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Values, Perceptions, Conceptions, and Peacebuilding: A Case Study in a Mexico City Neighborhood

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2013

Abstract

Values, Perceptions, Conceptions, and Peacebuilding:

A Case Study in a Mexico City Neighborhood

by

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Master's Degree on Humanistic Studies, ITESM, Mexico, 2008

BA on International Relations, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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September 2013

Abstract

Mexico is not a country at peace. Despite the government's fight to restore stability, violence has erupted since 2006 in several areas of the territory. According to Vygotsky's social constructivism and to Galtung's integral perspective of peace, some elements of peacelessness are informed by values, perceptions, and conceptions about violence and peace. These topics have not been qualitatively investigated in Mexico. The purpose of this case study was to explore the process involving the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions in regard to organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico. Research questions focused on the role of mass media and oral conversations in the social construction of perceptions about the government, criminal organizations, and peace. This study employed semistructured interviews of 15 residents from a neighborhood in a large Mexican city. A purposeful sample stratified by gender, age, and profession, according to the neighborhood demographics, was used. Data from the interviews were coded for patterns using preexisting theory-based categories along with new emerging categories. Findings showed that among these residents, the process of social construction of perceptions was primarily formed through individual experiences and observations, and nurtured by conversations. Social constructors, such as traditional mass media, were much less important. Residents constructed their perception that the basic causes of criminal violence are rooted in the structures of the political and economic system, which, if correctly addressed, would foster peace. This study contributes to positive social change by informing regional policymakers about the need to design local policies directed towards mediating structural and systemic transformations that are respectful of experiences and needs of citizens.

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Dedication

This dissertation is for my wife, entirely for her. Without her there is no world.

And without a world, there is no possible peace.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Mexico is not at peace and the country is suffering because of that. After its historical struggle for stability, the nation had 70 years of continuous calm and safe coexistence within its borders. Mexicans thought they had overcome the use of violence to solve disputes, disagreements, or to meet economic objectives. Underlying that apparent peace, however, were the structural conditions of *peacelessness* (Alger, 1987). Among those conditions, drug cartels and criminal organizations were becoming powerful with the passive and active consent of the single ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI; Snyder & Duran, 2009). Once the PRI left office, the way opened for full democratic development, social liberties, and freedom of expression. Unfortunately, the decentralization of power also brought with it the advance of these criminal organizations, due to a lack of constraints. The first non-PRI president, Vicente Fox, chose to tackle this issue in only a limited way (Chabat, 2010). From 2006 until 2011, President Calderon launched a frontal war against organized crime (OC). The OC cartels fought back. As a result, there is a generalized state of violence in many areas of the country (Guerrero, 2011).

Collingwood (2004) noted that social reality has a historical or cultural construction. Against a current of thought called *essentialism*, historicists such as Collingwood (2004) say that everything we see or have has historical roots. If we start from this point, then the last page of our history is not yet written; things can indeed be transformed. In this dissertation, I explore topics such as the social and cultural

construction of organized crime-related violence in Mexico so that I can then assess its possible impact on peacebuilding for Mexican society. Since that goal is too ambitious for a doctoral research project, I narrowed my focus to the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about violence and peace in a specific neighborhood inside Mexico City. Studying a concrete case on a small scale does not necessarily allow a researcher to generalize, but it can help illuminate certain mechanisms and processes. Future research projects can replicate the methodology and determine the degree to which the findings in Chapter 4 are present elsewhere in the country, or perhaps in other parts of the world. Peace needs to be made and kept, but mostly, peace needs to be built.

In this chapter I will describe the background of this dissertation, noting what has been studied before on peacebuilding and Mexico. I will show how this type of study fills a gap in the literature. I will then state the problem, and explain the nature of the study, the research questions, and how this dissertation addressed those questions. The two conceptual frameworks for the dissertation will be then be explained, including some of the basic definitions of terms used throughout the study. Finally, I will list the assumptions, limitations, and scope of the dissertation.

Background: On Peacebuilding and Mexico

Peace and peacebuilding have been studied from different perspectives. This area of inquiry has been linked in the past to war studies and how to avoid conflict between nation-states (Niebuhr, 1932/2002; Morgenthau, 1948/1954/1973; Waltz, 1979; Doyle, 1983). Other authors have addressed the topic from the angle of conflict resolution (Derouen & Wallensteen, 2009; Harbom, Högbladh, & Wallensteen, 2006; Jung, Lust-

Okar, & Shapiro, 2005; Marenin, 2005; Rank, 2010; Sikkink, & Booth Walling, 2007; Stanley, 2008; Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2010). The topics and contributions offered by these authors will be examined in detail in Chapter 2.

