



# From the American Dream to the Mexican Nightmare

## How US Border Control Enforcement and Migratory Policies are Fueling Violence in Mexico

Francisco Guillermo Alonso Norma

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences  
of the European University Institute

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**Department of Political and Social Sciences**

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*For Sandra-Lucía*

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I start these acknowledgments with a warning. They have explicit personal content and are written for cathartic reasons. If you, reader, are uniquely interested in the rigorous, groundbreaking social research augured since the title of this document, I suggest you to skip this section. Otherwise you may continue reading at your own risk.

The making of this dissertation was an incredibly enriching intellectual but mostly a life experience. In 2011 I resigned to my job as an analyst at the Instituto Federal Electoral in Mexico and enrolled as a doctoral student in the European University Institute in Florence. Six years later I find myself in Amsterdam, married and raising my first child. It seems that John Lennon was right: “Life is what happens to you when you are busy making other plans”. Or, in my case, when you are busy making a thesis.

I want to express my gratitude to all the persons that, either directly or indirectly, had an influence in it, starting with a great group of friends and colleagues who helped to turn the lonely tragedy of pursuing a doctorate degree into a sort of collective tragicomedy.

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Florence was a once in a lifetime experience. Idyllic. To the point it appeared superficial. Can anyone write anything honest about true tragedies like those linked to organized crime in Mexico while living the easy life of a privileged student in Florence? The answer is no. Unless the idyll is fragmented and accessed sporadically for therapeutic reasons.

A friend of mine is a criminal lawyer in Mexico. In his weekends he rides an off-road motorcycle at full speed because he says it is the only thing that helps him to stop thinking about the everyday horror of his work. To me, the challenge was the opposite. I pretended to write a convincing thesis involving a subject I only knew from secondary sources. Therefore I tried to get as close as I could to my object of study, without getting myself killed. At least I

succeeded in that last vital objective. I ended up in 2013 and 2014 trying to do fieldwork in La Montaña, Guerrero, a few miles from where the disappearance of 43 teacher trainees from the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa occurred at the hands of Mexican state forces colluding with a criminal organization a few months later.

My entry in the rural world of Guerrero was facilitated by Catholic missionaries and human rights' activists that allowed me to follow them in their pastoral and civic expeditions to remote hamlets where international and internal out-migration are livelihood alternatives weighed against opium poppy cultivation. The accounts of the people from Guerrero impressed me deeply and convinced me that my work should have theoretical and practical significance. After the persons I interviewed, the priests in Guerrero were the persons that contributed in the most direct manner to this thesis and paradoxically they are the ones whose names I cannot mention here.

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Finally, Sandra and Rafa are always in my heart and in my thoughts. For one and a half years Sandra has been winning the bread for a baby and a husband with a permanent writer's block. This thesis would not exist if it was not for her heroic commitment to our

recently created family. They are the love of my life and the best reason to find less dangerous research interests. I want to dedicate this thesis to them.

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation analyzes the connection between Mexican out-migration to the US and Mexico's ongoing internal wars during the process of US securitization and criminalization of undocumented migration. Until now Mexico's transition to democracy has been the primary explanation for the spike in levels of criminality in Mexico dominating the literature. However, this dissertation argues that the financial crisis and a decade of hostile US security policies marked by a record high in deportations has discouraged Mexican out-migration to the US. In doing so, these policies have removed an important counterweight to narco trafficking and ended up by helping the Mexican criminal organizations which they were claiming to fight. For decades, Mexican irregular migration to the US turned a problem into an opportunity for Mexico since remittances promoted peace and development, and the departure of unsatisfied people stimulated social and political stability, particularly in the Mexican countryside. Nevertheless, during the 2000s, post 9/11 migration and security policies in the US greatly reduced this "escape valve" and ended the "American Dream". Therefore, by restricting one of the main strategies for capital and status acquisition and one of the main alternatives from the "repertoire of adventures" for young males, Mexico became more violent.

A statistical analysis of the changes in the average number of homicides and migration data in two periods (1995 - 2000 and 2005 -2010) combined with semi-structured interviews and participant observation in regions of migration origin are used to provide evidence about the connection between the end of the "American Dream" and "the Mexican Nightmare". In addition, time-series data at the state and community levels are combined with ethnographic and journalistic material to provide analytical narratives about the trajectories followed by the migrant communities in three states. A controlled comparison selecting three Mexican states with strikingly similar socioeconomic and political characteristics but different levels of out-

migration and violence is conducted. At last, the consequences of European migration policies on Moroccan migration to the EU are analyzed in order to address the external validity of the proposed theory beyond the Mexican case. Such a mixed methods approach allows to identify certain nuances in social sciences that are usually not addressed simultaneously by works that do not bridge the quantitative-qualitative divide. In particular, this thesis identifies heretofore neglected variables as salient: increased competition for local scarce resources; deflection of prospective migrants into dangerous occupations like growing illegal crops; reactivation of blood feuds since paying back debts became more difficult; a fall in school attendance because parents were not able to sustain their children economically once they were impeded from sending remittances; and reduction in seasonal economic spillovers produced by migrants during holidays.

## Introduction

Donald Trump, the American business magnate, launched his campaign for the Republican presidential candidacy of 2016 bashing Mexican immigrants:

“When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. (...) They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (He Yee Lee, 2015).

Apparently Trump was not aware (or not interested in knowing) that Mexican-Americans have a lower rate of violence than blacks or whites in the US, and that the main explanation for such lower rate is precisely that more than a quarter of Mexican-Americans are immigrants. In disadvantaged neighborhoods, immigration appears to be strongly and negatively associated with homicide rates. A study conducted with a sample of 3,000 individuals in Chicago found that, after controlling for individual, family and neighborhood background, first-generation immigrants were 45 percent less likely to commit violence than third-generation Americans. Even second-generation immigrants were 22 percent less likely to commit violence than the third generation (Sampson, 2008). Why immigration in the US is associated with lower crime rates is still under research, but the explanations may lie in three facts: immigrants tend to be self-selected, hard-working individuals. They revitalize economies and foster urban growth.

A large and increasing body of research is filling the gap about the association between Mexican immigration to the US and lower crime rates in the US. Conversely, as this dissertation shows, Mexican out-migration is also strongly and negatively associated with lower crime rates in Mexico, suggesting that international mobility is a highly beneficial phenomenon for both countries, not only in economic, but also in security terms. The almost

absolute lack of studies trying to disentangle the out-migration-crime nexus in Mexico just confirms the well-known “receiving-country bias” in migration studies. This thesis is in part an attempt to contribute reducing such bias. But more substantively, it constitutes an effort to understand the perplexing parallel evolution of two key social aspects of nowadays Mexico: Violence and out-migration.

First, homicide rates in Mexico spiked during the last decade, reversing a pacifying trend that lasted for more than 80 years, since the demise of the Mexican Revolution. In Andreas Schedler (2014) words - a “criminal civil war” is unfolding in Mexico, increasing exponentially the number of homicides. Since 2007, more than 160,000 homicides have taken place. More than half of those homicides are presumably linked to organized crime (Guerrero, 2015). Such terrible figures allow to establish reasonable comparisons with war-torn countries like Syria, where the United Nations estimates that casualties rise to 250,000 since the conflict began (UN, 2015).<sup>1</sup> Criminal violence has become a central concern for the Mexican society. Understanding why violence erupted so drastically after decades of increasingly peaceful coexistence has become one of the main puzzles among Mexican social scientists, who have contributed to advance steeply the knowledge about such phenomenon, but without being able to produce a satisfactory answer yet.

Second, if the onset of a criminal civil war was not enough puzzling by itself, another strange phenomenon is taking place simultaneously: The stream of Mexican migrants to the US, “the largest sustained flow of migrant workers in the contemporary world” (Massey, et. al., 1998: 73) has come to a standstill. In fact, Mexican migration to the US is reaching a historic low in 65 years, a fact that has left migration scholars perplexed (Cave, 2011; González-Barrera, 2015). Are these two facts related? Or is it mere coincidence that the

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<sup>1</sup> After giving this estimate the United Nations stopped counting deaths in Syria because it considered the data unreliable. A more recent estimate from the Damascus-based Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR) situates the death toll at 470,000 (SCPR, 2016).



internal wars in Mexico turned more brutal precisely when the net migration flux dropped to zero? If they are related, shouldn't the association run in the opposite sense? Given that several refugee crises throughout history have made it clear that violence is one of the main drivers of out-migration, why is Mexican migration to the US decreasing despite the criminal civil war taking place in Mexico? To be sure, forced internal displacement has been one of the main consequences and course of action for people who feel that criminal organizations attempt against their lives in Mexico (CNDH, 2016), but when it comes to international out-migration, the case seems to defy the logic observed in many war-torn societies. It seems the fewer people leave Mexico, the more violent it becomes.

Furthermore, the relationship between these two aspects also seems to hold at the meso level. As it will be shown further, homicide rates are increasing more in parts of Mexico where out-migration ratios have fallen more and migration belts are suddenly transforming into epicenters of drug violence. Making sense of such inverse relationship constitutes the central endeavor of this thesis. The first step to understand such complex association is to invert the causal thinking between international out-migration and violence. By doing so, the analytical proposal of the dissertation becomes clear: To provide an alternative narrative about the "Mexican criminal civil war" based on the increasingly restrictive migration regime in the US.

Until now Mexico's transition to democracy has been the primary explanation for the spike in levels of criminality in Mexico dominating the literature. Political scientists have argued that the erosion of corrupt agreements, a lack of coordination between different levels of authority, or the politicization of the war on drugs brought by electoral competition are the key elements that explain the increase in violence in Mexico. In this dissertation I show that the democratization explanations need to be complemented in order to match up with the empirical evidence. I argue that such dominant view needs to be contextualized with the

decades of hostile US security policies marked by a record high in deportations. These policies backfired because they blocked a legitimate path for social mobility and increased the bargaining power of the criminal organizations they were claiming to fight. The whole intellectual enterprise departs from a fact that is evident for migration scholars, but is frequently ignored by other sub-disciplines in the social sciences: Migration to the US -both regular and irregular- has been an established means for capital acquisition and social success and a great adventure for many people in Mexican states like Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, San Luís Potosí, Nayarit, Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Durango and Zacatecas. In a country with low wages and difficult -usually abusive- credit conditions like Mexico, people have resorted to out-migration as a strategy to save money and be able to buy a house, start a new business, finance their children's education or pay back debts. This social equilibrium in Mexican migrant regions lasted for decades, until such regions were severely affected by the financial crisis and the restrictive shift in US border control enforcement and migratory policies of that country.

The implementation of colossal US security policies and draconian measures in criminal law regulating undocumented migration closed a very important path for social mobility, ending the "American Dream" for many Mexicans. It also removed one of the main courses of action from the young people's repertoire of adventures. For many years the possibility of such adventure worked as a counterweight against an apolitical rebellion in Mexico baptized by Ioan Grillo (2012) as a "criminal insurgency".

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter one explores the prevailing explanations about the wave of violence in Mexico, detects the explanatory factors and points out the theoretical and empirical links between frustrated out-migration and violence. It concludes that various mechanisms associated with the country's transition to democracy have been presented as the main reason behind the wave of violence in the country. After

critically reviewing such arguments, it concludes that most of them need to be complemented with the process of migration securitization that has been ignored so far. The chapter closes by explaining the relevance of the impressive changes in the out-migration patterns and by presenting with further detail the general proposition of this dissertation.

Chapter two traces back the origins of Mexican out-migration and narcotrafficking with the intention to understand why these two phenomena coincided in many times and in many places. Geographically referenced maps of out-migration and narcotrafficking including the Mexican railroad network and bracero recruitment centers are presented in order to illustrate such coexistence. It concludes that, spatially, several factors such as proximity to the border, rurality and the train connection fostered the coincidence of out-migration and the narcotrafficking business. In temporal terms, the narcotics prohibition in the US turned some Mexican parts that were well-connected to the US into propitious territories for the production and smuggling of illicit drugs. These activities flourished together with out-migration in the aforementioned territories when the Second World War simultaneously shifted the demands for cheap agricultural labor to produce food and opioids to treat injured soldiers.

Chapter three narrates the social evolution of the area known as La Montaña in Guerrero, with the intention to elucidate a causal connection between these two phenomena. It presents historical data about homicides in Guerrero that questions the validity of the explanations of Mexican criminal violence based in the Mexican transition to democracy. It also shows that, despite the concentration of many violence predictors such as rough terrain, poverty and the production of illicit drugs, out-migration helped La Montaña to buffer criminal and political violence. The chapter describes the mechanisms I observed during several trips to the region. In concrete, it explains how frustrated out-migration and violence may be linked by an increased competition for scarce resources; an impossibility to pay back debts; by the nowadays continuation of conflicts that used to end after one of the parts

involved in the conflict decided to leave towards the US; or by the absence of a seasonal economic spill-over that used to take place when migrants returned during Christmas or the festivities of the local patron-saint.

Chapter four discusses the main explanations about Mexico's criminal insurgency in the light of statistical evidence. It shows that accounts based either in the country's transition to democracy, the neoliberal turn or the divorce rate need to be complemented in order to square with data. It narrates the evolution of the US migration regime since the end of the Bracero Program with the intention to show that it helps to understand better other narratives in temporal and spatial terms. The chapter also includes the results of a series of statistical tests about the association between out-migration and homicides. First difference, time-series cross sectional event count models suggest the existence of a statistically and substantially significant negative association between out-migration, circular migration, remittance reception and violence, providing evidence about the relevance of the mechanisms observed in the previous chapter.

Chapter five presents a controlled comparison of three states that have strikingly similar socioeconomic and political conditions. It analyzes why Guerrero is more violent than Oaxaca or Chiapas despite sharing so many similarities. It shows that it is necessary to go beyond the state-level of analysis to provide an adequate understanding of out-migration and violence. It argues that violence is better appreciated as a combination of factors acting at different levels. It concludes that frustrated out-migration played an important role in spurring violence, although the influence of this factor is concentrated in the north of Guerrero.

Chapter six uses historical time-series of homicides at the state level and data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) to explore further the role that out-migration may play in buffering violence in Mexico. Since the MMP includes information on the documentation used to emigrate or the absence of such, it allows further refining for observing the parallel

evolution of out-migration and homicides. In other words, it provides a subsequent step to understand if the internal war in Mexico was truly motivated by an increase in frustrated irregular migration, product of the restrictive migratory policies. Case studies that take into account time-series of homicides at the state and migration prevalence ratios at the community-level are presented together with ethnographic and journalistic accounts in order to make sense of each case.

Chapter seven explores the external validity of this thesis beyond the Mexican case. It analyzes why Morocco, despite sharing many similarities with Mexico, did not experience a criminal insurgency when the shift in the European Union (EU) migration regime started to take place. It concludes that European borders have not been militarized to the same extent as US borders (at least not yet). In addition, the control of Moroccan migration to Europe was less effective than the control of Mexican migration to the US. Lower rates of alcohol consumption, less availability of firearms and a smaller and a less extended drug industry are all crucial factors that may have also impeded Morocco descending into a similar criminal war as Mexico did. Finally, it presents time series of Moroccan homicide rates and out-migration that suggest that, despite all the differences with the Mexican case, out-migration does seem to be inversely related to violence in Morocco.

Chapter eight presents the general conclusion of the thesis. It confirms the key claim that out-migration was crucial in containing violence in Mexico until it was transformed by the restrictive regime in the US and draws some reflections about US and Mexico policies that may help to improve public security in Mexico.

**Chapter 1**  
**Crime, Violence and Migration in Mexico**  
**The End of the American Dream**

Criminal violence in the twenty-first century is not only a Mexican phenomenon. Large-scale criminal violence is a reality in several Latin American, African, Asian, and sometimes even in Southern European countries like Italy. Nevertheless, since 2008 Mexico has experienced one of the most surprising increases in homicidal violence. Why did the country become so violent in such a short period of time? In the first part of this chapter I examine the concept of violence, its meanings and its usefulness to understand the ongoing security crisis in Mexico. Then I review classic theories of deviance and violence and discuss the main answers to this question as presented by a variety of scholars with different academic backgrounds. After critically reviewing several explanations I identify two key explanatory factors. The first one has been widely researched whereas the second has been almost completely ignored in analyses of Mexican large-scale violence: In the context of a lucrative transnational drug trade 1) the transformation of the Mexican state through democratization and 2) the reduction of Mexican out-migration to the US provoked by the securitization of migration played crucial roles in shaping the dynamics of criminal violence in Mexico.

In the second part of this chapter I use these hypotheses to construct a general framework for analysis of the development of the internal war in Mexico. My point of departure is a theoretical, empirical and historical fact: since the early twentieth century migration blew off steam and limited many of the determinants of criminal and political violence in Mexican communities such as levels of poverty and inequality, unemployment and underemployment, the rate of indebtedness and school dropout rates.

However, during the last decade out-migration was severely altered by the global financial crisis and particularly by the US border control enforcement and migratory policies. Such alteration is the basis for the general proposition of this thesis since the shift in the US border controls and migratory policies contained and transformed Mexican (particularly irregular) migration to the US. This contention influenced the dynamics of crime and criminal violence across Mexican municipalities. The economic crisis and US migratory policies may have direct and indirect effects in Mexican crime rates. As a direct effect Mexican would-be migrants may be redirected to the criminal economy. The indirect effects are the structural determinants of crime and criminal violence that may be affected by the sudden stop of the migrant flux. As an “instrumental variable” approach, where X is connected to Z but only when it is mediated through Y, frustrated out-migration can be linked to criminal violence because some of the factors mentioned before, such as poverty, inequality and education can act as mediators.

### **1.1 Framing and Reasoning Violence in Mexico**

The aim of this subsection is to delineate some basic notions to understand how violence has developed in the social and political context in Mexico. According to Nordstrom (in Hume, 2009), violence is “essentially defined” because every person assumes to know what it means (p. 26). Yet its definition remains highly contested and represents a conceptual challenge. According to Keane (in Moser and Mcillwaine, 2004) violence is: “unwanted physical interference by groups and/or individuals with the bodies of others” (p. 9). Even this simple definition already contains a first disputed element: the physicality of violence. The distinction between physical and other forms of violence serves to facilitate the detection of relatively coherent phenomena. The non-

physical types include: structural violence, understood as social injustice or preventable material deprivation (Galtung 1969) and also as the cause of psychological or mental strain (Bourdieu 1998: 98-99); and symbolic violence, referring to the imposition of meanings as legitimate on subjugated agents (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000 [1977]). These non-physical forms of violence are connected with the physical forms as they increase the likelihood that individuals who are victimized in these non-physical ways will suffer or perpetrate some form of physical attack.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis' focus is on the physical manifestations of violence and there are two reasons for this. Because specific and limited conceptual tools are more useful to detect social phenomena (See Tilly, 2004), and because there is important information available about violence in Mexico (like the death certificates issued by the Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (SNSP)), this approach would appear to have some promise. In addition, among the physical forms of violence, the emphasis in this thesis is placed on homicide precisely because it is more reliably measured relative to other forms of physical violence (Kalyvas, 2006: 20). Logically, data on homicides is better measured in countries where the police have greater investigative capacity and act more transparently. The notion that when a homicide is perpetrated there is at least a body left behind (Sampson, 2008: 30) certainly does not apply to Mexico with its approximately 27,000 missing persons. Nevertheless, the rate of homicide reporting is considerably higher than other crimes given the seriousness of the offense. This relatively higher rate of reporting is the reason why I decided to still use homicides despite the tenths of

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<sup>2</sup> A determinist interpretation of the postulates of a main school of criminological thought, such as strain theory, would even rule out agency and lead to the conclusion that people who suffer structural violence are "condemned" to perpetrate or suffer physical violence. For non-deterministic empirical studies that find associations between material deprivation, disadvantage or strain with crime and/or violence in Mexico see Osorio (2012) and Enamorado et. al. (2016). For an examination of how social exclusion in Latin America contributes to crime and violence see Moser and McIlwaine (2004), Arraigada and Godoy (1999) and Berkman (2007). A broad literature exists also for the US. See Agnew (1996); Agnew et. al. (2008); Baron (2007) Blau and Blau (1982).



thousands disappeared. Another type of crime that is also well reported is car theft, given the necessity for car owners to produce police reports to make insurance claims, as well as their desire to avoid implication in any crimes committed by those using the stolen car. However, this offense is not necessarily violent. By contrast, homicide, at least when it is intentional, is inescapably violent. It is also qualitatively different from other forms of violence. As Kalyvas argues, homicide is a good indicator of violence because it “crosses a line” (2006: 20). It constitutes “the worst of crimes” according to the UNODC’s *Global Study on Homicide* (2013:5).

#### 1.1.1 Typologies of violence

Within the sphere of physical violence, most of the definitions include two elements: 1) the act damages someone’s body 2) to obtain some sort of benefit. These benefits can be of many types (economic, political, sexual, etc.) (Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Kalyvas, 2006; Keane in Hume, 2009: 26). Many different acts of violence taking place nowadays in Mexico fit in this still very general definition (domestic violence, drug-related crimes, sexual assault, etc.). These phenomena need to be broken down to provide a better understanding.

##### 1.1.1.1 Organized and non-organized violence

A first typology can separate violence by its level of organization. The simplest dichotomy has only two levels: organized and non-organized. The former category can be imagined by actors with a high degree of bureaucratic rationality and internal (hierarchy, division of labor) and external (membership) differentiation (Schedler, 2015: 53) and is easily applied to the actions exerted by some criminal groups in Mexico that possess an impressive military capacity. According to Schedler (2013): “An estimated 30,000 professionals of violence work in the paramilitary branches of criminal

organizations: as bodyguards, street fighters, kidnappers, torturers (and) killers” (p. 8).<sup>3</sup>

The latter (non-organized violence) has a more individual and quotidian character (Knight, 2012: 116) but it is not less important than the former. As reported by Monárrez Fragoso’s study of Ciudad Juárez femicides based on a newspaper database (2008) only a share of the violence against women that preceded the wave of “drug-related” violence was organized. The organized forms of violence against women included the “sexual and systemic femicides”<sup>4</sup> and homicides related to organized crime, accounting for 32 and 9 percent of the cases respectively. The rest of the cases fall into categories in which violence is not necessarily organized - cases like intimate violence, violence against stigmatized occupations or communal violence (p. 38).

#### 1.1.1.2 Indiscriminate and selective violence

A second distinction can be made with regards to the selectivity of violence. Violence can be indiscriminate when perpetrators lack information and do not choose the victims under any perceivable criterion (such as location, ethnicity, gender, class), or it can be selective, such as when a network of informants allows for the personalization of violence (Kalyvas, 2006: 148-149, 173-174). Narco-terrorist attacks like the one in Morelia, Michoacán when grenades were thrown at a cheerful population celebrating Independence Day on September 15, 2008 are examples of the indiscriminate type.<sup>5</sup> The long list of assassinations of politicians, public officers, journalists, activists and reputed criminals are examples of crimes against victims who had been carefully chosen.

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<sup>3</sup> 30,000 entrepreneurs of violence is clearly a substantial number. Yet the “paramilitary branch” of criminal organizations is relatively small if we consider Shirk’s estimate that 450,000 people in Mexico have significant earnings from drug-trafficking (2012: 58).

<sup>4</sup> This type refers to female homicides motivated by sexual and sadist impulses) and inside this category only a part of them are committed by “organized killers” (Monárrez Fragoso, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Although they took place in the capital of the state that first experienced the law-enforcement operations of the former president Felipe Calderón. Therefore, they might obey a location criteria after all.

### 1.1.1.3 Violence, relational power and “criminal governance”

Third, violence can also be classified in relational power terms. It can be understood as domination if exerted by the stronger agent immersed in a power relationship trying to maintain the status quo; as competition if executed by actors with similar force willing to establish themselves at the top of a power hierarchy; and it can be understood as rebellion if the weaker party is trying to subvert the power relationship (Schedler, 2015: 59-60).

**Table 1.1 Categories of Violence**

Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organized</li><li>• Non-Organized</li></ul>
Selectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Selective</li><li>• Indiscriminate</li></ul>
Power relation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Domination</li><li>• Competition</li><li>• Rebellion</li></ul>
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sociopolitical</li><li>• Linked to organized crime</li><li>• Interpersonal</li></ul>

The narco-executions and massacres intended to reaffirm the power of an already hegemonic criminal group are examples of “criminal domination”; the constant disputes between rival criminal organizations exemplify a scenario of criminal competition; and the fight of weaker organizations against the hegemonic ones can be considered criminal rebellions or insurgencies. This last term (insurgency) can be problematic due to its strong association with a political project. Nevertheless, Fearon and Laitin (2003) have argued that it can be used as a “neutral” term, and can be taken as a simple technology. To avoid confusions, this dissertation uses the broader term “internal wars” to refer to the main criminal conflicts taking place nowadays in Mexico and the term “criminal insurgency” to refer to particular situations in which criminal

groups are fighting to subvert a position of subjugation, regardless of whether they fight against the state or another criminal group.

Outside the exclusive realm of criminality, the relational power approach is also useful to understand not only inter criminal group interactions but also the links between crime and the state. The work of Luis Astorga is an example of this approach. Astorga uses Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "social fields" to explain variations in organized crime and the state power relations through Mexican history. According to Astorga (2015), since the prohibition of opium in the US by the Harrison Act and the prohibition of production and commercialization of marihuana (1920) and opium (1926) in Mexico, narcotraffickers emerged as a subordinated field to politicians. Governors of Mexican states with intense narcotrafficking activity and the Federal Security Directorate (DFS)<sup>6</sup> functioned as the political police of the president and as mediators between the political and the criminal fields. Traffickers were at the mercy of politicians until the 1980s, when developments in the US drug demand and in Colombia, the disappearance of the DFS and democratization in Mexico changed the balance of power. Criminal organizations, strengthened by financial and military gain, were able to confront the state and renegotiate their subordinated status with it, while the state was simultaneously in the process of losing its control over governors and its mediator role through the DFS. This new power balance allowed the criminal organizations to "intersect" with the state in many parts of Mexico and in some municipalities to subdue the political field.

Astorga's account of the intersection of the political and criminal fields does not suggest a horizontal relation between them. In fact, in some municipalities in Guerrero

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<sup>6</sup> Created in 1947.

and Michoacán, the criminal organizations clearly have the “upper hand”.

Narcotraffickers in these parts have been able to present their own candidates for local governments and keep the other candidates intimidated. Once in office they deplete local budgets, use the information from the land registry to extort residents and assign public contracts to their own enterprises (Trejo, 2014). This dominion of the criminal over the political field is captured by the term “criminal governance”, understood as the appropriation of state power for criminal activities (Arias, 2006: 294).

Mónica Serrano (2012) echoes Astorga’s relational account but emphasizes a different outcome of the state’s weakening: the privatization of violence. Serrano focuses on how a clampdown in Turkish heroin, the rerouting of Colombian cocaine flow through Mexico and the dismantling of the DFS mediation system led narcotraffickers to arm themselves. Extra resources, the disbandment of the DFS and the overhauling of four other security agencies<sup>7</sup> following the crisis triggered by the homicide in 1985 of Enrique Camarena, a US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent, not only closed a forum to structure the illicit drug market, it also provided the cartels with the incentives and the financial capacity to hire numerous security personnel who suddenly found themselves unemployed as a result of the above administrative changes (Serrano, 2012: 145).

#### 1.1.1.4 Violence by motives

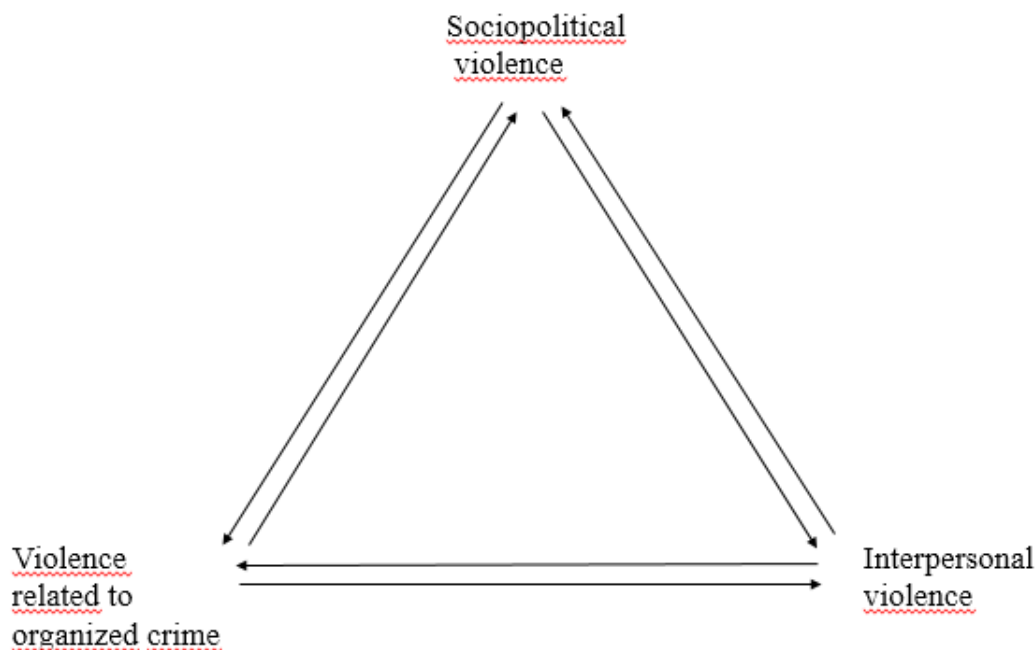
A fourth conventional axis to break down violent phenomena is according to their motivation. The UNODC (2013) identifies three categories of murder: those related to other criminal activities; socio-political homicides and interpersonal

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<sup>7</sup> The five chief anti-narcotic agencies that were disbanded or reformed are the Under-Secretariat for Investigating and Fighting Drug-Trafficking, the General Agency for Crimes Against Health, the National Institute for the Combat of Drug Trafficking, the Special Attorney for Crimes Against Health and the Under-Secretary for International Organized Crime (Serrano, 2012: 141).

homicides (p. 39). These apparently clear-cut classifications can be useful to show the complexity of types of violence that overlap, travel, mutate, fall in between, or affect each other as indicated in Figure 1.1. Scholars of Latin America have observed a pattern of “old violence” (from 1950 to 1980), in which violent acts were usually a direct political response to social inequality, political exclusion and authoritarianism. A pattern of “new violence” emerged after 1980. This new type was less openly political and only indirectly related to the state (Koonings, 2012: 255; Moser and McIlwaine, 2004). The change in the pattern implies that violence travelled from the upper corner to the lower-left and lower right corners in the diagram. The following section analyzes these categories in the Mexican context.

**Figure 1.1 Types of Violence by Motives**



Source: Own elaboration based on the UNODC (2013) categories.

#### 1.1.1.4.1 Violence related to organized crime

The explosion of violence in Mexico since 2008 was widely identified as pertaining to organized crime (lower-left corner Figure 1.1). The government was

instrumental in inducing this perception. The Calderón administration (2006 - 2012) promoted a narrative about violence in which at least 90 percent of homicides were caused by rivalries among the criminal organizations:

The image that has been transmitted about Mexico is that, if there were 6,500 deaths last year, [sic] the idea generated is that Mexican citizens are being abated by organized crime in this or any other city. And it is not like that. [...] In fact, according to police records those casualties last year tell us that more than 90 percent, 93 to be precise, are linked directly or indirectly to the organized crime gangs; they are drug dealers (Calderón, 2009, own translation).

Unfortunately, the police records are not reliable enough to substantiate a crucial assertion like this one made by the then Mexican president. In other words, they cannot be used to verify the criminal rivalry claim. Crime investigation in Mexico is carried out with opacity and inefficiency, and torture is used systematically by the police to obtain forced confessions (Human Rights Watch, 2011; CDH Tepeyac, 1993).<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Calderón repeated his interpretation on many occasions. According to the then Mexican president, the victims of the “drug war” were almost exclusively narcotraffickers killing each other. Violence was occurring outside the state and disconnected from the law-abiding citizens, with the rare exceptions of policemen dying in the line of duty and a few citizens hit by stray bullets (See Schedler 2015). This is not to deny that violence in Mexico is driven to a large extent by the battle between and within criminal organizations for the control of narcotrafficking and other illegal businesses. However, Calderón’s narrative obscured a series of collateral, interpersonal and political homicides that do not fit into his overarching “criminal rivalry” explanation. Doubts

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<sup>8</sup> The case of the 43 Ayotzinapa missing students exemplifies the extent to which torture is pervasive and entrenched in Mexico's judicial and police systems. Considering only federal officers, 55 of them were/are investigated for torturing municipal policemen from Iguala and Cocula while interrogating them about their participation in the forced disappearings. 19 of these federal policemen have been found guilty (Hernández, 2016: 367-372).

about the official narrative emerged when attacks and massacres against unarmed civilians started to take place on a frequent basis, including the killings of family members of the victims looking for justice, human rights activists, journalists and the tens of thousands of disappeared persons. These facts did not square so easily with the “93 percent” claim made by Calderon above, making it look like the figure was fabricated to maintaining a good image of the president’s crime control policies (Illades and Santiago, 2014: 106-107). A concrete and crucial accusation against Calderón was his deliberate attempt to hide the figure concerning the number of disappeared persons so that the true human cost of his war would not become known (Aristegui, 2012).

Despite Calderón’s efforts, the state’s official “criminal rivalry” narrative permeated popular belief only to a limited extent, with the professional background of the victim being a key predictor of the extent to which an individual believed that a particular violent death could be explained by the government’s overarching narrative. For example, in an opinion poll conducted in October 2013, only 35 percent of the interviewees believed that, when common people are killed, it must be because they are involved with organized crime. However, if the victim turns out to be a policeman then the percentage rises to 61 and if the victim is a politician to 72 percent (Encuesta Nacional de Violencia Organizada, 2014). In other words, the majority of the population rejects the idea that violence is external to the state. Police forces and politicians are perceived as linked to organized crime, a perception that was certainly reinforced by the disappearances of the Ayotzinapa students on the 26 and 27 of September, 2014 and many other tragic events in which authorities were seen to act as perpetrators.

#### 1.1.1.4.2 Sociopolitical violence

The perception about the participation of political and state agents in contemporary acts of violence is deeply rooted in the minds of many Mexicans and, as it



will be shown, is well founded. Ayotzinapa further brought into light the acts of political violence that were infamous during the 1960s and 1970s in particular, even if such violence has never been absent in Mexico. The massacre of approximately 300 participants in a student demonstration perpetrated by undercover police agents and the army just 10 days before the inaugural ceremony of the 1968 Olympic Games was a point of inflection in the country's history (See Poniatowska, 1971). The presence of national and international journalists during the massacre helped to show the authoritarianism of the PRI regime to the whole world (Aguayo, 2015: 126). A less overt episode of political violence was the "Dirty War", when Mexican state forces crushed rebels across Mexico, relying on torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, especially in the state of Guerrero (FEMOSPP, 2006; Comverdad Guerrero, 2014).

There is a clear connection between "political" violence in the 1960s and 1970s and "criminal" violence in the 2000s and 2010s. Organized crime benefits from the links with what Tilly (2004) called in his study of terrorism "government-employed and government-backed specialists in coercion" (p. 6). In Mexico, government intelligence agencies and special groups created to repress political dissidents, such as the DFS and the *Brigadas Blancas*, became crucial elements in the narco trafficking industry. In the Cold War context, criminal organizations were eager to buy protection or recruit DFS agents because the latter could act with absolute impunity. DFS agents became important for the criminal syndicates when narco trafficking began its exponential growth in the 1970s (Aguayo, 2015: 151).

Tilly's specialists in coercion are personified by characters like the director of the DFS, Miguel Nazar Haro, Francisco Quirós Hermosillo, the DFS coordinator, and Mario Arturo Acosta Chaparro, chief of the DFS Foreign Affairs Department and

simultaneously in charge of all the police corporations in Acapulco during the governorship of Rubén Figueroa Figueroa (1975-1981) (Padgett, 2015: 25). Nazar Haro was signaled by the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Past Social and Political Movements (FEMOSPP) as responsible of forcibly disappearing alleged members of armed groups in the 1970s (FEMOSPP, 2006). Quirós was tried and found guilty for *crímenes contra la salud*<sup>9</sup> by a military tribunal in 2002. He was accused of receiving money from Amado Carrillo Fuentes, leader of the Juárez cartel, although the sentence was revoked in 2006. Together with Acosta Chaparro, Quirós was also signaled by the FEMOSPP as responsible for torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Some of the bodies of their tortured victims were thrown from military airplanes into the Pacific Ocean. Interviews conducted by Padgett (2015) suggest that Acosta Chaparro grew opium poppy crops in the small hamlet of Corral de Piedra in the municipality of Leonardo Bravo, Guerrero, turned it into heroin and shipped it to the US (p. 17). In 1979, the crew from one of the planes used to throw out the bodies of alleged political dissidents was detained for carrying drugs from Acapulco to Laredo, Texas (Padgett, 2015: 32; Trejo, 2014). The accusation of protecting the Guadalajara cartel weighted over the DFS until it was finally discontinued.

#### 1.1.1.4.3 Mixed motivations

The connection between the "authoritarian past" and the "criminal present" goes beyond the continuity of certain perpetrators between these phases. Some crimes like those perpetrated against politicians, public officers, political activists or journalists can have multiple motivations; both a political and a criminal component. The assassinations of Iguala's political and social leaders Justino Carvajal Salgado and

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<sup>9</sup> Or "Crimes against health", a legal category of crime that includes narcotrafficking.

Arturo Hernández Cardona that preceded the forced disappearances of the Ayotzinapa students are an example of these mixed motivations. Salgado was elected Iguala's *síndico* -the second most important local public office after the presidente municipal. He was shot inside the building where his mother lives. According to Saúl Carvajal Salgado, his brother Justino was murdered because he confronted delinquents trying to seize public money:

Saúl: “Justino was the *síndico* responsible for managing town finances, authorizing and signing all the cheques and payments made by the local government. He was assassinated because he was affecting the interests of organized crime. It was the criminal group operating in the town (the ones responsible for his death), in collusion with the police.

Interviewer: So you attribute it (the murder) to *Guerreros Unidos*?

Saúl: Yes. When I started to investigate my brother's death, they sent me a message from someone, they wanted me to “cool down”. That group was operating before the Abarca administration and they were the ones who decided who will become mayors in their zones of influence” (Blancas Madrigal 2014, own translation).

Hernández Cardona was the leader of the Frente Unión Popular de Iguala (UP) – an umbrella organization comprised of civil society organizations and human rights advocacy groups. When Salgado was murdered, the UP leader was in the middle of a dispute with Iguala's mayor, José Luís Abarca, who refused to deliver fertilizer and social projects that he had promised before. Hernández Cardona accused Abarca of being responsible for the death of Salgado and declared his murder an act of political violence:

“We [the UP] vindicate the crime against Justino Carvajal Salgado as political, because only one power can authorize a crime against someone who does politics. Crimes against politicians do not occur as isolated cases, rather they are authorized by another power, equal or superior, but political power as well” (Salazar, 2014, own translation).

Hernández continued addressing himself personally to Abarca,

“My president, even if it may seem unfair what I will say to you now, from this moment onwards I make you responsible for anything that happens to a member of the UP.” (Salazar, 2014, own translation).

This address was violently interrupted by Abarca’s wife, María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa. A month later the UP blocked the Cuernavaca-Acapulco highway by taking over a paytoll at Puente de Ixtla, Morelos, 60 kilometres away from Iguala. Their intention was to pressure Abarca to deliver the pending fertilizer deliveries. On their way back to Iguala, an armed commando hijacked eight UP members. All of them were tortured and three of them, including Hernández Cardona, assassinated. One of the abducted UP members disappeared and four managed to escape alive. One of the survivors, Nicolás Mendoza Villa, gave his account in front of a notary, stating that Iguala’s mayor and police officers had conducted the torture and murders in person (La Jornada, 2013).

The aforementioned examples illustrate the motives of organized crime to “repress” social movements. Violence against popular leaderships was a response for denouncing an embezzlement of public finances and a murder, but it also served to terrify and tame one of the most combative social movements in Mexico. According to Saúl Carvajal Salgado, Iguala was silenced after the deaths of his brother and Hernández Cardona. When the attention brought by the forced disappearances of the Ayotzinapa students to Iguala started to fade away, the situation got worse. Afraid of what may happen to them, most of the family members of the victims now meet discretely in a church to continue organizing the search for the missing ones.

#### 1.1.1.4.4 Interpersonal violence

Criminal conflicts always have a profound interpersonal dimension.

Collaboration with the authorities or rival organizations are perceived as acts of treason and therefore as deeply personal. After crossing a “point of no return” parties involved in a (until then) predominantly criminal conflict can start to follow a predominantly personal logic. Regardless of their original motivations, conflicts produce their own grievances and create spirals of vengeance that end up clouding the original motives (Schedler, 2015: 58). Perpetrators relegate their illicit profit rationale from their set of priorities and give preference to revenge. The history of narcotrafficking in Mexico is full of acts of betrayal and vengeance. The case of the Venezuelan Rafael Clavel Moreno is an emblematic one. Clavel worked for the Arellano Félix organization. He infiltrated the rival Juárez cartel where he became a friend of Héctor Luis El Güero Palma’s sister. Then he seduced Palma’s wife, Guadalupe Leija Serrano, and convinced her to join him on a trip to San Francisco, California. Clavel decapitated the woman and sent her head in a cooler to Palma. He also threw their two children from a bridge in Venezuela. In the five years that followed the killing of his wife, Palma hunted down and killed Clavel, his sons, his partners in crime, as well as four Arellano Félix family members and their lawyer (Martínez Ahrens, 2016). Does it make sense to state they were fighting a “drug war” at this stage? The feud between Palma and Clavel is one of many. The plotline continues in 1993 when the leader of the Juárez cartel, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, decided to turn his employee Joaquín “*El Chapo*” Guzmán over to the authorities for his lack of discretion. Fuentes chose El Chapo’s partner and best friend Héctor Luis “El Güero” Palma to deliver El Chapo’s location (Hernández, 2015: 42). In January 2008, Guzmán turned Alfredo Beltrán Leyva, his cousin and partner, over to the police (Padgett, 2015: 27) causing a breakaway from the Sinaloa cartel and a war with

the newly formed Beltrán Leyva cartel. The brothers of Alfredo allied with the Zetas to fight against the Sinaloa organization and in May they killed Edgar Guzmán López, son of El Chapo (Valdez Cárdenas, 2008).

Conversely, interpersonal conflicts can also disguise or blend with political or criminal violence. As in Kalyvas' (2006) explanation for violence during the Greek civil war, personal motives may be an important factor behind denunciations of collaboration with the opponent in an irregular war (p. 178). In Mexico, little is known about the thousands of bodies left with *narcomensajes*,<sup>10</sup> many of which were hastily labelled by the Calderón administration as "criminals". It is possible that these victims indeed failed to comply with a "criminal obligation" or died at the hands of a rival organization. However, it is also possible that these victims were falsely accused as *soplones* (snitches or informers) by someone who wanted to settle a score with them. Or it can be that common people take advantage from the high probability of getting away with murder, taking the homicide of a personal enemy in their own hands, and then placing a fake *narcomensaje* next to the body to deviate the attention of the investigators. (See Schedler 2015:68; Cruz Monroy, 2014). Better, fine grained data (unavailable now) is needed to clarify these essential questions.

#### 1.1.1.5 Conclusion

This subsection offered a brief introduction to the different concepts and typologies applied to the study of violence, with a focus in Mexico. The specification of violence according to its organization, selectivity, relation of power and motivation will help us to better understand the following parts of the dissertation that will employ these

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<sup>10</sup> Notes usually containing threats to authorities and rival gangs and explanations about the motives for the killing.

categories for explanatory purposes. In addition, the broad term of internal war is considered to be useful to explain the criminal conflicts presently taking place in Mexico. Other concepts like criminal insurgency or criminal governance will also prove useful when they are applied to particular situations of the internal war contingent to the structure of power.

## **1.2 Theories of Crime and Criminal Violence**

When do crime and criminal violence increase? Why do people become deviant? What are the motivations behind this behaviour? Many theories have been developed in order to answer these questions. However, to a large extent, the state of the art with regards to the study of criminality is based in nuances or twists that stem from a relatively small set of classical theories. These nuances are very important, but the main axes were sketched decades and in the case of some theories even centuries ago.

### **1.2.1 The utilitarian theory**

One of the most influential of these “grand” theories is the utilitarian one. Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccaria are the two most renowned proponents of such approach. Bentham believed that people commit deviant acts when the “seducing” motives exceeded the “tutelary” ones that the act entailed:

“When the act, which a motive prompts a man to engage in, is of a mischievous nature, it may, for distinction’s sake, be termed a *seducing* or corruptive motive: in which case also any motive which, in opposition to the former, acts in the character of a restraining motive, may be styled in a *tutelary*, preservative, or preserving motive. (...) When a man is prompted to engage in any mischievous act, we will say, for shortness, in an offence, the strength of the temptation depends upon the ratio between the force of the seducing motives on the

one hand, and such of the occasional tutelary ones, as the circumstances of the case call forth into action, on the other” (2007 [1780] 142, 147).

Hence, Bentham’s utilitarian theory inaugurated the rational approach to crime by suggesting that individuals weight their motives when deciding about criminal acts. However, throughout more than two centuries, the predictive force of the utilitarian theory has been limited. Hirschi’s famous question: “Why don’t we do it?”, (2002 [1969], 34) although it was originally formulated to refine control theory, also captures the essential critique of the utilitarian theory: It has not been able to explain why most of the people restrain themselves from deviant behavior even when the likelihood of being apprehended for the deviant act and the costs are almost inexistent and the rewards are high. The utilitarian theory has also been criticized for failing to explain non-profit oriented crimes like those produced by anger.

#### 1.2.2 The biologic theory of deviance

Other competing theories were developed during the XIX and XX centuries, like Cesare Lombroso’s biologic theory of deviance, which proclaimed that some individuals were biologically more predisposed to commit crimes than others (Lombroso, 2006[1876]). Most of Lombroso’s criminality predictors (cranial circumference, asymmetries of facial bones, hair color, etc.) have been proven to be mistaken and nowadays even seem absurd. In broad terms, the biological theory of crime fails to explain the most important share of variance in deviance, which is non-biological. Hence Lombroso’s work has more merit for his methodology than for his predictions. He is renowned for inaugurating the scientific study of crime and his work is a clear predecessor of criminal profiling as a tool for criminal investigation. Correlates of biological characteristics such as age and sex with the likelihood of being involved in certain types of crimes are consistent in studies of crime. For example, since



certain types of crimes like homicides are high risk acts and young males are natural risk takers, young males are disproportionately represented in homicide cases.

### 1.2.3 Anomie and strain theory

Durkheim is the precursor of another prominent approach. He believed that crimes and suicides could be understood as a standard of morality. Therefore, crime should be linked to modernization because as such process develops, traditional ideals become less strong. Individuals detach from family and tradition as societies become more complex, and there should be a relation between social complexity and crime frequency (Alun 1986, Vilalta 2012). “Anomie” is the Greek word that Durkheim employed to describe such process. The original Greek term means something close to absence of laws but some ambiguity exists with regards to the sense with which Durkheim employed it. In *The Division of Labour in Society* anomie refers to the absence of norms needed to ensure the cooperation between different specialized social functions:

“Those actions (professional ethics for lawyers, magistrates, soldiers, professors, relationships between employers and white collar workers, between the industrial worker and the factory boss) most blameworthy are so often excused by success that the boundary between the permissible and the prohibited, between what is just and what is unjust, is no longer fixed in any way, but seems capable of being shifted by individuals in an almost arbitrary fashion. So vague a morality, one so inconsistent, cannot constitute any kind of discipline. The upshot is that this entire sphere of collective life is for the most part removed from the moderating action of any rules. It is to this state of anomie that, as we shall show, must be attributed the continually recurring conflicts and disorders of every kind” (1984 [1893], xxxii).

But in the *Suicide* (2010 [1897]), anomie seems to refer more to a confusion with regards to aspirations: Anomie brings the “malaise of the infinite” with it; a

condition where it is possible to “aspire to everything but not being satisfied by anything”. It is a question of “unleashed appetites”.

Merton (1938) was influenced by Durkheim’s ideas and presented a theory of deviance, again, without clarifying the meaning of anomie. Merton’s influential “strain theory” or the theory of institutional anomie (TIA), asserts that “aberrant conduct” can be understood as a symptom of dissociation between: “culturally defined goals, purposes and interests, (...) and the social structure that defines, regulates, and controls the acceptable modes of achieving these goals” (p.672-674). Anomie or strain theorists have reviewed Merton’s work looking for a definition of anomie. According to Besnard (2002), what Merton ultimately meant with anomie was precisely such contradiction between the culturally defined goals and the individual’s lack of access to legitimate means of achieving such goals (p. 512).

Merton’s strain theory states that people “innovate” when the means to meet individual aspirations are not available. Deviance is therefore understood as a sort of innovation, an adaptation that occurs when the acceptable modes of achieving cultural goals do not suffice. Strain theory has been understood as a theory of “differential access to the means to success” (Besnard, 2002: 512). One of the main predictions of the theory is that, given that opportunities for succeeding are unevenly distributed, deviance is most likely to take place among the underprivileged.

Strain theory has been criticized for being deterministic, and therefore incapable of leaving some room for agency (Davis, 1972). Nonetheless such critique is more against the structuralist approach in general than about Merton’s reinterpretation of Durkheim’s anomie theory in particular.

#### 1.2.4 Subcultures theory

Another important objection which turned into an improvement of the Strain theory was presented by Cloward and Ohlin (2001[1960]). They argued that, as it

happens with the socially accepted means to success, opportunities for crime were also unevenly distributed. Therefore, Merton's predictions were inaccurate. Crime or deviance should not be expected *necessarily* in the lowest socioeconomic strata, but in those places where socially accepted means are scarce and opportunities for crime abundant. Cloward and Ohlin also proposed a classification of deviance into three distinctive kinds of subcultures. They argued that adolescent males in lower class areas would attach to the type of deviant subculture that is available or closer to them. These included the criminal subcultures, the conflict or fighting subcultures, and the retreatist subcultures distinguished by evasive attitudes of alcohol and drug abuse.

Nevertheless, conceptualizing alcohol and drug abuse essentially as retreatist alternatives to other types of behaviors such as a "criminal" or "conflict" subcultures may be problematic. Under the substitutive logic underlying the subcultures theory, its prediction is that alcoholism should be negatively associated with violence. However, medical evidence in general and sociological evidence predominantly from the US indicate that alcohol availability may be positively related to crime and violent crime (Soyka, 2001; Gyimah-Brempong and Racine, 2006; Costanza, Bankston and Shihadeh, 2001). A first group of explanations about the alcohol availability-violence nexus has to do with alcohol ingestion. According to Soyka (2001), alcohol intake enhances the gamma-aminobutyric acid neurotransmission (GABA), which is the most important inhibitory neurotransmitter in the human brain. Once enhanced, the GABAergic neurotransmitter depresses the central nervous system and antagonizes the excitatory neurotransmitters, such as glutamate and dopamine. This psychotropic alteration can produce several states of minds in normal persons, including irritability, leading to spontaneous impulsive actions such as quarreling. Alcohol ingestion can be particularly harmful for some individuals (and their entourage) that are susceptible to a pathological intoxication known as the "idiosyncratic reaction". Such syndrome consists in severe

aggressive behavior and violent responses followed by a complete blackout (Soyka, 2001).

Anecdotal evidence across social contexts suggests that alcohol, rather than bringing violent behavior “out of the blue” from peaceful individuals, usually acts more as a catalyst of premeditated plans. According to such view, ill feelings can be kept unexpressed for long periods of time until people find themselves emboldened under the influence of alcohol and, without giving much thought to the consequences of their deeds, finally decide to carry out vindictive actions conceived in advance, sometimes ending up in perpetrating violent crimes like homicide. Not only perpetrating homicide is facilitated by alcohol consumption but the likelihood of homicide victimization also increases, since potential victims are less alert while inebriated. Data from the US Department of Justice for 1997 reveals that 37 and 20 percent of inmates in federal and state prisons respectively were inebriated at the time of their arrest. Similarly, 33 and 22 percent were under the influence of drugs at the time they were arrested (Mumola, 1998). According to Grant Stitt and Giacomassi (1992), alcohol is implicated in about half of all homicides, rapes, aggravated assaults and also plays a central role in domestic violence in the US.

Leaving aside the mind-altering effects of alcohol, some of the literature on the alcohol-crime nexus stresses the relevance of the social environment. According to this literature, poor socialization is the key for understanding crucial phenomena, such as the persistence of alcoholism and criminality across family generations. In other words, alcoholism and criminal behavior run through families because alcoholic or criminal parents tend to offer poor socializing environments to their children (Mcord, 1999).

A third type of explanation that seems to be particularly relevant for the Mexican case explores the supply side of alcoholic beverages. Alcohol outlets, including retailers, bars, restaurants and liquor stores not only increase the consumption

of alcohol, they can also be lucrative businesses and therefore extortion targets and/or effective tools for money laundering. A shocking example that illustrates this connection took place in 2011 in Monterrey when 52 persons died in a casino that was the target of an arson attack. It is thought that the gambling house was set on fire by the Zetas cartel because the owner did not pay extortion money (Archibold, 2011).

#### 1.2.5 Labeling or societal reaction

Labelling or societal reaction is another influential theory that switches the attention from the criminal acts towards the reaction of society to such criminal acts. According to labelling theory, what constitutes a crime is somewhat relative. Lemert's secondary deviance (2012 [1951]) or induced reoffending is the key conceptual tool. Society is in charge to categorize and stigmatize deviant acts. Once an individual has committed a crime, the law-abiding society rejects him while criminal peers accept him. On the long run, the offender is socialized in a criminal environment. Stigmatization and exclusion impedes him to return to a path perceived by society as honest.

A main critique to labelling theory is that, although its logic can explain the continuation of deviant behaviour, it fails to explain its origin. In other words, in a chain in which a criminal event subsequently leads to the next criminal event, it cannot explain why such events started in the first place. For such reasons, some consider labelling theory to be more promissory than productive (Davis, 1972).

#### 1.2.6 Neo-utilitarianism

Although the utilitarian approach was left behind during most part of the XX century, it regained its predominant place in criminality when economic theories began to spill over other disciplines to explain a wide range of social, political and moral phenomena in the nineteen sixties and seventies. Gary Becker recovered the notion of individuals rationally maximizing their utility in his influential model of 1968. As Becker himself recognized, his contribution was not so novel, rather a renewal of

Beccaria and Bentham's framework for illegal behaviour, a framework which was abandoned in social sciences for more than a century:

“Lest the reader be repelled by the apparent novelty of an "economic" framework for illegal behavior, let him recall that two important contributors to criminology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Beccaria and Bentham, explicitly applied an economic calculus. Unfortunately, such an approach has lost favor during the last hundred years, and my efforts can be viewed as a resurrection, modernization, and thereby I hope improvement on these much earlier pioneering studies (1968: 209).”

The neo-utilitarian paradigm has conserved its predominant place until nowadays, but not without receiving serious critics, coming particularly from sociologists, which complained about Becker's model in particular and rational choice in general for not taking into account the complexity of social life. But if sociology has been successful in showing the deficiencies of individualistic approaches as the neo-utilitarian, it has failed to provide a complete alternative to it. Therefore, micro-level mechanisms such as those provided by Becker have remained essential until nowadays. In this sense, the “constructive” contribution of sociology to the study of criminal behaviour is to complement the micro-level explanations that economists provided by taking into account that they are embedded in a macro-social structure. This type of models are considered nowadays to be the “state of the art” in order to analyse the complex phenomenon of deviant behaviour, given that they are sensitive to changes induced by multiple factors that interact at different levels, although they seem as a “second-best” option that is still waiting for a new paradigm to come and effectively replace neo-utilitarianism rather than complement it.

In conclusion, the theoretical tools to understand deviant behaviour include theories based in unbalances between desires and deterrent factors; biological

determinants; disproportionate aspirations; differentiated access to means of success; differentiated opportunities for crime; substance abuse and the reactions of society. All these mechanisms operate simultaneously at different levels of aggregation, influencing individuals that can choose by themselves their course of action, but the individual set of available opportunities is restricted by the social structures in which they are embedded.

The theories critically reviewed in this subsection have competed and/or complemented each other for decades, in some cases even centuries. Despite each theory's limitations, they remain valid explanatory frameworks nowadays. They constitute a general toolkit in which I rely in order to advance theory and conduct empirical tests analyzing the Mexican case. Now I turn to review the particular explanations offered to understand the wave of criminal violence in Mexico.

### **1.3 Crime and Criminal Violence in Mexico**

There is a unanimous consensus in that crime and criminal violence in Mexico are strongly linked to the illicit drug market. Nevertheless, although the country has already been a producer, provider and consumer of illicit drugs for at least 80 years it was becoming increasingly peaceful until very recently. (Astorga 2005; Ríos 2012; Osorio; 2013). What explains the last surge in violence? Why did Mexico become so violent in a relatively short period of time? Why some Mexican regions experienced a dramatic increase in violence but others did not? And what accounts for such a strong variation? This subsection reviews some of the main works that have tried to answer such questions.

### 1.3.1. Narcotrafficking, physical geography and criminal conflict in Mexico

The obvious characteristic that makes Mexico prone to drug related violence is its contiguous geographic location to the US, the largest consumer for illicit drugs in the world. It is fair to say that geography conspires against peace when it comes to Mexico. Together with the Caribbean, Mexico is one of the two main routes for smuggling cocaine into the US, which is produced in the Andean countries. But Mexico is not only a transit point of cocaine. It has also become an important producer of cannabis, heroin, morphine and D-methamphetamine and a consumer of all these drugs. The country has a history of smuggling illicit drugs into the US of more than a hundred years, since smoking opium was prohibited in the US following the Smoking Opium Exclusion Act of 1909. Since then smugglers have found a way to make their substances cross the 3,155 kilometre-length border. Smuggling practices usually took place in spite of the containment efforts from Mexican and US authorities and frequently with the help of corrupt agents on both sides (Astorga, 2000; Astorga, 2005; Díaz, 2015).

Therefore, given its geographic location, the country is propitious to host a vibrant criminal economy and face very particular security challenges. But such a geographically induced illicit economy has not always been violent. Paradoxically, the illicit drug business has helped to promote civil peace from time to time. Some periods of the history of crime in Mexico resemble to how mafia scholars have described Sicily during the 1950s and the 1970s, when the *cosche* or families organized themselves to make a pact and established a *pax mafiosa* (Blok 2001). As Malkin has observed, governments can benefit from narcotrafficking until this activity impinges its ability to function (2001: 102). The paradox can be taken to the extreme when it is acknowledged that a criminal economy with a certain level of organization can not only contain violence but have other temporary positive externalities like wealth redistribution, employment provision in regions with chronic unemployment and providing a sense of



achievement to frustrated individuals. Some Mexican scholars view criminal violence more as a symptom of illicit market dysfunctionality than as an indication of criminal prosperity (Osorio 2013). According to this view such dysfunctionality can be externally induced by crackdowns and law-enforcement operations. The fact that the government has to evaluate the utility of conducting crackdowns evidences the complexity of the security dilemmas brought by narcotrafficking. On one side the government may tolerate narcotrafficking to a certain extent for the palliative reasons mentioned before, but on the other it can easily get out of hand, chronically corrode the institutions and become a challenge for the survival of the state.

Furthermore, Mexico is not uniformly violent. The physical geography also seems to be crucial to understand why only some parts of the country have been affected unevenly by the wave of violence that surged in Mexico after the government intensified the crackdowns in 2006. For example, according to official estimates, in 2010 there were 15,273 homicides presumably related to organized crime, and 70 percent of those homicides took place only in seven states: Chihuahua (29%), Sinaloa (12%), Tamaulipas(8%), Guerrero(7%), Durango(6%) Estado de México (4%) and Nuevo León (4%) (Poiré 2011). In 2010 the average homicide rate for municipalities within 25 miles of the border was about 125 homicides per 100,000 people, whereas this figure for the rest of the municipalities was less than 25 (Arceo Gómez,2013:216). A starker contrast arises when we take into account that about a thousand municipalities (this is roughly forty percent of the 2,457 country's local jurisdictions) did not experience a single homicide in the year 2010 (Sistema Nacional de Información en Salud, retrieved from Maldonado and Grau, 2013).

Like borders, there are different types of regions that constitute strategic locations for those who –willingly or against their will- engage in the sometimes interdependent tasks of conducting a narcotrafficking business and fighting an irregular

war. Ports, roads and highlands are the areas that have been identified as important for drug trade organizations (Coscia and Ríos 2012; Osorio 2013). Insurgents, rebel groups or criminal organizations rely on ports, borders and roads to smuggle and transport weapons and, in the case of resource-driven insurgencies, export high-priced goods like precious wood or illicit crops. In rough terrains the presence of the state is usually weaker (Fearon and Laitin 2003) and therefore they constitute suitable locations for producing illicit crops and/or fleeing from authorities.<sup>11</sup> Nowadays it is widely accepted that the physical geography of some countries or country regions is conducive to conflicts. However, a strong variation among regions with similar geographic characteristics has led conflict scholars to focus into non-geographic factors. Moreover, geography remains the same when a given country or region transits from a low-violence equilibrium to a high violence equilibrium –as it happened with Mexico. Therefore the physical geography is part of the explanation of violence, but it is far from being a complete explanation.

### 1.3.2 Criminal violence in Mexico, cartelization and the erosion of social control

Anthropologist Natalia Mendoza (2012) studied the border community of Altar in the Mexican state of Sonora and explains that criminal violence in that village is linked to the erosion of local social controls. According to Mendoza, a process of “cartelization”, professionalization and redefinition of criminal zones of influence took place during the years when criminal violence increased. In 2005, an important number of the 9,000 inhabitants of Altar lived from guest houses where a flow between 1,000 and 1,500 potential irregular immigrants from Central America and Southern Mexico used to stay some days before crossing to the US. As this migration flow declined, the

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<sup>11</sup> A concept that seems useful is “territorial value”. According to Osorio, such territorial value act as a determinant for the geographic concentration of criminal violence (2013, 413).

economy of Altar stopped relying primarily in transit migrants and replaced its former economic activity with drug trafficking –an activity that was also mutating in itself.

