵⁷ (more pronounced from 2010 onwards); and, as a general consequence of both, the sharp increase in national homicide rates from 2007 onwards.

⁵⁵ This is widely elaborated upon by Mexican authors, who pinpoint the political alternation of 2000 (when the Mexican president Vicente Fox emerged, from a party other than the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* [PRI] for the first time since the Revolution and following the 71-year-long PRI monopoly) as the origin of the significant changes. The shift consisted in the change in relationship between the government (especially at the local level) and organised criminal groups, in particular those involved in the drug trade. The main argument here is that relationships which were less powerful politically loosened, and as a consequence, territorial competition arose. “In some cases, political change increased the political impetus to promote transparency, good governance, and a tougher approach toward organized crime; in others, it merely disrupted political connections to favor one organized crime group over another” (Astorga and Shirk, 2010, p. 17; Astorga, 2015). According to the authors, “Mexico’s DTOs [drug-trafficking organisations] began to take on a greater market share in the 1980s, they enjoyed a significant degree of hierarchy and cohesion, thanks in large part to the existence of a protective centralized power structure. By the late 1990s, however, there were four major DTOs fiercely vying for control of Mexico’s lucrative drug trade in a new era of competition characterized by levels of extreme, high profile violence of a kind never seen before. This pattern has continued to unfold over the course of the last decade” (Astorga and Shirk, 2010, p. 16).

⁵⁶ In Mexico, governmental response to criminal organisations (rather than to the deteriorating insecurity of citizens) has been twofold: punitive-military, with later on, a preventive approach. On the one hand, the main focus of state intervention is on the use of force and militarisation, while continuing with the ‘war on drugs’, and as a result, the increasing *violences* affecting Mexican society. On the other, public health approach(es) based on a more holistic understanding of violence and crime prevention prevail among different forms of non- and governmental local and national projects. Among its institutional examples is *Subsecretaría de Prevención de Delito y Participación Ciudadana*, part of the Ministry of Interior (*Secteria de Gobernación*, SEGOB) at the federal level since 2013. Similar agencies were developed at the municipal and state levels of government. In addition, the huge offer of the US-funded programmes has influenced the non-governmental sector agenda, in regard to, among others, preventive policy. This section nevertheless focuses on the former military engagement as part of the country’s problematic of insecurity.

⁵⁷ From now on I choose to follow Luis Astorga and David Shirk in avoiding referring these (organised) criminal groups as ‘cartels’ (Astorga and Shirk, 2010, p. 9), bearing in mind that some are local rather than transnational, and that others do not even occupy themselves with the drug trade but rather with other illicit activities, such as bank robbery, kidnapping, extortion (Astorga and Shirk, 2010, pp. 19-20), and more recently oil, and other resource theft (Arroyo Fonseca and Rebolledo Flores, 2019, forthcoming, pp. 11-15). This nevertheless remains, again, outside the main interest of this research.

There used to be a long-lasting, tacit agreement among authors and observers in Mexico that violence in the country should be interpreted through a lens of interpersonal violence (with homicide levels as its principal form of measurement), while keeping the label of so-called ‘war on drugs’⁵⁸. There was a significant debate on whether the ‘fragmentation’ of criminal organisations provoked their reconfiguration, and as a consequence fuelled territorial rivalries and increased the violence affecting people living in different regions of Mexico (Aguayo Quezada and Benítez Manaut, 2016; Guerrero Gutiérrez, 2016; Astorga and Shirk, 2010; also G. Calderón, et al., 2015). More recently however, ‘extreme’ forms of violence have prompted a change in focus towards mass (clandestine, informal) graves, torture, (enforced) disappearance and human remains, and particular groups which have been targeted (including human rights defenders, journalists, women, young men, farmers, doctors). On the one hand, this is narrated through the lens of human rights abuses⁵⁹ or even crisis (Amnesty International, 2018; Acosta, 2016, p. 67; Malpica Neri, 2018). On the other, it provides a renowned panorama to traditionally used forms of understanding of what has been happening, such as institutional inefficiency (the state-centred approach) or drug-trafficking organisations (non-state actors) (for example, Chabat, 2002; Bailey and Taylor, 2009; Astorga and Shirk, 2010; Lessing, 2015). There is a significant difference between how the conflict was described closer to the start of the so-called ‘war on drugs’ (Benítez Manaut, 2009), where the main focus, with some notable exceptions (Azaola, 2012), was institutional (or state) inefficiency. Almost twelve years in, there is a growing wider acceptance of its collective, highly localised, and brutal character (Correa-Cabrera, 2017; Malpica Neri, 2018). Nonetheless, an effort to leave the institutional and/or organisational framework is still rarely seen. This explains the everyday lens that this research adopts.

Violent conflicts in Mexico between criminal organisations, and between them and state law enforcement and military agencies, are highly localised. I refer here to a high contrasting variety of intensity depending on the state and region, which fluctuate over

⁵⁸ The term was applied by Mexican president Felipe Calderón in the end of 2006, although it originates in US president Nixon administration’s strategy regarding counter drug-trafficking-related activities in the early 1970s (Stuart, 2011, p. 5).

⁵⁹ With the internationally acknowledged example of Ayotzinapa, which however only reveals a tip of the iceberg, as further exemplified in the analytical part of this thesis, chapters four to six.

time⁶⁰. In other words, different states, and regions across the states⁶¹ provide locations for conflicts between different organisations; these locations shift over time, which in itself has a harmful effect upon people. The general geographic tendency shifted from the North and West (as the most affected regions in 2007-08) to the North-East and Centre (Atlas, 2016, p. 247). Yet a more careful lens admits a rather geographically dispersed evolution over time, towards a more generalised increase of violent deaths (Atlas, 2016). Highly localised conflicts which vary not only from state to state but also across administrative divisions and regions, fluctuating at the level of towns and sometimes at that of the *barrios*, are among the reasons this research focuses on a local level.

3.3. Some indicators of insecurity

Despite its imperfection as a homicide indicator, the death certificate is still the most common fundament for assessing cause of death in Mexico (INEGI, 2018c). Earlier studies have explored its quantified estimations while acknowledging its imprecisions (Benítez Manaut et al., 2009). This also applies to the rest of the indicators, mainly different types of violent crimes, within the context of extremely high impunity: over 90% of all crimes remain unreported both at the national and state levels. This figure has been stable over the years (ENVIPE, 2018a, pp. 10-11), and indicates that these estimations represent only a minor fragment of the whole picture⁶². Homicides are an imperfect and partial indicator of violence for yet another reason. In Mexico, the terms ‘execution’ or ‘drug-related execution’ (*ejecución* or *narcoejecución*) refer to targeted homicide resulting from supposed rivalries with drug-trade territory. Despite being widely used by politicians and the mass media⁶³, these terms lack any legal basis and it is unclear how they were (at some point, officially) quantified⁶⁴. Homicides in Mexico therefore refer to all murders, without

⁶⁰ *Atlas de la Seguridad y la Defensa de México 2016*, (here I use the abbreviated: Atlas, 2016) but also its previous volumes (2009; 2012) allow the appreciation of such dynamics over time; see also the ‘Justice in Mexico project’, San Diego University (L. Calderón et al., 2018).

⁶¹ An example of such a region is Huasteca, which extends across the following federal entities: Veracruz, Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosí, but also Queretaro, Hidalgo and Puebla. In particular, northern Veracruz, together with southern Tamaulipas and eastern San Luis Potosí, form a specific self-governing region where, according to one of my interlocutors, “the routes to the northern Mexican border are left unchallenged”. Conversation with Ricardo, Paloxpan, August 2015.

⁶² On systemic and generalised impunity, see notable examples of Mexican work by Guillermo Zepeda Leucona (2004); Mariclaire Acosta (2012a and 2012b).

⁶³ Even the president’s office used to offer a database of such categories during Felipe Calderón’s administration.

⁶⁴ Although for example Benjamin Lessing (2015), in his notable study analysing Mexican conflict, compares such numbers generated from local and national press reports about violent deaths.

referring specifically to drug-related killings. Their significant increase has been noted since the counter-drug military strategy has been deployed since 2006.

3.3.1 Homicides in Mexico and Veracruz

At the national level, homicides noted a dynamic increase since 2007, with a significant peak in 2011, a tendency also observed at the Veracruz state level. In Mexico, reported homicides doubled between 2006 and 2012 (Atlas, 2016, p. 348), only to increase again by 97% between 2014 and 2018 (Angel, 2019). Among the most affected by murder are the youth; the tendency is the younger, the more affected. Between 2000-08 the largest group of those killed was that aged 20-35 years old; from 2009, members of the youngest age group (15-19) are those increasingly killed in Mexico (Atlas, 2016, p. 348). Other registered (violent) crimes affecting the population expose multiple tendencies. For example, the inversely proportional relation: when homicide rates decreased (2011-15), extortion sharply increased (in particular during 2011-13, when it almost doubled) (Atlas, 2016, p. 351). In turn, registered kidnapping at the national level noted a steady increase with similar tendencies to homicide in the same period. Needless to say, these officially reported numbers are an under-representation of the real picture, which is difficult to provide, given the nature of crime reporting in Mexico and the system of justice, as well as the particularity of kidnappings and extortion, which are mostly left unreported. Not only did 2017 show the highest absolute numbers of violent deaths officially registered since 1931 when data recompilation started, namely 32,079 deaths (INEGI, 2018b), the rate of 25 per 100,000, jumping from 20 in just one year, overtook Felipe Calderón's administration levels and is the highest since the beginning of 1960s (INEGI, 2018c).

According to official sources, Veracruz has become one of the country's violent 'hot spots' (Proceso, 2018). However, this label is problematic, seeming to refer to a surge in oil theft as a major criminal activity, which may not be directly related to the increase in violence affecting the general society. If (in)security is to be imperfectly measured by absolute homicide numbers, in Veracruz this increased from the lowest (331 in 2004) to 1,557 at its peak in 2011 (Atlas, 2016, p. 354). This year was also marked by the violence in Veracruz becoming more spectacular – and thus visible, and impossible for even the local

elites to deny⁶⁵. In particular, this was due to the display of 35 bodies along with narco-messages⁶⁶ in September 2011 in Boca del Río, a wealthy part of Puerto de Veracruz, the biggest and most important city of the federal entity. “This took place amid the deployment of thousands of federal troops who were guarding the 11th National Meeting of Presidents of Supreme Tribunals and Attorney Generals that was taking place in the Fiesta Americana Hotel in Boca del Río” (Arroyo Fonseca and Rebolledo Flores, 2019, forthcoming, pp. 7-8). This spectacular event was immediately interpreted by state authorities, who blamed a particular criminal group over the rivalries against another before there was any evidence or trial (Arroyo Fonseca and Rebolledo Flores, 2019, forthcoming, p. 8). Suspicions arose which were further explored, when the association between the then state administration of Javier Duarte and one of the criminal groups became clearer. The event prompted massive troop deployment in a further militarisation of the state (which was already ongoing in the town, as in other regions of the country), as part of the ‘Operation Secure Veracruz’ from 4 October 2011 onwards. Street patrols and the setting up of military checkpoints continued until the time of this research fieldwork, four years later. This exemplifies the overall tendency towards militarisation as a potential solution to the (in)security problematic, discussed further in the subsequent subsection.

3.3.2. Militarisation

Following a controversial election in 2006, Felipe Calderón took presidential office in Mexico⁶⁷, with a “less than 0.6% majority” of the votes (Bruhn and Greene, 2007). The year pinpoints a shift in Mexico’s recent history, marked by massive troop deployment justified by the so-called ‘war on drugs’, involving, according to the government narrative (and often repeated since), criminal organisations representing a threat to national security. Such deployment of the military against its own people is unconstitutional in Mexico (Moloeznik, 2009, p. 9)⁶⁸. This militarisation of public security by employment of the

⁶⁵ The practice which has been further continued anyway, see Chapter Four, for example.

⁶⁶ See Chapter Five for the explanation of *mantas* and their usage in public communication. The usage by the criminal groups is out of the scope of this study; see for example Maihold (2015).

⁶⁷ After Vicente Fox (2000-2006), Felipe Calderón was the second person in this position from National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional, PAN), roughly favouring conservative values and a neoliberal economy. This, after the 71-year one-party rule by PRI, whose monopoly in power Mario Vargas Llosa famously called a “perfect dictatorship” (El País, 1990).

⁶⁸ Marcos Pablo Moloeznik raises the issue of the Supreme Court that opened the route to troop deployment after 2000 (2009, p. 9) which is against the Constitution (*Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, p. 172, quoted in: Moloeznik p. 9).

Mexican Army (colloquially called *Ejército*, and represented by SEDENA) and Navy (*Marina* or *Armada*; SEMAR, respectively)⁶⁹ is not a new policy. Its rationale remains grounded in the inadequacies in institutional efficiency of local and federal law enforcement agencies, and has been boosted by the high level of trust declared by the Mexican society in the army and navy, unlike any other public institution (Astorga and Shirk, 2010, pp. 27-28). Militarisation of public security and “counter-drug initiatives” in Mexico date back to the 1930s (Astorga and Shirk, 2010, p. 28). A long-term yet less visible tendency remained for former military personnel to replace civil police command units and other law enforcement institutions at the state and local levels, a process which was intensified in the 1990s. Since 2000 and in 2006 in particular, “tens of thousands of troops were deployed throughout the country, though the overall effectiveness of this strategy is highly questionable” (Astorga and Shirk, 2010, p. 28; also, Moloeznik, 2009). Beyond the questioned ‘temporality’ of troop deployment in public security activities, as well as the replacement of civil authorities by the military, there is also an argument regarding serious human rights abuses committed by military personnel, almost since the beginning of this wave of militarisation (Moloeznik, 2009, p. 6).

In short, the shift from individual towards collective violence has not occurred overnight. Nearly twelve years into the (current wave of) militarisation of public security in Mexico, over the time of this writing in 2018, the intensity of lived *violences* triggered a fragmentary shift in the observers’ perception. Not only does the immense quantity impress itself upon public opinion and the people individually, but also, and before anything, so does the form in which crime-led violence is exercised and exposed. Mexico is not a country at war. Yet its unrecognised set of violent conflicts, of relatively low intensity, has killed nearly a quarter of a million people in ten years and resulted in 37,000 disappeared, numbers representing official but very modest estimations⁷⁰. The incidents of violence are characterised by spectacular and situated ‘events’ that manifest specific brutality, such as the one in Veracruz, Boca del Río, Ayotzinapa in Guerrero, or San Fernando in Tamaulipas (Correa-Cabrera, 2017, p. 143) to name a few. Nonetheless, on a daily basis, the dynamics change from town to town, checkpoint to checkpoint, and sometimes even one neighbourhood to another. Thus, this study takes into consideration a very specific fragment of this rapidly changing reality.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Defence in Mexico, (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*, SEDENA) and the Naval Ministry (*Secretaría de Marina*, SEMAR). In Mexico, both govern under separated command.

⁷⁰ See also Lessing (2015) for the numeric comparison with war-torn countries such as Syria and Afganistan.

4. The local community: Paloxpan, Veracruz

Following the above brief discussion of the context of insecurity, and prior to the main methodological exploration, this section sheds light, firstly on where, and secondly with whom this research was carried out in the field. As Chapter One showed, this project approached its research participants with a fluidity inspired by the notion of grey zones: where the processes of criminalisation merge with the exposure of people to vulnerabilities (J. Zavaleta Betancourt, 2014), predatory authorities commit severe atrocities, and the division between legal and illegal does not provide much meaning. As Caroline Moser puts it, from the developmental perspective of urban studies, “In urban areas in Latin America and the Caribbean, the poor are the most likely to both be seriously affected by criminal violence and be held responsible for the crime and violence committed” (Moser, et al., 2005, p. 125); this concurs with the age-driven tendencies from the former subsection on homicide. Whereas it is of course correct that in informal urban settlements violence has become an everyday reality, the approach to the so-called urban poor is, in the Mexican case, insufficient. Drawing on the context framed above, the following four factors in the Veracruz case have contributed to the shift in the apparent “normalised” equilibrium (Moser, et al., 2005, p. 126). Firstly, further evidence of the collusion of local (and in particular, state) government with violent criminal organisations was revealed in the post-fieldwork period, after 2016⁷¹. Secondly, dominant drug-trafficking organisations have developed towards being more like paramilitary-like groups, and as a consequence their relationship with the ‘official’ authorities and local inhabitants has changed (Correa-Cabrera, 2017). In Veracruz, these dynamics again reflected changes in state-level administration⁷². Thirdly, there has been an increasing tendency towards enforced ‘recruiting’ (for which, read ‘kidnapping’) of youth – members of street gangs – from the most disadvantaged areas, by criminal organisations. Fourthly, there is an increasing influx of highly addictive illicit substances, increasingly cheap and of ever lower quality which,

⁷¹ As one of my interlocutors stated, the local PRI-members have evolved towards an “army of lawyers”. This army has become a key-merger in the process of collusion between the government and the criminals. Quite literally, “from administrating the crime, through collaborating, to finally transmute into the criminals” (Sp. *De administrar el crimen, a colaborar y a volverse criminales*). Conversation with Jorge via email, December 2018.

⁷² The first and the second tendency relates strictly to specific criminal organisations operating in the territory of Veracruz, the neighbouring Tamaulipas to the north, and Oaxaca to the South. For the purpose of this research, it is unnecessary to name these organisations.

together with the increasing numbers of incoming firearms, has provided the youth with relatively easier access to both⁷³.

As a consequence of the above, and bearing out the generalisation of this statement, the context of violence in Veracruz inclines towards a threefold direction. Firstly, the permissive “atmosphere” (Taussig, 2005, p. 11) of extortion, abuse, criminalisation and re-criminalisation, and other violent crimes; secondly, extreme forms of brutality, particularly in relation to the disappeared and tortured, uncovered in the period further to the fieldwork, from 2016 to the end of 2018 (Arroyo Fonseca and Rebolledo Flores, 2019, forthcoming). The criminal group⁷⁴ particularly targeted by state agencies and rival groups consist of young persons from particularly disadvantaged areas of the urban-rural amalgam around which this research centres. Thirdly, and as a result of the above, both fear and distrust have spread among the neighbours and families alike.

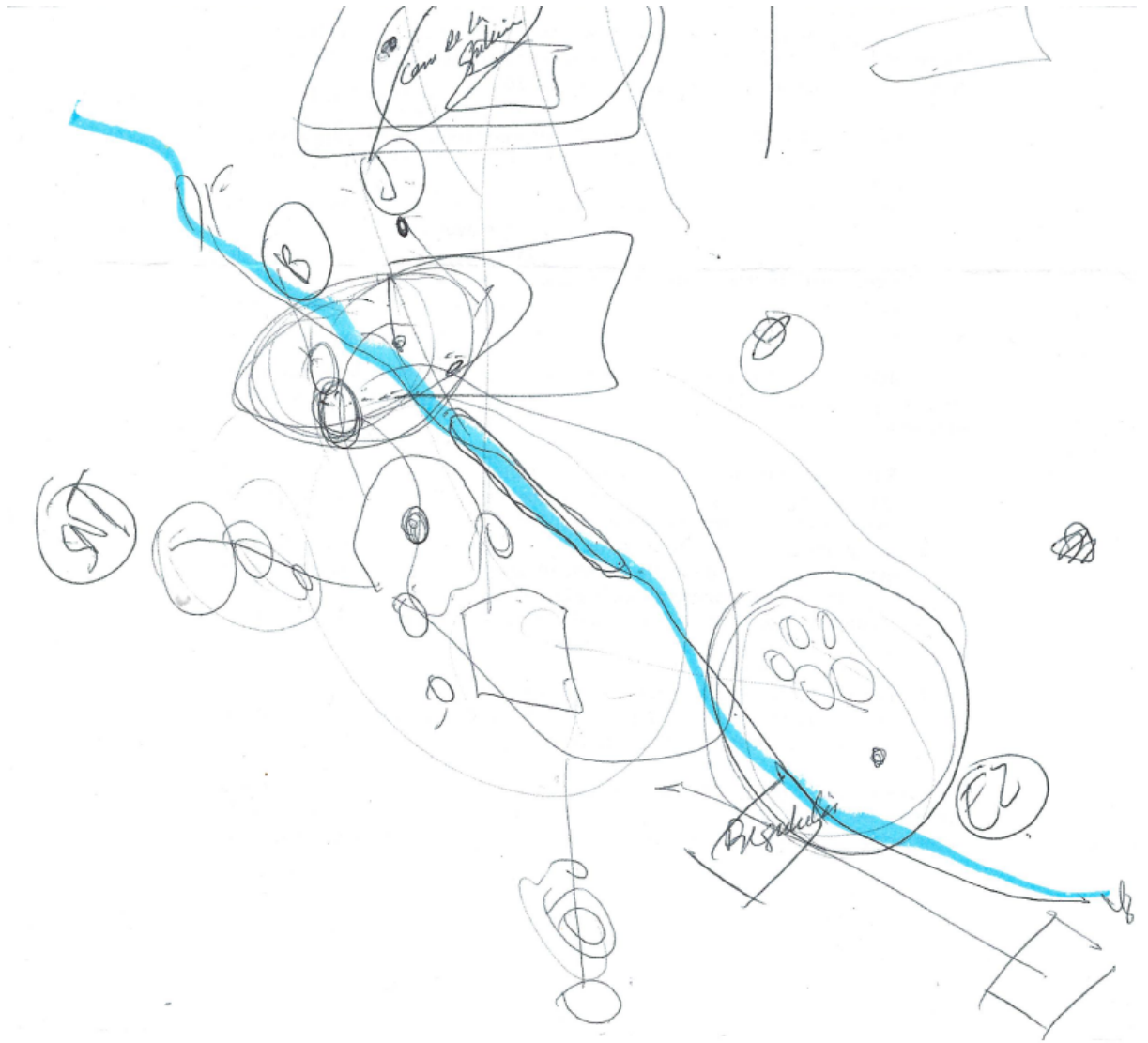
Of course, the context of Veracruz and Paloxpan goes far beyond its insecurity. Paloxpan is a vibrant city; its predominant source of income derives from simple services, where three main families form a kind of oligarchy built over the course of a century, and dominate the vast majority of businesses, which they own and run as they like (Arroyo Fonseca and Rebolledo Flores, 2019, forthcoming). Their influence originated in the coffee production industry, which they monopolised at the beginning of the twentieth century and on which they built their wealth, and extends to include nearly all aspects of services, from supermarkets to cafes and restaurants. Locally-owned, small-scale services exist in Paloxpan, but experience difficulty in sustaining themselves as competitors alongside the big, oligarchic businesses. The city is also marked by lively student and artistic communities which borrow from the locally famous *fandangos*, based in Veracruz Puerto and the south of the state⁷⁵; the periphery, however, is understandably different. Without drawing on extremes between urban vs. rural and the capital vs. province, I sketch some elements of this diversity in the next subsection.

⁷³ The third and fourth factors come from the fieldwork observations and conversations in Paloxpan, 2015.

⁷⁴ For the purpose of this research, it is unnecessary to use names of opponent criminal organisations.

⁷⁵ This refers literally to a party, where communication between musicians and dancers is carried out through the music of *son* and *huapango*. While vastly improvised, it recalls a syncretism of the local culture, embedded in the Veracruz region (rather than the particularism of the administrative state), beyond administrative boundaries with Tamaulipas to the north or Oaxaca to the south.

Often, mostly in conversations with ‘gatekeepers’ or people at risk, my interlocutors in Paloxpan drew a very simple map to indicate the locations they referred to. The vast majority of these maps contained a north-south division, marked by a ‘motorway’ that in the north went towards Mexico City (a drive of at least five-and-a-half hours) and southbound, to Veracruz Puerto. All *barrios* in Paloxpan and the surrounding villages were shown according to this spatial reference (see maps 2 and 3).



Map 2. Map of Paloxpan drawn by Eduardo. Paloxpan, August 2015.

a bus. In the perception of its inhabitants, the Young Zone was abandoned, as the mayor or governor were keen to visit their unpaved (and as a result, often flooded) streets with promises only in times of political campaign, if at all (see Chapter Five).

4.1. How did I access ‘the field’: who chose whom?

The field research which took place between July 2015 and February 2016 was marked by two main qualities: its slowness and its movement. From its very beginning I encapsulated this slow pace in motion as a journey which moved ‘from driving along motorways to walking unpaved roads’, in order to mark the contrast between the pre-field part of my life elsewhere in Mexico⁷⁶ and the actual field study’s location, Paloxpan, a city of half-a-million inhabitants in the central part of Veracruz state. The slowness of the first phase of the empirical study was marked by quiet and field-driven exploration, simultaneous with a high (perceived) intensity of ongoing flow of events. Such intensity revealed itself both in a feeling exhaustion and the sensation of high density of time passing by. As I wrote repeatedly in my fieldnotes: “Days feel like weeks, weeks like months”⁷⁷. I was frequently reminding myself to slow down and to ‘listen to the field’. As a result, this fieldwork was carried out at a relatively slow pace over eight months, with very short (a few days) periods of leave from the field (for family reasons, such as birthday and funeral to Mexico City, as well as one trip to the UK). The fieldwork nearly conducted the researcher in a number of ways, such as deciding where and with whom exactly to conduct the actual study. The following paragraphs tackle this process in further detail.

My first visit to Paloxpan was a so-called pilot one, with the purpose of verifying the decision to conduct fieldwork in Veracruz⁷⁸. Prior to arriving in the city, I knew only one person, briefly, from previous consultancy jobs in Mexico City. For the purpose of this first ‘pilot’ visit, I met a couple more gatekeepers-to-be, introduced to me as ‘friends of friends’, of whom in particular one local academic opened his networked world in the locality with great generosity. Following the traditional research path, during my first weeks in the field I set up a number of preparative meetings with local academics, contacted and met through a so-called snowball effect which took me from one to

⁷⁶ Five years in Mexico City, with a brief episode in Puebla.

⁷⁷ I could hardly believe that it was only, for example, three weeks in; my impression was that so many things had happened.

⁷⁸ This took place in February 2015, nearly four months prior to the actual fieldwork starting.

another. Most of these conversations brought me closer to understanding what not to do, rather than which direction to follow. The initial conversations with local academics turned out to be a useful and explorative rather than defining phase of the field study. Although my research developed independently after the majority of these early meetings, I recognised their valuable input and advice. During the first month in the field, I produced a table of the advantages and disadvantages of five diverse options of areas (neighbourhoods of Paloxpan and its surroundings) in which I considered carrying out my research (see Appendix 2, Table 2). I took into account feasibility of access, my available contacts, and the calculated level of insecurity that each area represented; I also estimated the safety levels of potentially living on site, to name a few factors. Whereas the table provided some clarity regarding possible paths for the study to develop along, its major benefit was the effect of actually listening to the field. The most relevant connection – to the Young Zone *colonia* and Mateo, the facilitator at the Youth Centre – resulted from an accidental encounter while wandering the streets of the village on the edge of Paloxpan: indeed, it was on one of the outside-the-centre streets where in one of the cafes an older lady, Rocío, called me a friend soon after we met. I still remember how emotionally overwhelmed I felt, with a sudden surge of gratitude directed towards her⁷⁹. Not only did she show a great amount of trust; she also introduced me to further gatekeepers, who were essential in connecting me to those who became research interlocutors, and from whom I learnt about how things ‘moved around’, their potential meaning, and what kind of local language prevailed. Among them was Mateo, the social worker and facilitator at the local Youth Centre where I attended weekly sessions of group therapy for youth at risk of addiction and their families. There was also Xochitl, who not only invited me to her home but also generously let me stay with her temporarily; treating me as her adopted niece, she introduced me to her neighbours in the Young Zone, where a great portion of this field research took place. Over time, I gradually gained the trust of and spent an increased amount of time with surrounding families, in particular those of Amalia and *Doña*⁸⁰ Lulú, as well as *Don*⁸¹ Ángel. Most of them I became attached to, and they indeed became friends.

⁷⁹ Yes, this was gendered, as the other participants of the encounter were male.

⁸⁰ An informal title, similar to ‘Mrs’ or ‘madam’, used to show respect.

⁸¹ An informal title, similar to ‘Mr’ or ‘sir’, used to show respect.

4.2. The encounter with whom?

This research is interested in vulnerable people, defined as ‘non-elite’ members of the local community. In this approximation I follow the ‘local-local’ (Richmond, 2011, p. 427), and Millar’s conceptualisation of the non-elite members of a community (2014a), that is, those identified as unprivileged on a map of local power relations, and who are excluded from the poles of power of whatever type (such as social, economic and financial). However, this study makes an effort to distance itself from categorisations situated along the ‘powerful vs. powerless’ dichotomous linear continuum. Instead, the focus is on disadvantaged community members, without pointing out any particular form of non-elitism, but also with the hope of recognising a potential for agency and therefore resilience.

Throughout this thesis I refer to the people, my research interlocutors and inhabitants of Paloxpan – the participants of the everyday I was immersed in, with the initial purpose of interacting with as many as possible ‘members of the community’. Over the course of the fieldwork, however, I realised that the family – often female-headed – was a more meaningful entity than an actual community. I was speaking with people who defined their identities in many different ways, and although most of them saw their lives embedded in the locality they called ‘home’, in fact, their ways of dealing with insecurity, as well as their forms of communication, evolved rather around their families (including the extended family) rather than a proper community. This is one of the main reasons I formulated the notion of the local community (see Chapter One) as based on a common understanding of ways of behaving in public, which was specific even at the level of *barrio*. This was a starting point; however, unlike the family, it did not have a defining force in the findings this thesis discusses in the analysis in chapters four to six. The exception of the sessions in the Youth Centre demonstrated how the loosely understood community merged with the extended family in the ‘safe spaces’, which I further elaborate on in Chapter Five.

My interlocutors were chosen from among the inhabitants of Paloxpan and its urban-rural periphery in the Young Zone for two reasons. Firstly, I wished to speak and cohabit with people identified as economically less privileged – those who did not form any type of local elite, following Millar’s conceptualisation of the unprivileged in his ethnographic approach to peacebuilding (2014a). Secondly, I was particularly searching for those exposed to the risk of being targeted, which derived from the type of professional activity

they were involved in, such as activists, journalists, or students and artists. For a long time, I looked for an adequate term to encapsulate such a diversity of voices. I rejected a number of labels for reasons that this thesis does not have space for, but my main purpose was to show them respect as individuals, and to move their voices, personalities, subjectivities and grey everyday lives to the foreground of the study. I opted to avoid terms such as ‘urban poor’ (Fay, 2005), ‘excluded’ (Domoslawski, 2016), ‘marginalised’ (Yiftachel, 2009) or ‘actors’ (Moser and Clark, 2001). While acknowledging the limitations of the general term ‘people’ or the emphasis on only one quality of ‘less privileged’, the remainder of this thesis nevertheless includes as much of their experiences as possible.

Not all of my interlocutors were at high risk of experiencing violence, and of course the risk of living in a deprived neighbourhood differed from *barrio* to *barrio*, as did the exposure of those engaged in more vulnerable professions (alongside those mentioned above was the activity of searching for a ‘disappeared’ relative as a full-time job). The ‘assessment’ of risk was mainly subjective and derived from my previous awareness of different types of journalist targeted, as well as from the pilot visit and the exploratory stage of this field research. This reflection emerged over an extended period of time, as a result of listening to as many local people as possible, reading the local press, and listening to academics based in the three major local higher education institutions.

5. Methods

This section focuses on the four main research methods used in the field. Firstly, I (almost entirely) passively observed the collective therapy sessions at the Youth Centre; secondly, I carried out informal conversations which were mostly scheduled not-too-far in advance (mostly with journalists, activists and local academics) and some accidental (with those I met on the street or in the food market). Thirdly, and when I gained more trust over time, I listened to what could be called live oral stories, from participants in the YC in a different setting (upon their invitation to their homes), among the neighbours in the Young Zone, and with some activists and artists. Lastly, I (actively) participated in some aspects of everyday life, predominantly in the Young Zone *barrio*. We – members of the female circle – used to cook different recipes together; some took two to three days to prepare, others were made to be sold and provide an income. The same was the case with washing and ironing for a local restaurant on the neighbours’ patio. These daily tasks,

mostly around meals, sometimes with family and children, were filled with casual everyday conversations where I could observe the way informal communication happened, but also what kind of things worried the inhabitants and why, and what were the differences between now and 'before' (which was a common, unspecified reference)⁸². To attend these activities on an irregular yet frequent basis allowed me to first, build trust, and second, to ask the same questions more than once. On purpose, and as a precaution I have learnt over the course of research in field, I avoided having a regular, repeated weekly calendar of events. As a consequence, I alternated my days of planned visits to the Young Zone (where I stayed overnight occasionally, but not extensively or regularly) with meetings with new and old interlocutors, which took place in locations of their choice: for example, the coffee field, or the centrally-located square, cafe or even bench. The only very regular commitment I had was to attend the weekly group sessions in the Youth Centre, which took place on Thursdays in the early afternoon. In addition, I sometimes attended the second group on Friday evenings (which because of the late hour I preferred to avoid), as well as one-to-one briefings with the group facilitator, Mateo, which took place fortnightly on average. I observed a total of 37 sessions, each with an average of 10-15 participants (not all of them repeated on a weekly basis), which marked the long period of gaining the trust of some of the regular attendees, some of whom let me into their homes and whose stories I could follow in more detail. This was the closest to the role of 'observant' I could get to, where I mostly listened, in order to respect the non-judgmental group dynamic taking place. In contrast, and evolving gradually over time, I participated in diverse daily activities, such as cooking and ironing (which provided a source of income) with the female circles in the Young Zone (around ten women of different age and their children). These were spaces of quotidian talk, chatting while doing, over daily activities, with conversations around family tasks, as well as around the subjects which concerned the neighbours and were as a result, 'on the agenda'. That changed on a daily or weekly basis and obviously developed organically. However, those topics which worried the neighbours were predominantly related to my issues of interest, and formed a smooth entrance to the conversations that I prompted to develop. Meanwhile, and as discussed in Chapter Five, these were also circles of generating informal channels of knowledge, quite literally 'at the table'. Conversations with activists and journalists (as I designate two of the predominant groups 'at risk') were located somewhere between the more 'passive' listening and more 'active' exchange. I predominantly received information from them, while taking notes

⁸² This usually referred to the 'peak' of violence in 2011, as depicted in the section 3.3.1 of this chapter.

during our informal conversations, which were only loosely guided by my questions. Rather, they were triggered by the more general, “So, what is the situation of journalists in Paloxpan?” which opened up the phase of so-called catharsis, filled with worries they revealed over the course of the conversations. I met with 22 representatives at least two to three times each⁸³, and who included photographers, journalists, students, activists, artists, and families of those who are called ‘disappeared’ – some of these categories overlapping – some of whom became friends, and with some others I still keep contact at the time of writing. The ‘peripheral’ spaces I attended which have not found that much of a space in the final version of this project include the coffee plantations, food markets, buses, food corner shops and food stands, and the laundry service, which I attended often but irregularly. However, all those with whom I established a relationship influenced the findings analysed later in this thesis, in chapters four to six.

5.1. Translating: from motorways to unpaved roads

This subsection develops around a number of translations I encountered throughout this study. Firstly, the one mentioned in the title of this chapter quite literally was associated with the movement between different spaces: from driving along the motorways in my previous life in Mexico (as a professional, friend and family member in Mexico City), to walking along the literally unpaved roads (for example, on my way to the Young Zone). In this I refer to various *mexicos* (Olivos Santoyo and Cuadriello Olivos, 2012) that not only vary from city to city, but also are embedded in one place, as the example below from Paloxpan to the Youth Centre depicts. Secondly, translations between languages included (but were not exclusive to) an almost automatic translation from Spanish to English. I did not require a translator, as I had been fluent in Mexican Spanish for five years prior to moving to Veracruz. In addition, on a daily basis I was learning about the particularities of the regional Spanish in its mundane, regional and vernacular version of different *barrios* that was in places different from the *chilango* Spanish (that is, which originated in Mexico City) I had known before⁸⁴. Needless to say, this street-based Spanish which filled my fieldnotes required translation into academic English during the writing-up process. Writing the thesis also involved translating the realities: one that was full of emotions and

⁸³ Not all of whom are listed in the appendix among the names of participants.

⁸⁴ Without neglecting the nuances of the regional and local specificities, I was able to acquire these linguistic differences gradually. Meanings were usually possible to deduce, but where nuances were not immediately obvious, I would simply ask for clarification.

perceived contradictions, unstructured and at times confusing, a personal amalgam of stories, to another reality of academic writing, based at a privileged Western university, exposed at conferences, apparently coherent and structured according to a 'cold' academic narrative.

I was guided by the field also in a sense of being open to unexpected spaces and accidental encounters. The so-called snowball effect drove the evolving networks of interlocutors: I met one through the recommendation of another. At other times, and with different precaution, I met 'informants' in a more accidental manner while in public spaces, for example, at food stands. Conversations were often conducted while walking, both with inhabitants of the Young Zone and with some of the activists at risk. I rather left them to decide. Very rarely did I record the conversations (the exception was in response to the expressed expectation of the activist), opting instead to make notes whenever acceptable. I always made my interlocutor aware of the reason for the conversation, together with making clear the purpose of my stay in Paloxpan. In some cases however, such as at the Youth Centre sessions, making notes was inappropriate: this was a circle of families, of a quite intimate nature, and often involving mostly cathartic forms of expression. Making notes immediately after leaving the therapy space was enough to capture the main topics, or even sometimes quotes, while they remained fresh. This seemed a better way gradually to build trust among the participants, who were from diverse deprived areas of Paloxpan. As a result, some of the quotations are not taken down exactly word for word; however, they always represent the exact meaning given by the author, to the extent I was able to grasp. Occasionally, when a meeting took place in a public space, my interlocutors demonstrated their nervousness about me making notes and asked what I was writing about. It was my aim at the beginning of every conversation (when meeting someone new) to reassure them of the purpose of my work, as well as their anonymity. It was necessary at times to repeat this, given that such a trustworthy relationship takes time to develop (hence the repetitiveness of our meetings). At other times, I stopped taking notes and listened instead, applying the same strategy as at the Youth Centre. As mentioned briefly in the introduction, all the names I use in this thesis (both of my interlocutors and of locations) are fictional, to protect their identities and to honour their given consent.

Much of my time was spent in commuting, and this was on purpose. Paloxpan, to a certain extent, is a very walkable city, despite its predominantly hilly streets. Commuting here was

considerably shorter than in, for example, Mexico City, but it still took time, particularly when there was a need to travel from the far-flung surrounding villages to the Youth Centre, or if, as in the case of maids and coffee plantation workers, they had several different workplaces to visit daily. Among the means of transport was the bus, and people took different connections to get to their destinations⁸⁵. My purpose was to experience the space in as similar a way as possible to the people alongside whom I lived. I walked long distances, especially at the beginning, to observe how the *barrios* changed from one street to another (see photographs 2 and 3).



Photograph 2. Urban spaces (1) captured while walking in Paloxpan. December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko)

⁸⁵ Needless to say, as elsewhere in Latin America the buses formed a phenomenon themselves: with their high speeds, loud music, at times mobile sellers and musicians on board, nearly-never enough space, as well as flexible and uncertain hours. This however, was not any different from those in Mexico City. Most of them were just older, and underfunded to an even greater extent.



Photograph 3. Urban spaces (2) captured while walking in Paloxpan. December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko)

Informing oneself about means of urban and rural mobility in Paloxpan is based predominantly on word-of-mouth, in terms of which direction to go or what bus to take.

On one of the initial trips to the Youth Centre, someone on the way⁸⁶ explained that of the two routes at my disposal, he highly recommended avoiding one (even though it was closer) because of its proximity to some “bad neighbourhoods”, as well as being much hillier and full of bends. He was protective in his manner, almost ordering me to take this particular route, advice clearly influenced by my ethnicity (perceived outsider) and my gender. Were I a young working-class man, he could have foregone that recommendation. I ended up using both routes on a weekly basis: one there, one back (see also Photograph 10 in Chapter Four). After a few weeks however, I realised another shortfall in my perception. Despite complaining about the cost of transportation and its bad timing, people preferred to take either the bus or communal taxis⁸⁷ rather than the cheaper option of walking; not all of them had time for such long walks (lasting up to two hours). Put another way, I wanted to walk everywhere to acquire a sense of the space as similar as possible to that of my interlocutors, but I took this too far: they used buses whenever possible to avoid wasting time. My (here unsuccessful) attempt at ‘walking as a local’ was soon corrected by my interlocutors.



Photograph 4. ‘Walking as a local’. Paloxpan, December 2015. (Photo by Sop Rodchenvko)

⁸⁶ He could have been my grandfather; he responded without being asked, overhearing my question put to a *señora* (lit. married woman) who ran a food stand on my way to the Youth Centre.

⁸⁷ Lit. (Sp.) *taxi colectivo*.

6. The researcher in the local context. Positionalities

I recognise the relational mode this semi-inductive study entails, and my – the researcher's – presence and interference in the reality which, rather than being objective, remains intersubjectively agreed and constructed. This section identifies several positionalities which may have affected the course of this study before, during and following the research in field. While it locates the study in a physical space, it is reflexive in that it draws on a network of relationships from among the research co-participants, including the author. Of course, this approach does not mean I revoke my own responsibility for the entire project; I nevertheless recognise the at times personal character of these non-objective relationships which unfolded during fieldwork.

The researcher is positioned as a partial insider. Notably, this consists in living inside (the community) while remaining perceived as an outsider (by the community). In consideration of this, the researcher aims to avoid positioning herself within the asymmetric power configuration within the local community. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the difference is inevitable, yet can be at least partially acknowledged. It is crucial that the research addresses the community with as humble an approach as is possible, in order to attempt to balance the inevitable perceived postcolonial positionality.

Cultural sensitivity becomes crucial to comprehending any local context. In this sense, this research is situated in opposition to the institutional – and rule-of-law – oriented proposal which ignores the contextual significance of particular circumstances, yet has been seen as dominant among the Mexican discourse of academia and policymakers. Indeed, specific cultural baggage requires consideration while positioning research participants. In this study, the cultural bias of the researcher is at least twofold. Firstly, a pre-bias of Polish historical memory, as well as transgenerational experience influenced this research design at all stages. These elements of collective, individual and family memory constructed a relevant background for the exploration of suffering and its effects on the population. Secondly, over five years spent mostly in Mexico City settings as a student, professional, lecturer, speaker, author, consultant, civil servant, pedestrian, cyclist and driver, woman and spouse, a friend and family member, '*la güera*' (the blonde), '*gringa*' (perceived as a US citizen), and finally 'the local', have affected the way in which Mexican reality is perceived, and examined in this study.

To acknowledge the positionalities one possesses requires a necessary (and at the same time impossible) distance. It implies not only a deep respect for diversity, including in cultural terms. This approach recognises a locally well-known aspect of “sentiment and irony that Mexican life contains” (Sheridan, quoted by Ibargüengoitia, 2008) that provokes a particular, somehow relaxed attitude of friendly disregard, which is frequently misunderstood as apathy or indifference. Consequently, for a stranger, and in particular for a newcomer, the level of flexibility may be surprising. This may be reflected in a joke, and irony, distance and critique.