Consideration has been given to possible parallels to a civil war or a condition of insurgency in Mexico (Azúa, 2010). The situation in that country, however, does not consist of a war against another country, nor can it be immediately compared to a civil war. It is an effort by a government to restore the rule of law inside its territory, where organized crime has established roots over decades. Some of the violence comes from cartels fighting against the government, and some of it comes from cartels fighting against themselves. In the middle, there are the people. As I will discuss below, including more detail in the literature review, the strategies of the government have been broadly questioned by analysts and scholars; but that does not mean the situation resembles a civil war.

There is an unfinished debate between those who think there is a human nature, those who think there is none, and those who think it is irrelevant (Stenmark, 2009). In Chapter 2, I will explain how social constructivism challenges the existence of innate human drives that push people towards violent behavior. According to Perea (2008), violence is always the product of contextual and historical conditions. In this dissertation, I maintain a similar perspective. Perea saw Mexico as a most peculiar instance; it has shown very low or attenuated violence, even among delinquent juvenile groups. To demonstrate this, Perea compared Central American gangs that migrated to the United States to Mexican gangs in similar conditions, for example, those that operate in Tijuana.

His conclusion was that there are some connectors that strengthen the Mexican social tissue and aid in containing the development of violence, for example, the power of the state and the negotiations that criminal groups had with authorities, as well as some cultural and religious symbols. Following a similar line of thinking, Snyder and Duran (2009) said that the Mexican case responds to a very peculiar historical evolution in which the state protected and sponsored what they called the “rackets” (p. 61) or criminal organizations during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. In their view, therefore, there is no direct connection between illegality and violence, because, as it happened in Mexico, illegality was abundant all over the country. But because it was sponsored and protected by the state, a low-violence condition resulted.

This does not mean that, during the PRI era, Mexico was entirely peaceful or there was no existence of state-sanctioned violence. In Chapter 2, I will review the much deeper concept of structural violence (Galtung, 1985) to explain why structural peace did not exist in the country throughout its history. As Herreros (2006) wrote, there are many levels of repression. Assuming states as rational actors, more concretely in dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, the author demonstrated through game theory, that random violence promoted by a state can succeed in conveying a message of control to the rest of the population, while at the same time not causing substantial modifications in the support from the people.

Snyder and Duran (2009) noted that three circumstances influenced the rise in generalized violence in Mexico: (a) The political monopoly that the PRI held was broken after it was democratically defeated. (b) Administrative reforms, which decentralized

power, making it more difficult for the cartels to negotiate with a single entity. (c) There was an influx of Colombian traffickers, who saw better conditions in Mexico for their operation. These circumstances explain the growth of OC, but the authors do not delve into the sociological or psychological process by which a seemingly peaceful country appeared to turn violent.

Chabat (2010) studied President Calderon's war against drug cartels, arguing that although the results have been poor, the war was inevitable. To present his argument, the author examined various alternatives that the Mexican president could have taken in order to fight OC. Before doing that, Chabat placed responsibility on the PRI governments, which tolerated drug cartels and the *Pax Narcotica* (Narcotic peace; the name given by Chabat to the state of absence of violence during the PRI era, in which cartels operated at their leisure [p.1]). According to Chabat, there is evidence of complicity between government authorities and drug cartels that goes back for decades. The state was not always promoting this activity, but the state did tolerate it through complicity. During the 1980s and 1990s, the government simulated a fight against OC, and maintained a discourse that expressed the need to combat cartels. According to Chabat (2010), there were pacts between authorities and the four main drug organizations, and violence was kept at a minimum or tolerable level. Thus, the power of cartels increased.

As soon as he was in office, President Calderon launched a frontal campaign against OC. Some have suggested that this was due to political reasons, but Chabat (2010) argued that the actual motive was that cartels were becoming too powerful and

were becoming increasingly violent. The goal of the campaign against drug dealers was to reduce the effects of OC and regain the monopoly of force for the state, in order to make life livable for common citizens. This meant making criminal organizations return to Lupshka's predatory phase (as cited in Chabat, 2010, p. 9). In the predatory phase, according to Lupshka's classification, organized crime does not challenge the state and is liable to be controlled by police. To do that, criminal organizations must be fragmented and weakened. To Chabat, there was no viable alternative but to make crime face crime the rule of law. Chabat argued that there were, in fact, three options: (a) tolerating crime, as in the past, thus facing the expansion of the problem; (b) combating crime with the instruments that the state possesses, facing an increase in violence; and (c) modifying laws or the state and its institutions in order to make it capable of enforcing the law (p. 11). This last option was not viable, in Chabat's perspective. Therefore, he concluded that there was no choice but to combat crime and face a raise in violence. The population of Mexico in 2009 was in favor of the strategy according to polls presented by Chabat (p. 12).