The drug trafficking activity became concentrated in only one regional organization, apparently the cartel of Sinaloa. Independent and local traffickers were displaced and the feeling of belonging to this organization increased among its members. This is the process she understands as cartelization. As the control exerted by this regional organization on the local dealers became more direct, previously established communitarian controls against violence, drug consumption and other social transgressions became less effective.

Mendoza's work constitutes a valuable input about the dynamics of violence and drug trafficking in a small border town. Few studies manage to observe how a town that traditionally relied in the income provided by transit migrants suddenly substituted that income for drug money when out-migration decreased. According to her account, the violence seems to be, on one side, a result of the reconfiguration process and on the other concomitant to the new economic activity. Her insight is particularly important for this dissertation since, as it will be explained in further detail, I also pretend to document a substitution mechanism like the one detected by Mendoza. Nevertheless, instead of finding such mechanism only in regions of migration transit, I also expect to find it in regions where migrants originate.

In addition, I also aim to test if some of the processes detected by Mendoza's ethnographic method can also be registered with a quantitative and subnational comparative research method.

### 1.3.3 Poverty, inequality and criminal violence in Mexico

The so-called "objective indicators" of underlying grievances such as local economic deprivation and inequality have been shown to be associated with violence of many kinds, such as criminal, ethnic, political and civil wars (Gurr 1970; Blau and Blau

1982; Sampson 1987; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Laitin 2009). Some scholars like Stathis Kalyvas (2013) consider that the best conflict predictor is the gross domestic product per capita, at least for the macro level. Others like Guillermo Trejo (2004) claim that socio-economic variables are poor predictors of some conflicts like rebellions because they tend to change very slowly throughout time. Although Trejo is arguing particularly about the role of poverty and inequality for rebellion, his comment about the gradual change can be easily extrapolated to other types of conflict, such as large-scale criminal violence. The periods of crisis and accelerated economic growth are the exception.

In the Mexican context, some of the locations that became disproportionately violent had indeed been previously hit hard by material deprivation. Perhaps the clearest example is again Ciudad Juárez. The city started a period of decay in 2007 when part of the *maquiladora* industry was attracted by lower wages in China or Bangladesh and left Juárez. To make things worse, this relocation started the same year when the US economy began to fall in recession, and employment in the sector fell sharply (The Economist, 2013b). Violence in Juárez reached a critical moment in 2010 when the general homicide rate rose to 280 deaths per 100,000 people (INEGI, 2014). The US and Mexico had just gone through the worst year of the economic crisis. Since then, Juárez appears to be on the track of a slow process of pacification that goes in hand with the economic recovery of the municipality. Such process of economic recovery seems to be provoked in part by an increase in the Chinese manual wages that led to a partial return of the *maquiladoras* to the border city.

The socioeconomic conditions that gathered in Juárez were also present in other parts of the country. They have been reviewed by political scientist Javier Osorio (2012), who analyzes the role of the “structural determinants” of criminal violence in Mexico by using a database of homicides presumably linked to organized crime

published by the Mexican government. He shows how temporal and spatial variations of organized crime violence at the municipal level are associated with socio-economic variables, although he finds an opposite result with regards to his expectation in the direction of some associations. For example, he finds that homicides presumably related to organized crime are negatively associated to poverty. He suggests that this puzzling result might be explained by the prevalence of geographic above economic factors. Particularly, he explains that municipalities closer to the north of Mexico have been traditionally wealthier than the rest of the country, but since they are closer to the US, criminal organizations are more willing to fight for those locations in order to control smuggling routes.

Another concern with Osorio's study is his restriction to show associations among variables for a period consisting in only five years (2006-2010). Therefore, it is not possible to conclude causation nor to understand how criminal violence interrelates with structural determinants for a longer period of time. In other words, it is not possible to determine to what extent these factors are driving criminal violence or to what extent they are a product of it. Techniques to deal with endogeneity such as instrumental variable analysis could be applied in order to advance more in this approach. In addition, by using Poisson models instead of negative binomials he does not account for the overdispersion of homicides. Therefore he may have overestimated the impacts of the indicators of poverty and inequality on violence.

At last, just as it happens with geographic explanations, socio-economic explanations have failed to account for the strong variation in the violence levels among subnational regions with similar socio-economic characteristics. For example, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas are the three states with higher poverty rates in Mexico but Guerrero presents consistently higher homicide rates than Oaxaca or Chiapas. Such

variation has motivated researchers to consider poverty or inequality as important background factors, but to go beyond them in order to provide better explanations.

#### 1.3.4. Criminal violence, narcotrafficking and agricultural shocks

A team of researchers contends that the increase of criminal violence in Mexico is related to the crisis that agriculture has experienced in the last decades, particularly with regards to shocks experienced by the maize price (Dube, García Ponce and Thom, 2016). The Mexican countryside has produced maize since prehispanic ages and this crop still constitutes the basis of Mexican rural families' diet. But from 1990 to 2015 maize prices fell by almost 60 percent. Such plummeting in maize prices provoked a surge in the cultivation of marijuana and opium poppies in climatically suited municipalities. Violence concomitant to the drug trade increased with the substitution of crops.

Given the bulk of research focusing on the consequences of law-enforcement operations and political factors, Dube et. al. (2016) rightly chose to focus on the impact of alternative activities. However, they leave aside the analysis of out-migration which, as I will explain further on, has been a crucial livelihood alternative to legal crop production in the countryside.

#### 1.3.5. Weakness of social and political institutions, crime and criminal violence in Mexico

Lawyer Carlos Vilalta (2012) tests Merton's institutional anomie theory with drug-related crimes for the Mexican case. Vilalta's work starts from the assumption that Mexico is a society oriented to economic success. Therefore, following the IAT, the high economic vulnerability of some population sectors and weak social institutions should explain the occurrence of crime and violence. As indicators of economic, family, education, religious and political anomies, he uses proportions of the population in the informal sector; female-headed households; years of education; non-Catholics and non-

believers; and abstentionism, respectively. He concludes that the percentage of people in the informal economy and family structure are related to criminal behaviour.

Vilalta follows a clever research strategy. Instead of developing and proposing a new theoretical framework he applies and tests one of the most accepted theories to explain deviance. However, it is not clear how successful is his operationalization of IAT, particularly when he deals with economic institutions. For example, it is not clear to what extent the percentage of people in the informal economy is a good indicator of economic anomie. Nevertheless, the correlates he finds are useful per se.

#### 1.3.6 Violent pluralisms, democratization, decentralization and the severing of agreements between political authorities and criminal organizations

Latin America has experienced high levels of violence over the last few decades. Paradoxically, this spike in violence coincided with what Huntington (1991) labeled “The Third Wave of Democratization”. With the notorious exception of Cuba, over the last quarter of the twentieth century practically all the countries in the region abandoned military dictatorships or authoritarian regimes and adopted formal democratic institutions inspired by western models. The coincidence of high levels of political, criminal and interpersonal violence with the establishment of pluralist institutions led some political scientists to attribute the emergence of violence to failures in the implementation of the imported model (See Diamond, 1999).

Anthropologist Daniel Goldstein and political scientist Enrique Desmond Arias (2010) have criticized this implicit and frequently unconscious teleological assumption of political scientists. The authors do not only provide an essential critique to mainstream political science, they also propose a persuasive alternative perspective. In their own words: “Instead of viewing violence as indicative of democratic failure, we can, from a violently plural perspective (sic), understand violence as critical to the

foundation of Latin American democracies, the maintenance of democratic states, and the political behavior of democratic systems” (p. 5).

The provocative book turned the traditional interpretation of Latin American violence on its head by underlining the counterintuitive central role fulfilled by non-state actors in providing peace and order. By taking violence out from the residual place where it was confined and placing it at the very center of the functioning of Latin American political regimes, Arias and Goldstein echo Octavio Paz, the influential Mexican thinker and poet who once said that in Mexico corruption is not a disgusting feature of the system, but the system itself (in Calderón, 2017). For Goldstein and Arias the system is not corruption but violence.

This important reinterpretation could not go without raising questions. Some are uncertain about the particularism of Latin America and consider that the centrality of violence is also critical to the foundation of democracies outside the region (Jaffe, 2013). In addition, important research about to be published picks up where the authors left by understanding the implications of rule of law in terms of violence. According to Arias and Goldstein (2010), “[t]he problem, as so many essays here have demonstrated, is not that the rule of law has failed or that citizenship rights are not effectively extended to the population, but rather, because violence is now held plurally by both state and non-state actors, that the rule of law and citizenship mean different things to different actors” (p. 261).

A team of political scientists led by Guillermo Trejo (2016) returns to the traditional democratization approach and sees the failure of rule of law as a problem (both in real life and as a research problem). They find a strong correspondence between the differences in Latin American levels of violence and the “robustness” of the truth and reconciliation commissions that were formed when these countries transitioned to democracy. According to Trejo et. al. countries that adopted a robust truth commission



(with participation of broad segments of the population, public excuses offered from heads of states, convictions against high-level political figures) differ substantively from countries that did not. Concretely, countries that managed to expose and punish state officers who systematically violated human rights during the authoritarian era present nowadays significant lower levels of non-state organized violence (e.g. Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Perú and Uruguay) than those countries who did not (e.g. Brasil, Honduras and Mexico) or those who left the process incomplete (Guatemala and El Salvador).

This new research does not question the centrality of criminal and rebel governance, nor the weight of the different meanings of the rule of law, both correctly pointed by the violent democracies paradigm, but emphasizes that it matters *how* countries democratize. A different degree of democratic rule of law did have an effect in these countries, to the extent that it makes difficult to group Chile or Argentina in the same category with Mexico and Brasil. To a certain degree, government-employed and government-backed specialists in coercion were removed and prosecuted from the former political systems but remained embedded in the latter.<sup>12</sup>

The debate between violent pluralists and democratic transition scholars has ignored a very important fact: In some areas of Latin American countries migration was a more important “system” than violence or corruption. To use the language of Hirschman (1970), some populations have relied more in “Exit” than in “Voice” or “Loyalty” for their social reproduction. Migration should also be understood as critical to the foundation of some Latin American societies and not as a residual. The

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<sup>12</sup> Transitional justice efforts in Mexico were particularly disappointing. As Manteca argues, the FEMOSPP was condemned to its failure since its inception by accusing the expresident Luis Echeverría and high-level officers of genocide, a very difficult to crime to prove (Manteca, 2005). The exoneration of Echeverría and other high-level figures send the signal that, despite democratization, impunity would prevail for perpetrators of human rights abuses (Trejo, 2016).

massification of out-migration in the 1980s and 1990s made this particularly true for Mexicans and Central Americans that established migrant connections in the US as well as for Bolivians and Ecuadorans that moved to Europe in important numbers.

Another group of authors explain the current increase of violence in Mexico as a result of the country's democratization or political decentralization. Political scientist Viridiana Ríos (2012) explains that drug-related criminal violence in a municipality is linked to the degree of decentralization brought by democratization, because it increases the number of officers that have to be bribed and, therefore, the corrupting acts needed in order to sustain an illicit drug business increase. For most of the twentieth century Mexico was a federation only in formal terms as power remained highly centralized in the president. Decentralization came hand in hand with democratization, when public officers in different government levels started to belong to different political parties. This is, when the president, the governors and the mayors started to belong to different parties.

According to Ríos, criminal organizations will prefer to bribe authorities under a centralized, authoritarian regime, but when authorities at different levels of government start to belong to different political parties, bribing became more difficult and costly. In some cases a criminal organization must bribe officials at the three different levels of government (municipal, state and federal) because they come from three different parties. This constitutes a big difference with regards to the times when the PRI was the hegemonic party in Mexico (prior to 1997 or perhaps prior to 2000) when, in theory, a single corrupt agreement was sufficient given that the three levels of government shared the same party affiliation and were aligned. Under decentralization, violence became a cheaper alternative than bribing to pursue illicit activities and settle disputes with other criminal competitors. In addition, as decentralization limits the responsibilities of local authorities to their territorial jurisdiction, it provides incentives for the criminal

organizations to engage in strategic criminal behaviour, like exerting violence in other organization's area of influence while remaining peacefully quiet in places where they produce or sell drugs.

Along similar lines political scientist Melissa Dell (2015) observed that violence linked to the drug trade substantially increased after a close municipal election in which a National Action Party (PAN is the acronym in Spanish) candidate won during the 2007-2011 time span. She argues that, since the fight against criminal organizations was the main policy of the Calderón Administration, PAN mayors were more likely to cooperate with the federal government crackdowns and crackdowns were more likely to take place in municipalities ruled by the PAN. The reason why PAN mayors were more likely to cooperate in coordinated crackdowns is because they share the same party loyalty with the federal government. PAN mayors were also more likely to receive support from the Federal government and had more incentives to participate actively in the crackdowns. The main incentive was to be recognized by other PAN members as a mayor that strongly pursues the main federal official policy and be able to win nominations for more important political offices (senatorships, governorships, etc.). According to Dell (2015), it is likely that the violence that follow the crackdowns is in large part conducted by a challenger criminal organization trying to displace an incumbent criminal organization recently weakened by a crackdown.

Dell (2015) provides evidence about the association between municipalities governed by the PAN, crackdowns, violence and violence spill-over. Her work shows compelling evidence about crackdowns being an important part of the explanation for the violence registered during the 2007-2011 years and for the dynamic character of violence, following the possible deviations towards different narcotic routes.

Nevertheless, an empirical challenge for both Ríos (2012) and Dell (2015) concerns timing. Ríos needs to explain why, if government decentralization began since

the early 1990s and perhaps even earlier, violence erupted with such strength only from 2007. A similar question should be asked to Dell. Crackdowns or law-enforcement operations did not begin with the Calderón Administration. Former Mexican presidents like López Portillo, Zedillo and Fox conducted military and police operations of this kind without resulting in similar violent outcomes. A critical observer of Mexican reality may ask himself why previous crackdowns had no such violent consequences. As will be explained later in the text, Mexico is a society that experienced major demographic, political, social, economic and migratory changes over the last 40 years. In the context of such structural transformations, crackdowns may be seen, in Braudelian terms, superficial events that followed the more profound changes.

Finally, Dell (2015)'s model embraces uncritically the official narrative about drug-related violence in Mexico, according to which, in the words of Felipe Calderón, the previous Mexican president who launched the "war on drugs", 90 percent of the homicides occur among criminals fighting each other (Ramos 2010). While the Mexican government has not provided convincing evidence to sustain this claim, the recurrent deaths and massacres of civilians perpetrated by Mexican authorities, or by criminal organizations in collaboration with Mexican authorities, have contributed to weaken the notion of a criminal preponderance among the victims. Finally, Dell (2015) uses confidential data of drug seizures, meaning that her study cannot be replicated.

A third explanation about large-scale criminal violence based in political change is the one provided by the political scientist Javier Osorio (2013). Osorio argues that, as democratization erodes the peaceful configurations between governments and criminal organizations, incumbents are forced to act against criminals if they expect to win elections and to remain in office. Hence more clashes result between state authorities and criminal organizations, but also between criminal organizations among themselves. Once a criminal organization has been targeted by the state, its competitors take

advantage and attack them while they are weak in order to seize the territory that has just been interfered with by the state forces (Osorio 2012). Osorio's effort of data collection is impressive. To test his hypothesis he designed a text-annotation tool to obtain information from the internet and built a database with more than 9 million daily-event observations about law enforcement and violent acts.

However, his outstanding effort of data collection does not help him to follow a path different from other political scientists. Just like Ríos and Dell, Osorio ignores the changes in migration patterns that occurred at the time span analyzed in his thesis. Political scientists studying conflict dynamics in Mexico focus -understandably- in the consequences of political changes, mainly the Mexican democratic transition, but they tend to overlook the effects of the migratory transition that took place at the same time. They have succeeded in producing a series of testable explanations linking large scale criminal violence to political change. However, in achieving this task, they are not aware that democratization may have masked other crucial dynamics taking place simultaneously.

At last, as the Mexican transition to democracy has been geographically uneven, it follows that criminal organizations may actually flee or remain strong in those subnational regions where electoral competition is less developed and where they can establish corrupt agreements more easily to conduct their business as peaceful as possible. Nevertheless cases as the state of Tamaulipas question the democratization narrative. The state has been pointed out as the headquarters of the Golfo Cartel, a strategic place to control drug and migration routes to the US and for clandestine extraction of oil from subterranean ducts. As other border states Tamaulipas has become considerably more violent although there has never been alternation in the state government and 80 percent of the municipalities are ruled by the PRI.

### 1.3.7. What do we know about criminal violence in Mexico?

Criminal violence in Mexico is a multidimensional phenomenon and the literature already points to many explanatory factors, such as the erosion of social controls that followed the process of cartelization of the drug economy; a state of institutional anomy that propitiated deviant behaviour among people without opportunities to achieve their personal goals; structural determinants such as poverty, inequality, school drop-out rates; changes in family composition and, particularly, a process of political democratization that has pluralized violence, increased the costs of corruption and eroded peaceful configurations.

There are many tasks pending: to test processes of social disruption like those described by anthropologists but with systematic empirical studies; find adequate indicators in order to correctly operationalize and test general macro theories; explain associations among variables with theories able to explain violence in the correct time-span; complement structural with dynamic, agency sensitive explanations; correct the endogeneity problems that underlie in the feedback loops between poverty and criminal violence in order to understand causation; disentangle the links between political and criminal violence; and, at last, to analyze neglected phenomena that may have been masked by democratization. In the following section I briefly review the most important theories of migration with the intention to provide the reader with essential background for what will be discussed in the rest of the thesis, which is basically why part of the explanation of Mexico's criminal insurgency may be found not in the democratic, but in the migration transition.

## **1.4 Theories of Migration**

Just as criminologists, migration scholars also believe that the theoretical development in their field has not advanced much in decades (de Haas 2014: 4) or that it remains stalled in nineteenth century concepts, models and assumptions (Massey et al 1993: 432). There are many theories of migration but five of them are the ones that have received more attention.

### **1.4.1 Neoclassical economics**

As it happened in criminology, a predominant theory of migration also emerged from utilitarianism. In its macroeconomic version, the neoclassical theory of migration states that supply and demand for labour determines the movement of people (Lewis 1954). In its microeconomic version, individuals engage in a cost-benefit analysis to take decisions whether to move and where to move (Todaro 1976). In the long run the theory predicts that if the expected earnings surpass the costs associated with the different stages of migration (preparation for the trip, moving costs, settling, etc.), then individuals should move. However, it has been pointed out that the rational maximization of individuals' utility misses out the relevance of non-pecuniary factors. And those factors, like social networks, idiosyncrasy or infrastructure, have appeared to be very important in empirical studies (Massey and Espinoza, 1997). The response of the neoclassical theory has been to stretch the rational argument to embrace almost everything, from learning a new language and adapting to a new culture, to bearing the psychological stress of leaving family members. However, such response has left many people sceptical about its validity.

#### 1.4.2 The Livelihood Approach and the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM)

Another approach to study migration came from sociologists and anthropologists interested in rural poverty. These social scientists elaborated the “livelihood approach”, which rejects the simplicity of neoclassical models and proposes to focus on the complexity of the rural world, particularly on the concrete constraints and livelihood strategies of the rural poor. Nevertheless, this approach can also turn holistic, given that it analyses the people’s access to physical, human, financial, natural and social capital as well as the role of external shocks; the institutions that shape their livelihoods and the strategies they adopt to pursue their goals, among other factors (Carney 1999: 3). In this approach, migration is still obeying rationality, a rationality of survival in many cases. It is conceived as an essential element in the income-earning strategies of many people, regardless whether they are poor or not (de Haan 1999), but the relevance of the family and the local context is underlined.

Some economists made a parallel development and argued that, more than individuals, families, households or sometimes even communities were the essential units regarding migration decisions. The “new economics of labour migration” (NELM), argues that households turn to migration to diversify risks (Stark and Bloom, 1985). In this sense, migration does not seem very different from medieval marriages or choosing different vocations for the siblings of ancient families. Some members of an agrarian household may leave towards a wealthier country in order to obtain resources that protect the household from an eventual plant illness just as ancient families used to encourage one of the siblings to marry into a wealthy family, another sibling to become a soldier and perhaps another to become a priest.

If no calamities arise for such agrarian household, then the earnings of the household member abroad are remitted and can be reinvested in productive projects of



the household or consumed. On this point, the NELM perspective underlines that improving monetary income is not the only migrant driver. The income obtained is in many cases not invested but consumed. This is because according to the NELM it is relative, not absolute income and status what matters for most people and consumption makes such status visible to the local community.

#### 1.4.3 Social capital theory

The sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman are recognized as the creators of the concept of social capital. As with regards to anomie, there is no consensus about the meaning of social capital nor a satisfactory definition, despite social scientists have copiously used the term during the last 30 years. For Bourdieu (2011[1986]) social capital is:

“The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group- which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (p. 86).

For Coleman, social capital is “a kind of resource available to an actor” (1988: S98) and it can take many forms such as relations, norms or information channels. Despite the ambiguity of the concept, social capital has become, perhaps, the most important development of American sociology from the last three decades and notions derived from such theory have been applied to practically all the subfields of social sciences. Migration has been no exception (Massey et al 1987). Empirical studies usually avoid the difficult task of improving the concept and operationalize it with the bare presence of family and/or social networks. One of the most solid findings is that family and social ties have a determinant influence on migration decisions (Massey and

Espinoza 1997). The explanation for such influence is that networks reduce costs and risks and channel information for decision-taking. The relevance of networks for migration is not surprising given that migration can be a very risky choice for individuals that need to reduce uncertainty about their options (Gambetta, 1987). Leaving behind the place of origin and settling in the unknown, sometimes without relatives or friends to rely on and sometimes without knowing the language or culture of the receiving country can be very difficult. Therefore, at the “meso-level”, family and friendship networks are among the main factors considered by potential migrants. However, as has also been claimed, they can constitute a reason why most of the people decide to stay. For the latter option, family and friendship ties can be perceived as “location-specific insider advantages”, or social links that benefit insiders vis-à-vis outsiders in many spheres such as work and leisure activities (Windzio 2008).

#### 1.4.4 World-systems theory

As its name suggests, world-systems theory advocates for a systemic level of analysis instead of countries or regions. It traces back the emergence of the modern world to the process of capitalist expansion that occurred in the sixteenth century (Wallerstein 2004: 1-2). Capitalists, looking for raw materials and a better return for their investments, spread their capital from core to peripheral countries. Migration scholars influenced by the work of Immanuel Wallerstein have conceptualized migration as a part, in fact, as a consequence, of such broader social process of capitalist expansion (Portes and Walton 1981, Sassen 1988) According to Massey, world-systems theory conceives migration as a “natural outgrowth of disruptions and dislocations that inevitably occur in the process of capitalist development” (Massey 1993: 445). The arrival of capital transformed the places it reached. In the case of pre-capitalist agrarian economies, peasants were dispossessed from their lands when capitalist farming was established. Such process entailed the substitution of traditional subsistence crops for

cash crops and the erosion of ancient practices of collective labor and ownership. The ripped-off peasants were left without many choices. After losing their land their reduced set of options was either to continue working in the land that previously belonged to them as laborers or to follow the inverse path of capital to the cities or to more industrialized countries.

#### 1.4.5 Segmented labour market theory

Segmented labour market theory has a starting point in the equalization of income and status in receiving societies. To be more precise, the point of departure is the sociological observation that people tend to believe that income and social status usually go (and should go) together. Thus the higher the income of the profession, the higher the status and viceversa. A second observation that is central for the theory is that people do not work only for earning an income, status acquisition is also a very important motivation (Piore 1979) The disturbing factor that modifies such equilibrium is that industrial societies have a systemic motivational problem given their hierarchic structure. The problem arises at the bottom of the hierarchy. Industrialized countries have a chronic demand for cheap labour, but the workers at the bottom of the hierarchy are not motivated because they earn the lowest salaries and have the lowest status.

The solution of the problem is the partition of the labour market in two segments: one which is capital-intensive, and another labour-intensive. In receiving countries, native workers usually belong to the capital-intensive segments where qualified jobs are the rule, salaries are better, and unions protect their members. Immigrants from developing countries fill the labour-intensive sector where the attractive conditions of the other segment are missing and jobs available are those that the native labor force refuses to accept (Piore 1979: 3). Therefore, in a way immigrants solve the problem because they find the wages at the receiving country more generous compared to what they could possibly earn in their home country and because their

reference group is also in their country of origin, at least during the first years from their arrival. In other words, they don't pay attention to the social ladder of the receiving country because they are focused on the ladder in their community of origin.

#### 1.4.6 How does migration theory help to understand a criminal insurgency?

A short review of the theoretical literature of migration touches upon several elements that may be useful to understand the criminal conflict unravelling in Mexico. First, from a neoclassical perspective, out-migration arises from a rational calculation. People may decide to migrate in order to maximize their income after engaging in a cost-benefit analysis. Conceiving of migrants as rational actors inevitably situates them in a crossroad where out-migration is weighed against other economic alternatives. Taken into account the economic crisis in the US as well as the rising nativism and the militarization of the US border, both prospective documented and undocumented migrants may give up out-migration for other options. However, since the economic crisis also hit Mexico it is difficult to conceive that some of these would-be migrants were attracted by the Mexican formal economy. In contrast, "criminal wars" just like the one taking place in Mexico, share important features with regular wars, such as generating a strong demand for "soldiers", and the recruits are usually young uneducated males, a demographic profile that matches with that of many Mexican migrants.

Second, the NELM perspective conceives migration similar to an insurance against unemployment; a futures or capital market. Migration then is a preventive action against worsening economic conditions, job loss, or injury of some member of the household who is economically active. Such preventive action avoids that the household's livelihood is threatened by those events (Massey et. al. 1993: 437). Reconsidering again a post-migratory scenario in which a crisis in the traditional receiving country and militarization of the border increases the costs of such insurance,

then households will probably try to find an alternative to out-migration. Such insurance may be found in working for one of the narcotrafficking organizations. The attachment to a drug-trade organization may not only reduce unemployment, but other more fatal risks. For example, in the context of a chronic security crisis it may be more safe to attach the loyalty of the household to one of the warring factions in order to benefit from their protection and avoid extermination. Neutrality or “fence-sitting” practices are usually not tolerated in the context of civil wars (Kalyvas, 2006). Therefore, households may emulate medieval practices by sending their siblings as “soldiers” to the warring faction they hope will prevail in the conflict.

Another relevant aspect that can be found in the NELM and may help explain an internal war is the mechanism of relative deprivation. If people emigrate because they are trying to use the hard currency obtained in the receiving country in order to transform the social status conferred by their communities of origin, then it may make more sense to refocus in status activities at their place of origin given that crossing the border has turned lethally difficult. Turning into a criminal boss may indeed procure the income necessary to produce such status and the conspicuous consumption of items such as vans and houses may render it visible. Therefore, if a migrant livelihood continues to become increasingly difficult and demanding, then criminal options may become comparatively more attractive.

The predictions of segmented labor market theory go in the same direction as to those of the NELM. The majority of male Mexican labor migration in the US concentrates in construction sector which falls under the labor-intense typology. According to Villarreal (2014: 2211), this number accounted for 31.6 percent of the total Mexican-born males employed in US industry in 2006. But this industrial sector shrank 20 percent during the crisis and by 2011 it represented only 25 percent. It appears, as described by Piore (1979), that when the US was hit by the financial crisis,

the construction sector contracted more than other sectors and that migrants absorbed the cost of their own unemployment. Without unemployment insurance, many may have ended up returning to Mexico to cope with families and producing a surplus of young males with low education levels.

At last, world-systems theory may also help to explain the criminal insurgency in Mexico in terms of an even more reduced repertoire of actions for the population that was dispossessed by the process of capitalist expansion. If landless peasants at the periphery cannot even follow the inverse path of capital to the core countries, then their only choice left is rebellion, or at least a criminal, apolitical expression of rebellion as it was conceived by some Marxist historians that were in line with the world-systems theory (Hobsbawm, 1959).

## **1.5 Out-migration, Crime and Violence in Mexico**

The link between immigration and crime in the US has been widely studied. In contrast, researchers have not been interested so much in the link between out-migration and crime in Mexico and empirical studies testing the predictions discussed in the previous section are very scarce. Perhaps in a country like Mexico, where the official discourse portrays emigrants as heroes, developing theories that potentially attribute some blame to them is not a rewarding research strategy. In this section I will focus on the works that have appeared on the subject.

### **1.5.1 Migration, narcotrafficking and modernity**

Anthropologist Victoria Malkin (2001) states that narcotrafficking and out-migration are conceived as pathways in the quest for modernity. These groups attract risk-takers willing to challenge the social hierarchy ruled by land owners and local businessmen. Both phenomena mounted when Mexico reorganized its agriculture in

order to transit towards an international economy under NAFTA in the 1990s. Mexico removed a host of agricultural subsidies and protections, leaving rural communities with the sense that honest, hard work in the place of origin is a strategy that does not pay off.

Although the shock of economic liberalization took place at the national, macro level, the elements that ultimately shaped the development of narcotrafficking were local histories, politics and economies. The town where Malkin conducted her fieldwork is a case in point. “Mayapán”<sup>13</sup> is located in Tierra Caliente, a “frontier region” in the state of Michoacán. An important event in Mayapán’s history has to do with one of the groups that populated the town in colonial times. In the late eighteenth century poor rancheros came from the Bajío, a region located at the centre of the country looking for land. They were already predisposed to run risks in their quest for wealth and property. Second, the local economy was determined to a large extent by the state interventions in the 1930s, which connected the port of Lázaro Cárdenas to the train tracks and encouraged entrepreneurial behaviour, making it possible for agricultural entrepreneurs to produce cotton and melon for export. Unintentionally, the creation of such infrastructure and the promotion of entrepreneurial behaviour gave the same advantages to the narcotrafficking business. Third, narcotraffickers, as well as successful international migrants, emerged as new social actors in the local power struggle, capable of challenging the old order set by landowners.

Malkin’s conceptualization of migration and narcotrafficking as paths to modernity and her stress on local contexts are valuable elements that I recover for my own analysis. However, Malkin does not see the possibility of a hydraulic association between narcotrafficking and out-migration. Instead she describes the concerns of mothers of migrants about the possibility of a sequential association. In other words, the

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<sup>13</sup> The name is fictitious.

mothers she interviewed are very concerned about their offspring turning deviant during their time in the US.

### 1.5.2 Criminal violence and internal displacement

A criminal war can produce more displaced persons than a civil war. Viridiana Ríos (2014) has set herself to the task of calculating the number of displaced persons by using estimates from the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO). According to Ríos, current Mexican out-migration cannot be only understood by using traditional arguments of economic motivation and hardship. According to her, the recent developments in Mexican migration make more sense under the literature on crime, security and violence. She finds that more than 250,000 people have recently moved to the US not for economic reasons but fleeing from extortion and drug violence. Most of these recent migrants are not rural, working class individuals from the center-west but middle or upper-class Mexicans living in the border region. Ríos' work is successful in identifying a new type of migrant but she does not explore other possible connections between out-migration and violence. In particular, there might be a mechanism that connects the contention of migration with an increase in crime, such as it is suggested in this thesis.

In addition, if would-be international migrants are becoming internal migrants such transformation may generate tensions. The work of James Fearon and David Laitin (2011) is illustrative of this point. By relying on the Minorities at Risk (MAR) database, these authors have found that approximately one-third of ethnic civil wars take the form of an "Immigrant vs. Sons of the Soil conflict". Such conflicts occur when members of the dominant ethnic group migrate inside their country in search of land and jobs, usually supported by the state and frequently with economic incentives and development schemes promoted by the World Bank. The criminal war in Mexico has no



clear ethnic cleavage, but other types of identities (e.g. regional) are definitively important.

### 1.5.3 Migration, sex ratios and crime rates

According to the economists Carlos Chiapa and Jesús Viejo (2012), Mexican crime rates are associated with Mexican out-migration via sex ratios. Out-migration of Mexican working age males to the US has significantly distorted sex ratios in Mexico, generating a surplus of females, particularly in Mexican migrant communities. Such surplus of females constitutes an “incapacitation effect” in which a decline in the proportion of males reduces the overall homicide rate simply because males are statistically more likely to commit or suffer a homicide. Thus according to these authors Mexican crime rates have increased because the economic crisis reduced the predominantly male migration flux to the US and the so-called incapacitation effect disappeared.

However, Chiapa and Viejo ignore that sex imbalances caused by out-migration may also have opposing mechanisms with regards to crime and criminal violence. One of such opposing mechanisms is that since the sex disproportion also holds true at the household level, the number of female-headed households in migrant communities is higher than in other regions of Mexico. The positive association between female-headed households and criminal violence is well known in the US literature on crime and there are some empirical studies for Mexico as well (See Sampson, 1987 and Osorio, 2012). Several mechanisms have been suggested to explain the female household associations to crime and violence, like the negative impact caused by marital conflict and unhappiness on the siblings; the lack of informal social control in these families; and a mediating effect through poverty, given the fact that single-parent households are usually poorer than two-parent households.

Therefore, a reduction in the proportion of the female population may have contributed to increase violent crimes in Mexico, but the reduction in female headed households may have produced the opposite effect. Both effects may in fact neutralize each other.

#### 1.5.4 Remittances and crime

The economists Brito, Corbacho and Osorio (2014) observe that remittances are negatively associated with homicide rates. According to these authors remittances can discourage deviant behaviour through a variety of mechanisms. Reductions in poverty and budgetary constraints are the most straightforward. But apart from a direct effect in violent crime, such income surplus can also have a positive impact via education. By keeping young people busy and broadening opportunities, education deters crime. Finally, remittances also propel housing construction and therefore help to expand the construction market. This market is a labor-intensive one in which many low-educated young males are employed. Thus remittances can also deter crime by providing employment to the population group that is most involved in violent crime.

The argument that remittances can contain violence through a variety of mechanisms seems compelling. However, the authors ignore the discussion put forward by political scientists and exclude essential factors that may be taking place simultaneously such as government alternation. Apart from ignoring such a central factor, they use for their analysis municipal cross sectional data and state-level panel data but they do not use municipal-level panel data, which may be the optimum strategy given that it allows to analyze data variations in space and time at a higher level of disaggregation.

At last, they don't discuss sufficiently the reasons why remittances have declined and attribute such decline to the financial crisis alone. But the shift in border

controls and migratory policies may have also contributed to such decline and therefore contribute differently to the outcome in terms of homicides.

#### 1.5.5 Incarceration of undocumented immigrants

According to Martínez and Slack (2013) the inclusions of criminal sanctions into US immigration law; the emergence of incarceration practices to control unwanted immigration and the shift from a deterrence to an effect of containment strategy had unintended consequences in Mexico. Deportees from prisons and detention centers are recruited by cartels or targeted as enemy combatants if they are released in Mexican territories controlled by rival gangs. Also, the risk of being exposed to a potentially unfamiliar criminal element has increased for undocumented immigrants since they began to be incarcerated with regular offenders. Therefore, they can become inserted in deviant activities that otherwise they would not have known.

Martínez and Slack's reflection is an important point in the analysis of the Mexican war on drugs but it still needs to be more developed. Further elaboration about the specific mechanisms that connect migrants with a criminal underworld is required. Also, their observation about an exogenous factor affecting Mexican violence needs to be checked with the other causes discussed above. In other words, it is not clear how important these changes in immigration law are with regards to other endogenous factors occurring in Mexico.

#### 1.5.6 Border controls, *Narco-coyotaje* and the Decline of Mexican Migration

Whereas there is consensus that border controls have reduced dramatically the circularity of the undocumented migration flow, it is still a matter of discussion if and how US border controls have succeeded in preventing undocumented migrants from taking their first trip to the US. For example, Villarreal (2014), using data from the Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo (ENOE), finds a strong and significant

negative effect between the numbers of personnel employed in the southwest sector of the border and male international migration.

By contrast, Massey, Durand and Pren (2016) use data from the Border Patrol Budget and the Mexican Migration Project and find a strong and significant negative effect of this budget on the probability of crossing by a traditional location. However, they argue that border militarization did not prevent undocumented border crossings but only persuaded migrants to take less known and more dangerous routes or hire a coyote. According to these authors border controls had a small effect on the likelihood of detention and, ultimately, no effect on the probability of successful entry after subsequent trips. Nevertheless, the authors recognize that, in a sense, enhanced border enforcement may have worked by increasing the costs of unauthorized border crossing and the risks of death and ultimately altering migrant decision making significantly.

In addition to the “direct effects” that border control enforcement may have had in the decisions of potential migrants, there are “indirect effects” that are difficult to account for. The most important is perhaps the one mediated by the *narco-coyotaje*. The emergence of such phenomenon is complex. Peter Andreas (1998) also considered that border control enforcement disrupted the conventional routes and methods of undocumented entry, but emphasizes that: “it transformed the once relatively simple illegal act of crossing the border into a more complex system of illegal practices (p. 599).” In other words, border militarization unintentionally created a very lucrative market niche for human traffickers. Until the mid-1980s, during the times of lax border enforcement, border crossers could opt between crossing the border by themselves or hiring a coyote for roughly \$550 USD. After three decades of massive deployment of staff and equipment the average cost of hiring a coyote rose to almost \$6,000 USD (MMP 2016). A multi-million illegal industry emerged. The business became so

profitable that it attracted the attention of criminal organizations that were previously devoted exclusively to narcotrafficking.

This business incursion of the criminal organizations turned out to be particularly dangerous for undocumented migrants. After the “San Fernando Massacre”, an event where 72 Central and South American migrants on their way to the US were killed allegedly for not being willing to work for the Zetas cartel nor accepting to pay their own ransom, most of the potential undocumented migrants may be more afraid of falling into the wrong hands than dying by dehydration in the desert (Archibold, 2010). Therefore, from the standpoint of the policymaker who is narrowly interested in preventing undocumented immigration, border controls may have succeeded in scaring away migrants by empowering human traffickers, a much more fearful guardian of the US-Mexico divide than the Border Patrol. However, from the point of view of any reasonable observer of the security dilemmas that stem from Mexican migration to the US, this result is obviously counterproductive.

#### 1.5.7 What do we know about out-migration and crime in Mexico?

Some authors suggest that the economic crisis in the US and border control enforcement has decreased Mexican migration to the US. Most of the scarce literature on the topic suggests that decrease in out-migration increased violence in Mexico by ending sex ratio imbalances; producing a decline in remittances; and by inserting migrants into criminal environments. Yet these explanations have not been tested simultaneously or taken into account the other explanatory factors about Mexican criminal violence.

Considerations of a possible differential impact according to the type of migration are notoriously absent. For example, research on European irregular migration suggest that “geographical flows” (e. g. border crossers) are larger than “status-related flows” (e. g. people who enter legally with a visa or do not require a visa

to enter but then decide to overstay) (Triandafyllidou et. al. 2009: 108-110). This implies that border controls may have reduced only the former type of flow. Border controls may have even pushed some potential border crossers to change their migrant strategy by postponing their trip until they get the required visas and then trying the overstaying pathway, increasing thus status-related flows.

However, overstaying may not be an option for the many in the former social category because they would not qualify for a visa in their near future. For example, Moroccans who wish to enter in an EU country as tourists must provide consular authorities their last three banking statements and salary receipts; prove they have extensive travel insurance coverage which includes emergency and repatriation expenses; round-trip plane tickets and a hotel reservation or other proof of accommodation. Other type of visas like student or business visas demand even more documents. Similarly, US tourist and business visas are only granted to Mexicans who can demonstrate sufficient funds to cover travel expenses during their stay; as well as sufficient social, economic, and other ties to their home country to compel the applicant to return after a temporary visit. Therefore, although there is no conclusive evidence about a categorically different socioeconomic profiles between overstayers and border crossers, it is likely that overstayers tend to be better off than border crossers, given that the former meet the family or financial threshold to qualify for a US or EU tourist visa.

Among the border crossers, is also possible that expensive border control technologies are having a differentiated impact in the communities where they originate by effectively reducing the likelihood of the most deprived people to migrate and by not affecting the odds for those who are relatively less deprived. As de Haan has observed: “‘illegal’ migrants are usually required to pay-off officials, which makes migration more difficult and, therefore, probably more selective, denying migration options for poorer sections of the population” (1999: 30).

## **1.6 Internal War and Out-migration: a General Research Proposal**

In general, works about criminal violence in Mexico enter into two broad lines of inquiry: a transformation of political nature and a transformation of economic nature. On one side democratization seems to have increased the difficulties for the Mexican state to coordinate and fight criminal organizations or sustain corrupt agreements. On the other side unmet aspirations and structural determinants such as poverty and inequality may be the conditions underlying such a criminal conflict. Overall, the effect of the transformation of migration has been ignored although works on the subject are appearing at an increasing rate nowadays. Such omission in the literature is surprising because, apart from the transformation of state power by means of democratization, the transformation of out-migration dynamics by means of securitization can affect substantially the levels of large-scale criminal violence in Mexico by modifying the aforementioned structural determinants.

Therefore, the general research proposal that will guide this thesis is the following: Strain theorists have pointed out correctly that the means for social mobility are distributed unevenly. In unequal societies, such as Mexico, those means tend to be particularly concentrated. Throughout the twentieth century one of the main “innovations” carried out by Mexicans in order to tackle the absence of opportunities was to migrate to the US with or without documents. But the restrictive policies that the US began to implement in the 1990s and that turned draconian after the 9/11 attacks radically raised the costs of such passageway. Hence many members of migrant communities found themselves in the necessity to innovate again once their first solution was blocked.

Given that Mexico is an important provider of illicit drugs to its wealthier neighbor, and that the Mexican criminal economy can provide livelihoods for the

potential migrants that become disappointed with the idea to settle in the US, such secondary innovation was perhaps found in the criminal world. Furthermore, the decline of out-migration activated several conflict predictors based in competition, debts and feasibility of revenge.

As will be explained in the next chapter, the transition from a migrant to a criminal economy was facilitated because in some cases the opportunities to out-migrate and opportunities to engage in narcotrafficking are present in the same parts of the country as transport communication, proximity to the border and rurality shaped the availability of those opportunities.

These propositions follow: First, the surge in criminal violence may be connected to the decline of Mexican out-migration by several static but mostly relational mechanisms that need to be delineated, such as an increased competition for scarce local resources and by the transition from a migrant to an illicit livelihood unintentionally fostered by the new US punitive migratory regime.

Second, a general, pluralistic research strategy is needed in order to document how the associations among out-migration, crime and criminal violence take place because different research methods can provide answers to different questions that are still pending and –hopefully- together they can provide one comprehensive rather than many contrasting explanations. How do potential migrants decide whether to migrate or not? How does the economic and security context affect these decisions? Under which circumstances does crime becomes an alternative to migration? When does crime turn violent? How to document value changes among the individuals that envisage such options? How to correct the endogeneity problems underlying in the violence-poverty-violence explanations? Analytical narrative, controlled comparison, ethnographic and quantitative methods will be used to answer these questions.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Origins of Out-migration and Narcotrafficking in Mexico**

So far I have reviewed some of the most relevant works about large-scale criminal violence in Mexico, argued that the “Mexican migratory transition” is an important explanatory factor about such phenomena that has not received enough attention, and formulated the research proposal of this thesis, an argument of how US migration policies affected criminal violence in Mexico: By removing out-migration from the set of livelihood options shared by millions of Mexican families and individuals and by altering several relational and socioeconomic predictors of conflict.

This chapter constitutes the first empirical contribution to test this proposition. The first part provides a cross-sectional portrait of out-migration and analyzes why some regions were more likely to become migrant regions than others. Factors that facilitated migration to the US are identified. Then, since violence in Mexico is usually associated to narcotrafficking, the chapter analyzes why narcotrafficking originated in some parts of Mexico throughout the twentieth century and not in others. By analyzing both phenomena it is possible to detect that in some cases they were affected by the same factors. Such characteristics are proximity to the US border, connection to transport infrastructure and rurality.

#### **2.1 Origins of Mexican Out-migration**

In this section I provide a cross-sectional portrait of the origins of Mexican out-migration, as documented by migration scholars. A cross-sectional perspective allows a classification of migration regions and allows to identify the epicenters of out-migration. The purpose in this section is not only to identify such regions but to

understand the factors that led them to become centers of out-migration. It begins by analyzing the reasons that motivated people to out-migrate.

### 2.1.1 Migration as a response to market failures

One of the most accepted understandings of Mexican migration to the US is that migration, more than a response to poverty, is a response to market failures. The grounding for this claim is introduced in this subsection. There is no pretention to produce a socio-economic history of migration. Instead, the aim of the subsection is restricted at presenting basic information about the limited alternatives in the countryside to prosper since the end of the Bracero Program (1964). The lack of opportunities makes more understandable why people left but also the relevance of international migration in rural Mexico. Four aspects are discussed: the socio-economic conditions in the ejidos; the criteria adopted by the government for land redistribution; the quality of the labor market; and access to housing credit.

#### 2.1.1.1 Socio-economic Conditions in the Ejidos

First, in the 1960s an important share of the population from the ejidos was finding very difficult to provide a livelihood for themselves. This was true even with the existence of complementary policies directed at improving the finances and productivity of ejidos like credit schemes and policies of prices. The credit granted by the *Banco de Crédito Ejidal* was scarce and hoarded by the wealthiest ejidos. Only 10 percent of the ejidos had access to credit (Gilly, 1978: 372). Similarly, the *precios de garantía* (guaranteed prices)<sup>14</sup> also benefited agricultural producers unevenly. Guaranteed prices were introduced to promote the production of some goods considered to be strategic and to benefit agricultural producers (Appendini and Sales, 1980: 200). In practice, they

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<sup>14</sup> Minimum fixed prices, usually above the international market price at which the state bought agricultural yields.

were more advantageous for large-scale producers and their deficient implementation worked to the detriment of the small-scale producers. The profit of this latter type of producers was usually captured by intermediaries and usurers who bought their yields between 30 and 70 percent below the guaranteed price and resold the product to state companies like the *Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares* (CONASUPO) (Gilly, 1978: 372). In 1960 34 percent of the ejidatarios had to work outside their ejidos to complement their income (Appendini and Sales, 1980: 188).

Ten years later the socio-economic reality in the ejidos was even worse. According to a study conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) with the 1970 census data there were 2.2 million peasant families in Mexico. The majority (56 percent, or 1.4 million families) were in an “infra-subsistence” socio-economic level. In other words, these peasant families had less resources than the minimum required to fulfill their basic consumption needs. 16 percent (414,000 families) were above the subsistence level but without the possibility to generate any wealth. Six percent (165,805 families) were potentially profitable and only eight percent (209,704 families) were in fact generating economic profit. In addition, there were 185,000 families without arable land and 87,000 families without land at all (1981: 105-109). This critical situation persisted despite the efforts of the government to distribute resources, including land, the central resource demanded by the peasants.

#### 2.1.1.2 A Political Criterion for Land Redistribution and Subsidy Allocation

The way in which land was granted contributed to the lack of opportunities in the countryside because it followed a political criterion. In the 1970s Mexican presidents had become fearful of a general insurrection. The armed rebellions in Guerrero and a series of large-scale land invasions in several states (Fox, 1993: 56)

were not good signs. These developments motivated presidents Diaz Ordaz (1964-1970) and Echeverría (1970-1976) to use the Agrarian Reform as a political tool to contain rebellions. These presidents titled more land than any other president since Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) (Trejo, 2012: 68).

The President was the only authority with the faculty of issuing a decree titling land. Nevertheless, before reaching the President, land petitions were screened by subnational agrarian commissions. These commissions were controlled by the governors and CNC members and in practice acted as intermediaries of the reparto agrario in their territories of influence. Once the land had been titled by the President it was not allocated immediately. The administrative procedure of granting the land was returned to the subnational commissions (Ley Federal de Reforma Agraria, 1938 and 1972). Peasants were thus trapped in a clientelist scheme in which governors and the CNC acted as intermediaries of the *reparto agrario*. To obtain their land peasants had to show their loyalty to the CNC and the PRI by participating in their mobilizations and electoral rallies. On average, it took a decade of participating actively in clientelist politics until land was finally handed over for good (Trejo, 2012: 67-69).

After Echeverría, President López Portillo (1976-1982) intended to “modernize” the countryside. His reforms again proved beneficial only to a reduced number of relatively well-off productive units. Lopez Portillo supported the adoption of the Agrarian Development Law (LFA) which was originally proposed by agribusinesses. The aim of the LFA was to attract private investment into agriculture. The main change it contained was the legalization of the rental of the ejido, an already widespread practice before the law came into effect (Fox, 1993: 76).

In order to give certainty to private land owners and investors López Portillo reduced the amount of land titled during his presidency to less than a half of the land

titled by his predecessors (Trejo, 2012: 68). Instead he implemented a new tool for political control. This tool was the Mexican Food System (*Sistema Alimentario Mexicano* or SAM) a massive food subsidy and distribution program financed with resources from the oil boom. The SAM was intended to help campesinos at the infra-subsistence level to complement their dietary needs. It was foreseen by the architects of the reorganization of the countryside that some families (close to one million) would not be able to reach economic viability. They were expected to lease their land and incorporate to other “productive units” as laborers. A Marxist interpretation of this incorporation portrayed it as: “concentration of property and proletarianization-pauperization of the peasantry” (Bartra, 1993: XV).

#### 2.1.1.3 Labor Informality

Another crucial factor weighting in the decisions of many Mexicans to emigrate is the deficient performance of the labor market. Many labor relations in Mexico are characterized by their informality, particularly in the countryside. 60 percent of the working force (29.4 million people) has an informal job (INEGI, August 2016). These people have no access to social security or social benefits.<sup>15</sup> Informal labor is also geographically concentrated in the poorer states, partly because those employed in subsistence agriculture are also considered to be informal.<sup>16</sup> Informality is not the only challenge of the Mexican labor market. Low wages, discrimination and precarious labor conditions are also serious concerns. Nowadays there are 52 million workers in Mexico.

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<sup>15</sup> Although this population does have access to the Seguro Popular, a public insurance offered for free and covering several health services like medical exams, cervical cancer treatment, prenatal and delivery care and dental treatment. It was established by the Mexican government in 2002 (See The World Bank, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> The seven states with the highest informality rates are Oaxaca (81%) Guerrero (80 %), Chiapas (80 %), Michoacán (73%), Puebla (73%) Tlaxcala (73%) and Hidalgo (72%). In contrast, Coahuila (37%), Chihuahua (35%) and Nuevo León (36%) have the lowest rates (INEGI, 2016).

68 percent of them earn less than three times the minimum wage<sup>17</sup> (less than 6,000 Mexican pesos or 306 US Dollars per month) (STPS and INEGI, 2010).

Mexico's Labor Secretary's overview of the challenges in the labor market include strong discrimination against young people, old people, those who suffer some sort of disability, those with indigenous traits and women, who are paid 40 percent less for doing the same jobs that men do. All these shortcomings take place despite a wide range of protections included under Mexican constitutional and labor law. The problem does not reside in the absence of legal provisions but in that the government does not have the capacity (or will) to force companies and employers to comply with the law. The government's limited capacity is revealed, for instance, by a dramatic lack of job inspectors (Navarrete Prida in Mexico Social, 2013).

#### 2.1.1.4 Limited Credit for Housing

Credit for housing has been accessible only to the population with middle and high incomes and to some segments of the population with low income. Large segments of the latter are far from fulfilling the constitutional right of every Mexican to *vivienda digna y decorosa* (decent and appropriate housing)<sup>18</sup>. The Financial Housing Program (PFV), Mexico's main housing policy from 1963 to 1989, required a down payment of 10 or 20 percent from potential borrowers, which represented, on average, a whole year's salary from the borrowers. As a result, 65 percent of the population did not have the financial capacity to access any credit scheme under the PFV (Connolly, 1997: 29). The working-class segments which did have access to mortgage loans were almost all

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<sup>17</sup> In Mexico, the minimum wage is considerably below the market wage, an economic and legal aspect that can be deceiving. In fact, workers earning three or four times the minimum wage can find themselves very constrained economically. The minimum wage per day is 80.04 Pesos (4.16 US Dollars).

<sup>18</sup> Article 4, Political Constitution of the Mexican United States.

linked to the state.<sup>19</sup> An important exception has been the private employees affiliated to the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS). But aside from the IMSS affiliates, working class segments with access to mortgage loans included public employees ascribed to the State's Employees' Social Security and Social Services Institute (ISSSTE), workers from Mexican Petroleums (PEMEX), the electricity company Compañía de Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LyFC) and the army (Connolly, 1997: 26). Like the titling of land these credit schemes also followed a clientelist logic because the workers' contributions to social security were used to finance highly subsidized housing for a just few beneficiaries with the aim to strengthen the social bases of the PRI (Connolly, 1997: 26).

Housing credit not only has been scarce, economically and politically selective, it has also been geographically selective. Mortgage loan schemes have been available mostly in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and in a few medium-size cities (Coulomb and Schteingart, 2006: 504). As a result of the difficult access to housing credit, very few households acquire their housing through a credit scheme: in 2006 only five percent of the total households in Mexico do so. Furthermore, households earning less than three times the minimum wage and with a mortgage are almost inexistent (only 0.5 percent). The overwhelming majority of the credit schemes are hoarded by the population earning eight times the minimum wage or more (Connolly, 2006: 107).

In sum, although political criteria for land redistribution, low remunerated jobs and the absence of credit, mortgage, saving and risk diversification schemes may not necessarily mean poverty, they are very persuasive motivations for Mexicans to leave to

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<sup>19</sup> This tendency started well before the PFV with Álvaro Obregón offering houses to workers affiliated to the Workers' Revolutionary Union of Mexico (CROM) in 1921 in Exchange of political and electoral support (Cohen, 1979: 781).

the US. Evidence shows that when Mexicans leave, many of them have the expectation of returning to Mexico after a few years and being able to buy a house, buy land or start a new business (Massey, Durand and Malone, 2003). Nevertheless, failing markets are a phenomenon that spread beyond regions of out-migration. Since migrants do not come from all the Mexican territory in which the labor and housing markets failed, low remunerated jobs or absent credit schemes do not constitute a sufficient explanation of Mexican out-migration. Opportunities to solve such market failures by moving to the US became available only in some parts of the country. Furthermore, international out-migration was one solution, sometimes precarious and insufficient, to the problem of failing markets, but it was not the only solution. In some parts of Mexico people turned to internal migration. In other parts they found no solution at all, and people had to endure the passing of time without alternatives for economic and social mobility outside the limited ones provided by the national economy.

Why then did only some parts of Mexico become out-migration regions and not others? Four characteristics have been highlighted: proximity to the border, rural character, the penetration of the rail track and contact with recruiters.

#### 2.1.1 Proximity to the border and out-migration

The first condition seems to be tied to the process of Mexican migration since its inception. Towns close to or at the border have the oldest migration history to the US. Moves from these regions are documented since the nineteenth century although migration was more a local than an international process back then. These moves were basically short trips of populations with social ties with the American towns, until these towns became American when Mexico ceded Upper California and New Mexico to the US under the 1848 treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Massey, Durand and Malone, 2003: 25).



The oldest Mexican guestworkers to the US also seem to come from the north. In 1909 the presidents of Mexico and the US, Porfirio Díaz and William Taft, signed an agreement to allow 1,000 Mexican agricultural workers from the northern Mexican states to work on beetroot fields in Colorado and Nebraska. According to Casarrubias, these migrants were from northern Mexico (1956). Later, when the Bracero Program was implemented (1942-1964), one provision included in the bilateral agreements made it cheaper for US employers to hire Mexicans from the northern regions. Concretely, it was established that US employers should cover the cost of the workers' transport from its place of origin in Mexico to its final destination in the US; the cost of transporting 35 kilograms of his personal belongings and, until 1948, they also had to cover the costs of the worker's return to his place of origin (Casarrubias 1956). Hence, employers could save transportation costs by hiring workers from places close to the border. This provision gave the US a motive enough to pressure Mexico for the opening of recruitment centers as close to the US as possible. In order to pressure Mexico, the US even opened centers at the border unilaterally (Gómez Arnau 1990). The Bracero agreement of 1948 explicitly stated that centers would not be opened south to the Guadalajara – Querétaro latitude. This provision was certainly the result of the employers' lobbying seeking to reduce their costs and obviously decreased the probability of recruiting migrants from the south vis-à-vis migrants from the north or central-western parts.

Nevertheless, even if hiring workers from the northern part of Mexico presented a cost-effective solution for employers, the US had to confront a Mexican demographic reality: Historically the north has been the least populated region in Mexico. The Sonoran Desert extends not only to Sonora and Arizona, but also to Baja California and Baja California Sur. Also, the Sierra Madre Occidental represents 1,500 kilometers of rough terrain from the US border at Arizona deep into Mexico. The Chihuahuan desert

is the largest desert in North America and in Mexico covers not only Chihuahua but most of Coahuila, parts of Durango, parts of Nuevo León and Zacatecas. Hence when the First World War stimulated the demand for agricultural workers in the US, the American farmers had to reach at least the Mexican population cores that are located south to the deserts at center-west Mexico. Given the lack of population in the north, wages were comparatively higher, labor conditions better, and people less willingly to leave than in other Mexican regions. The recruitment practice extended beyond the north although Monterrey, Ciudad Juárez and other northern towns were already important population centers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Such regional difference persists until nowadays. For example, in 2006 the Mexican government launched the Matrícula Consular program in order to provide an identification for Mexicans in the US. Data of such program shows that the border region only accounted for 11 percent of the total Mexican population in the US, whereas the so-called “historical region”<sup>20</sup> represented 45 percent. To sum up, the migration contribution from the border region was smaller compared to other regions. Nevertheless, it is an important migration region because it has the oldest history of migration to the US.

#### 2.1.2 Rurality and out-migration

In order to set the context for this subsection, the term rurality is discussed. Distinct ecological, functional and socio-cultural features of "the rural" and its polar counterpart, "the urban" can be traced back to the work of Ferdinand Tönnies' ([1887] in Harris 2001). These differences were captured by the classic sociological concepts *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (civil society). Tönnies depicted the former as “real”, small, organic communities driven by kinship ties, patriarchal authority and

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<sup>20</sup> According to Durand (1998) the historical region is comprised by the states of Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, San Luís Potosí and Zacatecas.

“common sense” and the latter as “artificial”, driven by the dissolution of traditional forms of authority and “rational thinking”.<sup>21</sup>

This dichotomy became very influential in both social sciences and in common perceptions. In the US ecological, functional and socio-cultural dimensions of the urban (and therefore also of the rural) were seen as overlapping. For example, Wirth (1938) stated that: "On the basis of three variables, number, density of settlement, and degree of heterogeneity, it appears possible to explain the characteristics of urban life and to account for the differences between cities of various sizes and types" (p. 18).

Nevertheless, the view of the rural as a place where ecological and socio-cultural rurality meet began to be challenged at least since the 1960s (See Dewey, 1960). Instead, it became clear that traditional rural culture had weakened over the course of the years; that capitalist expansion, industrialization and urbanization had acted as a homogenizing force, and a debate began about the extent of this homogenization (Miller and Lullof, 1981: 609).

Some argued that the gap between city and country lifestyles was not so important and not so big either. According to Dewey (1960) scholars of the urban in the US had intentionally exaggerated the cultural differences with the rural in order to consolidate their field of study as a separate one. Later a study of values by Buttel and Flynn (1975) concluded that there were little differences in “agrarian values” between samples of urban and rural populations in Wisconsin (p. 48).

This lack of difference turned the term rurality into a problematic one. As Miller and Luloff (1981) explained: “To the extent that the spatial distribution of people is

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<sup>21</sup> According to Tönnies: "Everyone who praises rural life has pointed to the fact that people there have stronger and livelier sense of Community. Community means genuine, enduring life together, whereas Society is a transient and superficial thing. Thus Gemeinschaft must be understood as a living organism in its own right, while Gesellschaft is a mechanical aggregate and artefact (Tönnies [1887] in Harris, 2001: 19).

causally related to (or at least covaries substantially with) occupational categories, on the one hand, as well as to the set of values, beliefs and behaviors that are theoretically characteristic of rural people, on the other hand, there is little cause for concern. To the extent that the three aforementioned dimensions of rurality are independent of each other, the customary practice of using geographic residence to measure the general construct will be of questionable utility (...) and will potentially introduce systematic but undetected measurement error into the analysis (p. 610).”

In Mexico anthropological investigations also indicate that the expansion of capitalism and state policies have forced some agrarian communities into cultural assimilation or marginal confinement. Nevertheless, they also stimulated a response from these communities and in some cases ended by strengthening them (Warman, 1985: 17; Hernández-Díaz 2010: 154). According to Bonfil Batalla (1991), the intensity and the deepness of a social identity depends, among other things, on the solidity of given group’s culture (p. 53) and therefore its capacity to resist.

Particularly among Indian communities, capitalist penetration triggered a process of introspection in which the members of these communities looked into their vast array of cultural repertoires to find strategies that could help them in their social reproduction.<sup>22</sup> For example, Giménez and Gendreau (2003) in their study of rural communities in the Atlixco valley, Puebla, find that “globalization” has not fundamentally affected the culture of the Atlixicans. Instead, Atlixicans have conserved their traditions; managed to remain outside the influence of the city of Puebla; mass media have been received through local cultural frames; and international migration has not eroded but reinforced local culture and identities under a transnational logic.

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<sup>22</sup> These cultural practices include norms of accountability, reciprocity, horizontal cooperation and self help (Fox, 2007: 64) For a description about these cultural practices see Warman (1985), Kearney and Besserer (2004) and Fox (2007).

According to Hirabayashi (1993), villages in Oaxaca's Sierra Juárez have been able to maintain social cohesion despite high rates of migration to urban settings due to their "cultural capital". As a complement, Lewis' (1965) discovery of "urban villages" showed that the culture of internal migrants can resist urban assimilation when they move to the city. These are usually *vecindades* (popular neighborhoods) where rural migrants concentrate and where family values, religion and lifestyles remain important.