A number of diverse positionalities interplayed over the course of the fieldwork, both for myself and for the communities I worked with. In particular, the wide disparity between my level of privilege and theirs felt at times overwhelming and marked the journey this research took. My fieldnotes indicate some of the positionalities I encountered while living in Paloxpan, all of which I experienced interchangeably (although they may appear contradictory), and at times they affected my perception of the surroundings (Sylvester, 2010). At the beginning of August 2015, I wrote to my supervisor a couple of lines which convey my state of mind at the beginning of the field research:

There is a lot (too much?) of empathy and compassion that make me feel extremely exhausted (I know it is a part of adjustment). I sometimes feel I resemble a tool, a box where everyone can throw whatever (no complaint here though). It's like I was living for others, living to listen to them (which is fine, I am here for this purpose). However, it is truly very hard to overcome the flow of emotions and to avoid sometimes openly reacting when facing certain testimonies. Before anything, tons of very strong feelings of hopelessness... Sometimes, people who I listen to may not survive tomorrow. And I'm ONLY a privileged listener. This changes everything, all of my privileged life experiences I had had before. Still, no idea how to make sense from what I am doing at the moment. Does it make sense at all?⁸⁸

I was careful not to let these feelings affect my relationship with others; at the same time, while debriefing my supervisor and noting them in the field diary, I was able to acquire some distance from some at times very strong feelings, and acknowledge them as temporary. Firstly, I assumed a position of humility, repeatedly asking myself: “How dare I come here and ask questions about people’s lives?”. This derived from a contrasting sense (and the actuality) of the privilege I exercised in my temporary interruptions of peoples’

⁸⁸ Email correspondence with my supervisor in the second month of fieldwork, August 2015.

daily lives, with the simultaneous prospect of return to a different, more secure reality. In short, I actually had a choice. With this in mind, I could not help but feel that I lacked the legitimacy needed to request my interlocutors to share their difficult life situations merely to benefit my research, a feeling I struggled with for a long time, both during and upon my return from the field. Secondly, an ‘activist drive’ overwhelmed me a number of times, especially at the beginning. I restrained myself from intervening in others’ lives, which would not have been ethical. Such ‘help’ – which they might in any case not be willing to receive – could result in unforeseen harm. Among others, this was revealed through sleepless nights (described in Chapter Five) or crying together with others (again, in the ‘safe space’ of the Youth Centre). Thirdly, I experienced a sense of guilt in relation to our contrasting privileged positions. The possibility of increasing their level of risk while making us (while meeting in public) even more visible led me to trust their judgement about the safety situation, and to be careful in my routine (for example, informing a trusted person of my movements, returning home before dusk, and sending a control message at the same time every day to a family member in Mexico City). Despite being accustomed to being so visible on the streets of Mexico, at times, I felt uncomfortable with the attention it brought me; I confronted this with the rhetorical question, “If my job is to observe people, who am I to expect them not to observe me?”. However, in Mexico, such visibility in public has a gendered dimension, which I had to accept, and ignore as much as possible. As a consequence, I invested a lot of energy into disguising myself in the way I dressed; I also changed my routine and daily walking routes, while at the same time attempting to gain as much experience of the ‘Others’ everyday as possible, for example, in the modes of transport I took, and acquiring certain food from markets rather than shops. Despite these efforts, of course I failed in the unrealistic expectation that drove me. Fourthly, I felt overwhelming frustration in the face of the many visible daily injustices, which at times paralysed me and which my research did not concern. This was however a repetitive aspect of my daily relating with reality, never ceasing to contrast with my effort to maintain my position of ‘neutral observer’. What I could do and was doing as a result, was acknowledging and constantly reminding myself that I needed to separate myself from the reality of this, and that there was little I could do about structural poverty, gendered inequalities, police corruption, mutual disrespect and others. I simply reminded myself to remain thankful. Aside from writing this thesis, there was in fact very little I could actually ‘do’ in return. My insistent active participation in daily jobs such as ironing and cooking exemplified such an attempt: a woman in charge could sit and rest for a few minutes as I

took her turn, a rare treat in her busy life. We continued our conversations and the dynamic silently changed: my physical work allowed her to rest and think things through. On another occasion, I organised some English teachers from the local university to volunteer to provide English classes for children in the local community at the periphery of Paloxpan. Although some classes took place, over time they stopped: the logistics in terms of the schedule and transport difficulties made them unsustainable. In the end, it proved very challenging to give something back to my interlocutors, and rarely sustained through the complexity of the local everyday.

7. Relational methodology of the encounter

This section presents the research methodology, epitomised by a metaphor of the slow and open-ended journey of the encounter. The “collage” (after Feyerabend, 1995, p. 143) of its components does not aim to reflect any systematic, rational, Western-oriented logic. On the contrary, it develops in a rather open, likely-to-shift framework of slow and messy discovery. It represents a subjective process of situated knowledge generation (Wibben, 2011). To shed light on particular forms of coping with emotions and embodied insecurities may contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which a community continues with everyday life despite on-going uncertainty, and perhaps in the future recover and heal. This approach of ‘positional reflexivity’ (Macbeth, Savin-Baden, 2010) intends to gain insight into the wide spectrum of possible emotions which contribute to these responses, which include fear but also shame, indignation and impotence, and is also revealed, among others, through humour and its culturally specific understanding (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2008; Danchev, 2006). Thus, the researcher is challenged by the task of representing someone else’s interpretation of history.

The purpose of this fieldwork is to continue learning *with*, rather than researching *on* the local community (Heron and Reason, 2006; Savin-Baden and Major, 2010). The journey starts with *unlearning* (Knott, 2014), although I am quickly reminded of its impossibility. It requires from the researcher an effort of disconnecting from any preconceptions and then reconnecting, to construct new basis for investigation. Despite the fact it was my wish, I could not erase my previous ‘knowing’ about living with insecurity (elsewhere than in Veracruz, but still) in Mexico. The constant questioning and re-evaluating of assumptions throughout the process leads to ‘active learning’ as an open-ended dialogue with

community members, who through the process of informal conversation contribute to the research design (Landry and MacLean, 1996). In this, the hypotheses that the analytical framework introduced in Chapter Two are of only a tentative character.

In sum, the research in field evolved around the following:

- Pre-field pilot visit. This included a brief introduction to the field, conversations with a few potential gatekeepers, and a pre-assessment of the overall security situation.
- Preliminary stage, based on interviews with local academics and other potential gatekeepers. This introductory and exploratory phase allowed the identification of particular local actors relevant for this study.
- Ethnographic elements form an on-going insight: participant observation, involving sensitivity and curiosity, common for anthropology and feminist studies, form a core stance for the researcher (Marcus, 2007; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; Enloe, 2014). These, together with listening (Landry and MacLean, 1996; K. Bennett et al, 2015), allowed a slow introduction to the community, achieving some degree of mutual trust and the start of informal conversations and interactions with community members. Furthermore, this research hoped to gain insight into ‘street-level politics’ (Rodgers, 2006, p. 288) of particular neighbourhoods in Paloxpan.
- This subjective and situated research addresses interactions among local community members through informal conversations with as many people as possible and in consideration of the analytical framework.
- Over time, when informal leaders and the vulnerable community members were identified, further conversations expanded on the flow of information as a potentially key element of the interactions within a violent context. In this, the fieldwork was guided by supporting questions, such as: how do inhabitants warn each other about a potential/existing threat?; how do they avoid exposing themselves to adverse conditions?

The main purpose of the field research was to transform (literally, to translate, as seen in the previous subsection) a map of often contradictory, yet simultaneously existing ways of coping into an understandable unit. Such an approach (whose methods included participant observation, informal conversations, simply ‘hanging out’ and walking together,

and fulfilling daily tasks within a household) hopes to add to the construction of a bridge between the theoretical (conceptualisation) and practice-based approach (immersed in the ‘field’). It constantly learns from, and is inspired by, the ‘field’, but is also nourished by some theoretical stances (Scott, 1990; Enloe, 2014; Cairns, 2013). It is also seen as a continuum, identifying past experiences as part of the context (including positionalities of research participants, the researcher included), but also the writing process. Finally, it is a complex and imperfect process. In this sense, it is comprehended as unfinished and likely to be transformed in due course, as open to further evaluation. The researcher is closer to a mediator between the community and the final text, rather than claiming the position of ‘expert’.

Reflexivity is among the essential components of this research. While in the process of fieldwork specifically, and the rest of the time conducting research more generally, I began an on-going evaluation. Given only a partial possibility to acknowledge and to *feel* completely with the ‘Other’ (Sontag, 2004; Dauphinée, 2013a), this study aims to write through the experience of others as collected and interpreted by the author. Thus it is inevitably through the relationship (or the encounter) that these findings emerged, rather than purely ‘seen by’ them. I acknowledge that this writing can present only a partial and subjective picture, as discussed by Dauphinée, from whom I learn what is actually *possible* in writing: “It is this openness to the worlds of the possible that shows us the partiality of our claims, the ubiquity of potentialities for victimhood or for guilt (or for both at once) and the thinness of our skins in the face of militarised violence” (2015, pp. 263-264). Potentially, this is what remains feasible in this study.

This study is situated in and works through asymmetric information possession (and thus unequal knowledge construction) from the start. Over time, and further into the fieldwork, it became clear that ‘the locals’ – neighbours, communities, friends and families, to name a few – possessed a great awareness of their surroundings. They revealed only what they wanted to. Whether individual or collective, organised or otherwise, their responses were formed apparently independently, and often framed in reaction to the authorities. Inevitably, however, they were also affected by the presence of the researcher, as well as the top-down narratives, as shown in the later analytical part of this thesis. I realised at some point I was being purposefully shown things that were conceived of as positive or beautiful somehow, for and by the people I talked to (including Rocío, Amalia, Xochitl)

or, put simply, what they chose to share with me (Don Ángel). On the other hand, I cannot overestimate the privileged position of being positively received at the start, because of my interlocutors' few but positive impressions of my country of origin (Poland). To recall another example, as a researcher of a foreign university, and as a result of pre-fieldwork contacts, I was invited to the closed meeting between "victims" and high-risk groups, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights representative. Of course, this resulted in further connections and fruitful networks that this study benefited from.

This research process takes place in attentive movement. It develops around slow discovery (in contrast to efficiency-oriented and at times depersonalised 'data collection'), to finally form a messy picture of 'results'. The researcher does not pretend this journey is complete in any way. On the contrary, a crucial awareness of the continuity with the 'before' and 'after' is one of the driving forces of this study in the field. This journey attempts to grasp an instant, a flashback or snapshot of fragmented memory of my interlocutors' experiences. It is not assumed that their complete understanding is feasible, nor that there is such an 'objective' perspective on coping with violent uncertainty. Rather, at the heart of this process is a conversation within an encounter: an instant of exchanged and shared words which represent ideas in a particular time and space. This is a process filled with mutual respect, of which 'active listening' is a crucial element (K. Bennett et al., 2015; but also Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007).

In this research, listening in the field approximates a form of being (K. Bennett et al., 2015), where "silence is not the absence of sound but the beginning of listening" (Voegelin, 2010, p. 83). It continues between what may be identified as the open and non-judgmental listening to an 'Other' as part of a conversation (as a more accurate term than an interview), and a 'wider' comprehensive action of staying attentive to the non-obvious inputs Scott labelled 'hidden transcripts' (1990). To give an example, what appears at first to be indifference, after a more patient digging may turn into indignation. Thus, a careful and sensible listening uncovers what is behind the unspoken and silenced. It allows listening to and learning from the 'noisy silence' of what is apparently unspoken (Green, 1995; Hume, 2008), but which lives fervent inside the community, underneath the surface of 'agreed' silence. This is also among the reasons this study listens to indirect artistic expression (such as music and its lyrics, as well as poetry), to laughing and jokes

(sometimes as a form of communication), to double-meaning (complex coded linguistic narratives), or daily forms of kindness expressed among strangers in public places. These cultural components may provide forms of healing for a particular community (Nordstrom, 2004).

8. Conclusions

This chapter supports the process of responding to the main research questions, namely: How do people respond to everyday *violences*?; How do they communicate amid silence? In that, it discussed how, where and with whom the study in the field took place. It connects the former conceptual part (chapters one and two) with the subsequent analytical part (chapters four to six), which analyses the fieldwork findings and reviews the analytical framework.

Through extended research in the field, this study developed access to diverse, unprivileged community members, and to those at risk. An insight to daily life was gained through participation in a number of mundane activities, providing support to some daily activities and jobs, as well as participating in some community and family gatherings, and assisting in the weekly meetings of families of youth at risk of drug consumption and addiction, while observing collective therapy sessions in the Youth Centre. I conducted long informal conversations, mainly with specific groups at higher risk, such as journalists and photojournalists, activists and their families, and families of the ‘disappeared’. This chapter introduced these access channels in detail, revealing some pitfalls, together with the real and perceived positionalities. It also covered the local state of insecurity as a relevant part of the local context in Veracruz and in Mexico.

This research writes against the depersonalisation of violence that some state-centred approaches perpetuate. In turn, I hereby follow the title of the thesis: *Walking through a land of skulls: persisting with everyday uncertainty in Mexico*. The title reflects on two main aspects of this research. Firstly, it was carried out literally by walking along the streets of Paloxpan, with all the subjective, slow and sensory aspects that such a form of mobility entails⁸⁹. Such walking brings together the relational form this study was co-generated in, and on

⁸⁹ I refer critically to the ‘walking as a local’ that I intended to pursue, particularly at the initial stage of the fieldwork.

which this chapter focused. Secondly, this type of walking was introduced by one of my interlocutors at the beginning of Chapter Six, where I quote her poem, in which she admitted “walk[ing] through a country of dead bodies; clandestine *tzompantli*⁹⁰ of anonymous martyrs”. In this, she referred to the mass clandestine graves, many of which were uncovered in the aftermath of my fieldwork but were actually being created in its course. She wrote her poem over a period of several months, similar to the length of my research in field, which again speaks to the walking pace. Through her written expression, she taught me about her ways of coping with the overwhelming news disclosed during that time. The clandestine yet uncovered graves – here, literally skulls – are mostly left unprotected. Not only are they not-so-clandestine anymore, but also their anonymity is reshaped by their public presence. Further, her words, as well as this study, stand against the disposability of the (massive amount of) found human remains which, in recent years, appeared to result in a shift in the public narrative about the violent conflict in Mexico, as mentioned in the local context in this chapter.

The disposability of human bodies is yet another element of the ‘surreal’ Mexico. Again, I wish to emphasise that this research stands in opposition to the normalised treatment this has been given by many observers. This study neither reduces the insecurity to “something to be fixed” (Sylvester, 2016, p. 65), nor does it ignore the suffering that people face. What Das indicates again resonates with my rewriting of the reality of Paloxpan into this thesis, in that in trying a number of times to write about violence, “I felt that every time I succeeded in saying something, I was left with a sense of malaise, a disappointment with what I had said. Given that there is a certain air of obviousness with which notions of the everyday and of violence are often spoken of in anthropological writing, I have been amazed at how difficult I found it to speak of these matters” (2007, p. 2).

⁹⁰ From Nahuatl (Aztec language): a wooden rack designed and constructed to carry and publicly display human skulls. See Chapter Six.

Chapter 4: ‘Everyday uncertainty’ in Mexico: between the embodied and narrated silences

Above all, the war machine understands atmosphere:
how to suspend reality, how to create the black hole.
Michael Taussig (2005)

1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the analytical part of this thesis (chapters four to six) which follows extended research in the field. Prior to this chapter, the conceptual part of the thesis detailed its core definitions (Chapter One), analytical framework (Chapter Two) and methodology (Chapter Three). These three chapters prepared this study for the eight months of fieldwork (July 2015 to February 2016) in the periphery of Paloxpan, Veracruz in Mexico, from which emerged a set of changes that this present chapter introduces to the research.

This chapter reflects on the in-depth exploration of the central research questions, namely: ‘How do people respond to everyday *violences*?’ and ‘How do they communicate amid silence?’. In doing so, it guides the reader through a journey which navigates the ‘everyday uncertainty’ which emerged from the research in the field. The chapter draws on the fieldwork’s findings in addressing the following particular objectives:

- To frame an understanding of ‘grey’⁹¹ everyday uncertainty, in contrast to the extremes of (in)security. This introduces the main components of the concept, as well as drawing a line of distinction between the two.
- To suggest a preliminary interpretation of different forms of negotiating everyday uncertainty, observed during the fieldwork and related to criminalised violences in Paloxpan. In doing so, it explores the initial responses of people to the everyday uncertainty surrounding them, together with some of the informal forms of communication they used.
- To introduce and examine a variety of silences expressed by the people of Paloxpan as the main ‘bottom-up’ response to a ‘top-down’ silencing. It thus studies the multiplicity of manners by which people use their agency in a

⁹¹ That is, related to the concept of greyness introduced in Chapter One.

silenced environment. The distinction between the two lies at the core of the second part of this chapter.

This chapter advances the development of earlier conceptualisations from Chapters One and Two, while at the same time incorporating some notions which emerged from the empirical study. Far from comparing, it rather embraces reworked concepts (such as the everyday, insecurity) which support multiple and on-going translations between languages and realities (see Chapter Three). In this, this chapter reassesses parts of the analytical framework presented in Chapter Two, which suggested potential mechanisms of coping with *violences*, supported by communication, and which enabled survival. Such evaluation continues during chapters five and six. The section on silences in the present chapter thus connects to two of the previously designed hypothetical responses to a context of violence, namely co-optation (collusion) and ‘apparent acceptance’, as explored in Chapter Two. Primarily however, this chapter adds to an understanding of people’s informal communication, which, together with coexistence, has been suggested in Chapter Two as a potential pillar of their further survival. Quite literally, this chapter and Chapter Five provide these forms of communication with meaning from the field.

This chapter introduces the forms by which the people of Paloxpan negotiated silences despite and alongside the dominant power relations, enabling them to persist in surviving within a context of uncertainty. This everyday context was linked to the subtle yet present threat of violence. Over the course of the fieldwork, the intention was to keep careful company with the residents of Paloxpan, while they played out this everyday uncertainty. I am interested in how potential ruptures to this dominant uncertainty work in spaces of ‘personal-political temporalities’, (borrowing from McLeod, 2016), ‘spaces of death’ (Taussig, 1992, p. 27; also 1987, pp. 7-8) and ‘shadows of death’ (Perera, 2001, p. 164; also Rodgers, 2006, p. 276), and normalised ‘states of emergency’ (Taussig, 1992, p. 25). Although far from being comparable with a context of diverse *violences*, these terms, originating in the literature of anthropology and politics, support an illustration of the everyday uncertainty in Paloxpan that this research focuses on. In this manner, the attempt is to follow the sensory experiences of everyday uncertainty in order to keep people at the centre of this enquiry.

The structure of this chapter unfolds as follows: firstly, it situates everyday uncertainty and

its function in the project, in terms of its rationale as well as core components. The second section then sheds light on the connection between uncertainty and the fieldwork, considering preliminary forms of living with the uncertain when dealing with the disappearance of a relative. Thirdly, the following section examines the forms that the silences take, from the top-down to the bottom-up. Lastly, this chapter also prepares a space in which to open further discussion on the ways of seeing and knowing, between ‘the imagined and the real’ as well as forms of communication which exist in the face of attempts to silence them. These, together with forms of persistence, will be examined in the following chapters five and six.

2. Everyday uncertainty

This section situates ‘everyday uncertainty’, as recognised by my interlocutors, at the core of a context of violence. It traces how uncertainty differs from insecurity in Paloxpan, and how it prevails against it. To push everyday uncertainty to the centre of the local context reveals a more subjective (than that of a traditional [in]security) approach towards the potentially violent everyday, and lies in accordance with the more informal, personal experiences which are of interest of this research. In taking the personal and subjective understanding of violence as the prevailing one, I follow Laura McLeod, as well as Veena Das and Artur Kleinman (2015; 2001, respectively). More importantly however, I pursue and interpret the ways people approach the possibility of violence, which I have encountered in Paloxpan since the early stages of fieldwork. In this, the concept of everyday uncertainty aims to contribute an alternative to the traditional perspective of insecurity. In this section I formulate everyday uncertainty through the eyes of the inhabitants of Paloxpan, taking on board its five core components: from ‘temporality’ and ‘subjectivity’, to ‘surveillance’ and the ‘unknown’. These elements are examined together with the fifth, ‘potentiality’, and enhance the situated aspect of this study, as well as everyday sensory experiences of the uncertain. Thus, the five components stem from my fieldwork observations, and add to the understanding of the context of this study. The following paragraphs situate the uncertain aspect of the context in the field.

2.1. ‘We are targeted’

Over the course of many informal conversations in Paloxpan, often while walking through

neighbourhood streets, the statement “We are targeted” (*Nos tienen apuntados*) was repeated to me⁹², as a form of reflection on the asymmetric power relations between militarised state agents and the ‘ordinary’ people in their everyday spaces. According to the official strategy of the federal and state authorities, the militarisation of public security (accelerated in Mexico since 2006) aims to protect the country’s inhabitants, while keeping criminals – the ‘Others’ – under control⁹³ (Astorga, 2015; Moloeznik, 2009). However, as my interlocutors and other authors have observed, the opposite was the case, and this apparent protection was read as – and often converted into – a threat⁹⁴ (Guerrero Gutiérrez, 2016; Gledhill, 2015).

There is a highly material dimension to the above paradox of militarisation: that of the firearm aimed at the people. ‘We are targeted’ has flown as a powerful whisper all around the city and the urban-rural periphery, repeatedly verbalising an illustration of the militarised police or Mexican Navy (*Gendarmería* or *Marina*) patrolling the streets⁹⁵. Troops and police officers formed a well-integrated component of the local urban-rural landscape: standing on the top of their pickup trucks, holding large firearms aimed at their surroundings full of pedestrians, other vehicles, children and families. This was a common sight at both the centre and the periphery of Paloxpan, incurring a state of alertness which pre-empted any need for the arms to be used. As one of my gatekeepers stated, law enforcement officials make it clear that they have their guns loaded and ready to fire at all times⁹⁶.

This image encapsulates a daily picture that for many anticipates a potentially random, even possibly accidental course of events. The very presence of firearms provided a real possibility for them to be fired at anyone, anytime. On the one hand, this blurred the line

⁹² For example, conversations with Xochitl and Itzel, The Young Zone and Paloxpan, July and August 2015, respectively.

⁹³ As elaborated in Chapter Three.

⁹⁴ Conversation with Lorena, Paloxpan, August 2015.

⁹⁵ The *Gendarmería Nacional* is a division of the *Policía Federal* (federal police; militarised police units at the federal level), launched in 2014 to combat organised crime. The *Marina* (also: *Fuerzas Navales*; *Navy*) is traditionally used in law enforcement in Veracruz, given that *Puerto Veracruz* (Veracruz Harbour, the biggest city in the state of Veracruz) has been historically considered its ‘home’. The *Heroica Escuela Naval Militar Antón Lizardo*, (Mexican Navy Officers’ College) is also situated in Puerto Veracruz. Correspondence with Jorge Rebolledo (his real name) via email, December 2018.

⁹⁶ One of this research’s gatekeepers, Jorge Rebolledo’s is one of the very few real names used in this thesis. As a local academic, he regularly interviews law enforcement agents in the state, among them soldiers and those of higher military ranks, as well as military police patrolling the streets. Correspondence with Jorge via email, December 2018.

between potential criminals and the rest of society, a tangible reminder to the people that in the eyes of the authorities, each one of them is under suspicion. In doing so, it expanded the ‘grey zone’ (as referred to throughout this work). At the same time, the repeated ‘We are targeted’ enabled my interlocutors to express and actively acknowledge how they *felt* about this, perhaps including some elements of what Judith Butler called ‘dignity in rage’ (2017). In articulating that they were a target, people’s agency was evident, while straddling the line between the apparent binary between the ‘powerful’ and ‘powerless’. In this statement, my interlocutors also embraced the very core of the uncertain reality in Paloxpan: the unknown of whether and when they would indeed become a target, and thus the daily possibility that they may be killed by the law enforcement agent’s firearm⁹⁷. At the same time, however, its repetition represented an acknowledgement of their awareness of the power asymmetry present in their environment. In this, they may have responded to the questions posed by Butler: “Does resistance require overcoming vulnerability? Or do we mobilise our vulnerability?” (2016, p. 13). Their response demonstrated constructive elements of persistence, properly examined in Chapter Six.

Everyday uncertainty as understood here seeks to connect with individual agency. As the above example illustrates, instead of any apparently objective, rigid form of insecurity, everyday uncertainty is defined as the (continuous) possibility of a violent event occurring, in that it takes into consideration a) the temporality of diverse forms of violence, and b) a subjective appreciation and experience of the possibility. Rather than referring to any particular or spectacular violent event, this approach acknowledges the processes of living with and experiencing (in)security. Instead of generating particular hope for any ‘safe’ everyday, or attempting to anticipate a specific threat, it represents an indeed ‘insecure’ world as a starting point, or as a multiplicity of possibilities, rather than a linear violent vs. non-violent binary.

2.2. Components of everyday uncertainty

For the purposes of this chapter and the analytical part of this thesis, this section considers the core elements of the uncertain everyday, derived from the fieldwork observations and

⁹⁷ As emphasised before, this paradoxically formed a strategy to protect the local community.

post-fieldwork analysis. To bring into focus the components of uncertainty in a non-exhaustive manner, I use the following illustration (Figure 3).

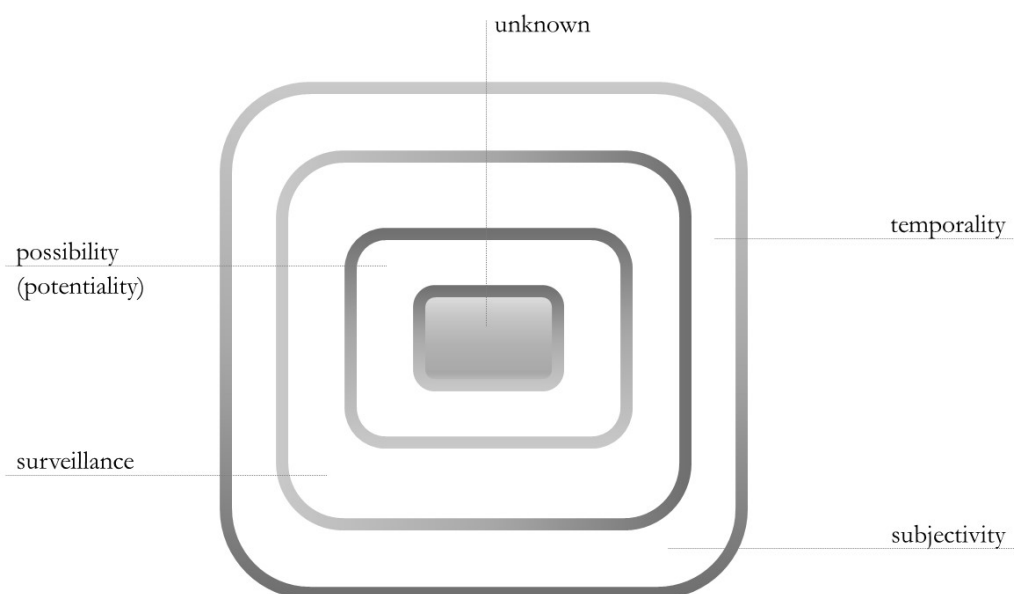


Figure 3. Everyday uncertainty: the components.

The notion of everyday uncertainty introduced here contributes to understanding of the violent context. Figure 3 above illustrates five tentative features of everyday uncertainty: temporality, subjectivity, surveillance, possibility (potentiality) and at its core, the unknown, all of which stem from the fieldwork observations and post-field interpretation. I introduce them briefly, from the exterior to the interior of the illustration, where the unknown, a definitional component of the uncertain, is situated at the centre. This constructs an image of everyday uncertainty alongside and throughout its layers, from the most ‘visible’ temporality and subjectivity, through the ever-present surveillance, to the layer just before the core: the possibility (potentiality), and finally, at the centre of uncertainty, the unknown. The lines between the spaces in Figure 3 are purposefully delineated in grey (following the theme of ‘grey zones’ introduced in Chapter One), and are nearly-blurred to emphasise the overlapping and fluid nature of its components suggested here.

I allude to uncertainty as a *temporary* state encapsulating the *possibility* of violence occurring⁹⁸ under an insistent *surveillance*; the latter forms part of the process of silencing, elaborated

⁹⁸ A possibility that generally forms part of the everyday and is also normalised. See Chapter One.

upon in later sections of this chapter⁹⁹. The two most external elements (temporality and subjectivity) are illustrated at the same level of recognition. This is because, in the experience of the people of Paloxpan they merge into one another, in that whenever a violent event occurs, it is *subjectively* conceived. Its temporality indicates both randomness (as depicted in the above example, ‘We are targeted’) and the tentative urgency of violence to occur. Rather than the existence of rigid labels of constant danger, uncertainty about what may occur (the possibility) depicts the everyday in a rather blurred manner, closer to coexistence within the grey zones, as conceptually explained in Chapter One. This refers to those spaces which are non-obvious and far from linear; rather, they form openings towards the unknown: “There may be danger coming around the next corner, but equally there may be not. So why bother?”¹⁰⁰. Its central component is the unknown.

In Paloxpan, under the condition of continuous surveillance by an amalgam of official and non-official authorities (presented later in this chapter), my interlocutors took hardly anything for granted as being ‘known for sure’. Far from being a constant attribute, such uncertain tension reflected a fluidity in people’s improvised practices of the ‘temporary’ everyday. Navigating the uncertain became for them a process of creating a reality that was ‘safe enough’. (Apparent) security was therefore revealed in ‘doing’ throughout daily practices, reduced to ‘tactics’, as understood by de Certeau (1984), but also (Hoogensen Gjørsv and Stuvøy, 2016) improvised and often reactive, rather than strategic and organised (as developed in Chapter One). In contrast to it enabling people to ‘make sense of’ or ‘understand’, as I had initially assumed before embarking on the fieldwork, the uncertainty they encountered was rather sensed or felt¹⁰¹. More broadly, the uncertain everyday challenges the meaning of security for those whose lives begin and end with insecurity as a point of reference.

Uncertainty therefore is located in the *potentiality* of violence to occur. In considering this potentiality, I follow Veena Das (2007, p. 9), who excludes anticipation as a rationalised way of reflecting on (in)security. Rather, taking potentiality instead of possibility on board, I include violence as if it were ‘already there’ (Das, 2007, p. 9), in the continuum of the everyday rather than as a constituent of disruptive events. Potentiality could therefore

⁹⁹ See the subsection on top-down silences in this chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Conversation with Xochitl, Young Zone, October, 2015.

¹⁰¹ My interlocutors also brought to the study the sensation of fog that facilitated their navigating this uncertain tension. However, fog occupies a very limited space in this thesis.

replace possibility in a further version of Figure 3. Furthermore, uncertainty not only considers the experience of one's own personal safety in the immediate surroundings but also looks broadly at how the potentiality of violence is practiced in the everyday¹⁰².

This research is far from (although aware of) existing literature on 'managing uncertainty', which tackles "particularly unforeseen, unspecific and unpredictable 'low-probability-high-impact' events" (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2015, p. 88). In turn, uncertainty as it is understood here is situated at some distance from the question of the predictability of an event. Predictability of violence in Mexico is a notion which is neither meaningful nor feasible¹⁰³. The unexpected forms as much a part of the everyday as the routine, as referred to by Das in her 'descent into the ordinary' (2007). Instead of the predictable logic of risk management, the uncertain here comprises an opening towards other than rational ways of knowing (this is examined further, among the *subjunctive* forms of knowing about insecurity), which is of course culturally shaped. Thus, uncertainty derived from the unknown provides this study with its context.

Further to the discussion of everyday uncertainty, a wider scope of literature elaborates on everydayness and the continuity of violence and insecurity, for example 'everyday (in)security' (Lemanski, 2012); feminist perspectives on security and violence (Shepherd, 2007), and everyday violence in anthropology (Scheper-Hughes, 1995; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). In addition, 'extraordinary' insecurity has been challenged by several authors, notably John Gledhill in his work on Mexico and Brazil (2015). He depicts how the practice of extortion rather than being a new phenomenon, has been copied from 'traditional' authorities in the state of Michoacán, Mexico:

Extortion of one kind or another should therefore be seen as a regular, everyday, feature of the way that the power that different levels of government bestowed on its authorised agents was exercised, whether we are talking about the bribes habitually paid to facilitate routine bureaucratic transactions, or the much larger sums ... The practice of extortion, and indeed much of the rest of what criminal organisations now do, were already firmly established in the era in which Michoacán was supposedly 'governable'. Many of them were, in fact, embedded within 'government' itself (Gledhill, 2015, pp. 157-158).

¹⁰² Following Cynthia Enloe, in "... demanding that everyday practices should be recognised as political is a core aspect of feminist security studies" (quoted in Shepherd, 2013, p. 16).

¹⁰³ As elaborated upon further in Chapter Six.

In this account of extortion in the state of Michoacán in Mexico, Gledhill depicts a steady continuity of its practice – and its blurred lines with bribery – as exercised by the authorities and criminal organisations alike. The tradition of the police extorting local businesses is widely-known across Mexico. This points to yet another of the Mexican grey zones: that the authorities and criminal groups share similar practices, locating them on a continuum of daily life and further contributing to the sense of insecurity of local inhabitants. In Veracruz, the pervasiveness of this continuum deprived the division between legal vs. illicit of its traditional black-and-white sense and exposed the local people to further danger. Under this condition of uncertainty, the unknown nature of who is with whom and acting with what purpose permeates the grey everyday. The above introduction and conceptualisation of everyday uncertainty form a part of the context in which this research in the field unfolded. The following sections expose more nuanced ways of dealing with it from the perspective the inhabitants of Paloxpan in Veracruz, Mexico.

3. Embracing the unknown (in search of a relative to ‘appear’)

This section introduces some examples of lived uncertainties, starting with experiences of those whose daily lives are driven by a search for their relatives, a situation far too common in Paloxpan and Veracruz. Here I argue that they embrace the ‘unknown’ about whether their family member is alive or dead in their everyday act of looking for them. Families of the disappeared, some of whom I knew in Paloxpan, taught me about daily living with the unknown, which the previous section of this chapter situates at the very centre of everyday uncertainty. I employ these examples with due humility, as every step they take is one along the continuum between life and death, recognised by Michael Taussig (1992, p. 27) and Sasanka Perera (2001, p. 164) as being central to uncertainty. Perera refers to this uncertainty as “once entered, one cannot be sure about the continuity of life” (p. 164). The purpose here is to explore the pluralism of meaning in the space of the unknown, as the subsequent examples aim to illustrate. Thus, in the following paragraphs I trace how people, in dealing with the situation of having someone close to their heart disappeared, shape the two core components of uncertainty: the potentiality and the unknown. In this way, I hope to create a bridge between everyday uncertainty (as presented in the previous section) and the next part of this chapter. The following section discusses the notion of silences as it is used in this study, as well as further forms of

embracing vulnerability in the face of uncertain surroundings, embodied by the people of Paloxpan, followed by the last section on *subjunctive* and alternative forms of knowing about insecurity.

The above mentioned ‘knowing’ becomes particularly relevant in ‘spaces of death’ and ‘shadows of death’ (Taussig, 1987, pp. 7-8; Perera, 2001, p. 164, respectively). The space in-between life and death, lived by the families of the disappeared, is where daily uncertainty is arguably pushed to the edge: the unknown becomes the centre of their life. In this, they move towards an acknowledgement of uncertainty, instead of striving ‘to know’, in order to ‘resolve the problem’ (after Das, 2007, p. 6). It is only when a family is required to identify the body of the disappeared and murdered person that the uncertainty is replaced with the painful acknowledgement of death, together with the momentary relief of knowing (as the example of Roberto and his father shows in Chapter Five).

In the following example, Kail, an artist-photographer based in Paloxpan, faced with the absence of many of his colleagues, all activists and photojournalists, expresses his frustration with the opacity of the term ‘disappeared’. This extract from one of his poems, full of anger directed towards the former Veracruz governor and entitled, ‘No sir, people don’t disappear over here...’ seems at first to focus on a linguistic aspect of the term *desaparecido* (disappeared)¹⁰⁴. At the end, however, he tackles the most profound notion of that which is missing from the realm of public discourse and from frameworks dealing with ‘insecurity’ as a problem: an acknowledgement of and respect for human life. In the context of further conversations in Paloxpan, his words are regarded as a disruption of multiple layers of purposeful, on-going ‘top-down’ silencing, which I further examine in this chapter.

people do not disappear,
they do not fade in the air,
no,
there is no spontaneous disappearance,
no,
it has to be denominated,
people are kidnapped,
tortured,
assassinated,
no sir,

¹⁰⁴ I use the term ‘disappeared’ instead of ‘missing person’ in light of its importance in the Spanish-speaking world. In Latin America the term was first employed in Argentina and Chile; see Gatti (2014).

people do not disappear,
we are killed over here.

that one,
they say he disappeared,
but no,
his absence remains here,
present,
that comes every day,
with face of a young man among a sea of people,
he is here,
that's a mirage,
in a desert of a belly that I feel among people,
among the children I see how you used to play as a child,
and you are in some place,
between water,
and a hill,
in the sky,
and here I'm waiting for you,
and in all places I'm looking for you¹⁰⁵.

The poet speaks about a certain presence within the in-between space which a mother feels when her child becomes 'missing'. Rage in his disagreement with the public version of the state of affairs recalls the notion of persistence which this research tackles later (see Chapter Six). Taking the lead from this poetic evocation of emotions, the two following examples are from mothers and other family members of the disappeared whom I had the privilege to know in Veracruz, and illustrate ways they related to the unknown of their everyday.

In Veracruz and elsewhere in Mexico, groups of relatives organise their collective daily work¹⁰⁶ around their missing spouses, children and grandchildren. The status of being 'disappeared' often follows a kidnapping; the main goal of relatives is to gain some degree of certainty about the status of the disappeared person and eventually to find them. Blurred collective/public and private/personal dimensions inter-shape their activities. Through collective action, pursued at times against or alongside state authorities, they chase public recognition of their status, and of those who are the subjects of their search. Their main purpose is thus to get to know, whatever the outcome is of 'knowing', what has happened to their relative.

¹⁰⁵ Kail published this under a pseudonym Eye of the wind (2016).

¹⁰⁶ For most of them who I met in Veracruz, searching for their relatives is a full-time job.

This ‘normalised’ urgency arises in response to official denials they experience throughout years of continuous effort to obtain recognition of their relative’s disappeared status (a tendency this chapter discusses further in the context of top-down silencing). “Nothing happens here” converts the official statement into an everyday ironic joke, a sarcastic phrase with a double meaning, used as a mundane part of Mexican culture. I refer here to the famous official statement of the then (at the time of this fieldwork) governor of Veracruz, Javier Duarte (his real name), who, at the meeting with journalists in Boca del Rio, Veracruz, in October 2014, insisted that local journalists should only “speak well” about the region. “Nothing happens here” has become a common shortcut for people to refer to his words: “Before, they say, there were some gun-fights and killings, with organised crime participation, and today we are talking about petty theft of some sweets [lit. “one *Frutsi* and two *Pingüinos*”] in the corner shop”¹⁰⁷ (N. Zavaleta, 2014; Pulido, 2016). During Duarte’s administration, such denials have appeared as part of a top-down strategy aimed at reducing the importance of people’s suffering and denying it formal recognition. Another well-known example took place in Orizaba, another Veracruz city, when the same governor, approached in public by the mother of a disappeared daughter, offered her a smile while ignoring her demands. This case became emblematic, demonstrating as it did a lack of respect towards relatives looking for family members and leading to a ‘revictimization’ of the person (Díaz, 2015).

For some groups of relatives looking for their next of kin through a collective effort, any act that provides recognition of their ‘case’ forms a step towards some element of hope, however fragmentary and illusory¹⁰⁸. Moreover, it represents the generating of a type of collective knowledge through their embodied acts of public engagement¹⁰⁹. Such acts are negotiated along a spectrum between visibility and invisibility as responses to everyday uncertainty; this is the subject of the following discussion in Chapter Five.

At the individual level, families often encounter uncertainty, especially as a result of refusal on the part of the authorities to engage, and the apparent postponing of the release of any information regarding the condition and location of their relative. Families often experience this in parallel with voices of discouragement from their community, advising,

¹⁰⁷ (Sp.) *Antes se hablaba de balaceras y asesinatos, de participación de la delincuencia organizada, y hoy hablamos de robos a negocios, de que se robaron un Frutsi y dos Pingüinos en el Oxxo.*

¹⁰⁸ Conversation with Ximena, Paloxpan, November, 2015.

¹⁰⁹ As shown in the example of Ximena’s Collective (Animal Político, 2015).

“It’s better not to do anything”, “Better not to know” or further revictimisation: “Surely [your child] was heading down the wrong path” (Díaz, 2015; also Chinas Salazar and Preciado Coronado, 2017). Interestingly, for the families, a state of ‘knowing’ often embraces ‘doing something’, which means insisting on requesting information about their disappeared relative. This also may include ‘moving around’ in order to ask whomever might be involved on the street (as in Irma’s case, discussed further below). In this sense, everyday practice forms a ‘way of knowing’. Also, it again connects with a need to make the case literally visible. The alternative is to dissolve it in a sea of the unreported (and thus publicly unknown) evidence of the insecurity crises in Mexico.

This was the case with Irma, whom I met after she had lived through the multiple disappearances of her younger daughter¹¹⁰. She appeared to me to be the personification of a lonely journey through an unknown landscape. Although advised by her only family member who lived locally to “forget [your daughter]; she isn’t here anymore; nothing can be done there”, she undertook the search on her own around the *barrios* where her daughter used to hang around, with photographs of her, printed using her own, very limited, resources, asking random people whether they had seen her daughter recently. More than once she was threatened not to speak out, not to ask about her daughter and not to look for her, and to avoid involving herself in ‘stuff that wasn’t hers’¹¹¹. Regardless of this, she kept on. “I don’t have anyone – I’m alone. The only family member left here is my brother, who told me to forget her. ... how could I forget my daughter?!? I won’t be silenced till I find her”¹¹².

I met Irma in one of the very first group sessions I attended at the Youth Centre (YC) for ‘the youth and their families at risk of using drugs’¹¹³. Usually rather talkative, loud and confident of her acerbic opinions, that day Irma appeared quiet. She was dressed all in black, and her sadness seemed to be visualised through the colour she was wearing, as if

¹¹⁰ Although the majority of those who disappear never return, some are kidnapped and disappeared a number of times. This was the case with Irma’s daughter, involved in friendships with those whose victim she became. She was then forced to return to her mother’s home and subsequently taken from it again. As described, this example shows a complex question of complicity in the most delicate cases of insecurity, as well as ambiguity of the term ‘disappeared’. This however remains out of the scope of this study.

¹¹¹ She was even intimidated by a taxi driver: “Careful with what you’re asking about, Mrs” (*Y cuidado por lo que está preguntando, Señora*). Irma, Paloxpan, August 2015.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ On a weekly basis, the families of young people at risk of taking drugs or other substances attended a free meeting with a social worker, here a facilitator for group therapy, Mateo. This is mentioned in Introduction and Chapter Three and elaborated upon in Chapter Five.

she was already in mourning, pre-emptively announcing her entrance to the ‘space of death’ (again, a notion derived from Taussig, 1987, pp. 7-8). Her tense posture and subdued voice seemed to embody her fear of losing the closest person to her. Unusually, she needed to be invited to speak. She began calmly and serious as always but ended up almost yelling, as if on the point of falling apart. She requested the group for advice, which she was in turn provided with, although it proved little beyond reassurance.