This argument, nevertheless, needs to be contrasted with current data, which shows that this approval has decreased to a point in which most Mexicans do not believe this strategy has been correct, nor do they think that the government has been successful in its fight against organized crime (Buendía & Laredo, 2010; Consulta Mitofsky, 2010, 2011). The problem with Chabat's (2010) article is that it does not focus on any other alternatives but those which he mentions. To him—much like the government's argument—there only seems to be one choice: either fighting drug cartels (meaning

combating them through law enforcement, including the use of the military when needed) or letting them grow. Nonetheless, according to the international literature on combating organized crime in many countries (Albanese, 2001; Cockayne, & Lupel, 2009; Curtis, Gibbs, & Miró, 2004; Friesendorf, & Penksa, 2008; Hozic, 2006; McDougall, 2007; Mackenzie, & Hamilton-Smith, 2011; Mohar, 2010; Ward & Bakhuis, 2010), different alternatives have been attempted with relative success. This suggests that some strategies other than a frontal armed war against OC might be implemented in Mexico. In the literature review, I will discuss those alternatives in detail and explain why knowing about them matters.

Pursuant to the Mexican government's fight against organized crime, cartels have disaggregated and multiplied, and they have taken control and coercion power in several areas of the country (Benitez, 2009, Guerrero, 2011). Violence has increased and it has multiplied its means. It now includes the use of terrorism (Meschoulam, 2010). Terrorism is a specific category of violence (Gerwehr & Hubbard, 2007). It is the psychological manipulation of a violent act with the purpose of producing a state of massive panic and sense of helplessness (Moghaddam, 2007). This psychological effect is directed at audiences that have only an indirect contact with the violent act (through the media, traditional and nontraditional, such as YouTube). The main goal of a terrorist attack is to produce a change in opinions, decisions, attitudes, and/or behaviors. For example, when a cartel sends a car-bomb into a police headquarters, or when a criminal organization kills its opponents, cutting the bodies in pieces, and then uploads a video to YouTube, it is conveying a message to a broad audience. This type of violence is considered by the

definition used in this dissertation, as terrorism. This had important implications for this project, as it was assumed that at least part of what people perceive is gained or acquired through traditional and nontraditional mass media. The extent to which that was a correct assessment was one of the aspects that were explored in this research. The role of mass media, however, proved to be much less substantial as a social builder of perceptions and conceptions among the participants researched. That is covered in detail in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Perez-Zavala (2010) noted that the roots of problems in Mexico lie in the political and economic structures of the country. The rupture in the political system was intensified after the elections of 2006, in which the process was deeply questioned by society. In Perez-Zavala's argument, after Calderon brought the army to the streets, two things were evident: (a) the inability of the government to fight OC, and (b) the appearance of an uncontrollable wave of violence throughout the country. According to Perez-Zavala, in wars between states, there are certain rules that are respected on both sides. However, when it comes to the fight against crime and conflicts between criminal organizations, which are composed in large part of ex-police members or even active police members, there seems to be no mercy at all.

Several authors (Aggoff, Herrera, & Castro, 2007; Flores & Nooruddin, 2009; Howell, 2004; see also Bongar, Brown, Beutler, Breckenridge, & Zimbardo, 2007) have discussed that these types of aggressive behaviors have their roots in different and complex psychological, psycho-social, sociological, economic, political, and cultural conditions. Some studies have addressed violence in Mexico as the product of poverty

and inequality and even unemployment (Arzate, Castillo, & García, 2010). Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers (2009), for example, studied criminal gangs in Central America, and explained how, when the fight against crime is not properly addressed, these bands can radicalize their means. Furthermore, in other places such as Ciudad Juarez, at the time of this writing the most violent city in the world (Gandiara, 2011), there have been studies trying to connect the *Maquiladora* model to the circumstances of violence (Méndez & Berrueta, 2010). (The maquiladora model involves outsourcing labor to countries as Mexico, designing to that effect, low cost factories and industrial complexes, employing Mexican workers that often come from different areas of the country. This model is very present in the northern regions of Mexico, which on one hand are very close to the United States, but on the other hand are precisely the most violent regions of Mexico, such as Ciudad Juarez.)

There is, however, not enough empirical evidence, as it refers to Mexico, to help in comprehending the process by which the strong social tissue that Perea (2008) mentioned is apparently falling apart. These unexplored circumstances might have turned a fraction of Mexico into a violent society, incapable of attenuating this type of aggression as it used to happen in the past. Understanding the nature of these developments might also lead Mexicans to think of possible ways to get out of the spiral of violence and reconstruct a peaceful society.

To address peacebuilding efforts, Galtung (1985, 2003, 2008), one of its fathers, explained what has been done towards it in different places of the world. Studying these

endeavors, however, would need to be accompanied by an effort of adaptation for the Mexican case, which is what I sought through this dissertation.