Opinion studies also provide a more complicated perspective of the rural-urban divide. In a recent poll 77 percent of the interviewees considered traditions as very important. Amongst those who answered 'very important' there were more women than men, more Catholics than people with other creeds or no religious beliefs; and - contradicting the conventional view that people from rural areas are more conservative - a greater proportion came from urban settings like Mexico City, (IIJ-UNAM, 2014).

The intricateness of the task of defining rurality has resulted in different actors providing different definitions that stress the different dimensions of rurality discussed above to better suit their political or academic interests. For example, government agencies usually focus on the ecological dimension. They understand and operationalize rural areas as delimited geographical zones with low population density.<sup>23</sup> By establishing a – frequently arbitrary – population threshold these agencies conclude their definitional effort.

In contrast, some authors have decided to focus on the functional dimension (see Halfacree, 1993: 24), but this solution risks obscuring rather than clarifying the meaning of rurality. In other words, by basing the notion of rurality in agriculture they miss out on the most important struggle and reality in these sites: the quest for finding

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<sup>23</sup> In Mexico this threshold is 2,500 inhabitants (INEGI, 2010).

alternatives to agricultural production and the complexity and diversity of economic activities (Arias, 1992: 15 - 16).

In sum, there are no simple conceptual choices about the term rurality. Nevertheless, to avoid any confusion, the main sense with which the term is used in this subsection is the ecological sense, unless explained otherwise.

Conceptual issues specified, the second essential character of Mexican migration is rurality, in part because Mexico was predominantly rural when international migration to the US rose. In the 1920s Mexican migration to the US was already an important established phenomenon with thirty or forty years of existence (Durand, 1991). At that time almost 70 percent of the Mexican population lived in localities with less than 2,500 inhabitants. In 1940, still 65 percent of all the Mexicans lived in rural localities and in 1960 still one out of two did (Zenteno, 1962)

Nevertheless, the main reason behind the rural character of Mexican migration is that the US has looked particularly for agricultural workers throughout different historic periods. For example, the “Burnett law”, a migratory law enacted in 1917 with the purpose to curtail the illiterate migrant flux from Eastern and Southern Europe, established as requirements for immigrants over 16 years old to know how to read and write and to pay an 8-dollar entry fee. But the drafters of the Burnett law did not foresee the immediate bellicose future. The need to boost the US agricultural production following the country’s entering the First World War motivated American politicians to establish an exception in this law tailored for Mexican agricultural workers. Workers on a temporary basis and employed exclusively on agriculture would be exempted of such requirements. These workers were basically the Mexicans (Durand, 2007b) and mostly Mexicans from the countryside.

Later on, during the time of the Bracero agreements, it was decided that only unemployed men 20-40 years old, physically fit for agricultural labor, and without land

were eligible to become a Bracero, although formal eligibility provisions were seldom respected (Fitzgerald, 2006: 274). Furthermore, when the Mexican government opened in 1942 the first emigration station to recruit Braceros in Mexico City, US employers complained because most of the workers to recruit in such urban location did not have enough work experience in agriculture. In the years thereafter, Mexico reacted to the pressure exerted by the US by closing the recruitment center at Mexico City and opening other emigration stations in regions like Jalisco, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato and Michoacán where farm laborers were abundant (González, 2013). According to González (2013) most recruiting took place in poor peasant villages, where the possibility of work in the US seemed a wonderful opportunity.

The predominant rural character of Mexican out-migration has lasted until nowadays. A survey conducted in 1969 found that 84 percent of the Mexican migrants came from a rural background (Samora, 1971 in Bustamante et. al. 1998). In another survey from 1978-79 that percentage was in almost 70 percent (Colef 1979). The portrait of out-migration that we obtain by looking at the data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) has also a strong rural character. According to Massey and Espinoza, 62 percent of the communities where the migrants came from were agrarian communities (1997: 956). According to the *Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México* (Colef, 2012) one out of two would-be migrants interviewed in the US-Mexico border and Mexican airports nowadays is still employed on agriculture, despite the process of agricultural mechanization taking place in both countries, despite the accelerated urbanization process in Mexico since the second half of the twentieth century and despite the diversification of migrant occupational backgrounds.

### 2.1.3 The railroad and out-migration

A third factor that defined Mexican migration was the arrival of the railroad. The railroad provided an unprecedented opportunity for mobility, but this mobility became a

reality mostly in those areas that were connected by the railroad or closer to it. In regions far away from the track, out-migration opportunities were scarcer. According to Massey, Durand and Malone (2003), seminal moments for Mexican migration occurred when Washington enacted the restrictive Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan. Such policies banned immigration from those Asian countries and someone had to take their place. Hence US recruiters looked for Mexicans to continue building the rail route to the US South West (p. 27).

The railroad provided the means to get to a new destination but in some cases it also provided the motive. It pulled workers by opening an opportunity to reach the US and look for a better paid job but in some cases it also pushed people from Mexico because According to Katz (2004) a recently built railway line usually made the value of the nearby lands skyrocket. These lands ended up in the hands of wealthy *hacendados* in most of the cases, leaving behind a dispossessed and rebellious peasantry (p. 12-13). The tracks expanded drastically during the *Porfiriato* (1877-1910). The Mexican Central Railroad connected Mexico City with the US border at El Paso, Texas (Monroy 1999). In the US, the railroad also generated a strong labor demand apart from the construction of the railroad itself, as it became one of the main factors behind the development of a capitalist economy in the American hemisphere. It connected Mexican villages to the fertile US South West fields and the agricultural production of these fields to the burgeoning cities on the Eastern US coast. It thus linked labor force with land and the production of this land with a final consumer destination. To sum up, apart from the proximity to the border and rurality, Mexican migration to the US was also shaped by the access that some populations had to the railroad network.

Map 2.1 shows the regions that were connected by the Mexican Central Railroad tracks. The main line opened in 1884 and connected Ciudad Juárez with Mexico City, joining important population centers on the way like Chihuahua, Zacatecas,



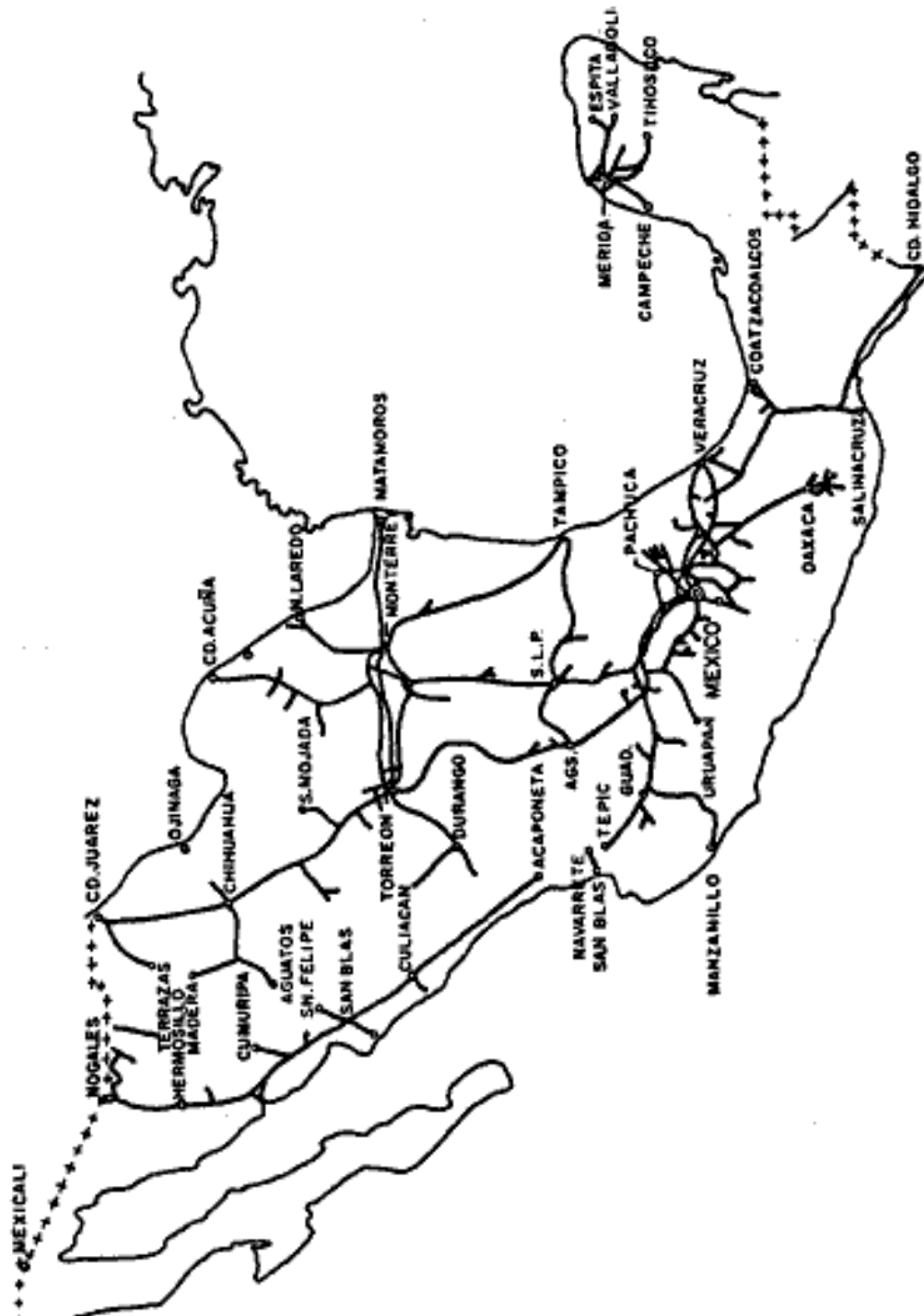
Aguascalientes, Guanajuato and Querétaro. A major branch departed from Irapuato towards Guadalajara and joined towns in the west of the country to the main line. The west of Mexico became the best connected region to the US. According to Durand, the railway connection that linked in an early and direct manner the west of Mexico with the US “sealed a pact” between supply and demand of cheap labor between both countries (1991, 9). In the 1920s a study based in money orders estimated that nearly 60 percent of all Mexican migrants came from Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato (Gamio 1930 in Durand, 1991, 32).

More densely populated than the north, these states became the epicenter of Mexican migration during the bracero era partly thanks to the train connection. The railroad also connected other places, some of which became migration regions. The Monterey and Mexican Gulf Railroad joined the main line with the port of Tampico, including Ciudad Victoria, Monterrey and Saltillo in the network. 500 kilometers south another branch also joined the main line with Tampico’s port, including San Luis Potosí in the network. The Mexico, Cuernavaca and Pacific Railroad was another line departing from Mexico City to the south. It was intended to reach the port of Acapulco on the Pacific coast of Guerrero but it was never finished and its construction ended when it met the Balsas River. Two important tracks that existed at the time were the Sonora Railroad and the Mexico City-Veracruz Railroad. The former connected Sinaloa with Sonora and the US border in Arizona and the latter connected Mexico City with the most important port in the gulf and also added to the network the important city of Puebla. All the regions that became epicenters of migration were connected to the railroad network. Many migrants came from Sinaloa, Nayarit, Puebla, Querétaro and Veracruz, although these cases are not so well known as Michoacán, Guanajuato and Jalisco, the so-called states of historic migration (Sánchez, 2012, Lizárraga, unpublished).

In contrast, out-migration from southeast Mexico was almost inexistent and just emerged in the last few decades. This is not surprising. The states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo are the most distant from the US border.

Furthermore, during the Porfiriato, when most of the railroad lines were built, the only part of Chiapas that was reached by the Pan-American Railroad was its western coast, leaving most of the Lacandona jungle and the highlands in a pristine state. In Yucatán some rail lines were built near Mérida to export sisal production through the ports in the Gulf of Mexico, but these lines never connected to the Mexican Central Railroad.

Map 2.1 Mexican Railroad System, 1910



Source: Reproduced from Coatsworth, 1981, 34.

#### 2.1.4 Recruiters and emigrants

The last important element in shaping the regional variation of Mexican out-migration was the contact with recruiters. As already mentioned, most of the recruitment took place in rural settings that were close to the railroads, but these rural settings were also close to emigrant worker stations. According to Taylor (1934) (in Durand 1991), news about job opportunities in the US were brought to the hamlets by ranchers and peddlers that went by horse to sell products to Guadalajara, Querétaro, Aguascalientes, Guanajuato and Morelia (p. 178).

The two last elements introduced –proximity to the railroad and proximity to the recruitment stations – are closely linked for two reasons: First, because recruiters traveled by train and second, because Mexico only established Bracero recruitment stations in population centers that were already connected by railway. Since these two conditions overlapped in the center-west, it is no surprise that most of the migrants are originally from that part of the country.

**Table 2.1 Years and Locations of Bracero Recruitment Stations**

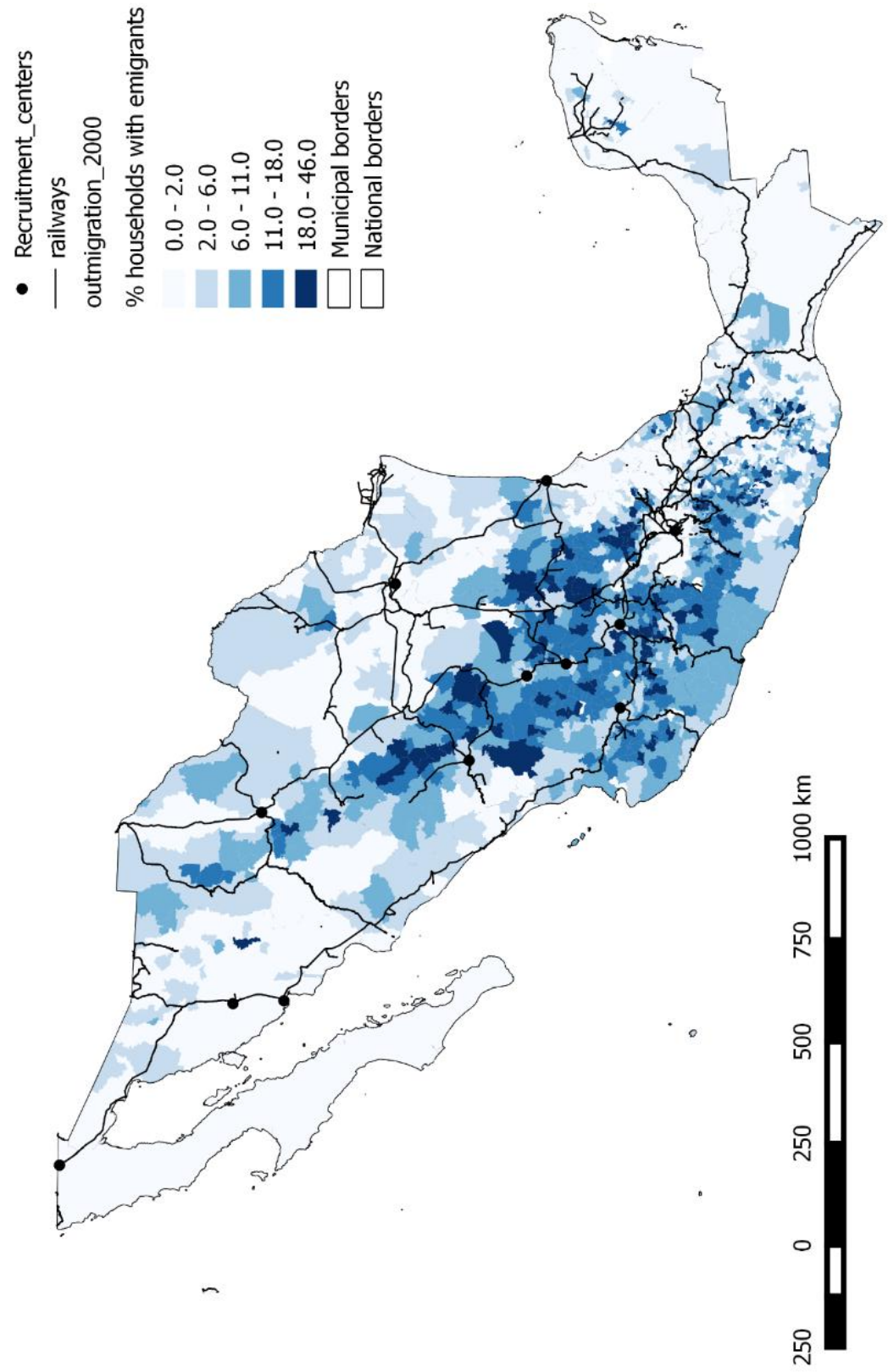
<b>Location</b>	<b>Year</b>
Mexico City	1942
Guadalajara, Jalisco Irapuato, Guanajuato	1944
Zacatecas, Zacatecas Chihuahua, Chihuahua Tampico, Tamaulipas Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes	1947
Hermosillo, Sonora Chihuahua, Chihuahua Monterrey, Nuevo León	1949
Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes Guadalajara, Jalisco Irapuato, Guanajuato Monterrey, Nuevo León Chihuahua, Chihuahua	1951
Monterrey, Nuevo León Chihuahua, Chihuahua Irapuato, Guanajuato Guadalajara, Jalisco Durango, Durango	1952
Mexicalli, Baja California Monterrey, Nuevo León Chihuahua, Chihuahua Irapuato, Guanajuato	1954

Guadalajara, Jalisco Durango, Durango	
Hermosillo, Sonora Mexicali, Baja California Monterrey, Nuevo León Chihuahua, Chihuahua Irapuato, Guanajuato Guadalajara, Jalisco Durango, Durango	1955
Monterrey, Nuevo León Chihuahua, Chihuahua Empalme, Sonora	1962

Source: Kosack, 2015: 45.

Apparently people outmigrated from some regions connected to the railroad and not from others mostly because recruiters arrived only in some of those previously connected regions. To be sure, they were present in population centers in the central-western region like Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán and San Luis Potosí (Massey, Durand and Malone, 2003: 27) but apparently they did not cover other regions included in the rail network like Morelos or Hidalgo and certainly did not arrive in Southeast Mexico. As a result, out-migration from those parts took longer to emerge.

Map 2.2. Levels of Outmigration by Municipality in Mexico, 2000



### 2.1.5 Conclusions

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century in Mexico, the failure of labor and credit markets were phenomena of national scale. However, people responded to these failures by migrating to the US only in some parts of Mexico. Unsurprisingly the places that became emigration regions were those where opportunities for outmigrating were concentrated: Rural places close to the border or in the center-west region; places close to the rail tracks and places close to Bracero recruitment stations. The profile of the migrants was also shaped by recruiters. Mexican migrants were usually young males with a rural background because recruiters were looking for that specific profile. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, international out-migration was not the only solution to the labor and credit markets underperformance. Another important response to failed labor and credit markets was narcotrafficking. The conditions that favored the growth of the drug trade industry are analyzed in the next subsection.

## 2.2 Origins of Narcotrafficking

In this section I provide a cross-sectional portrait of narcotrafficking and analyze the reasons that led this activity to become embedded only in some parts of the country. Just as it happened with out-migration, narcotrafficking is rooted only in some parts of Mexico, despite nation-wide failing labor and credit markets. Some of the factors used to explain the origins and growth of out-migration are also present in the explanations about the emergence of narcotrafficking. Such coincidence should perhaps not be a surprise. Both out-migration and narcotrafficking in Mexico are, in essence, responses to US demands. The former is a response to demand for cheap labor whereas the latter

responds to the demand for medical and recreational drugs. Therefore, both of these phenomena were likely to develop in those parts of Mexico that were either closer or better connected to the US, such as the north or the center-west. Two of the conditions that favored the growth of narcotrafficking in Mexico were the same that facilitated out-migration: Proximity to the US border and transport connections, particularly rail tracks and ports. The other elements that are not present in the literature of out-migration are weak institutions and rough terrain.

### 2.2.1 Proximity to the border and narcotrafficking

Mexican border regions have been crucial for smuggling illicit goods to the US and conducting activities that became illegal in that country since the beginning of the twentieth century. The banning of drugs, alcohol and gambling in the US created a very important market niche for narcotraffickers and liquor smugglers in Mexican border cities.<sup>24</sup> Given the industrial scale that drug and alcohol smuggling acquired it was necessary to establish numerous routes along the border. Recio (2002, 29) mentions 11 cities involved in alcohol and drug trade in the times of prohibition; seven of these are located at the border (Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Piedras Negras and Matamoros), three others on the Pacific coast or close to it (Ensenada, Mulegé and Culiacán) and one at the Gulf of Mexico coast (Progreso).

Furthermore, the prevailing view nowadays is that strategic border areas are the most important territory for narcotrafficking, even more important than places where illicit drugs are produced, giving smugglers predominance over growers or producers, at least for the particular case of the drug trade to the US. The available explanation about why Colombian organizations specialized in cocaine production ended up subordinated

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<sup>24</sup> The US federal government banned opium imports in 1906 and regulated national usage and traffic of narcotics under the Harrison Narcotic Act in 1914.



to Mexican organizations is based in an increase in the bargaining power of the Mexicans after they seized control of the transportation and distribution routes to the US (Rico 2013). The Caribbean route for smuggling drugs was practically closed after it came under heavy surveillance in the 1990s, when the US deployed their Army and Navy in that sea. This initiative provided a golden opportunity for Mexican traffickers as the only route left to smuggle drugs into the US was through the Mexican border, a three thousand-kilometer-long “backdoor” (Valdés 2013:190-191; Bagley 2001: 4-5; GAO 1996; ONDCP 1997). The control of several smuggling technologies such as tunnels, desert routes, light airplanes, drones, catapults and – above all – the connections with corrupt officials at the US border are assets that turned localities contiguous to the border into essential gateways for narcotraffickers.

#### 2.2.2 The railroad, highways and narcotrafficking

An overlooked but crucial aspect for the growth of narcotrafficking in Mexican regions was, again, the train connection. As it happened in California, Chinese coolie laborers also arrived to Baja California and Sinaloa in Mexico to place railroad sleepers and to work in mine shafts in the late nineteenth century (Romero, 2010). When xenophobic attitudes against Asians mounted in the US, many Chinese from California migrated to Mexico where they could find help from their kin and to work building the rail tracks in Mexico. Therefore, while Mexicans substituted the Chinese building the rail tracks in the US, the Chinese expelled from the US substituted Mexicans in Mexico. As was usual with the Chinese diaspora worldwide, they brought poppy seeds and the cultivation knowledge with them. They planted them in the Sierra Madre highlands where they found the adequate climate for the crop (Valdés, 2013: 32; Grillo 2012, 25-26).

The railroad was important not only because it conditioned the location for the establishment of the first opium cultivators in Mexican territory, but also because it was

the most useful means of transport for any merchandise by the time the drug industry came into existence and for most of the twentieth century. It transported people and goods at less cost than other means of travel (Coatsworth, 1981). The railroad was the optimal means to transport opium produced in Sinaloa to the US (Valdés, 2013) and drugs coming from Europe by ship through the Panama Canal, with various stopovers along the Mexican Pacific Coast. Ships were unloaded at Nayarit, Sinaloa and Sonora and their freight was then transported north with the Southern-Pacific Railway (Recio, 2002).

The recently disclosed testimony of the Flores brothers at a federal grand jury in the US has revealed that the railroad continues to be of central relevance for drug smuggling nowadays. According to this testimony – which was crucial for bringing down the inner circle of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán – from 2006 through 2008 the Sinaloa Cartel smuggled 60 million worth of cocaine every month by using freight cars with hidden compartments travelling from Sinaloa to Chicago (Longhini, 2014).

While the twentieth century advanced, means of transport like aircrafts and highways also became important for the shipment of licit and illicit goods. The railroad construction practically stopped when the Revolution broke out. Once the civil war resumed Mexican governments decided to build highways instead of railroads. The road network started its exponential expansion. By the end of the century the relationship between means of transport was upside down. In 1993 the overwhelming proportion of passengers (98 percent) and goods (62 percent) were transported by highways (Salinas, 1994). Highways became more important for human mobility and for narcotrafficking. Gledhil (2012) captured the threefold impact that the arrival of a highway had in the Indian community of Ostula, Michoacán: “the construction of a highway along Michoacán’s coast facilitated not only migration and peasant commerce but also the involvement of indigenous people in marihuana cultivation” (p. 244)

### 2.2.3 Corruption, caciques, frontier regions and narcotrafficking

Proximity to the US border and transport connections were important factors that correspond to the growth of narcotrafficking in Mexico. In addition to geography or logistics, social scientists have stressed the role of political and social factors. According to Steffensmeier and Martens (2001), organized crime tends to emerge in places where the government is “weak” – this is, where it lacks legitimacy or cannot fully control a territory under its jurisdiction (p. 2931). A former director of the main Mexican intelligence agency, the Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (CISEN), also recognizes such “weakness” as a key factor behind the surge in Mexico’s illegal drug industry (Valdés 2013: 15).

Even if there is no consensus about what exactly ‘weak institutions’ means, in Mexico this alludes very strongly to two phenomena: corruption and caciques. The former impedes the government to work efficiently and latter has been a major challenge for the territorial control of the central state throughout Mexican history. A third phenomenon, which is not so often alluded to as the two previous ones, is the condition of a “frontier region”, or, as Turner argued for the US (2010 [1920]), territories in Mexico where free uncultivated land was available for Spanish or Mestizos willing to settle there.

With regards to corruption, a historic-cultural explanation traces back the origins of such dishonest practices to the times of the Spanish colony: “the Spanish Crown, heritier of the judicial tradition, introduced in the occidental hemisphere a system to solve disputes designed to preserve armonious relationships among honorable persons. This system presupposed the reality of God’s justice” (Arnold, 2000: 49).

According to historian Enrique Krauze (1995), monarchs had not only absolute political power but also absolute patrimonial power when Mexico was a Spanish colony. Such prerogatives allowed the king’s representative in the colony, the viceroy,

to run public office as his own private business. As the Catholic Church used to do with regards to indulgencies, viceroys could even sell public offices. Therefore, it is no surprise that the personal enrichment of colonial officers was a morally accepted practice. This colonial legacy of corruption at the highest levels was challenged during the Reform period (mid-XIX century), but suffered a backlash during the Porfiriato, when a dictatorial president could grant magnanimous concessions to his friends if he pleased. Only the judicial apparatus seemed to be honest and efficient during that period, at least compared to what was yet to come (Krauze 1995).

The Revolution came in hand with redistribution in power and wealth (Katz, 2000: 88) and opportunities for many poor men to become rich (Krauze, 1995). Katz suggests that, although it is very difficult to define what constitutes a corrupt practice, particularly during a revolution, many *revolucionarios* engaged in some practices that were considered as corrupt (p. 87). For example, a poor man like Pancho Villa ended up having a very comfortable lifestyle in Chihuahua thanks to the power he acquired by gathering an army and some considered this as corrupt. Carrancistas and Huertistas, the other revolutionary factions, were perceived as more corrupt than the Villistas (Katz, 2000). Extralegal practices such as allowing local bosses to seize properties for personal enrichment, but also bribing or co-opting rivals became essential tools for the resolution of disputes and the avoidance of openly violent conflicts. Perhaps no one expressed himself better about the usefulness of corrupt agreements for the resolution of political struggles than Álvaro Obregón. Few men were more aware of the costs and benefits of violent conflicts than him. General Obregón defeated Pancho Villa at the crucial battle of Celaya in 1915, but also lost a hand while doing so. “Nobody resists a 50,000 pesos’ cannon shooting” is a famous phrase attributed to Obregón.

Fernando Gutierrez Barrios had an opinion similar to Álvaro Obregón, despite living in a different historical and political context. After acting as head of the secret

police in the 1970s and Secretary of Interior in the 1980s, Gutierrez Barrios used to advice PRI governors to coopt social movements instead of repressing them: “Buy them off, its cheaper” (Trejo, 2012: 70).

With regards to the narcotrafficking business, the utility of establishing corrupt or illegal agreements with authorities is clear: Narcotraffickers simply had no other alternative to conduct their relations with the Mexican and American authorities once recreational drugs were banned in the US and later in Mexico (Astorga, 2000, 2005; Osorio, 2013; Ríos, 2012). Nevertheless, corrupt agreements became essential not only for the business of narcotrafficking, but for the overall functioning of the twentieth century post-revolutionary regime. A popular view regards corruption as the “grease in the wheels”; a ubiquitous practice which is necessary for the concretion of political and economic transactions at all levels (Antón Alvarado, 2014). It is also seen by many as a perennial cultural problem, as recently evinced by President Peña Nieto (See Lomnitz 2000, 2014). It helped top political figures to settle disputes as well as badly paid policemen in the streets to get by at the end of the month.

Therefore, it is not so helpful to focus on corruption to understand the parts where narcotrafficking emerged precisely because corrupt agreements have been ubiquitous and secret. If corruption truly acted as a lubricifier, it had to be present almost everywhere: in the capital where the most important decisions were taken, in the surrounding regions, as well as the more distant ones. Such systemic and endemic phenomenon was in some cases the preamble, perhaps a necessary condition for narcotrafficking activity, but also a consequence.

Yet narcotrafficking became salient only in some parts of the country. In contrast to corrupt agreements, the phenomenon of caciques was not secret. Everyone knew who Santiago Vidaurri was in Coahuila, Ignacio Pesqueira in Sonora, Luis

Terrazas in Chihuahua or Gonzalo N. Santos in San Luis Potosí as these political bosses have played a key role in providing order in Mexico.<sup>25</sup>

*Caciquismo* is a predominantly emic term. Its meaning in Mexico roughly translates as “bossism or boss politics”. Paul Friedrich (1965) offered a definition half a century ago that, although some elements have been disputed, remains considerably valid: “A type of local, informal politics (...) that involves partially arbitrary control by a relatively small association of individuals under one leader” (p. 190). *Caciquismo* has been a peculiar “solution” of authoritarian political control that contrasts sharply with the praetorianism of the Latin American southern cone. Both are certainly carried by specialists in coercion but the former is less violent, sometimes “chirurgical” compared to the latter (Knight, 2005: 16).

The source of power of many caciques lies in their role as intermediaries (Wolf, 1956).<sup>26</sup> Many have control over tangible and intangible goods such as land plots to be distributed, jobs, social aids or protection. Although the origins of *caciquismo* can be traced to the colonial period and perhaps even earlier, to conceive *caciquismo* as essentially traditional or archaic is misleading. This misconception fueled some naive expectations that Mexico’s democratization and/or modernization would bring the demise of caciques.<sup>27</sup> Instead, these political bosses have shown a striking capacity for adaptation. The caciques find their feet, sometimes comfortably, under the relatively recent context of electoral competition (See Knight and Pansters, 2005).

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<sup>25</sup> These are just some of the most famous historical caciques, but the list is long and *caciquismo* is certainly not a phenomenon from the past.

<sup>26</sup> In his influential article of 1956 Eric Wolf never used the word “cacique”. Instead, he refers to: “individuals who can gain control of the local termini of these channels (of communication and mobility) (that) can (...) rise to positions of power in the national economy or political machine (1971).

<sup>27</sup> Consider, for example, Greco Sotelo’s narration of the demise of Guadalupe Buendía’s *cacicazgo* in Chimalhuacán, Estado de México (2000).

However, it is difficult to find a correspondence between narcotrafficking and caciques because the latter also have a ubiquitous character (Knight, 2005: 27; De Vries, 2005). Instead, it is more useful to think in the levels of the caciques as Alan Knight did (2005) and try to relate these scales with the phenomenon of narcotrafficking. This strategy is useful because narcotrafficking is a multibillion transnational industry that needs the intermediation of powerful caciques, those who reach the state and regional levels. Examples of these state-level caciques are the governors Esteban Cantú in Baja California and Leopoldo Sánchez Célis in Sinaloa (Astorga, 2000, Astorga, 2005). Furthermore, narcotrafficking also benefited when praetorianism was needed to contain armed rebellions, as the case of Guerrero clearly shows.

In many cases the caciques corresponded with narcotrafficking and this correlation began understandably with the banning of drugs. Mexico started to follow the international trend led by the US in regulating and/or banning recreational drugs in the 1920s. The cultivation and commercialization of marihuana was banned in 1920; at the state level, the cultivation of poppies was banned in Sinaloa in 1922, which already was, perhaps, the most important poppy producer among Mexican states; opium imports for smoking and heroin were banned nationwide in 1925; and the prohibitionist turn continued during the 1930s (see Astorga, 2005). However, the enforcement of such prohibitionist laws was lax –to say the least- during the next 50 years. According to Knight (2012) law enforcement was limited and selective although it had an exemplary function: it was exerted against drug dealers to remind them about their subordination to politicians. In addition, the drug business was tolerated because it was thought (and usually this was true) that most of the drugs were for export and therefore not harmful to Mexican nationals (Osorio 2013). In such context of complex bargaining rapports between an expanding postrevolutionary central power and sometimes very autonomous

local bosses, drugs were accepted as another resource among the many in which local bosses could extract an income for their own, just as it happened in regions where oil and mineral resources were abundant (Osorio, 2013 207-208, Knight, 2012). As with oil production in oil-rich parts, the US-Mexico border became a gold mine for some corrupt governors and drug dealers during this period of fragmented authority.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, narcotrafficking seems to emerge mostly in “frontier regions”. Such parts have a history of political and social contentious relations that precede narcotrafficking. As Grillo (2012) puts it succinctly for the case of Sinaloa:

“Back in Sinaloa, it didn’t take long to do the math. An unruly state, poppies at the mountains, and an illegal opium market 360 miles to the north. It was an easy equation: Sinaloan poppies could be turned into American dollars” (p. 28).

The history of frontier regions resembles that of the neighboring American “Wild West”. It includes the weakness of the central authority, erratic policies from the center in Mexico City (many times in response to US pressure), and periods when political institutions seemed inexistent. In fact, the north and the northwestern parts of Mexico have been different than the rest of the country for centuries. Those regions originated when the Spanish Colony established groups of military settlers in those underpopulated territories and granted land to mestizos to scare away the Apaches and other nomadic tribes. These settlers were sponsored again by Benito Juárez in the mid XIX century. In many ways they were more privileged than the peasant communities in

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<sup>28</sup> An implication of cacical structures for this thesis is the role that caciques played with regards to out-migration. When the Bracero Program was established, a lottery system was supposed to assign the bracero contracts but it never worked. In practice bracero contracts were won by bribing municipal and state officers (Fitzgerald, 2006: 52). Therefore, the bracero program reinforced caciquismo, as bracero jobs became another cherished resource controlled by them.



the southeast, in the south or in the center of the country. They owned their land and were usually wealthier. They also had the right and the duty to carry weapons (Katz 2004).

These regions acquired a strong degree of autonomy with regards to the center, were populated by strong and independent rancheros willing to defend themselves and ended up with a legacy of social and political conflict accentuated by the Porfirian policy of expropriations. After it became clear that semi-nomadic Indians in the north would not be able to win their struggle against the settlers and the Porfirian government (1876-1910), the government and the hacendado class became interested in the lands of the settlers and expropriated them, an action that partly explains the origins of the Mexican Revolution (Katz 2004). Military settlers established themselves in Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua and Coahuila but other internal migrations mirrored the process towards the north in other frontier regions in the west and in the south. Similar to those that headed towards the north, many poor, landless rancheros left the central Bajío region in the late eighteenth century and arrived at the Tierra Caliente in Michoacán (Malkin, 1997: 104, 109) and in the late nineteenth in Guerrero (Lambert, 1994). Strikingly similar to what happened in the north, a strong degree of autonomy and political conflict also marked Michoacán and Guerrero and narcotrafficking also became embedded in these regions despite being located relatively close to Mexico City and at more than a thousand kilometers from the US-Mexico border.

#### 2.2.4 Rough terrain and narcotrafficking

As it happened with out-migration, rurality also became an essential characteristic of narcotrafficking. Rurality is advantageous to a wide array of groups that may challenge the state authority, including drug trade organizations. As Kocher (2004) has sharply observed, a highly dispersed population constrains state forces from continuously occupying settlements. However, it was a particular type of rural setting

that provided the most advantages to the narcotrafficking business, the one with remote or difficult access. Just as guerrillas, narcotraffickers are more likely to develop a rural base in places of difficult terrain. Even in cities, groups that challenge the state usually locate themselves in narrow streets or neighborhoods and transform the geography into enclaves, ghettos or favelas as a way of “ruralizing” the urban landscape (Laitin, 2009). Since flat and domesticated rural fields do not constitute a natural protection, it was not in the central fields of the Bajío region where narcotraffickers found terrain advantages but in the highlands of states like Chihuahua, Durango, Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero or Sinaloa.

Furthermore, as it happens in the case of the frontier regions, state control is also weaker in places with rough terrain. The difference between the degrees of state control across locations with different terrain seems to be well perceived and even interpreted by narcotraffickers as a “license” to conduct their operations. The thoughts of Rafael Caro Quintero are illustrative of such perception. Quintero – one of the most renowned drug traffickers during the 1980s – was charged with the homicide of Enrique Camarena, a DEA agent that helped to discover Quintero’s massive ranch in the highlands of Chihuahua. Quintero said that Camarena’s murder was the first time he had problems with the law. The tons of marihuana he produced and the other wrongdoings he had committed before were not really crimes because they took place in the highlands where “there was no law” (Valdés, 2013).

#### 2.2.5 What do we know about the origins of narcotrafficking?

In sum, narcotrafficking emerged in municipalities where a complex set of conditions were present. The border became essential since the very beginnings because drug traffickers needed a point of entry to smuggle drugs into the US (Shirk, 2012). Places close to the border also became attractive for drug production due to reduced transport, logistics and bribing costs.

Although proximity to the border was important, it was not completely necessary for the emergence of the drug trade industry. The railroad provided the “arms and legs” to the business and allowed other distant places to join either by becoming production centers or by including them in the transport routes. The centrality of this means of transport gradually declined as trucks, boats and planes became more available and useful but it continues to be relevant nowadays. The railroad gave advantages to some parts of the country but not to others to develop a history of drug trade because it was the most important means of transport in the country when narcotrafficking emerged.

Another central aspect in the literature of the origins of narcotrafficking are weak institutions, a concept that alludes to corruption and caciques that challenged the establishment of the central authority. Such authority was particularly challenged in the frontier regions where landless and ambitious people were granted land to do whatever they wanted with it under the only two conditions of populating it and defending it from the raids of the Indians.

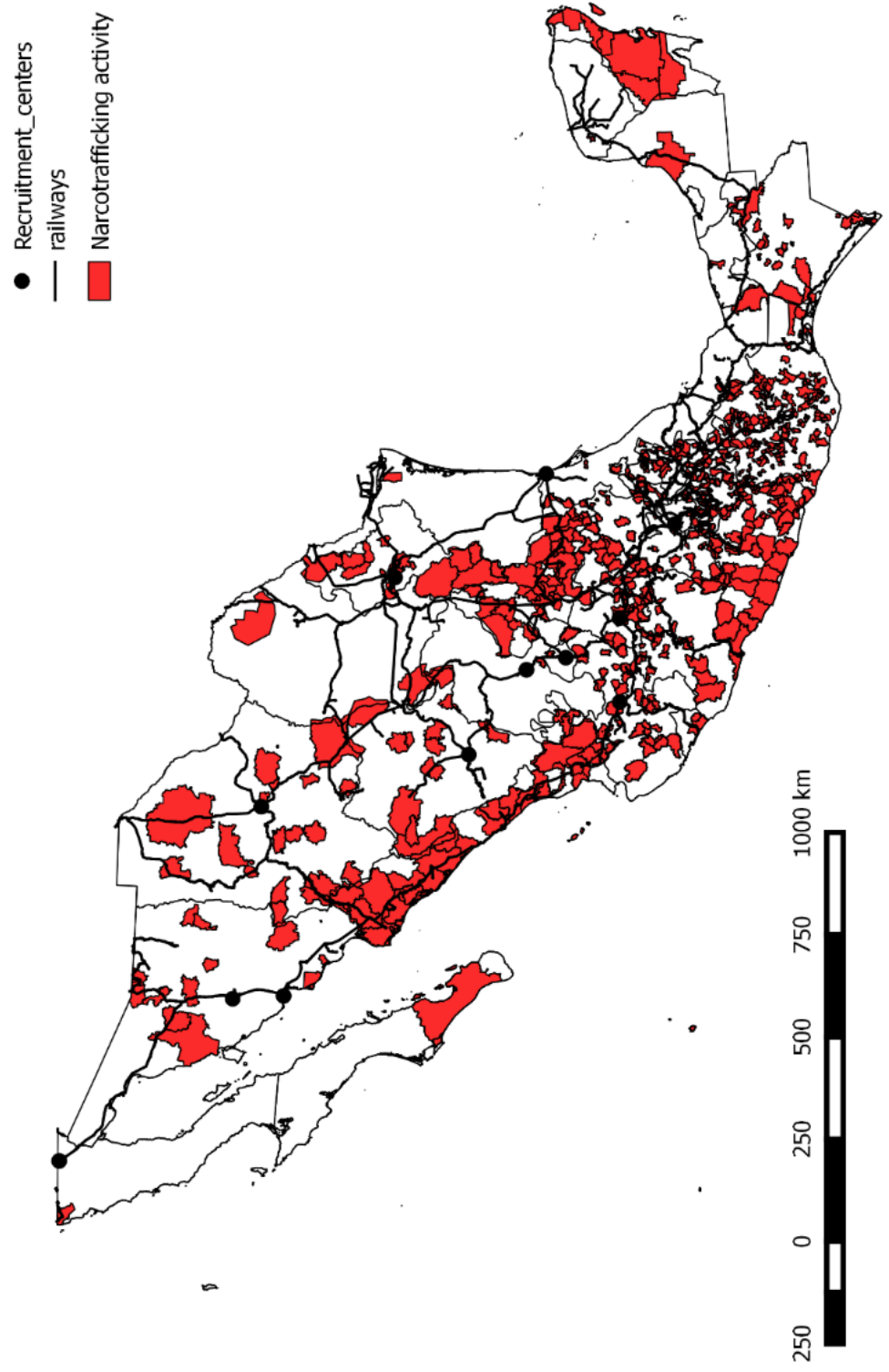
An optimal location for narcotrafficking would not only be close to the border or the railroad track but also close to low populated regions with rough terrain such as highlands or jungles, where illegal activities could be carried out more easily. Lastly, the perfect location should be a place marked by political and social conflict where law enforcement policies would be harder to implement. It also helped if an ethos of unrestrained freedom was present, as it may be the case in frontier regions. Parts of Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Sonora, Michoacán, Jalisco and Guerrero share many of these characteristics.

The information for producing Map 2.3 was collected by Michele Coscia and Viridiana Ríos (2012) using an algorithm that registered all the municipalities that were mentioned in online newspapers and blogs and in which an activity related to a criminal

organization was carried out. Therefore, the value I add to this map is simply to connect such information to the railroad and recruitment centers. A pattern that follows the railroad network can be observed in some regions, for example in the states of Sinaloa, Nayarit and Jalisco.

Another vertical cluster seems to follow the line that connects Ciudad Juárez with Chihuahua and Durango, following the Mexican Central Railroad. Parallel to the Juárez-Durango line, there is another cluster that begins just south to Monterrey and continues through San Luis Potosí towards the south, but it also bifurcates horizontally towards the port of Tampico in the Gulf of Mexico following the tracks again. Another big cluster is in the south, in the Tierra Caliente region, divided between Michoacán and Guerrero and through the Costa Grande and Sierra in Guerrero. This cluster begins where the railroad meets the Pacific Ocean in the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, although there is no rail line from there to Acapulco. Finally, an area where the presence of narco trafficking was detected is at the Riviera Maya, where the drug demand in the night clubs is high.

Map 2.3 Narcotrafficking Activity in Mexico, 2010



## **2.3 Place and Time**

In the previous subsections I explained that narcotrafficking and out-migration sometimes emerged in the same parts of Mexico because some of the factors that led to their origins were the same. They did not only coincide in space, but also in time. Just as Mexican migration to the US, the illegal drug industry that smuggled drugs into that country also began in the early twentieth century when prohibitions began. By definition, the smuggling of illegal drugs into the US could not exist before such practice became illegal.

Although some groups within American society were concerned about restraining recreational drugs, an external factor gave them the impulse they required. Historical accounts of the emergence of the US prohibition of narcotics emphasize the relevance that the cession of the Philippines from Spain to the US had for the enactment of the first laws. With the Philippines the US inherited the challenge of governing a population in which the number of opium addicts was substantial. Once the Philippines came under control of the US, the American government also became the target of activism by missionaries trying to protect this population from the evils of liquor and opium traffic. Under Spanish rule, the Chinese population of the Philippines were allowed to import, sell and consume opium but not the Filipino population. This system was well enforced until the Americans discontinued the Spanish rule and a large number of Filipinos became addicts. According to Taylor (1967) the amount of legitimate opium imports tripled from 91,823 pounds in 1899 to 285,000 in 1902 (p. 310). After an intense debate, the US adopted in 1908 a policy of prohibiting completely the import, sale and use of opium in the Philippines, except by the government and for medicinal use (Taylor, 1967).

An international anti-opium campaign spearheaded again by religious figures emerged as a side effect of such debate. Domestic pressure in the US mounted. Some groups took advantage of the opportunity opened by the debate about regulation in the Philippines to reorient attention towards regulation in US territory. Such pressure led to the passing of the Smoking Opium Exclusion Act in the US in 1909 and the regulation of the opium and coca leaves derivatives under the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914.

The new legislation placed some groups in Mexico in a very advantageous position to traffic illegal drugs, such as the Chinese who had established themselves in Sinaloa: They were close to the hills where they could grow opium poppies; they possessed the “know-how”; they also had the seeds; they were connected by the railway network to ship their product north; and they had the kin and family networks in the US to distribute their product and reach the final opium smokers (Grillo 2012). By the 1930s opium production take place in Baja California, Sinaloa, Sonora, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco and Durango (Serrano, 2012: 137; Astorga, 2005: 46-47). The definite boost to the industry came when the US entered the Second World War. The war not only propelled Mexican migration to the US via the Bracero Program, it also encouraged the cultivation of opium in Mexico to be smuggled into the US in order to produce morphine for the American soldiers fighting in Europe. The US encouraged the growth of opium poppies in Mexico because the Asian sources had been shut down by the war (Astorga, 2000: 182; Lupsha, 1992; De Palma, 1996; Padgett, 2015: 18, Grillo, 2012).

Opium and its derivatives are not the only illicit drugs with a long-standing tradition in Mexico. In the early twentieth century, consumption of marijuana, coca leaves and its derivatives were legal and even advertised in pharmacies as a remedy for asthma and other symptoms, although there was a strong moral sanction against people who exceeded drug use for recreational purposes and who could be detained (Astorga,

2005). Legal status in Mexico facilitated the spread of marijuana cultivation and trade until it was banned in 1920. Prohibition extended to opium in 1926. By the 1930s there is evidence of marijuana cultivation in Sinaloa, Durango, Mexico City, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Querétaro, Guanajuato, Morelos, Hidalgo, Tlaxcala, Sonora, Colima, Veracruz, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Tamaulipas and Estado de México. This production was both for national and foreign consumption (Astorga, 2005).

The narcotrafficking business in the twentieth century expanded in size, volume, geographical location and drugs handled. The shutdown of opium cultivation in Turkey in the late 1960s and 1970s, the increase in the demand of drugs in the US and the rerouting of Colombian cocaine were factors that led the consolidation of Mexico as the leading marijuana and opium producer and cocaine smuggler to the US (Serrano, 2012: 137-140). This consolidation was consequential in terms of violence as is explained in the next subsection.

## **2.4 Origins of Criminal Violence: The Role of Illicit Economic Activities and Narcotraffickers' Business Diversification**

Although the ongoing criminal war may have eclipsed previous periods of drug-related violence in Mexican history, violence has been concomitant with the drug trade since the prohibition of these substances in the US and later in Mexico. Before such legislation was enacted the lethal events associated to drugs were usually suicides or overdoses, not homicides related to fights among criminals (Astorga, 2005: 18). This situation changed soon after drugs were finally banned. From then onwards, drug-related violence started to take place in the same areas where narcotrafficking originated, i.e. in places of production and transit points.



Nevertheless, there have also been periods of relatively low violence even in places with vibrant illicit economies. The relationship between illegal markets and violence is complex and crucially dependent on the political and (informal) institutional context. Gambetta (1993) offers a theoretical appraisal of this relationship in the Italian case which is helpful as a contrast to Mexico. Gambetta's analysis is based on a separation between what he calls "the business of private protection" exerted by protection specialists and all the other illegal activities usually associated with the Italian Mafia.<sup>29</sup> According to Gambetta (1993): "by declaring a good illegal the state effectively declares that those who deal in it regardless will be pursued and punished" (p. 42). Therefore, illegality can create a new demand, as it can cause that those who disobey the law require protection. This new demand attracts private suppliers (mafiosi) offering their services to those who flout the law (drug dealers, contrabandists, etc.). Private protection suppliers must be militarized and ready to exert violence to scare away any potential protection supplier that may be willing to compete with them and to persuade their bold clients<sup>30</sup> that they are buying effective protection and that they should pay their fees.

Gambetta's view about the incompatibility between illegality and state protection is useful for analyzing protection schemes in democracies considered to be relatively more established<sup>31</sup> like Italy: "illegality means that state protection becomes unavailable by definition" (Gambetta, 1993: 42). Yet in other political and institutional contexts state protection may indeed be available in illegal markets. For Mexico – and in sharp contrast with the private actors in Gambetta's theoretical model – Snyder and

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<sup>29</sup> For Gambetta (1993) private protection is the definitional function of the Italian mafia. All other tasks in which they are involved (drug dealing, scams, illegal gambling, even the close activity of extortion etc.) are secondary to protection.

<sup>30</sup> The assumption that their customers are bolder than the average businessman is supported by the fact that they have already defied the law.

<sup>31</sup> Although not exempted from security threats by any means.

Durán Martínez (2009) have picked very carefully the term “state-sponsored protection racket”. According to these authors illegal economies are not necessarily violent if an effective state-sponsored protection racket is in place. Following Snyder’s and Durán Martínez’ (2009) account, violence in Mexico emerged precisely with the breakdown of a racket like the one just mentioned in the 1980s, when the country started to democratize and reforms decentralized the Office of the Attorney General (PGR). The uncertainty of electoral competition, the decentralization of the PGR and purges in security personnel – i.e. the already mentioned dissolution of the DFS in 1985 – reduced the state’s capacity to guarantee protection to drug traffickers. This incapacity to offer credible protection deals drove drug-related violence in Mexico as traffickers began to form their own protection armies (as indicated by Serrano, 2012). The reorganization in the drug dealers’ scheme of protection took place in the context of the cocaine boom in the US, crackdowns in Colombia and the dislocation of routes to smuggle cocaine through the Caribbean. The closing of the Caribbean route and the crackdowns in Colombia brought even more violence because cocaine started to be smuggled across the Mexican border, “raising the stakes” of the struggle to control the illegal drug smuggling in Mexico, as profits from cocaine are higher than the profits from the marihuana that was smuggled before.

Peter Reuter (2009) also argues that illegal markets, even drug markets, are usually peaceful. However, Reuter mentions four important caveats to this “peaceful illegality” outcome: succession crises that arise when the boss of the organization dealing illegal drugs dies, is imprisoned or retires; violence exerted for disciplinary purposes when bosses decide that members of the organization should be punished; “prophylactic violence” aimed at preemptively eliminating lieutenants before they get enough information to be able to imperil their bosses; and violence to solve disputes when conflicts with other rival organizations emerge. Therefore, even if a “public”

protection racket is in place, organizations profiting from illegal organizations remain vulnerable to inherent internal or external crises that are frequently violent.

In addition to the illegal organizations' "permanent vulnerability" to violence, they also have to remain "potentially violent" because in an illicit economy the threat of violence has to be latent to ensure contract complying (Reuter, 2009: 276). As Serrano (2012) explains: "the threat and the use of force have long been an inbuilt feature of illicit markets" and these markets are "intrinsically prone to violence" (p. 142-143)." Together with personal trust (McIllwin, 1999) and reputation (Gambetta, 1993: 43-52), the readiness for violence (Reuter 2009; Gambetta, 1993: 40-43) is crucial for the enforcement of illegal contracts.

In addition to the political and institutional context there are other factors that are relevant for the peacefulness of illegal markets. Gambetta (1993) credits the stability in the relationships among mafia families (p. 41-42). Snyder and Durán Martínez (2009) stress the relevance of legitimacy.<sup>32</sup> Reuter (2009) points to the value of drugs and the age of the offenders. There is evidence that variations in levels of Mexican criminal violence respond to these factors. For example, the eruption of violence against the Chinese in Sinaloa, Sonora and Coahuila after the Revolution was facilitated by a racist discourse that portrayed them as outsiders to the community (Romero, 2010: 145-190; Velázquez Morales, 2005: 463-464; Lim, 2010: 67; Grillo, 2012). This discourse was aimed at undermining the tolerance of other groups. The legitimacy considerations stressed by Snyder and Durán Martínez (2009) were important in this case as violence emerged when the racist propaganda dehumanized the Chinese, who were blamed for

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<sup>32</sup> The authors give the example of poaching in nineteenth century Britain. It was not violent if it was carried out by a poacher with a "semi-legitimate status" (Snyder and Durán-Martínez (2009:271).

the economic hardship and considered as illegitimate holders of any business, including the opium one (Lim, 2010: 66-69; Valdés, 2012; Grillo, 2012).

Legitimacy has also been stressed as a crucial factor accounting for violence at the Mexico-US border. As stated in the previous section, the attractiveness of borders for illicit activities like narcotrafficking is evident. Nevertheless, the reason why the inhabitants from these places may accept or reject these activities is not so obvious. It is not so clear either why these places can suddenly turn violent after years of peaceful coexistence with vibrant illicit economies. George Díaz's book *Border Contraband* (2015) offers a crucial insight about the legitimacy of smuggling activities at the border. According to Díaz, smuggling has been the norm among many border populations, not the exception. Díaz uses the term "contrabandista communities<sup>33</sup>" to refer to these populations where the interaction from states, petty smugglers and traffickers has taken place throughout history (2015: 7). Members of a contrabandista community are not morally sanctioned when they engage in smuggling. In fact, in some cases the opposite happens. Activities like bringing in goods to save a few pesos or establishing a contraband business to become rich are perfectly accepted, sometimes applauded by the members of these communities and even immortalized in *corridos* (Mexican folk ballads).

Díaz's work helps to conceive the last developments in drug trafficking as embedded in the larger history of contraband. In other words, it helps to see the continuity in the everyday smuggling practices of border communities, but it also shows a rupture in conventions in cases where social acceptance reaches its limits. These breaks usually come with the smuggling of goods that represent a danger to the community, such as drugs and firearms. The moral sanctioning of drug trafficking at the

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<sup>33</sup> Contrabandista is the Spanish word for smuggler.

border is an essential piece of information to understand why drug trafficking differs from other goods in terms of violence. In a nutshell, the social rejection of large-scale narco trafficking activities (even in these communities where contraband is widely accepted) leaves criminal organizations with not many alternatives but to resort to threats and violence to conduct their business.

Mendoza's (2012) analysis of the process of cartelization that took place in the small border town of Altar, Sonora also points out to the lack of social legitimacy as an essential explanation for violence. Four elements are part of the process of cartelization: the professionalization and incorporation of youths in structured and hierarchical regional networks; the displacement of "old school" independent narco traffickers; a (new) sense of collective belonging; and the privatization of border crossing routes. A consequence of the cartelization process was the control of the illegal migrant traffic by the drug trade organizations. The narco traffickers' business diversification studied by Mendoza also helps to understand the escalation of violence and a breaking point with the history of drug trafficking. According to Chabat and Bailey, before the 2000s there is no clear evidence that narco traffickers were involved in other types of organized crime (Chabat 2002: 137; Bailey and Chabat, 2001) although Astorga mentions their involvement in prostitution and legal and illegal joints (2000: 185; 2005). In contrast, the evidence of their business expansion from that moment onwards is overwhelming. Table 2.2 shows the activities in which narco traffickers have participated or being charged for their participation before and after the 2000s as reported by journalists, researchers and official sources.

**Table 2.2 Activities of Organized Crime Before and After the 2000s**

<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannabis trade</li> <li>• Opium poppy trade</li> <li>• Heroin trade</li> <li>• Cocaine trade</li> <li>• D-Methamphetamine trade</li> <li>• Legal and illegal joints (giros negros)</li> <li>• Prostitution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannabis trade</li> <li>• Opium poppy trade</li> <li>• Heroin trade</li> <li>• Cocaine trade</li> <li>• D-Methamphetamine trade</li> <li>• Legal and illegal joints</li> <li>• Prostitution</li> <li>• Money laundering</li> <li>• Car theft</li> <li>• Firearms</li> <li>• Extractive industries (oil and gas theft)</li> <li>• Human trafficking; migration governance</li> <li>• Kidnapping</li> <li>• Extortion, forced taxation</li> <li>• Embezzlement of public finances</li> <li>• Adjudication of public infrastructure through construction tenders</li> <li>• Municipal and state governance</li> </ul>

Sources: Astorga (2005), Bagley (2001), Grillo (2012), Grillo (2013), Goodman and Marizco (2010), Padgett (2015), Martínez (2014) Trejo and Ley (2015), Mendoza (2012), De Mauleón (2017), UNODC (2014), Vulliamy (2015), Wilkinson (2010).

The disciplinary and prophylactic violence mentioned by Reuter (2009) or Gambetta's (1993) stability in the relationships between criminal groups become relevant to understanding inter and intra-cartel violence at the level of personal interactions. The roots of nowadays drug violence can be traced back to a story of personal treasons, internal crises and cartel fragmentation that began in 1988 with the killing of "El Güero" Palma's wife and children ordered by the kingpin Félix Gallardo, Palma's former boss with whom Palma had personal differences (Shirk, 2012).

The political context mentioned by Snyder and Durán Martínez (2009) was the primary factor for the fall of Enrique Fernández Puerta, known as "Juárez's Al Capone" in the 1930s. Fernández established himself as Juárez boss by hiring a hitman to kill Enrique Dosamantes, chief of Chihuahua's Judicial Police. He reaped the benefits of the "vice boom" by acquiring an important night club and controlling the town hall. He also invested in developing his own social base by financing the construction of public schools. Despite being deeply rooted in Juárez, Fernández was displaced by the

Quevedo brothers when one of them became governor of Chihuahua. He fled the state to Mexico, where he earned the hostility of rival gangs by establishing himself as a cocaine distributor. He was allegedly killed by a hitman hired by the Quevedo brothers (Astorga, 2005: 41-42).

## **2.5 Conclusions**

Not all states face the same security challenges. The physical geography of each country plays a crucial role. The challenges for Mexico are extraordinary given its contiguous location to the US, which is the largest consumer of illicit drugs and the largest producer of firearms in the world.

Neither are all subnational regions within a state similarly exposed to narcotrafficking and its concomitant non-state violence. In the case of Mexico, subnational variation is very important. Ports, highways and borders are needed for shipping illicit drugs and narcotraffickers are willing to fight for the control of such locations. In the case of Mexico, the railroad was determinant in shaping the geography of narcotrafficking. Highlands, forests and jungles are also the settings where groups that challenge the state operate because they constitute a natural protection against state forces.

Narcotrafficking overlapped in time and space with out-migration to the US. In the early twentieth century, the connection of Mexican population centers to the North American rail network and the banning of drugs were almost simultaneous events that created unprecedented opportunities for accumulating wealth, but only in some parts of the country.

Mexican out-migration developed frequently in municipalities connected or close to the railroad or highways. Those municipalities also have comparative

advantages for narcotrafficking. Rural areas close to rough terrain and the railroad became the most suited ones for both the emergence of out-migration and narcotrafficking. However, the overlapping is far from perfect. Out-migration emerged in areas where recruitment centers were established, but recruitment centers are unrelated with narcotrafficking. And whereas drug trafficking emerged usually in areas marked by political conflict, emigrants originated equally in areas with or without political conflict. Both phenomena developed further along the railway routes linking the Mexican countryside with the border cities and have coexisted for a long period of time in some parts of Mexico.



### **Chapter 3**

#### **Out-migration and Criminal Violence**

#### **Connecting Mechanisms**

The first chapter presented the theoretical considerations that may lead to thinking that a decline in Mexican migration to the US affected levels of Mexican criminal violence in Mexico. The second chapter constituted a first empirical inquiry about the reasons why out-migration, narcotrafficking and criminal violence came to coexist in many parts of Mexico. It explained the role of transport infrastructure, rurality and distance to the border in shaping these phenomena and determined its coincidence in time and space. However, no empirical elucidation has been presented yet about how these two aspects may relate among themselves. This chapter aims to provide a qualitative empirical analysis of such association by focusing in the conflict dynamics of Guerrero and particularly in the eastern highlands of that state, one of the most deprived areas in Mexico. The chapter narrates the transition followed by a rural area in Mexico from different moments of social equilibrium. It tries to show how internal and international migration contained the escalation of violence in different historical periods. Second, it intends to exemplify in detail some of the concrete mechanisms linking a decline in out-migration to narcotrafficking and violence. The question that guides the chapter is the following: Why has an area that concentrates so many conflict predictors become more peaceful? My argument is that the buffering of the criminal insurgency was in part an unintended outcome of internal and international out-migration.

The first three sections of the chapter present an analytical narrative that questions several accepted conventional ideas about violence in Mexico. In particular, it questions the validity of the democratization explanation of violence by analyzing the

timing in the decline and escalation of homicide rates. The fourth section is based on original interviews I collected during several trips, mostly to migrant communities in Guerrero's eastern highlands and explains in detail the mechanisms behind the connection between out-migration and violence and why they came to an end until very recently.