Her persistence in searching for her daughter was not a mere straightforward reflection of consistency and strength. In fact, Irma was full of doubt about whether to continue her efforts so visibly, or if the tangible threats she had been receiving were of any worth. She mentioned more than once about the local state attorney that “They seem to be searching for bodies, not persons”¹¹⁴. In the end, she expressed her doubts and talked through these traces of uncertainty with the group. During the YC session, no one encouraged her to stop her efforts or avoid searching. Afterwards, and talking in a smaller group, the proximity of an uncertain search seemed even more frightening to Irma and others. Nevertheless, her persistence gave central meaning to her expressing, “I won’t be silenced till I find her” – and she was not¹¹⁵.

As shown above, the question of the disappeared embodies the unknown, which is the core component of the state of everyday uncertainty in which the disappeared’s relatives live. Taking the lead from the above examples of the search for relatives and how this means living with everyday uncertainty, the following section endeavours to explore silence as a form through which uncertainty is lived and understood, partly in a top-down, but predominantly in a bottom-up manner. In this, I approach silence(s) as a response by diverse Veracruz inhabitants to the local context, given its(their) connection to sensory knowing, and ways of communicating about potential *violences*¹¹⁶. I further allude to the practice of disappearing as a part of the top-down (politics of) silencing in Veracruz, perhaps in the most extreme form of the unknown, that is, between life and death.

¹¹⁴ Irma, Paloxpan, August 2015.

¹¹⁵ Both of the above-mentioned cases reflect the family bonds which form the central reference point for everyday relations in Mexico. Family, as repeatedly mentioned by anthropologists and observers (for example, Bartra, 1987) is central to Mexican society.

¹¹⁶ Flagged only briefly in this transitional paragraph between sections, silences as a response to potential *violences* actually consist in sensory knowing (which is an alternative to a ‘rational’ way of knowing), and also form ways of communicating about potential violence. The latter expose their relevant potential here, as it exemplifies silence as agency. I hope that the following section clarifies this pre-emptive point.

4. Between embodied silence and narrated speech

My interest in the multiple forms in which silence works in a violent context began years before this project started and Paloxpan in Veracruz became the locality of focus (and thus the ‘field’). As briefly alluded to in the Introduction and Chapter Three, this place first attracted my attention through hearing stories of ‘silenced’ journalists and media professionals, which indicated the existence of severe obstacles to what at that time in my professional environment was labelled ‘freedom of expression’¹¹⁷. This led to my interest in non-obvious, informal ‘ways of knowing’ when surrounded by ‘silence’, and therefore the second central research question, ‘How do [people] communicate amid silencing?’. In other words, in this section I wonder: if silence is the starting point, how can people get to know about safety on a daily basis, let alone the larger picture of (in)security? What prompts silence to be the dominant feature among *comunicadores*¹¹⁸? While in the field, it became clear that local inhabitants came to know about issues of importance in ways somewhat different than through the press. Also, the level of influence which the media enjoyed differed from the one I had assumed existed prior to the field, and in fact, people’s interests were not limited to those triggered by journalists. This led the thesis towards the dimension of the everyday, where people’s perspective of security (that is, their understanding and practice of it) can be recognised in contrast to, or at least in parallel with the one imposed by *comunicadores*. Secondly, silence was revealed in a multiplicity of unexpected forms, upon which this section elaborates. First and foremost, it was observed as a relevant response to everyday uncertainty. Here, I am interested in ways in which silence is productive, and in which it functions in part as the expression of people’s agency. My aim is to show not only how people shape silence in the context of everyday uncertainty but also how they break it. The following paragraphs refer to it as a verb (silencing), as well as emphasising its multiple types in the plural, silences.

This part is divided into two sections, reflecting the two-fold direction of the function of

¹¹⁷ Here I refer to the consultancy project for United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for Mexico and Central America, as well as its partial continuity at Freedom House. My involvement in both projects added to my inspiration in terms of this thesis, although they are separated from the thesis findings and took place away from Veracruz.

¹¹⁸ I use the Spanish term *comunicador* here as employed colloquially in the Mexican press to refer to all those who work in the media. By using it I neither intend to say that all journalists, reporters, editors etc. perform the same job as those who actually present the news to the public (on the radio or TV), nor that they are all professional social communicators. This is however to reflect on a commonly used term which covers a vast range of diverse media professions, as well as a wide meaning of communication. I elaborate on the controversy in defining a ‘journalist’ in law in Chapter Five.

silence in Paloxpan: top-down and bottom-up. Noticeably, this division gives an imperfect overview of the often blurred lines between the authorities and local inhabitants of the city. In this, I recognise the existent intersections between them, without claiming to form an exhaustive list. Firstly, silencing – referring to the practices of the dominant authorities, hence used as a verb – is applied here in a top-down fashion, in three overlapping yet distinctive modes (see subsection 4.1.). As this research’s main focus is on the everyday (in contrast to the elite) responses from below, the bottom-up silences (see subsection 4.2) are given greater attention. In this second subsection, I identify three forms in which my interlocutors used silence as a way of coping with uncertainty or in response to silencing (bottom-up), namely: silence as reaffirmation, as denial and declared silence. Unsurprisingly, given the spaces when they speak to each other, the artificial separation between top and bottom is acknowledged by them. Finally, I focus on some disruptions of the dominant silences, mostly improvised but also, organised modes of breaking silences. In this, I also hope to shed light on the relevance of informal and alternative ways of knowing, which will connect with the further discussions of this in Chapter Five.

4.1. Top-down silencing

This chapter argues that uncertainty in Paloxpan is revealed also through silences. This section briefly examines three components of top-down shades of the unspoken, namely ‘direct silencing’, ‘surveillance’ and ‘disappearance’. All of these practices are implemented by both official and non-official authorities, mostly state agents, often in conjunction with members of criminalised networks¹¹⁹. They should be read as three types of silencing which I observed in the field and, given their impact on people in the everyday, are relevant to the context of everyday uncertainty. In the following paragraphs which introduce these three types, I enter into a dialogue with some limited literature that in the particularities of its context shows similar processes. However, the grouping applied here stems from my observation and interpretation of the field.

The first type of silencing refers to the limiting or cutting off of expression by those in a position of power, so as to literally silence what individuals have to say. As pointed out by Taussig in the case of Colombia (1992, p. 26), silencing “is more than production of

¹¹⁹ See Chapter Three and the context of insecurity.

silence ... [It is] scaring people into saying nothing in public that could be construed as critical to the Armed Forces”, and “[T]he not said acquires significance and a specific confusion befalls the spaces of the public sphere, which is where the action is” (Taussig, 1992, p. 27). This imposition of power may be performed in subtle as well as direct forms of censorship; its effect on the work of local journalists in Veracruz provide a sharp example¹²⁰. This form of silencing limited the ability of many to keep professionally active, particularly those who opted to not submit to the state or criminal authority. In turn, those who obeyed top-down instructions, and continued working under the limiting rules of imposed expression, were silenced despite appearing active. Those groups whose activities are of public character, such as students and academics, artists and media professionals were particularly affected by such form of silencing in Paloxpan.

The second, even more nuanced form of contextual silencing, that of surveillance, appeared during the course of the fieldwork to be exercised directly by the formal authorities. In practice, however, in a rather indirect manner it was imposed through a web of their collaborators, and as a result it permeated local communities, further perverting the already limited interpersonal trust, and providing instead overly-present suspicion as a mode of operating. This state of affairs in Paloxpan echoed the one when “you can’t trust anyone”, as Taussig quotes in the context of rural Colombia (1992, p. 21):

In the murk, an eye watching, and eye knowing. Here you can’t trust anyone. There’s always one who knows. Paranoia as social theory. Paranoia as social practice. ... to be called “low intensity conflict” whose leading characteristic is to blur accustomed realities and boundaries and keep them blurred (Taussig, 1992, p. 21-22).

The process of the authorities imposing silence through creating among the people a sense of constant vigilance, encapsulated in the form of a continuously lived doubt about whether one was observed or overheard. This was repeatedly acknowledged by my interlocutors, who explained the *modus operandi* of *orejas* (ears), as informers operating the web of surveillance permeating the town were denominated¹²¹. For example, in western

¹²⁰ Based on material gathered in closed meetings with the journalists and human rights defenders and their families, as well as ‘others groups particularly affected by the context of insecurity in Mexico’, organised by Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (commonly known in Mexico by the Spanish abbreviation, CIDH) on 29th September 2015 in Paloxpan, Veracruz, as a part of the visit to Mexico, 28 September to 2 October 2015, led by Commissioner Rosa María Ortiz and Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Edison Lanza.

¹²¹ *Oreja* or *halcón*, (Sp., colloquial) lit. ear or falcon could be loosely translated colloquially as a nark/narc or snitch.

Colombia, the local term used was *sap̃po*¹²² (frog) (Taussig, 1992, p. 22). As Taussig rightly noted, the qualities of a frog – an animal – or here, in the case of an ear – an organ – indicate the attributes required for an informant to permeate discreetly specific groups of the population as the authorities request. In his words:

When you walk through the cane fields at night – as only the peasants, cane-workers, and the occasional conspirator, revolutionary organiser, and anthropologist ever would – you become the auditory equivalent of a sensitive photographic plate, registering under the black canopy of the immense skies the deafening silence of suddenly stilled sound. And the frog? I guess it's all ears too (Taussig, 1992, p. 22).

Taussig's description merges sensory aspects of breathing with an uncertain reality; it could easily apply to the rural-urban jungle in the periphery of central east Mexico. In this, both terms used for informants by *veracruzanos*, namely *orejas* and *halcones* (falcons) indicate vigilance through the senses. This chapter demonstrates that the sensory approach is appropriate to 'know' about everyday uncertainty, while exploring the notion of listening to silences; Chapter Five discusses visual aspects of navigating insecurity. As I heard on several occasions in the field, the grey coexistence with the *halcones* was not only a part of daily life but also fairly normalised. One of my interlocutors, Aron, a local photographer and photojournalist, portrayed such coexistence as follows:

- They've always been there. Working for the military, federal police, state police, 'the palace' [state government's headquarters], state attorney... they register what one says. The *orejas* are also very much visible. You can very quickly find out who they are.
- So, what are they there for?
- Well, obviously, to control us. To know beforehand, in order to report to their supervisors, what's going to be published. That's why while working in this, you attract *la oreja* very quickly. And yes, to spread fear among us. What does it mean to be followed? For example, you're working ['shooting', in the case of a local photojournalist] and they shadow you. Yes, they know what you're doing. Sometimes they also serve as a source of information. On one occasion I had this call, when I've been told that this and that was happening. They let you know about an event to shoot. They know what's going on, so they cooperate; they call you to give you a tip that there's an event you may be interested in. In that case he was my colleague, working also as *la oreja* for *La Marina* (the Mexican Navy). You have to be very careful¹²³.

As the above example shows, in Paloxpan the practice of surveillance often merged into grey – at times silent – collaboration. In a sense, silences not only guided the people

¹²² Usually written *sapo*. Here, the original writing is kept from Taussig (1992, p. 22).

¹²³ Conversation with Aron, Paloxpan, November 2015.

through living uncertainties, but they also enabled a grey coexistence under conditions of insecurity. Surveillance, as seen in the example given by Aron, refers to silencing which was direct (which I conceive of as the first type of top-down silencing) but which also occurred through negotiation, allowing specific, limited and controlled information to be accessed and covered up by those working in the media. Thus, once again, the top-down and bottom-up diversification is only of artificial character. This is only one case when unpacking silences is not about tracking down what is not said. When all is known but in the end nothing is certain, the unspoken may at times be revealed through what is actually said openly.

The third and perhaps most ultimate form of top-down silencing exercised upon the subaltern was the disappearing of persons. As indicated earlier (and thus receiving only a limited mention here), in the middle of uncertainty, getting to know the location of a missing relative became a rare gift. The above three types of top-down silencing lead to the following bottom-up approaches to silence in a situation of everyday uncertainty.

4.2. Bottom-up silences as a response to the uncertain

The purpose of this section is to unpack bottom-up silences which persist as part of a subjective experience of daily uncertainty, as contextualised in the first section of this chapter. I base my exploration of silences on particular examples repeatedly identified during the extended research in Paloxpan, Veracruz; to a limited extent, I also connect them to a few notable examples of literature which address the navigation of everyday insecurity, mainly in the field of anthropology and within diverse violent settings. These include Linda Green on Guatemala (1995), Mo Hume on El Salvador (2008), Michael Taussig on Colombia (1992), Sasanka Perera on Sri Lanka (2001), Polly Wilding on Brazil (2012). In this, I suggest a subjective configuration (or grouping) of bottom-up silences, as presented below. The following exploration links to the following particular questions: How are silences disclosed within the surrounding tension of a threat? How to *listen to silences*, if at all? Eventually, how may silences benefit survival? Does one remain alive if one keeps silent?

Silence is regarded here as a response and thus an action: a verb as opposed to a static

noun¹²⁴. This section therefore explores the forms in which people in Paloxpan silenced their reactions to potential and direct *violences*. During our informal conversations in Veracruz, I recognised these bottom-up silences through particular expressions which were actually spoken. Silence is comprehended as an active response, in contrast to the more commonly expected passivity of quietness. Bottom-up silences, as illustrated below, are therefore written across the blurred lines between silence and speech, rather than committing to either one of these. These silences formulate responses to the context of everyday uncertainty, within the context of locally conceived communication. At the same time, they often represent a form of certainty while exposing the agency that people possess, despite existing power asymmetries.

This section brings together and organises the silent bottom-up responses that I observed in Veracruz. I identify three types of silences, examined in the following order: first, reaffirmation (“all is known”); second, apparent denial (“nothing happens”); and the third a declaration of “not willing to know”¹²⁵. I will briefly introduce them to the reader and close this section with a questioning of how the silence in Paloxpan is interfered, contested and broken (subsection 4.3.).

4.2.1. Silence as reaffirmation

The first type of silence was encapsulated by the expression ‘everybody knows’ and functioned as reassurance in a heavily surveiled context of Paloxpan. It was embraced by the constant possibility of being seen or overheard and thus brought under control, as mentioned in the previous section of this chapter. The sudden reassurance of ‘We know it all here’ may appear in the same informal conversation next to another confirmation that ‘It’s very quiet around here’. This form of silence simultaneously reveals an unspoken preoccupation, which is literally stated out loud. It connects with further examined silence as denial, which has also been recognised as a way of dealing with uncertain surroundings in other contexts, such as that of political violence in Sri Lanka, 1988-91. Perera denotes this way of coping as a form of ‘surrealism’ and argues that a ‘relative silence’ is ‘normal’ in spaces of post-terror (Perera, 2001, p. 159). It also corresponds with Taussig (1992, for

¹²⁴ See Chapter One for the initial conceptualisation of an action and response.

¹²⁵ These quotations are further analysed frequent expressions of silence. The silence in this project is therefore pronounced and read.

example, pp. 24-25) who asserts that people are afraid of talking due to a lack of trust. However, he rightly spots that this kind of silence is always directed towards the outsiders of a community rather than its members (also Perera, 2001, p. 160). In addition, and back to the Mexican context, Gledhill recalls: “*Everyone knew* of specific cases that confirmed the habitual use of torture on witnesses, as well as on accused persons in police investigations” (Gledhill, 2015, p. 158; my emphasis). In his example of state of Michoacán, this reaffirmed silence functions therefore as the normalisation of violence. Also however, as ‘knowing’ applies only to the locals, it provides top-down surveillance (examined briefly earlier in this section) with a local alternative, which the following paragraph addresses.

‘We know it all here’ suggests the speaker is exceptionally well-informed about the local state of affairs. It provides an implicitly exclusive legitimacy to an ‘inner circle’ (a community, neighbourhood, zone, street, village) of those who live there, ‘the local’. Thus, they – here, ‘we’ – are those able to observe, listen and capture all the relevant information about ‘what’s going on around’ and ‘who’s who’. In this sense, ‘we’ is widely conceptualised and broadly framed within a local collective. This ‘localisation’ of temporary information links to the experience-based knowledge which is further exposed in the last section of this chapter. As an example, one of my interlocutors expressed his certainty that those who pass by *must* be related in some way to an inhabitant of a particular street or zone in the locality:

We see everyone who passes by. In fact, we *know* everyone who passes by. If a person doesn’t visit us, isn’t related to us, or doesn’t come to buy [something from] or offer anything to my house, it’d be equally a neighbour’s or the other neighbour’s house, and so on. There is no one who wouldn’t be *known* to us, or somehow related¹²⁶.

This provides an example of ways that people have constructed to support their belief that they have some means of learning about the potentially insecure everyday. This declared possession of knowledge also extends to include the rest of the local everyday actors and is embedded in the ongoing communication between them all, a thread which continues over the following chapters five and six. The news will finally arrive, as ‘everyone’ shares it with each other. But where is the ‘we’ located? The bonds of extended family and neighbours expand as the information is lived, asked about and responded to throughout the day, as the example of the Young Zone *colonia* on the edge of Paloxpan shows. As a

¹²⁶ Conversation with Chicken Seller, the Young Zone, August 2015.

further example, an informal notice from a community member might appear recommending that children avoid a specific crossing on their way home from school. A taxi driver, because of their constant movement, is a great source of not only fragmented but also collective daily news, because of their formal and informal networks. As he or she knows every pothole in the surrounding unpaved streets by heart, they can easily be the one to start a rumour in the neighbourhood. This might be reiterated by a mother who walks her children to school and on the way back passes a corner shop, whose owner eventually confirms, denies or amends the news. Prior to that even, a mobile seller of goods (such as vegetables, coffee, cheese or home-made meals such as *tamales*¹²⁷, or cleaning supplies) might also verify or add to the story. A little further on, next to the local market, the local Catholic church functioned as an after-Sunday-mass source of information. As well as facilitating regular religious celebrations, it also became a gathering space for exchanging ‘news’. Finally, the very window captured a legitimate source of information: I used to hear in the Young Zone “We *see* people passing by”, a statement which dovetails with the further discussion of the visual aspects of communication in Chapter Five. The micro mechanisms of community knowhow involve ‘knowing while living’. In all these spaces, things come to somebody’s notice *a oídos* (while hearing), hence the generalised yet apparently certain, ‘All is known’. This ongoing reaffirmation (and hence form of subjectively-conceived certainty) builds a wall of silence in the face of those who may not necessarily understand or, may not be trustworthy: mostly the outsiders of the community.

4.2.2. Silence as denial

The second form of silence emerging from the communities in Veracruz is a negation of the existence any insecurity issues at all. “Nothing [wrong] happens here [anymore]” at times immediately followed *bola* (hello), especially in initial conversations in the Young Zone and in other *colonias* in the periphery of Paloxpan. This form of silence initially acted as a calming message, like a smoke screen to divert the conversation from possible rumours about some unsafe events. Secondly, and together with the literal denial, it functioned in a reaffirming manner for the community: as they had lived here for so long, it must be bearable¹²⁸. This literal ‘construction of an alternate reality’ is identified by

¹²⁷ See Chapter Five for details of traditional Mexican meal, *tamales*.

¹²⁸ Conversations with Don Ángel & Chicken Seller, the Young Zone, August and September, 2015.

Perera as a way of coping with a post-terror reality dominated by a sense of distrust (2001, p. 166). Moreover, it resembles the imaginative-subjunctive mode, in the sense that it reflects how reality is *wished* to be shaped (the following section of this chapter elaborates on subjunctive forms of dealing with the uncertain). Perera calls this “surrealism”, which

can be a part of the manner in which individuals deal with terror. In this case victims, as the masses in a society, may attempt to construct an alternate reality and cling to it despite the illusory and fragile nature of that reality. (Perera, 2001, p. 166).

I was provided with a similar interpretation by one of the local academics almost upon my arrival, who illustrated the “surreal” – to use his words – state of affairs in Paloxpan by turning his nameplate outside his university office upside-down. His words, but most of all this small-big action in the particular context of the institution he worked in, have acquired a different meaning over time (Chapter Five further elaborates on this example).

As referred to in the above section 3, ‘Embracing the Unknown’, families of disappeared persons in Veracruz faced recurrent denial of the disappearance by the local authorities. Silence as denial, the tendency encountered ‘on the ground’ seemed to reflect the official narrative of publicly denying any insecurity, exemplified by the repeated expression of governor Duarte, that there was “only one *Frutsi* and some *Pingüinos* [stolen from] the corner shop” (N. Zavaleta, 2014; Pulido, 2016). This bottom-up mirroring connects to another part of Mexico, depicted by Gledhill in one of his opening quotations, when he recalls the apparently contradictory words of a person from the village where he was working in rural Michoacán, Mexico in 2012:

It’s fairly quiet around here. Well, we get the extortion calls on the phone, but there have only been a few cut-up bodies that they left in bags outside the cemetery and they weren’t people from here. We have their protection. (Gledhill, 2015, p. 1).

This illustrates with great precision the common “nothing happens here” Veracruz approach to the surrounding reality. The quietness stands next to the noise that reads as being fairly neglected. Far from being contradictory, these two coexist in the apparent silence of the normalised everyday. This combination only increases the tension tangible in many conversations in Veracruz. Both accounts of negation and preoccupation cohabit the same spaces, demonstrating grey possibilities across apparent contradictions. These accounts thus open up the potential to keep living despite the surrounding tension and an uncertain tomorrow.

4.2.3. Declared silence

Silence is also a choice of preference, a declaration of not willing to know. In my informal conversation with Itzel, this declaration appeared humorous and disengaged, even sarcastic: “We’re all very comfortable here: living and not seeing. As if literally nothing was happening”¹²⁹. She then gave the example of “we are targeted”, as presented earlier in this chapter. On another occasion, over one of our early coffees, Lorena elaborated on her evolving distrust of her neighbours in one of the southern *colonias* in Paloxpan¹³⁰. At first, she explained, she, a busy single mother, moved there with her daughter not long ago. She described the area as a busy one, full of diverse local businesses around her home. Nonetheless, her suspicions had grown recently about whether a nearby house was in fact an organised *la casa de seguridad* (a security house); in Mexico, a colloquial name for a place where a kidnapped person is kept. To paraphrase her words, she preferred not to know¹³¹.

There is a very slim difference between denial and declared silences. Whereas the former is a pronounced negation that the (signs of a) violent event had been (obviously) happening, the latter is a more disguised declaration of “I know what you mean, but I prefer not to know”. Both occurred in Paloxpan in circumstances where violent events used to happen. The first type of silence, in denying that something “wrong” was happening in the community, showed a position of knowledge. The second, in declaring unwillingness to know, diverged from knowing about the surrounding reality. In a way, it was acquiring a declarative position of not-knowing.

4.3. Disrupting silence

I choose the following two examples which disturb the dominant silencing in the most explicit manner. The first consists in the recurrent modification of a nameplate at the city’s central plaza. Undertaken as a collective effort, the official nameplate was physically replaced with the current one, amended, crafted and engraved with the name of a personified symbol of opposition, assassinated in 2012. Regina Martínez (her real name), a

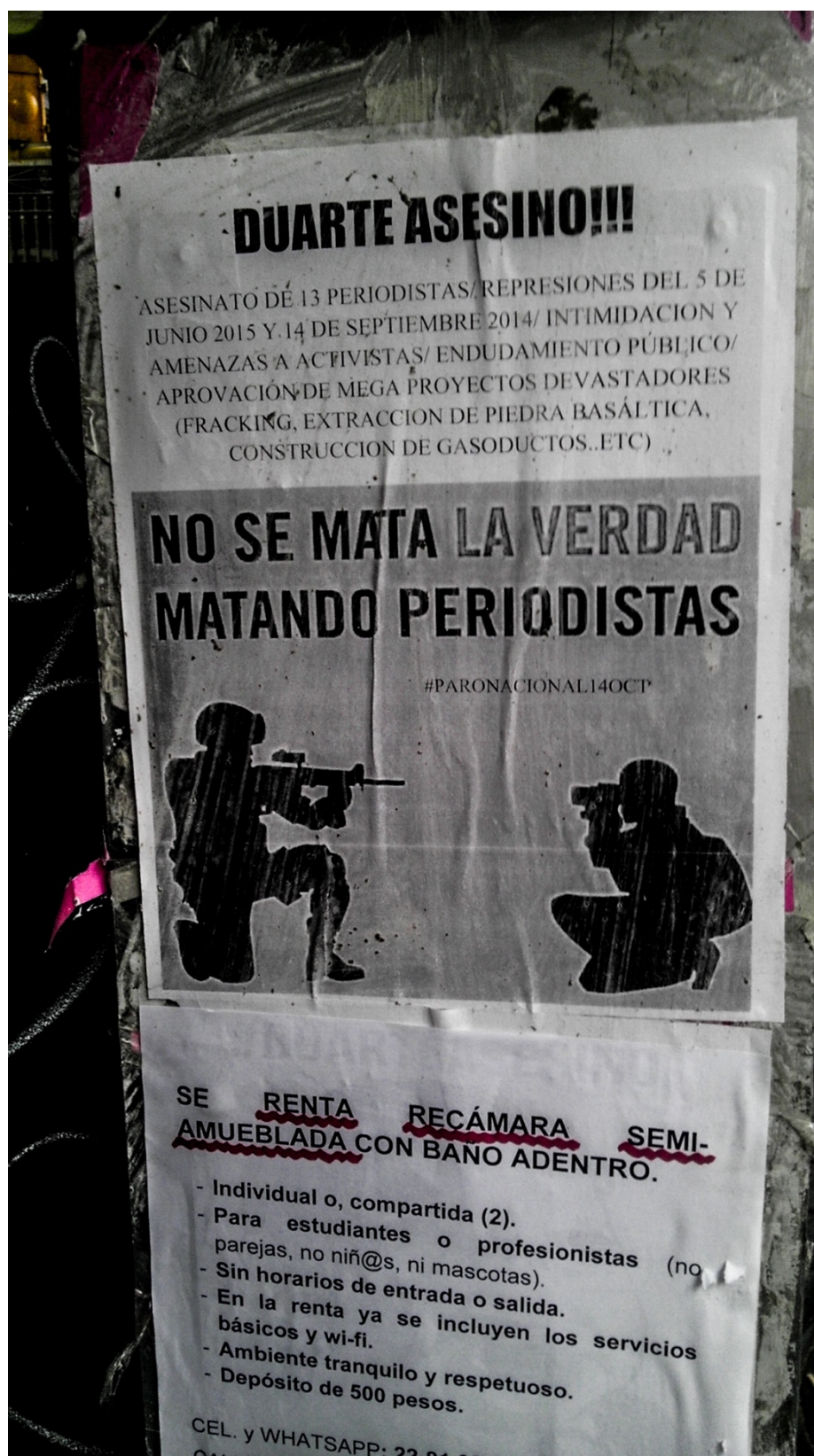
¹²⁹ Conversation with Itzel, Paloxpan, September 2015.

¹³⁰ Conversation with Lorena, Paloxpan, September 2015.

¹³¹ Ibid.

prominent local journalist, well-known elsewhere for her work for the prestigious national weekly *Proceso*, was killed in unclear circumstances. For many, her name became a symbol of the struggle against *de facto* censorship, as well as, more generally, the local regime. At the same time, the mere act of amending the nameplate was itself problematic for some, who acknowledged that Martínez would not have wanted her name to be so exposed. As one of my respondents explained¹³², “She wouldn’t have wanted to become a protagonist of this theatre”, which, far from providing a wider resonance, appeared to benefit a particular group of activists and media professionals. A further challenge to the top-down silencing provided by official discourse were artistic forms of experimental theatre plays, improvised lyrics of local music, as well as short critical messages on leaflets left around the city (see Photograph 5, and also Photograph 6 in Chapter Five).

¹³² Interview with Aron, Paloxpan, November 2015. This was also confirmed by her family member.



Photograph 5. The leaflet with the message accusing Veracruz governor Javier Duarte of killing journalists. The main message: “You cannot kill the truth while killing journalists”. Note that below is a separated leaflet about a room to let. Paloxpan, September 2015.

All these mostly improvised, less organised and informal forms of challenging the official

narrative indeed disrupted silence as a dominant response. They were nonetheless of a low profile, less obvious to perceive and often consisting of vernacular language which prompted the revealing of hidden transcripts (Scott, 1993), as the example of improvised lyrics demonstrates¹³³. An example of such a local theatre play is explored in Chapter Five.

One particular tool of communication – which literally broke the silence – that people in the Young Zone *colonia* applied (although more commonly seen twenty years ago than now) was to confirm whether “things were fine” or not through whistling. As explained to me by one of the oldest members of the community, Doña Lulú, neighbours would expect to hear a (usually male) whistler doing his job every evening. This would be a neighbour who had taken a turn to walk around the neighbourhood in the evening, followed later by a community policeman, who patrolled the streets, in this way serving the community by confirming “All is fine”¹³⁴. This can be read as a type of code, identifiable only by locals: it involved the specificity of whistling, the timing of patrolling the streets, listening and expecting an answer at a certain (although of course approximate) hour of the evening. Whistling to confirm that the neighbours were safe was a non-verbal form of communication which spread certainty throughout the mist of the everyday potentiality of violence. It was a form that everyone knew, breaking the silence as it did in a literal manner. This example provided the sense of a certain level of security, given that everyone in the area was familiar with this mechanism of communication. This sense of security was also achieved through a collective certainty, as an example of the often-armed groups which kept vigilance over a specific geographic area shows, following a model similar to that used by the formal authorities, with whom they sometimes competed¹³⁵.

The above section analysed the relevance of silencing and silences in top-down (but

¹³³ Ricardo’s musical group concert, January 2016.

¹³⁴ This was not the only sound around; one is surrounded by a variety of human-made sounds on a daily basis in Mexico, and they vary from one region to another and within particular localities. While in the field, I paid special attention to them and made a list of everyday sounds with their specific meanings. They are part of a non-verbal *everydayness in motion*, known to those who have lived enough time locally, as not all are obvious. For example, the mobile food sellers or those who offer basic services to the communities, rarely make a verbal announcement explaining what they have available. Instead, they each make particular sounds, such as whistling or even playing characteristic recorded music (the UK equivalent is the children’s icecream van). It is supposed to be understandable to customers but if not, one is expected to ask and have a short chat or a longer talk.

¹³⁵ Some examples of self-observing (or self-policing) groups from the region, made up of members of the *barrio*, also represented more formally ‘organised neighbours’ or even self-defence groups. With the notable exception of the Flowering Hill *colonia* explored in chapters five and six, these were outside my everyday field, keeping an eye on more vulnerable areas by acting as guards. These organised groups of *vigilantes*, some of whom fulfilled certain functions of justice, are beyond the scope of this research project.

primarily bottom-up) modes. It illustrated how silences both shape and react to everyday uncertainty in multiple ways, and provided the first examples of experiencing the local context in Paloxpan. Finally, it prepared the reader for the less palpable form of relating to the potentiality of violence, namely through wishes and dreams. To this end, the next section explores subjunctive (wished) forms of responding to the uncertain everyday.

5. Between the imagined and the real: subjunctive forms of dealing with uncertainty

Far from repeating the well-worn statement ‘people live in uncertain times’ this section delves into subjunctive modes of dealing with uncertainty. I refer to the subjunctive as a grammatical mood that entails a wish, or hope, such as, “Hope this evening will be a quiet one”, commonly used in Mexican Spanish using *ojalá + que* (see below). It seems an oversimplified statement that the vulnerable – here, people living in a state of high risk – are surrounded by uncertainty. As elaborated upon in the previous sections, I refer here to uncertainty as the potentiality for violence (to occur), which I argue is relatively higher for the economically unprivileged in the context of Paloxpan than for the rest of society¹³⁶. The insecurity of the inhabitants of the urban periphery has been widely explored by urban studies and development literature situated in the region, with Fay (2005) being a notable example. The routine in the *barrios* is uncertain, fluid and usually flexible – as everyday as their search for a daily income, acquisition of basic necessities, or just a glimpse of calm. Residents expect it to be changeable. Uncertainty is thus a daily and well normalised experience, as is everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). This section takes a parallel, if not actually opposite stance to treating ‘the urban poor’ as a unified and predominantly passive group who act in a somewhat predictable manner through their strategies of coping with the hostile everyday. Instead, I suggest that they actively and innovatively respond to an encountered hostility and present danger. They imagine different realities and outcomes that support their getting on with daily tasks and their wish for improved developments; they express these using the subjunctive grammatical form, which is central to this section’s discussion.

The argument in this chapter seeks to distribute the place and meaning of a response to an

¹³⁶ I do not explore here the division between ‘us’ (the observers) and ‘them’ (the subjects), as this somewhat daunting diversification is further elaborated in chapters five and six, as well as being mentioned in Chapter Three.

ephemeral yet present possibility of violence occurring, which forms a core of uncertainty. This evanescent ‘reality’ is situated far from the black and white, sharply drawn by those who appear certain in their ‘knowing’ when and why things happen. This is where the image of fog, frequently occurring weather phenomenon in Paloxpan (see Photograph 10 below), attempts to bring “a different way of seeing” (Gordon, 2008, p. 24) as well as knowing. The in-betweenness and temporality as qualities of fog provide support in immersing oneself in a space of uncertainty¹³⁷, following Avery Gordon’s attempt to “imagine beyond the limits of what is already understandable” (2008, p. 195). This is clearly out of the comfort zone of the traditional explanatory approach found in security studies; “to stretch toward and beyond a horizon requires a particular kind of perception where the transparent and the shadowy confront each other” (Gordon, 2008, p. 195). However, for the purpose of this section it is enough to say that fog enabled a space for the imagined to achieve a legitimate residence in this study. The following introduction to the subjunctive and imagined realms of living the uncertain also situates itself in conversation with Sylvester in ‘Critical Imaginations of International Relations’ (2016). More broadly, it corresponds to the overall purpose of this chapter to engage with sensory (forms of) knowing about violence.

¹³⁷ Fog facilitates (rather than obscures) an understanding of everyday uncertainty in Paloxpan, through the processes of shaping, shedding and showing, among others. However, the idea of fog as a proper analytical tool has yet potential to be explored, as conclusions state.



Photograph 10. Fog in Paloxpan. On my way to the Youth Centre. January 2016.

The subjunctive grammatical mode commonly used in, among others, the Mexican version of Spanish, reveals its meaning and relevant function not only linguistically but also

culturally, and is thus situated in the everyday. Expressions of wishing and hoping, predominantly formed by *ojalá* followed by an optional *que* and a corresponding subjunctive verb form, in particular in its impersonal version, serve to blur the distinction between the imagined, wished for and supposedly real¹³⁸. It also relates to the notion of waiting (for something to happen) yet not really expecting it (following Das, 2007).

During one of our conversations, Irma, in the middle of her searching for, finding and losing again her younger daughter (mentioned earlier in this chapter), offered me a ‘different’ kind of story: about her other daughter, the older one. It was over a somehow unexpected coffee, while we were waiting for legal and supposedly non-partisan support for ‘victims’¹³⁹. This was offered under the framework of the federal law for victims; in Veracruz at the time of my fieldwork, the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) undertook as their main focus the task of supporting relatives of disappeared persons¹⁴⁰. On this day, I joined Irma in a meeting with lawyers. While waiting, we sat near a small stage where theatre groups sometimes performed. She suddenly changed the subject and for the first time spoke about her older daughter and her “successful life”¹⁴¹. The notion of hope seemed to emerge with the change in our surroundings (we usually met in the YC facilities). With a visible spark on her face, she admitted to having never seen her daughter on the very stage that was situated next to us. “I wish I could have come and watched her performing so wonderfully on stage. She used to perform here when she was at high school – she must have been good at that”¹⁴². Her older daughter used to participate in a local theatre group while still living nearby, yet Irma had never found the time to watch her on stage, given her economic restrictions and working hours (even for this meeting, she had had to take some hours off). In that moment however, this did not matter: her face was glowing. Her whole-hearted expression – of her whole ‘self’ – indicated that at that very moment she was ‘seeing’ her daughter. She dreamt out loud about a different city where her older daughter currently lived, her daughter’s temporary work, and her great performance in full-time studies, “somewhere there”, in a better place.

¹³⁸ (Sp.) *ojalá* could be translated as ‘hopefully’, ‘let’s hope (so)’, ‘I wish’ and may refer to the present, past or future. Etymologically, it appears to come from Arabic ‘only if God wants’ and although nowadays it does not have an obvious religious connotation, it is widely used in Mexico.

¹³⁹ For the non-obvious multiple understanding of the ‘victim’ category, see Druliolle and Brett (2018).

¹⁴⁰ (Sp.) Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas (CEAV) based in Veracruz, a federal representative body at the state level, has made an effort in addressing victims of human rights abuse as one of the first top-down attempts to formulate politics that aimed to address the insecurity crisis.

¹⁴¹ Conversation with Irma, Paloxpan, October 2015.

¹⁴² Ibid.

The subjunctive mode of expressing dreams to leave, run away, move elsewhere, “to a better, safer place in another country” was recurrent not only with Irma but with others I met. In-between joking, wishing and dreaming, it had become a mutually understood and accepted way of dealing with a troubled reality, in particular when one wished to divert attention from something uncomfortable¹⁴³. An idealised ‘faraway’, unspecified as it was, had become a shortcut to venting and at the same time to dismantling the uncertain of ‘here and today’. These modes of dreaming and wishing for a better alternative had become a source of hope¹⁴⁴. In distinguishing these modes, I divert from using the passive forms of “magical thinking”, as Mateo referred to them in one of our conversations. He pointed to diverse modes in which less privileged people expect to receive support and be supported, in which they “pray for a better future and get angry if they do not obtain it”¹⁴⁵.

Further subjunctive mode, there is also a more straightforward form of creating certainty, one which is directly linked to personal experience. One afternoon, as we waited for the YC session at the entrance, I was confronted with a direct question which prompted me to reflect on the nature of knowing through experience. To my vaguely hidden surprise, Irma asked, “Have any of your family members ever gone missing?”. My response was a straightforward negative. I read her question as an expectation of a somehow similar or shared experience of suffering which could perhaps have led to me having an interest in others’ suffering, as we shared a great amount of time over my fieldwork. The therapy group at YC was led by real stories from the past and predominantly from the present. Given the shared experiences of the carers present, that of their children and grandchildren “getting into trouble”, as they used to frame it in YC, there was the potential for some form of peer-to-peer support and understanding to be generated among the participants. This constituted an expression of hope for finding likeminded company in the uncertain everyday of parents and grandparents. In this way, if I had also had a family member go missing, any interest I showed would have been self-explanatory

¹⁴³ Mateo frequently recalled displacement as a form of coping with generalised fear: he remembered that many of those he knew over his years of social work saw themselves forced to migrate away from their community, which for him equated to being displaced. Conversation with Mateo, Paloxpan, September 2015.

¹⁴⁴ On the margin of the present discussion, it should be recognised that my presence may have somehow triggered such open expressions, specifically when directed towards me in particular. Among other examples, a mother who offered me her adolescent daughter to adopt and take to a ‘safer place, in a better country’, was especially poignant. With yet another woman, Amalia, it became a recurrent joke that despite her being the ‘head of the family’, at the end of my academic stay, she would simply take her few things and leave with me. Conversation with Amalia, the Young Zone, August 2015.

¹⁴⁵ Conversation with Mateo, Paloxpan, August 2015.

and potentially legitimate. Irma's question could be interpreted as a request for 'evidence-based' knowledge, as suffering is to be understood (if at all) by sensory and personal experience rather than by reason. In other words, due to a lack of such experience, others simply "would not understand or care", as Perera put it (2001, p. 159). This kind of approach towards "tacit knowledge" (Das, 2007, p. 3) in times of uncertainty was triggered by personal experience.

Taking its lead from this knowing through experience, together with forms of hope in the face of everyday uncertainty, the following section presents concluding remarks on silence(s) as a response to the local context, given its connection to sensory knowing and communicating about potential violence, further explored in Chapter Five.

6. Conclusions

This first analytical chapter opened the discussion about ways in which people responded to potential violence in Paloxpan, Veracruz. Firstly, it contributed to a reconceptualisation of the local context into one of 'everyday uncertainty', to which my interlocutors responded informally yet creatively. It suggested how uncertainty, understood as the potentiality of violence to occur, worked on a daily basis through its five components of temporality, subjectivity, potentiality, surveillance and the unknown. The concept is located at a distance from traditional literature on uncertainty; however, some lateral dialogue continues, mainly involving navigating everyday violence in the anthropology literature. Identification of its components was followed by specific examples of living alongside the unknown, while facing the uncertainty of whether a disappeared relative was alive or already dead. As confirmed after this fieldwork concluded, Veracruz has become a place of state-criminal collusion (as elaborated in Chapter Five) but also one which has been undergoing investigation for "participation of state forces in crimes against humanity such as forced disappearances" (ICG, 2017, p. 3) since the government political transition at the state level in 2016.

Together with everyday uncertainty, the notion of top-down and bottom-up silences is the central contribution of this chapter to this research project. In unpacking the continuum between silence and speech, I shed light on particular repetitive expressions which I found embedded in the field site, and which represent silences in a predominantly bottom-up

fashion, taking the form of reaffirmation, denial and declaration. Denied insecurity and declared silences both correspond to a reconfigured ‘apparent acceptance’, as a form of living with everyday violence, exemplified in the analytical framework (Chapter Two). The silences as verbs – asserting agency in silence – were followed by their disruptions, as well as imagined and subjunctive modes of tackling everyday uncertainty. In these, informal communication resulted, an appropriate means for the inhabitants of Paloxpan to protect themselves. This thread continues into Chapter Five, which examines (in)visible aspects of embracing everyday uncertainty through multiple forms of communicating.

As a researcher, it is uncomfortable to acknowledge everyday (or any kind of) uncertainty as a central concept to have to relate to. Needless to say, it is my aim to clarify rather than obscure the modes of navigating insecurity I uncovered. However, this chapter has asserted that using a frame of everyday uncertainty works best to show the context in which people are obliged to operate in Paloxpan. This is not because violence lacks certainty, but that the possibility of violence places itself in the unknown. This was the unique, most relevant feature of navigating the everyday in Paloxpan. Thus, without reducing the text to black-and-white, I have written this chapter with the aim of embracing the unknown. Here, potentiality merges with bearing with the everyday, in that, rather than denying it, it opens up the possibility of speaking about the unknown more openly, to approach it as an everyday element of survival.

This and the following chapters five and six move beyond a descriptive enumeration of the ways used by the residents of Paloxpan to attempt to overcome the state of vulnerability in which they were obliged to live. These three chapters aim to add meaning to what it means to be unprivileged while maintaining determination to persist in the face of the potentiality of violence. In other words, and in this again following Butler, “What are the powers of vulnerability?” (2017).

Chapter 5: Communicating through the (in)visible: to show and tell in the face of silencing

Some people

Some people fleeing some other people.
In some country under the sun
and some clouds.

They leave behind some of their everything,
sown fields, some chickens, dogs,
mirrors in which fire now sees itself reflected.

...
Some invisibility would come in handy.
some grayish stoniness,
or even better, non-being
for a little or a long while.

Something else is yet to happen, only where and what?
Someone will head toward them, only when and who?
in how many shapes and with what intentions?

Given a choice,
maybe he will choose not to be the enemy
and leave them with some kind of life.

Wisława Szymborska (1996)

1. Introduction

Following Chapter's Four discussion of 'everyday uncertainty', top-down and bottom-up silences, and subjunctive responses to insecurity, the purpose of this second analytical chapter is twofold. Firstly, it addresses the role (in)visibility plays in responding to everyday uncertainty, introduced in the previous chapter. Secondly, it explores alternative forms of communication exercised by people living with the possibility of violence in Paloxpan, in central east Mexico.