In order to concentrate on the subject of peace in a serious manner, the first important step is defining it, and deciding whether it can be assumed in its narrow connotation or whether it must be addressed in a much broader scope as Galtung (1985) and other authors have argued (Alger, 1987, 1990; Lejano, 2006; Nathan, 2006; Terzis, 2008; Welton & Tastsoglou, 2002). Galtung (1985) wrote that peace has been mainly understood as an absence of violence, in the same terms as health has been assessed as the absence of disease. A positive concept of peace, however, includes more elements in it, such as collaboration, “harmony, cooperation, and integration” (p. 145). Understanding peace as a much larger endeavor would mean that complex measures, such as the economic to reduce poverty and underdevelopment (Alger, 1987; Arzate, Castillo, & García, 2010; Flores & Nooruddin, 2009), political (Lejano, 2006; Nathan, 2006), topics such as human rights, justice, transparency, and the rule of law (Institute for Economic and Peace, 2010), or even cultural and symbolic approaches (Ovalle, 2010; Perea, 2008), would have to be taken into consideration. Then, similar cases from around the world would need to be studied (Curtis, Gibbs, & Miró, 2004; Friesendorf, & Penksa, 2008; Hozic, 2006; Mackenzie, Hamilton-Smith, 2011; Jung, Lust-Okar, & Shapiro, 2005; McDougall, 2007; Sikkink, & Booth Walling, 2007; Snyder & Duran, 2009; Rank, 2010; USAID, 2006) in order to have a complete understanding of what has been done in the past with success, and what has not succeeded as to peacebuilding measures.

Assuming a holistic, integral scope on peacebuilding, this study will address the subject of violence, as a socially constructed complex phenomenon which is related to economic and political factors, but, which also includes discursive, symbolic, and sense making elements. This had not been done, as far as the current literature review about the Mexican case shows. Exploring the process of social construction of ideas, values and perceptions about violence, aggression, the role of the government in the present state of affairs, and the possibilities for peacebuilding, inside a specific community, proved to be an initial step towards further research developments, a more complete policy design, and as a social decision making asset, that could foster a nonviolent peaceful culture for the years to come in Mexico.

Chapter 2 will offer a more detailed discussion of the following topics: peacebuilding, the Mexican case, and the development of OC, as well as the theory of social constructivism and its application to this research project. In the next subsections, I will present the problem statement and I speak more about the nature of this study.

Problem Statement

Despite the Mexican government's fight to restore stability and institutional bureaucratic rule, criminal organizations have taken control of force in several zones of the country (Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011). According to different theories, such as social constructivism (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986), or to an integral perspective of peace (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985; 2003; 2008), some of the key elements to peacelessness rest deep inside the values, perceptions, and conceptions that social

actors construct among themselves. Until the present study, there was no qualitative research in Mexico on the process of forming values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and the possibilities for peace in the country. Finding how the inhabitants of a particular neighborhood in Mexico City, socially construct their ideas about the current state of violence, the role of the government, the role of criminal organizations, and the possibilities for peaceful coexistence, proved to be helpful in understanding how a culture of hostility has been built, and provided some clues to transform it.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative case study approach in order to interpret and understand the shared values, perceptions, and conceptions of the inhabitants of a specific neighborhood in Mexico City about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities for the country, and how these are socially constructed. A study such as this one cannot be ethnographic; I did not spend a long time living inside the community. It cannot be a phenomenological study either, as the rationale for such tradition lies in finding the essence of a certain phenomenon (Patton, 2002). In contrast, according to the conceptual framework of this dissertation, elements as values and perceptions are socially constructed through interaction and understandings, and thus in constant motion, a vision that collides with essentialism. However, I did ask questions that involved the participants' experiences, perceptions, and the process of formation of such perceptions and conceptions. That is why I concentrated on a specific location, a neighborhood inside a large Mexican city, and sought thick data about how those values and perceptions were

socially constructed among its inhabitants. This case study does shed some light on the situation of the entire country and provides some clues that will inform further research.

The methodology was based on face-to-face interviews. To ensure credibility and reliability of the information, I conducted a triangulation technique through member checking with all of the participants after the themes and patterns had been identified and analyzed. This helped verify whether the themes and patterns and results corresponded with participants' views. Member checking corroborated the fact that in 100% of the participants' views, the results made sense and accurately described what they feel. Details of these procedures are provided in Chapter 3.

Research Questions

This dissertation was guided by the following research question and subquestions:

Main Question: What is the process by which values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico are socially constructed among the inhabitants of a specific neighborhood in the capital of the country?

Subquestions:

1. What role does the government play in the participants' perception of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?
2. What role do criminal organizations play in the participants' perception of violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?

3. What is the role of mass media in their social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?
4. What is the role of oral conversation in their social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?
5. How has the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence been influential in the awareness, or production of peacelessness in that particular area of the country?
6. In what ways does gender impact responses as to how violence and peace are defined, and how peace might be fostered in the country?