### **3.1 State Formation**

There is no consensus about when Mexico started its: "long term process which led to the genesis of modern political domination in form of the territorial sovereign state" (Blieseman de Guevara, 2015), also understood as state formation. For Gillingham the critical period of state formation ran from 1930 to 1950 (2006: 336). For Davis this process was longer and stretched from 1930 to 1980 (2012: 67). What is clear is that this process advanced unevenly across geographical areas. State formation was more complicated in the highlands compared to flatter areas. The physical geography marked the history of the highlands in general and of Guerrero's Montaña in particular in at least three important ways.<sup>34</sup>

First, the natural protection attracted Indian groups, allowed them to conserve their culture in isolation and, justifiably, remain suspicious about the government, institutions and any external actor in general. Before the arrival of the Spanish some groups of Indians had already arrived in La Montaña fleeing from other Indians. Na Savi, also known as Mixtecos, are the oldest Indian group in the area. Despite being a millenarian culture spread through the fertile valley of the nowadays west of Oaxaca and southern Puebla, they arrived to Guerrero's eastern highlands after being expelled

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<sup>34</sup> This should not be taken as a deterministic but as a probabilistic explanation.

by the Aztecs from what is today's Pueblean town of Cholula. The Me'phaa or Tlapanecos became Na Savi's neighbors and established themselves around 150 B.C. Southwest to the Na Savi settlements. They founded Tlapa, a city that would become the political and commercial center of the highlands. At last, the Nahuas (also Mexicas or Aztecs) arrived as conquerors in 1486 A.D. during the Aztec imperial expansion. Spanish conquerors arrived in 1521 and left intact the political structure established by the Aztecs.

La Montaña became a "region of refuge" (Fox, 2007: 64-65, note 21), an overpopulated place where Indians not only fled from plunder, but also because a milder or colder climate helped them to survive influenza, smallpox and other infectious diseases brought from Europe. The colder weather and lack of contact with other populations protected them against the fast propagation of epidemics taking place in warmer areas. Centuries later, in 1930, the National Census reported 28 people per square kilometer for the former district of Tlapa, three and a half times higher than the national mean of 8.5 (García Cruz, 1940; DEN, 1930). A history of plunder and forced relocation drove the Indians to find solutions to everyday problems relying intensely on family and community cooperation practices that have been essential for Indians to survive throughout centuries. Such practices known as *tequio* or *mano-vuelta* are based on collective participation in a variety of works such as paving roads, harvesting, house repairs or, in recent times, even installing community police groups, known as *policías comunitarias*.<sup>35</sup>

Plunder and forced relocation were responded with rebellion in the nineteenth century (Hart, 1988). Montañeros were also resistant to the Cardenista establishment of

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<sup>35</sup> Tequio is unremunerated community service. Mano vuelta is the informal institution of reciprocal aid among neighbors. See (Kearney and Besserer, 2004; Nader, 1990).

socialist education, literacy campaigns (Gillingham, 2006) and health brigades. Apparently suspiciousness made the Indian population more susceptible to rumors spread by groups interested in keeping the state out of the region. Smith (2013) attributes the rejection of the state health services to local doctors, who were fearful that state-sponsored healthcare would hurt their status and income, so they sabotaged the health brigades by:

“spreading rumors that the state medics sought to kidnap local children, extract their fat, and use it to grease cars, airplanes and other machines. In 1931, the villagers of Malinaltepec chased the entire cultural mission out of town, claiming that the visiting doctor ‘was going to take away their sons and daughters’. If rumor failed to work, local medics took on state emissaries through force” (p.44).

The rejection of the state health services contrasts with other groups in rural settings like Zapotec Indians in the Sierra Juárez or rural workers in the Comarca Lagunera who accepted to be treated by the government after some bartering (Smith, 2013). However, it is important to mention that not all the state initiatives faced such strong rejection. If tax collection, literacy campaigns, the promotion of socialist education and health services proved highly unpopular, the agrarian reform was the exception to the rule. In the heyday of Cardenismo, land redistribution found its obvious supporters in landless peasants. According to Matías Alonso (2000), from 1930 to 1940 26,578 hectares were redistributed in only five out of the 20 municipalities (p. 96).

Second, the physical geography hindered the expansion of the modern state not only because of the resistance of the indigenous population, but also because it attracted external groups challenging the state. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, mountains, forests and jungles are often the settings where rebel or criminal groups operate because these environments provide natural protection against state forces. Like the Chiapas highlands, the Lacandonan jungle or the Sierra Madre Occidental in

Chihuahua, Durango and Sinaloa, Guerrero's highlands are among the roughest terrains in Mexico. Throughout history such natural protection provided by the highlands has attracted groups fleeing, challenging or avoiding the state or its predecessors, recruiting members for their belligerent endeavors and complicating the process of state formation since its very beginnings. For example, during the war of independence (1810-1821) Tlapa provided recruits to José María Morelos' rebel army and was attacked by Vicente Guerrero, who later hid from the royalists in the surrounding highlands; Porfirio Díaz gathered troops to fight the French intervention in 1865; the Zapatistas attacked Tlapa twice during the Mexican Revolution; episodes of resistance took place during the Church-State conflict, the so-called "Cristero rebellion" (Meyer 1994: 122); and the Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria (ACNR), a prominent guerrilla group in the 1960s and 1970s also hid from state forces in the eastern highlands during the period of the *Guerra Sucia*, although the ACNR cannot be considered completely external because their leader, Genaro Vázquez, was from San Luis Acatlán, a town nearby the Montaña. Thus the state also took longer to reach rough terrains given the presence of such antagonistic external groups.

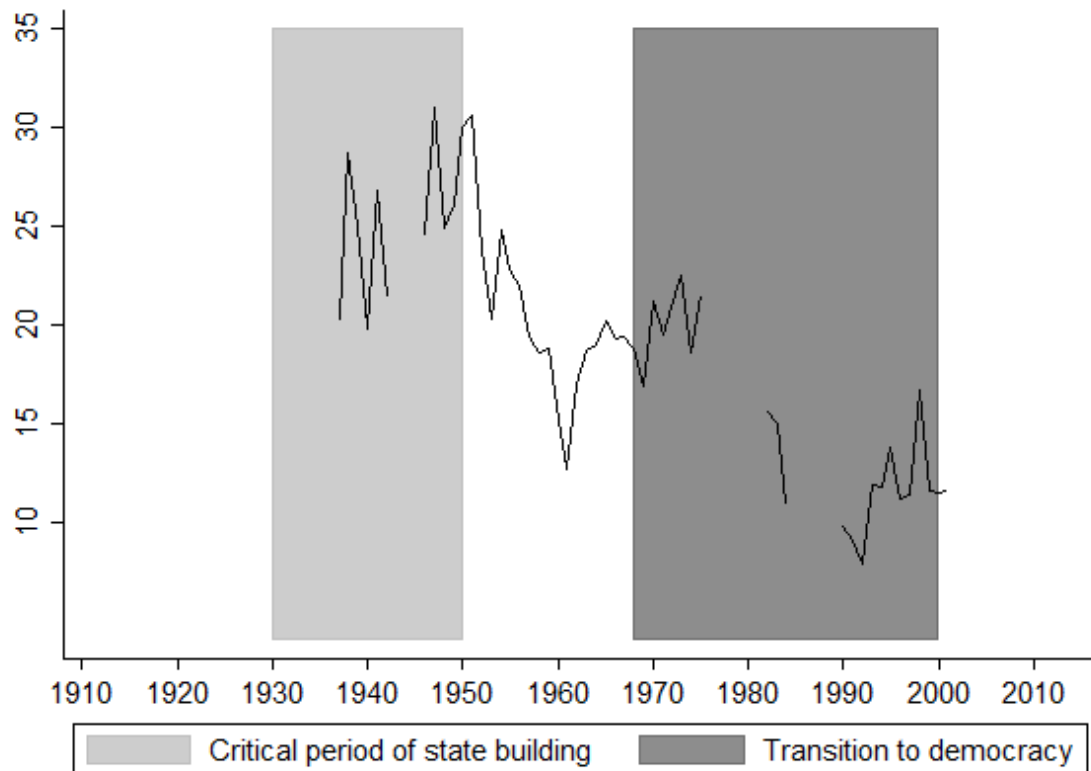
Third, given the absence of natural resources the state had no clear interest to expand its presence to such a complicated area. Rough terrain turned land unattractive for production (Matías Alonso, 2000). The proportion of land that can be irrigated is small and up until now the practice known as *tlacolol* (slash and burn agriculture) is the quintessential technology of the region. Also unlike in Taxco, Guanajuato or Zacatecas, precious minerals at La Montaña were found just until very recently. Thus other than suppressing rebellions the state had no other incentive for domesticating the terrain and until the end of the twentieth century very few roads were built.

La Montaña and Guerrero in general were more chaotic areas than the rest of the country According to Gillingham: "As late as 1950—after both Cardenista social

reforms and the Alemanista economic boom—Guerrero still had the lowest rates of literacy, urban employment, and capital investment, the second-lowest average rural salary, and what was described as the highest murder rate in the federation” (2006: 336). Guerrero also paid the lowest tax in the federation; 75% of children did not go to school and the literacy rate was in fact falling in the 1930s when the Church urged parents to withdraw their children from school in the context of an acute State-Church conflict; conflict between competing teacher unions sometimes ended in lethal casualties; strong caciques became embedded in the region, and extrajudicial killings as well as protection rackets became widespread (Gillingham 2006).

There are no homicide statistics for the area of La Montaña before 1990. However, Pablo Piccato (2003) has reviewed different sources to build historical databases at the state level. Providing reliable historical statistics of crime present many challenges, particularly for the years that are more distant in time when Mexican authorities were beginning to systematize information on the subject. According to Piccato (2003), in that period crime seemed to be not always registered because of corruption. Then, if underreporting was more common during the first half of the twentieth century, there are grounds to believe the negative slope across time is even steeper. In addition, qualitative evidence provided by historians support the general downward trend shown by these statistics (Piccato, 2003). In the case of Guerrero his data goes back to 1937. His data for Guerrero and for Mexico in general confirms the notion of the critical period of state building as the second most violent in the twentieth-century after the Revolution. A practice that is worth mentioning in order to capture the dangerousness of the area at that particular moment is that rural teachers, who were in charge of promoting socialist education, were licensed to carry guns for self-defense, given how unpopular such task could be in a profoundly Catholic countryside (Gillingham 2006).

**Figure 3.1 Alleged Homicides per 100,000 People in the State of Guerrero**



Source: Piccato: Estadísticas del crimen en México, series históricas.  
<http://www.columbia.edu/~pp143/estadisticascrimen/introducci%F3n.htm>

Despite the lack of homicide statistics for the specific area of La Montaña, anecdotal evidence provides testimonies for the particular intensity of violence during that period and supports the assumption that Guerrero's highlands were more violent than other domesticated areas of the state. For example, Gillingham has documented the cacical practices of teachers like Alberta Moreno, a Náhua kindergarten teacher from the town of Atliaca who privatized the only sewing machine in town and the local mill, sent school employers to work at her own distillery, led a gang of cattle rustlers and became a reputed murderer (2006: 332).

### 3.2 Out of the Hills and Far Away

From the 1950s onwards, the level of violence appears to decline. Gillingham mentions that this tendency was preceded by several factors: A stalemate in the conflict between teacher unions in the late 1940s when communists achieved power positions in the PRI; the arrival of a competent politician such as Baltazar Leyva Mancilla as Guerrero's governor; an increase in the state capacity to collect taxes; a real improvement in education; and Acapulco's economic development (2006: 350).

However, as the central argument of this thesis holds, the presence of another factor was also relevant for the pacification of the region. After incipient terrain domestication materialized in some roads and Acapulco's development demanded labor, internal and later international migration were set in motion. Until that moment and with the exception of some indentured laborers that arrived in the nineteenth century at the sugar and coffee plantations in Veracruz (García Cruz 1940: 254) the lack of roads had contained dispossessed people in La Montaña. If it would have been possible, this group would have certainly been pushed out by poverty and violence decades before. In addition to the absolutely deprived, the agrarian reform had created a motive for out-migration among another group of people, those ejidatarios and communal landowners that for the first time owned some land but had no capital to invest in it. Ejidatarios and comuneros left La Montaña in the quest of complementing their subsistence agriculture or accumulating some capital to turn their land plots productive.

From the moment it was possible to outmigrate the Na Savi resorted more to migration than the rest of ethnic groups, confirming the well-established notion in social sciences that cooperation flows along ethnic lines (Fearon and Laitin 1996). Apparently, there is no perennial reason in the Na Savi culture to account for their high level of out-migration. For example, by comparing them with Na Savi migrants from neighbouring



Oaxaca it is possible to “control for ethnicity” and figure out how isolation delayed the establishment of migrant networks in Guerrero’s highlands. Although Na Savi Indians from Oaxaca migrated to the US since the 1940s, when some men enrolled in the Bracero Program signed by the Mexican and US governments (López and Runsten, 2004: 254), there are no accounts of Guerrero’s Na Savi *braceros*. Still, probably influenced by their co-ethnic neighbors in Oaxaca, Na Savi nowadays are the ethnic group with the highest rate of international migration from Guerrero’s eastern highlands. Nevertheless, they turned to international migration decades after their Náhua neighbors or their relatively better communicated co-ethnic neighbors from Oaxaca.

Nahuas became the ethnic group with the longest migration history after the Na Savi. According to Ignacio Felipe (2007), from the 1940s to the 1960s they also moved to Guerrero’s coast, mostly to the booming port of Acapulco; then to the expanding metropolitan area of Mexico City during the 1960s and 1970s, in those decades the first Náhuas from La Montaña settled in California and Texas; and since the 1980s they started moving towards north-western Mexico to work in the agro-industrial export. Again, geography delayed the migration process as Nahuas from the Alto Balsas, an area closer to the railroad, participated in the Bracero Program since the 1940s (García Ortega, 2014).

Me’Phaa or Tlapanec Indians have considerably lower migration rates than Na Zavis or Nahuas and there is not an entirely convincing explanation for the reason of this variation yet, although some observers hint at the even more acute dearth of roads in the Tlapanec region (Oettinger 1980). Compared with Na Zavis or Nahuas, the Tlapanecs outmigrate in smaller numbers and mostly within Mexico (Blanchon, 2008).

**Table 3.1 Population of the Montaña Region by Municipality, Ethno-linguistic Groups (2015) and Households with International Emigrants (2010)**

No.	Municipality	Tlapanec (2015)	Mixtec (2015)	Nahua (2015)	Other (mostly Mestizo) (2015)	Total population (2015)	Households w. emigrants (2010)
1	Alcozauca de Guerrero	8	16204	24	3132	19368	
		0.00	0.84	0.00	0.16	1	0.15
2	Alpoyeca	52	753	233	5619	6657	
		0.01	0.11	0.04	0.84	1	0.10
3	Atlamajalcingo del Monte	2522	2372	13	569	5476	
		0.46	0.43	0.00	0.10	1	0.07
4	Atlixac	12450	10	4358	10394	27212	
		0.46	0.00	0.16	0.38	1	0.04
5	Copanatoyac	200	8988	7636	3368	20192	
		0.01	0.45	0.38	0.17	1	0.04
6	Cualác	19	13	2642	4975	7649	
		0.00	0.00	0.35	0.65	1	0.04
7	Huamuxtitlán	58	164	2148	12917	15287	
		0.00	0.01	0.14	0.84	1	0.05
8	Malinaltepec	18953	2640	43	3948	25584	
		0.74	0.10	0.00	0.15	1	0.03
9	Metlatónoc	1707	15823	9	1917	19456	
		0.09	0.81	0.00	0.10	1	0.07
10	Olinalá	6	5	8960	16512	25483	
		0.00	0.00	0.35	0.65	1	0.04
11	Tlacoapa	7741	22	18	1972	9753	
		0.79	0.00	0.00	0.20	1	0.02

12	Tlalixtaquilla de Maldonado Tlapa de	703 0.09	842 0.11	15 0.00	5847 0.79	7407 1	0.13
13	Comonfort	4652 0.05	19435 0.22	20621 0.23	43259 0.49	87967 1	0.06
14	Xalpatláhuac	39 0.00	4948 0.42	4824 0.41	1915 0.16	11726 1	0.12
15	Xochihuehuetlán	20 0.00	8 0.00	39 0.01	7134 0.99	7201 1	0.09
16	Zapotitlán Tablas	8549 0.76	23 0.00	647 0.06	2002 0.18	11221 1	0.02
17	Acatepec	32690 0.90	24 0.00	15 0.00	3720 0.10	36449 1	0.01
18	Cochoapa el Grande	9 0.00	16643 0.90	6 0.00	1800 0.10	18458 1	0.03
19	Iliatenco	9163 0.82	17 0.00	16 0.00	1918 0.17	11114 1	0.03
TOTAL		99541 0.27	88934 0.24	52267 0.14	132918 0.36	373660 1	

Source: Encuesta Intercensal, INEGI (2015); Índice de Intensidad Migratoria CONAPO (2012).

Since the moment when roads made it possible to move internal and international migration became one of the elements of what Patricia Arias (1992) named *la nueva rusticidad mexicana* (the new Mexican rusticity), a new social equilibrium in which the rural world is not grim and defeated but renovated, in part because the capitals acquired in the US and invested in hometowns sponsored the creation of economic alternatives and contributed to mitigate poverty, agrarian conflicts and social polarization.

### **3.3 Myths of Democratization and Development: La Vía Armada y el Desarrollo (des)Estabilizador**

Three episodes at Guerrero's historical figures help to get the facts right in order to understand better today's violence. The first episode is in 1970. Ruben Figueroa, the speaker of the commission for the development of the Balsas basin, presents a plan to establish a kaolin treatment plant in Iguala with joint resources from the Mexican government and a credit from the World Bank. The engineer in charge of the project corrects Figueroa in public by saying that, according to the commission's planning, the plant should be established 50 kilometers south of Iguala, and added that the reason for the plant to be placed in such location was the proximity to the kaolin deposits. If the kaolin had to be transported from the deposits to Iguala the costs of transport could turn the whole enterprise unprofitable.

Figueroa did not enjoy being contradicted publicly by one of his employees. And the young engineer would probably have thought twice before making such remarks if he had known that Figueroa would later become governor of Guerrero and be accused of hundreds of forced disappearances. "Cacique, monopolist, senator, governor, vulgar" is

how the weekly magazine *Proceso* described Figueroa when he died in 1991 (Proceso, 1991). That day in 1970 he simply took out a gun, placed it on a table in front of him, and in front of the media answered to the engineer: “Look you stupid young kid. Article double-O from the constitution of Guerrero sanctions me to place this plant wherever I want”. Nobody said anything else until a reporter dared to ask what does article double-O read. “Article double-O read my balls, you asshole!” was the reply Figueroa gave to the reporter (Interview, November 4, 2013). This was the man in charge of ruling the most complicated state in Mexico, a man who bragged about surviving six murder attempts and a kidnapping by the Partido de los Pobres (PdIP), a leftist armed group.

The years that run from 1954 to 1970 were particularly propitious for caciques like Figueroa to use state power to enrich themselves. Such period is known in Mexican economic history as the years of the “desarrollo estabilizador” (stabilizing development). The logic behind the economic policy of this period was that development should be driven by the private sector, particularly by the bankers and entrepreneurs, who were asked to invest heavily in the country. In return, the government would favor them with tax exemptions, subsidies, and a strong protection from international competitors. The production was oriented mainly to the closed internal market. The GDP per capita grew more than ever, at an average rate of 3.4 percent during 16 years maintaining relative stability in inflation (Tello 2010). Figueroa was able to establish Flecha Roja, and Autotransportes Figueroa México-Acapulco, his bus companies and his cattle estate among other businesses.

With this conception of development in the background, it appears not so much of a paradox that the period of major economic growth was also a period of mounting political instability, when different groups of society began to challenge Mexico’s autocracy. It was

also when the government showed its more repressive side, beginning with the watershed strike of the railroad workers in 1958 to demand the creation of a salary committee. As Aviña has observed: “Violence enabled Mexican golden ages and economic miracles” (2014: 173). The strikes of the ferrocarrileros as well as the mobilizations from agricultural workers, teachers and students were severely repressed and, as it happened during the previous period of state formation, Guerrero became a case in point again.

The second episode takes place in 1960. Eight years before the Tlatelolco massacre in downtown Mexico City the government of Guerrero had already repressed a student demonstration claiming university autonomy at Chilpancingo, the capital of Guerrero, killing 17 protesters. After the killings in Chilpancingo, the General Raúl Caballero Aburto, governor of the state, was forced to resign (Cervantes Gómez, 2007). The student uprising evolved into an urban popular movement with presence in many parts of the state. It was spearheaded by the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense (ACG), a political organization created in 1959 by regime opponents among whom school teachers figured prominently. The movement grew in strength during 1961 while the provisional state government called for elections to renew state and local authorities to be held in December 1962. The ACG presented José María Téllez as their candidate for governor. After the elections were held, the ACG, led by Genaro Vazquez, engaged in what became the quintessential practice of the Mexican transition to democracy: contesting in the streets the fraudulent results in the ballots.

Again, demonstrators were confronted by the police and the military. This time the toll of repression was 7 deaths, 23 injured and 280 arrests (Peláez Ramos, 2014). Vázquez fled the state but was captured in 1966. A commando force rescued him in 1968 from the Iguala prison and he fled to the Atoyac Sierra. He renamed the ACG as Asociación Cívica

Nacional Revolucionaria (ACNR) and declared that he himself and the members of his organization were convinced of *la vía armada* as the only means to transform the current regime (Menéndez Rodríguez, 1971).

The third episode takes place in Atoyac, where a protest rally in 1967 demanded the destitution of the primary school director and the school committee (Peláez Ramos 2014). The rally was led by Lucio Cabañas, a rural teacher and student leader from the Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa. The police had warned Cabañas they would not tolerate any demonstration, so they opened fire when Cabañas began his speech, killing five people. As Vázquez, Cabañas also fled to the Sierra and formed the *Partido de los Pobres* (PDLP) and its armed branch, the *Brigada Campesina de Ajusticiamiento*, (Peasant Execution Brigade) (Aviña, 2014). Later Cabañas declared that:

“The government, at the same time that they have punished, repressed the people of Guerrero, mainly at the Atoyac Sierra and Costa Grande, tries to apply a reformist policy. They send Luis Echeverría to do healings, to offer beans, to build highways, to give some money, to offer cows, to offer rabbits in order to please people. And he promises many things, free elections, freedom of speech. And Echeverría, in order to avoid coming here every time he is needed, is going to name one of his allies (...) Rubén Figueroa, a relative from that Figueroa who treasoned Zapata” (Cabañas in Tort, 2005, own translation from a speech in a political meeting, somewhere at the Atoyac Sierra before 1970).

Such brief accounts help to debunk some of the myths in the scholarship about the Mexican transition to democracy. The first myth is about the temporality of the transition. Many accounts place the onset of such process in 1987-1988 when the fracture inside the PRI evolved in the contested presidential elections between Carlos Salinas and Cuauhtémoc

Cárdenas, situating the pivotal moment in the 1990s electoral reforms that followed the fraud against Cárdenas and the conclusion of such transition in the year 2000 when Vicente Fox, a candidate from a party different from the PRI won the presidency of the country for the first time in 71 years.

The problem with such a short time span of the process is that it misses the crucial events that took place before the 1988 elections. As the examples above illustrate, elections began to be contested and the PRI began to promise free elections as early as in the 1960s. In fact, the long list of federal and subnational electoral reforms that Mexico undertook since the 1960s evidences the inadequacy of such a narrow temporal definition and supports the claim of some scholars that transitions to democracy are decades-long processes (Tilly, 2005b; Trejo, 2004; Hiskey, 2013).

The narrow temporal definition is, in part, a consequence of a bias in the level of analysis, centered on the national level and therefore missing crucial developments that took place at the local level, particularly in the marginalized and peripheral parts of Mexico. Examples of such developments can be observed not only in the rise of armed insurgencies but also in the first victories of opposition parties in local elections taking place years earlier (and their triumph being recognized by the government). As early as 1980, Othón Salazar, the historic leader of the Mexican Communist Party and the teacher's movement, the Movimiento Revolucionario Magisterial (MRM) became the first leftist opposition candidate to win a municipal election and be recognized as winner. Salazar was elected mayor of the montañese municipality of Alcozauca.

The second myth exposed by these accounts is about the smoothness of the transition. Many scholars have depicted the Mexican democratization as a “velvet revolution”, focusing on the pacts among elites and downplaying the role of popular



movements and armed insurgencies.<sup>36</sup> As Pansters has observed (2012: 6) this narrative focuses on “ballots” but has troubles accounting for the “bullets”. Perhaps the killing of 6 and forced disappearing of 43 teacher trainees from the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School the night of September 26, 2014 by the hands of local and state policemen with the knowledge of federal and military personnel was the unequivocal call to observers of Mexican reality to look closer at the continuities of authoritarianism and remove the velvet from of their lenses by realizing that the so-called pax-priista had not been so peaceful after all (Gillingham, 2012; Padilla, 2008).

The combination of these two misperceptions – the velvet cover and the lack of a longer-trend, subnational perspective – has produced a very distorted vision. Many Mexican scholars and conflict pundits are convinced that Mexico is more violent nowadays than it used to be in other historical periods. This is certainly not the case for the critical decades of state formation (1930-1950), nor for the true initiation of the democratization process in the 1960s and 1970s and particularly not for the rural areas of states like Guerrero that reached levels of violence comparable to the dictatorships in Chile or Argentina (Trejo, 2015). Quite contrary to what the established narrative holds, Mexico was considerably more violent and criminal during those periods when caciques such as Figueroa were state governors and hundreds were forcefully disappeared.

The last myth derives from such distortion and is the most consequential for this thesis because it holds that democratization is the main cause for today’s violence.

According to Kalyvas (2015):

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<sup>36</sup> See Magaloni (2006); Lujambio (2000); Greene (2007).

“Perhaps the most important factor behind the rise of large-scale organized crime, at least in Mexico, is political (or institutional): the transition from autocratic, one-party rule to democratic, multiparty rule” (p. 8).

But this notion does not seem to fit real world data, particularly if Mexico is less violent now than what it used to be forty or fifty years ago, at the heyday of the *Guerra Sucia*. The theory is difficult to square in the long trend if it is not contextualized with other factors and seems to be anachronistic as an explanation for current violence. If democratization by itself did not produce violence, then what was it? In the context of dismantling agricultural policies, blocking the exit option of out-migration triggered many conflict predictors as I will explain in the following two subsections.

### **3.4 Carrots and Sticks. The Logic of Counterinsurgency**

Wars are usually followed by reconstruction processes, as was the case in Europe, Japan and Korea (Durand 2014). Something similar happened after Guerrero’s *Guerra Sucia*. The government had already given too many sticks, now it was time for some carrots. The carrots meant a new program of land redistribution and significant state resources aimed to win the “hearts and minds” and avoid a subsequent rebellion in rural areas. According to Trejo (2004), in order to avoid a major national insurrection Presidents Díaz Ordaz and Luis Echeverría distributed more land titles than any other presidents since the Mexican Revolution (129-130). These policies had a lasting impact in areas such as La Montaña, even if these had not been the epicentre of guerrilla warfare during the 1960s and 1970s in the same way as the Atoyac Sierra. Yet guerrilla warfare training camps, arms delivery and other type of guerrilla activity had been detected in Metlatónoc, Malinatepec,

Xalpatláhuac, Cochoapa and Santa María Yusundacua, all these are Montaña or neighboring Oaxaca municipalities (Proceso, 2000, Castellanos, 2008). Cabañas' combat diary also reveals he was learning Náhuatl in order to extend guerrilla insurgency to that region (Aviña, 2014: 99, 165). These events convinced government officials to pay special attention to La Montaña to prevent subsequent insurgencies.

Hébert (2006) refers to this process as the state's "massive incursion", when the region experienced an unprecedented expansion of basic infrastructure. According to Hébert (2006), in the 1970s there was not a single road that could be transited by a bus in the Eastern highlands. After the Cabañas and Vázquez rebellions the state carried out electrification works, construction of schools and – particularly important for the intensification of migration – construction of roads (p. 30). The state actions that took place in the rural areas of Guerrero during and after the campesino rebellions of Vázquez and Cabañas seem to follow the suggestions of Fernando Gutierrez Barrios, head of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), Mexico's intelligence and counterinsurgency agency during the *Guerra Sucia*:

"A system that has produced good results is creating, first, a good information network among peasants and local people, then introducing a brigade integrated with elements of the health department, food pantry, subsidies to improve agrarian technology, etc., to cover the hamlets at the highlands and remove popular support from gunmen, infiltrate their group, very discretely, with one or two persons dedicated to obtaining information. Once they have been located, they are harassed continuously until they run short in ammunition and food, their morale is low and casualties and desertions put them to an end. It would be convenient that the current governor (Raymundo Abarca) together with the army, solve this problem so the next governor

would not need gunmen repressions, and with their extermination, the intentions of those aspiring to imitate them will be cut off” (Proceso 2000, own translation).

Together with land reform two other actions carried by the state had particularly lasting impacts: The establishing of stores from the National Company of Popular Subsistence (CONASUPO) and development schemes from the National Mexican Coffee Institute (INMECAFÉ). CONASUPO was a state agency with public stores where poor people could buy subsidized maize and other essential goods at prices lower than those of the market (Hébert 2006). INMECAFÉ had been established since 1958 with the goals of diffusing coffee technology and providing credits to small coffee producers, but it gradually assumed primary responsibility for commercializing and exporting coffee produced by those smallholders (Eakin, Tucker and Castellanos 2006: 159-160).

It is very likely that INMECAFÉ played a pivotal role in simultaneously pacifying the region and transforming ancient agricultural practices. The political elite’s idea was to help peasant communities to transit from subsistence to commercial agriculture. Given its relatively high return, coffee was seen as a strategic crop for developing rural regions. In 1973, during the period of greatest governmental control, INMECAFÉ was made responsible for the gathering and direct exportation of coffee beans (Renard and Ortega Breña 2010).

### **3.5 The Great Contradiction: Economic Liberalization and Migration Securitization**

#### **3.5.1 The neoliberal turn**

If people from the eastern highlands were told in the early 1970s about the abrupt transformations they were about to experience, they would not have believed it. The wave

of violence in the 1970s was perhaps not so surprising to them – in the end, conflicts had always been part of the history of the region. In contrast, the state-sponsored infrastructure projects had a lasting impact, partially integrating the agricultural production of the region into the national and international markets, changing subsistence agriculture practices that had existed for centuries (Hébert 2006). For several families it made more sense to stop or reduce their maize production in order to plant coffee or other more valued crop instead. Even if tortillas didn't taste as good as the ones produced with their own crops, it was possible to obtain the maize required for their everyday preparation from the CONASUPO subsidized stores.

The new profitable equilibrium lasted only short. The government's restorative effort to close the chapter of peasant rebellions with state intervention was helped by the boom in the oil price during the 1970s. But when oil prices hit rock bottom in 1982, public expenditure contracted dramatically. El Desarrollo Estabilizador was abandoned and replaced by a policy in which barriers to foreign trade and capital were removed at the same time that barriers to human mobility were reaffirmed.

If the transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture was already surprising, the crises that followed were even more. In the early 1980s the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a 3.9 billion loan to Mexico in order to allow the country to comply with its foreign payments, but the loan came with the condition of imposing sharp cutbacks in public spending and reducing the size of its public sector (Farnsworth 1982). Simultaneously, a sector of the Mexican political elite educated in the US and indoctrinated in neoclassic economics seized key power positions, including the country's presidency. Mexico, as many other Latin American countries, began a series of macroeconomic reforms aimed to replace the model of import substitution with one based in trade openness and

integration with the global economy. During this period of economic structural adjustment, inequality increased and a set of protections for the most vulnerable classes was reduced or transformed. According to Portes and Hoffman (2003), these changes had a crucial influence on the decision of millions of people to emigrate:

“Faced with a macro-economic model that simultaneously increases inequality and abandons market losers to their fate, many members of the intermediate and subordinate classes have embraced the exit option” (p. 74).

The Mexican countryside was particularly affected by these adjustment policies. A 2008 World Bank report pointed out that the rural population shrank by 25 per cent since trade liberalization began. Those who managed to remain in rural areas saw a significant decrease in their real purchasing power. The reduction and removal of state subsidies, constitutional changes facilitating the privatization of land, and competition with imports from US agroindustrial products pushed peasants to abandon the countryside. Given the increasing economic uncertainty, many abandoned or sublet their land in order to finance their out-migration. The menace that peasants have faced since then is a matter of survival, as has been well described by Jorge Durand:

“Just until two decades ago, the peasant and indigenous way of life in Mexico and Central America could maintain a level of survival for a good part of the population, but that ancestral way of life has been left behind. The countryside cannot maintain a numerous family anymore and in the city there are no jobs nor better living standards” (2014, own translation).

In 1989, following the dissolution of the International Coffee Agreement, INMECAFÉ was restructured and finally disappeared in 1992 together with production supports, price controls and government-managed marketing channels for more than

200,000 small coffee producers (Snyder, 1999: 184). From 1989 to 1993 productivity of the coffee sector contracted by one third, representing a loss in farm income of 70 percent (Eakin et. al. 2006: 160). In the same year that INMECAFÉ disappeared, the agrarian reform was erased from the Constitution. This modification was not a minor one, the agrarian reform was the most important social demand of the Mexican Revolution. The original Zapatista rebellion of 1911 in Morelos forced the inclusion of provisions for land redistribution and protection in the Constitution of 1917, contained in article 27. The US government had asked as a condition for the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) for a reform of article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in order to secure the property rights of the future American investors. In response to the US demands Mexico not only eliminated land redistribution, it also liberalized land tenure in the constitutional reform of 1992.

As in many other coffee producing parts, the disappearance of INMECAFÉ had very negative repercussions in the household economies at La Montaña.<sup>37</sup> Two decades before, the state had induced the Montañeros to change from subsistence to commercial agriculture by applying policies aimed at warranting prices for their crops. Now, after reorienting their production, it was abandoning them to their own luck, and hoping that the new poverty reduction program PRONASOL would help them buffer the shock. Some families went back to subsistence agriculture, others organized coffee cooperatives in order to be able to compete in the international market, still others used the recently built roads to

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<sup>37</sup> The exception was Oaxaca where a reregulation process started by the governor Heladio Ramírez resulted in a subnational neocorporatist regime for the coffee sector as explained in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

out-migrate. Chávez Román (2004) adds two more actions to this “repertoire of survival”: relying on the government assistance programs and growing illicit crops (p. 39).

This was the moment when, in Hirschman’s terms, exit crystallized as the essential “escape valve” of the Mexican countryside (Hirschman, 1969). By crushing the rebels in the 1970s the state had made clear that voice was not an option (at least not in Guerrero and at least not by military means). By dismantling the state’s economic and welfare institutions and erasing land reform from the Constitution the government gave up its tools of political control and loyalty ceased to be an alternative for large segments of the peasantry as they risked undernourishment. Therefore, exit was perhaps the only option that made sense to them. It is not a coincidence that rebellion broke out in Chiapas, another southern, coffee producer state but without a history of emigration. Ramos (2002) is correct when he states that “emigration and remittances are the real economic adjustment program of the poor in Latin America” (in Portes and Hoffman 2003: 74). The absence of migration networks may also be part of the explanation of Chiapas’ indigenous insurgency in 1994 as much as the current toughening of US migration policies can be part of the explanation of today’s internal wars in Guerrero and in other parts in Mexico, as I will explain in the next section and in Chapter 5.

### 3.5.2 Securitization of migration

Montañese irregular migration to the US proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s. The vast information available about the risks involved in irregular moves leaves no doubt this choice was far from ideal. But for such a limited set of alternatives as the one available to campesinos from the eastern highlands, it was perhaps the least bad scenario in order to make a living and in some cases even acquire some wealth. Cruz and Ferias (2004) explain:

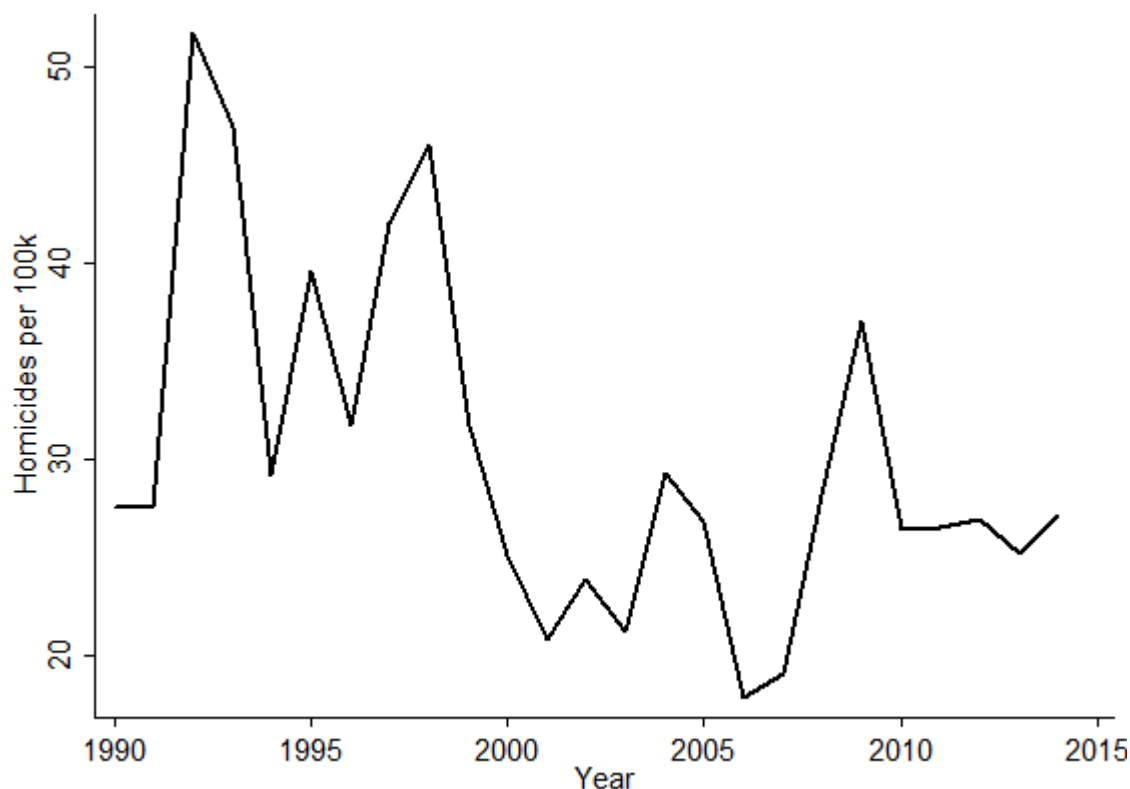


“Land scarcity, overpopulation and precarious economy in the region of Guerrero’s Montaña impose the need to pursue very diverse economic strategies in order to procure an income to oneself, combining local occupations with jobs outside the own plot of land, region or country” (own translation, p. 63).

The particular Montañese irregular migration to the US shared many features with the broader, well- researched phenomenon of Mexican irregular migration during the 1980s and 1990s: Migrants following a circular migration pattern, working part of the year in the US but returning to their communities during festivities, harvest and seeding seasons, anchor persons at destination lowering the risks and costs of irregular moves, crucial information (i.e. spotting of job opportunities and detecting risks associated with migration routes) flowing through social networks, and “systemic” remittances (usually from a relative already settled at the destination place) used to finance the trip of family members (Canabal Cristiani 2004; Cruz and Ferias, 2004, 64).

This “real economic adjustment program of the poor” lasted until the 2000s in most of Mexico but not in La Montaña. In 2001 the US political elite became determined to coordinate different levels of government and devote enough resources to controlling the border. The 9/11 attacks gave George Bush enough political support to pass radical legislation and boost the US security apparatus to unseen levels, with the immigration agencies on top of the funding list. The rise of the migration security apparatus is described in detail in the next chapter, but the important point here is that such radical toughening modified social behavior in communities of migrant origin. Graph 3.2 shows the homicide rates for all Montaña municipalities from 1990 to 2015. A clear slope can be observed from 1999 to 2001, followed by a small increase and a new slump in 2006. Then homicides start to rise again, precisely when the US tightened its migration controls.

**Figure 3.2 Average Homicide Rates in La Montaña. 1990-2015**



Source: INEGI (2015)

Another factor that is relevant for controlling the levels of violence is the emergence of the *Policía Comunitaria* (Community Police). During the mid-1990s, rapes carried out by soldiers and a series of cattle raiding events motivated inhabitants from La Montaña to organize a social movement to pressure the government to address these problems. But according to one of the religious figures that participated actively in this process, the government was unable or unwilling to act. Then, relying once again on their repertoire of ancestral cooperation practices, these local figures helped to found organizations responsible for conducting policing tasks. Such organizations were the Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias (CRAC), established by commissaries from the

communities involved who had been elected in assemblies, and a regional command (PC). Some attribute the decline of violence in the region to the institution of the CRAC-PC (Sierra 2015). However, self-defense organizations have also emerged in other parts of Mexico such as Michoacán or Guerrero's western highlands, where the levels of violence have not declined. While part of the explanation may lie in important organizational differences between self-defense groups (i.e. the groups from Michoacán seem to be more mestizo vigilantes hired by the agro-industrial sector whereas the CRAC-PC is a structure rooted in indigenous communities) a systematic comparative analysis that could shed light on that point does not exist yet.

### **3.6 From Coexistence to Interaction: How Restraining Irregular Migration Fueled Violence**

The fall of regular and irregular out-migration occurred until very recently.<sup>38</sup> Such recent change has the potential to modify behaviors in the regions of migration origin. With regards to the relationship between out-migration and violence, there are at least six concrete mechanisms that explain the connection. I discuss them now.

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<sup>38</sup> In 2000 and 2001 the US was experiencing an economic slowdown that certainly affected Mexican migration. However, the attacks of September 11, 2001 were followed by a brief period of two or three years in which military Keynesianism may have propelled the American economy and increased migration indirectly, at least during this period in which the new security provisions were still not fully implemented. Even if Mexican migration to the US started to decline in 2001, it experienced a small recovery in 2004. Since then, it has followed an unequivocal trend of migration decline. Migration figures are discussed in detail in the next chapter, based on the estimates provided by Passel and D'Vera (2012).

### 3.6.1 Competition for scarce resources

If conflict is understood as competition for scarce resources such as land or job opportunities, it may be fueled by an increase in both return migration and frustrated migration attempts. The following interview with José (all the names have been changed in this section), although he is an internal rather than an international migrant, illustrates this dynamic. After spending almost two decades in the Sierra, he decided in January 2014 to return to his hometown in the Tlapanec region of La Montaña. He was joined by his wife, whom he met in the Sierra, and children. Unspecified problems convinced him to return. He claims to have sent money to his brothers during the two decades he was abroad in order to build a house on a plot of land which he inherited from his parents. But when he arrived he was neither accepted (n)or recognized by his family. When he tried to communicate, he found his family hostile and superstitious:

“They say I am not José, but a sorcerer who looks like their brother, they accuse me of bewitching them, they say they have been getting sick since I returned. [...] Then, they say that I don’t have the right to cut down wood (cortar palo) anymore from the place where I cut it, not even dry wood! They burnt down my house and destroyed my tools, my own brothers!”

Therefore, return or frustrated migration – particularly when migrants go back to their communities without any wealth as it usually happens with those who did not succeed in their irregular attempt – increases competition for scarce resources. This competition may sometimes take the form of violent interpersonal conflict or even involve entire

communities rather than single individuals. As Abel Barrera, a human rights activist and anthropologist asserted: “Communities fight for the tlacolol of misery”.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.6.2 Impossibility to pay back debts

Remittances from the US can help to payout debts and therefore, to decrease tensions within communities. Tacho’s experience serves as evidence for this. Tacho lives in a small hamlet in the Tlapanec region. During his period as comisario (community’s unpaid authority) he used some of the community’s money for unspecified personal expenses. Although people from his hamlet do not usually emigrate, he observed that people from a near village did, so he decided to leave to the US in order to gather money and pay his debt back.

He paid 2,400 US Dollars to the smuggler and, after one failed attempt, he was successful in crossing the border, although he remembers spending two days hiding in the Sonora-Arizona desert. It took him three days to get to North Carolina, his destination. He worked first in restaurants and later in the fields, earning about 300 US Dollars per week.

Since Tacho took money that belonged to his community, it is possible that feelings of shame and remorse and a desire to avoid public humiliation and ostracism weighted in his decision to migrate. However, from the following sentence it is possible to deduce unambiguously that he was being threatened by someone from his community in order to make him pay back his debt:

“I don’t like having debts, it is dangerous”

He spent three years in the US, without drinking. According to Tacho, restraining himself from drinking was essential in order to save money.

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<sup>39</sup> Speech at the march for the twentieth anniversary of the Human Rights Center Tlachinollan, July 26, 2014.

“People drink a lot there. I spent three years there, without drinking. That’s how I managed to pay back my debts.”

Following Tacho’s account, after three years in the US he was not just able to pay back his debts, but also to provide financial support to his four children, which are now studying in the towns of Chilpancingo and Ayutla. His children still need economic support until they graduate. The oldest is expected to earn his Law degree in two years. His younger children needs economic aid for a longer period. Therefore, Tacho is considering migrating again.

Tacho’s story is particularly important for two reasons. First, it is based on his relation to his community and relational explanations have gained prominence over dispositional or systemic explanations over the last few years. Second, it illustrates how out-migration prevented violence at the individual, but also at the community level. On the one hand, Tacho avoided violence to be inflicted on himself because he fled from his community and when he returned, he was able to pay back his debts. On the other hand, he managed to stop a spiral of violence that could have ravaged his community because an attack against him could have been followed by a revenge attack carried out by a member of his family or friend. Such counterfactual supports the assertion that out-migration can be conceived as an asset of collective efficacy.

### 3.6.3 Out-migration as interrupter of blood feuds

Tomás told me a story that took place in his community. A girl married a man who beat her, abused her and fled to the US in order to avoid revenge from the girl’s brothers. As many migrants do, he came back to his hamlet years later during the celebration of the patron saint. The girl’s family seized their revenge opportunity and killed him. According

to Tomás, his story is not an isolated case. In his small (about a hundred people) hamlet there is another migrant who escaped from a similar threat.

Of course, irregular migration is not the only escape from vendettas – hiding in another location in Mexico is also option – but fleeing to the US is safer since it raises the costs and the probability of incarceration for those who want to make justice with their own hands. Tomás told me that now it is the abusive husband's family who want to take revenge. Tomás' story is similar to Tacho's relational and multilevel account. It reinforces the proposition that out-migration to the US can act as a powerful interrupter of blood feuds, but adds the essential understanding that debts are not only of economic kind.

#### 3.6.4 Deflection into a criminal occupation

For decades, Mexicans have migrated to the U.S. in order to find a better source of income. Given the wage differentials among the two countries, Mexicans can expect to triple their income by finding a job in the US.. As high income occupations and access to credit are scarce in Mexico, migrant communities have relied on remittances whenever they need to do extraordinary investments (like the investments required in order to build a house or start a new business). However, the restrictive shift in border controls and migratory policies that took place during the last years have “reoriented” frustrated irregular migrants into other high income occupations – and often illegal ones.

Conversely, at the same time that irregular moves to the US have decreased, the growing of illicit crops – particularly cannabis and opium poppy – has proliferated. According to the Mexican Ministry of Defense, Guerrero is the main opium poppy producer nationwide, accounting for 60% of the national production (CNN 2011). Poppy is a crop that needs to be cultivated at least 1,000 meters above the level of the sea, so it can only grow in the highlands. In January 2011, 245 kilograms of opium poppy was seized in

Chilpancingo, the capital of the state of Guerrero. It constituted the largest seizure of this drug in Mexican history (CNN, 2011).

The case of Teófilo exemplifies this “reorientation” mechanism. Teófilo is a thirty-five year-old Chamula. He has been working for many years as a gardener and construction worker in the town of San Cristobal, Chiapas. However, in recent years it has been very difficult for him to make a living. Jobs in construction and gardening have been scarce since the financial and economic crisis hit Mexico. Teófilo is desperate because he has to feed his wife and three kids. After five difficult years, he decided he should go to the US to look for a job. He paid 15,000 pesos (about 1,200 US Dollars) to a *coyote* (smuggler) who took him from Chiapas all the way north until he reached the US-Mexico border. He was caught while trying to cross the border without papers, then held in detention for a week and sent back to Mexico.

While being held in detention, he was forced to sign some documents. He does not know what these documents are about. He does not understand English and is almost illiterate in Spanish. His mother tongue is Tzotzil. However, he is aware that he signed something important and is afraid that if he tries to cross the border again, he might be locked up for a longer period of time. Therefore, he gave up the idea of migrating to the US. After his failed attempt to cross the border, he is more desperate than before. Now he has to find a better source of income in order to feed his family, but also to pay back the money he borrowed to cover the smugglers’ fee. He obtained some cannabis seeds and now he wants to start growing and selling marijuana. Hence, instead of doing gardening in the US he is becoming a cannabis dealer, a much more dangerous activity given that police may arrest him or, worse, that he may be risking his life if other cannabis suppliers regard him as a competitor.



The economic options for the rural population in other southern regions in Mexico are also limited. In a television interview Omar García (Aristegui, 2014), a survivor from the Iguala massacre committed by municipal police officers who colluded with members of a criminal organization and perhaps federal and state forces, describes this limited set of options:

“I come from the Sierra (Guerrero highlands), I’ve seen with my own eyes people killing each other. I’ve seen how people have to leave to the U.S., some (of them being) kids. (...) Some of them have to join up the lines of organized crime. (...) I also went as a labourer with the people. My classmates, we all grew like that, going as labourers with those who grow poppy. And I am not scared of saying it because that is how I grew up. (...) Those who don’t have the chance to study end up there or in the US. (...) We have arrived at the Normal (Ayotzinapa Normal Rural School) almost as a unique opportunity in life, (as) a way out from all the current social situation in the state of Guerrero, (as a way out) from all scarcities. In Guerrero, only one out of ten campesinos make it to college (own translation).”

Back at La Montaña I met Elías, who told me about a shaman who was renowned in the region for his accurate predictions of the future. Many people come from distant locations to consult him. Two of the main concerns that people pose to the shaman are: whether they will be able to cross the US-Mexico border if they decide to leave as irregular migrants; and whether they will have a successful harvest if they decide to grow opium poppy crops. As Teofilo, some peasants at la Montaña are also starting to grow illegal crops. They call opium poppy “maiz bola” (ball corn) because it has a round bulb. Illegal crop production is now one of the few survival strategies available to them. Producing poppy requires considerable time and resources. It is an activity usually weighted against other full-time decisions, like emigration. According to my personal enquiries, poppy

growing is a 24-hour job. It involves fertilizing, controlling plagues and taking turns to watch for the fields. Poppy production is an activity that employs a considerable amount of people as field labourers and night watchers, and all that effort can turn useless if the field is looted, spoiled or discovered and burnt by the army. Therefore, the shaman anecdote helps to reinforce the notion of reorientation and to underline the interplay between irregular migration and illegal crop production. As irregular moves to the US are becoming increasingly difficult, the alternative of producing opium poppies may be turning comparatively more attractive. Perhaps the shaman has been so accurate because border controls have turned his task of predicting the future easier.

### 3.6.5 Reduction of seasonal economic spillovers and the decline of public life

Back at Mexico City I met up with Rubén. He comes from a part from Guerrero's Sierra where towns are reputed for their opium poppy production. Inhabitants of his region also have a history of migration to the US. Both of Rubén's parents are schoolteachers. As many sons and daughters of schoolteachers, Rubén was an outstanding student. He attended college and he also completed a masters' degree in public policy. After graduating, he worked for a decade for the Mexican government at the Secretary for Social Development (SEDESOL). He is an exceptional interviewee given his capacity of making sense of first-hand experiences of the region with the reasoning of a policy analyst.

Although principles of empiricism and rationality guide his professional life, the conversation begins by confirming what the shaman anecdote, relying on radically different and more esoteric methods, illustrated – that out-migration and working for criminal organizations are alternative economic activities at his region of origin: “Lack of opportunities are particularly devastating regarding young people and kids. Acapulco

provides 85% of Guerrero's Gross Domestic Product, so the other options for personal development are migrating north or working for criminal organizations.”

Ruben says that youths working for criminal organizations do not earn too much money, about \$ 4,000 Mexican Pesos a month (300 US Dollars), so he is perplexed by the fact that working for these criminal organizations has become such a popular phenomenon.

A practice that has proliferated at his home region is racketeering. According to Rubén, fear is exploited by plenty of people who pretend to be part of a criminal organization but are not. These people bother regular citizens, particularly those who do not reside permanently in his town and are unknown to them. Therefore, it is difficult to know if extortions truly come from a criminal organization or just from a random citizen mimicking their extortion practices.

Such practices discourage the return of successful migrants and impoverish even more the already disadvantaged region. According to Rubén, an important economic spillover resulted from migrants coming back and spending their hard-currency savings on Christmas season. But circular migration has stopped for security concerns. Migration therefore is no longer seasonal and became rather a permanent phenomenon: “Many people leave with the idea of not coming back and migrants do not return anymore.”

In a town nearby his, almost everybody left and the town is now inhabited only by old people. Rubén himself has not been at his home place in a year although he lives only at a 3-hour drive distance from his hometown. Whenever he calls his family by phone, they tell him not to come back. He has become “extortionable” because the new kids working for La Familia Michoacana do not know him and he has been doing better than the rest of his friends in town.

Based in his own personal experience, Rubén attributes the decline of return and circular migration to increasing public security concerns at his region of origin. Nevertheless, it is useful to recall that a number of studies suggest that undocumented Mexican migration became less circular and temporal and more unidirectional and permanent when a shift in security policies at the border persuaded Mexicans already in the US to avoid seasonal traveling (Massey and Espinoza 1997; Massey, Durand and Pren, 2016). An unintended effect of increasing border controls was that undocumented immigrants already inside the US feared they would not be able to enter again so they stopped seasonal return trips to Mexico (Massey, Durand and Pren 2016)

According to Rubén, another reason why return migration has decreased is because public life in his town has disappeared, rendering return less attractive. Rubén remembers the balls that used to take place in the public plaza. When he was a high-school student he could hang out all night with friends without being disturbed by anyone. Nowadays the town inhabitants have imposed themselves a curfew at 8:00 p.m. After that hour, people usually assume that anyone who is still on the street has a dishonest reason to be there. Hence, violence has led to a decline of social gatherings that used to attract circular migrants and the end of seasonal economic spillovers linked to this circular migration. Therefore, the causality exemplified by this anecdote is opposite to the causality proposed in the general argument of this thesis, at least during a first moment. In other words, it is violence that affected migration and not the other way. However, as economists and criminologists have argued, economic opportunities and social capital are important for the containment of violence. Consequently, a feedback loop of less migration, less economic opportunities and less social gatherings may exist and may have contributed to exacerbating violence in his town.

### 3.6.6 Postponement of out-migration for security reasons

Samuel held two jobs for thirty years. He was employed as a housekeeper and as a dispatcher in a company that supplies material for electric installations. He is married to Graciela, who also works as a maid in the same summer house where Samuel has worked since he was a teenager. The summer house they keep is located in the state of Morelos, in a small village about an hour from Cuernavaca. The owners are a wealthy family from Mexico City who visit their estate once or twice every month during the weekends. As a part of their remuneration, Samuel and Graciela are allowed to live for free in a small, single-storey house situated in the backyard of the estate. They are raising three children. By saving on the rent and adding their housekeeping and dispatcher incomes, Samuel and Graciela's three children have become young adults with the possibility to attain more education than their parents and improve their economic opportunities.

However, whether their children will be capable of accessing a higher social strata is still under question. The eldest sibling (Lucas) got accepted at the university to study for a bachelor's degree in computer science, but dropped out after a year. Samuel then helped Lucas to get a job at the warehouse of the supplier company where he used to work. The two other siblings are still in high school. Lucas's dropping out was a main cause of concern for his mother. She thinks that Lucas does not have the passion for computers that is required to become an IT engineer: "I have observed the kids that want to become engineers. They are all the time working on their computers and they seem to like it and Lucas is not like that. He does not seem to have the interest that other kids have."

After thirty years of a relatively stable life, the future has become uncertain for the family of Samuel. Lucas' dropping out from college is not the only cause of anxiety. The estate in which they live has been divided between two owners, both members of the family

from Mexico City. Whereas it is clear that Samuel's family will be allowed to continue living in their house for now, their contractual agreement with one half of the owners of the estate has ended.

They also fear they can be evicted if the side of the property in which their house is located is sold. To make things more critical, Samuel lost his job at the supplier company and has been doing small jobs ever since. Now that his economic condition has worsened, he has been seriously contemplating other options, such as migrating to the US.

"I thought about going to the United States, there are many from a village nearby who go there. I met someone who takes people there and he was willing to take me if I pay him a good amount of money. I was ready to go, most of all, because I am curious to see how things are over there. But then Graciela and the kids came to me crying and told me I was crazy, that I should not leave. They feared that probably they won't see me again, that something could happen to me. So I decided to stay. I cannot leave them here alone, particularly now that things are getting complicated."

Samuel's explanation puzzled me for a while. Some of the more established explanations of migration refer to the quest for income maximization or risk diversification. For example, the neoclassical and the New Economics of Labor Migration theories predict that, either to increase his personal income or to diversify the risk of unemployment within his family, an individual like Samuel may be more willing to migrate in a moment of high uncertainty like the one he is currently experiencing. Social network theory also predicts that he might be able to reduce costs and increase the probability of an undocumented trip since he is already in contact with a coyote and migrant networks. Moreover, if Samuel wants to help his family economically perhaps his best alternative is to go to the US and secure an income in US Dollars for a few years. Yet the uncertainty felt by his family was

the reason that convinced him to stay. Why did Samuel cancel his migration trip although available theories predict his out-migration rather than his stay?

I understood better Samuel's reasoning when I decided to go to a party near their village. Samuel was worried about me going alone to the party and asked Lucas to go with me. The event was taking place in an open field. There was a dancing floor and two large loud speakers. Most of the attendees were teenagers or people in their early twenties, drinking beer, dressed either with banda or cholo gang outfits, or with an outfit combining elements from these two subcultures that have become very popular throughout Mexico.

Lucas' own look fitted very well in this ambiance of tough kids. He drives a pick-up truck with a huge figure of the Santa Muerte drawn on the windshield and is very fond of his cowboy boots and hat. He also knows dozens of narco-corridos<sup>40</sup> by heart.

Since I did not share their dressing codes and nobody knew me, it became clear to everyone at the party that I was an outsider. It became clear to me that outsiders were not welcome when a tall, strong boy approached, grabbed me by the neck and while suffocating me, said: "I am a narco". I managed to get rid of his grabbing, but other boys approached and began to push me so we decided to leave before things started to get worse. We probably spent less than 30 minutes at that party.

We left without knowing whether the boy was truly a narcotrafficker and without understanding why he behaved violently against me. Lucas doubts he was one. He thinks the boy was trying to impress his friends or the girls at the place. However, it might also be the case that he had received orders from someone to keep strangers away from that "turf". What became clearer to me after this experience is that Samuel was not only referring to his

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<sup>40</sup> Folk songs glorifying narcotraffickers.

family's economic situation when he mentioned that things were getting bad in his small village and surroundings. Although household finances were a strong cause of concern for Samuel, perhaps he was more worried about the kind of environment in which his three children were socializing. Samuel might have decided to cancel his migration trip to the US in order to be ready to offer guidance and help to his children if any problem arises given the difficult social context in which they are experiencing their transition to adulthood.

Samuel is not a singular case. For many people in the state of Morelos, the possibility that their family members may become either victims or perpetrators in a context of public security deterioration is their greatest concern. Their biographies intersect with the history of Morelos, a state that has experienced more kidnappings, extortions and drug-related homicides than many other states and with active participation of the police in these violence crimes. Many fear that their sons will have a similar fate as Juan Francisco Sicilia, the brutally murdered son of the famous poet Javier Sicilia. The body of Juan Francisco was found in 2011 in Temixco, a municipality that has become part of the urban area of Cuernavaca.

Since the early 2000s, homicide rates in Morelos followed the national trends. They decreased sharply during seven consecutive years, but then the tendency reversed in 2008. Morelos became a hotspot after December 2009 when Arturo Beltrán Leyva, a childhood friend turned arch-enemy of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, was killed in a raid by the police and the Mexican navy special forces in a gated residential area of Cuernavaca, the capital of the state of Morelos.

After their split from the Sinaloa cartel, the Beltrán Leyva cartel established itself as one of the most important criminal syndicates in Mexico, controlling drug corridors departing from Guerrero to the north of the country. Rumor has it that Morelos and



particularly Cuernavaca were safer than many other places in Mexico for a long time because the heads or the criminal organizations used to live there. The logic is similar to the one of the European colonization period when European empires used to wage war between themselves but only in regions outside Europe. In any case, after Beltrán Leyva's annihilation a struggle to death began among criminal organizations for the territory of Morelos that seems to continue until today.

Samuel's family face a difficult situation. Job loss of the household head, the school dropout of their eldest son and an overall deterioration of public security make their future uncertain. However, the confluence of adverse economic and security situations have not compelled either Samuel or any other member of his family to leave their homeplace. In fact, it appears they are trapped by opposing mechanisms that neutralize each other. Perhaps Samuel would have already left if the social environment of his village was not so threatening. Should crime evolve into an even more violent scenario and he might be compelled to move with his family altogether. Or if the economic conditions improve, he might be able to get a new job similar to the one he used to have.

More than contradicting existing theories of migration, the case of Samuel seems to unravel a more complex and realistic behavior. Migration can act as an effective strategy for diversifying risks like unemployment or crop destruction in agrarian societies, but this coping strategy depends on the absence of other risks like exposure of family members to violence.

### **3.7 Conclusions**

Why has La Montaña been rather peaceful for decades despite a concentration of many conflict predictors? Interviews and participant observation discussed in this chapter suggest that out-migration palliated violence. Homicide rates are lower now than in other historical periods, such as the critical moment of state formation, the decades-long democratization process, the Guerra Sucia in the 1970s or the neoliberal turn in the 1980s and 1990s.

Throughout decades irregular migration to the US became a crucial livelihood alternative for several members of rural communities in Mexico: It reduced intra-community competition for scarce resources; it made it possible to pay back debts and reduce interpersonal conflicts; it allowed people involved in such conflicts to escape from violent threats; it acted as a shield against drifting into criminal activities; it brought economic seasonal spillovers and reinvigorated local festivities and social life. Why did violence in La Montaña spike again in 2007? Because the shift in US border controls and security policies and the financial crisis in the US closed the escape valve of irregular out-migration. Nevertheless, migration and violence seem not to be related in a unidirectional way. Apart from all the mechanisms that explain how migration contained violence, there are opposite mechanisms joining these phenomena. For example, people may be compelled to leave in order to avoid violence. In other words, violence is indeed a strong push factor.