This chapter presents a discussion of some of the (in)visible aspects of people's responses to insecurity in the context of Paloxpan, Mexico. The aim is to explore how, during the fieldwork in Veracruz in 2015-16, the spectrum of invisibilities worked, how it mattered, and what function(s) it fulfilled in navigating everyday uncertainty. In this, I examine alternative forms of communication despite top-down silencing (see Chapter Four). In this, I recognise the relevance of communicating as an identified component of the analytical framework but most importantly, and following the research in the field, as a form of exercising agency by my interlocutors in Paloxpan. This second analytical chapter therefore aims to respond to the second research question that this study proposes: 'How

do [people] communicate amid silence?'. Put it differently, this chapter responds to the query: 'In times of silence, how do people know about the (in)security?'.

Prior to this project, my interest emerged over years of living and working in Mexico, as a result of the growing number of reported attacks against journalists and members of the press. Of all the Mexican states, Veracruz had the highest number of targeted killings of media professionals (Article 19, 2015, pp. 37-38)¹⁴⁶. I wanted to understand how people construct their knowledge about insecurity, including what is safe or not, and how they get on with their daily lives in such a hostile context. Yet just a few weeks into the fieldwork, my attention turned to more alternative forms of communication. Instead of following the news, the people of Paloxpan communicated through more informal channels. This does not mean I stopped reading the press or talking to journalists. Quite the opposite, although my intention was to avoid seeing those media professionals affected by violence as part of a unified group of 'journalists'. For example, I approached them through the eyes of their family members, mourning them as they struggled to put their lives in place again¹⁴⁷. My purpose was to look beyond their potential victimisation coming at them instead from the angle of a friend, relative, city inhabitant or member of the community¹⁴⁸.

This chapter links to Chapter's Four presentation of silences as ways of responding to uncertain surroundings. It advances discussion of modes of breaking such silences, outlining forms of communication which enable people to persist. Accordingly, Chapter Six tackles the notion of persistence. This chapter addresses ways of becoming less or more visible to safeguard oneself, while communicating about one's safety to others. This juggling along a spectrum of (in)visibility as a means of protecting and endangering, reveals the nuances of informal communication in the context of everyday uncertainty in Paloxpan.

¹⁴⁶ According to the organisation Article 19, from 2000 until March 2017, 22 *comunicadores* were killed in the state of Veracruz alone (2017). During the administration of the former state governor Javier Duarte (2010-2016), 17 journalists were murdered and three remained disappeared, for reasons related to their profession (Article 19, 2018b). In the whole country, between 2000 and 2018, 121 *comunicadores* have been killed because of their profession (Article 19, 2018b); 507 acts of aggression against journalists and 12 homicides were registered in 2017 alone (Article 19, 2018a). At the time of the fieldwork, according to official data, of all Mexico's states Veracruz had the highest proportion of disappeared journalists over the ten years from 2005-15 (FEADLE, 2015). The country was declared the most dangerous in which to exercise the profession of journalist, except for war-torn Syria (Article 19, 2018, p. 11).

¹⁴⁷ This was the case of Roberto, explored later in this chapter.

¹⁴⁸ This is elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

This chapter therefore interrogates the interplay between communication and (in)visibility in the context of everyday uncertainty in Paloxpan. In this, while maintaining a general focus on the second research question, namely: ‘How do people communicate amid silencing?’, it aims to respond to the following additional questions: How does being visible expose some of my interlocutors or, conversely, how does invisibility hide them in the crowd? To whom may they become too visible, and from whom they are likely to hide? Ultimately, what is it like to live under surveillance? In addressing the above, this chapter also adds to the general understanding of how people respond to everyday *violences*, which is the first central research interest of this study.

This chapter explores the relationship between communication and (in)visibility in the following manner. Firstly, it familiarises the reader with some core definitions and briefly discusses some relevant literature, adding to the previous conceptual chapters (one to three) further to the research in field. It then depicts the rationale of introducing the spectrum of invisibility as relevant to communicating in (and thus coping with) a hostile environment. Thirdly, further to a brief interval, I identify the following five types of communication linked to (in)visibilities which my interlocutors carried with them in their everyday context of uncertainty: selective (in)visibility, communication as presence, high-exposure communication, veiled visibility and lastly, communication through safe spaces. This should not be read as an exhaustive list. Indeed, some of the ‘types’ merge with others and, where their amalgam became obvious in the field, it was exposed here in the text (see subsection 5.3.1.). This chapter settles with some tentative concluding remarks and provides a space for further discussion in Chapter Six, which centres around persistence.

2. Communicating through everyday uncertainty

This chapter takes its lead from the final sections of Chapter Four which discuss forms of breaking the silence and subjunctive modes of knowing about insecurity, in the context of everyday uncertainty. It tackles yet another way of breaking the silence, in which the people manage their invisibilities – and that of some of their chosen material objects – in the context of (in)security. The chapter therefore interrogates nuanced ways in which the inhabitants of the periphery in Veracruz relate to uncertainty by positioning themselves somewhere along a spectrum of (in)visibility. One of my interlocutors neatly depicted the

relevance of being seen: “Here in the Young Zone, the former governor [Fidel]¹⁴⁹ visited us once. He came here, walked our streets; we were seen [by him] and therefore we existed. But that was only once. Since then, [to the current authorities] it’s as if we’re not even here”¹⁵⁰. Taking these and other power relationships into consideration, the chapter sets out to explore what (in)visibilities communicate.

My approach towards communication differs from one focused on conventional information channels or journalists at risk. The ways in which criminal organisations communicate with the public and the authorities, of which the work of Günther Maihold (2015) is a notable example, are out of the scope of this study¹⁵¹. Communication is regarded here in a limited yet literal manner. I consider communication a form of transmitting of information in the context of hostility in verbal but also non-verbal ways. In a nutshell, here, to communicate involves contributing to responses to the possibility of violence. This chapter focuses in particular on the visual aspects of this: how the spectrum of (in)visibility can shape the protection of the subject or endanger them. However, it avoids the visualisation of (in)security in the sense of images; rather, I interpret the notion of visibility in a more ontological sense, examining whether the person or the object concerned becomes more or less visible, and to what extent this may protect or endanger the subject. This chapter thus expands the understanding of communication presented in the analytical framework and responds to what the research in the field revealed. It therefore provides communication with new meaning in terms of coping with and living alongside everyday uncertainty. Hereby I am interested in the spectrum of visibility and how it operates at a more ‘local’ and personal, – though at times collective – level. The focus here is on micro-level manners, in which visibility plays a role in responding to potential violences.

In seeking out and exposing ways of informal communication I aim to “redirect the reader’s gaze” (Muppidi, 2015, p. 9) towards ways of living of the ‘Other’: in this case the marginalised and the victim¹⁵². In this, I turn to the daily interactions which fuel basic communication, thereby exchanging information which somehow relates to the context of

¹⁴⁹ Fidel Herrera Beltrán, PRI-mandated governor of Veracruz 2004-10 prior to Javier Duarte de Ochoa.

¹⁵⁰ Conversation with Don Ángel, Young Zone, September 2015.

¹⁵¹ Although while in Paloxpan, I was alerted on a number of occasions to places where criminal groups worked hard to literally erase some people or places.

¹⁵² Without neglecting consideration of the problematic nature of these concepts, as expanded in Chapter Three.

insecurity. In connecting this chapter with earlier threads of about the unspoken, this communication does not necessarily consist of verbal accounts: it is also about how insecurity is *shown*. In this sense, I refer to ‘communication’ as outlined in the analytical framework presented in Chapter Two. However, I trace the shift from traditional channels of communication (such as media and oral accounts) to the hereby regarded more subtle components of the spectrum along which the visible and the unseen are positioned. Beyond the evident threat to the more formal communication channels made by the conditions of silencing¹⁵³, I am interested here in how making the visible and invisible can provide protection. This triggers further conversation about senses and the perceived, developed following the fieldwork in Paloxpan.

3. Why and how the (in)visible matters in communicating (about) danger

The focus of this research on the (in)visible stems from the importance it was given by those I lived alongside during my fieldwork, more specifically with whom I walked the parks and hilly streets, and sat with on benches and, above all, in people’s homes in Paloxpan. According to their accounts, making oneself less or more visible repeatedly provided diverse ways to respond to the possibility of violence occurring, here labelled ‘everyday uncertainty’ (Chapter Four). I chose particular examples of making oneself, one’s body, or objects – such as books and homes – either less or more visible as, in my view, they explicitly illustrate the different ways through which my interlocutors related to insecurity. My interest in the ways in which people explore their (in)visibility in the face of potential danger stems from the reasons explored below.

This chapter aims to explore the spectrum of visibility and how people position themselves along it in response to uncertain surroundings. Among the main reasons for this are the very limited verbal possibilities that people have to explore the suffering and loss that they experience (Dauphinée, 2007b). As widely-cited Elaine Scarry succinctly puts it, “to have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have doubt” (1987, p. 13). Further, in her words:

The act of misdescribing torture or war, though in some instances intentional and in others unintentional, is in either case partially made possible by the inherent

¹⁵³ See Chapter Four, the section on top-down silences.

difficulty of accurately describing any event whose central content is bodily pain or injury. (Scarry, 1987, p. 13).

Thus, I am interested in the visual aspects of what appears to be communicated in situations of potential violence by those affected by it, either directly or indirectly. This represents an attempt by people to overcome the difficulty of verbal expression, and hence communication about insecurity and violence. During my research I constantly returned to the challenge of the impossibility not only of people's communicating, but also to fully *know* about the Other's pain (resulting from their trauma and general experience of violence). This is commented upon widely in the literature, exemplified by Dauphinée:

This unknowability is articulated and reconfirmed through the production of the visual – through the artefacts of the world that will always provide an imperfect representation of a phenomenon that takes no worldly object. (2007, p. 143).

Dauphinée referred here mainly to photographic representations of pain and violence. As an alternative, this research asks how people navigate their visibility by, for example, using available objects or surrounding spaces. In this sense, I engage with their ways of responding to the uncertain everyday through making and unmaking the (in)visible, and thereby attempts to expose their agency.

Despite “the temporality and inexpressibility of trauma”, Jenny Edkins recognises the necessity of speaking about it and the obligation to do so (2003, p. 15). Instead of pausing at the paralysing quality of the unknown, the purpose here is to write through the imperfection of the imagined, felt and perceived experience of the Other. In fact, I again follow Dauphinée, in terms of her belief in “the possibility that there is, in fact, no necessary insurmountable gulf between the one who experiences pain and the one who witnesses it” (2007b, p. 150). The aim here is to show that it is not only worthwhile “to think about the experience of the body in pain, but also to consider the possibilities for accessing and responding to that pain differently” (Dauphinée, 2007b, p. 150). The intention is to track the traces of hope left by Elizabeth Bartlett in *Rebellious Feminism* (2004), who suggests gaining insight of others' experiences through dialogue. What I wish to convey here is that some not-necessarily-wordy communication may enable access to other types of responses to uncertainty, thereby allowing a relational knowing about insecurity. The following paragraphs detail the threefold rationale that make this approach a relevant one.

Firstly, the question of (in)visibility emerges directly from (my interpretation of) the field. Faced with potential risks, the inhabitants of Paloxpan made themselves, at different times, less or more visible with the purpose of hiding (or exposing) in their everyday. It provided room for small practices which formed a kind of opening up to and/or closing down towards the uncertain. In the face of the potential or tangible threat, one may not know when it might occur and what form it will take. This study wishes to explore such openness that is, paradoxically, created through vulnerability (after Butler, 2016).

The second reason originates from the invisible (although at the same time ever-present) missing persons: the disappeared. In Veracruz, forced disappearance was one of the most disturbing features of ongoing shifts in a context of insecurity: within the context of the politics of silencing, not only the missing person (as discussed in Chapter Four) but also their family members, organised in collectives, dedicated themselves to search for them. According to this reading, a person is made disappeared and thus ultimately invisible (although this is questioned by the voices which call for recognition of their continuing presence, as exemplified by the poetry extract by Kail, Chapter Four, and by relatives searching for the disappeared in Veracruz and in Mexico, introduced in this chapter). Also, as part of the process of searching for the disappeared, moving between visibility and invisibility mattered to their families, with some of whom I kept momentary company with on their journey.

The third reason for this interpretation of forms of communication results from the fieldwork question: “To whom is one – an unprivileged resident of Paloxpan – visible or not?”. Responses were not always straightforward, yet this in itself contributed to the understanding of the context of insecurity in Paloxpan, and to the interrogation of the difference between the seen and the visible. Its importance is noticeable for those living under the ‘watchful’ *orejas* (ears)¹⁵⁴. The question of visibility in this sense stems from one of the components of everyday uncertainty, namely surveillance, examined in Chapter Four.

In addition, visual aspects of international politics have again been given attention in recent debates (Bleiker, 2018). However, the challenge of how – if at all – to show the

¹⁵⁴ On ‘ears’ in the context of surveillance in Mexico, see Chapter Four.

suffering of the Other is not new (Sontag, 2004; Dauphinée, 2018). A body of work addresses the visual aspects of (international) politics, including recent approaches in security studies, such as “Invisibility” (Van Veeren, 2018) and in visual studies, *Empathic Vision* (J. Bennett, 2005). The former categorises types of in/visibility which matter in relation to international security, whereas the latter interrogates the way in which visual art turns into an experience of other’s trauma¹⁵⁵. The interest of this research differs slightly, in that it aims to analyse the visual function given to objects with which people interact in their everyday living with uncertainty.

Visual aspects of responding to the uncertain are relational and revealed through practice. Thus, this chapter continues the endeavour to approach insecurity as practice, pursued in the previous chapter on silences, and indicated in the conceptual Chapter Two. More importantly, it attempts to show in what different forms responses to uncertainty and violence can be embodied. It thus evolves around sensory aspects of *becoming* more or less visible.

The research thus learned how people of Paloxpan improvised their routes to survive; more often than not, this had to do with the visual aspect of the objects they managed, or of themselves and their families. In this sense, both hearing and sight were engaged as receptors of the possibility of violence to occur, as shown in examples in this and the following chapter. Separating these two senses may appear to reduce the perceptive capabilities of the persons involved; in the vast majority of cases, both senses work simultaneously. However, separating them highlights the relevance of embodied responses which show how senses work through everyday uncertainty (even if not all of them are involved here). The visual aspect of responses may inform (and connect to) their persistence, in that linking to the following Chapter Six.

Finally, while addressing the spectrum of ‘visibility’ in regard to experiencing uncertainty, potential sources of my bias are twofold. On the one hand, it may stem from meeting people somehow related to the media, at least at the beginning of the fieldwork. To a

¹⁵⁵ Together with the literature, similar calls for panels and papers have appeared for the following conferences: the section ‘The Seen and Unseen of International Organisations: Crisis, Contestation and Change’ at EISA 2019; and the panel: ‘Critically Secret: Postcolonial, feminist and queer perspectives on secrecy, ignorance, silence and invisibility in global politics’ (BISA, 2019), and a workshop at the University of Bristol: Secrecy and (In)Security: New Perspectives (November 2018).

certain extent, the families of media workers and journalists might perceive themselves as being more prompt to being exposed in public, as they form part of a public enterprise whose *raison d'être* is to communicate in public, and because of being perceived as 'a targeted group'. Working for *Nota Roja*¹⁵⁶ (crime pages) brings more attention to the authors of articles due to the content of their writing, and at times they therefore publish under the anonymity of the publisher, rather than revealing their name. Another factor stems from the way they gather information for their stories; this is particularly the case for reporters and photojournalists, as well as 'empirical' journalists¹⁵⁷. To them, the visibility of events is linked directly to whether they get published or not. The second bias consists in my personal visibility on the Mexican streets, which is tackled in Chapter Three¹⁵⁸. Lastly, the focus on (in)visibility also stems from the response to the watchful eye (and ear) of top-down surveillance. This interpretation risks situating the dominating force (namely local government in collusion with criminal groups) as a more relevant reference, to which my interlocutors respond. Although the interest of this chapter is to write across such powerful vs. powerless binary, this power relation nevertheless forms part of everyday uncertainty.

The following section provides a brief break in tone from that which predominates throughout this thesis. It develops around the story of a well-known photographer whose murder occurred during my fieldwork in Veracruz, yet it also exemplifies a certain type of 'spectacular' violent event that too commonly shapes the dominant narrative about insecurity in Mexico. To reiterate, my purpose in this thesis is to delve into less spectacular and informal illustrations of everyday uncertainty. However, the impact that this particular event had on my interlocutors persuaded me to include it in the thesis. To differentiate it from the rest, I present the text in the format used for my fieldnotes and then connect it with an example in the literature.

¹⁵⁶ Literally, 'Red Note' (also in Spanish: *sección policiaca*: crime pages). In Mexico, local newspapers in particular have a specific section dedicated to covering criminal investigations, delinquency, violent attacks and accidents.

¹⁵⁷ A later subsection of this chapter (5.3.1.) elaborates on *periodistas empíricos*.

¹⁵⁸ There were also other aspects of visibilities not included in this study, despite their relevance, retrospectively, to the daily lives of people in Paloxpan. Over the course of my fieldwork, I spotted an unusual amount of waste (rubbish) on the streets, between buildings, on the city's edges, in sewage disposal pipes. Given the relatively low attention given to these by my interlocutors, this has not been included here. However, after my fieldwork ended, it seemed to amount to a much more disturbing everyday problem they needed to cope with (Lezama Palma, 2018).

4. Interval¹⁵⁹

Everyone spoke with a trace of sentiment about him. He seemed to be a nice type of guy, warm and open, ready to lend a hand if needed. It also seemed that ‘everyone’ had known him at some point. Although he wasn’t from here, he had already become ‘local’. “He had a good heart”, they kept saying, while the legend grew around his work, his photos, the places he frequented and his friends¹⁶⁰.

He was not here anymore. He had passed away abruptly in the capital, Mexico City, tortured before being killed along with four others in what is called an ‘execution-style killing’. In the aftermath, people gathered in the central square of Paloxpan, demanding justice. Prior to his death, they had changed the nameplate of the square, to that of one of the past victims of violence¹⁶¹. He had been among those ‘rebels’ who had shifted the nameplate. Now they gathered to remember him, to testify to his memory, and simply to be together in their loss. Or at least, that was what they declared. Yet voices were also raised elsewhere, by those absent from the gatherings, who refrained from joining the collective signs of mourning, instead accusing others of ‘showing off’ in a performance for the media collective. This was a sign of the atmosphere among those who called themselves journalists¹⁶².

He was one of them, and his abrupt death marked the start of the eight-month period in mid-2015 that this research covers, at least in the headlines of the local (and in this case also the national) newspapers. The hypothesis he provided in a television interview a few days prior to his murder blamed the local government for whatever harm would befall him (TV, 2015). His brutal killing occurred shortly after he fled to the DF¹⁶³. A subsequent version of his hypothesis not only pointed at the then state governor as intellectual author of his death, but also emphasised that it was his constant intention to expose those in power which led him to be killed.

It was not only my stay in Paloxpan that was marked by this story. Among a ‘flood’ of reactions I gathered after his death, Elías, – thinker, poet, and later a head of the

¹⁵⁹ Following the example of Laura McLeod (2015), I include the interval as a form of interruption, a break from the text, comprising a different type of writing.

¹⁶⁰ These are edited fragments of the field journal, Paloxpan, July and August 2015.

¹⁶¹ The story behind the nameplate (of Regina Martínez, the reporter of *Proceso* magazine murdered in Veracruz in April 2012) is included in Chapter Four.

¹⁶² For many years in Mexico there has been a debate as to who ought to be called a ‘journalist’. According to the Law to Protect Human Rights Defenders’ and Journalists, from 2012 journalists are “persons, as well as media enterprises and broadcasting companies that are: public, community-based, private, independent, university-based or any other type, of which work consists in collect, generate, process, edit, comment, express an opinion, spread, publish or provide information, through any type of broadcasting or communication mode that could be printed, radio, digital or image-based” (Camara de Diputados, 2012). The definition of ‘journalist’ as proposed by law was a controversial movement which gained a limited support (similar to the Brazil example, as depicted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (Downie, 2018).

¹⁶³ Federal District (*Distrito Federal*, or DF) is a former formal name (nowadays still in common usage) for Mexico City (*Ciudad de México*).

‘commission for victims’¹⁶⁴, and the only local person known to me in person before my arrival in the state – put it bluntly thus:

There’s been such overwhelming sadness these days; it’s disheartening, when your daughter asks why they were murdered. What to reply? How to explain to her that they were murdered because of what they thought and did? How?...¹⁶⁵.

This was what could be labelled a ‘spectacular’ death, of a local photographer whose death ‘there’ – in the capital city – affected those living ‘here’¹⁶⁶. His need to flee to a different state, together with the location of his murder (elsewhere from Veracruz), reinforced that he was made invisible (and also, in the language of the previous Chapter Four, silenced). His work, photographing those powerful in different ways, from social movements to local officials, was also made invisible through his death. To remember him, and to expose his murder, people – mostly his colleagues – gathered in protest in the centre of Paloxpan for weeks after his murder. In that, they visualised their response despite the associated risk: it was their form of breaking the silence. This thread assembles the silences from the previous chapter with the visual aspects of dealing with everyday uncertainty.

Although the choice to locate this research in the central east Mexican state was in part due to interest for those working for media companies (*comunicadores*), this chapter endeavours to explore some of the informal ways of communicating about insecurity despite the attempts by the authorities to impose silences. In this sense, it further challenges the official version of the security narrative prevailing in Mexico at the time of the fieldwork (from mid-2015 to the beginning of 2016)¹⁶⁷. On the one hand, the state authorities downplayed the ‘problem’ of insecurity. On the other, the ever-expanding militarisation of the country divided its own citizens into enemies and supporters. To challenge such a narrative, I hereby engage with the question posed by, among others, Himadeep Muppidi (2015), that is, whose stories are worth telling anyway? Why do “we” (as observers of the international scene) give our attention to “that” place, far away? And more importantly, looking beyond the ‘spectacular’ side of atrocity which triggers international media coverage, when (if at all) is brutal death an event “worthy of hearing beyond its local confines”? Further, still following Muppidi, “Are deaths – killings,

¹⁶⁴ Under the new federal victim law *Ley General de Víctimas*, every state needed a commissioner responsible for its implementation with the ‘victims’ locally; CEAV.

¹⁶⁵ Conversation with Elías, during the days following 31 July 2015.

¹⁶⁶ On the (apparent) difference between ‘here’ and ‘there’ in relation to people’s suffering, see for example Sontag (2004), J. Bennett (2005), but also Bauman (1992) and Okoth Opondo (2016).

¹⁶⁷ I expand on this in the local context in Chapter Three.

suicides, the violent destruction of the bodies – the only compelling tune of global politics?” (2015, p. 9). The intention here is not to show a lack of respect for the those whose deaths appear in the headlines of the national and local newspapers, or to dismiss the grief of anyone connected to those working with media and who died, or who were displaced or threatened. Instead, I attempt to track the multiple ways in which people keep living and surviving amid the disappearance or death of their relatives, in their ‘quiet’ – as opposed to ‘spectacular’ – everyday uncertainty¹⁶⁸.

Rather than attempting to resolve the impossible question of whose deaths are worthy of media coverage and hence public attention, I follow Muppidi in his approach to life-driven stories, accepting what Dauphinée depicts as the absence of a clear division between life and death (2013a; 2013b), of which accounts from the Mexican central eastern state are prominent examples. Muppidi addresses his reader directly thus:

... how do I re-direct your gaze, your ears, away from the deaths and to the life and the vitality of the politics that surrounds and exceeds these deaths? Some 800 and more deaths [in the context of Telangana, the region of India central to his book – my note], yes, but can we please also look at the 800 different ways in which a life of political creativity flourishes here? (Muppidi, 2015, p. 9).

In his inspirational book, Muppidi addresses the question of visibility in the global arena and tackles what matters in and for International Studies. I recognise the importance of visibility at the so-called macro level, and I therefore expose the challenges of translating in-between different cultural realities in Chapter Three. This research attempts to “re-direct [the] gaze” from the numbers of deaths, human traces and disappeared persons, to their experiences, voices and silences (Chapter Four), as well as in the current chapter, their creative ways of governing visibility. Further to this brief interval, the chapter pursues this endeavour in the following sections. They indeed aim at focusing on the ways in which local people navigate the spectrum between the invisible and visible in their everyday communication.

5. Communication through the uncertain: making people and objects (in)visible

¹⁶⁸ By the latter, as elaborated upon in Chapter Four, I mean ‘the possibility of violence to occur’.

This section explores the diverse forms of communication people use while juggling their everyday uncertainty. Without intending to present an exhaustive list, I organise these forms into the following five types of informal communicating, where hiding or exposing from being seen mattered in people's daily dealing with everyday uncertainty. These types are:

- Selective (in)visibility;
- Communication as presence;
- High-exposure communication;
- Veiled visibility;
- Communication through safe spaces.

In the vast majority of cases, these communication types took place between the inhabitants of Paloxpan and the state authorities, with the latter most often acting in collusion with criminal groups¹⁶⁹. On other occasions, communication took place among neighbours of the same *barrio*. This categorisation stems from, in my interpretation of the field, the most frequently encountered features of navigating (in)visibility in Paloxpan.

This section identifies five types of informal communication. I first examine 'selective (in)visibility', where some people chose what to reveal and what not to reveal in their daily professional lives. This is illustrated by the 'clandestine books' example in subsection 5.1 below. Secondly, 'communication as presence' emphasises daily spaces for living – for example, the precise location of homes – as transmitting a particular message about a person at stake. The third category, which I refer to as 'high-exposure communication', identifies the risks taken by the collectives of relatives of the disappeared in the course of communicating their case to the public. An additional subsection then tackles an amalgam situated between the second and the third types, exemplified by the family of the disappeared, murdered journalist and their home. The next subsection recognises 'veiled visibility' as an anonymous type of communication, usually taking the form of collective messages to the neighbours and the authorities. The last subsection takes 'communication through safe spaces' on board, examining the regularly-attended group therapy sessions for at-risk youth in Paloxpan. It focuses particularly on the ways news about the localities and their safety travelled by means of the relationships between family and friends. Some of the subthemes mentioned so far connect with further discussions in Chapter Six (for

¹⁶⁹ I leave them, however, mostly unspecified, as discussed in Chapter Three.

example, ‘safe spaces’ overlaps with the discussions I participated in around the family table in the Young Zone).

5.1. Selective (in)visibility

In the early days of my fieldwork I met a number of academics, whom at that time, I sought to become so-called gatekeepers for this research. Some did indeed enable further connections to those in the locality affected by violences; others were not so eager to do so. These meetings with local academics had, as a result, a surprising gift in common: in almost all cases I received a book that was meant *not* to be revealed publicly. Yet what is the function of arguably the most basic tool to spread traditionally understood knowledge, if not to be read by others?

The subject matter of these books all related to the current or recent social and political situation of the locality. Most tackled the challenging security situation of the regional population from diverse social science angles, such as sociology, political science and international relations. They were given to me during rather quiet, mostly one-to-one conversations inside small academic workspaces. As if sharing a secret, each of these ‘clandestine books’ were passed over as a quasi-prohibited item, which the author wished to remain *unseen* by the wider public. They shared their desire to hide their ideas, research conclusions and recommendations from the ‘outside world’. Many of the authors avoided making their genuine research agenda public, and moreover disguised it with more ‘neutral’ topics. No one appeared to be working on local security or politics, despite the ongoing political shifts, militarisation, and general turmoil, which according to common perception challenged Paloxpan at that time¹⁷⁰. Such work could only happen as part of a collaboration with local government, subject to governmental grants or as a result of competition for governmental funds. At times, it was also the case of a particularly directed commission (and thus restricted).

To use the language of analytical framework that I make limited use of here, the way in which these clandestine books move around proved the ‘acceptance’ of the *status quo* to be ‘apparent’. Their authors continued to publish them while refraining from publicly

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter Three.

expressing their opinion, thus seeming to apparently accept the way the local regime worked. Nonetheless, as exposed later, the notions of acceptance and contestation are, to say the least, twisted in the context of Paloxpan¹⁷¹. I refer to these books as ‘clandestine’ because of the way I received them, together with the message and intention communicated by their authors. Their hidden quality consisted in the fact that all of them were somehow published, despite their distribution being extremely poor or non-existent. They were not circulated officially or sold in bookshops or universities, and were thus not accessible to others. They were not publicised; some were not even registered at the local universities or professional associations with which authors were affiliated. These publications, intended to spread knowledge, were hidden on bookshelves under layers of dust sometimes for years, with no conference or launch event to introduce them to the public. By their authors, they were seen as dangerous tools which could reveal the unwanted development of ideas, or even as an alternative to dominant interpretations of local and regional problems, in particular in the realm of security and politics.

There was potential for creating a kind of myth, based on the anxiety of revealing the supposedly controversial books in public. Every author was afraid of the non-concrete but watchful *orejas* (ears: informants, see Chapter Four), who potentially would pass on any rumour to the governor, who to many, personified the ambiguous threat that ‘everyone’ was afraid of. The authors of these books were thus afraid of being exposed, to the point which they refused to reveal their work agenda or research interests, let alone their project results. ‘The legend’ was somewhat prompted by the rumours which circulated, but also derived from the quite tangible harassment even of foreign members of academia who dared to promote their books at local conferences¹⁷².

Yet the books travelled at their own pace. In the end they were distributed informally, from hand to hand, in the rather ‘private’ spaces of public institutions. In parallel to their informative quality – they communicated through their content – their authors fuelled

¹⁷¹ Since before its independence, the Mexican people have cultivated a long tradition of ‘apparently’ accepting orders from those in ‘authority’ (at that time, the conqueror, Spain), illustrated in expanded corruption and nepotism to protect what is kept apparently invisible. A well-known exchange is illustrated in these Mexican proverbs: “They act as if they paid me, and I act as though I worked”, and a particularly popular one, “The one who does not cheat, does not progress” (*Ellos hacen como que me pagan, y yo hago como que trabajo; El que no tranza, no avanza*).

¹⁷² The most famous one, recalled by a number of my interlocutors as an example endorsing their choices was an example of a British academic Professor George Phillip, then a professor of comparative and Latin American Politics at London School of Economics (LSE).

them with the secrecy of passing them on, learning from other colleagues' examples. These clandestine books were the result of the unwritten roles, developed in the spirit of the last, local administration, ongoing at the time of the fieldwork. Although the organisation Article 19 (2015) entitled their latest annual report on freedom of expression in Mexico the State of Censorship (*Estado de Censura*) there is no formal censorship. As one of the external experts from Mexico City stated, it was as if "old-times PRI-style politics" had never stopped in this state¹⁷³.

This subsection's argument presents an alternative view. The micro-management of unofficially distributed books reveals a powerful effort to counteract the vertical imposition of the dominant account created by the local authorities. Risking position and job possibilities, the books' authors kept sharing their attempt at challenging (or at least communicating) an alternative to the 'official' interpretation of the insecure circumstances. In this, they endeavoured to construct their own space of knowing about the insecurity, another possibility in the face of the dominant narrative (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić, 2017). In this sense, while navigating their books along the spectrum of the (in)visible, they acted upon their own insecurities and those affecting their communities. This meant that the content of their work went beyond the ideas described in their books; these also communicated a sense of their status and the conditions of everyday uncertainty under which they lived.

5.2. Communication as presence

This section examines issues of daily mobility, together with the spaces in which the people of Paloxpan lived and worked. Here, I enquire into what was transmitted as it moved along a spectrum of (in)visibility. Visibility also mattered where the dominant state of affairs – the one imposed by the authorities and/or criminal groups – was challenged. Being too visible worried many, yet being "not visible enough" concerned others. The everyday routines of my interlocutors in Paloxpan were usually subject to change, due to the possibility of becoming less or more visible to an *oreja*, a messenger of the government or member of a criminal group (or perhaps both at the same time). Some research

¹⁷³ Based on a private conversation with the academic colleague visiting Paloxpan from Mexico City, who prefers to stay anonymous. As mentioned before, PRI stayed in power over 71 years till 2000, when PAN came to power at the federal level. Then, after its return (in 2012) over one presidential six-year term – *sexenio* – lost to the leftist, Morena, on the 1st July 2018, for the first time in Mexican history.

participants felt observed to the point that they wanted to change where they lived, mainly because they perceived their former homes as being too easy to find and perhaps already under the watchful gaze of ‘someone’ (they were usually unable to say whom, but many referred to the *oreja*). In extreme yet not uncommon cases, this also included moving to a different state, and thus changing their whole community, as a way of minimising the exposure that they interpreted as a threat¹⁷⁴. Such change could be for long period of time (akin to going into exile), or for shorter times, when they would keep in constant motion, ‘coming and going’¹⁷⁵. Others changed their home address from the ‘very visible’ such as in city centre, to more peripheral locations. In addition, reducing or withdrawing from some of one’s social media activity was seen as a way to shelter oneself from public attention, especially for family members¹⁷⁶. Some others deliberately changed their daily routines while walking to and from work.

Conversely, particularly on the occasion of our first meeting, many of my interlocutors chose “the most visible” place to meet: such was the case of Aron, Kail, Roberto and Ricardo. This could include a café or a square, a small park or a bench in the urban space. Quite quickly, I was told upfront that this visibility was the reason for choosing that particular location. Despite demonstrating constant anxiety about being overheard, the perceived visibility of the place had the protective aspect of being surrounded by pedestrians and strangers: people on the street who would be there by accident. The underlying assumption was that it would have cost too much to openly challenge them in such a ‘public’ space.

Through juggling their use of everyday spaces (their daily routes and, more broadly, the places they lived), people deliberately avoided communicating their location, which could in their perception be endangering. In this, they exercised their agency, while responding to the practices of surveillance upon them. Likewise, I read their careful choice of a fairly visible (to those exercising surveillance) meeting place as a tool by which they chose to communicate their presence rather than hiding it. This discreet way of communicating connects with the following type of communication through high exposure. In short, among the people of Paloxpan, high visibility was at times considered a protective feature in dealing with everyday uncertainty.

¹⁷⁴ This was the case of Ricardo’s family, Marisol, Juan, as well as some others from YC.

¹⁷⁵ As in the case of Ricardo’s parents.

¹⁷⁶ As in the case of Marisol, one of the local journalists I met early on in my fieldwork.

5.3. High-exposure communication

This section describes how those who dedicate their everyday to search for their relatives govern the (in)visibility as a tool of communication. They often expose themselves – as well as the cases of their missing family members – in front of those who intend to silence their efforts (both authorities and criminals). In contemporary Mexico, missing people are called *desaparecidos* (disappeared). The term, which originated in Argentina and is effectively used from then on (Gatti, 2014, p. 162), highlights their quality of being unseen, suddenly made invisible from their surroundings. However, as Gabriel Gatti emphasises, the term *desaparecido*, rather than “refer[ring] to the quality of the subject, [points to] the state of being: a noun (in Spanish, “*es un desaparecido*”) as opposed to an adjective (“*está desaparecido*”)” (2014, p. 161 – *emphasis mine*).

Official numbers declare there to be close to 37,000 registered cases of enforced disappearances in Mexico, including those carried out by state forces and non-state groups (SEGOB, 2018). As usual, unofficial estimates reveal a much-enlarged scale of the phenomenon (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 258; Data Cívica, 2018). The United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances confirmed “the tendency of lacking reliable data about forced disappearances, [together with] barely any number of sentences, the emergency constituted by a large number of corpses without identification¹⁷⁷, and the clandestine mass graves lacking proper attention in the whole territory [of Mexico]” (UN, 2018). For example, in the case of Veracruz, the authorities of the state prosecutor (*fiscal*) as of 2016-2023, not only declared that these numbers used to be alternated by the former administration¹⁷⁸, with a current estimation of 3,600 cases registered in 2018, but also admitted the systemic case of (politics of) forced disappearance, supported by evidence (García, 2018). The current enquiry against the former state administration, including the entire unit of police of Veracruz state, has declared proof of a systematic effort to disappear, torture and kill supposed collaborators of a particular criminal group (García,

¹⁷⁷ As of latest numbers from 2018, the number of unidentified bodies in Mexico was estimated at 35,000.

¹⁷⁸ It is worth reminding that the Mexican system of justice is heavily politicised, and Veracruz is not an exception. In turn, this same *fiscal* is being accused of politicising the process of revealing the crimes of former administration of Javier Duarte, to the political advantage of the subsequent PAN-related governor as of 2016-2018, Miguel Ángel Yunes Linares. This, in turn, seemed to be a result of the agreement between the former *duartistas* (people of Duarte) and the PAN-based administration. Conversation with Jorge via online, December 2018.

2018). This would evidence not only the collusion of the former state government (with their competitors in Veracruz territory), but also the “emblematic” (ICG, 2017) case of Veracruz’s forced disappearance. Given this brief context of the process of searching by individuals and collectives, the following paragraphs delve into the features everyday living alongside the uncertainty whether a searched person is alive, or their remains could be found in one of the hundreds open mass graves in Veracruz territory¹⁷⁹. I hereby explore how the family members communicate through (in)visibility, while looking for their relatives to appear.

Ximena. Her name is widely known in the circle of those searching in the state for their disappeared. “She brought some fresh air to the way of searching”, they said. Her approach keeps up hope, which means searching for the disappeared as though they were still alive. Some of her colleagues from the Collective¹⁸⁰ investigate ‘clandestine’ common graves, about which news has proliferated across the press in recent years (Beauregard, 2018); They then face the complexity of identifying human remains when eventually found (Animal Político, 2018). Contrary to statistics and commonly held beliefs, Ximena affirmed, “Yes, it is possible to find a person alive. When we find out it’s happened, even when it’s in a different state, such information brings hope. [It’s] very seldom this happens, but yes”¹⁸¹.

This is a full-time job with no fixed routine. Ximena responds to the ‘crisis’ that the Collective faces on a daily basis. It is indeed a *collective* way of resolving issues: her daily work is to attend to the cases of others, not just her own. In fact, it feels inappropriate to speak only about one’s own situation in the Collective¹⁸². Working with and for others creates a sense of power within the group. The organisation was established to shed more light explicitly on cases of the missing, while not only putting pressure on the authorities to reveal more about the state of affairs, but also attracting public attention to the tragedy the families have lived through – thereby making them more visible. The ultimate purpose was to find the missing person (that is, to ‘make a person appear’ again).

(Re)criminalisation of the disappeared is a common practice of the local authorities and in

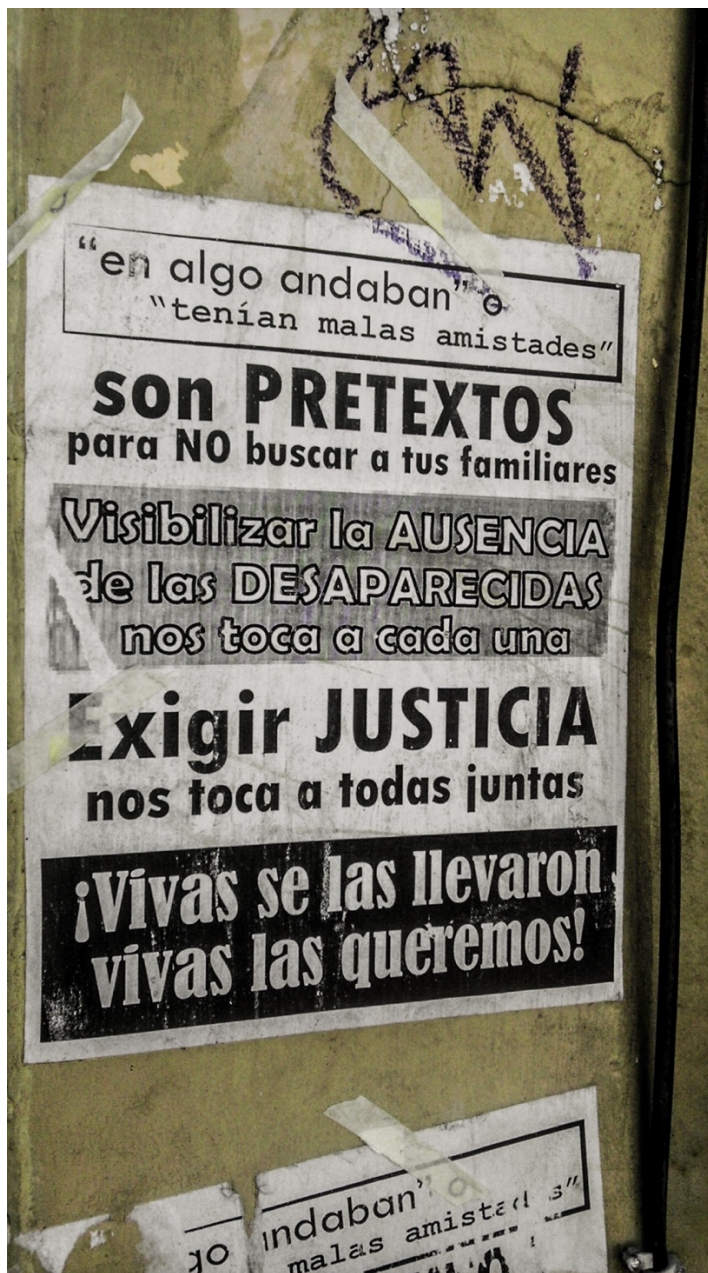
¹⁷⁹ As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, the estimated numbers range from 300 to 600. For example, García (2018) provides an estimation of 400 mass graves in Veracruz.

¹⁸⁰ One of the many local groups of relatives searching for the disappeared, chasing public prosecutors and police officers, lobbying them to move on with investigations into their families’ cases.

¹⁸¹ Conversation with Ximena, Paloxpan, November 2015.

¹⁸² Ibid.

the wider society (UN, 2018, p. 2). It is common to hear about a missing person and read, “they got into something murky” (*estaba metido en algo turbio*), or “they were heading down the wrong path” (*andaba en malos pasos*), implying that a missing person was somehow complicit in their own disappearance, a drug user or seller, or otherwise involved in illicit business. Even the Collective members recognise they also had had such preconception before they were personally affected by the loss of the relative. In Chapter Six, Tonia, one of my interlocutors, labelled this practice ‘automatic criminalisation’ (see Photograph 6).



Photograph 6. The leaflet calls for the courage of those who search for their relatives. It says: “‘They got into something’ or ‘they had bad friendships’: These are excuses to avoid searching for your relatives! What we must do is to make the disappeared [note the female form] absence visible. We must demand justice together. Alive they took them [note the female form], alive we want them back!”. In Spanish ‘disappeared’, ‘them’, ‘we’ are female forms of the words (*desaparecidas; cada una; vivas*) thus explicitly refer to the disappeared women, as well as female relatives who search for the disappeared. In addition, the phrase “Alive they took them, alive we want them back!” is the slogan of the relatives of Ayotzinapa students. See also capture of the Photograph 1. Paloxpan, September 2015.

Thus, the group’s exposure of their stories and demands for justice are forms of both spreading consciousness and exercising pressure on the political and judicial systems. Examples of their activities include being present and visible at political events, such as the launch of the yearly report by the state government, usually (in Mexico) a big public and media event at three levels of government (Animal Político, 2015). Such visibility meant a high-risk exposure for the members of the Collective. In answer to my question, “Does visibility protect you or put you at greater risk?”, Ximena replied:

To stay more visible is both positive and negative. The media is a double-edged sword. What my colleagues did posed a very high risk¹⁸³: they ended up being beaten up, contrary to the *gober* [governor]’s declaration. Then yes, the following day ‘everyone’ spoke about the incident, so it brought certain attention to the Collective.¹⁸⁴

Again, in the case of Colombia, Taussig recalls these collective acts of high exposure, in the face of top-down silencing (elaborated in Chapter Four):

It is this presence of the unsaid which makes the simplest of public-space talk arresting in this age of terror – the naming by the Mothers of the Disappeared in public spaces of the name of disappeared, together with their photographs, in collective acts acquiring the form of ritual in which what is important is not so much the facts, since they are in their way well known, but the shift in social location in which those facts are placed, filling the public void with private memory. (Taussig, 1992, p. 27).