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what socially constructed values, perceptions and conceptions about violence and peace are, how they are socially constructed, and how they have influenced the culture in a specific urban population. The study also explored the role of the government, the role of criminal organizations, the role of mass media, and peacebuilding possibilities, according to the socially constructed perceptions in a neighborhood in Mexico City. This study may inform policymakers, educators, scholars, and activists about what key areas should be assessed in order to foster peacebuilding in Mexico. Qualitatively identifying the process by which social constructs are formed among Mexicans could contribute to future

quantitative research, research that could promote policies to advance the structural conditions of peace in Mexico. For the purposes of this project, peace is defined as the set of conditions that allow a society to coexist, not only without internal violence, but also with respect for institutions and law, in an environment of harmony, cooperation, and integration, with positive and sustainable human, social, and economic development (Galtung, 1985, p. 985).

One way to address this was asking participants about the role of mass media, or the role of person-to-person discourse, in their current understanding of violence and peace possibilities. That the general perception about the government and the efficiency with which it has been conducting the fight against criminal organizations is very low, is a known fact (Buendía & Laredo, 2010; Consulta Mitofsky, 2010, 2011). The objective of a study such as this one, however, was to determine the process through which these types of perceptions and conceptions were being socially constructed and the extent to which that process has an impact on the values of peace and peacebuilding among the Mexicans living in the target case.

These themes and issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The methodology that was used to explore the research questions will be presented in Chapter 3.

Conceptual Framework

Since the research questions deal with how the values, perceptions, and conceptions about violence and the opportunities for peace are socially constructed, the conceptual framework of the study is based upon two different, but related, topics. One of

them is social constructivism (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Khalifa, 2010; Marin, Benarroch, & Jimenez, 2000; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Schneider & Sidney, 2009; Stenmark, 2009; Stetsenko, & Arieviditch, 1997; Vygotsky, 1986); the second one is the topic of peace, as understood through an integral perspective (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985). I will now briefly explain those two conceptual frameworks, as well as justify the need for a qualitative case study regarding peace possibilities for Mexico. A detailed review of each of the concepts addressed by these authors is given in Chapter 2.

Peace: an Integral Perspective

Peace has been addressed from different perspectives, most dealing with conflicts between nations, countries, ethnic, or political groups (Crookall & Thorngate, 2009; Derouen, Lea, & Wallensteen, 2009; Doyle, 1983; Moravcsik, 1997; Morgenthau, 1958; Waltz, 1979). In Mexico, violence has been studied in terms of gang, urban, and gender violence (Aggoff, Herrera, & Castro, 2007; Mora-Ríos, Medina-Mora, Ito, & Natera, 2008; Perea, 2008). Some studies have addressed organized crime in several countries around the world (Albanese, 2001; Cockayne, & Lupel, 2009; Curtis, Gibbs, & Miró, 2004; Friesendorf, & Penksa, 2008; Hozic, 2006; McDougall, 2007; Mackenzie, & Hamilton-Smith, 2011; Mohar, 2010; Ward & Bakhuis, 2010), and peacebuilding experiments have assessed the topic from various perspectives (Alger, 1987; 1990; Galtung, 1985; Lejano, 2006; Nathan, 2006; Terzis, 2008; Welton & Tastsoglou, 2002). The subjects and concepts these authors address will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Since Mexico is not at war with other countries, nor it is experiencing fighting between ethnic or political groups, a deeper understanding of peace is required. The *integral* perspective or scope about peace understands it as a condition that includes negative and positive factors. Peace is not only the absence of violence (Alger 1987; Galtung, 1985), although it includes it. Peace is also includes the absence of the fear of violence (Institute for Economic & Peace [IEP], 2010). Those aspects, nonetheless, are the negative side of peace; they are what peace is *not*. The positive side of peace embraces the factors that build it, the elements which, if present, promote that condition. They include fostering economic and human development, transparency, equality, respect for the rule of law, justice, and education, among many other aspects that eventually result in harmony and societal integration.

Some authors have studied conflict from a different angle: conflict as inherent in human relations, and how conflict is needed to advance certain agendas, such as community activism (Alinsky, 1971). There are natural conflicts about power and resources, and organizations enter into those conflicts. On this view, the public realm is marked by inequality and danger; it is characterized by conflicts over power and resources; the actors are self-interested and should not trust other actors. Organizing groups means taking all of that into consideration. The classic text by Alinsky (1971) is based on his own experiences as community organizer (Mayo, 2004). He developed a number of tactics to build organizations towards social transformation (Alinsky, 1971). His proposals are confrontational and controversial, but effective. The most important learning from this perspective is that communities must be a strong force so that they will

be taken seriously by other actors. Insight into Alinsky's proposals might help open an array of alternatives to address the Mexican case. Thus the topic will be explored in Chapter 2.

There were, however, no qualitative studies about how values, perceptions, and ideas about a different kind of violence, organized crime, are socially constructed in Mexico. This dissertation was designed to help fill that gap.