In addition, violence may modify migratory behavior in a non-linear way. For example, the New Economics of Labour Migration predicts that household members may decide to migrate in order to diversify economic risks. Such prediction may be true for cases with low levels of violence. But in cases with intermediate or high levels of violence

household members may decide to postpone or cancel their migration trip despite increasing economic uncertainty. In the next chapter I provide statistical evidence that, despite the singularity of La Montaña and the rural parts analyzed in this chapter, the processes described in this chapter are also taking place in many other parts of Mexico where out-migration is an embedded practice.

## **Chapter 4**

### **From the American Dream to the Mexican Nightmare**

#### **Out-migration and Criminal Violence in Mexico**

Chapter 3 explained in detail some of the mechanisms that connect the hindering of irregular out-migration to criminal violence in rural, indigenous communities, mostly from the Montaña region in Guerrero. The present chapter has several objectives linked to the previous one, beginning by showing that the mechanisms described in the previous chapter also function in many parts of Mexico that are less exceptional.

This chapter begins by analyzing cross-municipal data gathered into one single national observation. I use time-series at the macro level to discuss the main explanatory theories for the dramatic escalation of criminal violence in Mexico. Therefore, I analyze the temporal dynamics of criminal violence as they evolved throughout the process of securitization of migration in the US. I identify the spikes and the bottoms of violence and the crucial moments when lethal violence spread through Mexico, precisely at the same moment when a radical shift in US border control policies and the criminalization of irregular migration to the US occurred. Second, I will go back to the end of the Bracero Program with the intention to explain why the onset and escalation of violence in Mexico happened during the most intense moment of migration securitization, and in fact because of it. In the third part spatial and temporal variation in levels of out-migration and violence are analyzed to understand the consequences of the American securitization of Mexican migration in the so-called “Mexican war on drugs”.

#### **4.1 Democratization, Neoliberalism or Divorces?**

The main narrative about the wave of criminal violence in Mexico asserts that criminal violence increased abruptly because the former president, Felipe Calderón, initiated a series of military and police operations to fight criminal organizations. According to this view, his decision was influenced by the political context (Illades and Santiago, 2014). He had just won the closest presidential election in Mexican history against Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the leftist candidate who accused him of fraud and asked for a vote recount that did not take place. As there were serious doubts regarding the lawfulness of his electoral triumph, Calderón militarized the country and used public security concerns as an instrument to legitimize himself (Bailey, 2014). However, his plans backfired. Like a spark in dry grass, his poorly reflected decision of launching a series of spectacular law enforcement operations drew unforeseen consequences in escalating levels of violence and raising doubts about the effectiveness of his crime control methods.

**Figure 4.1 Homicide Rates in Mexico and the Onset of the “War on Drugs” 1980-2015**



Source: INEGI; SINAIIS.

The fact that Calderón’s crackdowns influenced the levels of violence in Mexico seems beyond question. Figure 4.1 shows the trends in homicide rates from 1980 to 2015. The vertical line in the figure indicates the moment when his administration carried out the first raids against criminal organizations in the state of Michoacán in December, 2006. This date is usually taken by analysts as the onset of the “Mexican war on Drugs”. However, Figure 4.1 also serves to highlight a subtle fact that is usually forgotten: The trend of deadly violence started to change before Calderón’s first law-enforcement operation took place. By taking a close look at the numbers, it is possible to observe that homicides went on a fall for twelve consecutive years since 1992 but the slope was becoming less and less steep. They reached a bottom in 2004 and then the trend reversed. In fact, the last two years of Vicente

Fox' presidency (2005-2006) had already been more turbulent than expected. The so-called "Mexican war on drugs" did not begin during the Calderón Administration. Fox had already sent federal forces to the states of Guerrero, Michoacán, Chihuahua, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas in 2005 and 2006, where there were already important clashes between police forces and criminal organizations. Furthermore, even decades before Fox, other presidents had conducted crackdowns against narcotraffickers. Since the 1970s the Mexican state has deployed military actions at the national level to contain drug production (Astorga, 2005). The most important of these actions was "Operación Cóndor", a military operation conducted in 1977 strongly funded by the US and consisting in 10,000 Mexican soldiers spraying defoliants from helicopters and incinerating cannabis and poppy fields in the Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua highlands. Another major crackdown happened in 1984 when a massive ranch of allegedly 1,000 hectares was seized in Chihuahua. The owner of the ranch was the narcotrafficker Caro Quintero and according to journalistic accounts he used it to employ 7,000 men to grow marihuana to be smuggled into the US (Chaparro and Salas, 2013; Astorga, 2005).

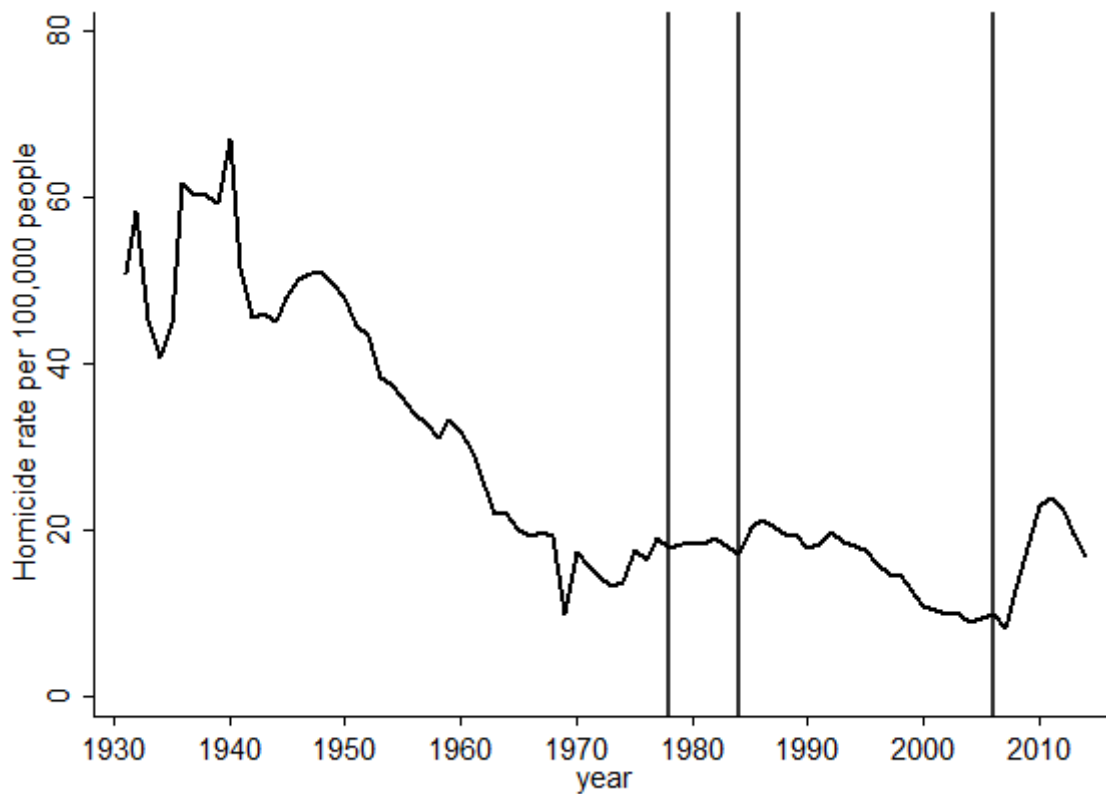
My point is not to diminish the relevance of the "war on drugs" started by Felipe Calderón as an explanatory factor of violence but to underline that it needs to be complemented with the important transformation of the US security apparatus and its consequences in terms of frustrated out-migration. Therefore, when Calderón took the momentous decision of launching a frontal attack against criminal organizations, he had very few other alternatives if none. The limited set of options for the Mexican government was foreseen by Chabat (2002), four years before the beginning of the Calderón Administration:

“The combination of US pressure and the role of Mexico as a major point of transit of drugs entering the US has generated serious tension in Mexican law enforcement institutions. Since Mexico has not the capacity to modify these parameters, it has very little margin for maneuver in the war on drugs, and it seems confined to fight a very costly war that endangers the Mexican transition to democracy” (Chabat, 2002: 135).

Therefore, my argument should not be understood as a rejection of the effect of democratization on violence as a whole. Instead, I argue that Mexico’s little margin of maneuver was reduced even more due to the restrictive US security and immigration policies. Figure 4.2 shows a longer trend perspective with regards to homicide rates. It includes vertical lines for the years 1977, 1984 and 2006. All of these are moments when crucial law-enforcement operations were carried out. In this figure it is possible to observe the absence of an escalation in violence after 1977 and a small increase in 1984. The figure also reveals a major point discussed in the previous chapter: in absolute terms there are more homicides nowadays. This trend is in part the result of a great increase in the population of Mexico. However, in relative terms Mexico used to be more violent during the first half of the twentieth century than nowadays. Therefore, Calderón’s law enforcement operations were certainly a breaking point with regards to the methods employed by his predecessors, but it should be taken into consideration that there have been other breaking points before. In other words, he increased the numbers of military officials with regards to his immediate predecessor, but other operations conducted in the 1970s and 1980s were also numerous and were not followed by waves of violence of similar proportions.



**Figure 4.2 Homicide Rates and Law Enforcement Operations 1930-2014**



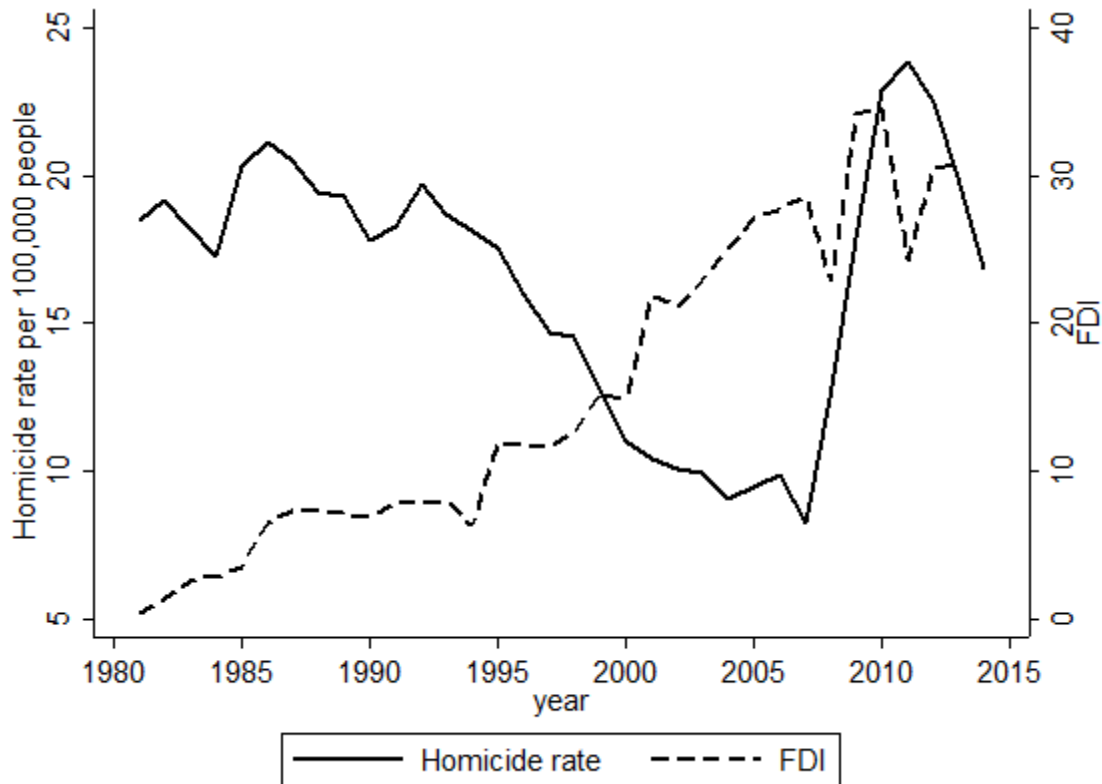
Source: Botello (2016)

These observations force us to pose a question: If conditions that favored violence were already in place during the Fox administration and even before, then why did the explosion of criminal violence only happen after Calderón came to power? In other words, if the grass was dry, why did it burn only after Calderón's first law-enforcement operation and not right after the operations that were carried out during the Fox, Lopez Portillo, De la Madrid or other administrations? The available theories to answer this and other questions related to criminal violence in Mexico seem hard to square with empirical evidence. In a nutshell, the main explanation asserts that violence, mostly related to the drug trade, grew because democratization drove the increase in violence by turning government coordination

increasingly difficult and simultaneously pushed the government to organize law enforcement operations that eroded its tacit arrangements with caciques or criminal organizations (Villareal 2002; Ríos 2012; Osorio 2013). Two other important narratives are that neoliberalism, by ripping apart Mexico's social fabric, created a fertile ground that could be exploited by cartels and gangs (Portes and Hoffman 2003; Watt and Zepeda 2012; 3; Moser and McIlwaine, 2004) and that changes in the family structure eroded social control and impoverished households when the rate of divorce increased in the country (Villareal 2002; Osorio 2012).

The main problem with these three narratives concerns timing: They don't do very well in explaining the timing of the upsurge. As already mentioned, until 2004 the homicide rate is moving in the opposite direction to the one predicted by these theories. In other words, homicidal violence was on a fall while the indicators that should provide empirical evidence for these theories are all increasing. The next three figures show the trends in some of these main indicators. Figure 4.3 displays the stock of foreign direct investment in Mexico for the last 35 years. This has been used as a measure of "economic globalization" and should provide evidence for the thesis that the implementation of the neoliberal economic model is causing criminal violence. Figure 4.4 shows the effective number of parties in Mexico since the 1970s and should provide support for the theory that democratization is driving the increase in violence. Figure 4.5 shows the increase in divorces and should provide support for the theory that family disintegration is behind the violence upsurge.

**Figure 4.3 Homicide Rates and Foreign Direct Investment 1980-2014**



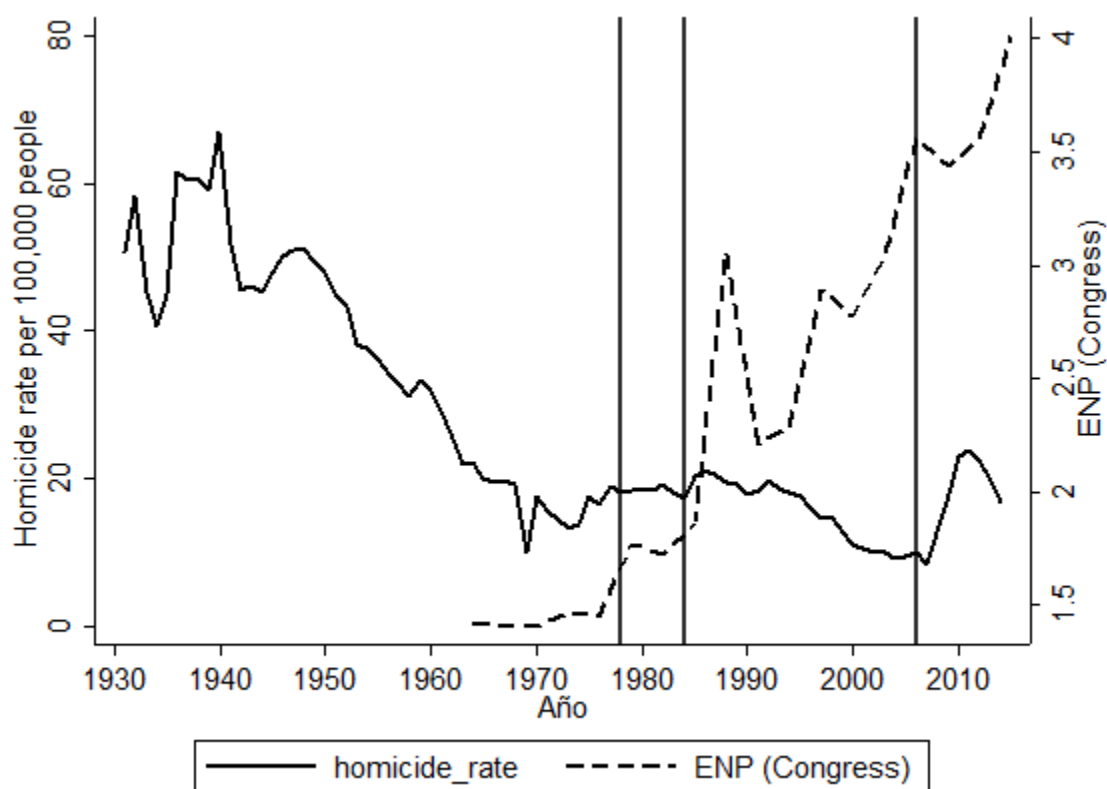
Source: INEGI [www.inegi.org](http://www.inegi.org), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). [unctadstat.unctad.org](http://unctadstat.unctad.org)

First, with a few setbacks, neoliberal reforms started in 1982 and took a major leap forward when constitutional changes in the early 1990s paved the road for the coming into effect of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, more than two decades ago.

Second, both top-bottom and democratization from below narratives trace back the onset of the Mexican transition to democracy to the 1960s and 1970s, when the student movement and the armed struggle in the countryside pushed the political elite to recognize some electoral victories from the opposition, develop a mixed multiparty system and grant amnesty to the former guerrilleros. The first substantial electoral reform was accepted in

1977. Transition to democracy accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s and reached its climax when the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the party who had ruled Mexico for 71 years, lost the presidential elections in the 2000 elections. This means democratization started at least forty years before the current security crisis, raising timing concerns again.

**Figure 4.4 Homicide Rates, Effective Number of Parties and Major Law Enforcement Operations 1930-2014**



Source: Botello (2015), Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo A.C. (CIDAC, 2016).

Finally, the divorce rate has increased continuously in the last twenty years. Again, the notion that divorces are driving an escalation in violence is problematic, given that violence decreased continuously for a twelve-year time-span (1992 – 2004). In order to win

some empirical support, these narratives have to rely on assumptions that are sometimes difficult to sustain, like lagging effects or the existence of a period when “violent capital” was accumulating.

**Figure 4.5 Homicide and Divorce Rates 1980-2014**



Source: INEGI [www.inegi.org](http://www.inegi.org)

## **4.2 The End of the American Dream**

I argue that the missing piece in the puzzle of the Mexican “Criminal Civil War” are the out-migration patterns, a variable that has been completely ignored in the literature. The key difference between the Calderón administration and his predecessors is that Calderón launched his military operations against narcotrafficking when the “escape valve” of irregular migration to the US had already been closed. In contrast, the previous Mexican presidents benefitted from the fact that out-migration buffered political and criminal violence when they conducted their crackdowns.

#### 4.2.1 The “Safety Valve” of Irregular Migration

In order to illustrate the previous point this section briefly reviews the political economy of Mexican migration to the US. It shows that contradictory migratory and security policies changed the rules of a game whose origins can be traced back at least a century, at the demise of the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution. The Revolution triggered an agrarian reform that provided land to many peasants. Between 1911 and 1992 nearly 100 million hectares, equivalent to half of the Mexican territory and two-thirds of all rural land was redistributed, 30,000 ejidos<sup>41</sup> and communal lands were established, and land was given to millions of ejidatarios and comuneros (Warman, 2003). As Trejo (2012) has pointed out, land redistribution became the pillar of political and social peace in the Mexican countryside not only because it alleviated poverty but also because it was granted in exchange of the peasants’ political support. It became a tool of control to warrant stability in the countryside. However, by the mid-1960s the Agrarian Reform started to show symptoms of exhaustion. The land left for distribution was scarce and of bad quality (Warman, 2003). Mexican migration to the US substituted the Agrarian Reform in that decade as the essential escape valve of the Mexican State.

Several complex mechanisms at the individual, family and community level explained in the previous chapter illustrated how migrants contributed to maintain peace in Mexico, but the short answer that summarizes such mechanisms is out-migration and remittances. Out-migration contributed to maintain peace in Mexico as it became a strategy

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<sup>41</sup> Ejidos are land plots owned by the state but granted to peasants to be farmed collectively or individually. Until the constitutional reform of 1992 ejidos could not be sold.

of survival for some, and a socially accepted path for capital acquisition and success for others.

#### 4.2.2 The End of the Bracero Program and the Dawning of the Irregular Era

Among the eventful path of Mexican migration to the US, two years are particularly relevant in the story: 1964 and 2001. 1964 marks the end of the Bracero Program. “Strong arm” is an inaccurate but illustrative translation for Bracero. As its name indicates, the rationale of the program was to provide American factories – but mostly American farms – with Mexican workers while American men were sent as soldiers to Europe during the Second World War. American women and children were not enough to fill the US demand for farmworkers during the war and the US was not willing to take the risk of a food shortage during wartime. The Bracero Program was so successful in boosting the American agricultural production that the US kept it going for 22 years after the end of the war. Once in motion, it could not be ended so easily because the American economy was booming after the war and avid for workers and entering into a new war in Korea, so it was sustained during the 1950s and early 1960s. Yet the program ended in 1964 as a result of the pressure exerted by religious and labor organizations (Massey and Ziang, 1989).

As table 4.1 shows, there is a strong variation in the places where braceros originated. As far as I am aware, the only source that reports the number of braceros by state is Salinas [1955] in Durand (2007), and unfortunately it only offers information for the two years mentioned. Even with this limitation, and aware that the number of workers were probably different in other years, it offers a sense of the places where braceros came from. In a single year, tens of thousands of braceros came from Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas. Guerrero and Oaxaca are in the middle of the distribution with thousands of workers and Chiapas is



almost at the end. The only two states with less braceros than Chiapas were Campeche and Quintana Roo.

**Table 4.1 Bracero Workers Hired, 1953 - 1954**

	1953	1954	Total 1953-54
Aguascalientes	3,107	3,469	6,576
Baja California	85	3,979	4,064
Campeche	69	1	70
Chihuahua	39,148	12,934	52,082
Coahuila	8,710	12,934	21,644
Colima	313	1,421	1,734
Chiapas	116	32	148
Durango	34,297	26,707	61,004
Estado de México	2,567	3,752	6,319
Guanajuato	25,549	33,212	58,761
Guerrero	6,489	4,688	11,177
Hidalgo	994	1,342	2,336
Jalisco	19,475	34,983	54,458
Mexico City	2,527	2,643	5,170
Michoacán	16,191	32,180	48,371
Morelos	418	619	1,037
Nuevo León	783	13,343	14,126
Nayarit	742	3,290	4,032
Oaxaca	8,842	6,650	15,492
Puebla	960	1,922	2,882
Querétaro	418	1,339	1,757
Quintana Roo	-	1	1
San Luis Potosí	8,889	14,671	23,560
Sonora	55	2,141	2,196
Sinaloa	168	4,099	4,267
Tamaulipas	526	2,690	3,216
Tlaxcala	809	781	1,590
Tabasco	222	412	634
Veracruz	579	596	1,175
Yucatán	323	215	538
Zacatecas	22,779	34,183	56,962
Total	206,150	261,229	467,379

Source: Salinas [1955] in Durand (2007): 318-319.

In 1968 Mexican migrant workers were subject to a quota of 20,000 per annum. The quota was unrealistically low considering that, from 1955 to 1960, the annual Bracero migration fluctuated between 400,000 and 450,000 workers (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003, 37). The result was that many Mexicans continued migrating to the US but without a valid visa. Irregular migration increased dramatically. Mexican migration transited from the Bracero or guest worker to the “irregular” era when the Bracero Program stopped but nothing was done to contain the migrant flux from Mexico.

This was a true “kick-off” moment for a game whose name was “hide and seek”. The key of the game was a lax enforcement of the immigration regime. Either because it was technically and politically impossible or because authorities were unwilling, the US turned a blind eye to undocumented immigration during most of the second half of the twentieth century. In turn, Mexicans without the economic, technical or family credentials to apply for any American visa understood that even if they would not be granted legal status as during the Bracero era, they would be tolerated to continue migrating without papers, mostly because American employers relied heavily on the migrants’ cheap labor and lobbied on several occasions for inaction and because effective border control was a colossal endeavor implying prohibitively high costs and a major coordination effort with US border states and counties. This does not mean that US authorities remained idle during the irregular era. Several reforms were made to control the irregular migration flux. It was a period in which “restrictive” policies (i.e. more border patrol agents) were usually complemented or followed by “comprehensive” policies (i.e. an increase in the numerical limits of visas). Many reforms of that period were a good example of what in legislative jargon are called “sausages”. The term refers to bills containing contradictory elements that are calculated to please several groups with opposing interests such as employers, ethnic

and civil rights organizations and nativist political clienteles at the same time. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), the most important immigration reform in the last 40 years, is perhaps the best example of a “sausage”. Enacted in 1986, IRCA legalized about 2.3 Mexican irregular migrants who were already in the US, granted the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) the authorization to inspect the immigration status of welfare recipients, increased Border Patrol staff by 50 percent, and established sanctions for employers recruiting immigrants without working permits although such sanctions were never really applied. During the 1990s several restrictive immigration policies were introduced and the comprehensive complement disappeared little by little. Increasing funds, personnel and technology for border surveillance, expeditious deportation schemes, sanctions for passport and visa fraud, penalties for human smugglers and reentries after deportation and restraining access to public education, restrictions to welfare and health services for undocumented immigrants among others were the policies of that decade (DEMIG, 2015; Migration Policy Institute, 2013).

However, despite all these efforts, according to the data gathered by the thirty years of ethnosurveys of the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), the risk of apprehension of every border crossing attempt remained very low (one out of three) and usually had no major consequences. An irregular migrant would still have a 66 per cent chance to successfully cross the border. In many cases if (s)he was caught, (s)he would be simply sent back to Mexico. The probability of successfully crossing the border after three consecutive attempts was very high, particularly before 1985 (MMP, 2016).

#### 4.2.3. The Criminalization of Migration

The real change – this is, when the US became determined to coordinate different levels of government and devote enough resources to control the border – only began to take place after 2001. The 9/11 attacks drove the US to “rally around the flag” and gave the US President, George W. Bush, enough political support to pass radical legislation and boost the US security apparatus to unseen levels, with the immigration agencies on top of the funding list.

With the exception of a temporal increase in the number of temporary non-agricultural visas, the clearance for border residents and a program to cover authorized immigrant health insurance, the “comprehensive” complements of the immigration policies disappeared after 2001 or were directed only to highly skilled or relatively wealthy migrants, such as Mexican professionals or spouses of traders and investors (DEMIG 2015; MPI, 2013). More precisely, these comprehensive complements were frozen in the US Congress as happened with the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act). The first introduction of this bill was in August 1, 2001, but the terrorist attacks that occurred one month later secured that would not see the light at least until today.

The DREAM Act remained stalled in the US Congress during the Bush and Obama Administrations, despite the fact that the overwhelming support of the Latino voters helped Barack Obama to win the US presidency. Latino voters supported Obama, in part, because one of the crucial proposals of Obama’s campaign was precisely a comprehensive immigration reform. He even promised to present an immigration bill during the first year of his first term (Ramos 2008). However, despite winning the US presidency and majorities in the House of Representatives and in the Senate during the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Democrats

failed to keep their campaign promise of overhauling the immigration system. It was not before 2012, when the Republican Party had already won control over the House of Representatives, that the Obama Administration launched the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) as an executive action aimed to allow the people that the DREAM Act was supposed to help<sup>42</sup> to request a deferral of removal for a renewable period of two-years.

In 2013, under Democratic leadership, the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill that included many border control and immigration enforcement provisions, but also recovered the core element of the DREAM Act: the possibility to adjust to permanent resident status without being placed in removal proceedings for those undocumented who meet some requirements (US Congress, 2013). However, the timing of the action condemned the bill to be blocked by the Republican leadership in the House and only served the Democrats to put all the blame on the Republicans and getting off the hook.

In 2014, once the Democrats lost both the House of Representatives and the Senate, intense pressure from Latino leaders forced the Obama Administration to implement even more executive actions to lessen the damage caused by the deportation policies to Latino families. These executive actions included the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), aimed at allowing parents of US citizens to stay in the US temporarily and be considered for employment authorization for a three-year period. In addition, the Secure Communities Program was discontinued. Secure Communities started in 2008 with the Bush Administration as a pilot program but

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<sup>42</sup> People under the age of 31 enrolled in school or with complete high school education and a clean criminal record, who migrated to the US as children and have continuously resided in the US ever since.

developed into a multimillion program during the Obama Administration. It used biometric data from fingerprints submitted during bookings by state and local law enforcement agencies to allow the federal government to know the immigration status of every person arrested, transfer these persons to federal custody, and to initiate proceedings to deport detained persons in case they did not have a valid immigration status. Secure Communities received strong criticism from human and civil rights' advocacy groups and even from police officers claiming the program was making their job increasingly difficult since it was eroding trust between local police corporations and immigrant communities (Defiesta and Peak 2012). When Secure Communities was discontinued, it was substituted by Priority Enforcement, a program that still relies on fingerprints' data collected by the local police corporations. However, under this new program, the federal government only checks immigration status and transfer detainees to federal custody if the detainee has been convicted of an offense considered as a priority, such as felonies or significant misdemeanors such as domestic violence, sexual abuse or exploitation, burglary, unlawful possession of a firearm, drug distribution or driving under the influence, active participation in a street gang, three or more misdemeanor offenses other than minor traffic offenses or being apprehended at the moment of illegal entry (US Department of Homeland Security 2014).

Nevertheless, DAPA and an extension of DACA were stopped in February 2015 when a federal court in Texas granted a preliminary injunction promoted by a Texas-led group of 26 states, considering that the President had failed to comply with the Administrative Procedure Act when he launched these executive actions. The case arrived before the US Supreme Court of Justice. A 4-4 deadlock on June 23, 2016 seems to be the

end of Obama's executive actions on immigration since the lower court's decision becomes the last word on the matter when a 4-4 split occurs in the Supreme Court.

In contrast to the DREAM Act, the so-called "Patriot Act" was enacted within weeks of the 2001 attacks. The aim of this piece of legislation was to provide the US government with legal, financial and technical grounds to counteract and handle Islamic terrorist threats, but it ended up by becoming a heavy burden for Mexican undocumented immigrants. The act authorized again a major increase in personnel and technological infrastructure to secure the border, but it also represented an unprecedented effort of database creation and allowed the government to detain indefinitely a person if (s)he is considered by the Attorney General a terrorist suspect or threat to national security, even without being charged with a criminal offense. In 2002 the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act allowed the Attorney General to increase the number of immigration inspectors by at least 200 full-time employees over the number already authorized by the Patriot Act. It also authorized extra funding for the INS, Border Patrol, and consular personnel, training, facilities, and security-related technology.

An institutional reform in 2003 grouped together investigative and immigration responsibilities under the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE), a branch of the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS). ICE became the largest investigative arm of DHS. According to Meissner et. al. (2013: 3, 12), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which includes the Border Patrol, receives more funding than all other federal law-enforcement bodies combined, about 18 billion US dollars. The construction of 613 miles of border walls and fences followed and, more importantly, federal and subnational reforms establishing criminal penalties for irregular migrants. All these changes were strongly publicized with the aim to send the signal that the age of tolerance towards irregular

migration was over. The reforms also turned the words “securitization” and “criminalization” into accurate terms for referring to the way the US manages irregular immigration.

Furthermore, since 2005 “Operation Streamline” requires the criminal prosecution of all undocumented border-crossers in some border areas before being placed in civil removal proceedings. In order to avoid judicial backlog, criminal immigration cases are sometimes handled in collective hearings of groups consisting in as many as a hundred cases, a practice that has received serious criticism for undermining due process (Kerwin and McCabe, 2010). However, despite the collective hearings, the US justice system is now clogged because of the changes in immigration enforcement procedures. Today more than half of all the federal criminal prosecutions concern crimes related to immigration (Meissner et. al., 2013:10).

Hence, after years of simply being returned to the Mexican side or (at worst) handled by the civil immigration system, an irregular Mexican migrant may be punished with up to six months in detention for first-time offenders, up to two years for those charged with felony reentry and up to twenty years if (s)he has a criminal record (Migration Policy Institute, 2013; Martínez and Slack 2013). According to Kerwin and McCabe (2010), data from the Transnational Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) for the first three months of the 2010 fiscal year show that the median prison sentence for persons convicted of illegal reentry was six months.

Another aspect that is weighing heavily in the decisions of Mexicans willing to emigrate without the required documentation is the outsourcing of prison services in the US. This trend is expanding towards the management of irregular migration and this incursion of the private sector is creating perverse interests to increase the penalties against



irregular migrants. Subcontractors like Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), a company that almost bankrupted ten years ago, reported 1.7 billion dollar revenues in 2012. Their key for success was to move into the business of irregular immigration management. According to Forbes Magazine a quarter of their 2012 revenues came from contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Federal Bureau of Prisons to imprison non-citizens. At the same time, some politicians who opposed the so-called “DREAM Act” like John Cornyn (Texas Republican) have received tens of thousands of dollars in donations from CCA and their competitors. Associated Press found that CCA, GEO Group and Management and Training Corp have contributed at least 45 million US Dollars to campaign donations and lobbyists at the state and federal level in the last decade, even though these companies deny any lobbying on immigration. As a result, half of the people detained on immigration violations nowadays are in private detention facilities (Burke and Wides Muñoz, 2012).

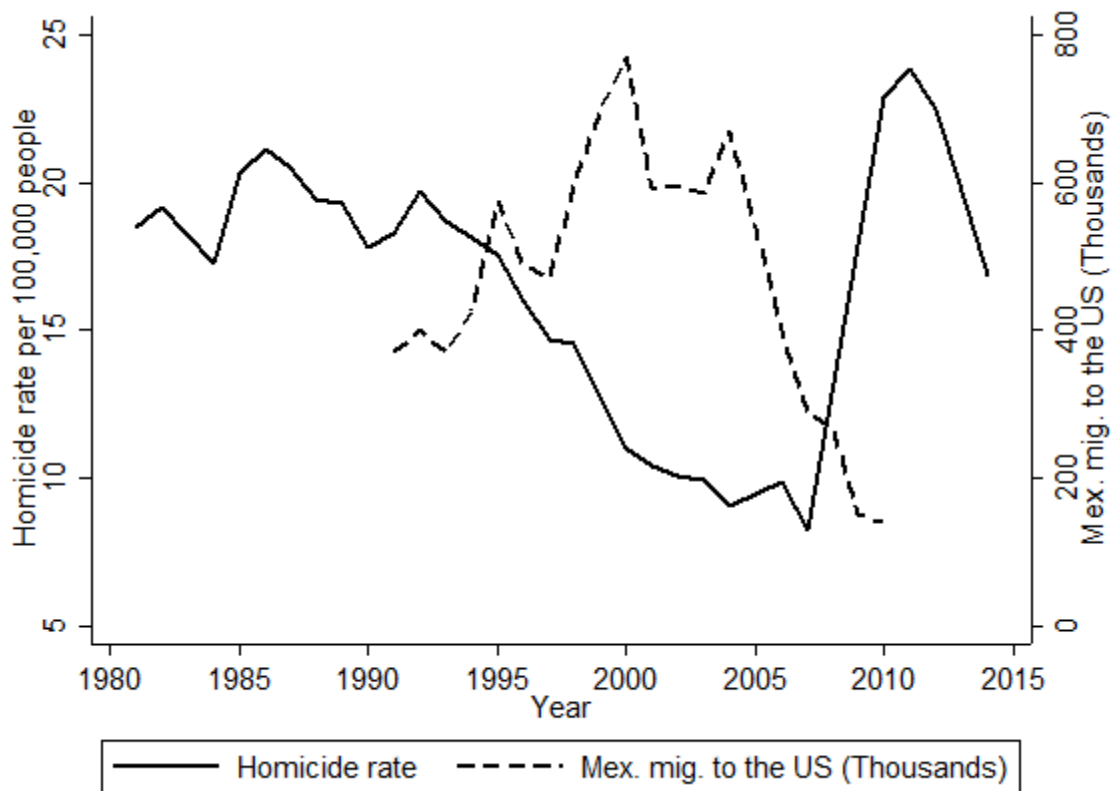
The interests behind the management of irregular migration are also driving the way law is enforced. This new multimillion industry has relieved state authorities from budgetary stress by buying prison facilities and paying them in advance, but have asked for an assurance that the rate of prison occupation exceeds 90 percent in order to secure the profit of their business. (Pavlo, 2012). Such contracts motivate police and immigration authorities to become stricter in law enforcement practices: in order to meet the rates of occupations agreed in the contract terms they have to focus now on petty violations and misdemeanors that some years ago used to be left unpunished (See Martinez and Slack, 2012). All these relatively recent changes prevented out-migration from fulfilling its traditional role as an escape valve of social, political and economic stability in Mexico and are crucial to understanding Mexico’s ongoing security crisis.

Figure 4.6 shows the parallel evolution of Mexican migration to the US and homicide rates in Mexico. It shows that the rise and demise of out-migration since the 1990s fits almost perfectly the patterns of homicide rates, at least at the macro-level. From 1992 to 2014 homicides present a “U-shape” and out-migration presents exactly the opposite, an “inverted U-shape”. Out-migration rose during the 1990s when many Mexican peasants with expectations of receiving some land finally decided they had nothing else to wait for after the Agrarian Reform was finally erased from the Mexican Constitution. Their expectations of receiving land from the government faded at the same moment when agricultural and financial crises hit the country. First the fall in the international coffee prices from 1989 to 1993 and later the collapse of the Mexican banking system during the Peso crisis that started in 1995 convinced many to stop postponing their trip to the US. To further boost the exodus, it also helped that the Zapatista uprising alarmed the government about an imminent political collapse and compelled the elite to redouble their not so hidden efforts to promote temporary labor migration to the US during that terrible decade for Mexico. The Mexican political elite is far from being a unitary, homogeneous actor nowadays and opposing views have been expressed with regards to emigration policies, but the predominant understanding in the last decades among Mexican politicians is that migration to the US can indeed buffer economic, political and social tensions in Mexico.

The debate that took place when the Mexican citizenship regime was reformed in 1997 and 1998 evince that elite perception. Until that moment, Mexican immigrants who naturalized in the US or in other countries had to renounce their Mexican nationality, a fact that – as the justification for the law proposal argued – translated into a greater social disconnection with Mexico. The acceptance of dual nationality reform – could help naturalized US citizens to continue being as socially connected as possible to their country

of origin; raise the odds of remittance-sending and transnational entrepreneurial investment in Mexico (Escobar, 2007: 54). A crucial point of the dual citizenship reform is its multiplying effect on out-migration. Each new person that acquires US citizenship enables more people entitled to immigrate to the United States without numerical restriction (Durand, Massey and Parrado, 1999). However, from 2001 onwards out-migration begins its impressive, in fact, historic, decline.

**Figure 4.6 Homicide Rates and Mexican Migration to the US 1980-2014**



Source: INEGI; Passel and D’Vera (2012).

### **4.3 Subnational and Temporal Evidence: How the “War Against the Immigrants” Affected the Mexican “Criminal Civil War”**

In order to provide support for my explanation linking the consequences of the enforcement of US immigration regime to the levels of Mexican criminal violence, I will attempt to go beyond the macro-level of analysis and conduct a statistical test using the Mexican municipalities as units of analysis. The goal is to provide statistical evidence that may support the mechanisms that were collected through ethnographic work and described in the previous chapter.

#### 4.3.1 Data and methods

In the last two decades there has been an increase in the number of studies that use subnational units of analysis to study diffusion processes such as out-migration, criminal and political violence or protest cycles (Tuirán, 2002; Villareal, 2002; Trejo 2012, Sberna and Olivieri, 2014; Osorio, 2012; Ríos 2012). Subnational studies have many advantages in comparison to national studies. Most importantly, they help to establish more reasonable comparisons and make allowances for unobserved variables. According to Trejo (2004) national-level studies capture less variation than province or state-level studies. Province-level studies in turn capture less variation than local or municipal-level studies. Subnational comparisons are therefore useful to capture intra-country variation of social phenomena across local contexts. According to Snyder (2001) the smaller the unit of analysis, the larger the number of cases and the better they capture variation.

I relied on a panel model with two waves of Mexican municipalities. I analyze the five-year averages of two time periods (1996 - 2000 and 2006 - 2010). Since violence started to mount in 2008, these two moments capture the major change in Mexican out-migration and violence.

#### 4.3.2 Variables

a) The dependent variable: The Mexican nightmare

***Homicide counts (five year averages).*** As already stated, the 27,000 missing individuals represents a problem for the measurement of homicides. Despite this problem, using homicide counts as indicators of violence has the advantage they tend to be better reported than other forms of violent crimes like assault and rape. The dependent variable is the average number of homicides in the municipality  $i$  in the period  $t$ . I decided to use five-year averages in counts instead of single-year counts to improve the measurement of

homicides in small municipalities. In these municipalities a considerable number of homicides can take place in a given year but in the next or previous years it can remain peaceful.

Using homicide counts instead of homicide rates means that a measure of population control should be included. Included below, is the natural logarithm of the population and also the GDP per capita. Homicide counts were taken from the Sistema Nacional de Información en Salud (SINAIS), a source that has systematized administrative records of mortality and produced homicide counts for each municipality for the last 26 years.

b) The explanatory factor: The End of the American Dream

***Out-migration, remittances, circular and return migration.*** Hypothesis building in this section stems from a simple observation: Mexican migration to the US is at its lowest levels in sixty years. This fact may have important implications for a variety of social dynamics in Mexico, homicidal violence being one of them. Given the decline in migration occurred at the same time criminal violence erupted in Mexico, these two trends may be related either directly or by some mediating factors. First, the conflict literature has found negative associations between economic alternatives or “opportunities” and the conflict indicators, like the onset of civil wars (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). As already mentioned, labor emigration to the US has been a very important economic alternative for the population of some Mexican regions, an alternative “social ladder” for upward mobility and its recent obstruction may be directly and inversely related to criminal violence. Hence the first formal proposition is the following:

H1: A decline in out-migration is associated with an increase in violence

Second, in addition to out-migration, a decline in remittances may also be linked to the surge in violence by a direct causal path. The hypothesis of a direct association stems from the idea that grievances can emerge if the positive economic impact of remittances suddenly stops. In a recent paper Regan and Frank (2014) suggest that, in times of crisis, a decline in remittances is linked to the onset of civil war. Using World Bank country-level data for 152 countries for the last 25 years, they suggest that the mechanism behind such an association is that social welfare provided by remittances remedies economic distress and therefore reduces rebellion incentives. Applying their reasoning to a subnational level of analysis, my second hypothesis is:

H2: A decline in remittances is negatively associated with violence

Third, one of the least disputed consequences of restrictive US immigration policies of the last 20 years is the reduction in the circular migration of the undocumented population. Scholars have presented evidence arguing how policies aimed to keep the undocumented out of the US backfired because those undocumented who were already in the US feared that if they leave, they would not be able to reenter (Massey, Durand and Pren, 2016). These policies changed the plans of the undocumented: instead of leaving their Mexican hometowns for a few months or years, they opted to stay longer, eventually settling in the US. Such transformation from circular to permanent migration had a profound impact in the family configurations of the migrant population. Migrant families disintegrated more easily since seeing each other became harder. Many males who migrated to the US with the original intention of providing a livelihood for their Mexican families abandoned them, entering into other forms of cohabitations and/or starting new

families in the US. The rest of their original family stayed in Mexico and experienced subsequent hardship.

Therefore, circular migration and violence may be linked through family dissolution, or because many of these abandoned families in Mexico are matriarchal households that experience poverty and exert poor social control on their children. This type of household has been identified as a crucial indicator of violence in different settings. For example, Sampson (1987) argues that the percentage of African American matriarchal households in the US is the key predictor of homicides perpetrated by young blacks, and Osorio (2012) finds a similar result for the Mexican case. Although the proportion of matriarchal households is a relevant variable correlating with both a dependent and an independent variable of interest, following King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 163) I cannot account for matriarchal households because they are partly a consequence of my key causal variable of circular migration. Hence the third hypothesis I formulate is the following:

H3: The decline of circular migration is related to violence.

Fourth, some research suggests that immigrants substitute some labor market groups. According to Borjas (1987), wages of native workers and immigrants that were already settled in the US were negatively affected by a new wave of immigration, although the effects on native workers is small. Other researchers have questioned if immigration truly has a detrimental effect on the wages of American native workers. For example, Card (1990) focused on the sudden increase of Cuban migrants to Miami during the Mariel boatlift and concluded that this wave of immigration did not have any effect either on the wages of natives or on the wages of previous immigrants, perhaps because the Miami economy was capable of absorbing them. The arguments in this debate can be used to



formulate a hypothesis about the Mexican case. Given that return migration to Mexico has increased considerably over the last decade, it is reasonable to suggest that the inflow of returnees may have had an economic impact on the places where they returned. In turn, increased competition for scarce resources may have fueled conflict and violence in Mexico. Therefore, my fourth and last hypothesis is that:

H4: Return migration is positively related to violence.

The data that I use for my independent variables come from a subsample of the last two national census editions. Due to the special relevance that migration entails for Mexican demography and society, there are very few countries for which a similar type of official data has been produced on this subject. The availability of migration data at the municipal level is an uncommon advantage of taking Mexico as a study case. The census was carried out in the years 2000 and 2010 and the Mexican Population Council (CONAPO) generated a municipal-level index of migratory intensity with this data. This is a multivariate index for most of the 2,443 municipalities that existed in the year 2000.<sup>43</sup> It takes into account the following four indicators: (1) the proportion of households that receive remittances; (2) the proportion of households with emigrants to the US during the last five years; (3) the proportion of households with at least one member being a circular migrant during the previous five years; and (4) the proportion of households with returning

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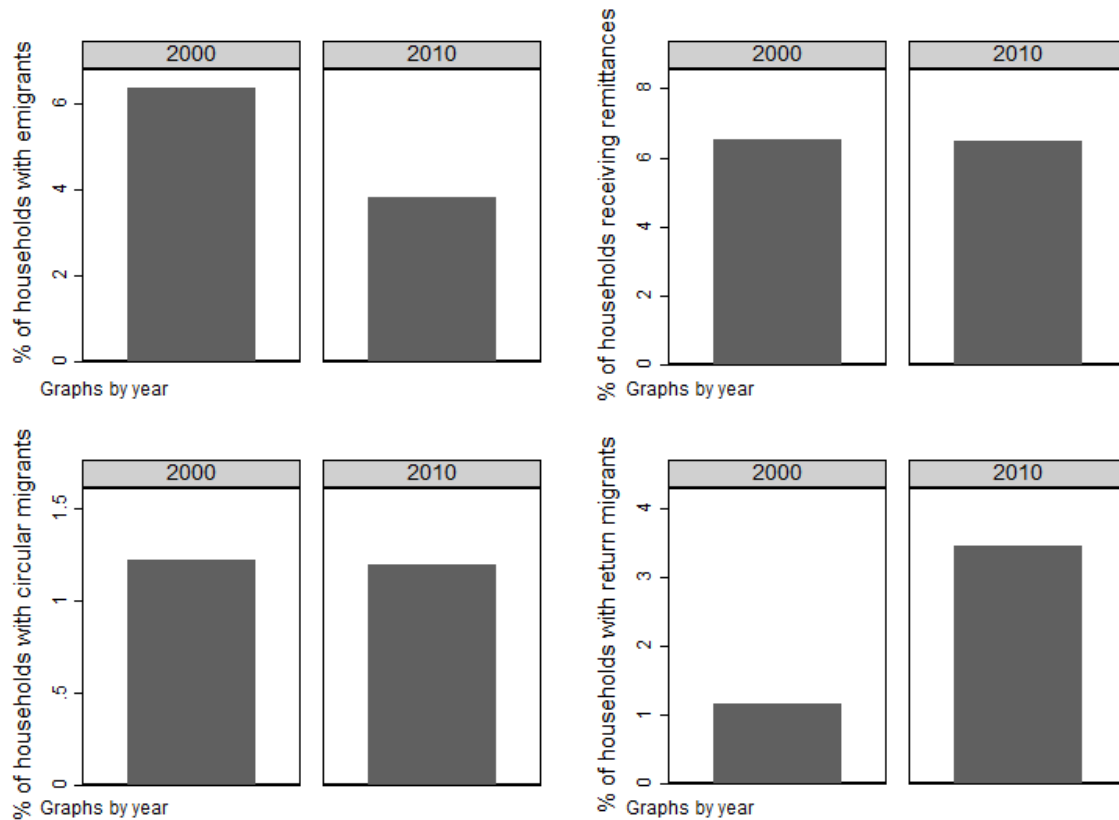
<sup>43</sup> 19 municipalities have been created since 2000: Belisario Domínguez, Emiliano Zapata, El Parral and Mezcalapa in Chiapas (2011); San Ignacio Cerro Gordo in Jalisco; Luvianos (2002), San José del Rincón (2002) and Tonanitla (2003) in Estado de México; Marquelia (2001), Cochoapa (2002), José Joaquín de Herrera (2002), Juchitán (2004) and Iliatenco in Guerrero; Bacalar (2011), Tulum (2008) and Puerto Morelos (2016) in Quintana Roo; San Rafael and Santiago Xochiapan in Veracruz (2004); and Santa María de la Paz (2005) in Zacatecas. Given their recent creation, out-migration and remittances data were not produced for these municipalities in 2000 and therefore cannot be included in the study.

migrants during the last five years. I include the logs of the three first indicators as independent variables not their linear terms, because the logs provide the best fit.

Before proceeding to the formal test of hypotheses, an important aspect that should be taken into consideration is that these four migration indicators (emigration, remittances, circularity and return) evolved differently during the period in question. The average number of households with migrant members decreased from six to four percent while the average number of returning migrants increased from one to three percent. These two changes seem to be quite intuitive and in many cases they may be recording the movement of the same person: the more migrants that return, the less households have members abroad. For this reason, I do not include the out-migration and return variables in the same equation.

Figure 4.7 provides important information with regards to the average proportion of households receiving remittances and the average proportion of households with circular migrants: they remained equal in 2000 and in 2010 and this absence of variation appears puzzling. In the context of migration securitization, border militarization and economic recession in the US, a reasonable expectation would be a reduction in the average number of households receiving remittances.

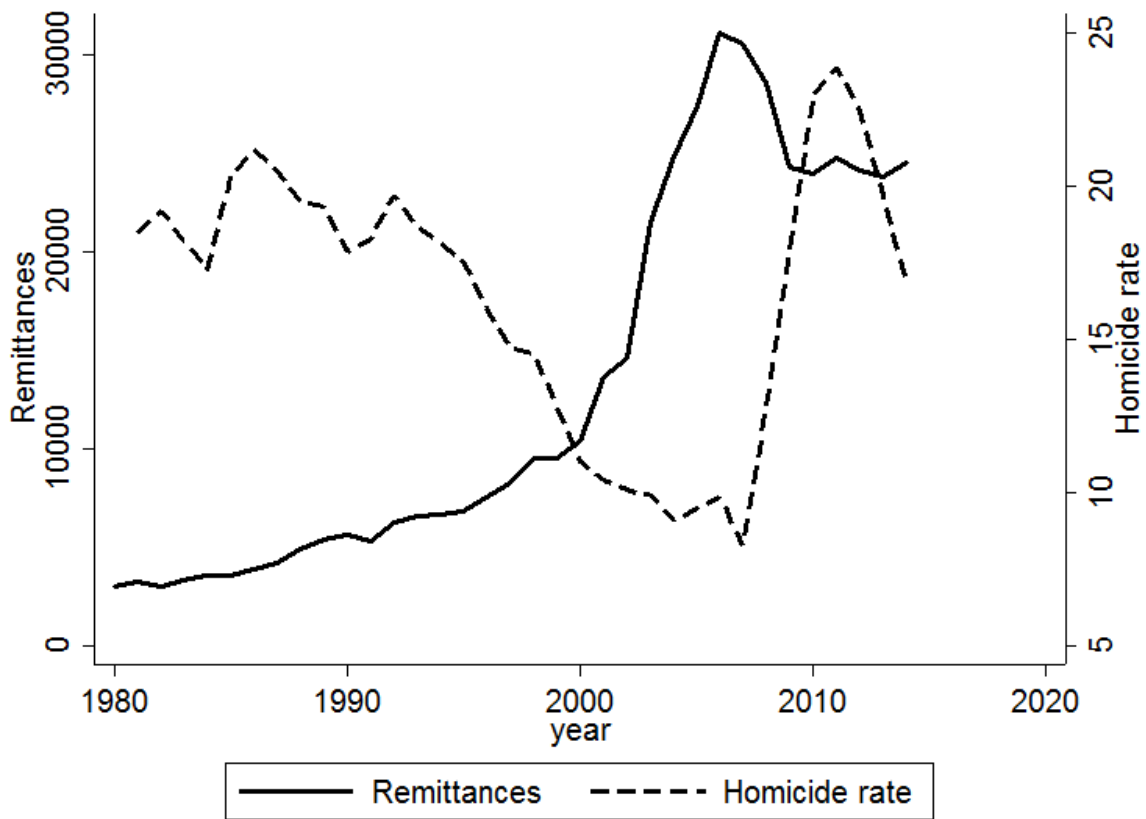
**Figure 4.7 Average Percentage of Households with Emigrants, Receiving Remittances, with Circular Migrants and with Return Migrants**



Source: CONAPO.

It should be taken into consideration that remittance inflows began to fall after 2006, as the data from the World Bank shows in Figure 4.8. The timing reveals a potential problem for my study: my indicator of remittances may not capture adequately the fall in remittances because the question asked in the census subsample was if a member of the household received remittances *during the previous five years*. Since the censuses were carried in 2000 and 2010, this question registers the reception of remittances in two five-year periods (1996-2000 and 2006-2010). It is possible that the CONAPO data registered households that received remittances between 2005 and 2006, but not after that period.

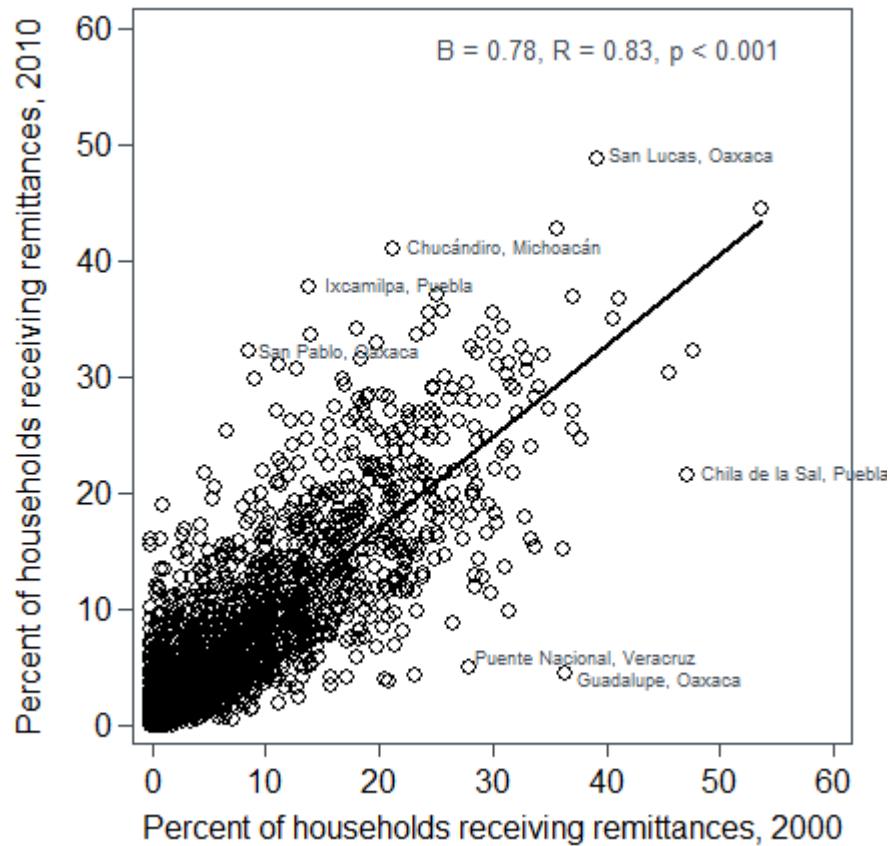
**Figure 4.8 Remittance Inflows to Mexico and Homicide Rates (1980 - 2015)**



Source: The World Bank; INEGI.

There are other important factors with regards to the proportion of remittance-receiving households. The most important is the stability (and in some cases the change) in the municipalities with the largest proportion of remittance recipients in the ten-year period analyzed. Despite border militarization, economic recession and other phenomena that triggered eventful changes in Mexican out-migration during the 2000-2010 decade, the municipalities with more remittance-receiving households were often the same in 2000 and in 2010. As illustrated in figure 4.9, there is a strong persistence in the proportion of remittance-receiving households. The correlation coefficient of the 2000 and 2010 proportions is 83 percent.

**Figure 4.9. Persistent Proportion of Remittance-Receiving Households per Municipality, 2000 and 2010**



Source: CONAPO (2002 and 2012).

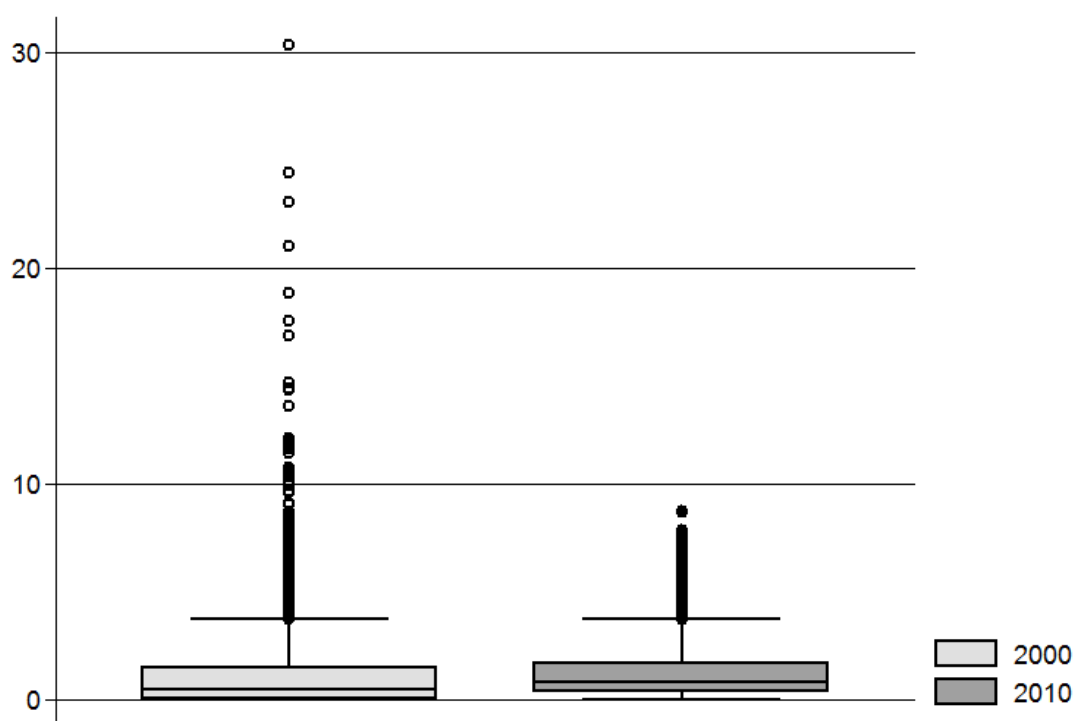
The presence of some outliers in the scatterplot above is also evident. In some municipalities like San Lucas in Oaxaca; Chucándiro in Michoacán or Ixcamilpa in Puebla the proportion of remittance-receiving households increased by 20 percent or more. In contrast, other municipalities like Chila de la Sal in Puebla, Puente Nacional in Veracruz or Guadalupe in Oaxaca experienced a decline of similar proportions.

To summarize, the remittance indicator I use is not ideal to capture the variation that took place during the period of time analyzed, but it still captures some important changes. Violence is expected to increase in the municipalities where remittance-receiving

households were reduced. Conversely, a decrease in violence is also expected in the municipalities where the proportion of remittance-receiving households has increased.

The circular migration indicator also deserves to be inspected more closely. The average proportion of households with circular migrants remained equal in the years 2000 and 2010, but some outliers in the year 2000 are not present anymore in 2010. In other words, circular migration decreased in many municipalities where it used to be an important phenomenon. This decrease can be observed in the boxplot presented below. In 2000, more than twenty municipalities had at least ten percent of households with circular migrants. In 2010, not a single municipality reached that level.

**Figure 4.10 Proportion of Households with at Least One Member who is a Circular Migrant by Municipality, 2000 - 2010**



Source: CONAPO (2002 and 2012).

In contrast with the proportion of remittance recipients, the municipalities with higher proportions of households with circular migrants were not the same in 2000 and in

2010. As the following scatterplot shows, regressing circular migration in t2 with circular migration in t1 yields a considerably flatter slope (with a beta coefficient of 0.22) compared to the scatterplot of remittances (beta coefficient of 0.78):

**Figure 4.11 Scatterplot of the Proportion of Households with at Least One Member being a Circular Migrant per Municipality, 2000 and 2010**



Source: CONAPO (2002 and 2012).

Table 4.2 includes summary statistics, including the between (across space) and within (across time) variation.

**Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics**

Variable		Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Observations
Homicide counts (five-year averages)	overall	5.956288	30.87393	0	1560.2	N = 4914
	between		26.85893	0	904.5	n = 2457
	within		15.22971	-649.7437	661.6563	T = 2
Percent of households with emigrants (log)	overall	1.059346	1.275122	-4.033355	3.84303	N = 4581
	between		1.194159	-3.567841	3.55736	n = 2402
	within		0.5474724	-1.164187	3.28288	T-bar = 1.90716
Percent of households receiving remittances (log)	overall	1.236198	1.319461	-3.907412	3.983679	N = 4688
	between		1.291549	-3.568405	3.889451	n = 2439
	within		0.4167213	-0.9854706	3.457866	T-bar = 1.9221
Percent of households with circular migrants (log)	overall	-0.1349346	1.116105	-5.759343	3.414101	N = 3931
	between		1.00594	-4.563149	3.195639	n = 2289
	within		0.5450192	-2.439787	2.169918	T-bar = 1.71734
Percent of households with return migrants (log)	overall	0.4101504	1.278889	-6.1304	2.881129	N = 4064
	between		1.080864	-3.568687	2.700461	n = 2388
	within		0.721447	-2.50467	3.324971	T-bar = 1.70184
Population (log)	overall	9.378604	1.525824	4.532599	14.41203	N = 4901
	between		1.521808	4.611974	14.4002	n = 2456
	within		0.0946311	8.271627	10.48558	T-bar = 1.99552
GDP per capita (log)	overall	8.576543	0.613253	6.778979	10.71471	N = 4874
	Between		0.5227552	7.226695	10.53116	n = 2456
	Within		0.3195817	7.686673	9.466413	T-bar = 1.98453

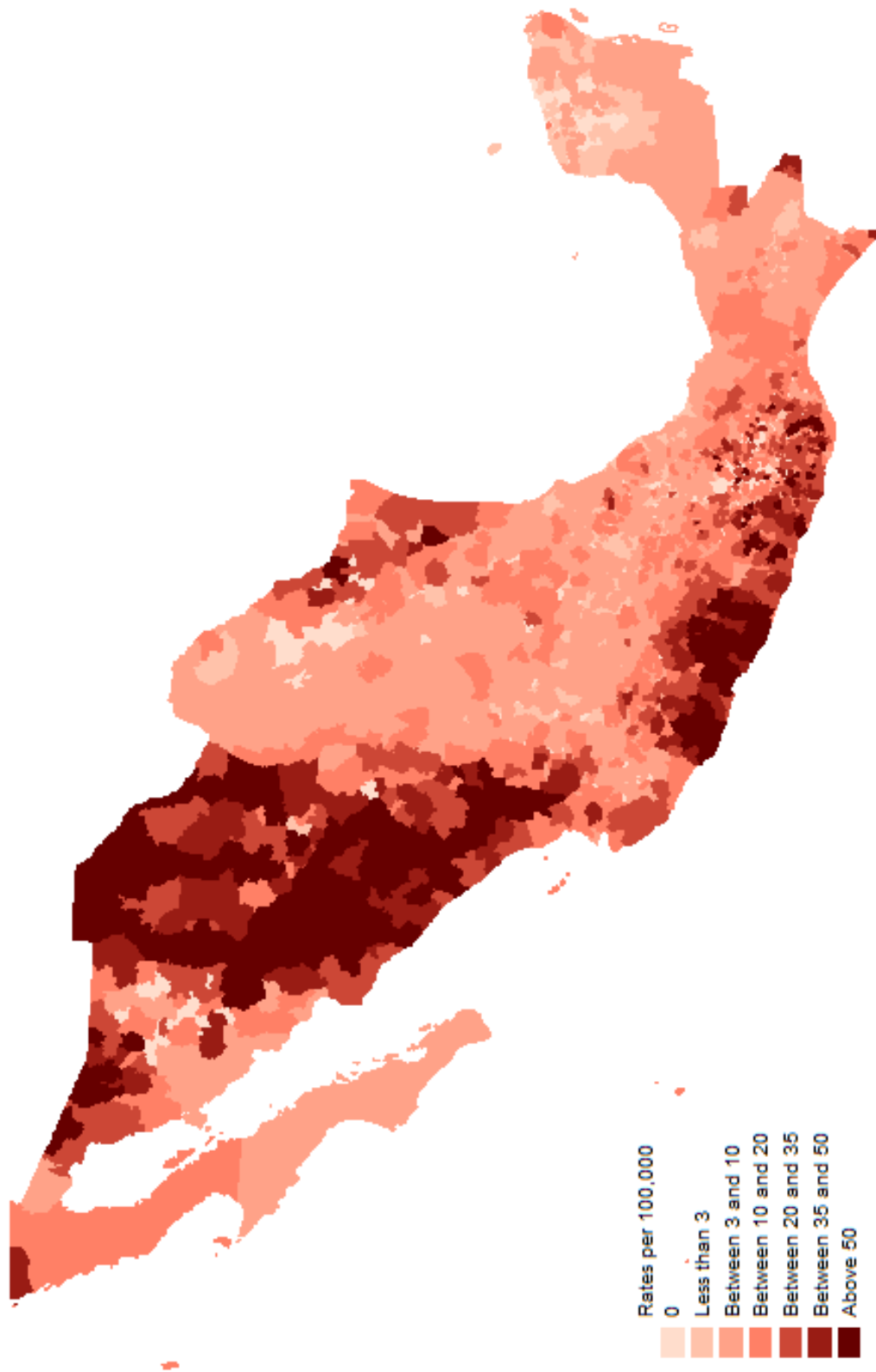


#### 4.3.3 Statistical methods

For empirical validation I rely on a “First Difference” model. In other words, I study the change in homicides ( $t_2 - t_1$ ) that took place between 2000 ( $t_1$ ) and 2010 ( $t_2$ ) as a function of changing out-migration ( $t_2 - t_1$ ), and changing control variables ( $t_2 - t_1$ ). First Difference models are widely used in social experiments and have many advantages over other more complicated statistical techniques. The simplest experiment would measure a dependent variable in two groups in  $t_1$ , assign a treatment to one of the groups (usually an independent dichotomous variable of interest) and measure again the values of the variables in  $t_2$ . Any difference in both groups would be attributed to the treatment. The “treatment effect” in this case is measured by the coefficient of the variable of interest. This coefficient can be interpreted as the difference between the average change in the group that received the treatment and the average change in the control group (See Cameron and Trivedi 2005: 769). In this case, the “treatment” is not dichotomous but continuous, and is captured by the four variables of interest: out-migration, remittances, circular migration and return migration. A single data set has been used, a “short panel” of two waves with data over a five-year average of homicide counts, four independent variables and two controls: the log of the municipal population and GDP per capita.

Non-linear models were used because linear models make the crucial assumption of independence across spatial observations. Map 4.1 illustrates that homicides tend to cluster geographically and the independence assumption cannot be sustained. Quite the contrary; the notion coined by an epidemiologist in which “the best predictor of a case of violence is another a case of violence” (Slutkin, 2013) has proved to be systematically correct.

## Homicide Rates (5 Year Average) 2006-2010



Event count models were used because homicide is a discrete event, not a continuous variable. Negative binomial models were used instead of Poisson models because the latter is deficient for overdispersed count data; as in when the variance exceeds the mean (Cameron and Trivedi 1999: 5). This empirical fact makes the negative binomial a suitable method because the dependence across events is one of the main features of the negative binomial distribution (Trejo 2004: 109).

#### 4.4. Regression Results

As expected, results across the First Difference models suggest that some of the migration variables are associated with the intensity of homicidal violence in Mexico. However, not all the variables of interest turned out to be statistically significant in the two models. The percent of households that receive remittances seems to have no statistical significance in the first model, but is significant in the second one. Meanwhile, the log of households with return migrants is not significant in any of the two models in which it is tested.

**Table 4.3 Results of First Difference Negative Binomial Models of Homicide Count Averages (1996-2000, 2006-2010)**

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2
<i>The end of the American Dream</i>	Coef.	Coef.
Percent of households with emigrants (log)	-0.113***	
	(0.0312)	
Percent of households receiving remittances (log)	-0.00994	-0.0855**
	(0.0398)	(0.0391)
Percent of households with circular migrants (log)	-0.0513**	-0.0623***
	(0.0215)	(0.0235)
Percent of households with return migrants (log)		-0.0372
		(0.0228)
<i>Controls</i>		
Population (log)	-0.192***	-0.22***
	(0.0637)	(0.06)
GDP per capita (log)	-0.268***	-0.05***
	(0.0531)	(0.06)
Constant	7.247***	5.65***
	(0.770)	(0.84)

Total observations (TxN)	3,082	2,724
Number of municipalities	1,541	1,362
Log Likelihood	-2,265.06	-2,076.71

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Results of non-linear models cannot be interpreted as straightforward as marginal effects on the conditional mean (Cameron and Trivedi 1999). However, the coefficients can be exponentiated and interpreted as the expected value of the dependent variable for a one-unit increase in the independent variable, if the other predictors are held constant at its minimum value. In this case all independent variables were logarithmically transformed, adding complexity to the task. The use of graphs facilitates the interpretation. Figure 4.12 presents the exponentiated coefficients of model 1, while all the other values are at their minimum value.

**Figure 4.12 Exponentiated Coefficients of Homicide Counts (Model 1)**

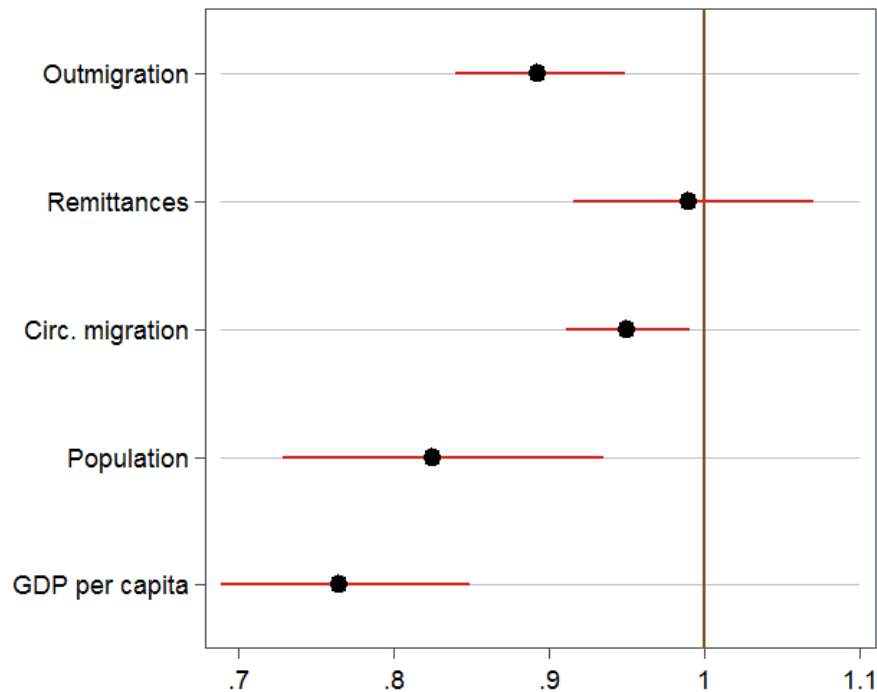
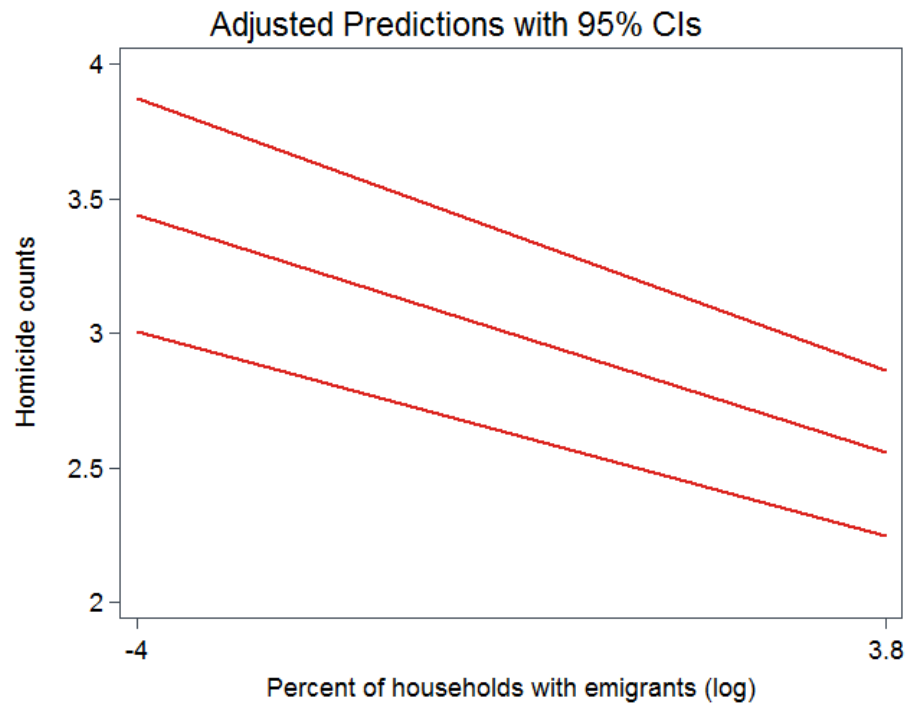


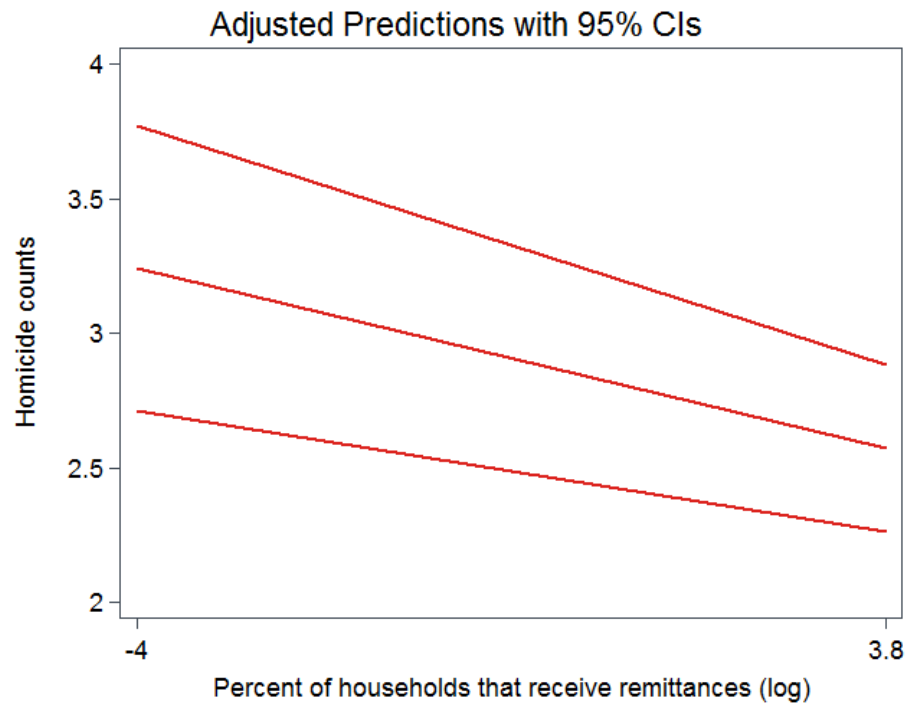
Figure 4.12 is useful to appreciate that the confidence intervals of the remittances coefficient (represented with the red line) cross the exponentiated intercept of 0 at 1 ( $\exp(0) = 1$ ). This means that remittances are not significant in model 1. However, it is still not possible to provide a substantive interpretation of the coefficients. In order to do so, it is necessary to calculate the predictions of model 1 with meaningful quantities of interest, or in other words, plausible or real cases. A conventional method to calculate these quantities of interest is to vary the values of the independent variable in question while, at the same time, center the rest of the independent variables at their means. For example, focusing in model 1, if during the two periods studied, a municipality were to increase the number of households with emigrants from its minimum value (0 percent, or -4 in logs) to the maximum value in the distribution (46.6 percent, or 3.8 in logs), the difference in the logs of homicide counts would be expected to decrease from 3.4 to 2.5, while holding the other variables in the model constant at their means. This represents a twenty-six percent decrease.

**Figure 4.13 Average Marginal Effects of Out-migration in Homicides**



The same technique can be used to calculate meaningful quantities of interest for the indicator of remittance reception. Substantial profiling of the remittance indicator should be taken with caution, as it only resulted in statistical significance in one model but not in the other. All independent variables were centered at their means and the average marginal effects were calculated for remittances at their lowest (0 percent, or -4 in logs) and highest values (53 percent, or 3.8 in logs). According to model 2, the difference in the logs of homicide counts are also expected to decrease from 3.2 to 2.5 homicides, resulting in a 22 percent decrease in the ten-year period studied..

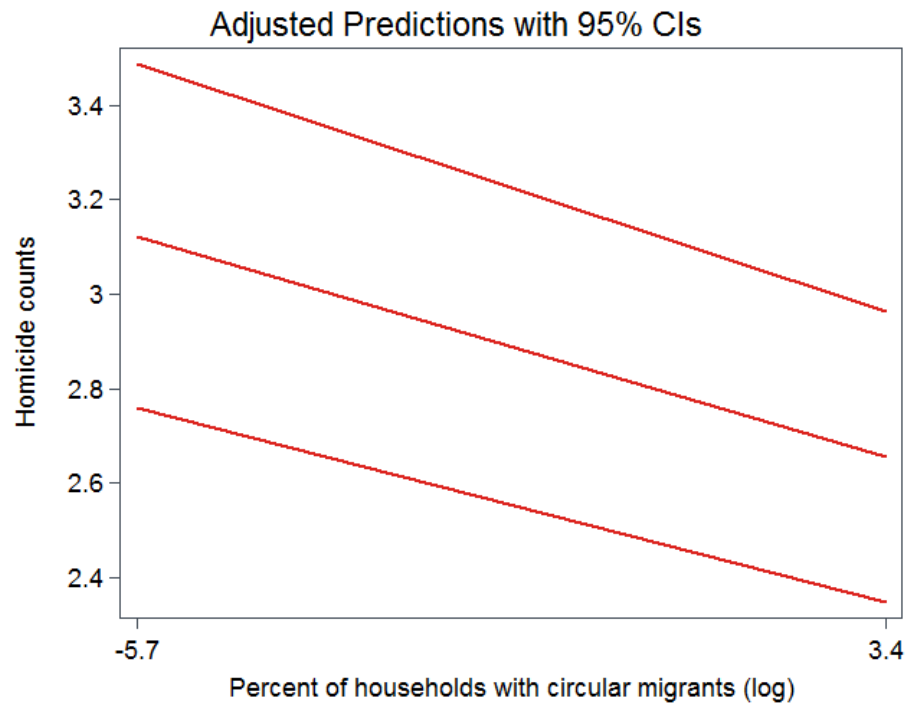
**Figure 4.14 Average Marginal Effects of Remittances in Homicides**



The same exercise is repeated when logging circular migration. This result was significant in both models and the coefficients in the two models are very similar. Model 1 was chosen to center all independent variables at their means and calculate the average marginal effects for circular migration at its lowest (0 percent, or -5.6 in logs) and highest values (30 percent, or 3.2 in logs). According to calculations that stem from model 1, the difference in the logs of homicide counts are then expected to decrease from 3.1 to 2.6 in ten years, a sixteen percent decrease. Since the ratio of households with return migrants was not statistically significant, the average marginal effects for this variable were not calculated.



**Figure 4.15 Average Marginal Effects of Circular Migration in Homicides**



## 4.5 Conclusions

The literature on large-scale homicidal violence in Mexico has ignored an important variable. The dominant theories explain the increase in violence in terms of political, economic or family composition changes, ignoring the role that US border controls and restrictive migration policies had in affecting patterns of out-migration and the economic effect of remittances. Moreover, the available theories are either anachronistic or do not coincide with the “U-shape” that the evolution of violence has followed. In contrast, time-series at the macro-level show that out-migration is almost perfectly inversely correlated with violence in Mexico. The historical narrative offered since the end of the Bracero

Program up until today reveals a pattern in which the securitization of migration mounted at the same time when violence increased.

Statistical analysis conducted at the meso-level also suggests that the decline in out-migration and circular migration are important factors to take into account to understand the surge in Mexican violence, although results about the effect of remittances are not consistent across models.

## **Chapter 5. Out-migration and Violence in Southern Mexico**

### **A Controlled Comparison**

Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas have many social, political, economic, cultural and geographical similarities. However, they are characterised by different levels of violence and different levels of international out-migration. This chapter presents a three-case “controlled” comparison, to evaluate if violence in southern Mexico was affected by frustrated out-migration. Time series of homicide rates at the state level are reported; basic development indicators are presented and information about violence and remittances is combined in maps to scrutinize local-level correlations. The evolution of violence and out-migration is considered alongside other important elements like the legacy of the Dirty War, the economic and strategic weight of Acapulco for criminal organizations, the construction of new transport routes and the dense network of cooperatives and human rights organizations promoted by the Catholic Church.

The chapter concludes that frustrated out-migration played an important role in spurring violence. However, this mechanism occurred only in the north of Guerrero, a region with an important migrant tradition in which out-migration fell drastically. Other migrant regions like the Montaña or the Mixteca Oaxaqueña remained relatively peaceful largely because out-migration increased in these regions and because they benefited from important protective cultural factors and powerful allies like the Catholic Church. In the Costa Chica, split between Guerrero and Oaxaca, out-migration and violence have an unexpected positive association. However, this is related to the construction of a new road that traversed the mountainous region for the first time.

## 5.1 Violence in Southern Mexico

In 1984 nine bishops from the regions of Oaxaca and Chiapas issued a pastoral letter denouncing the drug-related violence which was seriously affecting their communities. The letter constitutes an invaluable testimony about the expansion of narcotrafficking in southern Mexico in a period when the official sources were offering a contradictory account.<sup>44</sup> Catholic priests had (and still enjoy) exceptional access to remote communities and many have earned the trust of the local campesinos. In 1984, they possessed some of the best knowledge of the social situation in rural Mexico. The bishops' pastoral letter contained essential pieces of information that debunked the view offered by official sources and described the central aspects, forms, patterns and actors of a very serious problem in these two impoverished states.

According to the bishops the lack of fertilizers, technology and extreme poverty was turning peasants and Indians into easy prey for narcotraffickers. Many narcotraffickers were ex-soldiers, forcing the campesinos to grow illicit crops and accept weapons to protect the crops that now belonged to narcotraffickers. Many peasants were trapped between the desperation of intergenerational poverty and the lure of short term gains to be obtained by growing marijuana, a situation that entailed the risk of incarceration. This crop expanded dramatically, particularly among the Indians. Narcotraffickers destroyed community

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<sup>44</sup> The testimony of Gregorio López García, commander of the 28 Military Zone based in Oaxaca, serves as an example of the information provided by official sources. López García dared to declare that the sowing of illicit drugs in the state was over (Reyes, 1984).

organization in many cases and imposed a rule of terror. The letter is worth quoting at length:

“We have found fears of a major and generalized worsening of the social situation of the people and communities in our region due to drugs. (...) We do not want to make an alarming denunciation of the facts and of the people involved. This could lead to a witch-hunt, creating an opportunity to behead popular movements and to unleash personal rancor or revenge among groups. In the end (these vengeful acts) serve to nothing, even more, they leave the people immersed in the most terrible trauma due to irrational violence.” (...) “Some of the leaders of these groups are ex-soldiers. They know the dynamics of the “business”. Many campesinos are imprisoned for this reason. Furthermore, he who dares to inform, dies, he who desists (from growing marihuana), dies. Deaths are multiplying.” (...) “Marihuana sowing has increased in recent years. More areas are being incorporated into the growing of this crop; remote and inaccessible zones and even places with easy access (are incorporated). Unfortunately, most of them are Indian communities.” (...) “Due to the power of money and, above all, the power of firearms, the “boss” and his mafia practically take over the life of the hamlet. They manipulate community authorities and in many cases, destroy them imposing their own and establishing terror in all the zone” (Buendía, 1984, own translation).

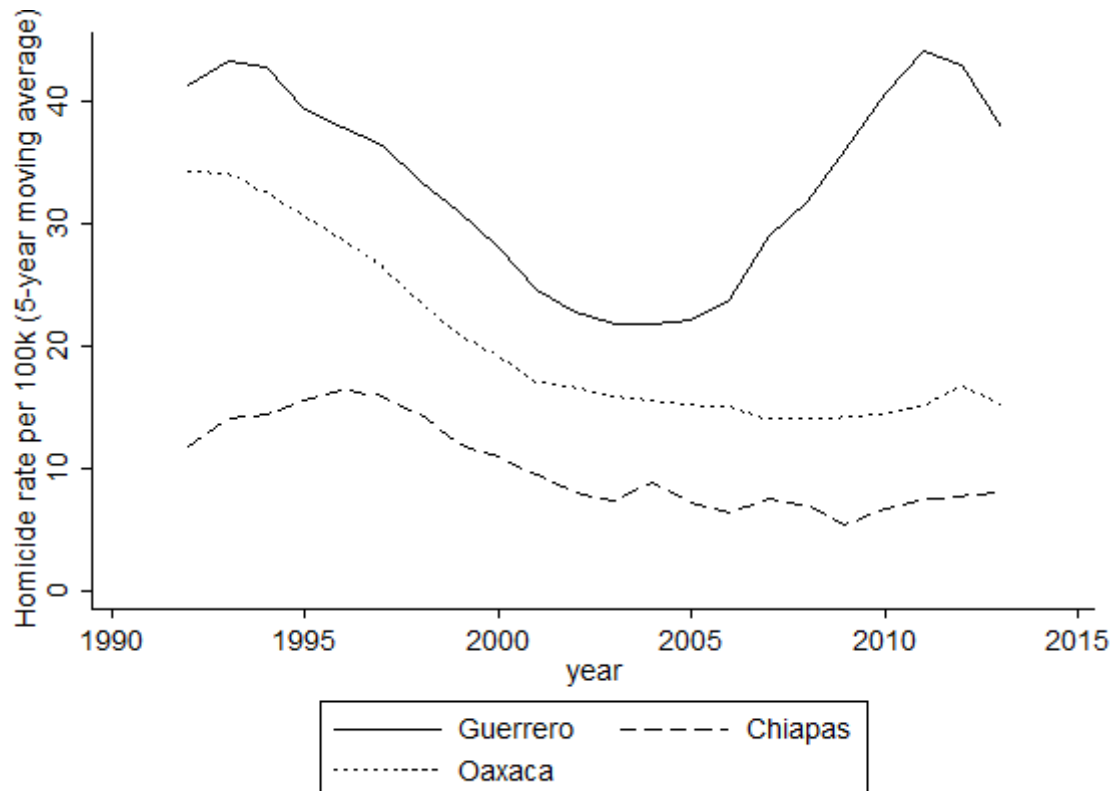
The bishops produced an exceptionally well-informed account about the profound effects of narcotrafficking in rural southern Mexico in the mid-1980s. Similarly, independent journalists portrayed Oaxaca as a third state affected by narcotrafficking, surpassed only by Sinaloa and Chihuahua (Reyes, 1984).

Besides narcotrafficking, violence was linked to a very complicated combination of land takeovers, alcoholism, sexual violence, religious conflicts and village factionalism (Nader, 1990; Rus, 2005; Gledhil, 2012; Trejo, 2012; Bartra (2000[1996]) Pansters, 2012). The situation in southern Mexico was also critical in terms of political and electoral violence. In Oaxaca, leaders of the influential Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students

(COCEI) in Tehuantepec were persecuted, removed from power and nearly killed after they won the municipal elections in Juchitán in 1983 (Trejo, 2012: 165; Rubin, 1994). In Chamula, Chiapas, the religious expulsions had as root causes the political challenge of frustrated young people to the ruling caciques (Rus, 2005) and the appalling socioeconomic conditions combined with the absence of opportunities in the state for independent groups to achieve political representation resulted in the ethno-political rebellion of 1994. In Guerrero 250 members of the newly born PRD opposition party were murdered in the 1988-1994 period (Schatz, 2001: 259).

Nevertheless, despite sharing a past of criminal, political and interpersonal violence and sharing socioeconomic and geographic indicators usually regarded by conflict scholars as violence predictors (see Chapter 1), Chiapas and Oaxaca are today considerably less violent than Guerrero. Figure 5.1 shows the 5-year moving average homicide rates from 1992 to 2013 for these three states. The time period includes the two main events that marked the trajectories of violence in the region: the 1994 Zapatista uprising and the 2006 “War on drugs” launched by the former president Felipe Calderón. These two moments are paradigmatic of the “old” and “new” patterns of violence described in the first chapter. The time-series clearly shows that violence in Oaxaca and in Chiapas decreased since the mid-1990s and remained stable since then. In contrast, in Guerrero homicides also decreased but have started to mount again since 2005, reaching more than 40 homicides per 100,000 since 2010. What accounts for this difference? Why have patterns of violence in Guerrero differed so dramatically from those in Chiapas and Oaxaca?

**Figure 5.1 Homicide Rates per 100,000 people in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas**



Source: SINAIS. Retrieved from Maldonado and Grau (2013).

To answer this question, this chapter evaluates a hypothesis that was presented in *Clandestinos* (2003), Durand and Massey's seminal book on Mexican migration.

According to these authors:

“From a migration perspective, there is a paradox in the case of Chiapas: the absence of out-migration can explain the war, and the latter can explain out-migration. In other words, out-migration and remittances seem to have acted as a palliative for social conflicts in similar situations, as the ones in Guerrero and Oaxaca. On the other hand, the low-intensity war in Chiapas (...) has displaced people, and it is known that this factor, as in Central America, can turn into a catalyzing element of

the migrant flux. Something similar happened in the state of Sinaloa, where the war against narcotrafficking has been considered one of the main triggers of the migrant flux (Lizárraga, 2002). Inter and intra-ethnic conflicts and religious conflicts also have an influence and have provoked many displacements” (p. 90).

Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca provide an excellent opportunity to evaluate this hypothesis with a “controlled” comparison because, although they have important differences, they have many striking similarities. They are the poorest and most unequal states in Mexico, they are home to an important share of Mexico’s indigenous population, they have inaccessible mountainous terrain and are situated in close geographic proximity along the strategic Pacific coast. They also share a history of harsh repression and strong social and political mobilization. Furthermore, the three states experienced party alternation and the leftist PRD or a coalition in which the PRD participated came to power only to lose against the PRI and its allies after one or two elections.<sup>45</sup> However, they have different levels of international out-migration and violence. Table 5.1 summarizes the main indicators of these three states.

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<sup>45</sup> In Guerrero the PRI lost the governorship against the PRD candidate Zeferino Torreblanca in 2005 and recovered it with Héctor Astudillo in 2015. In Oaxaca party alternation at the state level took place in 2010 with Gabino Cué as an opposition candidate and the PRI returned to power with José Murat in 2016. In Chiapas party alternation took place with Pablo Salazar in 2000 and the Partido Verde-PRI coalition won back power with Javier Velasco in 2012.



**Table 5.1 Controlled Comparison of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas, 2000**

	<b>Guerrero</b>	<b>Oaxaca</b>	<b>Chiapas</b>	<b>National Mean</b>
<i><b>Out-migration</b></i>				
Emigrant households (%)	8.5	5.9	0.8	4.1
<i><b>Controls</b></i>				
GDP per capita (year), U.S.\$	2,847	2,185	2,101	5,811
Poverty (% below the line)	75.7	78.9	79.1	53
Inequality (Gini coefficient)	0.44	0.44	0.47	0.34
Indigenous (%)	13.9	37	24.6	7.1
Rural population (%)	44.7	55.5	54.3	25.4
Socially shared land (%)	79	86	49	53
Mountainous Terrain	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Located on the Pacific coast	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Party alternation / PRI return	Yes	Yes	Yes	
History of “old violence”	Large-scale armed insurgency	Small-scale armed insurgency	Large-scale armed insurgency	
Militarization	Experiment in military governance	Strong militarization	Strong militarization	
<i><b>Outcomes</b></i>				
Homicide Rate (2010)	40	14	6.7	20

Source: INEGI; SINAIS.

There are many elements that should be considered for the evaluation of this hypothesis. First, if out-migration and remittances truly acted as a safety valve in Guerrero and in Oaxaca but not in Chiapas, then Guerrero and Oaxaca should have experienced more violence when this safety valve was closed. The closure started to take place when post-9/11 border controls and migratory policies were implemented in the US and it was reinforced when the 2008 financial crisis made it very difficult for migrants to find jobs in the US. Nevertheless, as Figure 5.1 shows, the only state that returned to the high levels of violence experienced during the 1990s was Guerrero. Homicide rates in Oaxaca remained below 15 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>46</sup> The fact that violence in Oaxaca did not

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<sup>46</sup> Homicide rates of 15 per 100,000 people are very high for international standards. Yet in Mexico this is below the national mean as shown in the previous chapter.

increase notwithstanding important migrant ties and networks with the US demands closer inspection. Second, the fall in out-migration should be explored more closely at the local level. In other words, although national-level figures (as shown in chapter 4) clearly show an unprecedented decrease in Mexican out-migration to the US, these three states may have behaved differently. Furthermore, some areas within these states may have contrasting developments. The third element is timing. If the absence of out-migration can explain the war, and the war can explain out-migration, then the temporal dimension is crucial. It is necessary to understand the sequencing of rebellion, militarization and out-migration (in any of the possible orders) to disentangle causal patterns.

Finally, detecting the type of violence emerging in each case is helpful to throw light on the relationship between out-migration and violence. Massey and Durand connect many types of violence to out-migration: social conflicts, ethnoreligious conflicts, low-intensity war and drug-related violence. Although these manifestations of violence share many similarities regarding their relationship to out-migration, they also keep important particularities. Violence should be contextualized in order to be understood. At different points in the chapter I provide contextual evidence to this end. I turn now to the first two tasks: explaining why, unlike Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas remained relatively peaceful and exploring out-migration at the local level.

## **5.2 Why Violence Increased in Guerrero but not in Oaxaca and Chiapas?**

In Guerrero, frustrated out-migration was a more serious problem than in Oaxaca or Chiapas. US border controls and restrictive migratory policies played an important role in de-incentivizing out-migration in Guerrero. In a decade, the proportion of Guerrero's households with at least one member in the US was reduced by a half. In absolute terms this reduction may not appear significant: roughly 23,000 out of 674,177 total households. However, the geographic concentration of these households in the north, in the Montaña area, and in some neighborhoods of Acapulco should be taken into consideration.

Table 5.2 includes basic descriptive indicators about southern Mexico's out-migration and remittances. It shows that, on average, municipalities in Guerrero had 8.5 percent of households with at least one member abroad in the year 2000. In Oaxaca, the mean was 5.9 and in Chiapas less than one percent. However, mean values are usually skewed by outliers. This is particularly problematic for calculations based on municipal data because small municipalities with high out-migration rates have a determinant weight. For example, the small town of Santa Anna del Valle in Oaxaca has the highest out-migration rate in southern Mexico with 46.7 percent of the households with at least one member abroad. However, it only has 491 households. In absolute terms, roughly 240 of these are migrant households. In contrast, Acapulco only had five percent of migrant households in the year 2000, but it was a city of 171,793 families. Five percent represent 8,550 household units with a member abroad.

**Table 5.2 Out-migration and Remittances from Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas**

State	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	N	Min	Max
<b>Out-migration 2000</b>							
Guerrero	8.5	7.5	6.2	3.3	76	0.0	28.7
Oaxaca	5.9	3.2	7.3	7.7	570	0.0	46.7
Chiapas	0.8	0.5	1.1	7.9	118	0.0	6.1
<b>Out-migration 2010</b>							
Guerrero	4.8	4.1	2.9	5.3	81	0.7	14.9
Oaxaca	5.6	3.9	5.7	9.8	570	0.0	44.1
Chiapas	1.2	0.6	1.4	9.5	118	0.0	8.6
<b>Remittances 2000</b>							
Guerrero	9.5	7.4	8.0	3.5	76	0.0	33.7
Oaxaca	5.5	2.9	7.2	8.1	570	0.0	45.5
Chiapas	0.6	0.4	0.8	13.8	118	0.0	5.8
<b>Remittances 2010</b>							
Guerrero	9.2	8.1	7.0	3.8	81	0.4	32.5
Oaxaca	7.0	4.2	7.5	6.7	570	0.0	48.7
Chiapas	1.0	0.5	1.2	9.4	118	0.0	7.4

Source: CONAPO (2000) and CONAPO (2012) retrieved from Maldonado and Grau (2013).

A more reliable indicator of out-migration is the median because is less susceptible to extreme values. In Oaxaca, the median municipality for the year 2000 had only 3.2 percent of households with one member abroad. The high kurtosis in Oaxaca helps to complete the picture of its migration profile. The kurtosis indicates that, although the median level of out-migration in Oaxaca's 570 municipalities is usually low, there are a handful of municipalities with very high levels. These are concentrated in three areas, in the Mixteca Alta neighboring Puebla and Guerrero; in the Costa Chica bordering Guerrero; and in Oaxaca's central valleys.

Some hamlets in the Mixteca area like San Sebastián Nicananduta are almost deserted during most of the year. The only time of the year when San Sebastián is inhabited

is during holidays when migrants return (Durand and Massey, 2003: 94). But again, these hamlets are exceptional. Most of Oaxaca presents low levels of out-migration. The east of Oaxaca presents very low levels, just like neighboring Chiapas.

More substantively, Table 5.1 shows that Guerrero's median out-migration fell from 7.5 to 4.1 percent in ten years. In contrast, Oaxaca and Chiapas increased their levels marginally (from 3.2 to 3.9 in the case of Oaxaca and from 0.5 to 0.6 in the case of Chiapas). Therefore, state-level median out-migration figures elucidate a first important element to answer the central question of this section: out-migration fell only in Guerrero.

Remittance figures also provide important information. Contrary to what should be expected in times of border securitization and economic crisis, the median number of households receiving remittances actually increased in the three cases, albeit moderately. However, these state-level figures are far from reflecting stability. They are rather the result of two opposing processes: Areas in which migration is a consolidated phenomenon were severely affected and at the same time new migrant municipalities appeared. This evolution cannot be appreciated in table 5.1 as it is necessary to go beyond state-level figures for this purpose. Maps 5.1 and 5.2 were generated for this reason. The first map shows that in the year 2000, out-migration was a consolidated process in areas where *braceros* had been recruited half a century before. In the north of Guerrero and in some municipalities of Tierra Caliente, at least 20 percent of the households received remittances from a family member. This was the case in Cutzamala, Tlachapa, Tlapehuala, Arcelia, Teloloapan, Ixcateopan, Apaxtla, Cocula and Huitzuco. Boruchoff (2013) reports that in some hamlets of these municipalities the economic crisis of the 1980s motivated up to 75 percent of the population to move to the US (p. 348-349).

Crucially, not a single migrant municipality in the north of Guerrero was experiencing high levels of violence in the year 2000.<sup>47</sup> Flanked by Teloloapan, Cocula and Huitzuco, the municipality of Iguala that became infamous for the abduction of the Ayotzinapa normalistas in 2014 had an intermediate level of remittance reception and, for Mexican standards, low levels of violence.<sup>48</sup> In ten years, the north of Guerrero experienced dramatic changes. Most of the municipalities in the north of Guerrero experienced intermediate or low levels of remittance reception and high levels of violence. However, non-migrant regions in Guerrero also experienced high levels of violence. This is the case of the Costa Grande and Acapulco. Further inspection of these regions is required to understand their high homicide rates.

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<sup>47</sup> Above 40 homicides per 100,000 people.

<sup>48</sup> Homicide rates below 20.







A contrasting pattern arises in the Oaxacan Mixteca Alta. In 2000 it already had high levels of remittance reception in San Mateo Nejápam, Santiago Tamazola, Ixpantepec, San Juan Cieneguilla, San Miguel, San Nicolás and Santiago Ayuc. The surrounding municipalities had intermediate remittance levels. In terms of violence, the Mixteca resembles the neighboring Montaña area in Guerrero, where violence is manifested in low-intensity land conflicts that simmer for decades (Canabal Cristiani, 1999). With the exception of San Francisco Trapancingo, Guadalupe de Ramírez and San Nicolás, homicides have remained at intermediate and low levels at the Mixteca Alta.

A third pattern emerges in the Costa Chica, the south side of the border between Guerrero and Oaxaca in the Pacific coast. Violence and out-migration have a positive instead of a negative association in this area. As outliers usually contain essential pieces of information, this contradictory result in the Costa Chica also requires in-depth inspection.

In Chiapas, the inverse relationship expected by the theory holds. Remittance reception was very low in the year 2000. No single municipality recorded ten percent or more households receiving remittances and many had intermediate levels of violence. Ten years later there are municipalities with high levels of remittance reception in the northern Chol region, in the Tzeltal Lacandon jungle bordering Guatemala, in the Tzotzil highlands, in the central valleys and in the Soconusco region in the Pacific Coast. The only municipality with high levels of violence in 2010 was Benemérito de las Américas, on the border with Guatemala.

To sum up, understanding the relationship between violence and out-migration demands first and foremost to get the picture right. The only state in southern Mexico that experienced a contraction in out-migration and remittances was Guerrero. Chiapas and Oaxaca went against the national trend and they became even more embedded in the migratory phenomenon.

Second, out-migration is geographically concentrated in some areas within these states. These areas behave differently depending on the stage of the migration process in which they are immersed. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the state-level of analysis to capture the important migratory changes taking place. Otherwise we would get the wrong impression that levels of out-migration remained the same, and we would not be able to appreciate that some areas experienced a drastic drop in out-migration and remittances while out-migration emerged in new areas. The north of Guerrero is the most important out-migration region in the state. It is an area that experienced a drastic reduction in remittances and an equally drastic increase in violence. The Mixteca, the area in Oaxaca where migration is most concentrated, evolved differently. Remittance reception increased and violence remained at the same levels. Chiapas became less violent and experienced increased out-migration in the same period.

### **5.3 Conversation with Other Explanations**

The appraisal of the previous section concluded that from 2000 to 2010 Guerrero was the only state in southern Mexico in which an important migration area experienced a drastic decline in out-migration and remittances. It also concluded that Guerrero was the only state in the south that became more violent. This result could be taken as strong evidence for the “palliative” hypothesis if it were not for two reasons. First, correlation does not entail causation. In fact, the causation can flow in the opposite sense and more violence can result in less out-migration. This was shown in the ethnographic material presented in chapter 3. Some potential migrants, particularly male heads of household, decided to cancel or postpone their journey when they considered that the lives of their family members were endangered. This

“preventive” hypothesis does not necessarily substitute the palliative one, both mechanisms can operate simultaneously.

The second caveat is that some non-migrant areas also became more violent. Acapulco and its surroundings, the Costa Grande and the Costa Chica all experienced higher levels of violence in 2010, suggesting the possibility that other state-level or regional processes rule out migration as an explanation. Certainly, violence is a complex phenomenon and is usually the outcome of many influences operating at different levels. However, macro processes are locally articulated in different ways and these local peculiarities are critical to a greater understanding of the phenomenon under analysis.

The national-level “war on drugs” affects all these parts of Guerrero but it certainly does not rule out their particularities. Violence in the Costa Grande is to a large extent a legacy of the Dirty War whose epicenter was located in the Atoyac Sierra (Aviña, 2014; Padgett, 2015). Violence in Acapulco is explained in large measure by its strategic location and by the “double tribulation” that criminal organizations can extract from this touristic enclave (Illades, 2014; Trejo and Ley, 2015). In the Costa Chica, the increase in violence is related to the inauguration of a new highway in 2004 that traversed the region for the first time and connected the city of Tlapa in La Montaña with the small town of Marquelia located in the Pacific Coast. In the north of Guerrero, frustrated out-migration has an important role in the local manifestations of violence. In contrast, the growth of out-migration in La Montaña, in the Mixteca in Oaxaca and in most of Chiapas helped to alleviate social conflicts. The following section situates out-migration in conversation with the aforementioned factors in order to provide a better understanding of the local level variations in violence.

### 5.3.1 The legacy of the Dirty War

As stated, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas are scarred by experiences of armed rebellions and harsh state repression. Yet the levels and the timing of rebel activity differ

categorically. Guerrero hosted the most important armed political insurgency of the 1960s and the 1970s. As Bartra (2000 [1996]: 111) states:

“The Atoyac rebels (PdLP) represent the biggest peasant guerrilla that has ever existed in Mexico after the revolution and the turbulent 1920s. Their consistent and successful military campaigns surpass by far the poor warfare of other rebels, like the ones that operated in Chihuahua’s sierra from 1962 to 1965, led by Salvador Gaytán and Arturo Gámiz, or the three Armed Liberation Committees that from 1969 to 1972 were held by the ACNR in Guerrero as well” (own translation).

In the Cold War context and with the Cuban revolution not so distant in place or time, the Mexican state was particularly sensitive to spectacular actions held by rebel groups that could send shockwaves across Mexico and motivate other uprisings. Extortions of caciques, kidnappings of wealthy landowners and politicians, bank robberies, “revolutionary expropriations” and military ambushes resulted in increased repression and violence. As Aviña mentions: “In the aftermath of the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre, the last thing the PRI regime wanted was to admit the existence of “armed subversives” in the impoverished sierras of southern Mexico” (2014: 147).

A government worried by the expansion of communism but reluctant to publicly admit the existence of rebel groups followed a two-level counter-insurgency strategy. On one hand, it deployed disproportionate military actions aimed at neutralizing the rebels and sending a preemptive local message to discourage future insurgencies. On the other hand, it tried to keep these military operations as low profile as possible and to hide them from national and international opinion, although these actions were consistently denounced by PDLP and ACNR communiqués (Aviña, 2014: 147).

The disproportionate state response to the rebellions led by Cabañas and Vázquez in the 1960s and 1970s marked the political history of Guerrero and sent it into a trajectory different from the one followed by other southern states. Crucially, these rebellions required a considerable number of soldiers and police officers to physically repress these groups. As

suggested by Aviña: “Disappeared schoolteachers, tortured campesinos, and razed rural communities thus demand a regionally nuanced redefinition of PRI authoritarian rule” (2014: 13). Unlike the repression strategies displayed in other Mexican states, in Guerrero the scope and function of government brutality resemble the dirty wars of Argentina or Chile (Trejo, 2014). In Montemayor’s words, what happened in Guerrero was an “experiment in military governance” (in Tort, 2005). This experiment made a difference not in the “degree” but in the “kind” of repression. According to a census elaborated by family members of the victims of state repression, from 1969 to 1980 348 persons had been “disappeared” in Guerrero (Cárdenas and Hoyo, 1981 in Bartra 1996: 171). The response of the Mexican state to the Cabañas and Vázquez rebellions distinguishes itself by the following actions:

**Table 5.3 Actions of Repression and Cooptation in Guerrero During the Dirty War**

•	Systematic arbitrary detentions, torture, rape and extrajudicial executions (FEMOSPP, 2006: Ch. 6).
•	The deployment of 24,000 soldiers in the state (roughly one-third of the Mexican army at the time) (FEMOSPP, 2006: Ch. 6, 39; Maldonado, 1971 in Bartra 1996: 112).
•	Aerial bombings (FEMOSPP, 2006: Ch. 6, 39).
•	Collaboration with narcotraffickers to fight against the guerrilla (FEMOSPP, 2006: Ch. 6: 50).
•	Hundreds of medical and social workers including doctors, dentists, barbers, veterinarians and shoe makers in rural communities to obtain popular support and intelligence (Aviña, 2014: 127) as well as social programs aimed to reduce illiteracy, improve access to electricity and potable water and subsidized food provisions (Proceso, 2000; Aviña, 2014).

Disproportionate repressive actions and cooptation methods extended over the period of five state administrations. Guerrero’s militarization, the hundreds of murders and disappearances, the thousands tortured, the illegally detained or the harassed and surveilled occurred during the PRI governorships of Arturo Martínez Adame (1961-1963), Raymundo Abarca Alarcón (1963-1969), Caritino Maldonado Pérez (1969-1971), Israel Noguera Otero (1971-1975) and Rubén Figueroa Figueroa (1975-1981). It included several large-scale operations. These irregular war actions started to take place as a corollary of the 1962

elections, when the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense (ACG) was repressed in 1963 for protesting against what they considered electoral fraud and lasted until 1981.

Crucially, these robust, long-standing military and police operations represented an opportunity for state-employed and state-backed coercion specialists to consolidate as a network, after years of counterinsurgency in Guerrero. In other words, military and police operations gave coercion specialists more time, excuses and impunity needed to set up a transnational narcotics trafficking business in Guerrero than in any other southern state (Trejo, 2014; FEMOSPP, 2006: Chapter 6: 50; Padgett, 2015). The network of state forces boosted a local-agrarian marijuana market that had long existed in Guerrero. According to Padgett (2015) they also introduced opium poppy in the state, a considerably more valued crop (p. 17). Historical evidence in Mexico is conclusive in that narcotics trafficking emerged and evolved because state forces protected the traffickers or because state forces were directly engaged in trafficking themselves (Astorga, 2000; Astorga, 2005; Serrano, 2012: 137; Padgett, 2015; Trejo, 2014; Knight, 2012: 120). In sum, the large-scale rebellion in Guerrero attracted overwhelming state forces that could act with absolute impunity, and this type of state presence eventually led to the establishment of particularly robust networks of narcotics trafficking.

For peasants in Guerrero, the rebellion was an attempt to gain access to better living conditions; its consequent repression was the perfect opportunity to establish corrupt connections in the province. Similar acts of repression have continued to occur in Guerrero. A particularly infamous act was the massacre of Aguas Blancas in June, 28, 1995, when members from the Peasant Organization of the Southern Sierra (OCSS) were traveling in pick-up trucks to the town of Atoyac. They wanted to join a demonstration against the disappearance of Gilberto Romero Vazquez, one of their leaders, and demand fertilizer from the government. A video in national television showed Guerrero's Motorized Police stopping

the pick-up trucks and shooting 17 OCSS members dead and wounding a further 21 (see Guzmán Martínez, 2015).

Popular outrage forced the demission of the third governor coming from the Figueroa clan. Like his father, Figueroa Alcocer was neither tried not convicted for his responsibility in the killings. An armed group emerged on June 28, 1996, exactly one year after the commemoration of the Aguas Blancas massacre. The first communiqué from the Revolutionary People's Army (EPR) denounced that:

“repression, persecution, imprisonment, murders, tortures and disappearances continue as a government policy. A similar situation to 1967 and 1968, when commanders Lucio Cabañas Barrientos and Genaro Vazquez decided to take up arms against exploitation and oppression. That experience, the unfair current situation and the revolutionary spirit inspires the Mexican people to fight again” (EPR, 1996, own translation).

In Aguas Blancas an old pattern of overt state violence was reproduced. A group of campesinos from the same region where Lucio Cabañas and the PdIP emerged in the 1960s were repressed by an authoritarian governor, incidentally the son of the former authoritarian governor. After the massacre a new rural armed group appeared and a new counterinsurgency campaign was launched. Significantly, the Costa Grande did not have a *bracero* out-migration tradition and has continuously followed a “voice” pathway to prosperity. Boruchoff (1999) explains the violence in Aguas Blancas as follows:

“Near Aguas Blancas peasants with no significant transnational connections to the US were seeking to express themselves as citizens and participate democratically in the Mexican nation-state by demonstrating in a nearby city. However, en route they were brutally silenced in a police massacre reminiscent of past decades. Perhaps apparent concern and violent repression are the PRI's contrary means to the same end of maintaining dominance” (p. 11).

Chiapas and Oaxaca evolved differently. In Chiapas militarization began seventeen years later than Guerrero. In fact, these cases influenced each other as Guerrero's

militarization made Chiapas a comparatively more attractive site for urban guerrillas looking for rural social bases. According to Salvador Morales Garibay, one of the EZLN sub-commanders, the relative absence of the army was one of the reasons valued by the Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN), an urban guerilla from northern Mexico that preceded the EZLN, to set up a *foco guerrillero* in Chiapas:

“Chiapas was not chosen by its revolutionary potential, but by a geographical reason. Soldiers did not reach there, and shooting practices could be carried without problems. The group recruited by César Yáñez, the founder of the FLN, had already been there in the early seventies. His vision was that Chiapas was a suitable place for the guerrilla, the Lacandon forest in specific, because it is a closed place, of difficult access (...) (After EZLN indoctrination the Indians) used to say that the federal armies (sic) were very evil, but some of them have never even seen a soldier. (...) not only the army but the State as a whole was absent in Chiapas” (De la Grange and Rico, 1999).

A FLN camp discovered in 1974 alerted the army about guerrilla presence in Chiapas. Yet there was no heavy presence of the military until 1980, when the army was called in to contain land invasions (Collier and Collier, 2005: 453). Another surge in military presence took place in 1989, when a base was built at Rancho Nuevo, seven kilometers’ distance from San Cristobal.

The experience in Guerrero also influenced the FLN “evasive warfare” approach to revolution, an approach that helps to understand the delayed militarization in Chiapas. As contradictory as it may appear the FLN were antimilitarists in their methods. They had arrived at their own interpretation of Marxism-Leninism, an interpretation that had one basic premise: there was no need to start a revolutionary war. This would break out sooner or later. The inherent contradictions of the capitalist system would make it inevitable. Therefore, their task consisted not in conducting a revolutionary war but in being ready for the war, whenever it begins (Oikonomakis, 2016: 68-69). The Zapatistas’ strategy to wait was also influenced by the on-the-ground experiences of other revolutionary organizations, perhaps more than by



Marxism-Leninism theory. They studied the failed experiences of the PdLP and the ACNR in Guerrero. They also analyzed the failure of the Grupo Popular Guerrillero (GPG) led by Arturo Gámiz in Chihuahua. These experiences convinced the Zapatistas to restrain themselves from conducting any action that could draw attention from the government (Oikonomakis, 2016: 115, 223). As Cedillo (2012) states: “[the FLN were] a politico-military organization that for 24 years (1969-1993) prepared for a people’s war that never took place (2012: 148). Until January 1st, 1994 they refrained from kidnappings, bank robberies, “revolutionary expropriations” and any action that could draw attention from the government.<sup>49</sup> Instead they found other methods for financing their revolutionary activities. Initially, they financed themselves with their own money and resources before forging some forms of financing by supportive rural communities (Tello, 1995; De la Grange and Rico, 1999).

Recent ethnographic evidence suggests that out-migration is demobilizing the EZLN bases. According to Aquino Moreschi (2009), the Zapatistas have endured harsh repression and a prolonged low-intensity war. Nevertheless, out-migration represents a different, unexpected type of challenge. The new generation, those who are expected to inherit the movement, was leaving the area in the early 2000s.<sup>50</sup> Out-migration became to them an alternative way to gain a livelihood . In addition, returned migrants brought new ideas,

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<sup>49</sup> Although they did draw attention when they organized a demonstration in 1992 against the commemoration of the 500 anniversary of the arrival of Cristobal Colón to América in San Cristobal de las Casas and destroyed the statue of the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Mazariegos.

<sup>50</sup> Tellingly, they turned to out-migration just after indigenous rights were included in the Mexican Constitution. The Zapatistas were very disappointed with the final text included in article 2. As I have argued elsewhere: “the constitutional bill that was finally approved was radically different than the text agreed at San Andrés during the peace talks between the EZLN and the Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación (COCOPA). The Constitutional text was limited to the lowest extreme; it is impossible to derive secondary laws from it and therefore impossible to define mechanisms by which indigenous peoples will benefit from their natural resources, meaning that Subcomandante Marcos’ qualification of the reform as a “legislative mockery” was entirely correct” (Alonso, 2014).

lifestyles and experiences that are not necessarily digested with ease under the Zapatista mantra of egalitarianism.

In Oaxaca insurgent training camps, firearms and rebel activity were detected in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca in 1967 (See Chapter 3). The most important insurgent groups with presence in Oaxaca were the Movimiento de Acción Revolucionaria (MAR) and the Partido Proletario Unido de América (PPUA) (Castellanos, 2008: 358). Mexican state forces defeated both and a large-scale armed rebellion similar to that led by the PdIP in Guerrero never developed. An important number of the MAR leaders were captured after they robbed a bank in Morelia, Michoacán in 1971 (Castellanos, 2008: 173). In the case of the PPUA, it suffered a major setback when their charismatic leader Florencio “El Güero” Medrano died after being shot during a land invasion near Tuxtepec in 1979 (Gómez, 2012: 98).

A region in Oaxaca with a strong parallel to Guerrero’s Costa Grande in terms of counterinsurgency activity is the Loxicha highlands. In August 28, 1996, the EPR launched coordinated attacks in Tlaxiaco, San Pablo Macuilxóchitl and La Crucesita. The latter is a small village near the touristic town of Huatulco. At La Crucesita nine people died in the clash between *eperristas* and armed forces. One of the *eperristas* who died was from San Agustín Loxicha (Norget, 2004: 102).

The death of a guerrilla from San Agustín Loxicha attracted Mexican state forces to the Loxicha highlands. Fearful of a potential territorial expansion of the Zapatista rebellion developing in neighboring Chiapas, the Mexican federal government deployed roughly 500 members of the preventive police, judicial police and the army in the town which has a population of only 3,000 inhabitants. Police and military personnel behaved as they did in the 1970s in Guerrero: disproportionate military actions, unlawful detentions, torture, beatings, the ransacking of homes, evictions, food deprivation, extrajudicial executions and transforming local *cacique* gunmen into paramilitary groups (Norget, 2004). As can be seen in

maps 5.1 and 5.2, the Loxicha highlands did not have an international migration tradition to help them palliate the repression that began in 1996. It has preserved the high levels of violence and it has developed moderate levels of out-migration (around 5 percent).

### 3.3.2 Acapulco's territorial value and strategic location

Acapulco's relevance for the criminal organizations increased when José Francisco Ruíz Massieu became governor of the state (1987-1993). The transnational drug trafficking industry established in Guerrero during the Dirty War became more profitable during his administration. Ruiz Massieu started a process of neoliberal authoritarian modernization and followed a *fondomonetarista* approach "by the book". Half of the state government enterprises were dismantled in his term.<sup>51</sup> His administration was a complete change with respect to the government of Alejandro Cervantes Delgado (PRI, 1981-1987), his predecessor. Cervantes Delgado had focused on developing participatory rural projects (construction of schools, roads, credit schemes, assistance to producer organizations) aimed at developing the interior of the state and had allowed the participation of independent peasant organizations. In contrast, Ruiz Massieu abandoned this participatory development orientation and concentrated his efforts in attracting foreign and national investors for the expansion of tourist enclaves and products for the international market. Interviews conducted by Snyder (2001) with peasant leaders capture the essence of Ruiz Massieu's authoritarian modernization. One of them states: "[Ruiz Massieu] only cared about Acapulco, he didn't give a damn about the rest of Guerrero!" (p. 108). His four most important "mega-projects" were a luxurious residential development and shopping complex in Punta Diamante next to the bay of Acapulco (Bartra, 2000:135); a super-highway to connect Cuernavaca and Acapulco; a highway to facilitate timber extraction from the Filo Mayor area and the modernization of the

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<sup>51</sup> When Cervantes Delgado became governor in 1981 there were eight state owned companies in Guerrero. Cervantes created twenty-eight new public enterprises. Ruiz Massieu became governor of a state with thirty-six companies and closed nineteen out of these (Estrada 1994 in Bartra, 1996: 131; Snyder, 2001: 108).

irrigation system in Tierra Caliente for agro-industrial exports (Estrada, 1994: 106). This economic strategy oriented to the exterior motivated the creation of transport and tourist infrastructure made Guerrero's narcotrafficking and tourist industries very lucrative and deeply entangled with one another.<sup>52</sup>

Acapulco became very important for criminal organizations because of its wealthy tourist industry. Racketeers have depleted substantial municipal finances and have extorted tourist entrepreneurs. As the homicides of Luz María Ortega and Simón Cohen show, municipal government employees can be brutally murdered if they do not co-operate with the demands of organised criminal forces (Animal Político, 2012). These public officers were killed because they denied access to the property registry database to a criminal organization that was intending to use the information for extortion (Trejo and Ley, 2015).

In stark contrast to Guerrero, a tourist enclave like Acapulco did not emerge in Oaxaca or Chiapas. In the momentous transition of Mexico from a state-oriented to a neoliberal economy Heladio Ramírez López (1986-92), a well-known statist and populist politician was chosen by the Mexican president as candidate for Oaxaca's government, which at the time guaranteed his election as governor because of PRI domination in the region. Ramírez could not have been more different from Ruiz Massieu. The former was selected by the Mexican president because he could counteract the strong social opposition to the federal neoliberal policies. The latter was selected because he was helped by influential politicians such as his mentor Guillermo Soberón Acevedo, the federal Secretary of Health and Welfare, who declined his own nomination in favor of Ruiz Massieu. In addition to his mentor's lobbying, Ruiz Massieu had the support of his brother-in-law, the influential Undersecretary of

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<sup>52</sup> As Shirk (2012) states for the case of Mexico as a whole: "The same physical, financial, and technological infrastructure that created opportunities for legitimate businesses in the 1980s and 1990s also benefited transnational organized crime networks reaching from Mexico into the United States, and undermined interdiction efforts" (p. 58-59).

Budgetary Planning at the federal Ministry of Finance, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who became president of Mexico in 1988, one year after the election of Ruiz Massieu as governor of Guerrero (Snyder, 2001: 106).

President De la Madrid (1982-88), the enthusiastic neoliberal who launched the first liberalization reforms in Mexico, had virtually no other option but to select what Snyder (2001) calls a “peripheral populist” like Ramírez as the PRI candidate for the government of Oaxaca (p. 60, 99). Oaxaca had had five governors in the previous 12 years and was in the need of a veteran experienced politician who could negotiate with the various social groups (Corro, 2012: 1). In the context of the implementation of structural adjustment reforms at the national level, selecting a technocrat as a governor would only aggravate Oaxaca’s governance crisis (as happened in Guerrero). Ramírez did not abandon the countryside to favor tourist enclaves. Instead, he succeeded in promoting political and social stability by creating state-level neo-corporatist participatory regimes to fill the vacuum left by INMECAFÉ and other federal state-owned agencies that had been dismantled (Snyder, 2001). Contrary to the expectations of state shrinkage during neoliberal reforms, Oaxaca’s public sector was expanded. By the end of his term, Ramírez had created the State Coffee Council, but also Caminos y Autopistas de Oaxaca, a parastatal company to foster highway and transport construction, and the Consejo Forestal y de la Fauna Silvestre del Estado de Oaxaca, a regulatory agency for the lumber sector (Snyder, 2001: 62).