Ximena speaks confidently from a position of power. “I approach the *fiscal* (public prosecutor)¹⁸⁵ as if he was my employee. ... You really need to know how to treat them”. To her, the key in building relationships with the authorities is to keep her communication networks alive (“buzzing”) at all times. She openly speaks about ways of negotiating with

¹⁸³ She referred to the event mentioned earlier, where three of the Collective members presented public demands at a state government event: an extreme form of exposure (Animal Político, 2015).

¹⁸⁴ Conversation with Ximena, Paloxpan, November 2015.

¹⁸⁵ In Mexico, *fiscal* is the title both of the public prosecutor (whom are many and whose main role is to investigate the case), as well as of the head of the office of public prosecution at the state level.

those officials whom she needs to open further doors of hope for incoming or ongoing cases of disappearances. “I have learned not to let them shout at me while avoiding making enemies”, she declared. One of the ways of exerting pressure was to publish an article in the local newspaper, making the case more ‘public’ and thus gathering more visibility. At times, this resulted in change to the official (the public prosecutor) responsible for the case, which might advance the investigation. To exchange micro-favours and to recognise the ‘human face’ on the opposite side also resulted in some progress, such as extrajudicial visits to the possible crime scene, and facilitating access to a mass grave or to the jail. Such an exchange requires mediating and building personal relationships with public prosecutors, as well as with others carrying out parallel searching in other states¹⁸⁶. According to Ximena, it also requires “long hours of listening, talking with them with an attempt to make [the authorities] more sensitive. Many times, it’s putting them in my shoes or those of others. So rather than speaking to you on behalf of their institution, they speak as family members they also have”¹⁸⁷.

“It’s frightening”, as members of this and other collectives repeatedly declared¹⁸⁸. Many reported threats against them and their homes related to their activities, such as pressure exercised on them to change their attitude to searching for their relatives, and which they interpreted as an attempt to intimidate them. Nevertheless, Ximena smiles as she says acceptingly, “Yes, it’s scary, sometimes”.

The way Dauphinée described the arrival of news of a soldier killed on the front in the Bosnian war accurately recalls how relatives of the disappeared are left with a shadow of hope. It thus sheds some light on how the information travelled among those interested in receiving it.

The army always announced a dead soldier as “wounded” and it was always a lie, but it was a lie that allowed for that tiny particle of hope that this time it would be true. It was not yet death. It was the suspicion of death, and the suspicion of death allows that last pinpoint of hope to remain, no matter how small and cold. (Dauphinée, 2013a, p. 65).

¹⁸⁶ For example, through organisations such as ‘National Network of Connections’ (Sp. *Red de Enlaces Nacionales*), joined by at least 40 groups of those searching for their missing relatives, as of the end of 2015. Not to be confused with *Red de Enlaces en Derechos Humanos*, the governmental initiative.

¹⁸⁷ Conversation with Ximena, Paloxpan, November 2015.

¹⁸⁸ Together with the informal conversations, this is based on meetings between the CIDH and journalists, human rights defenders and other groups affected by the context of insecurity in Mexico, Paloxpan, September-October 2015; see Chapter Four.

The above examples of communicating through acts of high exposure, centred around the disappeared, both contain the risk of appearing too visible to the authorities, and increase the possibility of a loved one reappearing. The following section merges the two types of communication: the one encrypted in presence and the other dignified by high exposure.

5.3.1. An amalgam of presence and exposure

This subsection unpacks the examples where two types of communication examined previously, namely that of presence and high exposure, combine into one amalgam. Visibility in Paloxpan acquired further meaning under actual spotlights which were never switched off, and which hindered the sleep of the inhabitants, despite them declaring themselves to be used to this “as to everything”. These spotlights were part of the federal- and state-led schemes of protection for journalists and human rights defenders¹⁸⁹. In one particular case, a journalist’s family lived in the same house where he had been kidnapped and subsequently murdered. As I wrote in the field diary after the visit:

The spotlights were accompanied by a protective wire surrounding the walls of the house, which had been unfinished for years, with an incomplete structure and no glass in the windows. The living room housed three screens connected to a network of cameras. A few meters from the house, two state policemen enjoyed the scant shade of the closest tree¹⁹⁰.

These ‘objects’, together with the state security agents, were meant to keep the house under observation and to make the lives of its inhabitants safer, in case the kidnappers of the father, husband and grandfather returned for any of them. Under this same scheme of protection, Roberto, the only son, had been allocated a security guard, with a car and a driver accompanying his every movement. Unofficial rumours and every criminal investigation thread led to the municipal mayor, who, at the time of the fieldwork, had been labelled a fugitive from justice. Yet representing as he did the lowest ladder of governmental hierarchy, he must have been allowed, if not encouraged by those of higher ranks – as argued by Roberto’s family, friends, and the organisations which supported them – to use paramilitary-like forces to kidnap and then to kill. How the watchful and

¹⁸⁹ (Sp.) *Mecanismo de Protección para Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas*.

¹⁹⁰ Visit to Roberto’s family home, Veracruz Puerto, October-November 2015.

supposedly protective visibility – epitomised by the guards, spotlights and the car – could enhance the family safety remained an open question.

Over the course of our conversation, it struck me that Roberto's mother (and a journalist's wife), with a timid smile, compared this home to a prison. The spotlights made rest at night-time nearly impossible. The surreal yet very probable consequence of the electricity bills (the family's highest bimonthly bill, made unaffordable by the spotlights and for which Roberto needed to work longer hours) was that the power could be cut off any time. At the same time, according to Roberto, the lights together with the constant vigilance of the authorities made the family too visible, in contrast with the surrounding unpaved, flooded streets of the neighbourhood. Not only was their home paradoxically exposed by the supposedly protective measures; their most intimate space was filled with the memory of being brutally invaded and the head of the family being taken away by an armed group in front of his wife and grandsons¹⁹¹.

Nonetheless, Roberto knew there was nowhere to hide, even if he wanted to. He used the attention directed at him and his resulting visibility in two ways. Firstly, he continued to exert pressure on the system of justice despite his moderated disbelief in its efficiency, using the transport provided to frequently visit public attorney officials who conducted his father's case both at state and federal levels. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, he continued his father's efforts to pursue local and so-called empirical journalism. Gaining other media attention and support in the aftermath of his father's brutal murder¹⁹², he dedicated his scarce spare time and night-time energy to put together the next edition of the paper his father had published on irregular basis. Over the first couple of numbers he condemned the 'spectacle' of the long, politicised legal procedures which followed his father's homicide, in addition to revealing other similar cases. Further, he invited other journalists to write in his (father's) paper and continue discussing the local issues that people faced on a daily basis. He added to the newspaper's title, '*La Unión...*' his father's words: "Living with fear is not an option"¹⁹³. In continuing his father's practice, as well as

¹⁹¹ Chapter Six provides yet another example where the public and the private blurred in the aftermath of a paramilitary attack on a student birthday party. The limited space of the home where this took place became a theatre stage, driven by the hope of reconstructing meanings of violence in the locality.

¹⁹² He had a support from several organisations, including Article 19 and National Centre for Social Communication (*Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social*, Cencos).

¹⁹³ *La Unión... Vivir con miedo no es opción*. Rather than being a syndicate, 'The Union' hereby acquires the meaning of a merger (of several entities). The title of this paper is authentic.

insisting on revealing news uncomfortable for the local authorities, he personified persistence.

This so-called ‘empirical’ journalism, represented by the work of his father, is situated at the edge of the contribution to alternative forms of communicating. It may seem contradictory to the initial purpose of this chapter to address informal and non-obvious forms of communication. Nevertheless, I deliberately include this type of journalist practice, which is located away from the work of formal mass media professionals. Unlike the work of many of Roberto’s colleagues, this type of informing is based and developed upon experience rather than formal education. Usually, *periodista empírico* (a person who exercises such an experience-based form of journalism) learns their profession by doing, alongside a job which provides them with resources to live and maintain a family. Roberto’s father was a taxi driver, as was his colleague, Pedro. Below is a fragment of the article in *La Unión*... about Pedro, written by Roberto. They died within five months of each other.

A taxi, looking for a passenger, drives along the streets of the city. Pedro sits behind the wheel. ‘Take me to the centre, please’ – requested an individual. ‘Sure, *jefecito* [‘boss’, in a common diminutive form], why not! I just need to make a stop a few blocks away. It won’t be a minute. I reassure you, won’t be long,’ – Pedro blurted out. ‘Right’ – confirmed the other. (Carvajal, 2015, p. 7).

In this way, Pedro could stop at a crime scene, quickly take pictures and drive away, taking less than two minutes of his passenger’s time. Both Roberto’s father and Pedro had earned money for a living, while navigating their everyday in search for momentary opportunities which allowed them to continue their – quite literal – drive to communicate. Driving a taxi only had the appearance of protecting Roberto’s father, while at the same time disguising his profession as a *comunicador*, even after his death¹⁹⁴. Despite efforts to silence them, their voices continued to be heard.

The following subsection on ‘veiled visibility’ continues elaborating on alternative forms of communication, which persist in spite of and through ‘everyday uncertainty’ and the top-down silencing depicted in Chapter Four. Further subsections connect with the former three, in that they address the agency that the unprivileged practice in less expected spaces.

¹⁹⁴ Following his death, the former governor Duarte publicly denied his journalistic profession, emphasising he was only a taxi driver.

In this, they all dig deep to find alternative ways to communicate, addressing the central research question: how do [people] communicate amid silence? Put it differently, when knowing is (apparently) impossible, how does one communicate danger?

5.4. Veiled visibility

Among the responses this chapter offers to the question formulated at the end of the previous subsection, I consider a few forms of disguised communication in this and the following subsection. Veiled-visibility communication did not allow for the precise identification of its author, who remained hidden behind the well-pronounced, even loud message. In this sense, it is through communication which was only partially visible, as if through a veil, which enabled the actual message to be transmitted. Unless anonymous, this message could not be revealed under the context of insecurity which prevailed in Paloxpan. Unlike its form, its content was rather clearly formulated against the potential violence or that which had already occurred.

On my first day in Paloxpan, while wandering the streets just to get lost and familiarise myself with the nearby surroundings, I spotted graffiti which stated, “Everyone lies. Don’t get hung up”¹⁹⁵. In a very succinct manner, it cast doubt on whatever I would listen to and whatever I would be told, and warned me to remain neutral. Yet this ambivalence was somehow extended to the wider communication among the inhabitants of Paloxpan and Mexico: the well-known background (*tra(n)sfondo*, or ‘second layer’) to a message revealed a fairly quotidian aspect of living with everyday uncertainty (see Chapter Six). It opened up further possibilities of interpretation, the revealing of which was limited by the local context. It therefore formed a part of the everyday uncertainty.

From the distance of time, I recognise that this phrase marks the way the fieldwork evolved. Sometimes people chose carefully what to react to. Being on permanent standby allowed them to get on slowly with important commitments, while neglecting matters of lesser priority; at times, they faced an abrupt need to react to urgencies. One reaction did not prevail over another.

¹⁹⁵ (Sp.) *Todos mienten. No te claves.*

One of my interlocutors in Paloxpan (a ‘gatekeeper-to-be’) exemplified this as one of the surreal aspects of his reality. He showed me his nameplate next to the entrance to his office. He cherished this process as if he was revealing secret, deriving a great deal of amusement from his actions. The nameplate had been purposefully turned upside down, which made him laugh, again, as he must have repeated this ritual to many others before me. But it was not about his name. As he pointed out, this was the way he saw things in this city. The metaphor disclosed the surreal mechanisms of power games I was yet to grasp. Despite his name not being anonymised, this qualifies as an example of veiled visibility: his name was evident yet twisted, conveying a clear message to the public: that there was something murky in the upside-down values and practices surrounding him and with which he disagreed.

At times, people employed rather more traditional methods of visual communication to indicate what they found disturbing in their everyday dealings with insecurity. In a particular example of collective effort, in diverse neighbourhoods all over the city were hung large, white *mantas* (coarse lengths of cloth) with large, handwritten text in colourful letters – their messages to the outside world, often to local authorities, at other times to criminal groups¹⁹⁶. These covered a range of topics which concerned local inhabitants, from their opposition to recently introduced electricity meters to nearby construction failures. More importantly for this research, at the same time they were announcing their frustration with the levels of insecurity they perceived around them. The *mantas* that related to the nearby *colonias* were meant not only to inform, but also to exert pressure on the local government “to do something”¹⁹⁷. The locations of these banners, some displayed over the main streets of the city, purposefully increased their visibility and thus their relevance. Similarly, the request to reduce violent robbery in a local corner shop or, very common at other sites burglary, was equally directed to local criminals, who were at times named in the text being displayed.

These traditional *mantas* explicitly called attention to the place at hand. At times, they pointed only to the tip of the iceberg, while the ‘rest’ was more accessible through rather more nuanced forms of communicating about insecurity. In particular, the neighbours’

¹⁹⁶ Importantly, *narvomanta* is also a common tool used by armed groups to communicate their messages directly, mostly to authorities or rival groups (Maihold, 2015).

¹⁹⁷ Neighbours commonly exercised this practice under the label *vecinos vigilantes* (vigilant neighbours) – see also the following footnote –.

WhatsApp groups provided a very popular form of navigating everyday insecurity. This tool was frequently suggested by local police forces who, together with municipal civil servants, ‘launched’ “organised neighbours groups”¹⁹⁸. This was similar in a number of *colonias* and involved regular, usually monthly meetings with the local police, where the locals were able to flood the authorities with complaints in regard to whatever worried them, from transportation and parking issues, to questions about murders and missing people. More often than not, these meetings provided a form of catharsis.

The paradox about ‘organising’ groups of neighbours lies with *who* was inducing *whose* organisation. According to informal conversations I had with some of the neighbours involved, people in the *colonia* would communicate with each other about any suspicion or complaint they had, long before the police arrived. They laughed at the process of ‘organising’ neighbours who had already organised themselves, having informed not only each other but also the authorities, as and when they considered it necessary. Thus, the question of who was teaching whom made my interlocutors doubt where the real authority lay and the power asymmetries in place¹⁹⁹. Beyond engaging in power relations with the local police, these tools of direct communication between state agents and local inhabitants neither guaranteed the efficiency of the former nor improved the security of the latter. The following subsection departs from discussion of direct forms of communicating and connects with the silences, previously examined in Chapter Four. It takes on board the less obvious spaces of opening up towards how uncertainty feels; this becomes the central point of the following two subsections. A further section elaborates extensively on yet another type of potential opening up towards spaces, where at-risk youth felt safe enough to communicate about their dealings with everyday violence.

5.5. Communication through safe spaces: not-so-grey zone?

Observing up to two weekly sessions²⁰⁰ of group therapy was among my most regular commitments while in the field. The families of the so-called youth at-risk of taking and becoming addicted to drugs gathered in a small space at the semi-governmental institution, the Youth Centre. Over time, I came to understand that this space enabled a different kind

¹⁹⁸ (Sp.) *vecinos organizados contra la delincuencia*.

¹⁹⁹ I further elaborate on this example in Chapter Six.

²⁰⁰ Thursdays and sometimes Fridays. In total, 37 sessions over eight months.

of conversation for its participants than the one intended, revealing more about living within a violent environment than the official purpose that the institution assumed. The space where the sessions unfolded looked as follows.

In a shabby room, a small circle of chairs grew at a slow pace. Everyone who arrived, usually in the company of another, would take their seat in silence, adding to the organically growing circle. This was a weekly (or twice weekly) ritual, before the session started. Rather than a meeting of friends, it was almost one of family. To be precise, it was a meeting of families. Mateo, the group facilitator working with the vulnerable youth, created something out of the possibility the group generated. He attempted to fill the gap in the ‘grey space’ between them being criminalised and lacking the protection they needed. The following paragraphs explain the ways in which he pursued such an endeavour.

This grey space between criminalisation and vulnerability was not only blurred but appeared to an outsider to be almost invisible. In fact, it rendered nearly inept by their – the young participants – rage to live, as depicted below by Max, one of the teenage participants. Mateo provided not only a safe space to talk, but also a very literal space in which to breath. If there was a ‘space of normality’ it would be this room, heavy with collected stories brought by tired bodies balancing between life and death. They were situated on the margin of the protection offered by the state – for example, by police agents – and their simultaneous abuse by it, in its urge to apprehend potential criminals, who would “fill the statistics up”²⁰¹. In this context, the term ‘illegal’ did not make sense. Police officers – who should in theory protect the state and enforce the law, instead of providing support for those at risk and safeguarding them were often the origin of the danger and its expansion. *La pesca* (fishing), as it was commonly labelled. Put simply, this means using ‘preventive’ (or rather, pervasive) measures as an excuse to look purposefully for a person, who would then be accused of being guilty regardless of what they had done or not done, and thus become criminalised.

Following the cathartic second session I attended, my fieldnotes grasped the greyness of communicating violence:

²⁰¹ Alternatively, as mentioned earlier in the section on high-exposure communication, this could also be the deliberate politics of colluding state agents (García, 2018; also J. Zavaleta Betancourt, 2014).

Max filled the room with his heavy breathing. Everyone seemed to be listening carefully. He wore his hat on one side in a way that every now and again fell over his eyes, to be adjusted from time to time. With his eyes half-closed and a loud voice, he seemed to move all over the room while sitting in the circle. His words were so heavy as to almost challenge his audience. That day he neatly described his recent time living with the threat brought home by his younger brother. Max's sibling had got hold of someone else's "*fierro*" [here: gun]²⁰² and brought it home. This disclosed a direct threat from the gun's owners, who might look around for his brother, and even come to the house after him. Max was worried about his mother, too. That July afternoon he described their desperate late-night escape which had happened the night before. In Max's words²⁰³:

What was I supposed to do? Whatever I did, we were done for. I didn't want to run, because running after 10 pm makes you immediately suspicious. But there was nothing left: we were running for our lives, I had to run for my little brother. (...) I could only think about my little brother. I told him to run, to run away as fast as he could. So, for every five steps I took, he jumped eight²⁰⁴.

In Mexico, a family, in particular an extended family (colloquially, a 'tribe') is perceived as a basic seed of trust by which to circulate information (Bartra, 1987). This however can be challenged. Firstly, for some of the youth, another kind of family exists – in the gang of friends who hang out together on the streets of their *colonia*. With its strong links and rituals of initiation (commonly known as *pandilla*), a gang differentiates itself from the so-called organised crime groups, while at times appearing more similar (Jones and Rodgers, 2009; J. Zavaleta Betancourt, 2014; Rodgers, 2006). For those growing up on the streets of their locality, their peers – with whom they share time, values and ways of living – become their families. They notify each other of any danger, sharing information to survive. A particular threat which teenagers discussed in the Centre was that of being kidnapped by a criminal group. For others however, membership of such a group was a 'dream job'²⁰⁵. This was the case with Max, as he often stated. His father had also grown up on the streets, from his early years selling auto-parts, followed by other 'goods' on the street. The idea of a trustworthy family is thus fulfilled by the street gang and by a number of safe spaces, of which YC was a notable example.

²⁰² Literally, (Eng.) iron. A word commonly used for guns: unlike the material, here applied as a synonym for a gun on its own.

²⁰³ Fieldnotes, after a Thursday session at the Youth Centre, Paloxpan, July 2015.

²⁰⁴ Max, Youth Centre, Paloxpan, July 2015.

²⁰⁵ A limited scope of literature refers to similar tendencies in Mexico, as in the case of another state in Mexico, Tamaulipas (Correa-Cabrera, 2017).

More importantly for the purpose of this research, a second alternative to the family was created in that shabby room. Youth Centre, despite and together with its formal purpose, created a community space through its members who came to relate to one another over somewhat alike, or even shared experiences. Officially, the Centre was created as an amalgam of the governmental and non-governmental bodies which aimed to integrate youth at risk of any kind of addiction, mostly to drugs and alcohol. Beyond that nonetheless, while working on long-term relationships with the community, the group therapy uncovered further aspects of life as a young person in the surrounding, often ‘insecure’, *colonias*. In other words, the most visible ‘tip of the iceberg’²⁰⁶ – the action of taking drugs – revealed over time family and other relationships which contributed to the process of how people respond to violence. Over nearly two decades, it had become a space in which to breath and to share the burden of accounts which otherwise would barely be made ‘public’. It extended then a kind of understanding, shared among the group gathered in the shabby room. This was a trusted circle, but also one that respected its hierarchy. Usually, the seniority of those who participated regularly over years on a weekly basis, mostly parents and grandparents of the ‘recovered’, was observed. Similarly, long-term participants were often generous in listening to newcomers. Again, my fieldnotes read:

That day, Max talked about how many days (that is, nights) he had been unable to sleep. He kept saying how these sleepless nights troubled him, with his whole body showing signs of tension, as if he was dredging up his concerns in front of us. There was no way to differentiate between the effects of whatever substance he had taken prior to the session and the lack of sleep. In the following week, I barely slept. When I briefed Mateo about this, he contributed several examples of how he had acquired symptoms of vicarious trauma over the two decades he had worked with them, including insomnia.

Interrupting himself that day, Max suddenly shared, almost as if he was proud it, the notification that, “You know we’re under the curfew, don’t you?”²⁰⁷.

This subsection stems from the somewhat surprising black-and-whiteness of the punitive mechanisms reproduced in public and at the family level in the Centre. In contrast with the actual idea of grey spaces, an antagonistic public discourse was being replicated in the smallest cell of the society, revealing the potential desire of exercising control over someone weaker. It was most frequently revealed at the initial, cathartic stage of the

²⁰⁶ As depicted in a body of work which conceives of violence as a public health problem and therefore preventable, following the World Health Organisation (Krug et al., 2002).

²⁰⁷ Fieldnotes, after a Thursday session at the Youth Centre, Paloxpan, July 2015.

weekly session, and it did so through judgmental, moralising and short-tempered expressions mostly in regard to the youth, and mostly expressed by their parents, grandparents or other guardians. According to Mateo, in particular at the beginning of their therapeutic process in the Centre, yearning for “rapid solutions” was quite common²⁰⁸.

Nonetheless, this should be seen in a wider context of punitive solutions to the ‘problem’ of violence, widely exposed by the media and popular among Mexican politicians, notably through the militarisation of public security. This kind of ‘repeating’ state discourse inside the family circle revealed a common desire to enhance punitive forms of power. It was also stretched to the extreme in expressing a desire to kill. “I wish I could have killed him, the father of my daughters. I would have better done it then”, as stated in one of the sessions²⁰⁹. This echoes the illusion of the ‘strong hand’ of the usually-militarised state forces, “who’d come and wipe spaces to ‘clean’ them from the unsafe”, as another group member put it²¹⁰. This belief accords with the perception of insecurity measured by the survey, where *La Marina* and *Ejército* (the Navy and Army) were still the most trusted and perceived as the least corrupt among the Veracruz’s security and justice institutions (ENVIPE, 2018b, pp. 28-29). According to the hereby imagined picture, the army would miraculously change reality ‘back to’ a better, idealised past.

Yet this may be considered a reaction of a twofold nature. Firstly, and generally speaking, this is a top-down premise, which authorities work on and the media replicates. This also forms part of the context of those who are capable of ‘buying’ their safety, namely to live in safer areas or to employ private guards. This is also a common reference for the government, as seen in the rhetoric repeated by the state and municipal officials since at least 2006. However, during the cathartic part of the session, one of the participants stated the opposite.

- How do you know it isn’t safe around here?
- The more policemen you see around, the less safe it is²¹¹.

²⁰⁸ One-to-one conversation with Mateo, Youth Centre, Paloxpan, August 2015.

²⁰⁹ Youth Centre, Paloxpan, August 2015. Chapter Four presents Irma’s case in more detail.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Youth Centre, Paloxpan, September 2015.

This statement returns to the argument expressed at the beginning of Chapter Four, where the presence of state forces caused visible fear, causing local inhabitants to feel targeted rather than protected. Furthermore, this fear is unequally distributed through the social stratification of central eastern Mexico. That is, the way people are treated by the police and military forces is differentiated according to their socio-economic appearance (J. Zavaleta Betancourt, 2014). There is thus a long tradition of distrust between the police and the people, which contributes to the context of this research.

After one of three long conversations with local artist Ricardo, my fieldnotes about distrust and suspicion while living everyday uncertainty read as follows.

“Who to trust? You don’t know anymore. It’s a small place. We know what happens... You know who belongs to which organisation, who did what, but (!) you don’t know what to expect”. Ricardo embodied this ambivalent state when fear is not uttered verbally, yet the whole body screams to express it. His voice trembled over his loud breathing, in between the cigarettes smoked one after another. Some distant sadness was in his eyes. He repetitively expressed his suspicion in regard to what I was noting down. Yet he rarely mentioned the word ‘fear’. He didn’t have to. He WAS it, while admitting: “In the end, everyone knows everyone. That’s how it moves around”²¹².

Ricardo’s account above neatly exemplified the attitude I labelled in Chapter Four as ‘silence as reaffirmation’. He talked about the community ‘knowing’, which neither implied interpersonal trust but also, more importantly, did not enable knowing in the sense of ‘predicting’ violence. Lack of trust was fuelled by the constant suspicion that there was a ‘second layer’ of reality, or that an action was carefully planned, according to several of my interlocutors²¹³. In this sense residents of Paloxpan showed a limited amount of trust, triggered by a perception of the existence of surveillance. Despite the aspect of *trasfondo*, this type of distrust is not something particular to Veracruz or Mexico. Again, the black-and-whiteness in decision-making while surrounded by violent conflict was depicted by Dauphinée:

You talk about ethics,” [Stojan] went on. “You act like it can be calculated. ‘The ethical moment of decision,’ you call it. But sometimes we just have to choose – like Petar Petrovic chose when he unloaded his rifle. We don’t, or can’t, see all the consequences, and we just choose. And the thing we think is the right thing turns

²¹² Fieldnotes after the conversation with Ricardo, Paloxpan, August 2015.

²¹³ This was an ongoing topic of conversations with Xochitl and Itzel, to name a few. Paloxpan, September-October 2015.

out to be the worst choice imaginable. And the thing we think is the wrong thing – well, sometimes it stays the wrong thing, and sometimes it’s even worse than that. And then we have to live with it. (Dauphinée, 2013a, p. 168).

This subsection discussed diverse types of communication occurring in safe spaces. It followed five other tentative types of communicating amid silence, which took into account the spectrum between the visible and (in)visible. The following concluding section summarises some of this chapter’s findings, together with making a connection with earlier and later analytical chapters.

6. Conclusions

My intention in this chapter was to show how both verbal and non-verbal ways of communicating were utilised by people affected by violent uncertainty. These ways were nonetheless limited to those where the purpose was to transmit information; I purposefully omitted cases which could, for example, provide an opportunity for potential over-interpretation, or for guessing others’ intentions. The focus here was on exploring a ‘different kind of knowledge’; the one that stems from this informal communication, as the language used under vigilance was filled with silences (see Chapter Four). These silences can also speak, or this informal communication reveals the forms in which silence is – notably, visibly – broken.

This chapter focused on how the spectrum of visibility and invisibility was played out as a result of the uncertain everyday. In this sense, its purpose to respond to the second research question ‘How do [people] communicate amid silence’ was understood as seeking visual ways of expression through the uncertain. Such responses provided the inhabitants of Paloxpan with a subtle trace of empowerment, partially dignifying their everyday living with potential violence. I identified a non-exhaustive list of five forms of communication related to (in)visibility, namely:

- Selective (in)visibility;
- Communication as presence;
- High-exposure communication;
- Veiled visibility;
- Communication through safe spaces.

Some contained firm messages directed at authorities or criminal organisations, and included veiled visibilities and high-exposure communication. Others revealed a slightly more layered content, as in the examples of communication through safe spaces and communication as presence. The result was a successful reconfiguration of initial suppositions regarding how communication unfolds in hostile surroundings. The five types presented included some cultural aspects of coping with violent environments.

The question about alternative forms of communication is also a moral one. This research does not entail any organised or unified ‘community’, meaning it identified no organisation where communication would be a crucial question to address. The process of responding to the second research question (above) led to the puzzle of ‘How do people know what they know despite silencing’, which increasingly becomes a meta-enquiry, framing the development of this research. Consequently, the types of communication and the associated examples given in this chapter address a range of possibilities rather than provide exhaustive answers. There is a great moral difficulty in revealing how people communicate and thereby get to know what they know while under threat. Nonetheless, I hereby unfold an enquiry about alternative forms of knowing about conflict, drawing on de Guevara and Kostić, or Muppidi, among others (2017; 2015 respectively). Secondly, among the primary conclusions from Chapter Four was that of the verbal account being insufficient. Silences are listened to and heard here ‘beyond absence’ (following Dauphinée), and this chapter extends them towards their visual aspects (Dauphinée, 2013b). There is a great need to add the non-verbal to the spectrum of transmitting some kind of knowledge about everyday living in potentially violent surroundings. This chapter therefore proceeded with presenting these different *kinds* of knowledge (in the plural), which challenge standard forms of transmitting or exchanging information for the purpose of academic knowledge production.

This chapter writes through the tension between the expressed and the muted initially tackled in Chapter Four. It thereby expands upon the elements of everyday uncertainty. Such tension was here made visible and as a consequence, is where a different kind of knowledge about living under violent conflict is arguably sensed and made feasible to reach. I nevertheless accept the impossibility of ‘fully’ accessing such knowledge, following much wider former attempts, as exemplified by Dauphinée:

Rather, trauma and grief must be *shown* in order to be fractionally intelligible: ‘the war’ lies in every gesture, in every movement of musculature, in every silence in which the imperative to witness is too exhausting to contemplate and too urgent to ignore. (Dauphinée, 2013b, p. 350 – emphasis mine).

Chapter Six will elaborate extensively on the notion of ‘improvising to persist’; it thus examines persistence in relation to responses to the uncertain everyday. How do people improvise their way through uncertain times? Firstly, there is an emphasis on the lack of actual pattern or category in responding to the uncertain everyday. I am interested in a *process*, rather than an examination of a series of events in isolation. Certainly, people do respond to some events on a daily basis, and sometimes these events are sharp and sudden; however, here the attempt is to appreciate them in context, rather than as individual occurrences. Notably, observing responses in the context of their respective processes sheds light on the importance of people’s lives. Secondly, to speak about improvising draws attention to the rhythm of the everyday. Again, rather than any imposed pattern, it draws an individually crafted, usually family-dependent regularity, which is as flexible as the everyday. However, it does have its particular rhythm.

Thirdly, improvisation invites sound to accompany the written word. This was outlined explicitly by two of the interlocutors of this research, Leo and Ricardo, both affected by violences and both of whom introduced diverse music genres to the conversation. Leo asserted that, “At any moment a policeman can give you the beating of your life,”²¹⁴ thus depicting everyday uncertainty under constant police monitoring, as one never really knows when, how and why to expect such an attack. According to him, alertness dominated the everyday.

²¹⁴ Conversation with Leo, Paloxpan, January 2016.

Chapter 6: Improvising to persist: how informal communication navigates through uncertainty

I walk through the country
Of dead bodies;
Clandestine *tzompantli*²¹⁵
Of anonymous martyrs.

I walk through the blood
Of those who left it all,
Their lives uprooted,
Their dreams snatched away.

...
We walk amid the dead persons,
Yet we are still alive.
Yet there are still many of us,
Who feel your pain.

Tonia²¹⁶

1. Introduction

This third analytical chapter explores persistence in its various forms, by which people responded to insecurity and everyday uncertainty in Paloxpan, Mexico. It stems from providing company in walking – here, persisting – which Tonia neatly depicts in the above fragment of her poetry. This chapter also draws on the two analytical chapters (four and five), which refer to silences and invisibilities respectively, while incorporating both as elements of the analysis. It aims to shed light on the research questions this study suggests, namely, ‘How do people respond to everyday violences? How do they communicate amid silences?’. In particular, ‘how do people of Paloxpan inform themselves about their insecure surroundings?’ However, this chapter situates the post-fieldwork analysis at a distance from a previously formulated analytical framework (see Chapter Two), while at the same time relating to some of its components. Instead of providing an exhaustive list of coping strategies, I examine how people persisted, while improvising ways to survive. This chapter thus explores the link between informal communication and persistence.

Persistence is conceived as a prevailing form of response to violent uncertainty which emerged from my encounters during the field research in Paloxpan. However, it should

²¹⁵ From Nahuatl (Aztec language): in Mesoamerica, the ancient region where parts of Mexico are currently situated; a wooden rack designed and constructed to carry and publicly display human skulls.

²¹⁶ Tonia, Paloxpan, Oct 2016–May 2017. Tonia, a singer and teacher, wrote this poem in two moments in time, the first part in October 2016, finished in May 2017. Informal conversation with her via online, May 2018.

not be read as a single response or solution. Persistence suggests an alternative to coping mechanisms, and depicts various forms of everyday improvisation, rich in creativity. In Paloxpan, these included informal communication, material and space-embedded forms. It embraces messiness, multiplicity, and at times contradictory features of daily living with the possibility of violence, without pretending to overly explain it. Rather, persistence represents a potential to embrace marginal ‘narratives in IR’ (Moulin, 2016, pp. 142-144) as a valid form of knowledge generation.

This chapter looks at persistence in light of previously discussed silences and invisibilities²¹⁷ in particular, almost ‘intimate’ meanings (Moulin, 2016, p. 137) of responses to uncertainty. Through advancing forms of persistence, it contributes to the understanding of how people navigate through everyday uncertainty. At the same time, it addresses informal forms of communication, which connects to the wider purpose of exploring alternative forms of knowing.

The chapter is structured as follows. After introductory remarks, the second section explains how persistence is defined, while marking a difference from the coping mechanisms described in Chapter Two. In particular, it draws on connections with, at the same time differentiating from, ‘everyday resistance’ and co-optation. The third section explores spatial and subjunctive aspects of persistence. Further delving into the violence-related everyday, a brief fourth section returns to Tonia’s poem featured in the introduction and its meaning for persistence. Section five addresses informal communication as a form of persistence, embedded in mundane spaces and accompanied by material objects. It explores their functions in the ways people persist under conditions of everyday uncertainty. Section six challenges ‘apparent acceptance’ as a form of persistence and is followed by conclusions.

2. Defining persistence in relation to coping mechanisms

This section defines persistence in connection with earlier categorisations of coping, as presented in Chapter Two. Firstly, without rejecting previously discussed coping mechanisms, it traces two reasons why these transformed into persistence following the

²¹⁷ See chapters four and five.

fieldwork. In this sense, the attempt here is to ‘disorientate’ responding to uncertainty, following Aoileann Ní Mhurchú in that it is “defined *across* such categories, rather than grounded in one or two of them” (Ní Mhurchú, 2016, p. 115). Secondly, this section examines meanings of persistence in relation to particular ways of coping, such as ‘everyday resistance’ and ‘co-optation’, drawing on examples from the research in field. It then formulates the rationale of engaging with persistence. This section prepares the ground for the examples of persistence embedded in everyday life in Paloxpan later in this chapter.

Firstly, following the research in field, the coping mechanisms which formed the core of the analytical framework introduced in Chapter Two (namely co-optation, avoidance, apparent acceptance, everyday resistance and open confrontation) seemed to be categorisations generally too rigid to depict the experience of everyday uncertainty. Instead of insisting that my interlocutors’ responses should ‘fit’ these constructed categories, the research came to recognise that elements of these coping mechanisms occur in people’s lived experiences, and that taken altogether, over time, arrive at a state of persistence. Put differently, living with potential violences resulted in an adjustment to the initial analytical framework to reflect the more fluid ways in which the people of Paloxpan deal with uncertainty. In particular, elements of the category ‘apparent acceptance’ are encountered in persistence, as the last section of this chapter demonstrates.

Secondly, the responses categorised in the analytical framework were externally driven. That is to say, all of them were based on prior, outside-of-Paloxpan ideas and literature (chapters one and two), despite also being grounded in my former experience of living and working in other regions in Mexico, prior to this research project. In particular, their meanings – and as a result, ways of thinking – were somewhat polarised, rather than fluid and based on experience. The association between these earlier categories and the spectrum between adaptation and contestation suggested that through these responses people either adapted to or contested the hostile situation. Instead, persistence, as examined in this chapter, provides a smoother and more flexible interpretation as an alternative to this externally driven (and therefore artificial) polarisation.

While tracing some elements of these responses, this study critically questions their ‘right’ to be imposed upon the fieldwork experiences. Instead of the black-and-whiteness of the

analytical framework's responses, this study opts to default to the colour grey. Nonetheless, as highlighted at the beginning, this section also aims to connect persistence with some coping mechanisms, bearing in mind the lines of distinction drawn above. Thus, the title of the section consists in persistence *in relation to* coping mechanisms, rather than in opposition to them. The purpose of this chapter is far from one of replacing coping mechanisms with persistence. Rather, it is to turn the readers' attention to lived experiences, and the fluid, non-mechanical responses which are part of everyday life, rather than somehow extracted reactions to insecurity. It thus endeavours to embrace the multiplicity of forms of the experience of everyday uncertainty.

The following paragraphs attempt to shed light on the rationale behind choosing to use persistence – arguably the most accurate translation of the experiences gathered in the course of the fieldwork – as an acceptable form of knowledge (Jacoby, 2006). In choosing this one concept, I recognise the risk of overgeneralising or seemingly oversimplifying the topic. However, far from insisting upon it being 'the only coping mechanism' which is valid, or dismissing the multiplicity of individual experiences, I hereby choose persistence as an arguably broad enough category to translate everyday navigation amid uncertainty and violence.

There is a very nuanced difference between this notion of persistence and 'everyday resistance'. The latter, as described in chapters one and two, refers to micro-level and culturally embedded actions which resist a dominant authority, according to the understanding of Scott (1990), developed and further critiqued, as neatly reviewed by Shindo (2016, p. 169 and further) as well as further adapted (for example, by Mac Ginty, 2013b). Among others, Shindo brings 'everyday resistance' (again) in its unintentional version to the IR 'table'. She problematises its numerous aspects, taking on board both the agency and 'internationalisation' of such political action, as well as the epistemology of such enquiry (Shindo, 2016, 174-178). In a nutshell, the difference between persistence and everyday resistance stems from the implicit *opposition to* authority – or an entity that possess some kind of power over another – embedded in an action of resistance, even if in the form of hidden transcripts²¹⁸ (Scott, 1990).

²¹⁸ As presented in Chapter One.

Despite the complexities of resistance as a concept and in action²¹⁹, the notion of opposition forms its essential core, given the prefix ‘re-’ (‘against’) together with the ‘-sistance’ core, meaning “withstand the action of”, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Etymology (1966, p. 759). Etymologically, to ‘resist’ and to ‘persist’ share both the time when they appeared in English (from French), and most importantly the core (from Latin *-sistere* that is, to “stand” (1966, pp. 671 and 759). The prefix ‘re-’ indicates ‘undoing’ (or in this case ‘against’), whereas ‘per-’ emphasises ‘forward’, ‘through’ (Oxford Dictionary, 1966, p. 666). To persist entails to “*continue* firmly in a state; *remain* in existence” (1966, p. 671, emphasis mine). In short, resistance points towards an action of opposing something (regardless of the questions of powerful vs. powerless or deliberate vs. unintentional). In contrast, persistence denotes continuity, with the emphasis on bearing adverse conditions rather than making objection to them.

Persistence in the context of Paloxpan sheds light on a tendency to withstand conditions of insecurity, and ultimately to remain alive. This should not be simplified as tolerance or passive endurance. Beyond continuity (which a later section of this chapter examines in detail), it indicates flexibility in adaptation to change, as well as insistence (here) upon living and surviving. Its emphasis on a process as opposed to an event also points at non-spectacular forms of coping. As it goes beyond standing against, it is far from excluding acts of opposition. Rather, persistence may actually embrace it, as it engages in a longer-term perspective. In essence, ‘to persist’ engages both the slowness of the continuous process, as well as the urgency of unexpected shifts in uncertain surroundings which demand re-action.

‘To persist’ is situated close to (but is not equal to) ‘endurance’, as Rebecca Walker explains in her enlightening ethnography of the east Sri Lankan conflict: “Yet, for those mothers, fathers, grandparents and grandchildren, it seemed that rather than allowing the situation [of everyday violence] to consume their sense of the everyday, people learned to negotiate and question, to work their lives *along* and *beyond* violence” [my emphasis] (2013, p. 2). However, instead of living along and beyond violence, ‘to persist’ functions *through*: it responds to the everyday uncertainty (that is, the possibility of violence to occur) rather than to violent events themselves. In this sense it resembles the interconnected, ongoing quality of everyday violence. Persistence connects to endurance, as with the people in

²¹⁹ See Chapter Two for this discussion.

Walker's research, "[p]ushing at the small cracks and spaces in the continuum of violence, they created a sense of the everyday that was about violence yet also challenged the meaning of the everyday and of the ordinary, opening up meanings to encompass other meanings and imaginations" (2013, p. 2). These spaces and places of imagination, hereby referred as subjunctive modes of thinking (see also Chapter Four) are elaborated upon in the following section. Finally, and certainly bearing in mind the different contexts of our studies, I find familiarity in Walker's choice of the "endurance" of everyday life instead of, "say to resist, be resilient to, or even to contain" (2013, p. 3). Again, and following this thread from Chapter Five, this chapter insists on a continuous persistence, rather than focusing on violence. In this sense, it places people's forms of living rather than ways of dying, at its central interest.

The response that persistence provides to everyday uncertainty differs further from that previously outlined as part of the analytical framework's coping mechanisms. Firstly, to persist (and improvising to persist) captures *living through* everyday uncertainty. It moves further from the core, polarised distinction which the analytical framework made, that of 'adaptation vs. contestation'. As seen in a number of examples from the fieldwork, the conceptual responses mapped between and along those two threads shifted over time, and as a consequence do not match with the actual meaning of the empirical responses. Instead, the responses diverge, and furthermore turn into 'experiencing' and living 'through'. The following two stories from the field exemplify this transition from coping mechanisms to persistence.

The first example embraces persistence, which softens 'sharp' (and judgemental) co-optation as a coping mechanism. Itzel provided everything her brother needed when he was mistakenly imprisoned in a high-security jail²²⁰. For months, she dedicated her days to overcoming the prison's administration and security to bring him the smallest everyday things he needed, from a toothbrush and clothing to mobile phones and cigarettes. As she explained, it was cheaper and more efficient to bribe members of the prison's administration than to try and obtain such items on the illicit market which functioned inside the prison. She persisted in her daily journey for two years, and following his release never talked with her brother about that time again. To say she used the corrupt system to her advantage would mean to neglect the entire Mexican context, while incorporating the

²²⁰ Based on the first and second conversations with Itzel, Paloxpan, August-September 2015.

externally-driven notion of co-optation. On the contrary, she insisted on keeping her brother alive, while bringing him not only objects, but also news from his family and herself, providing an extension to the outside world. Rather than co-opting with the system, she persisted in sharing traces of hope throughout the long days in prison.