Social Constructivism

One of the two pillars of this dissertation's conceptual framework is social constructivism (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion). Some authors use the terms *social constructions* or *social constructionism* (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), but social constructivism is the original name. The worldview of social constructivism challenges the idea that there is an innate human impulse towards violence or aggression (Freud, 1929/2005). In fact, in understanding Freud or an author such as Niebuhr (1932/2002) more in depth (see Marmor [1964] and Fox [1986]), a distinction must be made between the behavior in the individual, and how it impacts societies. Niebuhr saw human violence as a drive towards equilibrium—not towards aggression—which could be contained by politics (Niebuhr, 1932/2002). Freud, in contrast, saw a human innate impulse towards aggression, but only as self-assertion, which could be projected towards society. He was attentive to how culture mediates instincts of love and aggression (Freud 1929/2005).

Social constructivism challenges the fact that violence (or peace) is the product of individual drives. Instead, the social constructivist perspective understands violence or peace as the product of human social interactions and understandings, as a process of

historical and cultural conditions (Lipowetsky, 1983/2002), individual and collective developments (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009, Vygotsky, 1986), and/or social arrangements (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010). According to social constructivism, realities are not given facts, but negotiated conceptions about how that reality comes to be what it is.

Combining the social constructivist worldview with a complex vision about how peace conditions are created from the roots of economic, political life, and society (Alger, 1987; 1990; Galtung, 1985), provided an integral framework to research the process through which certain collectivity socially shares its views, and constructs its beliefs about the future. Peace and violence, in that sense, are not given, but socially constructed conceptions that grow from material and ideational structures, socially shared knowledge, understandings, norms, and identities. This dissertation used that framework as an underlying assumption throughout the research process. Thus, participants' responses (values, perceptions, and conceptions) were not innate; they were the product of social interaction that denotes social agreements and understandings that are both cultural and historical. These concepts are described in more detail in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, there is also an explanation of how social constructivism and the integral peace perspective are connected to the research questions, the methodology, and the interview questions.

It is important to clarify that perceptions and conceptions are two distinct cognitive processes. Perceptions, initially, come from the sensory experiences with the environment; that is, the way in which a person organizes visual-spatial representations (Suwa, 2003). A conception, on the other hand, means how a person interprets those

perceptions and generates new ideas. A perception is how a person regards a certain context and a conception is how a person thinks (Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007). However, research shows that sometimes previous conceptions can guide or lead perceptions (Conception and perception of ambiguous figures, 2011; Halberstadt, Winkielman, Niedenthal, & Dalle, 2009), which means that previous knowledge can determine how realities are perceived. That is why in this project, some consideration must be given as to how social constructions can affect both perceptions and conceptions.

Another angle that figured into this research is the gender construction of policy and the impact of women engaging policy issues. In the United States, various authors have addressed this subject with two basic questions: (a) How well represented are women in public administrative bodies? (Dolan, 2001; Dolan, 2004; Keiser, Wilkins, Meier, & Holland, 2002; Moloney, 2007; Naff, 2010), and most importantly, (b) How do women's participation in politics and the formation of public policy affect the decision making processes and outcomes? (Dolan, 2001; Hannagan & Larimer, 2010; Kathlene, 1995). As I will describe in detail in Chapter 2, the conclusion is that for the past decades, women are more represented in local and federal administrative institutions in the United States and in some other countries (Poloni-Staudinger, & Orbals, 2011). The studies conducted so far demonstrate that women do tend to engage in different decision making processes than men (Hannagan & Larimer, 2010). These are characterized mainly by a more democratic, collaborative, and cooperative style, whereas men tend to be more authoritative. This is due to different ethos: women are more collaborative, men are more competitive. Kathelene (1995) studied different visions of crime between women and

men in the Congress of the state of Colorado. The thesis of Kathelene's work was that the ever-changing gender composition of administrative and legislative bodies will eventually have an impact on decision making. Consistent with previous literature, the author demonstrated through interviews that men tend to see people more as individuals; they tend to see criminals as autonomous decision makers who are responsible for their own paths. Women tend to see criminals as people immersed in a social environment. Regarding justice, men have a tendency to think more consistent with universal principles; whereas women are more case oriented, more concerned with helping others. Men tend to be instrumental; they view people as self-centered and self-serving. Men tend towards objective thinking. This leads them to protect individual rights and the defense against the invasion of freedom. Women are more contextual; they think in terms of links and connections, interdependence; they are more relation oriented. They see crime as a social problem that needs social solutions. Men seek more punitive measures; women see society as responsible. Therefore, solutions for women lie in education and in the increase of opportunities. Although such studies are far from conclusive, they point to a line of investigation that was explored in this study.

This perspective might have accounted for different answers given in the interviews, but it could also shed some light on how Mexico's insecurity and fight against organized crime would be addressed differently by men and women, providing there was gender representation in the Mexican public administration. According to Stevenson (2004), Mexico's public administration and legislative branches have shown a substantial increase in the participation of women. In the end, my research showed that there were no

substantial differences related to gender regarding the most repeated patterns (see Chapter 4). Some variations, however, were found, and may open a path for future research in this area.