The willingness and capacity of Ramírez to negotiate with independent coffee producers and accept substantial amendments to his original proposal of coffee re-regulation proved to be crucial for the success of the neocorporatist project. In particular, Ramírez sacrificed the control of the state coffee council by the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), the PRI’s preeminent rural corporatist federation, and allowed the participation of independent producers in the council. Oaxaca’s neocorporatist participatory regime for the

coffee industry fostered the construction of storerooms, solutions for plague control, the transfer of INMECAFÉ equipment to local producers and the incorporation of economic development projects to the coffee industry (Snyder, 2001). All these actions proved to be crucial for an industry that provides a livelihood to 300,000 individuals in Oaxaca, 10 percent of the state's population (Snyder, 2001: 69).

Privileging negotiation over repression had important implications for the state's infrastructure. Federal, state authorities and the construction companies have struggled to build a super highway to traverse the Sierra Madre del Sur and connect the city of Oaxaca with the town of Puerto Escondido at Oaxaca's Pacific coast. Originally the project was granted to the Spain-based Constructora Omega in 2008, but the Spanish company abandoned it arguing economic and social impediments and transferred it to Empresas ICA S.A.B. de C.V in 2012. Subsequently ICA withdraw as well arguing that unforeseen costs rendered the highway financially unworthy. The highway was supposed to conclude in 2014 but it has been delayed until today. The major reason for the delay is that popular movements, some of them demanding compensation for the right of passage, have blocked the joint efforts of the authorities and construction companies at several points. Judging from the experience of Guerrero, the absence of such project in Oaxaca has been a blessing in disguise. It has unintentionally saved Oaxaca from narco-violence.

Oaxaca's negotiated path to neoliberal governance and its implications in terms of uncompleted transport infrastructure has implications for the narcotrafficking business and for the levels of political violence. However, since Ulises Ruiz reached the state government, Oaxaca's governance strategies have started to resemble those in Guerrero (See Osorno, 2007). Ruiz (2004-2010) decided to follow a punitive path to confront the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), a powerful popular insurrection led by the Section 22 of the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE), the dissident teachers' union.

Initially motivated by the defense of their labor conditions, the teachers organized several demonstrations gathering more than 85,000 people in the city of Oaxaca and a million people across the state. The protests escalated and began to demand Ulises Ruiz's dismissal and an end to his corrupt and authoritarian government (Esteva, 2007: 130). The APPO was supported by roughly 300 student, worker and indigenous organizations and Ruiz's security apparatus responded with harsh violence. Some acts linked to the government of Ruiz are the murder attempt against the municipal secretary of San Pedro Jicayán and the assassinations of the leader of the Triqui Movement of Union and Struggle (MULT); the leader of the inhabitants of Zaachila and the municipal coordinator of the Program for Strengthening Rural Enterprises and Organizations (PROFEMOR). After a siege of Oaxaca's city centre which lasted six months, the federal government occupied the city with a law-enforcement operation that resulted in the deaths of 26 people, including the American journalist Brad Will (Santiago and Illades, 2014: 75-77).

### 3.3.3 More out-migration and more violence in the Costa Chica: the effects of a new highway

After more than two decades of construction, the city of Tlapa in La Montaña was finally connected to the town of Marquelia on the Pacific Coast. President Fox inaugurated the Tlapa–Marquelia highway in August, 2004. In general, the inhabitants from the Montaña - Costa Chica were enthusiastic about the arrival of the new highway. They had been demanding better transport infrastructure, since at least the early 1970s (Villa Arias, 1999). Before, a limited service of light planes was available in case of emergency to those who could afford it.

The new road was particularly appreciated because it allowed the inhabitants of the Costa Chica – Montaña region to bring people in need of medical attention quicker to hospitals and avoid unnecessary deaths. As a dweller from Santa Cruz del Rincón, Malinaltepec expressed: “How many people that could not pay for a flight in light airplanes

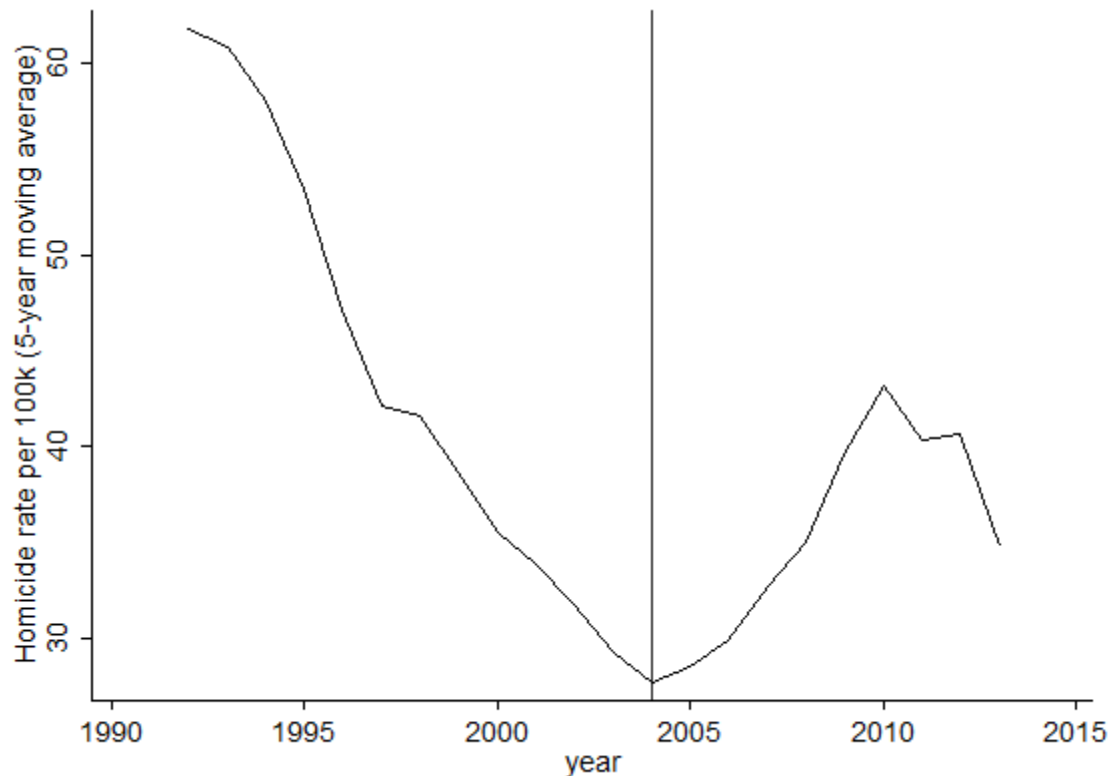
suffered or died from a disease? Life was terrible. Now at least we have a highway, but it is very damaged. It seems that things are going to be the same they used” (Rodríguez, 2009). However, the inauguration of the highway brought a side effect. It was accompanied by an increase in homicides as shown by Figure 5.2.<sup>53</sup> The evolution of the Costa Chica provides evidence for the world systems theory prediction (Portes and Walton, 1981) that, as capital and transport infrastructure penetrate peripheral a regions, labor and raw materials follow the inverse direction. These revolutionary changes in mobility are not exempted from political, criminal and interpersonal violence.

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<sup>53</sup> According to Mario Campos, priest from the diocese of Tlapa, a similar escalation had taken place in the mid-1990s at La Montaña, when a highway connected Tlapa with Tecamatlán, Puebla. The violence brought by the highway motivated inhabitants from the Costa Chica and Montaña regions to organize community police organizations to defend themselves (Interview, Utrecht, May 22, 2016). Gledhil (2012) mentions that a similar effect had taken place in indigenous communities in Michoacán after the construction of a highway in the 1980s (p. 244).



**Figure 5.2 Homicide Rates in the Costa Chica (Guerrero and Oaxaca)**



Source: SINAIS, retrieved from Maldonado and Grau (2013). The vertical line signals the year of the Tlapa – Marquelia highway inauguration.

#### 3.3.4 Religious Proselytism, Social Organization and Defense of Human Rights

The dismantling of a religious monopoly has had important consequences in terms of social organization in Southern Mexico. An important share of Mexico's Indian population is concentrated in these southern states. This population counted not only on internal cultural resources that helped its inhabitants to resist colonial exploitation, mestizo homogenization and neoliberal marketization but also on powerful allies like the Catholic and Protestant churches, with the former determined to protect its flock from the penetration of the latter (Norget, 1997). According to Trejo (2012) Catholicism abandoned the demands of the poor during a long period when religious competition was absent. For centuries, the Church's efforts concentrated only on guaranteeing the elite's adhesion to Catholicism, a low-cost

strategy that allowed them to preserve the unanimous faith of the rural villages. But when another religious supplier emerged, the Catholic Church was obliged to modify its broader approach. The Protestant strategy of conversion (translating Bibles into indigenous languages, providing health clinics, and organizing rural cooperatives) proved so successful that the Catholic Church reacted first by imitating it. However, after centuries of neglecting the poor the Catholic priests had a credibility deficit and imitating the Protestants was not enough to keep the loyalty of its congregation. They had to go a step further and help the poor in their social and political struggles. The unintended result of Protestant proselytism and Catholic progressive activism was a dense network of communal organizations.

Radical priests influenced by liberation theology reformulated the apostolic approach of the Catholic Church. This reformulation was materialized in the “Indian pastoral” (*pastoral indígena*), an initiative established to attend the spiritual, social and political demands of the Indian population. The *pastoral indígena* had one of its epicenters in the diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, where bishop Samuel Ruiz devoted special attention to fostering autonomous community organizations since his appointment in 1960. According to Fox (2007), in just 15 years Samuel Ruiz had trained 8,000 Indian catechists, instructors and activists, who embodied “the most important single factor permitting collective action beyond the village level” (p. 72).

Similar organizational processes were fostered by the Oaxacan dioceses of Tehuantepec and Oaxaca city and by the diocese of Tlapa, in the eastern highlands of Guerrero, where the Indian population of that state is concentrated. A particularly important legacy of progressive bishops like Samuel Ruiz, Arturo Lona, Bartolomé Carrasco Briceño and Alejo Zavala was the creation of centers for the protection of human rights of the Indians. These centers have acted as powerful counterweights to the abuses of Mexican authorities and

have helped to raise awareness of the critical economic, political and social exclusion suffered by the indigenous populations.<sup>54</sup>

An unintended outcome of the dense network of catechists, human rights activists and social projects set in motion by the Indian pastoral was the emergence of radical *agrarista*, social movement organizations like the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC) in Chiapas, and the Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students (COCEI) in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca (Serrano, 1998: 465-467; Trejo, 2012: 113-30; Rubin, 1997: 128-129). In the case of Chiapas some of the deacons and catechists trained by Samuel Ruiz even joined the armed insurgency led by the National Zapatista Liberation Army (EZLN) and played a pivotal role in convincing their flock to participate in the Zapatista rebellion (De la Grange, 1999).

### 3.3.5 The value of illicit drugs and the narcotraffickers strategic behavior

Unlike cannabis, opium production is different in Guerrero and in Oaxaca. An export, local-agrarian marihuana market had existed for a long time in Guerrero. Tons have been seized since the 1930s (Astorga, 2005: 48). In the 1980s it was already a large-scale phenomenon. According to data from the Defense Secretary, from 1988 to 1993 3,968 hectares of marihuana fields were destroyed. A similar area was burned in neighboring Oaxaca: 3,509 hectares. A very different number of opium poppy fields was destroyed in these two entities. In Guerrero 15,813 hectares were burned while in Oaxaca only 1,046 hectares were destroyed (Astorga, 2005: 127-128).

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<sup>54</sup> The cases of Inés Fernández and Valentina Rosendo exemplifies the relevance of these human rights centers. In the context of militarization of Guerrero's Montaña area, both Me'Phaa women suffered rape and torture in 2002 while they were interrogated by soldiers. Helped by Tlachinollan, a human rights' advocacy group based in Tlapa, Guerrero, the two Me' Phaa Indians accused the Mexican state in the Interamerican Court on Human Rights (CIDH). The CIDH decided in favor of Fernández and Rosendo, pressuring Mexican authorities to take to court four alleged offenders.

This difference in opium poppy production is crucial as the type of drug planted or trafficked has consequences in terms of violence (Synder and Durán Martínez, 2009). The “drug-specific violence” argument is widely accepted with regards to cocaine. As Serrano (2012) states: “the US induced transition, from an export local-agrarian drug market to a national cocaine service illicit economy, played an important role in the intensification of violent illicit exchanges and in the more brutal manifestation of violence” (p. 144). Less attention has been given to the specific consequences of opium cultivation although this is changing rapidly after the “epidemics” of heroin and opium-based painkillers in the US (Quiñones, 2015) and the homicide and disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students. The massive, indiscriminate attack by local policemen, members of a criminal organization and allegedly state and federal policemen and the army against the students left Mexican and international civil society perplexed. The disproportionately brutal nature of the killings has proved particularly disturbing. There is no apparent reason for a coalition of criminals and state forces to launch an unprecedented murderous attack against a group of rebel students seizing a bus, particularly because the “occupation” of buses to be used for transportation to protest events has been a common practice of the normalistas (GIEI, 2015: 319). One of the main hypotheses presented by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) - established to investigate the attacks in Iguala on the 26 and 27 of September, 2014 – is that the students may have accidentally hijacked a bus that was loaded with heroin (2015: 320).

The relevance of opium poppy and its derivatives explains in part why Guerrero is more violent than Chiapas and Oaxaca. Padgett (2015) mentions that peasants’ earnings from marihuana are modest and have been reduced considerably in the last years. They are paid 300 Mexican pesos per kilo (about 15 US Dollars), a quarter of the price they earned just ten years ago (p. 79). The profits obtained by peasants per kilogram of opium poppy is also in decline, but it remains considerably higher: 15,000 Mexican pesos (about 750 US Dollars).

Data from the Defense Secretary indicate that 60 percent of Mexico's opium poppy is grown in Guerrero. 25 percent is produced in the "Golden Triangle" of Chihuahua, Durango and Sinaloa and 15 percent is produced in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Sonora, Nayarit, Colima, Jalisco and Michoacán altogether (Padgett, 2015: 37).

The strategies followed by narcotrafficking organizations are also important. After splitting from the Sinaloa cartel, the Beltrán-Leyva organization (BLO) established its stronghold in Guerrero and Morelos. Violence followed a dialectic logic between Acapulco and Sinaloa, with homicides appearing in one city as a retaliation for previous attacks which had occurred in the other. The war between the Sinaloa organization, the BLO, the BLO subcontracted Zetas, and state forces in Acapulco resulted in the fragmentation of organized criminality in Acapulco (Guerrero, 2013)

In contrast, the preference for negotiated solutions of some Oaxacan politicians also apply to Oaxacan criminal organizations. Some of the most important narcotraffickers in Oaxaca have acted as the former governor Heladio Ramírez did with regards to the coffee reregulation: they seem to avoid confrontation as much as possible. Juan José Esparragoza Moreno "El Azul", linked to the Sinaloa cartel and allegedly in charge of the opium and marihuana production in Oaxaca was reputed to act as a "low-profile mediator" (Animal Político, 2016). While the leader of the "Oaxaca cartel", Pedro "El Cacique" Díaz Parada, was also characterized by discrete methods and contrasted with the extravagance and notoriety of other criminal bosses (Ramírez, 2000).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Díaz Parada did dare to order the indiscrete assassination of a federal judge that sentenced him to 33 years in prison in 1987. The body of the judge was found with 33 bullets, one for every year in prison. Nevertheless, aside from this incident, the little information that exists about his organization confirms his discretion (La Jornada, 2007).

Nevertheless, the negotiating style of criminal bosses also has its limits as an explanatory argument. Diaz Parada was captured for the last time in 2007 and the vacuum left in Oaxaca was filled by the Zetas, the most violent cartel in Mexico. In addition, a valid objection to the type of drugs and violence argument is that it falls into a circular logic. In other words, it is not clear why more opium was planted in Guerrero than in Oaxaca in the first place.

#### **5.4 Internal Out-migration and Violence. The Case of Chiapas**

The previous section analyzed many factors that interrelate with violence and international out-migration, the two key variables of this dissertation. This section explores how these phenomena correspond to each other when internal out-migration is more prevalent than the international option. As argued throughout the chapter, this section shows that internal out-migration can also alleviate violence if the group that out-migrated finds a sustained economic alternative outside their homeplace but within Mexico. To this end, this section focuses on Chiapas, the case with least international out-migration.

Historically Chiapan outmigration has been a regional phenomenon. International migration is a recent development (Rus and Rus, 2012; Villafuerte and García Aguilar, 2006). Chiapans used to migrate to destinations inside Mexico and particularly inside Chiapas. Scholars believe the low levels of international migration are due to a limited participation in the Bracero Program and to the existence of internal hiring or *enganche* (Durand and Massey, 2003: 89). The state has a long history of internal labor migration as well as internal displacement caused by the construction of public works, natural disasters and ethno-religious and political violence (See CDHFBC, 2002). Some internal migration fluxes started more than a century ago motivated by the expansion of the international coffee market. Coffee

production became the second economic activity in terms of employment in the Chiapan countryside, only surpassed by maize production (Villafuerte and García, 2006: 109). Since the 1950s and until the 1980s, dam constructions attracted internal migrants. The oil industry in Tabasco and Campeche and tourism in Cancún have also been important pull factors for the Chiapan workforce (Villafuerte and García, 2006: 117).

The town of Chamula and its nearby hamlets in the Tzotzil highlands provide a well-known example of internal migration. Tzotziles were forced to move towards the Grijalva valley in the mid-nineteenth century where they became bound by incurred debt to work on the cotton, cattle and sugar cane estates. Subsequently, they were attracted to the Soconusco region where the slopes of the Sierra Madre meet the Pacific coast to work in the *fincas cafetaleras* (coffee estates) (Wasserstrom, 1978). Debts were created by enacting vagrancy and tax laws and enforced by bilingual officials ruling their communities. Work in the *fincas* was the only possibility for debt repayment. After the penuries suffered during the Revolution, Chamulas continued going voluntarily to the *fincas* because they were offered relatively high wages (Rus, 2005: 172). Coffee producers also preferred a stable, seasonal labor force and did not encourage permanent relocation. They introduced a system of payments in advance that allowed the Tzotziles to work in the estates for periods of three or four months and then return to live in the highlands between harvests. Since then Tzotziles depended more on their salaries than on agricultural production for self-consumption (Wasserstrom, 1978: 139).

As stated, international migration from Chiapas is relatively recent. Not even the agricultural crisis that began in the 1980s nor the Zapatista rebellion of the 1990s were immediately accompanied by international migration. In fact, initially they reinforced the incentives to remain inside Chiapas. In order to de-incentivize the Zapatista rebellion and reduce tensions, the federal government implemented a mechanism to circumvent the 1992

constitutional provision that marked the end of land reform. In other words, to undermine the legitimacy of the Zapatistas and provide a non-violent solution to the land invasions the government continued to engage in some land reform. They did so by creating a trust to buy some of the lands that had been invaded during the rebellion and granting them to the occupiers. In this way, Chiapas experienced a *reparto agrario* after 1992. This outdated and informal “Market Agreement Land Reform” managed to solve 47 percent of the more than 2,000 land disputes partly by buying and granting land plots (Becerra, Castañares and Pérez Mota, 1996; Bobrow-Strain, 2004).

It was not until hurricane *Mitch* struck Chiapas in 1998 that out-migration to the US became a notable phenomenon. Migration to the US increased substantially during the first half of the 2000s. Data from the *Encuestas de Migración la Frontera Norte* (EMIF) (1993-2016) indicate that Chiapas was fast becoming one of the leading migration sending states. However, out-migration was reduced by border control enforcement, crime at the border and the financial crisis before it could fully consolidate itself as a process (Rus and Rus, 2013).

The historic case of the Chamulas from the highlands are again illustrative of how governance decisions affects violent outcomes. The Porfirian vagrancy and tax laws not only ignited a process of internal seasonal migration to the coffee estates in the Pacific coast, it also motivated the Chamulas to establish rigorous cultural controls to avoid falling into serfdom again.<sup>56</sup> These controls were subverted over the decades by the “scribe-*principales*”, originally young literate men whose secular role was limited to communicate the decisions of the elders to the authorities of the postrevolutionary state. The scribe-*principales* gradually took advantage of their position and transformed their marginal role into a crucial intermediary function. In addition, their salaries allowed them to finance *cargos*, ceremonies

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<sup>56</sup> Monolingulism and participation in all the community service roles were established as requisites for Chamulas (Rus, 2005).



that were usually sponsored by the elders and conferred social status. This functional appropriation eventually led them to become the caciques from Chamula.

Young men avid for opportunities became frustrated with the concentration of political and economic power in the new caciques. Taking advantage of a wave of religious competition these men and their families started to express their dissatisfaction by abandoning Chamula's syncretic Catholicism known as *Tradición* and converting to Protestantism and mainstream Catholicism. A particularly important feature of the new religion was its disapproval of alcohol ingestion. Caciques had become producers and retailers of *poch*, a traditional distilled liquor obtained from sugar cane and switching to Protestantism was a manner of indirectly condemning *caciquismo* (Rus 2005:177).

By 1970 these young, frustrated Chamulas began to challenge the power of these caciques by means of protest and electoral competition, seizing a momentary lapse of approval for free elections on the side of governor Manuel Velasco Suárez. Chiapas' governor was no democrat. Velasco Suárez just wanted to break the hold of Chamula's caciques who had become too repressive and independent and were obstructing some of the state government's modernizing initiatives. Governor Velasco favored a young bilingual teacher to compete and win against the cacique Juan Tuxum in 1970. Tuxum and his collaborators were detained while an investigation about their responsibility for a murder in 1965 was conducted. Nevertheless, the young teacher got scared and resigned from his newly elected office fearing that he would be blamed for the incarceration of the cacique-elders. Tuxum and his group were freed and managed to retain power after threatening of diverting the highlands Indian vote away from the PRI (Rus, 2005: 184-185). In the following 1973 municipal elections the government had renounced their efforts of limiting the caciques' power and declared them winners despite the pressure and disbelief from the anti-*caciquistas*. The following year 150

anti-*caciquistas* invaded Chamula's townhall and denounced their corrupt deals with Velasco's government.

The caciques reacted by spreading the rumor that the behind the town hall invasion were Catholics and Protestants with the ultimate intention of destroying Chamula's *traditionalist* temple. After spreading the rumors, they orchestrated religious expulsions that have continued sporadically ever since. Violence in Chamula subsided because the expelled founded colonies in San Cristobal and ended up with higher standards of living than the population that remained in Chamula (Rus, 2005).

International out-migration is the last chapter of the Tzotzil people. The path of the small town of Ch'ul O'sil in the Tzotzil highlands described by Rus and Rus (2013) is illustrative of the development captured by the EMIF data. Young men from Ch'ul O'sil started to migrate in the year 2000. They succeeded in finding work in the construction sector in the US and remitting part of their "hard currency" income. The transfer was substantial in one case and the money was invested in visible housing improvements, sending shockwaves through the village dwellers. Several families started to imitate the early leavers when success materialized, even if there was only one "success" story. In only six years, 74 young men (representing 34 percent of the total young male population) left for the US. From 2006 to 2009 43 of them returned. Approximately half of them managed to return with some savings. Those who did not manage to succeed in their trip, as well as their families, suffered economic hardship and a difficult social situation with cases of alcoholism and deprivation that contributed to further violence.

## 5.5 Conclusions

Why is Guerrero more violent than Oaxaca or Chiapas? This chapter attempted to provide a migratory interpretation to the different degrees of violence in these relatively similar states. By analyzing other factors that relate to violence, this chapter placed the “palliative hypothesis” in conversation with other explanations. It concludes that frustrated out-migration did play an important role in spurring violence since the mid-2000s, but this effect is concentrated in the north of Guerrero, the only place where out-migration fell dramatically. In other areas of Guerrero violence is determined by other factors like the legacy of the Dirty War, Acapulco’s territorial value and strategic location and new transport infrastructure.

The chapter also found evidence that violence in previous political conflicts in Chiapas was reduced either because those displaced by politico-religious conflicts found better opportunities to prosper outside their communities or because the young bases of rebel groups are more interested now in the “sueño americano” than in the “sueño Zapatista”.

## **Chapter 6**

### **International Out-migration and Violence in Mexico 1940-2014**

#### **Evidence from Historical Data and the Mexican Migration Project**

Chapter 4 analyzed municipal-level data obtained from a sub-sample of 1.2 million interviews of Mexican census data and found a negative association between violence and three indicators at the municipal level: the proportion of households with emigrants; the proportion of households with circular migrants and the proportion of households that receive remittances. Another quantitative insight is offered in this chapter by examining whether those results are consistent with the data from the Mexican Migration Project, an independent source of information produced by researchers from the University of Guadalajara and Princeton University. The aim of this chapter is therefore similar to the previous one: to analyze the dynamics of homicidal violence and its relationship to out-migration.

The principal hypothesis continues to be that the efforts of the US government to render undocumented migration unattractive for Mexicans had the unintended result of favoring the emergence of a criminal insurgency in Mexico. It analyzes whether the decline in Mexican migration to the US stemmed violence. This chapter presents time-series data from different sources that support the main hypothesis. The possibility of a different impact in violence between documented and undocumented out-migration is explored. National trends and state-level case studies are analyzed suggesting that additional mechanisms to those already discussed in chapter 3 are at work. The reinvigoration of the finances of criminal organizations due to their incursion in human trafficking seems to be particularly relevant. The data presented supports the notion that restrictive immigration policies and border militarization involuntarily helped criminal organizations at the very moment when drug trafficking activities were becoming less profitable.

## **6.1 Data Sources: Why Taking into Account Different Sources is Better than Conducting a One-Time-One-Source Analysis**

One of the advantages of conducting research about well-studied cases is the existence of several sources already providing information. In this sense, researchers of Mexican migration have benefitted greatly from the existence not only of official but also independent sources. Unquestionably the most important of these independent sources is the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) created by a group of researchers led by Douglas Massey and Jorge Durand. The MMP constitutes a collection of ethno-surveys carried in several migrant communities in Mexico for more than thirty years, gathering retrospective information from the interviewers. This collection of surveys has allowed the production of several datasets at the individual and community level.

The success of the MMP has led other researchers to create similar projects to increase the knowledge about migration from other regions, such as the Migration between Africa and Europe Project (MAFED). However, the MMP stands out for the quality and the quantity of its data. Over its 33-year existence, it has already included representative samples of 154 communities in Mexico. It can be said that potentially no other country uses such a similar source of information about varying aspects of migration.

The availability of this data permits a complementary insight to the analysis of chapter 4. There are several advantages of conducting such a complementary analysis.

First, researchers should be doubtful when studies about the same phenomenon arrive at contradictory results. Likewise researchers can be more confident when different studies using different data sources arrive at similar results. Therefore one way of interpreting this chapter is as a sort of “robustness check” for the analysis conducted in the previous chapter.

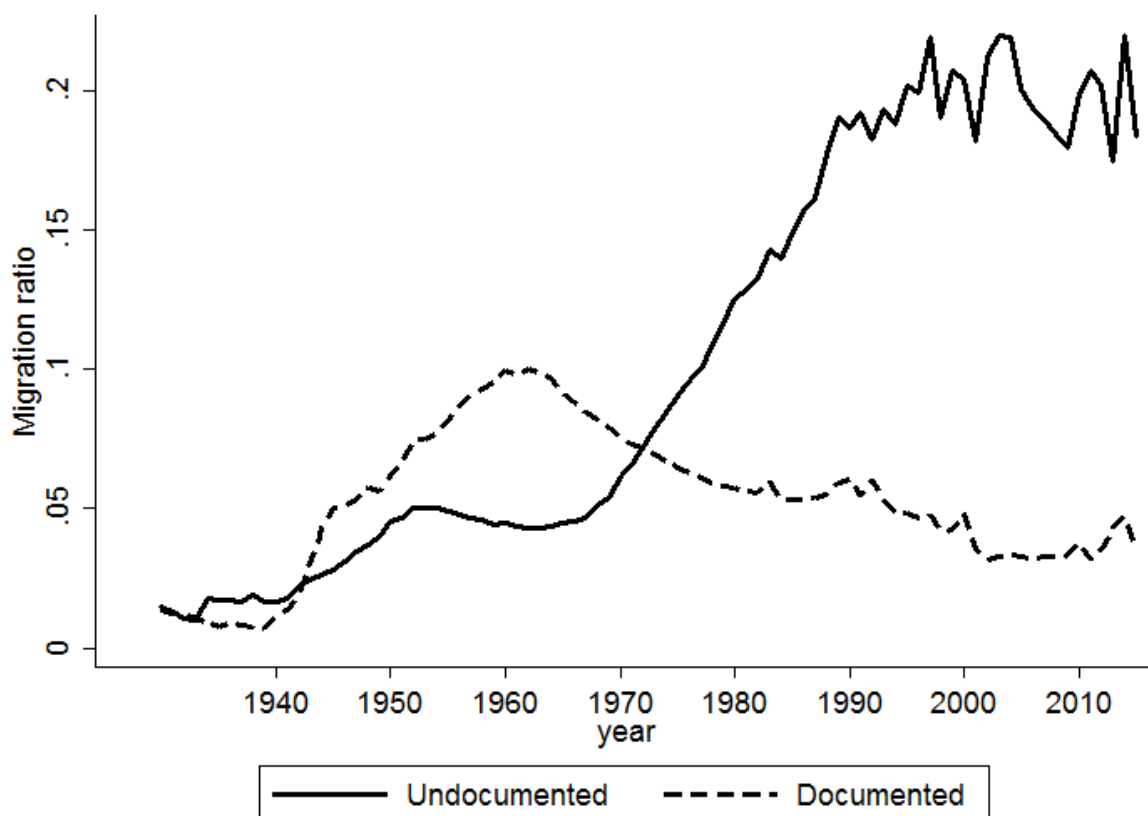
Second, important information missing in some datasets may be included in others. This is the case with regards to datasets about Mexican migration. The migration indicators obtained from a subsample of the Mexican census data – the CONAPO data – do not include information about the documents that were used to emigrate (or their absence). The inferences that can be drawn are therefore limited. For example, in order to provide evidence about the effect of border controls the focus needs to be on undocumented migration, because there is no apparent reason why people with valid visas would be affected by border controls. The only evidence provided so far about the negative association that exists between a decline in indicators of general municipal out-migration rates and remittances and an increase in homicides in Mexico. My narrative assumes that the decline in out-migration is, at least in part, driven to a large extent by the restrictive US border controls and migratory policies and that such decline concerns therefore mostly undocumented migrants. So far I have only provided evidence about a connection between declining rates of general out-migration and criminal violence in Mexico but not about undocumented out-migration and criminal violence.

In contrast with the CONAPO data, the Mexican Migration Project records whether the migration trip was undocumented or not. This is the main advantage of incorporating this data into my study. Assumptions about the composition of the migrant population are unnecessary using the MMP data because the proportion of undocumented and documented out-migration can be estimated. This crucial distinction turns this chapter into something more than a robustness check since it concerns a central issue related to the research question of my dissertation.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the previous point. Using data from the Mexican Migration Project it is possible to estimate flows of legal and illegal migration from 1930 to 2015. According to the MMP data, these two categories behaved similarly until the 1950s, showing

an upward trend. Then, during the heyday of the Bracero Program, the undocumented moves declined while the documented moves continued increasing. Another turning point that redefined these trajectories for the rest of the twentieth and the twenty-first century came in 1965, revealing the well-known hydraulic association that was described in the previous chapter: the substitution of legal for illegal moves that occurred after the Bracero Program came to an end in 1965. As has been suggested before (Massey, Durand and Malone 2009; Massey, Pren and Durand 2009), the end of the Bracero Program did not reduce Mexican migration, it simply spawned the transformation of one type of migration into another.

**Figure 6.1 Average Community Male Documented and Undocumented Migration Ratio to the US 1930-2010**



Source: Mexican Migration Project (2015).

Third, as previously explained, the CONAPO data analyzed in chapter four was only recorded in 2000 and 2010. It asked each time about the migratory or remittance behavior of the members of the household in the previous five years. This creates important limitations, as the data cannot provide the levels of out-migration previous to the period 1996 - 2000. Also, the data for the years between 2000 and 2010 may, at best, be added with imputation techniques based on assumptions that are often difficult to sustain. In contrast, the Mexican Migration Project calculates migration probability ratios for every community and for each year based on the number of people with migration experience, and also includes migration prevalence ratios since 1940. As it has already been shown with the previous figure, the time span of independent variables can be expanded over several decades.

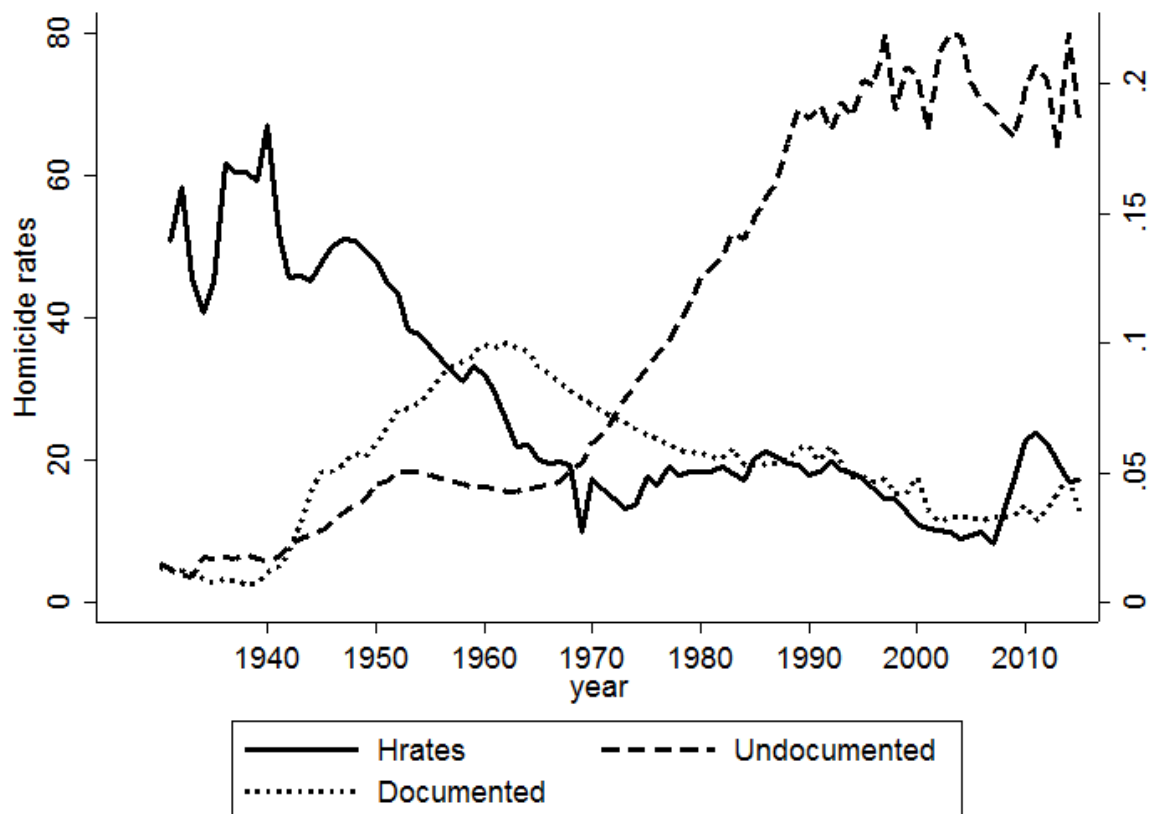
Nevertheless, this is not the case for the dependent variable. There are no homicide rates disaggregated at the community level and municipal level rates only exist since 1990. In order to obtain information for the previous years, a higher level must be investigated. As mentioned in chapter 3, the historian Pablo Piccato (2003) gathered homicide figures for most of the twentieth century at state level. By matching community-level migration ratios with Piccato's state level homicide rates it is possible to produce a time-series and offer an idea about the relationship between out-migration and homicide rates, without fitting a formal model. In addition, the engineer Manuel Aguirre (2016) produced a time-series at the national-level by consulting different sources. The information used in this paper about homicides at the national-level comes from Aguirre and included in the appendix are all the state-level time-series produced with the data from Piccato and the MMP.



## 6.2 Out-migration and Violence: The Long Durée

By simultaneously analyzing the evolution of out-migration and violence during the twentieth century in Mexico an inverse relationship emerges again. Figure 6.2 is produced by merging Aguirre's homicide data with the migration prevalence ratio of the 154 communities of the Mexican Migration Project. The figure supports the notion that the period of state building (1930-1950) was more violent not only in Guerrero, but in Mexico in general.

**Figure 6.2 Time-series of National Homicide Rates and Average Documented and Undocumented Male Migration Prevalence Ratio in MMP Communities<sup>57</sup>**



Sources: Aguirre (2016); MMP (2015)

<sup>57</sup> State-level time series are presented in the appendix.

In the years prior to 1965, both documented and undocumented flows seem to counteract violence in Mexico. That year potentially identifies another turning point. After that moment, it is only the undocumented migrants that seem to buffer violence. Hence the metaphors such as “safety valve” or “structural adjustment program of the poor” seem to describe only the undocumented moves from that moment onwards. In contrast, after 1965 the trend for the documented flow starts to resemble the homicide trend, suggesting a different relationship between homicides and this type of move: the less violence, the less documented migration. This positive relationship between documented out-migration and violence is consistent with research recording a “new type of migrant” pushed by violence, particularly among the middle class in the border region (Ríos 2012). In other words, those who can, do move to the US when violence rises and tend to stay when things are calm.

Putting aside the northern middle class, what happens with those who cannot move so easily, either because they don’t possess the documents or because they have more economic limitations? The rural, working class male population have always been candidates for an undocumented trip, and first-hand examples about the mechanisms linking declining out-migration rates with a surge in violence in the rural region of La Montaña were presented in chapter 3. But what are the consequences of border militarization in other settings? The following subsection provides study cases that combine a time-series at the state and community levels with ethnographic and journalistic material to provide analytical narratives about the trajectories followed by the migrant communities in these states. The three cases analyzed are Sinaloa, a northern state; Jalisco, a state located in the traditional migration region; and Nuevo León, a state that borders the US. These cases were chosen with the intention to show how the restrictive migration agenda turned more insecure parts of Mexico with different geographical and social contexts and to complement the analysis offered in the third chapter about the eastern highlands of the southern state of Guerrero.

### **6.3 Border Controls and Violence in Mexico. Study Cases**

Despite all the information generated about the militarization of the US border, it is still debated if the shift truly had an effect in curtailing the illegal migrant flux from Mexico. Villarreal (2014) uses data from the Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo and finds a statistical and substantial negative association between the amount of watch hours of the Border Patrol in the Southwestern sector and Mexican out-migration. In contrast, Massey, Durand and Pren (2016) use data from the MMP and find that the number of Border Patrol Agents was insignificant in preventing a first undocumented trip. Nevertheless, there is consensus that border controls had an impact in several other features of Mexican undocumented migration. For example, that border controls succeeded in achieving the first part of US control policy agenda (i.e. raising the costs and reducing the benefits of undocumented migration). In short, they have succeeded in their declared objective of making the journeys of migrants crossing the border and their stay in the US as complicated as possible. Border controls unintentionally helped end circular migration by trapping illegal migrants who would have eventually returned to Mexico, but were afraid that if they went back they would not be able to reenter the US (Massey, Durand and Pren 2016; Massey and Riosmena 2010; Reyes 2001). The policy also augmented the number of migrant deaths (Eschbach et al 1999), forcing migrants to save more money or to indebt themselves by paying higher smuggler fees and transforming their decisions with the knowledge that if they moved to the US, they would be leaving “for good” and not for a few months.

#### **6.3.1 Sinaloa: deflection into illegal crop production**

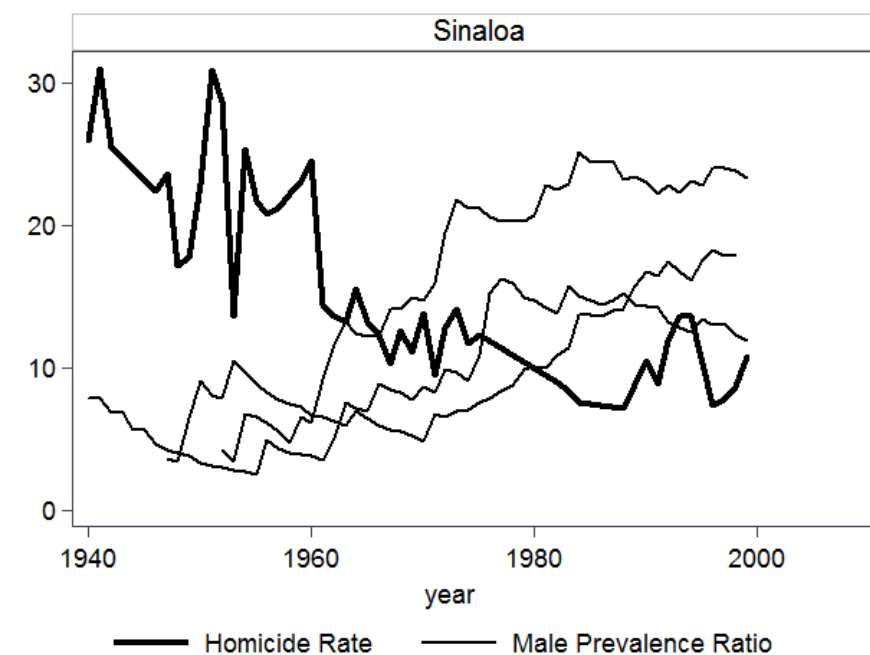
There are many rural communities in Sinaloa where employment opportunities are scarce. The most famous narco trafficker in Mexico, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán grew up in

one of these communities. After his second runaway and before his third capture, Guzmán gave an interview in which he declared that:

Where I'm from, the municipality of Badiraguato, I was raised on a rancho called La Tuna, in that area and up until today, there are no job opportunities. The way to have... to be able to have food, to survive, is to grow poppy and marijuana. And from that age (15 years), I began to grow it, to harvest it, and to sell it (Del Castillo and Penn, 2016).

The account of Guzmán is not rare. Lack of opportunities in rural Sinaloa is a reality shared by many others. A survey in three municipalities located in the highlands of Sinaloa revealed that poverty is an important driver of out-migration (Lizárraga, unpublished). The Mayor of Cosalá, one of these rural communities, considers that sixty percent of municipal income stems from out-migration while the remaining forty percent is due to narcotrafficking and primary activities (Lizárraga, unpublished: 14). These two activities appear to be entangled in a vicious circle, as violence is naturally associated with narcotrafficking, and people are used to fleeing from violence exerted by both narcotraffickers and state forces. For example, people fled massively following army raids in 1970, 1971 and 1977, but engaged in a seasonal return to participate in the harvests of opium and marijuana (Lizárraga, unpublished). The conditions that favor both out-migration and drug-related violence at the highlands in Sinaloa share similarities with the conditions already explained for the case of La Montaña. Narcotrafficking violence has displaced peasants and some of these peasants have found a livelihood alternative in international migration (Lizárraga, unpublished).

**Figure 6.3 Homicide Rates and Male Migration Prevalence Ratio in Three Communities in Sinaloa**



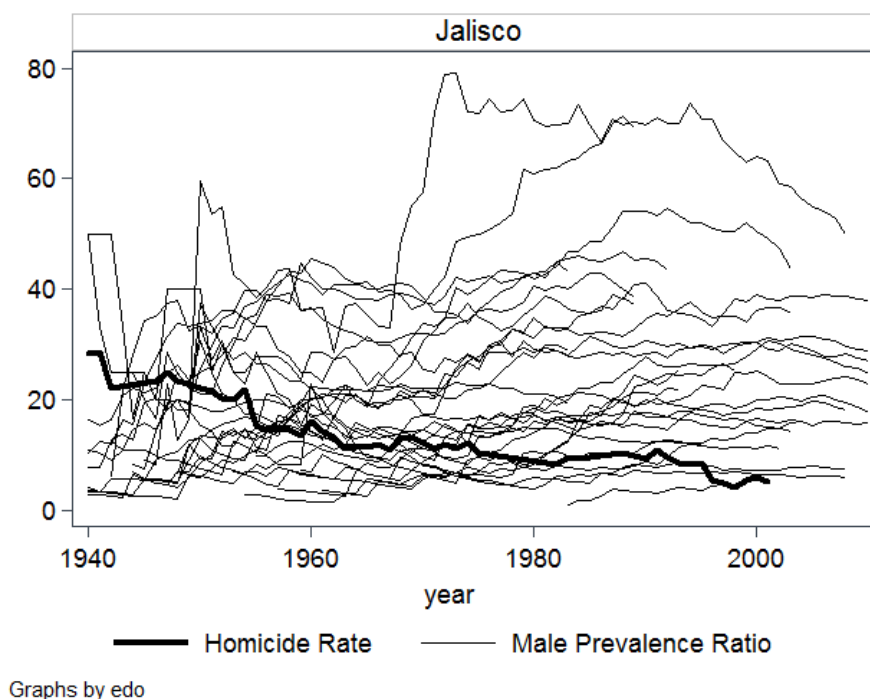
Source: Piccato (2003); MMP(2015). Name of communities excluded according to the confidentiality policy of the MMP.

### 5.3.2 Jalisco: aspirational shifts

Martínez (2013) compares the differences in educational aspirations of second-generation Mexican immigrants in California with their peers at Ameca, the town of origin of the first generation, located at the fringes of the Sierra Madre in Jalisco. He compares children from immigrants in the US with children of non-immigrants in Mexico focusing on the town of origin of their parents. He analyzes the differences between the aspirations of these groups and the factors that explain the differences. According to Martínez, the aspirations of the children of non-immigrants in Mexico are higher than the aspirations of the second-generation in the US, but the aspirations are dependent on social class. Middle class youths in Mexico migrate internally and often attend college, whereas youths from a low socioeconomic status either move to the US, find a low paying job in Ameca, or join the rank-and-file of narcotrafficking. Therefore, it seems that by removing out-migration as an aspiration of

youths with a low socioeconomic status, they become an easy target of recruitment for the criminal organizations.

**Figure 6.4 Homicide Rates and Male Migration Prevalence Ratio in 19 Communities in Jalisco**



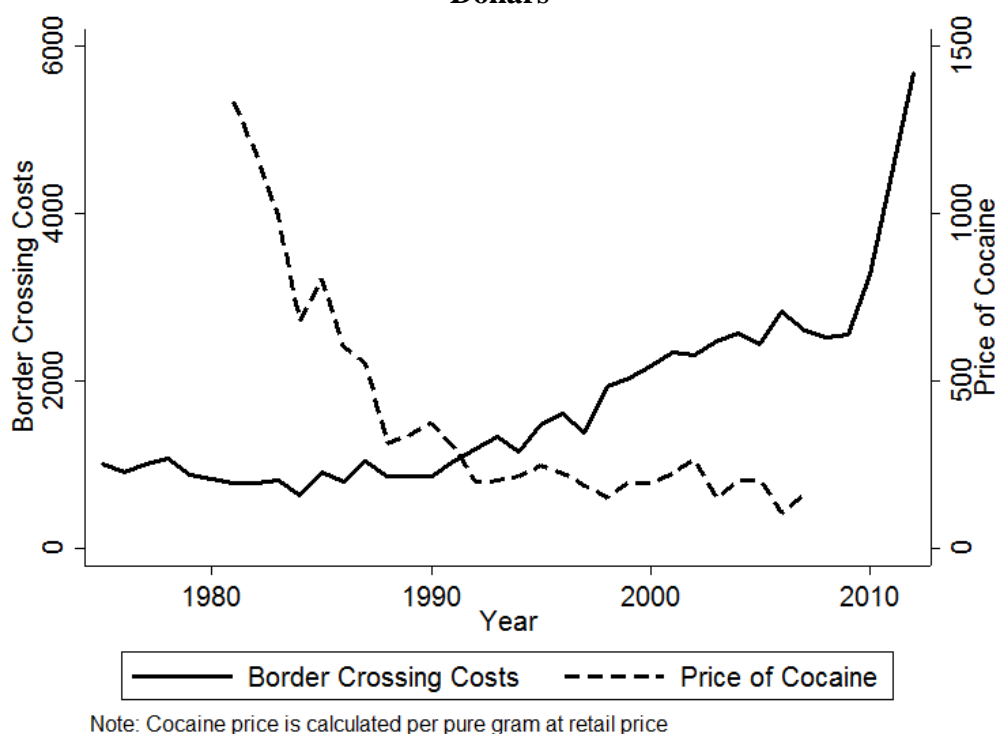
Source: Piccato (2003); MMP(2015). Name of communities excluded according to the confidentiality policy of the MMP.

### 6.3.3 Nuevo León: Illegal Market Niches

Another unintended effect that has already been mentioned but needs to be further explained is the creation and stimulation of a market niche for traffickers. Figure 5.3 illustrates this point. It is produced with data from the Mexican Migration Project and the System to Retrieve Information from Drug Evidence (STRIDE), a dataset with more than a million records based on seizures and undercover purchases of illicit drugs maintained by the Drug Enforcement Administration. According to reports from the US-based Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), it is possible to obtain a plausible idea about the price and the purity

of illegal drugs, and also a sense of scale about the consumption of illicit drugs in the US. The figure illustrates a declining tendency for the average price of a pure gram of cocaine sold at retail level in the US. According to researchers from the IDA, this trend signals either a waning user demand or highlights situations that need to be studied further (Fries et al 2008: VII-4). In contrast, the costs of hiring a coyote to cross the border, as reported by first-time undocumented border crossers, rose from roughly a thousand to almost six thousand US Dollars. The opposing tendencies in those two black markets suggest that militarization of the border acted as a rescue or bailout program for the criminal organizations.

**Figure 6.5 Coyote Fees and Average Price of Cocaine, Calculated at 2015 Constant US Dollars**



Sources: MMP (2015) mig154 file; STRIDE Database (2008).

A reasonable inference is that the sharp decline in the price of cocaine since the 1980s substantially affected the narcotraffickers' utilities. On the contrary, when looking at the coyote fees it seems that human trafficking turned into a very lucrative business at the moment when hard-hit narcotraffickers needed it most. The narcotraffickers' incursion into

the human trafficking business may have allowed them to gather financial resources to wage their war against the Mexican state and other narco trafficking organizations at a moment when the price of cocaine reached a historic low.<sup>58</sup> Although the incursion of narco traffickers into the human smuggling business is still a matter of dispute (Slack and Campbell 2016) the tendencies in the two illegal economies just described seem to support the notion that a process of diversification of the criminal underworld took place in Mexico. As it has been explained, such diversification entails a departure from activities exclusively linked to narco trafficking towards other potentially more lucrative businesses such as depleting the budgets of local governments or transiting to practices of human extraction, such as extortion and kidnapping (Trejo 2014). Mexican government officials also believe narco traffickers are moving into the business of human trafficking. That was the explanation offered by the former interior secretary Alejandro Poiré when seventy-two Central and South American migrants were massacred in San Fernando Tamaulipas:

“This act confirms that criminal organizations are looking to kidnapping and extortion because they are going through a difficult time obtaining resources and recruiting people willingly” (Cited in Archibold 2010).

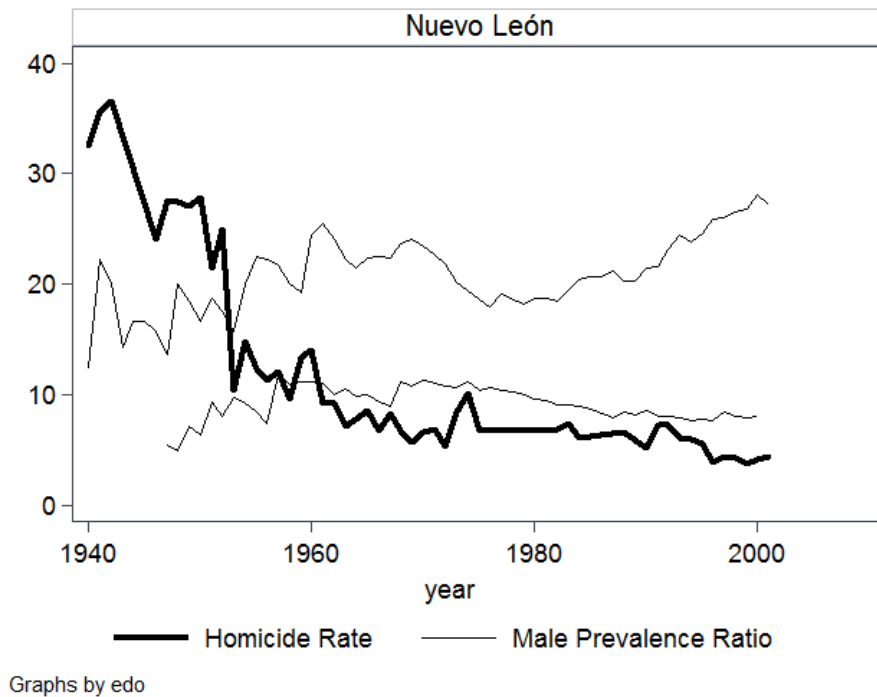
In the end, human smuggling easily turns into kidnapping. Undocumented migrants are very vulnerable people, often finding themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. They or their families usually have to pay half of the coyote cost upfront, but then are held in safe houses until a family member pays the rest. During this time they are usually at the complete mercy of smugglers.

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<sup>58</sup> There is no reason to believe that other drugs supplanted the income from cocaine because, as I show in the next chapter, their prices also plummeted.



**Figure 6.6 Homicide Rates and Male Migration Prevalence Ratio in Two MMP Communities in Nuevo León**



Source: MMP (2015); Picatto (2003)

## 6.4 Conclusions

The results of the analysis, carried out with a historical time series of crime and data from the Mexican Migration Project, are consistent with the results of the previous chapter that used the CONAPO data. The evidence that out-migration is negatively associated with homicide rates grow stronger since analysis using different data sources provides consistent results.

This chapter also provides evidence that it is undocumented (and not documented) migration that aids more in the social and political stability of the country. Furthermore, the chapter provides evidence suggesting that border control enforcement is not only transforming migratory and security conditions at communities of migrant origin, but it is also transforming migration and security paradigms at border crossing points. Border crossing costs reported by

undocumented migrants when compared with cocaine prices suggest that earnings from human trafficking may have filled a financial gap that narcotrafficking organizations experienced after a sustained fall in the price of narcotics. Therefore, the militarization of the US-Mexico border unintentionally provided both the motive and the opportunity the cartels needed to fight against Mexican state forces and among themselves.

## **Chapter 7**

### **External Validity Beyond Mexico**

#### **Frustrated Out-migration, Deprivation and Conflict in Morocco**

The historical facts, anecdotal testimonies, statistical analyses, controlled comparison and study cases provide evidence for the thesis that deterred and failed Mexican out-migration to the US played an important role in the wave of violent conflicts going on in Mexico. However, the external validity of the theory has not been discussed so far. The aim of this chapter is therefore to test the validity of the explanation offered along this dissertation outside the Mexican case. Hence it explores the link between decreasing out-migration opportunities and criminal violence in Morocco, a North African country whose migration dynamics have striking similarities with the Mexican ones. However, the two countries also have many differences.

This chapter thus serves to offer a comparative perspective, a reference point to better understand the interactions between decreasing out-migration opportunities, conflict and violence determinants, and conflict and violence outcomes. The question that guides the chapter is: Why did Morocco not descend into a criminal civil war when Spanish and European Union migration policies closed off irregular immigration routes from that country, which shares many migration dynamics with Mexico? The chapter begins by briefly pointing out similarities and differences among the two cases. Then it discusses the effects that other “determinants of violence” have on the main conflicts in each country. Finally, it analyses how variation in the level of remittances and out-migration affect these conflicts.

## **7.1 Frustrated Emigration and Conflict. External Validity beyond the American Hemisphere**

Mexico and Morocco have many similarities that are relevant for migration and other social dynamics. The most obvious ones are their category of “middle income” countries and their geographical location as neighbors of much wealthier industrial societies. According to Skeldon (1997), both countries can be considered as “labor frontier” countries.

In Morocco, as in Mexico, many youths are frustrated due to a lack of opportunities. The lack of economic prospects for the Moroccan youth has a disturbing and paradoxical feature: it is more about distribution of opportunities than about economic growth. In fact, the North African country has grown, on average, by close to five per cent during the last ten years. Nevertheless, this economic development has not reached the youth. Despite economic growth, youths are experiencing a “chronic idleness”. According to a Gallup poll (2009), 41 percent of the people between 15 and 30 years were neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) in 2007. This percentage is high even for North African standards. A survey sponsored by the World Bank reports similar levels of unemployment but also high underemployment, low quality of young people’s jobs and increasing perceptions of inequality and disadvantage among youths (2012). In Mexico, the percentage of NEETs is only half of the Moroccan (22 percent), even if the Mexican economy has only grown by 2.3 per cent during the last 14 years.

On both sides of the Atlantic, some of these unemployed and underemployed youths have found an alternative in out-migration, particularly among the working class. As Mexican migration to the US, Moroccan migration to Europe seems to have functioned as a social, political and economic “escape valve” by providing an “exit option” to working class youths. Geography plays a role in determining who migrates. As de Haas and Vezzoli (2007) argue,

in Mexico and Morocco, out-migration has been relatively accessible for low-skilled workers and their families whereas in more-distant and poorer countries it is often the relatively high-skilled and relatively wealthy who migrate the most.

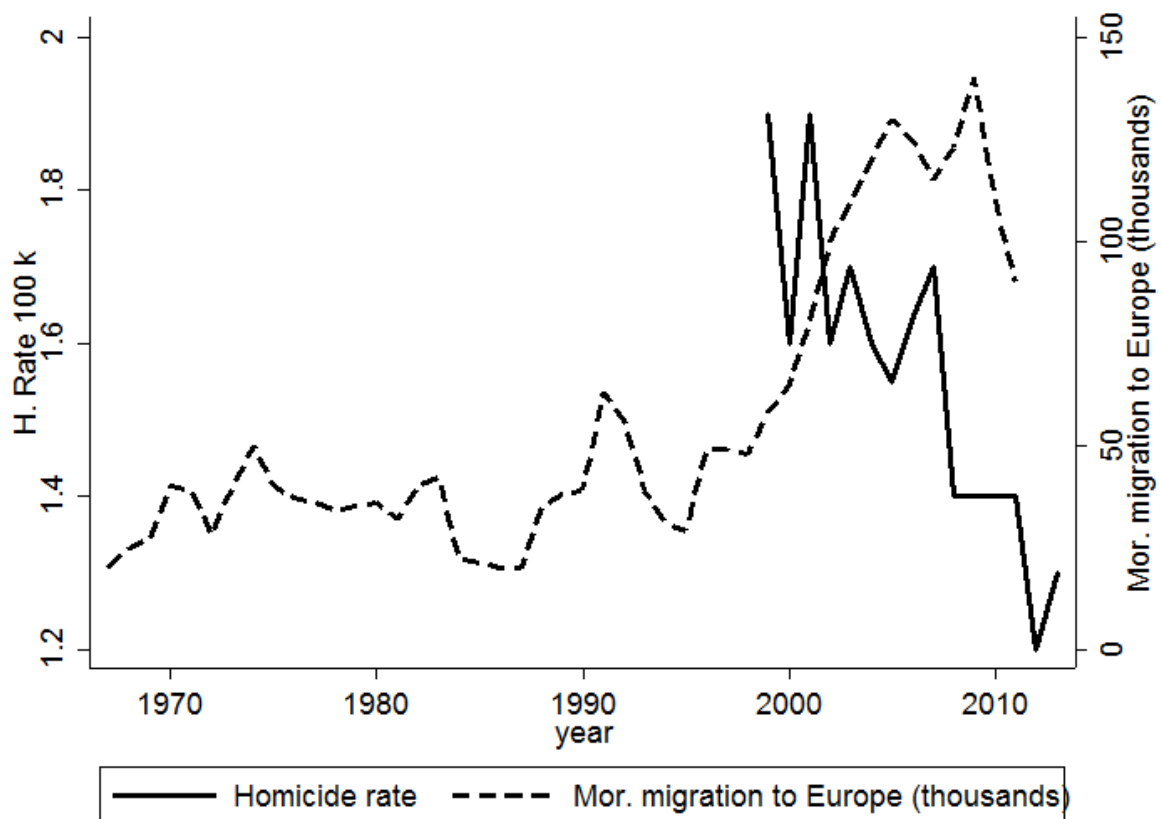
But working class Moroccans willing to migrate to Western Europe – as the Mexicans willing to migrate to the United States – have seen a drastic increase in the legal requirements for granting visas of any type (work, family reunification, tourist, etc.). Also, the Mediterranean Sea is going through a process of militarization aimed to curb irregular migration, analogous to the one taking place along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The similarities between the two migration systems are not limited to the restrictive evolution of the migratory policies and border controls of the host countries. The financial crisis in the US and in Western Europe has lowered Mexican and Moroccan expectations about finding an alluring livelihood opportunity in “The North”.

In spite of these bleak, striking similarities, Morocco has not drifted into a “criminal conflict” of the kind occurring in Mexico. In fact, homicidal violence in Morocco is considerably lower than in Mexico. Why is that? According to my theory, if a migration sending country is facing a set of negative conditions involving restrictive migration policies from their wealthier neighbors as well as shifting border controls and poor economic prospects in their traditional migration receiving countries, it is likely to experience high levels of violence. Why did Morocco then not descend into a “criminal civil war” as Mexico did?

Figure 7.1 shows the net out-migration rate for Morocco and the Moroccan homicide rates since 1950 in five-year periods, according to data from the United Nations. It also suggests the existence of an inverse relationship between out-migration and violence. Despite the fact that Morocco shows considerably lower homicide rates, these seem to drop when out-migration rise.