The second example originates in the Flowering Hill *colonia* in Paloxpan, initially explored as a part of the ‘veiled visibility’ form of communication in Chapter Five. An ‘organised’ groups of neighbours, who in fact had communicated with each other about potential insecurities prior to the authorities’ efforts to ‘organise’ them, used for that purpose their hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990), which generally “[r]ather than being public or hidden... are often confusing, contradictory, and thick with local meaning; they are ‘non-obvious’ to outsiders who are often woefully lacking in the skills of observation and interpretation” (Mac Ginty, 2013, p. 425). Accordingly, at first glance this could have been interpreted equally as a collaborative exercise between the authorities and co-opted groups of neighbours, ‘organised’ in their outrage regarding violent incidents and the high frequency with which they occurred. However, as part of the fieldwork, following an introduction via the ‘gatekeeper’²²¹, people insisted that their modes of communication (for example, through WhatsApp) had been functioning long before the governmental initiative (of ‘organising’ the neighbours in the area) was put in place. In fact, their network was already well-established when the authorities arrived, and they expressed pride in how efficiently they informed each other of anything suspicious that happened in Flowering Hill. In this, they turned the eye of surveillance around: they felt empowered by being the ones ‘in control’ of their streets²²², keeping in touch with each other and with the local police at their own convenience and on their own terms. At the same time, it was clear to them that this neighbourhood was not the most dangerous one. Only three *manzanas* (lit. apples; here: three streets away) further on, “things were much more complicated”, with more frequent robberies and violent assaults²²³.

Not only did these neighbours expose the wishful thinking of the authorities, namely that it was they, the latter, who had induced the former to organise. They explained how they often laughed among themselves at the arrogant, arbitrary actions of officials, while

²²¹ A local academic, Paloxpan, September-October 2015.

²²² This was also the case among some of the neighbours in the Young Zone *colonia* (as presented in Chapter Four), who presumed that they “all knew it there”.

²²³ Neighbours in Flowering Hill, Paloxpan, September-October 2015.

continuing to accept what they considered useful, and provided by the state agencies. For example, they would call on the police rather than attempting to catch a thief themselves. At the same time, they chose to leave some cases unattended, as this enabled them to confirm the 'hidden' layer of rumours, and which proved convenient for them²²⁴. This does not imply their co-optation by criminal groups or the local police. Rather, they exercised choice, acting in their own interest and practicing agency while continuing to do so, reacting in an ad hoc manner when appropriate. In continuing with such selective collaboration with law enforcement agents, they performed their own ways of persisting.

The above examples delve into more complex responses to everyday uncertainty which move beyond the polarised acceptance vs. contestation. Rather, these examples of collaboration with authorities reveal their not-so-obvious mechanisms of knowing and creative response to the adversities of the everyday. In this navigation of everyday uncertainty, people improvised ways of living through, both individually and collectively, using their relationships with the 'authorities' at their convenience, instead of openly opposing them or becoming co-opted. In this sense, their responsive actions drew a rather grey and complex picture, in contrast with what was on the surface a black-and-white image. Persistence here seemingly moves forward from having continuity as its exclusive aspect. Not only does persistence indicate a sense of permanency, but it also has the wider potential to support an understanding of flexible ways to respond to and live under uncertain conditions. In this, persistence reveals forms of practicing agency which the less privileged have it in their power to choose. The following section turns the reader's attention to the spatial aspects of persistence, and draws on Chapter Four to develop subjunctive modes of thinking and knowing.

3. Spatial and subjunctive features of persistence

This section embarks upon discussion of two aspects of the act of persisting as a response to everyday uncertainty, namely its spatial and subjunctive²²⁵ aspects. In the previous analytical chapters, the former barely appeared²²⁶, whereas the latter was given only limited

²²⁴ As an example, a corner shop was recurrently attacked by a group presumed to have been hired by its owner, in order to continue money laundering at its convenience. The neighbours chose not to report the case, in order to continue with things as they were.

²²⁵ As elaborated on in Chapter Four, subjunctive modes relate to wished for and imagined forms of expression, usually indicating hope.

²²⁶ With the brief exception of 'Communicating through safe spaces' in Chapter Five.

attention in Chapter Four. The following paragraphs intend to reinforce both the spatial aspects of navigating insecurity and its subjunctive responses. Both emerged as a result of the recognised importance of the accounts of the people of Paloxpan of their uncertain everyday.

By aspects related to space, I mean those qualities of response which are directly involved in the space of their location, that is to say, where space mattered for the negotiated persistence within and despite specific uncertainty related to violences. People related directly to 'their' spaces and provided them with meaning while navigating everyday uncertainties. In many cases, these spaces coincided with what accounted for 'home'. The latter also connects to the idea of the family as a central communication point, as addressed in Chapter Five²²⁷. In addition, the prevalence of fog in Paloxpan supported a more tangible understanding of 'everyday uncertainty' in space.

This spatial aspect of persistence takes 'knowing' about uncertainty to the next level. The spatial mode of thinking reminds us that responses make sense only in a particular context, that is, one of physical locality and time. Although these were generally provided in the local context of the thesis, this section occupies itself with literal routes *through* uncertainty. Thus, moving throughout while staying immersed within a fog supports that understanding in an almost palpable way.

The subjunctive, wished for and imagined modes of thinking about uncertainty stem from, among others, linguistic aspects of living the everyday. These, already briefly introduced in Chapter Four, are captured by the Mexican Spanish *ojalá* and *ojalá que* as subjunctive grammatical forms of expressing hope and wish (the latter an impersonal one). This section attempts to expand on the functions of this form of expression in space, in learning about persisting everyday uncertainty.

The subjunctive mode reinforces the 'unknown' as the central component of lived uncertainty. As plans, wishes and hopes are seen as valid forms of knowing about uncertain surroundings, the paradox of constructing this 'knowing' lies in accepting the unknown as one of its bases. In other words, it is fundamental to think through the unknown in a serious manner as a component of the uncertain. In everyday violent

²²⁷ Ibid.

surroundings, wishes and hope contribute to the process of gathering serious knowledge about the uncertain.

This is yet another reason contributing to the incorporation of the metaphor of fog into the conversation about experiencing uncertainty on a daily basis. It combines imagined realities with creative possibilities of surviving the insecurities. The following subsection brings together a selection of examples which are neither representative nor exclusive, but which shed light on some of the spatial and subjunctive features of persistence.

3.1. A place to live, a space of hope

Amalia dreamed of owning her own home, for her and her youngest son, Abraham²²⁸. At the time of the fieldwork she lived in a shared home in the Young Zone *colonia* with her elderly mother and two sons, and her brother and his family of four. The elder son was a self-employed taxi driver, the younger was in primary school. She was responsible for caring and providing for her elderly mother, following her father's death the previous year. The house had originally been her parents' family home, but recently her brother had bought it for his family. This extended family shared not just a tiny living space but also beds, as there was barely enough space for everyone. By buying the rights to the house, her brother had indicated indirectly that the rest of the family (in particular Amalia and her sons) should find a home elsewhere. He had also started extending the living space without notice, worsening the living conditions of Amalia and her youngest son.

The land of Amalia's imagined future home is walking distance from her current place of residence, a short journey which nevertheless represents a significant difference. It is on the edge of an area that used to be occupied by *cafetales* (coffee plantations) years ago which, following profound changes to the local economy, disappeared to be replaced with fast-growing giant sugar cane used for cheap alcohol production. Amalia's father used to work the land and later managed the workers on the *cafetales*.

Amalia was given this land by her brother as compensation for him taking over their parents' home. However, there was no building on the land, no electricity or water supply

²²⁸ Abraham is in fact her grandson; this study respects her willingness (and the custom of the family) to not only call him her child but also to consider him as such.

to it, and not even the chance to obtain basic services, mainly because of their cost. Palm trees and dense vegetation left barely any space for humans, only allowing tiny footpaths to appear here and there, created by those searching for banana leaves²²⁹. The house was intended to be built amid what could be called ‘pure nature’. It stood in the middle of the forest at the very edge of the Young Zone neighbourhood, a quasi-village that in fact forms a part of the town, which itself is at the periphery of the city of Paloxpan. Everything merged in one urban-rural organism, lacking any physical or visible divisions, with a fried food stand and a private college building standing next to a pigsty, all surrounded by unpaved roads.

Over time, the place of dense vegetation surrounding the periphery of the town started to be called ‘no-mans’ land’. It was described by Amalia’s neighbours as ‘out there’, despite its location in the border zone of the village (it was in fact on their doorstep), where “things used to happen, but these days not anymore”. Local people avoided the place, or at least frequented it less. Rumours about the area becoming a place of suspicious activities was invigorated by bodies being found in similarly apparently remote zones, together with the sound – although very seldom actual sight of – black pickup trucks²³⁰. “The things”, if addressed at all, were rather at the margins of our everyday conversations around the dining table, elsewhere denoted as “the time[s] of problems” (Poole, 2004, p. 57). Rarely addressed by direct discussion, they were left with ‘an air’ of “potentiality” (Das, 2007, p. 9) (that provided a ground to become a component of ‘everyday uncertainty’, as seen in Chapter Four). There was no direct reflection on ‘no-go zones’ just around the corner. Instead, they were “shown” by people in the course of everyday life or left “on the edges of the conversation” (Das, 2007, pp. 10-11). Their mode of acting was to show their nuanced knowing about their surrounding spaces, with its due fluid status, as described in section 6 of this chapter. As Das neatly puts it:

Potentiality here does not have the sense of something that is waiting at the door of reality to make an appearance as it were, but rather as that which is already present. The ethnographic task here is to describe how feelings of scepticism come to be embedded within a frayed everyday life so that guarantees of belonging to larger entities such as communities or state are not capable of erasing the hurts or

²²⁹ Nearby was where we walked at sunrise to pick huge banana leaves to use as an envelope for a dish they were planning to teach me to cook that day: *tamales*. This is also described in the section ‘Communicating to persist’.

²³⁰ Commonly used by drug traffickers in Mexico, these black pickup trucks became a commonly known sign of their presence. Interestingly, they look similar to the police and military pickup trucks, just of different colours, described in Chapter Four.

providing means of repairing this sense of being betrayed by the everyday. (Das, 2007, p. 9).

The location of the land made it impossible for Amalia to construct her home, notwithstanding her financial ability to do so. Given barely any choice, she accepted the transaction anyway, encouraged by traces of hope to “make it somehow in future”. And she has kept faith in this for a long time. Working as a maid in the homes of others alongside her long-term family commitments she was scarcely able to afford to support herself, let alone complete construction from scratch. Regardless, she persisted in her dream.

Don Ángel, son of one of the first settlers in the Young Zone, now in his late sixties, liked to elaborate on his archaeological findings of which he was proud owner. His land had expanded on the edge of the neighbourhood, the “kind of edge” which some of his neighbours considered less safe than the rest of the zone. Walking distance from other buildings, his home was situated on a small hill, the first to be registered in the area (see Photograph 7 below). While we wandered around, he showed me where he made his discoveries while we chatted about ‘quotidian’ things²³¹.

²³¹ He told me he was an everyday drinker (which his wife dislikes) and that one of his sons lived next door with his own family. He still enjoyed physical work in construction, mainly to provide for his family, especially for his wife who is disabled and requires constant support.



Photograph 7. Walking with Don Ángel on the edge of the Young Zone *colonia* (on a particularly beautiful day). Young Zone, September 2015.

On one occasion, Don Ángel outlined what he considered his ambitious plans to construct a gate in front of his house, intended to protect him and his family from “these speeding black pickup trucks that, from time to time, suddenly appear from dense vegetation “out there” and may equally crash into our home”²³². He is one of a very few people I met over the course of my nine-month fieldwork who actually uttered the name of a violent regional group, the so-called ‘cartel’, which arguably disputed the zone at that time. He did so while talking about his archaeological findings, with no attempt to disclose any further details. As if these were not relevant, he hid behind the usual phrase, “Things used to happen here; not anymore though”²³³. As also mentioned several times among the women’s circle at Amalia’s brother home, he talked about the sound the pickup trucks made, which would compel his family go into the house and listen. This sound was so particular that people were able to estimate the direction in which the cars were speeding, which they found to

²³² According to his account, the gate would create enough protection to prevent the trucks from hitting his home accidentally. Conversation with Don Ángel, Young Zone, September 2015.

²³³ Chapter Four refers to this as ‘Silence as denial’, in the subsection 4.2.2.

be a useful protective tool, potentially giving them a few more moments to react “just in case”. However accurate their anticipation, the margin of unexpected accidents kept open in the daily rhythm of uncertainty.

Neither story has complete closure. They illustrate the relevance of the spatial and the imaginary in the everyday responding to uncertainty, yet there was no conclusion, ‘way out’, pattern or specific action people carried out in the face of rumours, feelings, stories, accidents and sounds of everyday uncertainty. These shifted according to their daily conditions. Both stories – those of Amalia and Don Ángel – are unfinished as all they can do is bring together traces of hope. Without expecting a ‘happy ending’, it is due to their expressed faith that these traces are revealed. In other words, these stories mattered not because the dreams of the people who told them were likely to come true, but because of their powerful imaginaries and wishes for the better, which kept them persisting with their everyday.

3.2. The “Pure Place”²³⁴

The following example aims to combine the imaginary with the relevance of space, introducing yet another example of persistence. This contributes to the spatial and subjunctive forms of responding to insecurity, yet in contrast to the above, it elaborates upon an organised endeavour by a large artistic collective in Paloxpan, in creating a theatre play. I chose to incorporate this unusually ‘formal’, organised example, which linked the imaginary with the space, in an attempt to connect with the community from both the past and present. The effects of this ambitious project on community involvement were ambiguous, yet did represent an intent to respond to existing and past violences.

El Puro Lugar (the Pure Place) aimed to represent, and respond to three episodes of violences in the context of Paloxpan, as follows²³⁵:

1. An attack on a theatre group from Veracruz state which took place during its performance of *‘Cúcara y Mácara’* (Mexico City, 28th June 1981);

²³⁴ (Sp.) *El Puro Lugar*

²³⁵ Based on conversations with the actors and co-creators of the project, together with the author’s participation in one of the pre-performances, as well as on Flores Valencia (2016) and Lamadrid Guerrero (2016); see also: (E-consulta Veracruz 2016).

2. A brutal attack by a 10-member paramilitary group on eight student activists, during a birthday celebration in their temporary dwelling, a small rented room (Paloxpan, 5 June 2015);
3. The space where these students were attacked is located in the San Bruno *colonia*, whose street names commemorate 10 anarchist workers from a nearby factory, kidnapped and executed in 1924.

My brief focus here is on the second from the above sections of this artistic project, as the event coincided almost exactly with the start of the fieldwork in Paloxpan. The theatre endeavour stemmed from an explicit intention of re-making the meaning of a space marked by brutal violence²³⁶. *El Puro Lugar* intended to represent a “response in action” (Flores Valencia, 2016) to remake “pure places of horror ... to seek their transformation into spaces of production of life” (Flores Valencia, 2016) and memory, rather than oblivion. The transformation began with the title, aimed at converting *no place* (the ‘anonymous place’ of Marc Augé, after Lamadrid Guerrero, 2016) to the ‘Pure Place’, its polar opposite: a place of ‘density’ and the ‘known’ which stem from the meanings given by those related to it. The theatrical performance was situated in the *cuartito* (lit. small room) where the brutal attack on the students took place (Lamadrid Guerrero, 2016, pp. 4-5). The *cuartito* was rented by the group of artists and for the purpose of this performance, with an intention to transfer it afterwards to the community, for their use and to contribute to the ‘collective memory’. In other words, the actors and the public remade a place of violence through the act of attending and participating in the play, and by contributing their expressions of, among others, empathy and/or refusal to ignore what had occurred there²³⁷.

From the perspective of those members of the public I met as part of the pre-performance and subsequent discussion in December 2015, the act of coming to the place and realising what had occurred there half a year before was revealing. Some started to share their own stories of fear, and the threats and attacks they had received. The space had a very palpable relation to the past event, which in the sense of Rob B. J. Walker,

²³⁶ Visualised in the media by the photographer killed a month later in Mexico City, whose story was introduced in Chapter Five (E-consulta Veracruz 2016; Flores Valencia 2016).

²³⁷ Based on my participation in the pre-performances, followed by discussions between the artists and the public in Paloxpan, December 2015, as well as post-performance reflections in seminars organised in collaboration with the local university, *El Encuentro Telecápita* (Puro Lugar, 2016; Lamadrid Guerrero, 2016).

expands it into a *process*, “which is constructed” (after Ní Mhurchú, 2016, p. 111). Later on, the public was involved in several ways: numbers invited to performances over the course of a year were limited to 100, with whom a constructive dialogue was meant to be carried out, with the intention of ‘constructing the community’, together with the neighbours living in San Bruno *colonia*, some of whom recounted stories of their relatives who had been present during the massacre of activists in 1924.

The purpose of engaging people from the *colonias* historically affected by violence was only partially accomplished. According to one of the co-creators of the play, there was a relative lack of response to one of the calls for participation²³⁸, and the people currently living in San Bruno perceived the artistic effort to be disconnected from their reality, somehow related to a past which did not belong to them anymore. In contrast, the remaking of the room where the students had been attacked resonated with the younger members of the audience, who, they said, identified with the young activists celebrating their birthday²³⁹. Despite its pitfalls, the partial remaking of the space nevertheless represented an explicit attempt to continue to embrace traces of life amid past and present violences, rather than insisting only on the existence of the latter. In this sense, it showed a transformative (rather than passive) aspect of persistence, with use of an explicit imaginary being part of an invitation to participate in and relate to the “pure place”.

Before this study turns to the communicative and material aspects of persistence, the following brief section explores a poem, a fragment of which was given at the start of this chapter. The poem connects two longer sections of the present chapter (the first focused on the spatial and subjunctive, the second on the communicative aspects of persistence), while continuing the conversation on hope and leading to a discussion of subtle forms of everyday communication which, this research argues, have, among the people of Paloxpan, been transformed into persistence.

4. Tracing hope in persistence

In suggesting persistence as a useful category by which to capture the atmosphere of responding to everyday uncertainty, hope is a fundamental, yet only partial fragment

²³⁸ Conversation with Itzel via online, August 2018.

²³⁹ Based on my participation in the pre-performances of *El Puro Lugar*, Paloxpan December 2015.

contained within the stories of this research's co-participants, that is, the people of Paloxpan. There is also pain, fury and momentary impotence, to name but a few. I encountered all of these in one place: the poem of Tonia, a woman and mother, who asks forgiveness of future generations:

I walk on the mass graves
On uncertain paths
And the stiff hope
Collapses in my hands.
What is left from the future
We promised to our children
And that perhaps we don't see anymore?

I walk on the sand
Of so many bones
Burnt, ground, butchered,
Made into dust and oblivion.
And my singing suffocates
With the wind crying.
...

My apologies,
Meantime my steps keep moving,
For this promise of the future,
That is gone amid so many deaths,
Since the god of green gold,
Of emptiness and of power
was more important
that looking and each other's eyes.

My apologies,
For my fear,
For your pain,
For your stolen innocence,
For indifference,
For lukewarmness,
For malice...
Our human decomposition²⁴⁰.

I include this second fragment of Tonia's poem (the first found at the start of this chapter) as an attempt to supply the missing pieces of the picture by presenting a personal experience of everyday living with violence-related uncertainty. If including emotions as part of the depiction of the possibility of violence and its aftermath is feasible at all, poetry

²⁴⁰ Tonia, Paloxpan, Oct 2016 – May 2017.

is among the very few tools that can undertake this task²⁴¹. It comes to hand at the exact moment when there seem to be “no words to express what happened” (Bleiker, 2009, p. 98). The above fragment constitutes a direct response of a mother to her child and the children of others, who face what she described as:

a debt we have – as a society and as a country – to our youth, because the country we had a chance to cherish as children does not exist anymore, and it’s yielded to their future that is far from uplifting. This is why I ask for forgiveness... because I think about these young persons who cannot follow their normal lives and about girls and boys as mine, because the future is grim. I know it’s very sad, but this pain motivates me to look towards peace education, to share my music from a different perspective and to create everyday spaces of construction and resilience²⁴².

Tonia’s comment on the poem presents her attempt to make sense of the “horrors of Veracruz” uncovered in late 2016. She explicitly referred to the overwhelming arrogance of what she considered the “colluded” – the authorities²⁴³ – on the one hand, and the hopelessness of the people on the other. In particular, she alluded to her outrage when faced with “the way ‘kitchens’²⁴⁴ operated, and the fact that one of them was installed and functioning in the local Police Academy,... the number of *feminicidios*, the hypocrisy of the church..., so many people’s indolence and automatic criminalisation of victims of disappearance, homicide or femicide”²⁴⁵ (see also Photograph 6). As recently as early 2018, human remains found in the local Police Academy were linked to cases of forced disappearance (Topete, 2018a; Topete, 2018b) and the local- and state-level government authorities were directly accused of (and evidence produced to support the accusation) being “active agents in violence” (Arroyo Fonseca and Rebolledo Flores, 2019, forthcoming).

Tonia’s poem, together with her detailed commentary, outlines the concept of persistence within the context of the everyday insecurities that people in Paloxpan and in particular in the Young Zone lived through. Her call for the forgiveness of the young generation involves them in a way which challenges the usual narrative of the criminalisation of

²⁴¹ For an extended discussion on how poems may overcome the impossibility of expression (which is beyond the scope of this research), see for example the aesthetic turn in International Politics (Bleiker, 2009). For further forms of including emotions in feminist IR research, see Sylvester et al. (2011).

²⁴² Conversation with Tonia via online, May 2018.

²⁴³ ‘Collusion’ of the authorities in this study refers to their collaboration with violent criminal groups.

²⁴⁴ Lit. *cocinas*, a colloquial term for the places where human bodies are dissolved in acid (Zerega, 2018).

²⁴⁵ Conversation with Tonia via online, May 2018.

youth. Rather, it opens up the possibility to dignify them, and places them in the context of time and continuity of life, despite the overwhelming presence of death. These traces of hope connect to the forthcoming subtle forms of communicating, as well as representing the persistence embedded in the local context of Veracruz.

5. Communicating to persist

This section addresses communication that is relevant to persisting. Here I take upon only those examples, which make communication valid for enabling the creation of little traces of knowledge about insecure surroundings in contrast with generalised top-down silencing, as presented in Chapter Four. Whereas the usual forms of knowledge are purposefully destroyed or distorted by the perverted politics of those local authorities which are on a par with organised criminals, these informal forms of knowing ultimately matter for survival. This is important in the particular context of Paloxpan, but also this ‘on-the-ground’ knowing may work against the “destruction of known landscapes” to avoid the “removal of access to the context” as noted by Das and Kleinman (2001, p. 17). In particular cases of overwhelming intensity of accumulated violent explosions, “the difference between interpreting a sign correctly or incorrectly became a difference between life and death” (Das and Kleinman, 2001, p. 17).

In the context of the circle of families (discussed in Chapter Five as ‘safe spaces’), communication triggers relational knowing: this was the case of sessions in the Youth Centre. The generation of relational knowledge is a slow process; however, it may provide a degree of instant relief. The cathartic feature of some sessions explains why some people feel understood and acknowledged in the circle as belonging to the same ‘community’.

The following two subsections continue the focus on mundane spaces and activities, as well as adding the relevance of material objects to everyday practices of persistence. In this, the primary interest is to shed light on alternative forms of communicating which identify persistence in responding to and living alongside everyday uncertainty.

5.1. ‘At the table’

As part of the research process, the concept of persistence emerged. Used by the people of Paloxpan to address the everydayness of communication within lived uncertainties, and as the following example from the Young Zone *colonia* highlights, it may become a part of an everyday – however flexible, yet still – routine.

‘We’ – the female circle in the Young Zone – gathered with the excuse of cooking different dishes, to learn from each other, and eventually to share several hours of our day (see Photograph 8 below). Yet this was more than sharing time. I stayed as many hours as I wanted, always with a bittersweet taste of having to leave before it was too late to make the journey home safely. Sharing the craft of cooking from scratch, we prepared simple daily meals in that small kitchen, where Amalia’s voice vibrated at a high pitch. The kitchen was in the family home²⁴⁶ and among the women at the table were always Amalia’s mother Doña Lulú (as she was lovingly called by the whole *colonia*), as well as her sister-in-law Ana and their children and grandchildren in frequent rotation, Abraham among others, returning from school, and at times some female relatives or neighbours such as Xochitl, or Laura, Amalia’s daughter.

²⁴⁶ See section 3.1 in this chapter.



Photograph 8. 'At the table' in Amalia's family home. Here we de-kernelled ears of corn of different colours. Young Zone, October 2015.

That daily routine was quite obviously marked by meal times and school timings, on top of church matters and daily jobs which involved commuting, but there was always a family dynamic that was important to attend to, and which sometimes interrupted scheduled activities. The latter most often comprised of a family issue: someone suddenly became ill, a long-scheduled doctor's visit was waiting, or some speciality food suddenly became available at the local market. The apparently static routine of the everyday was marked by

an ongoing mobility, and the boundaries between home and the outside were blurred. In fact, a mobile seller of coffee or bread used to call from outside and look through the windows to see if anyone was in.

Over cooking (see Photograph 8 above, and 13 in the Appendix 1) and ironing²⁴⁷ we talked about everything. During the weeks and months that followed I was also asked questions, and we got to know each other more. We laughed a lot. Such a setting was marked by meanings of privacy which differed from my preconceived ones. In addition to the mobile seller described above, someone was always entering the house and others were leaving, most of the time without even knocking. This included neighbours and construction workers²⁴⁸ as well as family members who came and went almost constantly.

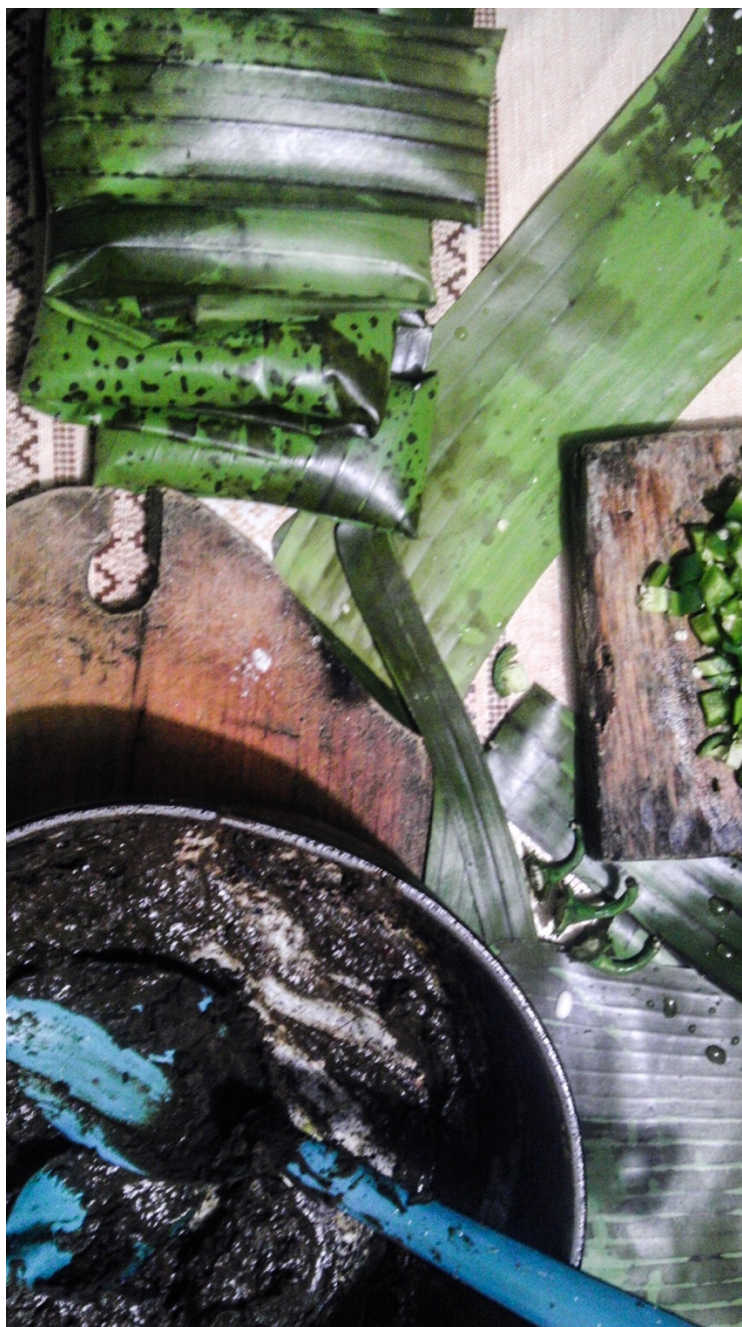
They each brought some sort of news: sourced from a taxi, from school, from a corner shop and the food market, *tortillería*²⁴⁹ or the church. As mentioned in Chapter Five, this is how ‘we’ got to know about “things that were happening”. From the perspective of that female circle at the cooking table, there was barely any need to leave home, as it was indeed the case of Doña Lulú. Any relevant news was brought from outside; in fact, through people coming and going, the outside and inside merged. News circulated briskly and was usually rapidly confirmed or denied; at the same time, there was an almost organic need to verify the reliability of the information that arrived. Among women in this circle I received a succinct explanation of the figure of ‘whistler’, as depicted in Chapter Four.

On one occasion, we made *tamales* (a typical Mexican dish – see Photograph 9 below), mainly for sale at the local festival related to the traditional Day of the Dead. It takes more than a day of labour to prepare over 100 *tamales*. We started at sunrise, collecting banana leaves in the area nearby Amalia’s home-to-be (see photographs 11 and 12 in the Appendix 1). We did not need to elaborate on the topic of the limits between the safe- and the no-go zones – while cutting and preparing best leaves, there was a non-spoken agreement of ‘where and where not to go’ (I was actually *shown* ‘where to go’ together and ‘at what time’, on several occasions).

²⁴⁷ As briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, the latter was our second everyday activity, in which I involved myself as frequently as I could. Among other things, the local women washed and ironed tablecloths for nearby restaurants as a source of income. They did this on the patio rented from a neighbour, where there was enough space for the washing machines and to hang up the many clothes to dry.

²⁴⁸ Who were carrying out the work for the brother. See section 3.1, A place to live, a space of hope.

²⁴⁹ As in the Introduction to this thesis, the small business where corn bread is made.



Photograph 9. Tamales wrapped in banana leaves. Young Zone, October 2015.

It is worth mentioning that for most of the day this was a predominantly female circle of ‘making’; there was a certain sense of ‘commonality’ in carrying out ‘female’ activities, which reached beyond our differences (although from the feminist perspective, the way ‘female’ circles and activities are portrayed render me at times uncomfortable). There was a sense of trust at the table. Male members of the family, and neighbours or workers sometimes interrupted these daily activities, and while jokes were exchanged, there was an

almost tangible sense of female intimacy among the women in this circle – a kind of ‘obvious’ understanding, acquired through the things we did, not necessarily what we said. At times there was no need to speak. Dossa, in her case of Iranian women (2003), identifies these silences as a form of language, as do Mannergren Selimovic (2018) and Ross, who puts it in a particularly convincing manner:

Women’s “silence” can be recognised as language, and we need carefully to probe the cadences of silences, the gaps between fragile words, in order to hear what it is that women say. (2011, p. 273).

These kinds of silences were also discreetly ‘broken’ in the family/neighbour circles, including through jokes. I recall one late-evening December celebration on Xochitl’s patio, in the same Young Zone. The occasion was *posada* (a pre-Christmas gathering), featuring at its centre the colourful traditional children’s play, *la piñata*. This followed another family play, where in a circle we collectively told a story by repeating the sentences of the previous participants and adding one sentence. I remember everyone’s consternation when one of the teenagers added: “... and then out of that dark, rainy evening a big truck arrives, and it crashes into the wall, revealing a cargo of marijuana”²⁵⁰.

The above examples from the Young Zone *colonia* contribute to the picture of how people persisted through informal communication in their everyday routines. This micro-governance of silences and speech in their mundane living spaces show how very subtle communication shaped and benefited their everyday drive to persist. Rather than directly opposing the authorities or criminal groups, they acknowledged things as they experienced them, in traces of communication embedded in everyday life which continued along its usual path. The following subsection discusses some of the material objects relevant to specific forms of communicating, and shows how, in their owners’ insistence on survival, they constituted forms of persistence.

5.2. “Communicating and conversing”: material objects in persistence

Communicating gives meaning to everyday life, as neatly depicted by Clara Han in the experience of loss in a low-income neighbourhood of Santiago de Chile, where a mother’s grief – Martita – after her youngest son’s violent death gave place to the re-

²⁵⁰ Young Zone, December 2015.

accommodation of her former loss resulting from the separation from her husband (2016, pp. 497-499). Living a “life between two deaths” prompted her neighbour to take care of her on a daily basis, providing the grief-stricken mother with the additional daily obligation of collecting her children from school, motivating her to get out bed and out of the house, and becoming part of her daily routine. Her friend also conceived “‘communicating’ and ‘conversing’ as a way of staying alive” (Han, 2016, p. 500). Quoting her interlocutor (the widow), Han describes a very direct form of notifying that danger (in this case, shooting) has passed and that the way is ‘clear’ to go.

When the police arrive, everyone yells, and again when they leave, “They’ve left!” ... When he heard the yelling “They left!” he opened the door [reinforced with steel] to stick out his head to see if he could leave, and he was shot, and he fell right here inside. I don’t know. I feel that they have killed me, too. (2016, pp. 496-497).

Similar to the response of others to their experience of loss, my interlocutor from the Youth Centre in Paloxpan, Irma, also gathered physical, material objects which might help her in her search for her daughter²⁵¹. She pursued a complex task of first searching for the ‘right’ picture, followed by collective decision-making within the YC circle of families about her proposal to actively search for her daughter by showing her photograph to passers-by on the streets of her *colonia*. Finally, Irma printed out the pictures, with the contact number and formal report to the authorities. This breaking of the silence imposed by the stonewalling of authorities resulted in threatening messages from her family, her daughter’s friends and local taxi drivers, yet she persisted in her search.

By keeping and making use of her child’s picture, Irma “attached” herself to life, employing the physical traces of her daughter in what may be called an altered “ethics of survival” (Fassin, 2010; Han, 2016, p. 502)²⁵². As Han rightly observes (2016, p. 502), Fassin recalls her interlocutor, who constructs what for her means “to live beyond death”, exemplified by a “memory box” containing a number of objects representing traces of herself to pass on to her future-grownup child, after she herself has died from a terminal illness (Fassin, 2010, p. 90). Alike Martita from the precarious *barrio*²⁵³ of Santiago (Han,

²⁵¹ Chapter Four elaborated Irma’s case. Her daughter was found and then was repeatedly disappeared (and reported as such). The state of affairs hereby described took place upon the first disappearance.

²⁵² I am inspired here by both authors, but it was Clara Han who led me to Fassin’s work.

²⁵³ As mentioned in the Introduction, elsewhere in Latin America *barrio* has less negative connotation than in Mexico, as is used as a synonym of *colonia* (neighbourhood).

2016, p. 502), Irma in Paloxpan collects traces of her lost child; however, in contrast with Martita, she uses them in her persistent search for life. Rejecting her brother's suggestion to forget her disappeared daughter (because "she wasn't there anymore, so what's the point"), Irma not only remembers, but also attaches herself both physically and emotionally to the photograph she carries with her. In this way, she goes beyond "communicating and conversing" to survive (after Han, 2016), despite the contrast with her appearance of mourning and the struggle with her continuous fears and doubts²⁵⁴.

Such material objects representing an "attachment to life" also support the expression of Roberto's ways of persisting following the loss of his father, a local journalist²⁵⁵.

Continuing to publish his father's newspaper, *La Unión...*, Roberto travelled with copies of it between cities, using it as a resource to report what troubled him most. By continuing to produce the same newspaper, and thus empowered to support others, Roberto attached himself to life "beyond death" of his father, which in contrast provided his life with (a new) meaning. Han's words also resonate with Roberto's experience: "I learned that this labo[u]r of making a world one's own is not simply finding again one's place in the world but rather involves nurturing the possibility of a life together in one's absence" (2016, p. 507).

In a similar fashion, the continuity of life is emphasised by Anne Guillou, who argues that a constant link with the land can provide people with "a sense of continuity after massive death and social destruction", as in the aftermath of the Cambodian genocide (2016, p. 732). She connects this attachment to the land with the religiosity which gives meaning to everyday life in Cambodian society. This is yet another example of linking the 'regeneration of life' (Guillou, 2016, p. 739) or "reinhabiting everyday life" (Das and Han, 2016) in the context of "remaking a world" (Das and Kleinman, 2001) to some material aspects of the everyday.

This section has contributed to the reconstruction of meaning found in informal communication which pursues forms of persistence despite silencing. Mundane spaces and objects were ascribed specific significance, a means for people to trace out hope while searching for their relatives on the one hand, and continuing with the everyday on the

²⁵⁴ As elaborated in Chapter Four, section 3.

²⁵⁵ See Chapter Five, subsection 5.3.1.

other. In this sense, the ‘ordinary’ of their everyday blended with the extraordinary activities they continued practicing on a daily basis, and which encapsulated their persistence in life. The following section challenges some of the preconceptions regarding predictability in persisting, everyday uncertainty, and tackles the notion of ‘apparent acceptance’.

6. Persistence as ‘apparent acceptance’

Following an examination of various forms related to spaces, subjunctive thinking, material objects and hope, this section discusses the notions of ‘apparent acceptance’ and predictability as potential aspects of persisting everyday uncertainty. It does so while looking at connections with chapters four and five, namely silences and communicating through (in)visibilities. Rather than claiming that persistence stems from accepting things as they are, this section brings together the predominant features of persisting, such as continuity, flexibility and insistence on survival, based mainly on anthropology literature, while continuing to learn from the field research in Paloxpan. It thus shapes persistence as a concluding notion of living alongside, and thus responding to, the everyday possibility of violence.

As earlier sections of this chapter demonstrate, persistence evolves slowly, as an alternative to an urgent reacting to hostile surroundings. It grasps at the small-scale, informal and non-organised activities through which people navigate their everyday. Persistence evolves as a result of a long-term, informal learning. This research depicts people enduring daily struggles through persistence, a gentler strategy than either ‘avoidance’ or ‘confrontation’, concepts too rigid and exterior-derived, as argued earlier in this chapter in the example of ‘co-optation’. Nonetheless, some elements of the originally identified coping mechanisms indeed make sense as part of the ‘larger’ notion of persistence, among which the idea of apparent acceptance is examined as follows.

Persistence reaches to the core of the silences and (in-)visibilities discussed above; indeed, this research sees it as a translation of these ideas, from Mexican street language into more formal academic tones. As presented in chapters four and five, engaging with silences and playing with a spectrum of the (un)seen, results in a creative insistence upon survival amid the recurrent possibility of violence. Instead of a literal understanding of people being

‘silenced’ and ‘invisible’, both these earlier chapters engage in a somewhat surprising usage of both terms. People make use of silences, as well as making objects and themselves more or less invisible, *apparently* to obey but in fact to overcome the ‘powerful’, as the examples of clandestine books (Chapter Five) or organised neighbours (this chapter) demonstrate.

The ‘apparent’ quality has a key role here. As with the notion of apparent acceptance developed in Chapter Two, a response can have more layers than it *appears* to have at first glance. For example, in Mexican Spanish, a *tra(n)sfondo* vaguely translates as a ‘second layer’, part of a ‘background’ response, an expression whose meaning is obvious to the locals, but contains a hidden, non-obvious alternative meaning. Perhaps Scott would refer to them as hidden transcripts of communication (1990).

At first glance, this apparent acceptance may seem to be driven by what is labelled as the normal. This section briefly discusses spaces of ‘normality’, while at the same time departing from them. While apparently accepting everyday uncertainty, the inhabitants of Paloxpan strove to create limited, temporary spaces of normality, which enabled them to keep going. However, the possibility or indeed “potentiality” (after Das, 2007, p. 9), as a component of everyday uncertainty, presents more fruitful results than the normal vs. abnormal dichotomy, as Dauphinée demonstrates:

It is this space of radical possibility, stretching to the limits of existence, which endangers the fear associated with uncertainty. It is this limitless space across which all of the Others and all of the other Others are speaking and moving in ways that are unintelligible to the systems of exchange we have devised. (2007a, p. 77).

In contrast to the limited hope Dauphinée expresses, in my reading of the fieldwork I came to believe that these spaces of “radical possibility” (rather than normality) opened up a chance to understand the ‘Other’. I hesitated to look for spaces of normality; my purpose is to avoid writing alongside the polarisation between the ‘normal’ and its opposite, as the claim for such spaces suggests that violence is somehow abnormal or unusual. In the everyday which also characterised Paloxpan, violence is far from uncertain: it is very present and can in fact be palpable and straightforward. Nancy Scheper-Hughes neatly depicts this difference as follows.

What if the disappearances, the piling up of civilians in common graves, the anonymity, and the routinization of violence and indifference were not, in fact, an aberration? What if the social spaces before and after such seemingly chaotic and

inexplicable acts were filled with rumors and whisperings, with hints and allegations of what could happen, especially to those thought of by agents of the social consensus as neither persons nor individuals? What if a climate of anxious, ontological insecurity about the rights to ownership of one's body was fostered by a studied, bureaucratic indifference to the lives and deaths of “marginals”, criminals and other no-account people? What if the public routinization of daily mortifications and little abominations, piling up like so many corpses on the social landscape, provided the text and blueprint for what only appeared later to be aberrant, inexplicable, and extraordinary outbreaks of state violence against citizens? (Scheper-Hughes, 1993, pp. 219-220).

This chapter writes through the everydayness of the possibility of the occurrence of violence, that is, the everyday uncertainty. This is not to say that fear is everywhere, or that it stopped surprising people at times, but rather that ‘Others’ lived by joking about it, or passing on the news in a form of a rumour. Nevertheless, regardless of how it affected them and/or their relatives, they kept breathing through the silence of loss, or potential loss, of their closest ones. To return to the notion of apparent acceptance, as opposed to actual indifference, my argument here is that this is understood as a nuanced form of communicating and, as a result, persisting.

During the fieldwork, I frequently heard a statement along the lines of, “It is how it is. What else can we do about it?”²⁵⁶. At first glance, this reads as a form of apparent acceptance. In line with the silences elaborated upon in Chapter Four (in particular, the section on silence as denial), this contributes to the practice of keeping silence, while carrying on whatever was the topic of the conversation. However, these silences, far from indicating a lack of agency, were replete with a relevant message. They represented a daily disguising of the essential things that mattered, together with (and as a result of) cutting down the actual talk. Over time, it also became a joke-like, recurrent response in the circle of women with whom I hung out in the Young Zone. Following the connection with Chapter Four, in particular the discussion of silence as a denial, Sarah Sefchovich (2014) observes that in Mexico, “life follows its path as if nothing was happening” and continues:

... as weird as it seems, even though the citizens regard insecurity as the worst of their problems (way above unemployment and poverty), they also seem to accept it as a part of their existence and they do not seem to change their forms of living too much²⁵⁷. Some have modified their habits and usual hours of activities, but they keep

²⁵⁶ In its numerous Spanish versions: “Es así?”; “Y (eso) que ni que?”; “Y qué le hacemos?”; “Así es esto”.

²⁵⁷ It is worth noting that Sefchovich’s (2014) conclusions about everyday activities stem from the National Survey on Victimization and Public Security Perception (ENVIPE) conducted by the INEGI, corresponding to the periods 2013 and 2014.

carrying them. (2014, pp. 134-5).