Operational Definitions

I will now explain the way in which some basic terms are understood and used for this dissertation. At this time I will not define them exhaustively. The explanations below are only intended to provide the reader an idea of the way in which this dissertation uses such terminology. These subjects will be described with more detail in Chapter 2.

Grassroots approach - One that addresses problems from the basement of societies

(Alger, 1987; 1990). To this approach, positive aspects of peace such as dealing with material conditions of underdevelopment, but also such as fostering a culture of harmony and human coexistence (Galtung, 1985) can succeed in the long term.

Ideational structures - Taken from social constructivism, (Assmann, 2008; Cederman &

Daase, 2003; Stenmark, 2009; Stetsenko, & Arieivitch, 1997; Vygotsky, 1986).

The ideational structures are those immaterial sets of circumstances that have been socially shared and agreed by societies. Among others, the ideational structures include ideas, values, norms, perceptions, conceptions, and worldviews.

Material structures - Those sets of circumstances that involve economic and objective

conditions within a society that directly impact upon its human development

(Reus-Smit, 2005).

Peace - In this dissertation, peace is regarded under a holistic and integral perspective, as

a socially constructed phenomenon composed of material and ideational

structures such as discourse, symbols, and sense making components, that include those set of conditions, which allow a society to coexist without internal violence, with respect for institutions and law, in an environment of harmony, cooperation, and integration, with positive and sustainable human, social, and economic development (Galtung, 1985, p. 985).

Peacelessness – This is a common term used in the literature on peace, and refers to the absence of structural conditions of peace (Alger, 1987). It cannot be substituted by terms as *violence* or *lack of peace*, since peace is not understood only as the absence of violence or a nonviolent environment.

Peacebuilding - The process through which integral peace is constructed by a society. Peacebuilding thus, is different than peacemaking or peacekeeping. Peacemaking would consist of measures to mediate and solve conflicts (Portilla, 2006), and peacekeeping might be the steps taken to maintain the state of absence of violence between actors (Derouen & Wallensteen, 2009).

Social construction - The process through which certain ideas, values, perceptions, or norms are shared by the members of a human group, and through which agreements are negotiated and understood to determine what reality is or should be (Fagan, 2010; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Assmann, 2008).

Structural peace - That circumstance which would only be achieved when positive conditions for human development are fostered in a society (Galtung, 1985). These conditions include the lack of violence, but also the lack of structural violence. Peace, as we see, is constructed through a holistic approach that

embraces the material as well as the ideational structures from the positive standpoint.

Structural violence- Those material or ideational conditions, which harm human beings through most commonly slow processes, but, which do not consist of directly intended violence towards them (Galtung, 1985). These circumstances include but do not limit to poverty, underdevelopment, inequality, or psychosocial stressors, and the lack of structural opportunities to move out of them.

Values, perceptions, and conceptions- A perception is understood as the way the subjective reality is apprehended through our senses and through our minds. Perceptions are the way in which a person organizes visual-spatial representations (Suwa, 2003), whereas conceptions are related to the interpretation of those perceptions, and generation of new ideas from that point. I will understand a value as the socially constructed degree of significance, worth, or importance that the collectivity assigns to ideas, norms, behaviors, and different realities.

Direct Violence - In this dissertation, violence is defined as a socially constructed behavior that includes harm, aggression, cruelty, or barbarity, directed towards another actor (Galtung, 1985), and, which is conducted either to attack or to defend, in the midst of an environment that is perceived as dangerous to the individual or to the organization's (whether criminal or not) objectives.

Organized criminal violence - That specific type of violence associated with criminal organizations, either as a result of government combating these organizations, as the product of them fighting between themselves, or as the result of them

performing aggressive or unlawful activities against members of society (Cockayne & Lupel, 2009).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

Assumptions

This study cannot be said to be complete because things as values, perceptions, and conceptions are always changing. However, a start and an end must be set in order to abstract some of its implications. Since ideational structures are indeed in constant change, I can only try to take a snapshot of particular moments in this ongoing evolution. It could be assumed that what I imply for a specific area of Mexico City can tell us more about what is taking place in the whole country. But this may not be true. This study shed light on some notions about what types of questions should be asked in other parts of Mexico in order to truly determine if the social construction of values, perceptions, and ideas is also taking place in a similar fashion in other parts of the country. However, this cannot be verified through this dissertation. Some suggestions, nonetheless, are valid to increase our understanding of such phenomena. This study primarily has heuristic value; it provides scientific evidence that would allow other types of instruments to be designed, instruments that could eventually lead to quantitative, generalizable knowledge.