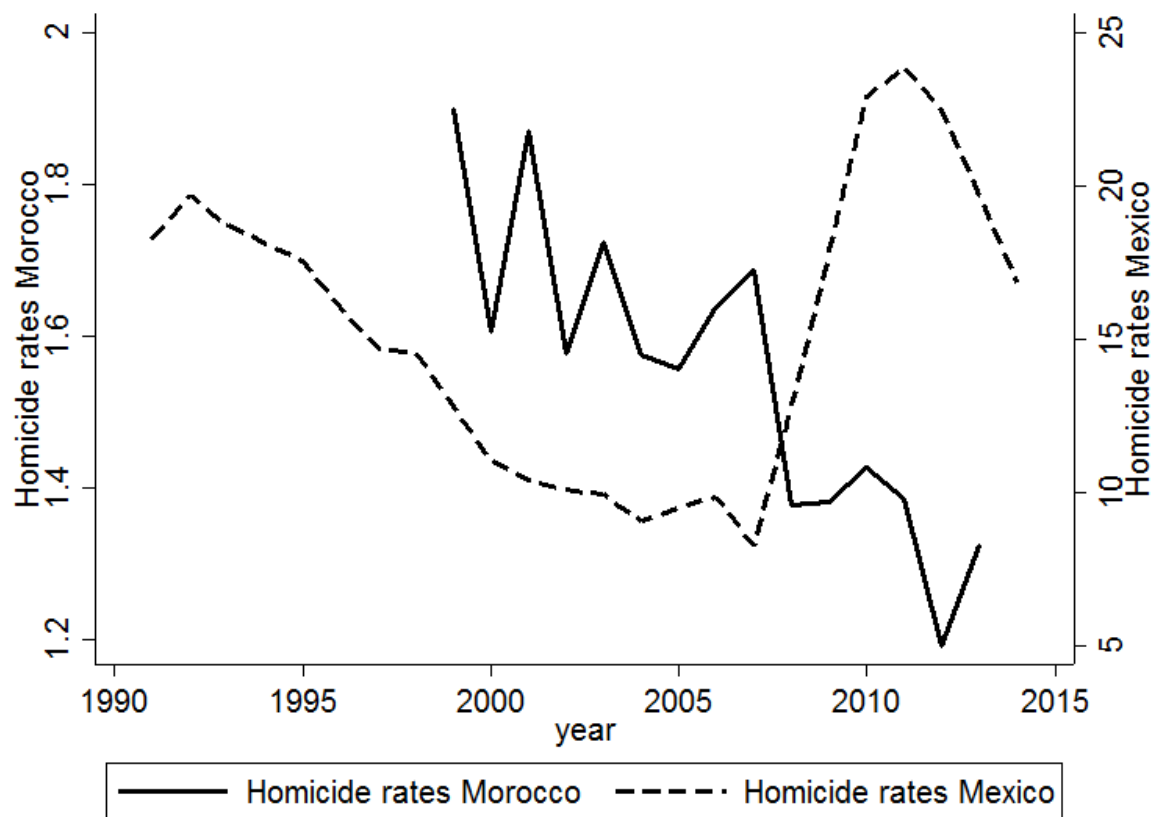
**Figure 7.1 Out-migration to Europe and Homicide Rates, Morocco**



Source: United Nations, Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects; HCP Morocco; Berriane et al. (2015).

Figure 7.2 displays the trends in homicide rates in Mexico and Morocco for the last twelve years. It shows the already known escalation in Mexico's murder rates. The other line shows consistently low homicide rates for Morocco. The contrast is a clear one; while Mexican rates in the last years are typical for the most violent regions in the world (Central America or Sub Saharan Africa) homicide rates in Morocco are similar to those of Western Europe, one of the quietest regions. What accounts for this difference?

**Figure 7.2 Homicide Rates in Mexico and Morocco (1990-2015)**



Source: INEGI 2015; UNODC 2014.

The limited presence of “violence enablers”, the descent into a “political” rather than into a “criminal” conflict, and a less dramatic fall on out-migration and remittances during the financial crisis may be part of a multi-causal and probabilistic rather than a single-factor explanation and deterministic answer to this question.

## **7.2 Increase in Conflict but not in Violence: Firearms, Alcohol and Illicit Drugs Availability as Violence Enablers**

As already explained in previous chapters, conflicts can be violent but they don’t need to be. Hence, an increase in intensity of conflicts does not necessarily result in an increase in violence. Violence is influenced by multiple factors. In Mexico, two well-known violence

enablers are widely present while they are limited in Morocco. A third enabler, though present in both countries, seems to be relatively stronger in Mexico. Firearms is the first of these enablers. The Mexican Constitution allows residents in Mexico to possess firearms, keep them at their homes, and use them for self-defense (Article 10). Legally, according to Villareal (2013), residents can have their own, private, heavily armed militia forces thanks to this constitutional article, as long as they obtain all the required authorizations. Although there are no private gun shops in Mexico, any law-abiding resident can purchase firearms directly from the Secretary of Defense which in practice functions as a parastatal company.

In addition to the legal means for acquiring firearms, the illegal black market is also an option, particularly for those individuals interested in obtaining weapons the use of which is restricted to the army. According to Sánchez (El Universal, 2010), the Secretary of Defense has a register of almost 3 million legal firearms. In addition, there are about 17 million illegal firearms in Mexico, a conservative estimate according to her.

The Small Arms Survey (2016) research project also estimates that there are about 20 million civilian firearms in Mexico and only 1.5 million in Morocco. The average rate of guns owned by civilians is 15 per 100 inhabitants in Mexico. Hence, according to this source, the rate is three times lower in Morocco. It is estimated that only 5 percent of civilians in Morocco own a gun. Gun ownership laws in Morocco are also more restrictive than in Mexico.

The fact that firearms are considerably more present and available in Mexico than in Morocco is crucial to understanding the different levels of violence in these two countries. Firearms availability shapes the development of conflicts at any scale, inside or outside the political realm. It facilitates the escalation of conflicts, for example gangs' pathways to becoming criminal organizations or the transformation of peaceful protest movements into guerrilla groups or terrorist organizations.



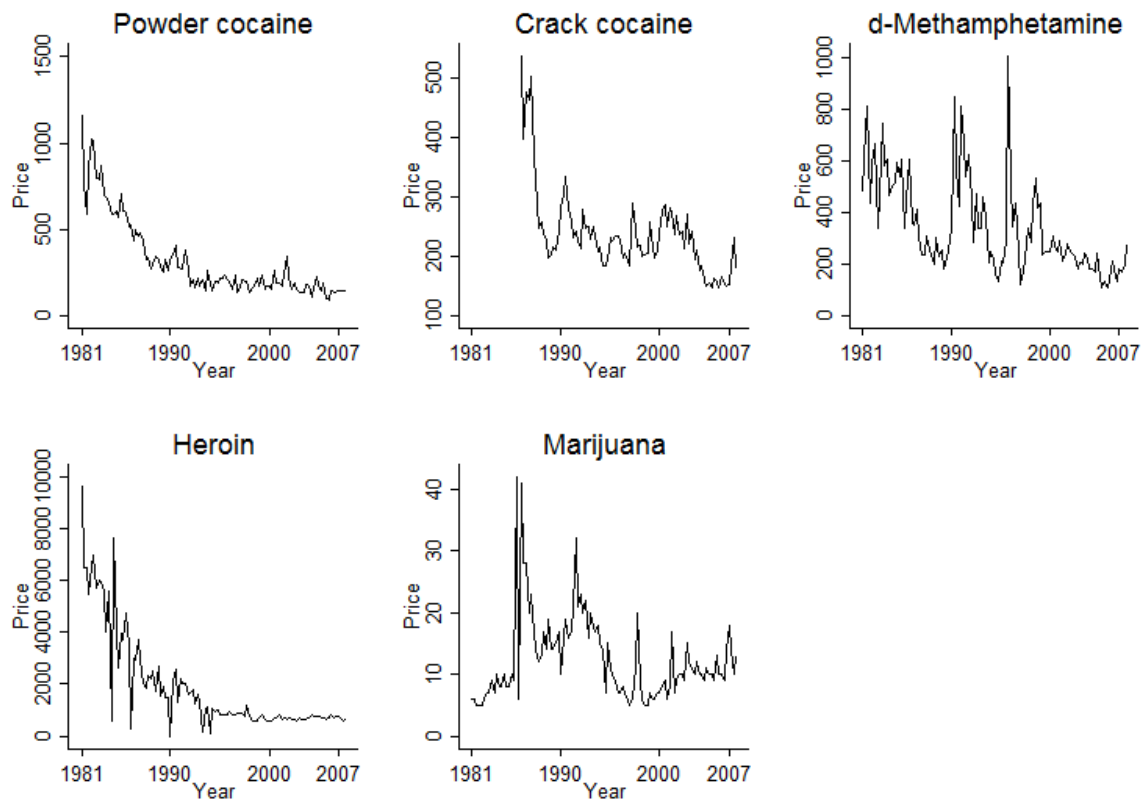
Also, there is extensive evidence worldwide about how firearm availability relates to homicide perpetration. According to the UNODC *Global Study on Homicide 2013*, 41 per cent of all homicides worldwide were perpetrated with firearms (p. 65). Hence, a higher level of homicides in Mexico than in Morocco is no surprise, given that guns are considerably more accessible in Mexico than in Morocco.

A second risk factor – widely present in Mexico but limited in Morocco – is alcohol. As it has already been explained, the consumption of alcohol is a common feature in Mexican social gatherings, and hazardous drinking behavior is not rare. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO) Mexicans consume, on average, five liters of pure alcohol every year. In contrast, as in many other Muslim countries, alcohol consumption is shunned as a social practice in Morocco. Moroccans consume, on average, less than half a liter of alcohol per year and 86 percent of the population aged 15 and over describe themselves as lifetime abstainers (WHO 2016). Considering the earlier discussion presented in chapter 1 about the links between alcohol availability and homicide, it is no surprise that Mexico experiences higher homicide rates than Morocco. Third, other drugs can have a similar effect on violence by affecting the behavioral controls of the perpetrators, but they can also stimulate violent acts indirectly, for example, by provoking the well-known wars among competing criminal organizations to control its profitable illicit trade (as alcohol did in the US during prohibition). How drugs affect violence seems to depend, on the one hand, on the severity of the drugs' psychological effects on perpetrators (overexciting, hallucination, depression, addiction, etc.) and on the other hand, on how useful violence is for given groups aiming to control illicit drug markets.

Although accurate information about clandestine markets is more difficult to obtain than information related to licit markets, several empirical recent studies focus on the violence caused by criminal groups fighting to control the production, transport, smuggling and retail

of illicit drugs in Mexico (Osorio 2012, Osorio 2013, Ríos 2012). A higher degree of difficulty to find reliable information does not imply that illicit market data are completely unreliable nor that these markets are impossible to study. Perhaps conventional surveys cannot capture information about the price and quality of proscribed goods or substances, but some research carried or sponsored by the US government contend that these parameters can be estimated by other means. For example, the Office of National Drug Control Policy of the US (ONDCP) estimated the price for powder cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, d-methamphetamine, and marijuana by using records from the System to Retrieve Information from Drug Evidence (STRIDE), a dataset with more than a million records maintained by the Drug Enforcement Administration (2007). These records are based on seizures and undercover purchases of illicit drugs. Hence, according to US reports, it is possible to obtain a plausible idea about these parameters and also a “sense of scale” about the consumption of illicit drugs in the U.S.

**Figure 7.3 Estimated Price of Major Illicit Drugs in the US, Median per Pure Gram at Retail Level, 1981-2007**



Source: ONDCP (2008).

Figure 7.3 presents the estimated prices for the five substances aforementioned. The ONDCP reports a net decline of all the prices for the 1981-2007 time span. Paradoxically, with the exception of cocaine, prices dropped while the demand remained stable or increased. Hence, it remains unclear whether the drug traffickers' have increased or decreased their gains during the last decades. And it also remains unclear what the consequences of these market fluctuations are in terms of violence. Some argue that revenues for drug traffickers are shrinking and this reduction is stimulating more violence in Mexico, either because drug traffickers are under more pressure to neutralize competitors (Osorio, 2013) or because they resort to other more pernicious activities, such as racketeering or kidnappings in order to complement the rents they obtained from drugs, as it was already mentioned (Trejo, 2014).

Despite the reduction in prices, US residents spend around 100 billion dollars on illicit drugs every year. As the annual remittance flow is estimated by the Mexican Central Bank as 20 or 25 billion, depending on the year (Serrano Herrera 2014, 132), the amount of money spent on these drugs in the US amounts to four to six times the size of the remittance flow sent to Mexico. Despite the effort to reduce uncertainty about the illicit drug market dimensions, it remains unclear what share goes to Mexico, even if a large part of these drugs are produced in Mexican territory and smuggled through the US-Mexico border. Still, it is no surprising that some Mexican would-be migrants have looked for livelihood opportunities in this 100 billion-per-year industry, exactly at the time when a restrictive migratory shift is taking place in the US. In other words, if the estimation of the illicit drug market size in the US is correct, the drug industry might have room for many deported and failed irregular migrants looking for a job. Hence, there may have been a “hydraulic” or “balloon” effect from a “migrant” to a “criminal” livelihood not “in spite” but precisely “because of” US border controls and migratory policies.

The US government can present estimates about overall drug spending and consumption in US territory because a large amount of data has been gathered systematically during three decades. In the absence of a similar dataset for Europe, to obtain a plausible idea about the scale of the illicit drug market on the eastern shores of the Atlantic is more difficult. Nevertheless, information provided by governments and gathered by international organizations identifies Morocco as the first producer of marijuana consumed in Europe. In 2008, 43,850 metric tons of cannabis and 877 tons of cannabis resin were produced on Moroccan soil, accounting for one fifth of the world production (UNODC 2009: 91).

A survey carried out in 2003 obtained the following estimates: 96,600 households are involved in cannabis cultivation. This accounts for 2.7 % of the country’s population of 29.6 million in 2002. 27 per cent of the study area were devoted to cannabis cultivation. The

farmers' income from cannabis was estimated in 2 billion Dirhams (US\$ 214 million) and the annual value of international trade in cannabis resin was estimated as 10 billion Euros (UNODC and APDN 2003). I have found no reliable estimates regarding the amount of cocaine or heroin smuggled into Western Europe through Morocco.

Conversely, the most important health and security challenges posed by drug consumption in Morocco is not the Moroccan cannabis nor a portion of the South American cocaine deviated from its transit to Europe, but prescription pills smuggled into Morocco from Europe and Algeria. A report from the Moroccan ministry of health estimates that between 40 and 45 percent of the youth population have taken these pills at least once (World Bank 2012: 45). Therefore, it seems the excitation, hallucinating, depressive or addictive effects under which perpetrators sometimes commit violent crimes in Morocco are usually not caused by alcohol or cannabis but mostly by these psychotropic drugs, known in the black market as “karkoubi”. Following Abdelkebir El Assi, member of *Addel Al Warif*, an organization devoted to raise awareness about problems related to drug use, close to 80 percent of youths incarcerated in the Oukacha Prison at Casablanca during 2009 and 2010 committed their crimes under the influence of these pills (World Bank 2012: 45).

The three violence enablers described above affect how conflicts unfold in both countries. Psychotropic substances, such as alcohol and drugs, turn people bold and addicted. They reduce skills for conflict resolution and therefore the chances for negotiated solutions. They also provide an economic motive to engage in a conflict, a particularly strong motive in countries where job opportunities are scarce and usually low remunerated. In addition, the opportunities for homicide perpetration increase when firearms are available. These are some of the factors that interact with a decrease in out-migration opportunities to shape the development of conflicts.

### 7.3 A “Political” instead of a “Criminal” Rebellion

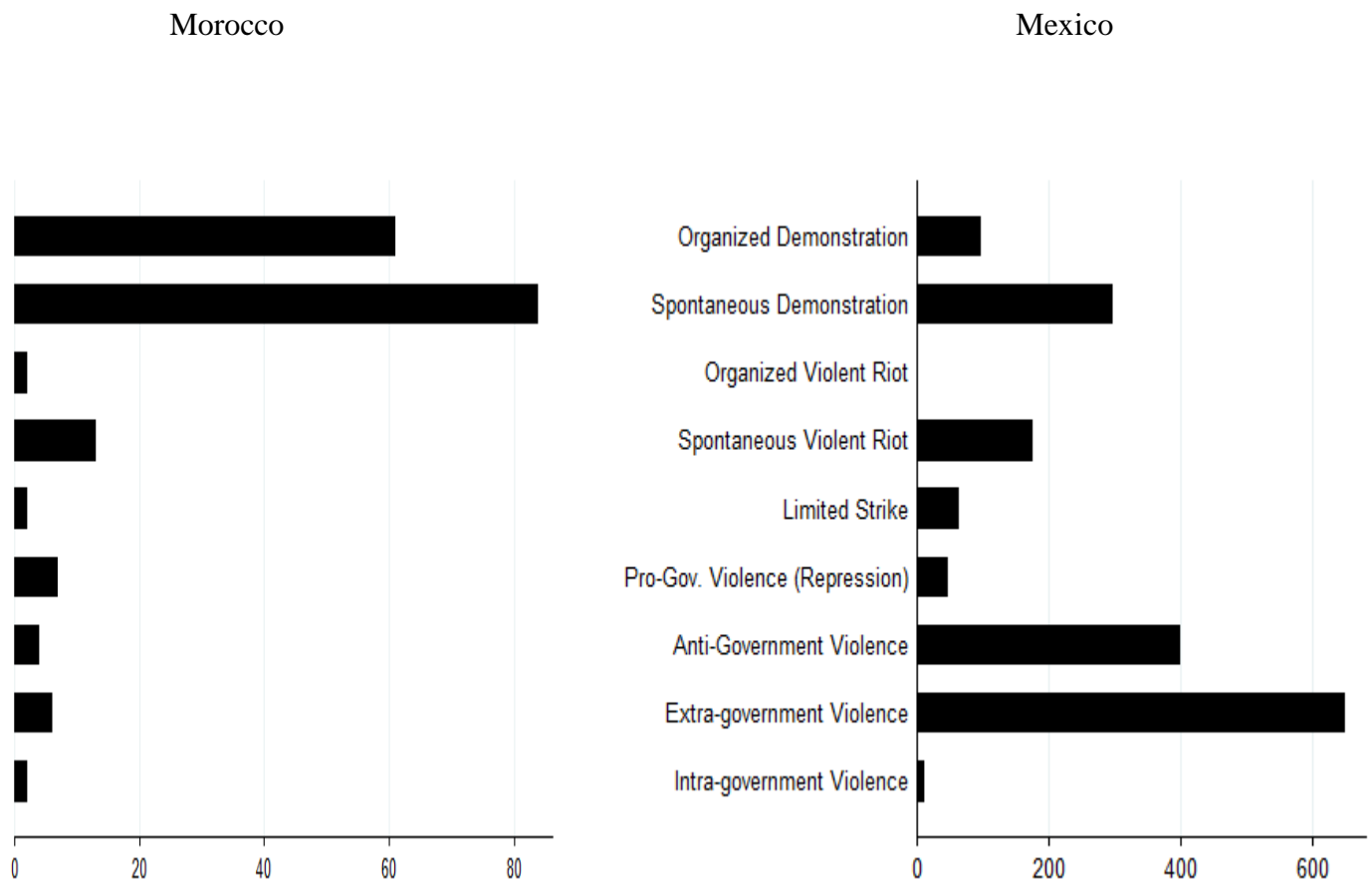
Paul Collier (2000) has stated that rebellion and crime, from the standpoint of economic analysis, are analogous phenomena (p. 840). Collier and Hoeffler have argued that murders and rebellion are similar in that they need a “motive” and an “opportunity” (2004: 563). Motives and opportunities for these two type of events arose in Morocco and Mexico during the last three eventful decades. Both countries democratized, liberalized their trade and adopted some social customs typical of modern Western societies, all to a certain extent. These structural changes were either driven or resisted by groups struggling for or against the status quo. Such profound transformations generated a fertile ground for future conflicts. For example, democratization “from below” narratives emphasize the role of protest organizations in driving political change of authoritarian regimes (Trevizo 2011; della Porta 2014). There is also extensive research on the resistance posed by vulnerable groups (i.e. Indian and peasant communities) against liberalizing reforms that could imperil their standards of living (See Mejía and Sarmiento 1987; Bogaert 2013). In addition, several works suggest that neoliberalism, by removing a host of protections from vulnerable groups, generated a fertile ground for crime and/or rebellion for subsequent generations (Arias and Goldstein, 2005; Watt and Zepeda, 2012; Portes and Hoffman, 2003; Bogaert, 2011; Bogaert, 2013). Hence, as usually happens when important changes occur, conflict was the main feature concomitant to these transformations.

The wave of political mobilization that convoyed the economic, political and social changes in these two countries included actions such as denunciations, marches, meetings, sit-ins, hunger strikes, land invasions, riots, invasion and destruction of government buildings and lynching of authorities. *Extra-political* actions that may be understood better as criminal expressions also increased during this cycle. This second group of actions include theft,

production, smuggling and selling of illicit drugs, prostitution, rape, kidnappings and executions.

Regardless how different these two group of actions may appear, they share the opportunity denominator. Again, as economists have argued persuasively, economic resources can both provide the motives and shape structures of opportunity for different type of conflicts. As Collier (2006) has argued, rebellion is popularly conceived as a protest motivated by genuine and extreme grievance. Yet economists conceive rebellion more as a form of organized crime because it emerges out of circumstances (p.1). If protest and organized crime have something in common, perhaps it makes sense to compare the subsets of actions attributed to these groups.

**Figure 7.4 Types of Conflict Events in Mexico and Morocco, 1990-2013**



Source: Salehan et. al. (2012).

Figure 7.4 displays the number of Mexican and Moroccan conflict events by type of event. The information comes from the Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD), created by Saleihan et. al. (2012). This dataset includes all the social conflict events that appeared on any newspaper included in Lexis Nexis from 1990 to 2013. It captures several contentious actions regardless whether they are political or apolitical, legal or illegal, criminal or not criminal, and violent or not violent. These actions may or may not be linked to macro processes. In Mexico, many of these events are protest or insurgent actions linked to processes such as the Zapatista rebellion, or the post-electoral conflict of the 2006 elections, but also homicides connected to the ongoing internal wars. In Morocco, many of the events captured are considered to be part of the *Mouvement du 20 février* or protests by the *Diplômés*

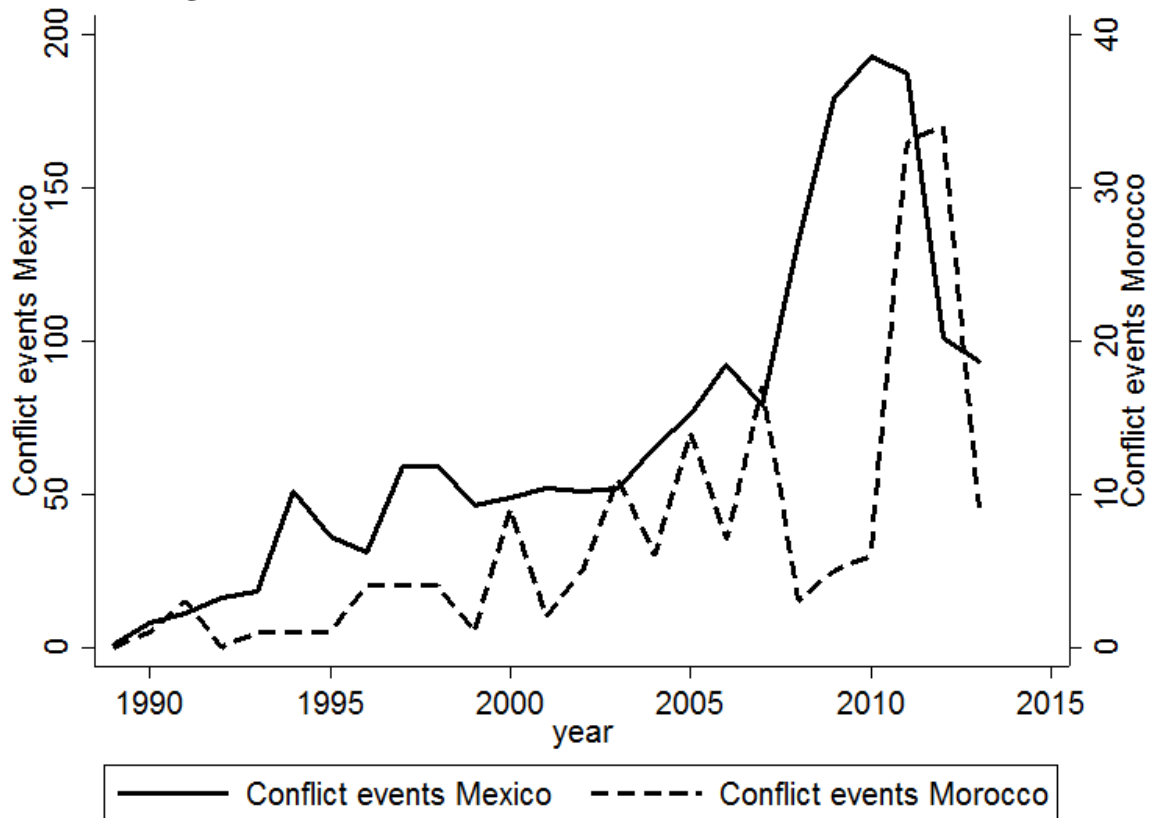


*chômeurs*, but they also include jihadist actions such as suicide bombings or homicides of European tourists. Apolitical actions such as street fights or would be irregular migrants killed by Spanish guards in an attempt to cross the border are also captured.

The bulk of conflict events in Mexico concentrate in the anti-government and extra-government violence categories. This is hardly surprising because homicides related to organized crime are included under these categories and are affected by the enablers mentioned before. The event is classified as anti-government violence if policemen, army officers or government buildings were targeted. An event is classified as extra-government violence if the targets were none of the previously mentioned.

Conversely, most of the conflict events captured by the SCAD dataset in Morocco fall under the categories of organized or spontaneous demonstrations. As shown in the figure just below, Moroccan mobilization reached its peak in 2011 when the revolutionary wave of demonstrations emerged in Tunisia and spilled over North Africa.

**Figure 7.5 Conflict Events in Mexico and Morocco, 1990-2013**



Source: Saleyhan et. al. (2012)

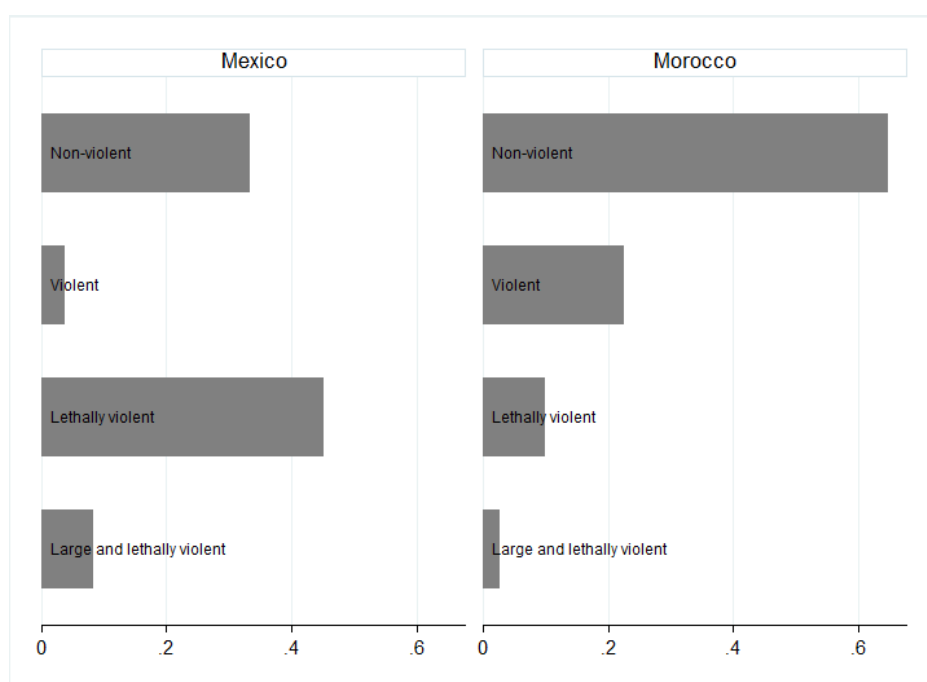
Figure 7.6 classifies the conflict events by degree of violence. I created four categories: 1) no violent acts were reported; 2) violent acts but no casualties; 3) at least one death occurred; and 4) events in which at least 10 people died. In Mexico, most of the conflict events were lethally violent. In contrast, the largest share of conflict events in Morocco were non-violent. As expected, the country where firearms, alcohol consumption and illicit drugs are less present is the country where conflict events are less lethal.

Homicides presumably linked to organized crime, a large share of the acts included in the Mexican dataset, usually fall under the lethal violence category. Also, eight percent of the total events in Mexico were “large and lethal”. This is the category for events where at least 10 deaths occurred. Some of these terrible events in Mexico are clashes among drug cartels, riots in prisons, peasants being repressed by police, family feuds, land disputes, ethnic

violence, massacres of alleged guerrilla groups by the army, shootouts between police and criminal organizations, executions and discoveries of mass graves.

In Morocco, only two percent of the events reached the “large and lethal” level. The Moroccan events in this category are severe repression of strikes, car bomb explosions, irregular migrants killed by Spanish border guards and clashes between activists and the police.

**Figure 7.6 Conflict Acts by Degree of Violence in Mexico and Morocco**



Source: Saleyhan et. al. (2012).

## **7.4 Remittances, Out-migration and Violent Conflict in Migrant Regions**

How did remittances and levels of out-migration correlate with the conflict acts described above? Political, social and criminal tensions in Mexico and Morocco were not the only features accompanying the essential transformations described in the previous section. Migrant flows also increased during this period. International out-migration was motivated by the coincidence of the tensions mentioned above with other factors, such as improved access to transports, increasingly modern aspirations, and awareness of the wage differentials with neighboring countries.

On both sides of the Atlantic, out-migration and remittances seem to have functioned as an escape valve. EU border controls and migration policies may have played a role in the North African uprisings. As de Haas and Singona (2012) have observed:

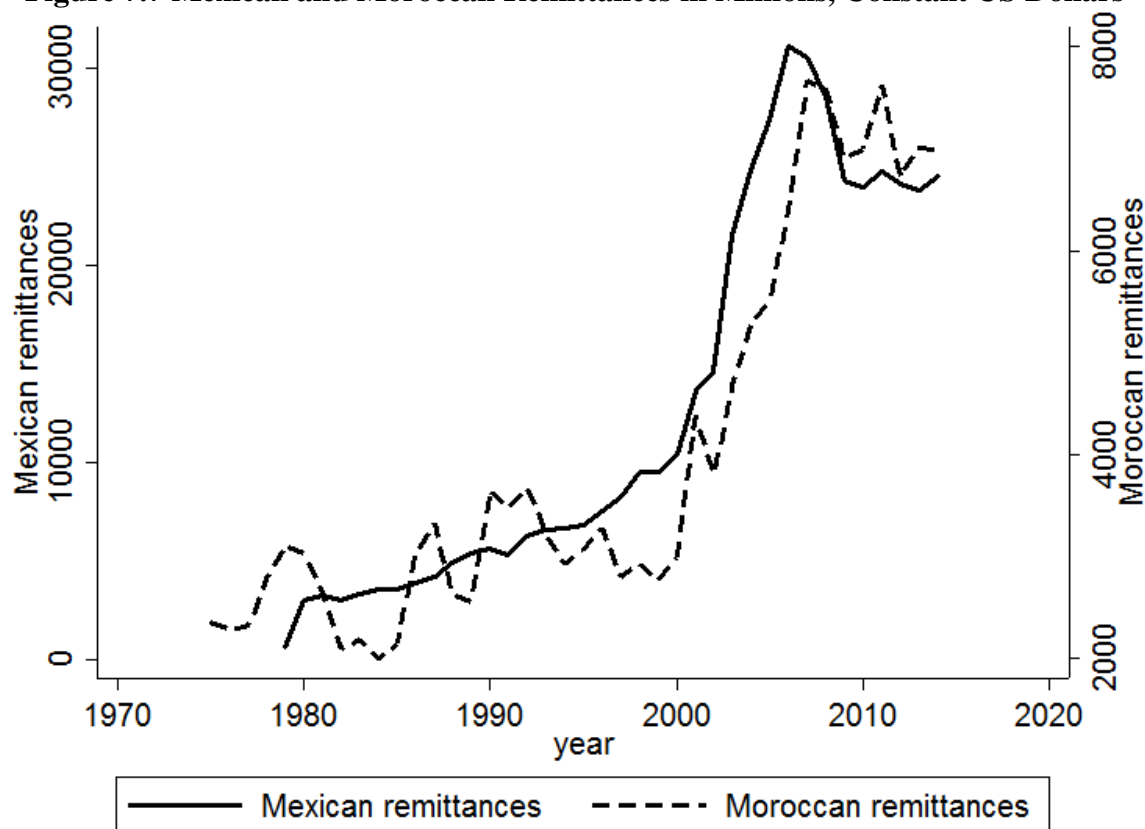
“For political elites in the region, migration has fulfilled an important role as a safety valve, since the opportunity to migrate overseas relieved unemployment, discontent and internal political pressures for reform. This lack of migration opportunities may perhaps have turned the attention and anger inwards, and tipped the balance in favor of revolutionary forces” (p. 5).

Nevertheless, with regards to remittances, they did not seem to work exactly in the same manner in both cases. For example, despite the financial crisis in Europe, remittance sending to Morocco was not reduced as drastically as in the Mexican case. This is not a minor issue since remittances are a crucial source of income for many households in some Mexican and Moroccan regions. In an ongoing debate about the effects of remittances, a prevailing “optimistic” view nowadays about the developmental consequences of international migration claims that remittances can help households to diversify risks (i.e. unemployment or drought), act as a safety net to prevent poverty and reduce inequality, and promote investment and job creation in communities of origin (de Haas, 2007).

Although remittances are a small share of the Mexican GDP (around 2.5 percent), they represent the second source of foreign currency in Mexico after oil exports, exceeding foreign direct investment flows and tourism returns. And obviously, remittance reception concentrates in the migrant regions, where they constitute the main income of many families. In fact, in 2006 there were about 600,000 households in Mexico in which remittances comprised at least 75 percent of their monetary income (CONAPO, 2012).

In the case of Morocco, remittances are simply the most important source of foreign currency for which records are available. As in Mexico, Moroccan remittances outdo foreign direct investment and official development assistance (de Haas, 2006). Figure 7.6 shows the absolute monthly remittance inflows for Mexico and Morocco. There are important elements to observe in these time-series. For example, the escalation took place during the 1990s and particularly during the first half of the 2000s. In addition, Mexican remittance flows appear to be more sensitive to the global economic downturn than Moroccan flows. In other words, the fall in Moroccan remittances was not so drastic as the fall in Mexican remittances. To be precise, in 2006, just before the sharp escalation of violence, the yearly remittance flows to Mexico achieved a historic peak of amount to 31 billion dollars after adjusting for inflation. Three years later this inflow was reduced to 24 billion, a 22 percent decline. In fact, according to World Bank data, Mexico has not recovered the 2006 level of remittances ever since.

**Figure 7.7 Mexican and Moroccan Remittances in Millions, Constant US Dollars**



Source: World Bank Open Data.

In contrast, although it is also possible to observe a reduction in the remittance inflows to Morocco, this reduction appears to be not as dramatic as in Mexico. Moroccan remittances reached their peak of 7.6 billion in 2007 and also experienced a decline when the financial crisis started. In 2009 the amount of remittances was 6.9 billion, a 9 percent decline.

Furthermore, in 2011 remittances to Morocco reached the levels before the crisis. Perhaps this difference may be explained by the relatively higher dispersion of Moroccan migration.

Mexicans abroad are concentrated in the US. 98 percent of the almost 13 million Mexican-born population residing abroad lives in that country. In contrast, 85 percent of the Moroccan diaspora is dispersed in five countries (France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Israel). This dispersion may have “cushioned” the overall fall in Moroccan remittances since these countries did not experience the economic crisis in the same manner and not all the Moroccan

populations in these countries were equally affected. Presumably, the average living standards of Moroccan migrant regions did not fall much more than non-migrant regions during the financial crisis. Rather, Morocco continued to grow steadily and remittance sending from abroad fell less than in Mexico.

But even if remittances did not fall as much as in Mexico, out-migration to Europe do seems to function as an escape valve for Moroccan social conflict, as suggested by the first figure of this chapter. There are some signals of an inverse relation between migrant livelihood opportunities and social conflicts in Morocco. For example, the fact that some regions in which out-migration to Europe is an established livelihood option have experienced a disproportionate increase in social conflicts now that irregular out-migration has come under excessive control. These regions include the three traditional migrant regions (The mountainous Rif, the Sous, the oases located at South East of the High Atlas) and the recent areas of heavy migration (Middle Atlas, Tangier, Tetouan and Larache).

The Rif is perhaps the region that best exemplifies this link. The mountainous Rif was economically neglected by the Spanish protectorate and also during the reign of King Hassan II. Rebellions erupted in the region many times and were repressed by the government in turn. With the expectations to curb down revolts and ease economic tensions, two livelihood opportunities were promoted or tolerated by the Moroccan authorities: out-migration and cannabis cultivation. The criteria to delimit both “policies” was not only geographic, but ethnic as well. For decades, Morocco promoted international out-migration by issuing exit visas and passports selectively and directing recruiters to Berber areas (de Haas 2007) while simultaneously turning a blind eye to cannabis traffic in the same areas (Ketterer, 2001).

Both activities became essential to the region’s economy. According a survey on cannabis cultivation (UNODC and APDN 2003), the “kif economy” employs 66 percent of the rural households – about 800,000 people – in the Northern provinces of Al Hoceima,

Chefchaouen, Larache, Taounate and Tetouan. Out-migration has been said to play an important role in financing the construction of houses in the Rif ( de Haas, 2009). These two activities have even changed the landscape in some places like Beni Saïd, where remittances and the income from cannabis were used to build many houses (Gauche, 2005).

Nevertheless, given the lack of infrastructure, migrant transfers have not been invested in productive activities (Khachani, 2009) and the population from the Rif still faces a subsistence dilemma between outmigrating or growing and trafficking cannabis (Gauche, 2005, Peraldi 2007). Therefore, similar to what happens in the Montaña region in Guerrero, Mexico, the earnings made by tilling, irrigating or harvesting land for cannabis or opium should be considered as the opportunity cost of out-migrating. According to Tawil (2006) this income is about a hundred Dirhams per day (\$10 US Dollars). In a context of chronic lack of opportunities, even such an income is enough to prevent children from attending school and drag them into cannabis cultivation (p. 509).

Therefore, the European measures to curtail international migration from Morocco have, on one hand, reoriented prospective irregular migrants into cannabis cultivation and on the other hand, increased discontent and internal political pressures for reform, just as de Haas and Singona thought. The economic shock influenced the demonstrations that took place in the Imzouren and Aït Bouayache migrant towns, while Al Hoceima became a Northern epicenter of mobilization during the 2011 cycle of protests.

But the “demobilization through emigration” strategy was not exclusively applied in the Rif nor were Moroccan authorities the first to promote out-migration with the purpose to tame rebellions. The French had already sent recruiters to Agadir and Tiznit during the period of colonial occupation. The recruits served in the French army, worked in the French industry and in French mines during the two World Wars. Some were even sent to Indochina as soldiers to control the Vietnamese decolonization process (de Haas 2007). Once independent,



the Moroccan State continued the emigration policies started by the French. In fact, Morocco also built on what the French began by introducing strategies to secure remittances, stimulate investments by migrants, and through symbolic policies aimed at fostering bonds between expatriate populations and their homeland (de Haas 2006).

Migration policy shifts are also related with even more radical reactions and social contestation. Following the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo*, Tangier and Tetouan have turned into a breeding ground of transnational jihadists who leave to fight in Iraq and Syria. The newspaper got access to Moroccan national security data and disclosed that 30% of Moroccan Jihadists originate in those two provinces, particularly in the town of Fnideq.<sup>59</sup>

On the same lines, a recent study by *L'Observatoire du Nord des droits de l'homme* (ONERDH) interviewed 30 jihadists from these northern migrant regions and found that their essential motivations were not religious; instead they engaged in jihadism driven by glory, social status aspirations, adventure and rent seeking. Religious motivations and solidarity with the Syrian and Iraqi people only ranked second in relevance. Most of them had less than 25 years, were economically marginalized, came from poor neighborhoods in Fnideq, Martil and Tetouan, were socially excluded, and worked as clerks in stores, construction workers, street merchants or drug traffickers. Surprisingly, they also had very low levels of political participation, since 90 percent had never been affiliated to a political party and only 10 percent participated in the *Mouvement du 20-Février* or supported the Islamic detainees' defense commission. 60 percent were recruited by the internet and 40 percent were recruited by traditional family, friends or Salafist networks (2014).

Nevertheless, the role that migratory policies from EU countries may have played in spurring conflict and violent outcomes in Morocco is more limited than in the US-Mexico

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<sup>59</sup> Other important provinces of jihadist recruitment mentioned by the study are Salé (32 percent), Fez (15 percent) and Casablanca (14 percent).

case because the policies from EU countries have been less effective in curtailing the irregular flow. In fact, according to de Haas et. al. (2015) immigration restrictions backfired by reinforcing the reliance on family migration through networks, increasing the irregular character of migration and the exploration of new migration destinations in the economies of southern Europe that were booming until the mid-2000s. Since the implementation of immigration restrictions began, those who return to Morocco are mostly Moroccans with European citizenship or permanent residency. In contrast, compelled by the fear that they might not be able to enter in Europe again, Moroccans without legal status have tended to remain in European countries despite unemployment and economic uncertainty (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2015: 507). Therefore, Moroccan migration to Europe has fallen not so sharply as Mexican migration to the US despite the economic crisis and restrictive policies. According to Berriane, de Haas and Natter (2015) low-skilled Moroccan migration to Southern Europe has continued and some types of low-skilled migration have even increased, such as female domestic workers employed as nannies, cleaners, or in agriculture and small industries. In addition, although the flows from Morocco to Europe have certainly been reduced, those affected were primarily Sub-Saharan migrants. Many of these Sub-Saharan transit migrants seem to have abandoned their original European plans and decided to permanently settle in Morocco.

## **7.4 Conclusions**

Restrictive migration policies and increasing border controls in the United States and Europe occurred at the same time that the number of conflicts rose in Mexico and Morocco. Conflicts can be violent but they need not to be. Firearms availability, alcohol consumption

and a larger criminal economy linked to the illicit drug trade are clear reasons why conflicts in Mexico are more violent than in Morocco.

A more dramatic fall of out-migration and remittances in Mexico is also an important difference. Nevertheless, the high number of conflicts in Moroccan migrant regions suggests that frustrated out-migration played a role in spurring discontent during the protest wave of 2011. It is also likely that many would-be migrants from the Northern regions changed their plans and decided to work in the cannabis industry or were recruited by jihadist groups. Regardless of the stark difference in levels of violence between these two countries their tendencies are the same across time: Violence declined in periods when out-migration rose and vice versa. Hence, the theory that out-migration buffers violence seems to hold outside the Mexican case.

## **Chapter 8**

### **General Conclusions**

The sudden increase in criminal violence that started in 2008 took Mexico by surprise. No one was aware of how severe it would be. Since then, explanations about the surge have been proposed and Mexico's internal wars turned into one of the most popular objects of study among Mexican social scientists and observers of Mexico. However, the state-centric view of democratization as the major cause has dominated the literature by far.

Why this view has become so dominant is perplexing, given that statistics of homicide rates throughout the twentieth century show that the democratization theory does not match up well with empirical evidence. The theory predicts that levels of violence should have risen at last since the 1980s and the 1990s when the country went through its democratic transition and opposition parties began to win local and state-level elections. However, exactly the opposite happened: The period of democratic transition – the last quarter of the twentieth century – was the most peaceful in twentieth century Mexico. Evidence suggests that the main effect brought by democratization was not the erosion of peaceful configurations between corrupt governments and criminal organizations, nor the discoordination among authorities of different levels of government over law-enforcement operations. These processes are indeed taking place but democratization seems to have triggered other countervailing processes that apparently surpass the former. Analysing in detail those countervailing processes such as the emergence of a free press; a relative independence of the judicial and legislative from the executive branch and the active defense of human rights by civil society organizations was beyond the limits of this dissertation. The main objective for my appraisal of the democratization theories of violence was to show the need for thinking “outside the state” in order to complement the existing theories.

These shortcomings motivated me to look for an explanation that could help to better understand why the Mexican criminal civil war only took off in 2008 and not before. By analyzing the consequences of the transformation in out-migration patterns this dissertation proposed “The end of the American Dream” as a complement to the democratization explanation of violence in Mexico.

This out-migration-based interpretation, while complemented with the democratization explanation, provide a better understanding of the levels of violence that Mexico is experiencing. The decline of out-migration fits with the temporal and spatial variation in the patterns of violence although its key is, geographically and theoretically speaking, outside the state.

After analyses of different datasets, participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted in regions of migration origin, a historical search for the origins of out-migration and narcotrafficking in Mexico, a controlled comparison, state-level study cases and a cross-national comparison with Morocco as a case with migration patterns that are remarkably similar to the Mexican ones, the evidence contained in this thesis suggests that, in traditional migration areas, out-migration played an important role in containing violence in Mexico until it was disrupted by US draconian policies. A Hirschmanian “hydraulic” relation between out-migration and violence protected parts of Mexico through indirect and direct mechanisms.

### **8.1 Why did the End of the American Dream Fuel Violence in Mexico? Social Mechanisms**

With regards to the indirect mechanisms, qualitative evidence presented in this thesis shows concrete examples of how a decline in out-migration and remittances may increase poverty and then have an impact in violence. If poverty is understood broadly as insufficiency

for procuring a livelihood for oneself, then there are several causal paths linking violence through poverty as a function of out-migration. One of those mechanisms exemplified in this dissertation is that, in communities where out-migration is an established social practice, resources can become scarcer if less people leave and competition for those resources increase to the point when it turns violent.

Another causal link connects remittances and violence through debts. When debts are not paid back, interpersonal conflicts can emerge and grow until they turn violent. Unpaid debts can be very harmful for the social fabric in migrant communities given that many of these communities are small populations that facilitate face-to-face interactions for those who stay on a frequent basis. Debt repayment then becomes crucial for the maintenance of the social links within the community.

International out-migration also contains violence through other mediating variables such as reachability during a blood feud. In this sense out-migration is a “protective factor”, an “unintended resource of collective efficacy” at the community level, capable of stopping spirals of vendettas because in a cycle of vendettas the person to be punished in turn could flee more easily and with a socially accepted excuse for his absence. Hence the reachability of people involved in blood feuds increased once the border was militarized.

In addition to the mediated associations, a direct connection seems to exist. In other words, in the quest for a high income activity, the costs of irregular moves became so high that prospective migrants deflected from their original plans and engaged in illicit activities that turned more attractive. During most of the twentieth century it was easier for the inhabitants of migrant communities to find a hard currency income job in the US than in other parts of Mexico. The removal of out-migration from their repertoire of economic alternatives generated a more violent scenario because, in a country where low wages for unskilled

workers are the rule, defecting into more dangerous occupations, such as illegal crop growing or drug selling, was often left as the only course of action for acquiring capital and status.

At last, border controls seem to have attracted narcotraffickers into the human smuggling business. While the price of drugs in the US dropped, the coyote fee augmented considerably. This variation in the prices of illegal markets motivated and funded criminal organizations to fight against the state and among themselves.

## **8.2 So what? Theory and Policy implications**

Acknowledging that US migration policies played a major role in fueling Mexico's internal wars has important theoretical and practical implications. In theoretical terms it encourages further research to review the explanations of criminal violence applied to other prominent cases, particularly to Central American countries. Central America is an outlier in terms of violence. The region has the highest homicide rates in the world among countries without open conflicts. As with Mexico, the explanations for the Central American spike in violence also focus on political change. However, since these countries share part of the same migration corridor with Mexico, it is possible that an important part of the Central American violence is also explained by a transformation in the out-migration patterns of Central-Americans. In other words, studies about Central American violence have potentially suffered from the same omitted variable bias as the studies of Mexican violence. Furthermore, since Central America is the outlier, untangling the true explanations of violence in these countries can potentially change the predominant explanation of democratization and criminal violence not only in Mexico or Central America, but eventually in the world.

With regards to policy implications, I consider that this thesis clearly supports the need of reforms in Mexico to counteract the deterioration of the countryside since the implementation of the liberalization policies began and economic crises as a recurrent

phenomenon emerged. Mexico has been very innovative with regards to social and economic policies. The poverty reduction program that succeeded PRONASOL was PROGRESA and then *Oportunidades*. Since PROGRESA, Mexico became one of the first countries to introduce cash transfers for the poor that conditioned the household heads to send their children to school and take them to a medical visit every month. The program has received positive evaluations from external parties, particularly from the World Bank. However, it has also been critiqued for *asistencialista*, suggesting that it turns people dependent and discourages entrepreneurial attitudes or engagement in productive activities. Moreover, Mexico has also innovated in social policies involving the migrant population. The “3 x 1 Program” joins federal, state and municipal funding with collective remittances provided by migrant clubs to promote productive activities in migrant hometowns. This program has been criticized for not gravitating towards the poorest regions and for being biased in favor of the PAN, the political party that implemented it for the first time in 2002 (Aparicio and Messeguer, 2012). However, it seems there is room for improvement if there is enough political will to do so. For example, in order to make the 3 x 1 Program more accessible to poorer municipalities, public funding could be incremental depending on the poverty rates of the municipality where the migrant community is located (Aparicio and Messeguer, 2012). Apart from the 3 x 1 Program, Mexico and the US have implemented a transnational program for abandoned mothers in Mexico whose partners live in the US. Under the Uniform Interstate Support Act, US judges have the faculty to find non-compliers and force them to respect family law not only in the US, but also in Mexico. Therefore, this transnational program applies for Mexican migrants who abandon their families in Mexico (Durand, 2014).

Despite innovative solutions in terms of social policies, social aspects are only one of the important dimensions affecting the multidimensional phenomenon of violence. Enhancing respect for human rights; addressing the impunity and corruption of Mexican and American

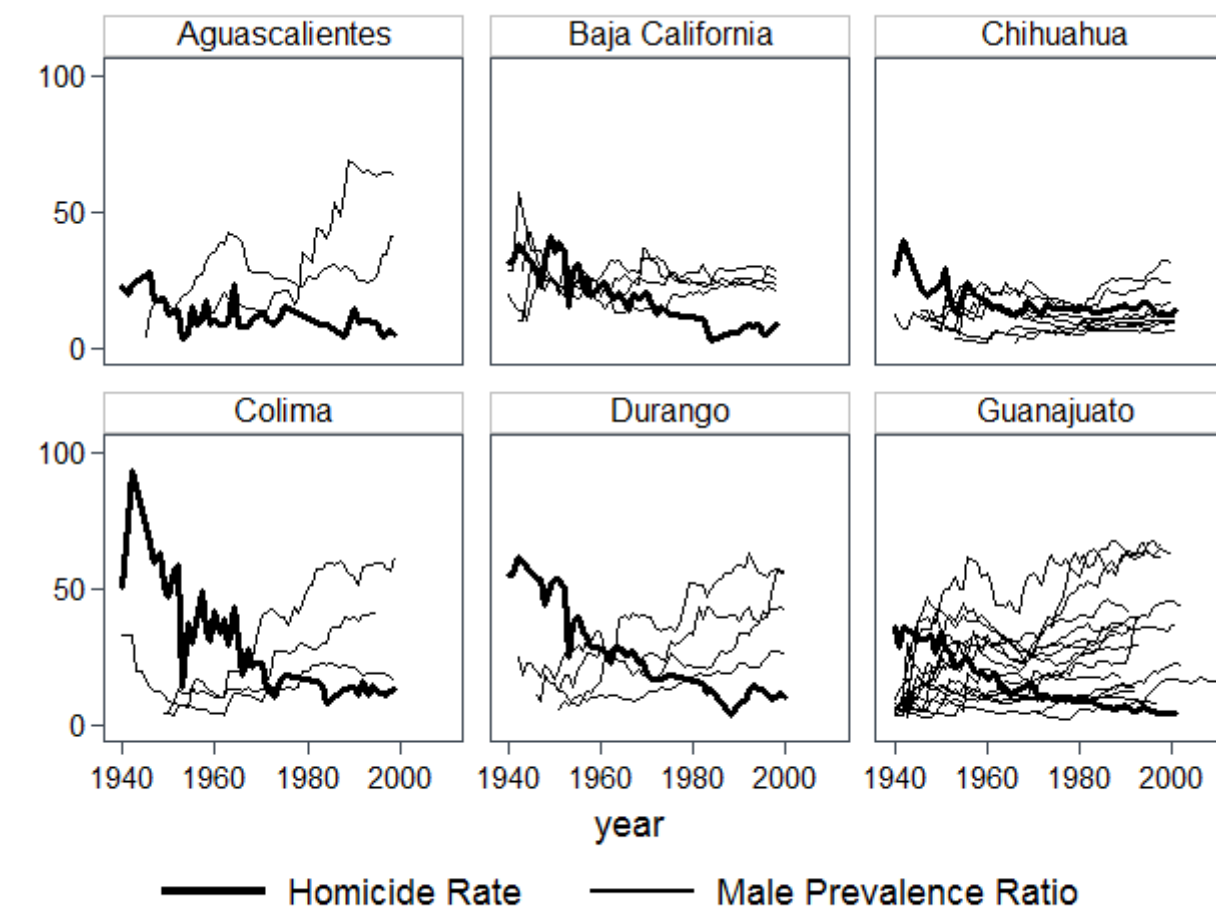


authorities at the border and elsewhere in the territories of these two countries; improving the poor technical capacities of the state forces and the justice system in Mexico are all essential to build a peaceful and democratic rule of law. Moreover, policies implemented or improved by Mexico alone are likely to have a limited impact unless a concerted effort is made jointly with the US, the most important consumer of illegal drugs and producer of firearms that are smuggled illegally to Mexico. The shift towards legalization of marijuana for both medicinal and recreational use in some states as well as the discussion of a federal bill to introduce background checks for firearms buyers are indicators that the US is moving in the right direction, but important resistance exists in these and other fronts, such as immigration reform.

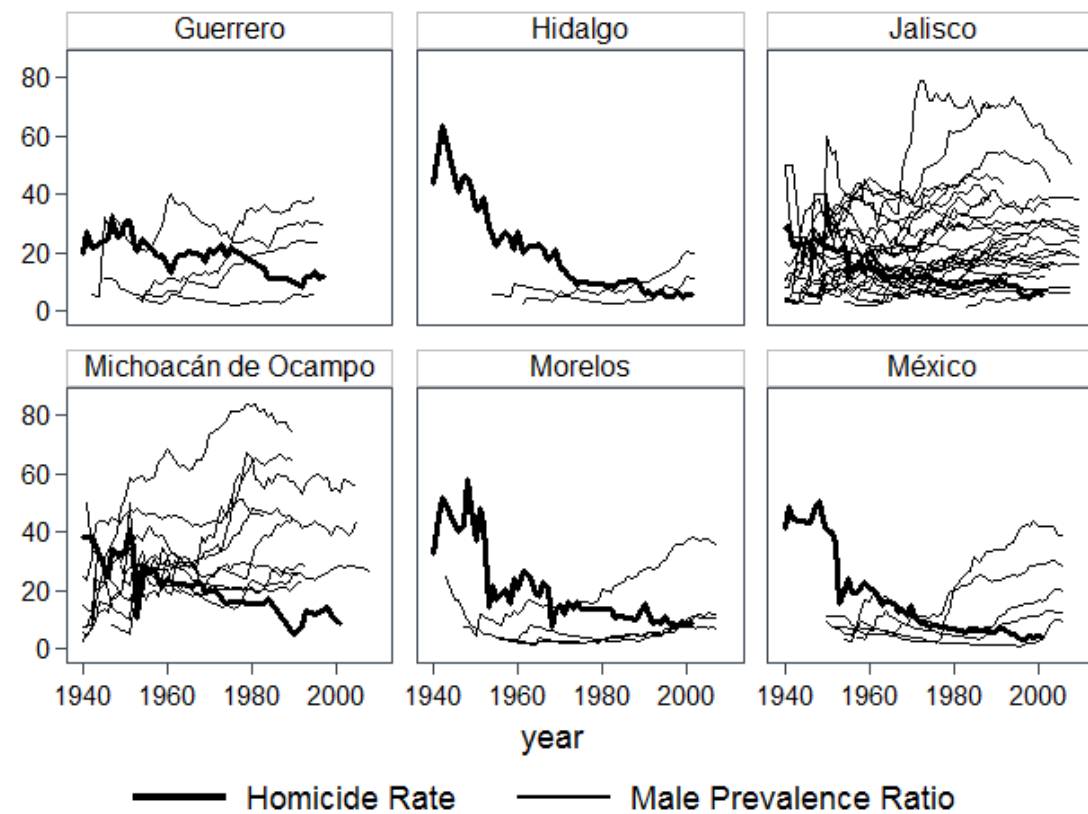
If the central argument of this thesis holds true, then a comprehensive immigration reform in the US can improve security conditions in Mexico substantially. The immigration reform that is needed should interrupt the ongoing vicious mechanisms by providing a realistic path to legal status for the undocumented, broadening the temporary labor migration programs and – in collaboration with Mexican authorities and civil society organizations – facilitating social and economic development and the protection of human rights of the members of a transnational society in the US as well as in Mexico. A reform like the one mentioned would not only help to ameliorate social conditions in migrant regions but it would also take away an important share of the income generated by the human smuggling activity from the criminal organizations. Bills including these provisions have remained frozen in US Congress for more than a decade. US immigration policy had been moving towards a comprehensive approach in the early 2000s and until September 2001. The 9/11 attacks boosted security concerns to the top of the US agenda and prevented liberal immigration reform. Nevertheless, a window of opportunity began to open again in 2006 when a massive wave of demonstrations for immigrant rights took place across the US as a reaction against

the restrictive Sensenbrenner bill and in support for the comprehensive alternative proposed by a bipartisan coalition led by senators Edward Kennedy and John McCain. Barack Obama capitalized the sentiment expressed by the immigrant rights' movement and made immigration reform a central part of his electoral campaign. Obama won the 2008 elections thanks, in part, to the overwhelming support of the Latino population. Latinos also contributed to give the Democrats control of both the House and Senate that year. But once in power, Obama and the Democrats ignored the immigrant agenda and played a contradictory role in order to avoid problems with other constituencies. Therefore, Mexico's criminal insurgency is not only the result of erratic Mexican and US policies such as the Mexican irresponsible economic liberalization and the US securitization of migration, but also the result of the absence of sound policies such as a comprehensive immigration policy – the road the Obama Administration did not take when it could.

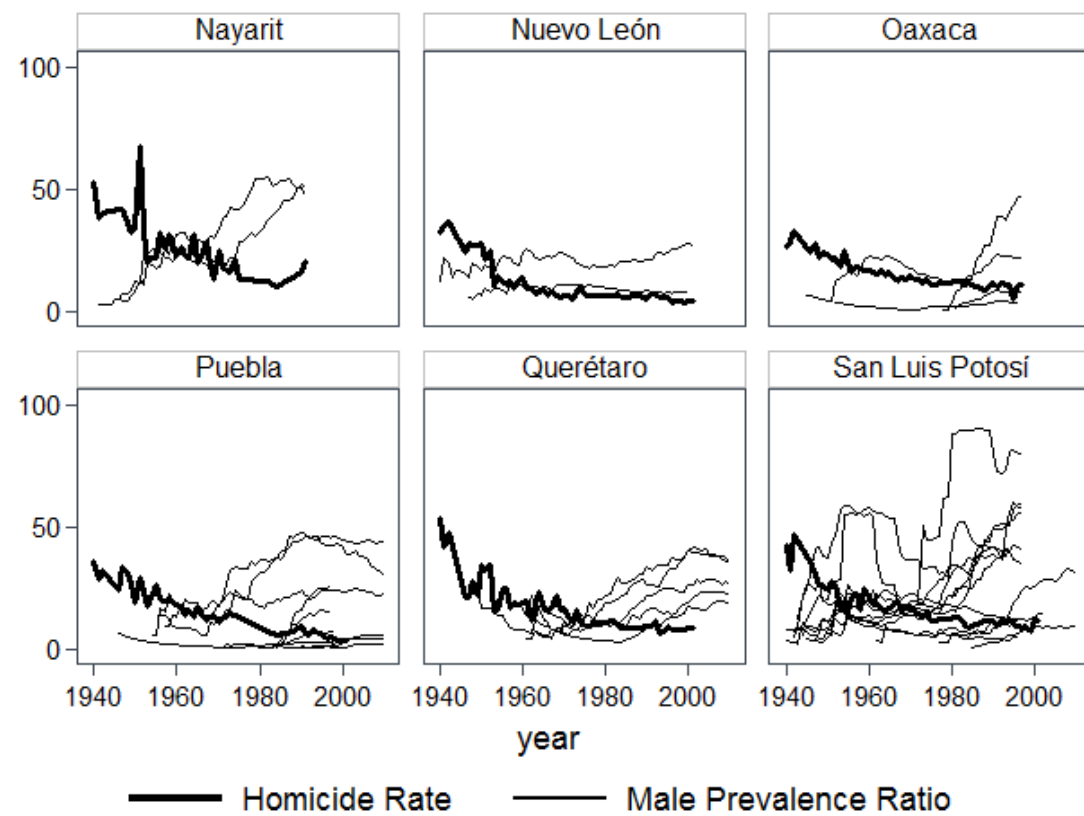
# Appendix. Time-series of State Homicide Rates and Male Migration Prevalence Ratio in MMP Communities



Graphs by edo



Graphs by edo



Graphs by edo

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(Department of Political and Social Science, Ph.D. Programme)**

I Francisco Guillermo Alonso Norma certify that I am the author of the work *From the American Dream to the Mexican Nightmare. How US Border Control and Migratory Policies are Fueling Violence in Mexico* I have presented for examination for the PhD thesis at the European University Institute. I also certify that this is solely my own original work, other than where I have clearly indicated, in this declaration and in the thesis, that it is the work of others.

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July 10, 2017