The recurrent statement, “it is how it is”, as the above quote confirms, represents an example of a micro-response which contributes to the category of ‘apparent acceptance’. Further, it indicates a somewhat subtle, indirect form of communication. While appearing to end the conversation, it may constitute an invitation to a further exploration of the topic of interest. The apparently accepting “it is how it is” became almost a key expression in the informal talks carried out over daily activities in Paloxpan. In fact, it opened the door to not only the relief brought by a brief smile, almost a laugh, but also to the continuation of a more important topic. As a result, while safely ‘apparently accepting’ how things were evolving, people showed their readiness to enter a more muddy, unsafe terrain of further chat. The ‘acceptance’ of whatever complex reality brought, functioned as some sort of ‘opening’ towards more sincere conversations. In this sense, these consisted in spaces of potentiality rather than ‘normality’, in that they indeed enabled a brief moment of undertaken risk of communicating. In the end, these spaces opened up the possibility to continue and to persist amid adverse circumstances.

This apparent acceptance differs depending on how distant the potential or present violence is to the person at stake. On the one hand, the Mexican proverb states *Cuando te toca, te toca*²⁵⁸, which broadly translates as “There is not much one can do to avoid or to prompt anything that destiny has already decided upon”. The seed of acceptance inherent in the above proverb opens up further discussion on (un-)predictability and its relevance to living with violence on the streets of Paloxpan, where predictability is far from being an issue. There are spaces which literally ‘everyone knows’ one should avoid after dusk, or be wary of even in daylight. There is not much uncertainty involved in navigating these. At the same time, a local person may well laugh if one is not aware of ‘the obvious’ state of affairs. According to what people say and hear, there is a significantly higher probability of being assaulted in these places than elsewhere. This ‘everyone knows’ approach is similar (yet intrinsically different from) ‘we know it all here’ as elaborated upon in Chapter Four’s discussion of silence as reaffirmation²⁵⁹, or “that’s the way things are” as a form of ‘apparent acceptance’, as the example from the Young Zone demonstrates below. On the other hand, the seriousness of what might happen and to whom makes all the difference.

²⁵⁸ Alternatively, in its more elaborate version, *Cuando te toca, aunque te quites, y cuando no te toca, aunque te pongas*.

²⁵⁹ See Chapter Four, subsection 4.2.1.

If a close relative is affected, the often-expressed conclusion remains in line with “things have changed” (it used to be better, safer, calmer), regardless of the street on which it actually occurred; people know these things fluctuate. This would usually confirm the rumours which circulated among neighbours, the community of families, or friends and acquaintances, about which Scheper-Hughes has written widely (1993, p. 220), and as was the case with Irma and her daughter in Paloxpan. The following two paragraphs further problematises the notion of ‘predictability’ in ‘apparently accepting’ the everyday uncertainty.

Around the Young Zone *colonia*, there was a sharp bend at a nearby crossroads that everyone told me about at some point. It was surrounded by a semi-deserted area, generously shaded by vegetation, of which robbers took advantage. Here, the air was colder and condensation thicker, making fog a frequent occurrence, especially at and after dusk. It was common sense to take extra care in such a place. News about “another unlucky one, possibly from outside the area” often circulated: “that’s the way things are”, people used to say. More surprising was a violent assault involving gunfire which occurred in the daylight of a Mexican lunchtime – around 2 pm – at the cash machine next to a busy shop²⁶⁰. This distinction between the ‘evident’ and the ‘not-so-obvious’ is certainly a fluid and mobile one. In particular, it depends on whom is the (affected) subject and who is speaking. This also keeps to the spatial aspect of persistence. Most importantly however, despite such division, there is no map able to predict what might happen to people in a certain place. In particular, as seen in the local context of this thesis (see Chapter Three), the years prior to the research in the field (from the ‘peak’ of criminal violence in 2011 onwards) had blurred all previous mind maps that neighbours used to move with. Since then, anything could happen to anyone at any time; geography had little to do with it. Such a shift has affected the apparent acceptance of ongoing violence. Rather, during the months of fieldwork, there was an ever more increasing “ontological insecurity” (Scheper-Hughes, 1993, p. 220) or even a growing sense of “terror as usual” (after Taussig, 1989).

²⁶⁰ The day before, I participated in an interview conducted with Mateo in the café of that same place, in the late afternoon and evening. It was his choice of place, as the interviewer was from outside of the town. Following the custom of drinking coffee in the evening, in Paloxpan those cafes are open late, so that families can gather for a coffee after work. Somewhat similarly to the British ‘tea time’, it is a light and milky coffee that prevails, so that people can drink it at night.

This section introduced how apparent acceptance benefited persistence, drawing on examples from everyday Paloxpan. It contested actual acceptance as passive indifference and, as a result, demonstrated its potential towards a subtle opening up of possible spaces for persistence amid the everyday possibility of violence. It therefore expanded some examples from former analytical chapters, together with connecting to the elements of analytical framework and persistence.

7. Conclusions: to persist is to survive

This concluding section brings together several forms in which persistence contributes to navigating everyday uncertainty in Paloxpan. This chapter has suggested persistence as an alternative to, yet not entirely replacing coping mechanisms formulated in Chapter Two. It identifies various ways of persisting, without providing any exhaustive list. Persistence is revealed here in forms of living through everyday uncertainty, namely its mundane spaces, subjunctive expressions and material objects; in hope and ultimately in apparently accepting the state of the everyday. It connects with chapters four and five which address silences and communicating, as they mattered in the response of the inhabitants of Paloxpan to everyday uncertainty. It also further develops the idea of informal communication and suggests linkages to alternative forms of knowing about everyday insecurity. The following two paragraphs expand on the last example in this chapter of subtle communication – rumour – in its navigation of insecurity.

During my first conversation with a local academic (who later became a ‘gatekeeper’), he discussed how the parents of his (middle-class, privileged) group of friends were driven by a fear of leaving their children alone on the streets of a particular neighbourhood. As an example of his anxiety, he described the complex process of organising a particular afternoon out for the children to visit a cinema and the kind of detail it involved. Compared with arranging similar excursions for his older children, he was surprised by its complexity and the “near panic” it involved, especially from the perspective of allowing a daughter out alone. The group of teenagers was meant to be under the supervision of one of the parents. He included a gender dimension to this fear when referring to girls specifically, who, according to rumour, were at special risk of increasingly violent attacks (see also Photograph 6). Talk about the growing number of cases of *feminicidio*

(‘feminicide’)²⁶¹ said that girls had been robbed, kidnapped, hurt and disappeared, and at times sexually assaulted. This was fuelled by the increasing number of cases of ‘disappeared’ teenagers, but most of all by the sense that “everyone knew someone to whom it happened”²⁶².

Fast forward two years, and some findings confirmed these rumours in the wake of the “horror” which came to light following the change of state-level administration (Ureste and Ángel, 2018). One of the most recent mass graves to be uncovered revealed the gendered division that my local interlocutor highlighted above. The majority of belongings buried with the human remains appeared to be those usually owned by females. However, despite the ‘discovery’, the dead were not identified and the family members (some of whom belonged to collectives searching for their relatives) were not informed or included in the process (Camarena, 2018). The estimate that just under ten per cent of human remains found in mass graves were identified between 2016-18 in the state of Veracruz is doubtful (Ureste and Ángel, 2018). This stems from divergence between the number of graves discovered informally and those the authorities recognised in the process of registering them. As Taussig put it, “surely but a small fraction of the actual number” (1989, p. 7) was actually officially acknowledged.

As the above example demonstrates, rather than being unchallenged, rumours were acted upon. This does not indicate resistance, but rather a continuing insistence on life while navigating the everyday. Indeed, the spatial aspect of communicating does not necessarily provide the everyday with certainty. In spite of violence being very certain when it occurs, one can rarely know when it will happen, hence the separation of ‘predictability’ from an understanding of ‘uncertainty’. Persistence includes both an insistence on continuity and ‘apparently accepting’ the state of insecurity, including the “horror of the clandestine mass graves in Veracruz” and the participative role of state authorities because, as Tonia labelled it, “they thought of themselves to become owners and masters of others’ lives”²⁶³.

²⁶¹ A type of gendercide, a neologism widely used in Mexican/Latin American media, as well as in some academic works, for example (Arrizón, 2014; Martín and Carvajal, 2016; Alcocer Perulero, 2014). Lately used with a similar meaning in a UNODC report as a part of *Global Study on Homicide. Gender-related killing of women and girls* (2018).

²⁶² Conversation with Eliot, Paloxpan, July 2015.

²⁶³ Conversation with Tonia via online, May 2018.

To persist implies a dose of flexibility, together with revealing a certain agency needed to continue with everyday activities. To reiterate, this is not to persist 'despite' uncertainty, but rather throughout and within it. Instead of a plea to avoid or to overcome violence, what seems to prevail on the streets of the periphery of Paloxpan are daily activities, improvised and routinised rhythms of place, through which people construct dreams and realities for themselves and their families. As an outsider, however greatly immersed, one never knows whether the curfew is a serious thing (see example, Chapter Five), whether it would disappear the following day or week, or last for months. Or perhaps it was a bluff from the beginning. 'They' – the neighbours and their families – knew just a tiny bit more than anyone else. However, they lived through it, rather than planning, stretching out the time and dividing their dreams from daily reality, as the consequences of everyday uncertainty are very real. They improvised to persist.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

1. Synthesis of the research results

This study contributes to understanding firstly, how people respond to everyday *violences*, and secondly, how they communicate amid silencing, through the following main threads of the argument:

- The unprivileged participants of this research improvised to persist, rather than employing rigid strategies to coping with insecurity in Paloxpan. Among their responses were silences, diverse forms of communication, and a material and spatial persistence which contributed to their survival.
- Pronounced silences functioned amid hostile context: they reaffirmed, denied and declared.
- Informal communication connected with survival, while breaking the silences. Communicating along the spectrum of (in)visibilities enabled alternative knowledge generation about everyday violence and insecurity. Such informal communication took five forms: selective (in)visibility, presence, high-exposure, veiled visibility and safe spaces.
- ‘Everyday uncertainty’ shed light on the local context of living alongside the potential of violence to occur, with its five components, namely temporality and subjectivity, surveillance, potentiality and, at its centre, the unknown.

This research was inspired by both personal and professional interests which stemmed from living in Mexico prior to the PhD and, above all, a very basic concern about human lives in danger. The first part of the thesis reflects the desk-based study (Chapter One) that led me to the analytical framework outlined in Chapter Two. The subsequent eight-month research in the field prompted a transition from the too-rigid coping mechanisms embedded in the analytical framework to the rather more fluid lived experiences of the local community in Paloxpan, as they improvised to persist. The following paragraphs discuss the summary of these research results, which emerged from my analysis of the empirical fieldwork and subsequent interpretation of its findings. With them, I hope to contribute to the understanding of living with the daily possibility of violence, by

examining the responses of the people in Paloxpan and the forms of communication which prevailed in the community.

Persistence represents an innovative take on everyday living with potentiality of violence, because it takes people's daily experiences seriously. Instead of providing an attempt to 'solve' the problem of violence – or indeed that of insecurity – it rather depicts how people live through and amid such everyday uncertainty. In this, the study intentionally focuses on continuity and insistence on survival, and thus on forms of living rather than violence and the ending of lives (while certainly recognising the blurred lines in-between).

Persistence became a response to everyday uncertainty and was revealed in a number of sensitive and creative ways. From subtly expressed silences, subjunctive forms of hoping, as well as various forms of communicating, together with its spatial and material dimensions, persistence enabled a better understanding of the potentiality of violence. All these forms were embedded in the local and everyday reality in Paloxpan, Mexico, and as such they mattered to inhabitants of Veracruz. In this, analysis of these responses indeed endeavours to bring the human presence back to the literature on navigating violence and insecurity, thereby contributing to this research findings. For example, their sensory and ontological aspects – of how people feel and know about insecurity – reveal the embodied and embedded living amid the possibility of violence to occur.

The subjunctive and imaginative responding to everyday uncertainty contributes to the understanding of how people persist in the face of the possibility of violence. Instead of directly referring to violent events, the people of Paloxpan live through their plans, wishes, and dreams which support their everyday persistence. These subjective and culturally embedded forms do not shape any form of rigid certainty. Instead, they reveal personal ways of going about daily activities, which contribute to each individual's survival. Both chapters four and six introduce how these subtle forms of approach benefit persistence, but also reveal how the unknown, the subjective and the potentiality play a role in living 'everyday uncertainty'. Together with surveillance and temporality, these five components contribute to understanding the context of a fluid and tense everyday uncertainty, as opposed to the certainty of violence (upon which Chapter Four elaborates in depth). In turn, Chapter Six addresses the ways in which spatial and subjunctive persistence merge in

the everyday of the Young Zone *colonia*, and how material objects acquire alternative meanings of persistence.

Silence inhabits a special place among these research findings. This study traces pronounced bottom-up silences as forms of agency amid top-down silencing, such as silence as reaffirmation and as denial, as well as declared and disrupted silences. These silences express a position beyond their literal meaning and are culturally and subjectively shaped and embedded in Veracruz. Exploring both silences and (in)visibilities undertakes a challenge to show sensory aspects of living everyday uncertainty. It may nevertheless appear that to a certain extent, (un)heard and visual aspects of everyday persistence merge. It only is so, while considering the obvious need of senses to work together. However, my purpose was first to show forms of agency-led (and therefore non-passive) silences on the one hand, and then ways of breaking the silence in responding to everyday uncertainty. These forms are revealed – and notably communicate – along the spectrum of (in)visibility and further enable persistence.

Communication and its contribution to the people's ability to persist was revealed to have particular meaning as a result of the analysis of findings, in contrast to the pre-fieldwork assumptions. In Paloxpan, it both demonstrated and benefited persistence. Notably, Chapter Five examined how invisibilities communicate in uncertain surroundings. Everyday, small, informal, not-organised and non-spectacular forms of communication do transmit relevant information and possess agency. The (in)visibilities communicate about insecurity in the following five ways: selective (in)visibility, as presence, in high exposure, as veiled visibility and through safe spaces. Some of these (such as veiled visibility or high-exposure communication) at times transmit the message strongly, others disguise the information behind culturally specific layers, such as those enabled by safe spaces. They also have dignifying potential for the unprivileged²⁶⁴, where selective (in)visibility or veiled visibility exemplify twisted and non-traditional ways of challenging apparent power relations. In this, sensory aspects of the (un)seen and (un)heard play a particular role in persisting, rather than opposing the silencing which occurs as part of everyday uncertainty. Beyond communicating a literally safe route to survival, the following paragraph details the meaning of communication that this thesis introduced.

²⁶⁴ Although this study does not evidence its emancipatory potential. See for example Richmond, 'Critical agency, resistance and a post-colonial civil society' (2011).

Prior to the fieldwork, communication had been considered in a rather instrumental manner. I had tentatively assumed that transmitting information would add to a person's ability (or literally prepare them) to respond to insecurity. However, the field research revealed a different story. Rather than using conventional channels of communication, or any 'mechanical' connection between communication and survival (much like drawing up a list of coping mechanisms), the people of Paloxpan used alternative ways of knowing about insecurity, that they devised themselves. They were not interested in contemplating or choosing one action from a static box of options; neither did they plan or predict (as Chapter Six shows) how to live alongside the *violences* next door. Instead, and for the benefit of this study, it was not possible to separate their actual responses from the means by which they communicated about the potential threat. Prior to the research in the field, a hypothetical assumption was that one would 'communicate to know' (about one's safety), with the purpose to then react. However, further interpretation of the fieldwork findings revealed this separation to be a rather artificial effort. In short, people have barely any time at their disposal for such strategic knowledge accumulation to then be able to prepare for a reaction. Rather, the study here interprets the responses as being experienced within a continuum of violence as a process, rather than in reaction to specific, abrupt events. This does not contradict the existence of spaces for further reflection, notably communicating through 'safe spaces', as Chapter Five depicts.

Communication finally connects with alternative knowledge generation, as it validates the particular, different-from-traditional creation of local knowledge about the everyday in a hostile environment (Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić, 2017; Dauphinée, 2015). While exploring informal ways to communicate, this research also interrogates "what counts as knowledge" (Hill Collins, 2002, p. 251). I include fluid and informal forms of knowing about insecurity, while taking "lived experiences ... as a criterion of meaning" (Hill Collins, 2002, p. 258). In this sense, while discussing how silence can speak (Chapter Four), as well as what (in)visibilities communicate in their five forms along the (in)visibility spectrum, I trace how thought is actually transmitted in hostile surroundings. In this, this research opens up the possibility of exploring how knowledge is generated by those who are usually not expected to do so.

Therefore, rather than providing any ‘all-inclusive’ model as to ‘how to read marginalised people’, persistence reveals a range of possibilities which stem from responses depicted in the three analytical chapters four, five and six. The people of Paloxpan persisted through and alongside the context of everyday uncertainty. I recognise the fluid and temporary, mundane and disruptive, but most of all, the ‘unknown’ quality of everyday uncertainty, as Chapter Four asserted.

This thesis emphasises the importance of placing the human and personal aspects of experiencing potential violent surroundings at the centre of enquiry. The study has undertaken this in the following ways. Firstly, it considered a number of diverse labels for the persons at stake: from the vulnerable, victims, the urban poor, local community, the marginalised, disadvantaged, excluded, and finally to the accepted, the at-risk groups that are unprivileged in a number of ways, elaborated upon in Chapter Three. The central point was to denominate in a respectful way a highly diverse group that I had the privilege to live alongside and talk to on a daily basis in Paloxpan and the Young Zone. All these categories presented some disadvantages, yet I decided that despite its imperfections, the description ‘the unprivileged at risk’ reflects the way these people were identified for the purpose of this study. On the one hand, they were economically unprivileged, and excluded from the political and economic elites of the region (I follow the ‘unprivileged’ notion after Millar, 2014a). On the other, my interlocutors experienced a higher-than-average risk due to the following reasons: being exposed through their profession (journalist, activists, academics), because of their relatives (families of the disappeared), or their location on the social ladder (criminalised youth). All three categories at times overlapped. These criteria placed my interlocutors somewhere on the spectrum of Paloxpan inhabitants who experienced potential *violences* in diverse, non-spectacular ways, traditionally neglected in the literature but also, and most importantly, in the dominant politics of public and national security in Mexico. Secondly, this research takes the human experience seriously while considering the importance of its sensory aspects. In-between the (un)heard and (un)seen, I got a closer look at how the potentiality of violence feels. Thirdly, the personal and mundane is placed in the centre of the enquiry. Insecurity is thereby known through everyday activities, from the close insights gained around the family table and the route to-and-from school and work while walking side by side, rather than as seen from a distance. These everyday spaces show how people live amid silencing and everyday uncertainty. Fourthly and yet equally importantly, this study endeavours to

re-turn the gaze to human lives (to paraphrase Muppidi, 2015), within the context of the failure of the Mexican state at its different levels; the very basic state function to protect human lives is far from being delivered. By constantly focusing on the surreal reality of human remains found in trailers, suitcases and, most frequently, in black rubbish bags, both human lives and human bodies seem to be numbed in the disrespectful absurd of a daily narrative (de Mauleón, 2018; Agren, 2018). In an attempt to redress the balance, and with all due respect, this research firmly brings human experiences into focus, rather than quantifying the injured, disappeared and murdered.

Forms of life of the families of the disappeared are discussed across all three analytical chapters. In their everyday life practice²⁶⁵ they embraced the ‘unknown’ about whether their relatives were alive or dead²⁶⁶, which was the ultimate effect of both silencing and being made invisible. Nonetheless, they kept reminding the wider community about their presence. Chapter Four recalls the example of Irma, the mother of a disappeared daughter, who responded to silencing by asserting her visibility. Despite repeatedly receiving the warning, “If you start to search overtly, you will not receive your daughter but her body”, she chose to print out her daughter’s photographs and search for her on the streets, exemplifying the route taken by many parents and grandparents alike in Mexico. She purposefully increased the visibility of her case. This is not to deny she was terrified; she embodied fear, as well as pre-emptive mourning (see Chapter Four). However, driven by the firm intent to see her daughter again, in choosing to make overt her efforts in public, she persisted.

Finally, this research explores persistence in its various colours and nuanced shades. For example, Chapter Six traces the meanings of ‘apparent’ acceptance as culturally shaped persistence, arguing that persisting in the face of the possibility of violence neither becomes equal to indifference, nor implies co-optation. Rather than choosing between the polarised acceptance vs. contestation, persistence exemplifies practice which enables continuity, and that insists on forms of living and as a result, survival.

²⁶⁵ The reference to de Certeau (1984) is not intended here.

²⁶⁶ Or neither of these, as Federico Mastrogiovanni reminds us in *Ni Vivos Ni Muertos. La desaparición forzada como estrategia de terror* (2015).

2. Room for improvement: what I could have done better

This study undertakes a critical approach which requires remaining accountable in regard to those aspects of the research process which could have been addressed in a more appropriate manner. This project investigated how people live through the everyday possibility of violence. However, my aim was to live among non-associated people and to study non-organised, everyday responses to the insecurity I had suspected Veracruz was affected by. Despite developing my informal (and in the end extensive) networks ‘on the ground’ at a surprisingly quick pace, I failed to ask research co-participants how they would ‘label’ themselves. I still hesitate to consider them as part of one efficient, ‘all-inclusive’ category, because the only thing that united them was the place they lived and the context of insecurity in the various *colonias* of Paloxpan. However, the ‘unprivileged at risk’ grouping indeed reflects at my process of identifying them. This should be considered as only one example among others. Under ideal circumstances, the preliminary research design as well as the findings should have been carried out in consultation with the research co-participants, including the women of the Young Zone, authors of ‘clandestine books’, and members of the group therapy at the Youth Centre. Indeed, I plan to discuss them with residents of Paloxpan in the future.

At the same time, the relational aspect of this study may have not been revealed well enough, by which I mean the reflexive practice of acknowledging the role of the researcher as a tool in research co-generation. Despite identifying a number of positionalities (both real and perceived) which evolved over the course of the fieldwork, my conclusion is that, with notable exceptions, I failed to include my own emotions and bias explicitly enough in the final writing of this research. Both my interlocutors’ emotions and potential biases while interacting with me, as well as mine towards them, were too neglected in my final reading of this thesis. In spite of my intentions and efforts, the relational aspect of this research has been underexposed. I am aware, therefore, that the sincere effort of a more critical approach towards the research process has not gained its due space.

Similarly, yet more importantly, I did not ‘return’ to the field as much as I had intended. Despite organising English classes for children, working long hours alongside women in the Young Zone *colonia*, and fulfilling some, mainly one-off needs in particular cases of vulnerability (such as pregnancy), I recognise an ethical controversy in my lack of ability and capacity to return to the people without whom this research could not have existed.

At the same time, a discomfoting feeling needs to be acknowledged: that long-term engagement at the research site entails close relationships and friendships, resulting sometimes in more expectations that one could ever fulfil. These potential responsibilities show how asymmetric the embedded field research is and how potentially ambiguous these close human relationships at times are. At the time of writing, I still maintain contact with some of my interlocutors from Paloxpan, who generously sent some books from Veracruz to my recently born son. This is yet another reason to express gratitude and acknowledge the privilege one possesses, while dealing with the trust people invest in one on a daily basis.

Finally, several features of this research have not found a place in the final version of this thesis. Notably, beyond the already mentioned emotional aspects of everyday living, the gendered asymmetries could have been revealed in a more explicit tone. Many relevant spaces were, in the end, absent: for example, the coffee plantations and daily work of the coffee growers, together with the sensory characteristics for which the Veracruz region is widely known. Notably, diverse non-verbal sounds and a variety of artistic input this study was inspired by, as well as 'empty spaces' identified all over the city, barely encounter a mention in this writing. Similarly, the food markets are somewhat absent, despite providing everyday spaces which facilitated informal communication with the research interlocutors. Likewise, the visual material created by my interlocutors – namely, photographs – have not been included. Finally, but no less importantly, the idea of including fog as a functional explanatory tool was not finalised, resulting in it being provided with very limited space in the thesis, despite its analytical potential. I believe that understanding everyday uncertainty through the illustrative and sensory quality of fog as a metaphor, could benefit further interdisciplinary studies of navigating *violences*.

3. Possible future research

This study has purposefully undertaken an approach beyond that of the Western and traditional peace and conflict studies, or security studies scholarships. In this, it identifies and includes not only the everyday as seen at first glance, but also some imaginary, subjunctive modes of expression, and the apparent layers of common practices, as well as forms of informal communication. Although far from adopting a postcolonial lens, it recognises the critical and feminist scholarship traditions which benefited its fundamentals,

as seen in Chapter One. In this, I recognise the well-used statement that there is no one homogenic Mexico²⁶⁷. This research endeavoured to enquire and identify only some of its multiplicities through the lens of everyday dealing with *violences*. Mexico's pluralism prevented me from extending these conclusions beyond the state of Veracruz. Nonetheless, in the same way that this research benefited from my earlier studies of everyday violence elsewhere, its findings have the potential to support understanding of everyday experiencing potential *violences* in other sites affected by violent conflict. In particular, an understanding of everyday uncertainty, the spectrum of (in)visibility as a tool for communication, silences as agency, and sensory aspects of living alongside everyday *violences* carry explanatory potential across cultures, despite its particularisms depicted here. At the same time, micro-scale responses and interactions presented in this thesis could contribute to an understanding of at-risk communities in their persistence of everyday violence. Not that they are self-sufficient, as some accounts of resilience notably suggest. Rather, 'safe spaces', (such as the Youth Centre) for example, could possibly enable communication not only to gain an insight into the perspective of the unprivileged, but also perhaps to include them in addressing some of their needs. In this, they reveal the possible paths of informal communication and non-obvious routes people employ in their everyday persistence. In future, these may be translatable into conciliatory efforts which notably – at the time of writing – are planned under the not uncontroversial framework of governmental promises in Mexico (AMLO, 2018; Turati, 2018), as well as potentially under bottom-up forms of peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2015).

Despite an assessment of the ongoing conflict(s) in Mexico being far from the purpose of this research, following the fieldwork in Veracruz and its interpretation, a slow picture of everyday living within a context of latent conflict has emerged. People, despite their unprivileged position, continue to live in Veracruz in Mexico and have the potential to redefine the status quo of violent conflict/high levels of violence beyond its black-and-white labels, as Chapter Three outlines. The picture that this study reveals contains components of a highly localised but also highly functional context of extremely brutal, adaptive and fluctuating conflicts, which draw upon the spectrum of criminals and authorities, including diverse organised crime groups and security agents at three governmental levels in Veracruz. From place to place, these circumstances vary, which also

²⁶⁷ For example, as discussed here between two notable anthropologists in Mexico, the usefulness of the categories "multiple deep Mexicos; other mexicos" (*muchos méxicos profundos; otros méxicos*), is revealed and documented by ethnographic scholarship (Olivos Santoyo and Cuadriello Olivos, 2012).

reinforces the decision to carry out such field research in specific localities, rather than at the regional level or the country as a whole²⁶⁸. The purpose here is to reiterate the need for further work on challenging the explanations and labels traditionally applied to the Mexican public and the national security state of affairs.

Walking was particularly relevant to the way this fieldwork unfolded. However, the thesis title *Walking through a land of skulls: persisting with everyday uncertainty in Mexico* stems from the insight of a mother and artist, who in her efforts embodies both hopelessness and hope as not mutually exclusive notions of persisting through the everyday (see chapters three and six). While the category of persistence originated from outside the community at stake, it was actually realised – by nearly all its inhabitants – through walking: an indeed mundane aspect of living the everyday life in a city such as Paloxpan. Moreover, walking “through the country of dead bodies; clandestine *tzompantli* of anonymous martyrs” (see the introductory poem in Chapter Six) connects this study with the future in ways that are at least twofold. On the one hand, it reveals ‘the unknown’ aspect of the fragmentary violent reality which existed from 2015-16 – discussed here under the label ‘everyday uncertainty’ – which was ‘apparently’ hidden under the surface in an indeed clandestine fashion. In this, and given the post-fieldwork revelation of the collusion of state authorities on a massive scale, I recall the importance of rumours, most of which were retrospectively confirmed in the years following the fieldwork, as the example of Eliot (Chapter Six) notably explored. This in turn confirmed that the choice of fieldwork site was indeed the correct one. On the other hand, walking still depicts a very basic form of mobility which, despite the “clandestine *tzompantli*”, promises some kind of future. It is a time-consuming, non-spectacular mode of moving through (the fog of) uncertainty, representing much of the pace that Paloxpan’s everyday requires. There is a hope in this slow movement alongside the dead – of whom not only the mother asks her-and-others’ children for forgiveness – and also, in moving forward from them, towards the fragments of life which persist.

²⁶⁸ See Introduction and Chapter Three for further elaboration.

References

- Aaronson, M., Ahram, A. I., Duffield, M., Etzioni, A., Holland, J., Mac Ginty, R., McLeod, L., Podder, S., Richmond, O. P. & Roberts, D. (2016). 'The Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding Ten Years on: Critical Reflections and Stimulating Ideas on an Evolving Scholarship'. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 10(1), pp. 13-15.
- Acosta, M. (ed.) (2012a). *La impunidad crónica de México. Una aproximación desde los derechos humanos*. Mexico City: Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal.
- Acosta, M. (2012b). La impunidad crónica y la violación de derechos humanos. In: Aguayo Quezada, S. & Benítez Manaut, R. (eds.) *Atlas de la Seguridad y de la Defensa de México 2012*. Mexico City: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia (CASEDE).
- Agren, D. (2018). Mexicans outraged after officials leave trailer full of corpses on outskirts of city. *The Guardian* [Online]. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/17/mexico-jalisco-trailer-full-of-corpse> [Accessed 10 October 2018].
- Aguayo Quezada, S. & Benítez Manaut, R. (2012). Introducción: las violencias. Balance, efectos y prospectiva. In: Aguayo Quezada, S. & Benítez Manaut, R. (eds.) *Atlas de la Seguridad y de la Defensa de México 2012*. Mexico City: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia (CASEDE).
- Aguirre Botello, M. (2018). Mexico, Tasa de Homicidios por 100 mil habitantes 1931 - 2017. 19 November 2018 Available: <http://www.mexicomaxico.org/Voto/Homicidios100M.htm> [Accessed 14 December 2018].
- Åhäll, L. & Gregory, T. A. (2013). Security, emotions, affect. *Critical Studies on Security*, 1(1), pp. 117-120.
- Albanese, J. S. (2009). Controlling organized crime: looking for evidence-based approaches. *Victims and Offenders*, 4(4), pp. 412-419.
- Alcocer Perulero, M. (2014). "Prostitutas, Infieles y Drogadictas". Juicios y Prejuicios de género en la prensa sobre las víctimas de feminicidio: El caso de Guerrero, México. *Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, 20, 97-118.
- AlSayyad, N. (2001). *Hybrid urbanism: on the identity discourse and the built environment*. Westpoint, Connecticut, London: Praeger.
- Alsayyad, N. & Roy, A. (2006). Medieval modernity: On citizenship and urbanism in a global era. *Space and Polity*, 10(1), 1-20.
- AMLO. (2018). *Anuncia AMLO propuesta para realizar: "Foros Escucha para Trazar la Ruta de Pacificación del País y la Reconciliación Nacional"* [Online]. lopezobrador.org.mx. Available: <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/2018/07/22/propuesta-para-la-realizacion-de-foros-para-trazar-la-ruta-de-pacificacion-del-pais-y-reconciliacion-nacional/> [Accessed 21 November 2018].
- Amnesty International (2018). *Amnesty International Report 2017/2018. The State of the World's Human Rights*. London: Amnesty International.
- Angel, A. (2019). 2018, el año más violento con más de 34 mil homicidios; en diciembre aumentaron 9%. *Animal Político* [Online]. Available: https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/01/2018-violencia-homicidios-delitos-mexico/?utm_source=Hoy+en+Animal&utm_campaign=0010fa7726-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_21_02_52&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ae638a5d34-0010fa7726-392951545. [Accessed 21 January 2019].
- Animal Político* (2015). Familiares de desaparecidos en Veracruz protestan en el informe de Duarte. *Animal Político* [Online]. Available:

- <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2015/11/familiares-de-desaparecidos-en-veracruz-protestan-en-el-informe-de-duarte/>. [Accessed 21 August 2018].
- Animal Político* (2018). No hay patrullas, no hay peritos, tampoco tecnología para rastrear un crimen pero sí 35 mil cuerpos sin identificar. Available: https://www.animalpolitico.com/muertos-mexico-homicidios-impunidad/sin-tecnologia-crimen.php?utm_source=Hoy+en+Animal&utm_campaign=9128d00767-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_06_20_01_37&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ae638a5d34-9128d00767-392951545 [Accessed 5 July 2018].
- Aradau, C. (2010). Security That Matters: Critical Infrastructure and Objects of Protection. *Security Dialogue*, 41(5), pp. 491-514.
- Arendt, H. (1970). *On violence*. New York: A Harvest Book.
- Aristegui Noticias*, Redacción (2014). El periodismo debe dar voz a los invisibles: Marcela Turati en CNN. *Aristegui Noticias* [Online]. Available: <https://aristeginoticias.com/0710/mexico/el-periodismo-debe-dar-voz-a-los-invisibles-marcela-turati-en-cnn/> [Accessed 6 October 2018].
- Aristegui Noticias*, Redacción (2018). Senado llama a Corte de La Haya a investigar a Javier Duarte por posibles delitos de lesa humanidad. *Aristegui Noticias* [Online]. Available: <https://aristeginoticias.com/2509/mexico/senado-llama-a-corte-de-la-haya-a-investigar-a-javier-duarte-por-posibles-delitos-de-lesa-humanidad/>.
- Arrizón, A. (2014). "Invisible Wars" Gendered Terrorism in the US military and the Juárez Feminicidio. In: Ponzanesi, S. (ed.) *Gender, Globalisation, and Violence: Postcolonial Conflict Zones*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Arroyo Fonseca, M. & Rebolledo Flores, J. (2019, forthcoming). Elites, Violence and Resources in Veracruz, Mexico. In: Paley, D. & Granovsky-Larsen, S. (eds.) *Organised Violence. Capitalist Warfare in Latin America*. University of Regina Press.
- Article 19 (2014). Disentir en silencio: Violencia contra la prensa y criminalización de la protesta. México 2013. In: Artículo 19 (ed.) *Informe sobre estado de la libertad de prensa en México*. Mexico City: Artículo 19. Oficina para México y Centroamérica.
- Article 19 (2015). Estado de censura: Informe 2014 sobre violencia contra la prensa. Mexico City: Artículo 19.
- Article 19 (2017). Asesinan a periodista en Veracruz, suman 22 en el estado, *Article 19* [Online]. Available: <https://articulo19.org/asesinan-a-periodista-en-veracruz-suman-22-en-el-estado/> [Accessed: 22 July 2018].
- Article 19 (2018a). Democracia simulada, nada que aplaudir. Informe Anual 2017. Mexico City: Artículo 19.
- Article 19 (2018b). Periodistas asesinados en México, *Article 19* [Online]. Available: <https://articulo19.org/periodistasasesinados/> [Accessed: 2018-04-08].
- Astorga, L. (2015). "¿Qué querían que hiciera?" *Inseguridad y delincuencia organizada en el gobierno de Felipe Calderón*. Mexico City: Grijalbo.
- Astorga, L. and Shirk, D. A. (2010). Drug trafficking organizations and counter-drug strategies in the US-Mexican context. Working Paper USMEX WP 10-01.
- Atlas, (2012). *Atlas de la Seguridad y la Defensa de México 2012*, (eds.) Aguayo Quezada, S. & Benítez Manaut, R. Mexico City: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia, CASEDE.
- Atlas, (2016). *Atlas de la Seguridad y la Defensa de México 2016*, (eds.) Aguayo Quezada, S. & Benítez Manaut, R. Mexico City: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia, CASEDE.
- Auyero, J. (2007). *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power (Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics)*: Cambridge University Press.

- Auyero, J. and Berti, M. F. (2015). *In Harm's Way. The dynamics of urban violence*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Auyero, J., de Lara, A. B. and Berti, M. F. (2014). Violence and the State at the Urban Margins. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(1), pp. 94-116.
- Azaola, E. (2012). La violencia de hoy, las violencias de siempre. *Desacatos*, 40 (September-December), pp. 13-32.
- Bagley, B. M. (2012). Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in the Americas: Major Trends in the Twenty-First Century. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Latin American Program. Working paper, August, pp. 1-21.
- Bailey, J. & Taylor, M. M. (2009). Evade, Corrupt, or Confront? Organised Crime and the State in Brazil and Mexico. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 2, pp. 3-29.
- Bartlett, E. A. (2004). *Rebellious Feminism. Camus's Ethic of Rebellion and Feminist Thought*. Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Bartra, R. (1987). *La Jaula de la Melancolía. Identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano* (Segunda Edición ed.). Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo S.A.
- Bauman, Z. (1992). *Morality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Wasted lives: Modernity and its outcasts*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bayat, A. (2000). From 'Dangerous Classes' to 'Quiet Rebels': Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South. *International sociology*, 15(3), pp. 533-557.
- Bayat, A. (2004). Globalization and the Politics of the Informals in the Global South. In: AlSayyad, N. & Roy, A. (eds.) *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia*. Lenham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Lexington Books.
- BBC World. (2018). Mexico trailer storing corpses angers residents. *BBC News* [Online]. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-45555614>. [Accessed 28 December 2018].
- Beall, J., Goodfellow, T. & Rodgers, D. (2013). Cities and Conflict in Fragile States in the Developing World. *Urban Studies*, 50(15), pp. 3065-3083.
- Beauregard, L. P. (2018). Veracruz tiene más fosas clandestinas que municipios. *El País* [Online]. Available: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/01/30/mexico/1517284876_628755.html [Accessed 5 July 2018].
- Becerra, O. (2013). Press Ganged. Journalists under attack in Mexico. *IHS Jane's Intelligence Review*, 25(05).
- Belsey, C. (2004). *Culture and the real: theorizing cultural criticism*. New York: Routledge.
- Benítez Manaut, R. (2009). La crisis de seguridad en México. *Nueva Sociedad*, (220), marzo-abril, pp. 174-189.
- Benítez Manaut, R. (2010). *Crimen Organizado e Iniciativa Mérida en las Relaciones México-Estados Unidos*. México, DF: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia, CASEDE.
- Benítez Manaut, R. (2015). Democracia, violencia y narcotráfico en México. Desafíos 2015. *Anuario Latinoamericano: Ciencias Políticas y Relaciones Internacionales*, 2, pp. 127-146.
- Benítez Manaut, R. (2018). México: los militares en tiempos de cambio. *Nueva Sociedad. Democracia y política en América Latina*, noviembre-diciembre 2018(278), pp. 100-110.
- Benítez Manaut, R., Rodríguez Sumano, A. and Rodríguez Luna, A. (eds.) (2009). *Atlas de la Seguridad y la Defensa de México 2009*, Mexico City: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia, CASEDE.
- Bennett, J. (2005). *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

- Bennett, K., Cochrane, A., Mohan, G. & Neal, S. (2015). Listening. *Emotions, Space and Society*, 17, pp. 7-14.
- Berents, H. (2018). *Young People and Everyday Peace. Exclusion, Insecurity and Peacebuilding in Colombia*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bertely Busquets, M. (2010). Views from the hemisphere of resistance. In: Meyer, L. & Maldonado Alvarado, B. (eds.) *New World of Indigenous Resistance. Noam Chomsky and Voices from North, South, and Central America*. San Francisco: City Lights books.
- Besteman, C. (2002). Conclusion: political violence and the contemporary world. In: Besteman, C. (ed.) *Violence: A Reader. Main Trends of the Modern World*. New York.
- Bleiker, R. (2009). *Aesthetics and World Politics*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bleiker, R. (2018). Mapping Visual Global Politics. In: Bleiker, R. (ed.) *Visual Global Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bleiker, R. and Hutchison, E. (2008). Fear no more: emotions and world politics. *Review of international studies*, 34, pp. 115-135.
- Bliesemann de Guevara, B. (2017). Intervention Threatre: performance, authenticity and expert knowledge in politicians travel to post-/conflict spaces. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11(1), pp. 58-80.
- Bliesemann de Guevara, B. & Kostić, R. (2017). Knowledge production in/about conflict and intervention: finding 'facts', telling 'truth'. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11(1), pp. 1-20.
- Booth, K. (2001). New wars for old. *Civil Wars*, 4(2), pp. 163-170.
- Bourgois, P. (2001). The Power of Violence in War and Peace: Post-Cold War Lessons from El Salvador. *Ethnography*, 2(1), 5-34.
- Brewer, J. D. (2013). *Peace processes: a sociological approach*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Bruhn, K. & Greene, K. F. (2007). Elite Polarization Meets Mass Moderation in Mexico's 2006 Elections. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 40(1), pp. 33-38.
- Burton, J. W. (1997). *Violence explained: The sources of conflict, violence and crime and their prevention* (with foreword by Vivienne Jabri), Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Buscaglia, E. and van Dijk, J. (2003). Controlling organized crime and corruption in the public sector. *Forum on Crime and Society*, 3(1,2) December, pp. 3-34.
- Butler, J. (2016). Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance. In: Butler, J., Gambetti, Z. & Sabsay, L. (eds.) *Vulnerability in resistance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Butler, J. (2017). Bodies that still matter. *Proceedings of the conference: Vulnerability and the Politics of Care: Cross-Disciplinary Dialogues*. British Academy, London, 9 February.
- Buzan, B. & Little, R. (2009). Waltz and World History: The Paradox of Parsimony. *International Relations*, 23(3), pp. 446-463.
- Cairns, K. (2013). Ethnographic locations: the geographies of feminist post-structural ethnography. *Ethnography and Education*, 8(3), pp. 323-337.
- Calderón, G., Robles, G., Díaz-Cayeros, A. and Magaloni, B. (2015). The Beheading of Criminal Organisations and the Dynamics of Violence in Mexico. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(8), pp. 1455-1485.
- Calderón, L., Rodríguez Ferreira, O. & Shirk, D. (2018). Drug Violence in Mexico. Data and Analysis Through 2017. *Justice in Mexico*. San Diego, California: University of San Diego, Department of Political Science and International Relations.
- Camara de Diputados (2012). Ley para la Protección de Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas. In: Camara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión de México, S. G., Secretaria de Servicios Parlamentarios (ed.). México D.F.
- Camarena, S. (2018). Montañas de cráneos sin rastro de justicia. *El Financiero* [Online]. Available: <http://amp.elfinanciero.com.mx/opinion/salvador->

- [camarena/montanas-de-craneos-sin-rastro-de-justicia? twitter impression=true](#) [Accessed 12 September 2018].
- Carling, J. (2007). Vigh, Henrik, 2006. Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau. New York & Oxford: Berghahn. *Journal of Peace Research*, 44(3), pp. 371-372.
- Carvajal, I. (2015). Agenda pública de un reportero asesinado. *La Unión... Vivir con miedo no es opción*. August, Irregular, pp. 1-12.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Vol. 1 of The information age: Economy, society and culture. Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells, M. (2000). Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society. *The British journal of sociology*, 51(1), pp. 5-24.
- Cates, D. F. (2003). Conceiving Emotions: Martha Nussbaum's Upheavals of Thought. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 31(2), pp. 325-341.
- Centro Prodh, (2014). *Rompiendo el Silencio. Todas Juntas Contra la Tortura Sexual*. [Online]. Mexico: Centro Prodh. Available: <http://centroprodh.org.mx/rompiendoelsilencio/> [Accessed 2 August 2016].
- Cerwonka, A. & Malkki, L. H. (2007). *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Chabat, J. (2002). Mexico's war on drugs: No margin for maneuver. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 582(1), pp. 134-148.
- Chandler, D. C. (2015). Resilience and the "everyday": beyond the paradox of "liberal peace". *Review of International Studies*, pp. 27-48.
- Chinas Salazar, C. & Preciado Coronado, J. (eds.) (2017). *Reflexiones sobre Ayotzinapa en la Perspectiva Nacional*, Universidad de Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico: Ediciones de la Noche.
- Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. (2001). *Participation: the New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books.
- Cooke, P. N. (1989). *Localities: the changing face of urban Britain* London: Unwin Hyman.
- Cousin, G. (2010). Positioning positionality. The reflexive turn. In: Savin-Baden, M. & Major, C. H. (eds.) *New approaches to qualitative research: wisdom and uncertainty*. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.
- Cox, R. (1981). Social forces, states and world orders: beyond international relations theory. Millennium: *Journal of International Studies*, 10(2), pp. 126-155.
- Crawford, N. C. (2009). Human Nature and World Politics: Rethinking 'Man'. *International relations*, 23(2), pp. 271-288.
- Cruikshank, G. A. (2007). *La muerte y el humor en México: Joaquín Bolaños, José Guadalupe Posada, Elena Garro y Octavio Paz*. PhD thesis: Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Spanish, University of Arizona.
- Daigle, M. D. (2015). *From Cuba with love: Sex and money in the twenty-first century*. University of California Press.
- Darby, J. (1986). *Intimidation and the control of conflict in Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Das, V. (1996). Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain. *Daedalus*, 125(Winter, 1), pp. 67-91.
- Das, V. (2007). *Life and Words. Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Das, V. and Han, C. (2016). Precarious Lives (introduction to the section 4). In: Das, V. & Han, C. (eds.) *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World. A Compendium*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Das, V. and Kleinman, A. (2001). Introduction. In: Das, V., Kleinman, A., Lock, M. M., Ramphale, M. and Reynolds, P. (eds.) *Remaking a World: Violence, Social Suffering, and Recovery*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Data Cívica (2018). *Personas Desaparecidas*. Available: <https://datacivica.org> [Accessed: 20 December 2018]
- Dauphinée, E. (2007a). *The ethics of researching war: Looking for Bosnia*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Dauphinée, E. (2007b). The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery. *Security Dialogue*, 38(2), pp. 139-155.
- Dauphinée, E. (2010). The ethics of autoethnography. *Review of International Studies*, 36(3), pp. 799-818.
- Dauphinée, E. (2013a). *The Politics of Exile*. London: Routledge.
- Dauphinée, E. (2013b). Writing as hope: Reflections on The Politics of Exile. *Security Dialogue*, 44(4), pp. 347-361.
- Dauphinée, E. (2015). Narrative voice and the limits of peacebuilding: rethinking the politics of partiality. *Peacebuilding*, 3(3), pp. 261-278.
- Dauphinée, E. (2018). Body. In: Bleiker, R. (ed.) *Visual Global Politics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. London: University of California Press.
- de Mauleón, H. (2018). Una historia en la que solo hay huesos para contar. *El Universal* [Online]. Available: <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/columna/hector-de-mauleon/nacion/una-historia-en-la-que-solo-hay-huesos-para-contar> [Accessed 10 October 2018].
- Díaz, G. L. (2015). Exigen disculpa pública a Duarte por trato a madre de joven desaparecida. *Proceso* [Online]. Available: <https://www.proceso.com.mx/419324/exigen-disculpa-publica-a-duarte-por-trato-a-madre-de-joven-desaparecida>. [Accessed 15 November 2018].
- Domoslawski, A. (2016). *Wykluczeni* (Excluded) Warszawa, Poland: Wielka Litera.
- Dossa, P. (2003). The Body Remembers: A Migratory Tale of Social Suffering and Witnessing. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 32(3), pp. 50-73.
- Downie, A. (2018). How Brazil's 'ethno-communicators' are helping indigenous people find their voice. *Committee to Protect Journalists, CPJ* [Online]. Available from: <https://cpj.org/blog/2018/10/how-brazils-ethno-communicators-are-helping-indige.php> [Accessed 5 October 2018].
- Druliolle, V. & Brett, R. (eds.) (2018). *The Politics of Victimhood in Post-conflict Societies. Comparative and Analytical Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dudouet, V. (2013). Dynamics and factors of transition from armed struggle to nonviolent resistance. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(3), pp. 401-413.
- Duffield, M. R. (2001). *Global governance and the new wars: the merging of development and security*. London: Zed Books.
- Eagleton-Pierce, M. (2011). Advancing a reflexive international relations. *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 39(3), pp. 805-823.
- Edkins, J. (2003). *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edkins, J. (2011). *Missing: Persons and Politics* (First ed.) Cornell University Press.
- El País* (1990). Vargas Llosa: "México es la dictadura perfecta". Españoles, y latinoamericanos intervienen en la polémica sobre el compromiso y la libertad. *El País* [Online]. Available: https://elpais.com/diario/1990/09/01/cultura/652140001_850215.html [Accessed 12 November 2018].
- ENVIPE (2018a). Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública, ENVIPE. México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.
- ENVIPE (2018b). Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública, ENVIPE. Principales Resultados: Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave. Septiembre 25, México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

- Esteve, G. (2010). Beyond Education. In: Meyer, L. & Maldonado Alvarado, B. (eds.) *New World of Indigenous Resistance. Noam Chomsky and Voices from North, South, and Central America*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Estévez López, A. & Vázquez, D. (eds.) (2017). *9 razones para (des)confiar de las luchas por los derechos humanos*, México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte (CISAN) Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales-México.
- Eye of the wind. (2016). no señor, Aquí la gente no desaparece... *Ojo de viento* [Online]. Available from: <http://ojodeviento.blogspot.com/2016/03/no-senor-aqui-la-gente-no-desaparece.html?view=timeslide> [Accessed 2 March 2016].
- Fassin, D. (2010). Ethics of Survival: A Democratic Approach to the Politics of Life. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 1(1), pp. 81-95.
- Fay, M. (ed.) (2005). *The Urban Poor in Latin America*, Washington DC: The World Bank.
- FEADLE (2015). Informe estadístico de la Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos cometidos contra la Libertad de Expresión. México: Procuraduría General de La República, PGR.
- Feyerabend, P. (1995). *Killing time: the autobiography of Paul Feyerabend*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Flores Valencia, A. (2016). Obras: El Puro Lugar. Available: <http://artescenicass.uclm.es/index.php?sec=obras&id=1874> [Accessed 9 September 2018].
- Fry, D. P. (2007). *Beyond war: The human potential for peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garay-Salamanca, L. J. & Salcedo-Albarán, E. (2012). *Narcotráfico, corrupción y Estados. Cómo las redes ilícitas han reconfigurado las instituciones en Colombia, Guatemala y México*. México: Debate.
- García, J. (2018). La desaparición de personas en Veracruz era sistemática e institucionalizada. *El País* [Online]. Available: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/02/24/mexico/1519510585_044530.html [Accessed 25 June 2018].
- Garzón, G. V. (2008). *Mafia & Co: The Criminal Networks in Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Latin American Program.
- Gatti, G. (2014). *Surviving forced disappearance in Argentina and Uruguay: identity and meaning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gayer, L. (2014). *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gergen, K. J. & Zielke, B. (2006). Theory in Action. *Theory & Psychology*, 16(3), pp. 299-309.
- Gill, S. (2012). Towards a Radical Concept of Praxis: Imperial 'common sense' Versus the Post-modern Prince. *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 40(3), pp. 505-524.
- Gilligan, J. (2000). *Violence. Reflections on our deadliest epidemic*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd.
- Gledhill, J. (2015). *The new wars on the poor. Production of insecurity*. London: Zed Books.
- Gordon, A. F. (2008). *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Green, L. (1995). Living in a state of fear. In: Nordstrom, C. & Robben, A. C. G. M. (eds.) *Fieldwork Under Fire. Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Guerrero Gutiérrez, E. (2011). La raíz de la violencia. *Nexos* [Online]. Available: <https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=14318>. [Accessed 2 August 2016].

- Guerrero Gutiérrez, E. (2016). La inseguridad 2013-2015. *Nexos* [Online]. Available: <https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=27269> [Accessed 2 August 2016].
- Guillou, A. Y. (2016). Traces of Destruction and the Thread of Continuity in Postgenocide Cambodia. In: Das, V. & Han, C. (eds.) *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World. A Compendium*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Hall, T. (2013). Geographies of the illicit: Globalization and organized crime. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(3), pp. 366-385.
- Han, C. (2016). Echoes of a death. Violence, Endurance, and the Experiences of Loss. In: Das, V. & Han, C. (eds.) *Living and dying in the contemporary world. A compendium*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Harris, R. (1972). *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster: A Study of Neighbours and "strangers" in a Border Community*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Harroff-Tavel, M. (2010). Violence and humanitarian action in urban areas: new challenges, new approaches. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 92(878), pp. 329-350.
- Haynes, D. & Prakash, G. (1991). Introduction: The entanglement of power and Resistance. In: Haynes, D. & Prakash, G. (eds.) *Contesting Power. Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Heron, J. & Reason, P. (2006). The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' people. In: *Handbook of action research*, pp. 144-154.
- Hill Collins, P. (2002). *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Revised tenth anniversary edition ed.). New York and London: Routledge.
- Hobbs, D. (1998). Going down the glocal: the local context of organised crime. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37(4), pp. 407-422.
- Hoffman, D. (2011). *The War Machines: young men and violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Duke University Press.
- Hoffman, D. (2014). *Caught in the Crossfire: Urban Violence, Inside and Out*. London: LSE Cities: LSE.
- Hollis, M. & Smith, S. (1990). *Explaining and understanding international relations*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press.
- Hoogensen Gjør, G. & Stuvøy, K. (2016). Gender, Resistance and Human Security. *Security Dialogue*, 37(2), pp. 207-228.
- Hume, M. (2008). The Myths of Violence Gender, Conflict, and Community in El Salvador. *Latin American Perspectives*, 35(5), pp. 59-76.
- Hutchison, E. (2013). Affective communities as security communities. *Critical Studies on Security*, 1(1), pp. 127-129.
- Ibargüengoitia, J. (2008). *Instrucciones para vivir en Mexico*. Mexico City: Booket, Planeta Mexico.
- ICG, International Crisis Group (2013). *Peña Nieto's Challenge: Criminal Cartels and Rule of Law in Mexico*. Mexico City, Bogotá, Brussels: International Crisis Group.
- ICG, International Crisis Group (2017). *Veracruz: Fixing Mexico's State of Terror*. Latin American Report. Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group.
- INEGI (2015). Encuesta Intercensal. México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.
- INEGI (2018a). *Map of Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave*. Available: <http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/app/mapas/> [Accessed: 2 August 2018] México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.
- INEGI (2018b). Consulta Interactiva de Datos. Defunciones por homicidio; por año de ocurrencia; según año de registro. México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

- INEGI (2018c). Datos preliminares revelan que en 2017 se registraron 31 mil 174 homicidios. Comunicado de prensa núm. 310/18. Available: http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2018/EstSegPub/homicidios2017_07.pdf [Accessed: 2 August 2018] México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.
- Ingelaere, B., Parmentier, S., Haers, J. & Segaert, B. (eds.) (2013). *Genocide, Risk and Resilience: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jabri, V. (1996). *Discourses on violence: Conflict analysis reconsidered*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Jabri, V. (2013). Peacebuilding, the local and the international: a colonial or a postcolonial rationality? *Peacebuilding*, 1(1), pp. 3-16.
- Jacoby, T. (2006). From the trenches: dilemmas of feminist IR fieldwork. In: Ackerly, B. A., Stern, M. & True, J. (eds.) *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, G. and Rodgers, D. (eds.) (2009). *Youth Violence in Latin America: Gangs and Juvenile Justice in Perspective*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, G. A. and Rodgers, D. (2011). The World Bank's World Development Report 2011 on conflict, security and development: A critique through five vignettes. *Journal of international development*, 23(7), pp. 980-995.
- Jütersonke, O., Muggah, R. & Rodgers, D. (2009). Gangs, Urban Violence, and Security Interventions in Central America. *Security Dialogue*, 40(4-5), pp. 373-397.
- Kaldor, M. (2006). *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Polity Press.
- Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kjaerulf, F. & Barahona, R. (2010). Preventing violence and reinforcing human security: a rights-based framework for top-down and bottom-up action. *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública*, 27(5), pp. 382-395.
- Kleemans, E. R. & Van de Bunt, H. G. (2008). Organised crime, occupations and opportunity. *Global Crime*, 9(3), pp. 185-197.
- Kleinman, A. & Kleinman, J. (1994). How Bodies Remember: Social Memory and Bodily Experience of Criticism, Resistance, and Delegitimation following China's Cultural Revolution. *New Literary History*, 25(3), pp. 707-723.
- Knott, M. L. (2014). *Unlearning with Hannah Arendt*. London: Granta books.
- Koschut, S. (2013). Emotional (security) communities: the significance of emotion norms in inter-allied conflict management. *Review of International Studies*.
- Krug, E. G., Dahlberg, L. L., Mercy, J. A., Zwi, A. B. & Lozano, R. (eds.) (2002). *World Report on Violence and Health*, Geneva: World Health Organization WHO.
- Kruijt, D. (2011). Uncivil actors and violence systems in the Latin American urban domain. *Iberoamericana* (2001-), 11(41), pp. 83-98.
- Kurowska, X. & Tallis, B. C. (2013). Chiasmatic crossings: A reflexive revisit of a research encounter in European security. *Security Dialogue*, 44(1), pp. 73-89.
- Lamadrid Guerrero, G. (2016). Informe sobre El Puro Lugar: recuento y preguntas. Available: http://arteseszenicas.uclm.es/archivos_subidos/obras/1874/ElPuroLugar.pdf. [Accessed 9 September 2018].
- Landry, D. & MacLean, G. (eds.) (1996). *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, London: Routledge.
- Law, J. (2004). *After method: Mess in social science research*. New York: Routledge.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Lemanski, C. (2012). Everyday human (in)security: Rescaling for the Southern city. *Security Dialogue*, 43(1), pp. 61-78.

- Lessing, B. (2015). Logics of Violence in Criminal War. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(8), pp. 1486-1516.
- Levi, P. (2002). The Gray Zone. In: Scheper-Hughes, N. & Bourgois, P. I. (eds.) *Violence in war and peace: an anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Levi, P. (2017). *The Drowned and the Saved* (first original edition 1986 ed.). New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi: Simon and Schister Paperbacks.
- Ley, D. (2004). Transnational spaces and everyday lives. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29(2), pp. 151-164.
- Lezama Palma, A. (2018). Xalapa no tiene dónde dejar su basura; Limpia Pública está paralizada. *Al Calor Político* [Online]. Available: <https://www.alcalorpolitico.com/informacion/xalapa-no-tiene-donde-dejar-su-basura-limpia-publica-esta-paralizada-272594.html#.WWSZqeca8o> [Accessed 17 October 2018].
- Little, D. (1993). Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts by James C. Scott. *Political Theory*, 21(1), pp. 153-156.
- Lynch, C. (2008). Reflexivity in Research on Civil Society: Constructivist Perspectives. *Int. Stud. Rev.*, 10(4), pp. 708-721.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2006). *No war, no peace : the rejuvenation of stalled peace processes and peace accords*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2008). Indigenous peace-making versus the liberal peace. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43(2), pp. 139-163.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2010). Hybrid peace: The interaction between top-down and bottom-up peace. *Security dialogue*, 41(4), pp. 391-412.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2011). *International peacebuilding and local resistance: hybrid forms of peace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2013a). Introduction. In: Mac Ginty, R. (ed.) *Handbook of Peacebuilding*. Routledge.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2013b). Introduction: The Transcripts of Peace: Public, Hidden or Non-obvious? *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 7(4), pp. 423-430.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2014). Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies. *Security Dialogue*, 45(6), pp. 548-564.
- Mac Ginty, R. (ed.) (2015). *Alternative and Bottom-up Peace Indicators*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Mac Ginty, R. & Richmond, O. P. (2013). The Local Turn in Peace Building: a critical agenda for peace. *Third World Quarterly*, 34(5), pp. 763-783.
- Mac Ginty, R. & Sanghera, G. (2012). Hybridity in Peacebuilding and Development: an Introduction. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 7(2), pp. 3-8.
- Macbeth, D. (2001). On "Reflexivity" in Qualitative Research: Two Readings, and a Third. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(1), pp. 35-68.
- Maihold, G. (2015). La Comunicación de la Violencia: Narcocorridos, Narcomantas y Narcosantos. In: Maihold, G. & Mackenbach, W. (eds.) *La transformación de la violencia en América Latina*. Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala: F & G Editores.
- Malešević, S. (2010). *The sociology of war and violence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Malpica Neri, D. (2018). Mecanismos de Justicia Transicional y el Sistema de Justicia Penal en México: Ventanas de Oportunidad. *Revista Mexicana de Justicias Orales*, 1, January - July(1), pp. 7-43.
- Mannergren Selimovic, J. (2018). Gendered silences in post-conflict societies: a typology *Peacebuilding*. DOI: 10.1080/21647259.2018.1491681 pp. 1-15.
- Manz, B. (2009). The Continuum of Violence in Post-War Guatemala. In: Waterston, A. (ed.) *An Anthropology of War: views from the frontline*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

- Marcus, G. E. (2007). 'How short can the fieldwork be?'. *Social Anthropology*, 15(3), pp. 353-367.
- Marlow, A. & Pitts, J. (eds.) (1998). *Planning Safer Communities*. Russell House Publishing Ltd.
- Martin, A., Rutagarama, E., Cascão, A., Gray, M. & Chhotray, V. (2011). Understanding the co-existence of conflict and cooperation: Transboundary ecosystem management in the Virunga Massif. *Journal of Peace Research*, 48(5), pp. 621-635.
- Martin, P. M. & Carvajal, N. (2016). Feminicide as 'act' and 'process': a geography of gendered violence in Oaxaca. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(7), pp. 989-1002.
- Massey, D. (1994). *Space, Place, and Gender*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Massey, D. (1999). Space-Time, 'Science' and the Relationship between Physical Geography and Human Geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 24(3), pp. 261-276.
- Mastrogiovanni, F. (2015). *Ni vivos ni muertos. La Desaparición forzada como estrategia de terror*. Mexico: Desbolsillo.
- Mazzitelli, A. (2011). Mexican Cartel Influence in Central America. *Western Hemisphere Security Analysis Center*.
- McLeod, L. (2015). A Feminist Approach to Hybridity: Understanding Local and International Interactions in Producing Post-Conflict Gender Security. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 9(1), pp. 48-69.
- McLeod, L. (2016). *Gender politics and security discourse: Personal-political imaginations and feminism in "post-conflict" Serbia*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Melimopoulos, E. (2018). Violence, impunity and fear in the Mexican state of Veracruz. *Al Jazeera* [Online]. Available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/violence-impunity-fear-mexican-state-veracruz-180926051629034.html>. [Accessed 28 December 2018].
- Mercy, J. A., Butchart, A., Rosenberg, M. L., Dahlberg, L. & Harvey, A. (2008). Preventing violence in developing countries: a framework for action. *International journal of injury control and safety promotion*, 15(4), pp. 197-208.
- Meyer, L. & Maldonado Alvarado, B. (eds.) (2010). *New World of Indigenous Resistance. Noam Chomsky and Voices from North, South, and Central America.*, San Francisco: City Lights books.
- Meyer, M. (2014). *Mexico's Police Many Reforms, Little Progress* Washington, D.C.: WOLA, Washington Office on Latin America.
- Millar, G. (2014a). *An Ethnographic Approach to Peacebuilding: Understanding Local Experiences in Transitional States*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Millar, G. (2014b). Disaggregating hybridity Why hybrid institutions do not produce predictable experiences of peace. *Journal of Peace Research*, 51(4), pp. 501-514.
- Milosz, C. (1946). *A Child of Europe*. New York.
- Mitchell, A. (2014). Only human? A worldly approach to security. *Security Dialogue*, 45(1), pp. 5-21.
- Moloeznik, M. P. (2009). Principales efectos de la militarización del combate al narcotráfico en México. *Renglones, revista arbitrada en ciencias sociales y humanidades*, September 2009 - March 2010 (61), pp. 1-14.
- Moser, C. and Clark, F. (eds.) (2001). *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, London and New York: Zed Books.
- Moser, C. and Rodgers, D. (2005). Change, Violence and Insecurity in Non-Conflict Situations. *ODI working paper series*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Moser, C., Winton, A. & Moser, A. (2005). Violence, Fear, and Insecurity among the Urban Poor in Latin America. In: Fay, M. (ed.) *The Urban Poor in Latin America*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

- Moulin, C. (2016). Narrative. In: Ní Mhurchú, A. & Shindo, R. (eds.) *Critical imaginations in international relations*. London: Routledge.
- Moxham, B. & Carapic, J. (2013). Unravelling Dili: The Crisis of City and State in Timor-Leste. *Urban Studies*, 50(15), pp. 3116-3133.
- Muppidi, H. (2015). *Politics in Emotion. The Song of Telangana*. London: Routledge.
- Márquez Murrieta, A. 2018. La lucha por los desaparecidos y los aparecidos en Veracruz. *Entre el Poder y el Derecho* [Online]. Available from: <https://formato7.com/2018/09/27/la-lucha-por-los-desaparecidos-y-los-aparecidos-en-veracruz/> [Accessed 27 September 2018].
- Newman, E. (2004). The 'New Wars' Debate: A Historical Perspective is Needed. *Security Dialogue*, 35(2), pp. 173-189.
- Nordstrom, C. (1995). Creativity and Chaos. War on the Front Lines. In: Nordstrom, C. & Robben, A. C. G. M. (eds.) *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and survival*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Nordstrom, C. (2002). Terror warfare and the medicine of peace. In: Besteman, C. (ed.) *Violence: A Reader. Main Trends of the Modern World*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 273-296.
- Nordstrom, C. (2004). *Shadows of war: violence, power, and international profiteering in the twenty-first century* / Carolyn Nordstrom. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Nordstrom, C. & Martin, J. (eds.) (1992). *The paths to domination, resistance, and terror*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Nordstrom, C. & Robben, A. C. G. M. (1995). *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and survival*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Ní Mhurchú, A. (2016). Knowledge Practice. In: Ní Mhurchú, A. & Shindo, R. (eds.) *Critical imaginations in international relations*. London: Routledge.
- Okoth Opondo, S. (2016). Letters to Yvonne: words and/as worlds. In: Dauphinée, E. & Inayatullah, N. (eds.) *Narrative Global Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Olivos Santoyo, N. & Cuadriello Olivos, H. (2012). La Etnografía: El descubrimiento de muchos méxicos profundos. Entrevista a Andrés Fábregas Puig. *Andamios*, 9(19, mayo-agosto), pp. 161-196.
- Oxford Dictionary (1966). In: Onions, C. T. (ed.) *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Parashar, S. (2013). What wars and 'war bodies' know about international relations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26(4), pp. 615-630.
- Paylor, I. (1998). Reviews: *Planning Safer Communities* Alan Marlow and John Pitts (Eds.) *Probation Journal*, 45(3), pp. 175-176.
- Peoples, C. & Vaughan-Williams, N. (2015). *Critical security studies: an introduction* (Second Edition). London and New York: Routledge.
- Perera, S. (2001). Spirit possessions and avenging ghosts: Stories of Supernatural Activity as Narratives of Terror and Mechanisms of Coping and Remembering. In: Das, V., Kleinman, A., Lock, M., Ramphela, M. & Reynolds, P. (eds.) *Remaking a world: Violence, social suffering and recovery*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Petersen, R. D. (2001). *Resistance and rebellion: lessons from Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pink, S., Hubbard, P., O'Neill, M. & Radley, A. (2010). Guest Editors' Introduction. Walking across disciplines: from ethnography to arts practice. *Visual Studies*, 25(1), pp. 1-7.

- Poole, D. (2004). Between Threat and Guarantee. Justice and Community in the Margins of the Peruvian State. In: Das, V. & Poole, D. (eds.) *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Proceso, Redacción (2018). Durazo cataloga a Jalisco, Guanajuato, Veracruz, NL y Tamaulipas como focos rojos. *Proceso* [Online]. Available: <https://www.proceso.com.mx/562744/durazo-cataloga-a-jalisco-guanajuato-veracruz-nl-y-tamaulipas-como-focos-rojos> [Accessed 10 December 2018].
- Pulido, M. (2016). Javier Duarte: la insoportable frivolidad. *Aristegui Noticias* [Online]. Available: <https://aristeginoticias.com/2101/mexico/javier-duarte-la-insoportable-frivolidad-articulo-de-miguel-pulido/>. [Accessed 21 December 2018].
- Puro Lugar (2016). *Programa Encuentro Telecápita "El Puro Lugar"* [Online]. El Puro Lugar. Available: <https://elpurolugar.wordpress.com> [Accessed 9 September 2018].
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). The prosperous community. *The american prospect*, 4(13), pp. 35-42.
- Radcliffe, S. (2004). Geography of development: development, civil society and inequality - social capital is (Almost) dead? *Progress in Human Geography*, 28(4), pp. 517-527.
- Raphael, R. & Cervantes, A. (eds.) (2011). *El México Indignado*, México, DF: Editorial Planeta Mexicana; Destino.
- Ratelle, J.-F. (2013). Making sense of violence in civil war: challenging academic narratives through political ethnography. *Critical Studies on Security*, 1(2), pp. 159-173.
- Resillas, A. (2014). Michoacán: Periodistas en Apatzingán fueron obligados a sostener más de 10 reuniones con el crimen organizado. *Revista Búsqueda* [Online]. Available revistabusqueda.com.mx. [Accessed: 20 August 2018].
- Richmond, O. P. (2009). A post-liberal peace: Eirenism and the everyday. *Review of international studies*, 35(3), pp. 557-580.
- Richmond, O. P. (2010). Resistance and the Post-liberal Peace. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 38(3), pp. 665-692.
- Richmond, O. P. (2011). Critical agency, resistance and a post-colonial civil society. *Cooperation and conflict*, 46(4), pp. 419-440.
- Roberts, A. & Ash, T. G. (eds.) (2009). *Civil resistance and power politics: The experience of non-violent action from Gandhi to the present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robertson, R. (1994). Globalisation or glocalisation? *Journal of International Communication*, 1(1), pp. 33-52.
- Rodgers, D. (2007). When vigilantes turn bad: Gangs, violence, and social change in urban Nicaragua. Book section, available in LSE Research Online <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/96039.pdf> [Accessed 13 August 2014], pp. 1-17.
- Rodgers, D. (2009). Slum wars of the 21st century: gangs, mano dura and the new urban geography of conflict in Central America. *Development and Change*, 40(5), pp. 949-976.
- Rodgers, D. (2014). Urban Uncertainty Principle. *Proceedings of the conference: Caught in the Crossfire: Urban Violence, Inside and Out*. London: LSE Cities: LSE, 3 April.
- Rodríguez Luna, A., Quintanar, P. & Vargas, K. (eds.) (2016). *Atlas de la Seguridad y la Defensa de México 2016 - Anexo Estadístico*, Mexico City: Colectivo de Análisis de la Seguridad con Democracia, CASEDE.
- Ross, F. C. (2011). Speech and Silence: Women's Testimony in the First Five Weeks of Public Hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In: Das, V., Kleinman, A., Lock, M. M., Ramphela, M. & Reynolds, P. (eds.) *Remaking a world: Violence, social suffering and recovery*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Roy, S. (2008). The grey zone: the ordinary violence of extraordinary times. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14 (2, June), pp. 1-32.

- Sabaratnam, M. (2013). Avatars of Eurocentrism in the critique of the liberal peace. *Security Dialogue*, 44(3), pp. 259-278.
- Salter, M. B. & Mutlu, C. E. (2013). *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Sanín, A. F. (2014). *Reír o no reír: (meta) humorismo y violencia en la literatura contemporánea de Colombia y México*. PhD Thesis: Doctor of Philosophy, Harvard University.
- Saugmann, R. (2018). Surveillance. In: Bleiker, R. (ed.) *Visual Global Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Savin-Baden, M. & Major, C. H. (2010). *New approaches to qualitative research: wisdom and uncertainty*. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.
- Scambary, J. (2013). Conflict and resilience in an urban squatter settlement in Dili, East Timor. *Urban studies*, 50(10), pp. 1935-1950.
- Scarry, E. (1987). *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schedler, A. (2015). *En la niebla de la guerra. Los ciudadanos ante la violencia criminal organizada*. México: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE).
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (1993). *Death without weeping: the violence of everyday life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (1995). Everyday Violence: Bodies, Death, and Silence. In: Corbridge, S. (ed.) *Development Studies: A Reader*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (2004). Bodies, Death and Silence. In: Scheper-Hughes, N. & Bourgois, P. (eds.) *Violence in War and Peace*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. & Bourgois, P. (2004). Introduction: Making sense of violence. In: Scheper-Hughes, N. & Bourgois, P. (eds.) *Violence in war and peace: An anthology*. London: Blackwell.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. & Bourgois, P. I. (2002). *Violence in war and peace: an anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. New Heaven and London: Yale University Press.
- Scott, J. C. (1993). Rituals of Resistance: A Critique of the Theory of Everyday Forms of Resistance: Reply. *Latin American Perspectives*, 20(2), pp. 93-94.
- Sefchovich, S. (2014). *¡Atrévete! Propuesta hereje contra la violencia en México*. México, D.F.: Santillana Ediciones Generales, Aguilar.
- SEGOB, Secretaría de Gobernación de México (2018). *Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas, RNPED*. Mexico: SEGOB.
- Shepard, M. F., Falk, D. R. & Elliott, B. A. (2002). Enhancing Coordinated Community Responses to Reduce Recidivism in Cases of Domestic Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17(5), pp. 551-569.
- Shepherd, L. J. (2007). 'Victims, Perpetrators and Actors' Revisited: Exploring the Potential for a Feminist Reconceptualisation of (International) Security and (Gender) Violence. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 9(2), pp. 239-256.
- Shepherd, L. J. (2013). *Critical Approaches to Security: an introduction to theories and methods*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Sheppard, E. (2002). The Spaces and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality. *Economic geography*, 78(3), pp. 307-330.
- Shindo, R. (2016). Resistance In: Ní Mhurchú, A. & Shindo, R. (eds.) *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Sicilia, J. (2014). 'La nueva dictadura', *Proceso* [Online]. Available: <https://www.proceso.com.mx/383749/la-nueva-dictadura-2> [Accessed 2 February 2017].

- Smith, N. (1996). Spaces of vulnerability: the space of flows and the politics of scale. *Critique of Anthropology*, 16(1), pp. 63-77.
- Solomon, T. (2013). Attachment, tautology, and ontological security. *Critical Studies on Security*, 1(1), pp. 130-132.
- Sontag, S. (2004). *Regarding the pain of others*. London: Penguin.
- Sponsel, L. E. & Gregor, T. (1994). *The anthropology of peace and nonviolence*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Stanko, E. (1990). *Everyday violence : how women and men experience sexual and physical danger*. London: Pandora.
- Steenkamp, C. (2005). The Legacy of War: Conceptualizing a 'Culture of Violence' to Explain Violence after Peace Accords. *The Round Table*, 94(379), pp. 253-267.
- Stern, M. (2005). *Naming security-constructing identity: 'Mayan-women' in Guatemala on the eve of 'peace'*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Stern, M. (2006). 'We' the Subject: The Power and Failure of (In)Security. *Security Dialogue*, 37(2), pp. 187-205.
- Strange, S. (1983). Cave! hic dragones: a critique of regime analysis. In: Krasner, S. D. (ed.) *International Regimes*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cornell University Press.
- Stuart, S. (2011). War as Metaphor and the Rule of Law in Crisis: The Lessons we Should Have Learned from the War on Drugs. *Southern Illinois University Law Journal*, 36, Fall(1), pp. 1-44.
- Sylvester, C. (2010). *Feminist international relations: an unfinished journey*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations.
- Sylvester, C. (2012). War Experiences/War Practices/War Theory. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 40(3), pp. 483-503.
- Sylvester, C. (2013). *War as experience: contributions from international relations and feminist analysis*. Routledge.
- Sylvester, C. (2016). Creativity. In: Ní Mhurchú, A. & Shindo, R. (eds.) *Critical Imaginations in International Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Sylvester, C., Marshall, S., MacKenzie, M. H., Saeidi, S., Turcotte, H. M., Parashar, S. & Sjoberg, L. (2011). Emotion and the Feminist IR Researcher, *International Studies Review*, 13(4), pp. 687-708.
- Szyborska, W. (1996). Jacys Ludzie (Some People). *New Republic, Magazine*, December 30, 1996.
- Szyborska, W. (2001). *Koniec i Początek (The End and the Beginning)*. W. W. Norton and Company Inc.
- Taussig, M. (1987). *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man: A study in terror and healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Taussig, M. (1989). Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin's Theory of History as a State of Siege. *Social Text*, (23), pp. 3-20.
- Taussig, M. T. (1992). *The Nervous System*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Taussig, M. (2002). Talking Terror. In: Scheper-Hughes, N. & Bourgois, P. I. (eds.) *Violence in War and Peace*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taussig, M. T. (2005). *Law in a lawless land: diary of a limieza in Colombia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Topete, J. (2018a). Antropólogos de FGE exploran Academia de Policía, en El Lencero, en busca de restos humanos. *Al Calor Político* [Online]. Available: <https://www.alcalorpolitico.com/informacion/antropologos-de-fge-exploran-academia-de-policia-en-el-lencero-en-busca-de-restos-humanos-258466.html#.WrYu6eca8o> [Accessed 10 October 2018].
- Topete, J. (2018b). Hay cuerpos humanos debajo de edificios de la Academia, en el Lencero, acusa víctima. *Al Calor Político* [Online]. Available:

- <https://www.alcalorpolitico.com/informacion/hay-cuerpos-humanos-debajo-de-edificios-de-la-academia-en-el-lencero-acusa-victima-255690.html#.WrZWacca8o> [Accessed 10 October 2018].
- Turati, M. (2018). Un “desastre”, los Foros por la Pacificación *Proceso* [Online], (2181). Available: <https://www.proceso.com.mx/547690/un-desastre-los-foros-por-la-pacificacion> [Accessed 20 November 2018].
- Turner, V. W. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual* (Vol. 101). New York: Cornell University.
- TV (2015). Periodistas de a Pie. *La última entrevista con Rubén Espinosa*. Mexico City: Television por Internet.
- UCDP (2017). Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Uppsala, Sweden: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala Universitet. Available: <https://ucdp.uu.se> [Accessed 20 December 2018].
- UN (2018). Observaciones finales sobre el informe presentado por Mexico en virtud del artículo 29, Parrafo 1, de la Convencion. In: Disappearances (ed.). Geneve: United Nations.
- UNODC & UN-HABITAT. (2009). *Handbook on the Crime Prevention Guidelines: Making Them Work*, Viena, Austria: United Nations.
- UNODC (2000). United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
- UNODC (2018). *Global Study on Homicide. Gender-related killing of women and girls*. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
- Ureste, M. & Ángel, A. (2018). Identifican en dos años apenas 9% de los 339 cuerpos hallados en fosas en Veracruz. *Animal Político* [Online]. Available: https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/09/cuerpos-fosas-identificacion-veracruz/?utm_source=Hoy+en+Animal&utm_campaign=97aff27d3b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_09_10_01_56&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ae638a5d34-97aff27d3b-392951545. [Accessed 11 September 2018].
- van Schendel, W. & Abraham, I. (eds.) (2005). *Illicit flows and criminal things: States, borders, and the other side of globalization*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Van Veeren, E. (2018). Invisibility. In: Bleiker, R. (ed.) *Visual Global Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Vigh, H. (2006). *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn.
- Visoka, G. (2016). Peace is what we make of it? Peace-shaping events and ‘non-events’. *Peacebuilding*, 4(1), pp. 54-70.
- Voegelin, S. (2010). *Listening to Noise and Silence. Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. New York and London: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Vrasti, W. (2008). The strange case of ethnography and international relations. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 37(2), pp. 279-301.
- Walker, R. (2013). *Enduring Violence. Everyday life and conflict in eastern Sri Lanka*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Wibben, A. T. R. (2011). Feminist Politics in Feminist Security Studies. *Politics & Gender*, 7(04), pp. 590-595.
- Wibben, A. T. R. (2016). *Researching war: feminist methods, ethics and politics*. Oxfordshire, England: Routledge.
- Wilding, P. (2010). ‘New Violence’: Silencing Women's Experiences in the Favelas of Brazil. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 42, pp. 719-747.
- Wilding, P. (2012). *Negotiating Boundaries. Gender, Violence and Transformation in Brazil*. Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Williams, P. (2012). The Terrorism Debate Over Mexican Drug Trafficking Violence. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24(2), pp. 259-278.
- Yiftachel, O. (2009). Theoretical Notes On 'Gray Cities': the Coming of Urban Apartheid? *Planning Theory*, 8(1), pp. 88-100.
- Yiftachel, O. (2012). Critical theory and "gray space". Mobilisation of the colonised. In: Brenner, N., Marcuse, P. & Mayer, M. (eds.) *Cities for people, not for profit. Critical urban theory and the right to the city*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Zavaleta Betancourt, J. A. (2014). Las representaciones e interacciones de jóvenes y policías en Xalapa. In: Alvarado Mendoza, A. (ed.) *Violencia Juvenil y Acceso a la Justicia en América Latina*. Ciudad de México: Colegio de México, COLMEX.
- Zavaleta, N. (2014). En Veracruz sólo hay robos de "Frutsis y Pingüinos del Oxxo": Duarte. *Proceso* [Online]. Available: <https://www.proceso.com.mx/384800/en-veracruz-solo-hay-robos-de-frutsis-y-pinguinos-del-oxxo-duarte>. [Accessed 18 August 2018].
- Zepeda Leucona, G. (2004). *Crimen sin castigo. Procuración de justicia penal y ministerio público en México* (First Edition ed.). Mexico City: Centro de Investigación para el Desarrollo, CIDAC; Fondo de Cultura Económica, FCE.
- Zerega, G. (2018). Una investigación periodística cifra el drama de las fosas en México: 1.900 en una década. *El País* [Online]. Available: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/11/12/mexico/1542056452_001005.html [Accessed 20 November 2018].
- Ziller, A. (2004). The community is not a place and why it matters - Case study: Green Square. *Urban Policy and Research*, 22(4), pp. 465-479.

Appendix 1. Photographs



Photograph 11. Collecting banana leaves for *tamales*. Young Zone, October 2015.



Photograph 12. Collecting and cutting banana leaves for *tamales*. Young Zone, October 2015.



Photograph 13. Cooking *tamales*. Patio of Amalia's family home. Young Zone, October 2015.

Appendix 2. Table 2.

Table 2. Potential fieldwork sites in Paloxpan and its periphery (left in draft unedited condition except for names).

Localisation / name	La Rica	Al Este de Cortinas	Col. Francisco Madero	Munic. V Carranza	Colinda
	Far North	South-West	Central-South	South-East, not Paloxpan	South, not Paloxpan
Short characteristic / logistics	Old enough but former informal and bad fame. HUGE. Next to the major highway crossing the whole city North-South, but the huge one. Diversity. Border zone /limit rather than a mix.	'barrio popular del Este'. Seems former informal; many unpaved streets. Vegetation. "de todo".	Mixed up neighbourhood with all types of social-economic living conditions. Huge: Circuito de Presidentes crosses through. Neighbouring to the Univ area (Los Lagos), not too good fame (barrio popular del centro). Relatively close to the centre.	Quasi-Rural. Extremely poor. Typical alongside the road (former Highway). Very friendly people. Already interacted intensely w/org ejidal communitarian.	So-called "pueblo mágico" but not entirely this: bigger than assumed. Bad fame previously, some isolated "events" now: "you never know". Coffee-based identity. Separated from Paloxpan, but v easy access.
pros	Possibly interesting stories linked to the insecurity. Potentially LIVED insecurities. Complex former informal. Very friendly people met so far, even accidentally in the centre.	Close to the centre + quick access. Mix economies / inequalities / contrasts. First contact made on my own. Good vibe. Potential links with rural areas towards West: very close.	Potentially promising mix between social groups and classes; and perceived risks and real experiences. Not sure if pros/cons: Potentially uni-artist-people.	Very good and friendly access. Potentially LIVED insecurities. Past experiences and stories vs. present. Multi-cultural but very small community. Very interesting mix. Traditional Values. Apparently? stronger social cohesion. PRD: president municipal. Potentially linked with the City / m.	VERY good & promising access. Not sure if pros/cons: Potentially uni-artist-people. Potentially interesting mix of social-economic classes. Very recent "events" and experiences. Stronger social cohesion. Beautiful area,

				Francisco Madera. V interesting link Older-Younger generations.	separated from Paloxpan, yet linked (!). Potentially already researched. Potential interesting relation Older-Younger generations.
cons / obstacles	Tricky: safety. Bad fame. Far from the centre “The Northern Periphery”.	Not entirely reliable contacts? Who knows. Getting there.	Not Enough Data.	Far away from the city. Bad fame. Previously VERY dangerous, hence not entirely predictable now. (quasi-) RURAL. Community’s potential high expectations.	Not clear access to the more vulnerable community / “barrio popular” but I guess” promising.
safety	Specifically my visibility. Good and reliable contact required. Warned a lot. Past? Bad fame.	N/D	N/D	Problematic, though as I was very well received, I’d believe that community would protect me very well.	NED OK in gen. Changing.
Initial contact/ gatekeeper	N/D Getting there. * M * S * E	Veggie restaurant people. Who else? Good intuition.	Getting there: * E * Y	*S Anthropologist. A little bit of HIS research agenda.	* R & S * new former Polish family (this Sun). * L (this Sat) * E * M * M M.
Past experiences vs. present (insecurities)	Not too sure: whenever past or present.	N/D	NED	VERY interesting example: as a strong marc perceived: the complicated past vs. more peaceful present	Potentially V interesting!!!
First impressions	Not Visited N/D	Not too bad. (walking down Cortinas) NED	Not Visited N/D	Yes, visited. Difficult but feasible. Very RURAL. Vegetation (insects). BASICS might	Yes, visited. Con potencial. Tranquilo.

				be personally problematic.	
Vs. research objective: INFO flow	NED	?	NED	Round table. My hunch: very plural, very interesting. “a lot of families”	Good feeling BUT not too easy to adapt / enter to the new community (though this is common).
Press				Photos.	
Climate	NED: Apparently slightly colder.	Paloxpeño.	N/D	Tropical. Very hot. Rural area.	Warm but fine.
additional	This neighbourhood is understood as a huge one, further from what is admin, and covers large area. *Las señoras refiriéndose a “Del Moral: a dentro de la Rica“	La anecdota del señor del sombrero, Domingo camino al Museo de Antropologia: “diferencias sociales: casas bonitas vs. Colonias populares”		Perhaps when time allows, it might be a second location.	Lovely people. Good feeling. Feeling well. Perhaps a second option, or in parallel.

NED: Not Enough Data.

N/D: No Data

Appendix 3. List of names of my interlocutors who appear in the thesis (all changed).

Abraham

Amalia

Ana

Aron

Don Ángel

Doña Lulú

Eduardo

Elías

Eliot

Itzel

Irma

Juan

Kail

Laura

Leo

Lorena

Marisol

Mateo

Max

Pedro

Rebeca

Ricardo

Roberto

Rocío

Tonia

Ximena

Xochitl