Limitations

This study has the potential weakness of researcher bias and the role of the researcher. I have had the same experiences as the interviewees, at least from the insecurity standpoint. I watch similar TV shows, listen to similar radio stations, and belong to the same social system. This was a major threat to the credibility of such a

qualitative study. I needed to make explicit my own inclinations from the beginning. I might have asked only the questions that I believed would give me the answers I consciously (or unconsciously) sought. This might have had an impact on the whole process, from design to conclusions. For example, I might have interviewed only those few cases that confirmed to what I already “knew,” and not pursue the issue further. After interviewing two or three people, I could have reached some conclusions prematurely and thus lost the overview.

In sum, this study has limitations inherent to any qualitative research conducted on a small sample of participants by a researcher who is also subject to similar issues as participants are. For those reasons, I made my project transparent and verifiable (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I was explicit about the exact procedures and questions that were asked; I quoted parts of the interviews, while keeping the transcripts at hand in case they should be required; I explained the codes used, and showed the precise mechanisms for analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. In that way, peer reviewers (in this case, as this is a doctoral dissertation, the peer reviewers are the members of my committee and the IRB) could examine the exact map that was walked, and provide some feedback to control for the threats I mentioned. Moreover, methodological triangulation assisted through the combination of different procedures such as member checking and journaling, in addition to the direct interviews and their recordings.

Another potential limitation that the dissertation could have encountered had to do with the truthfulness of participants’ responses. It could have occurred during the interviews that some person was either deliberately or not, telling me a lie or untruth.

This could have happened due to personal interests, or embarrassment, or even out of fear of consequences. The methodology, however, was intended to minimize the impact that this could have had upon results and conclusions. This means that despite the untruths that specific participants may have offered as responses, it was unlikely that this would have had affected the procedure through which conclusions were reached. By detecting patterns and repetitions, the qualitative methodology does not rely on one participant or on one single response. It is likely that a specific lie was not repeated enough times, so as to become a regular theme among the different participants. Furthermore, along with the number of repetitions of certain theme, the results in Chapter 4 provide the number of participants that repeated that specific subject. Therefore, in case some untruth was communicated to me by only one or two participants, then it did not make it to the most repeated patterns that form the results of this research. That way, the risk of arriving to conclusions by confusing lies with truthful thoughts, ideas, and perceptions, was at least partly averted. As explained in Chapter 4, there were no discrepant cases among the 15 participants I interviewed. .

Scope and Delimitations

As mentioned above, I would have preferred greater scope to understand the situation in the entire country. This could not be done for material and logistical circumstances. For security reasons, I did not travel into the most violent areas of the country. I researched a section of the city in which I live. Organized crime is limited in Mexico City. The zone of the city in which I conducted the research is safe. I interviewed a sample of common citizens, teachers, business owners, students, and community

leaders, who allowed me to explore their values and perceptions. Therefore, the natural bounds of my investigation only establish something about the place where the research was conducted. I had to keep in mind that I spotted only some signs that could feed future ambitious projects of larger scope. In this case, however, I sought evidence that could provide clues about the process of the social construction of values, perceptions, and ideas about organized criminal violence and the possibility for peacebuilding in Mexico. This study can lead the way for future questionnaires based on evidence--not common sense--in order to determine whether those conditions exist elsewhere in the country.

Significance of the Study

As will be covered in Chapter 2, there is abundant literature on peacebuilding and organized crime around the world. There is also some literature on the history of organized crime in Mexico, as well as some analysis and assessments about Mexico's current circumstances. There were, however, no qualitative studies that dealt with this specific type of violence --which is organized crime related violence- and its impact on the perceptions or social construction of reality among the people in Mexico City. In other words, there was no empirical evidence to determine in what ways the process through which Mexicans socially construct ideas, values, and perceptions regarding these realities, affects such realities. This case study provides evidence about the process by which values, perceptions, and ideas about (a) organized crime, (b) violence, (c) the role of the government fighting against it, and (d) peacebuilding possibilities, are socially constructed in this society, and more specifically, in a specific discrete location in Mexico City.

Professional Application and Positive Social Change

Peace is not only the absence of violence, but it also includes several other factors such as the absence of fear of violence (IEP, 2010). Mexicans' perceptions about their reality involve fear and terror (Consulta Mitofsky, 2011; Meschoulam 2012b).

Understanding more about the process through which those perceptions are formed, matters towards designing potential solutions, prevention, and intervention strategies. Thus, this dissertation offers policy recommendations that point to positively impacting people's perceptions at the structural, the local, and experiential levels. These recommendations include local integrative, gender inclusive, culturally sensible programs to promote education, trade, culture, and sports at the local level, as well as peace policing, among several others.

This study also provides qualitative support to inform educators, social leaders, and media representatives about peace journalism, and its potential positive influence on people's perceptions and conceptions about violence and peace. For research purposes, the project provides evidence that could inform future qualitative and quantitative studies to generate further evidence in terms of a more accurate diagnosis and possible solutions to improve Mexicans' perceptions about their country and the perspectives to build peace.

Summary

In this chapter, the central elements of this dissertation have been presented. The lack of peace in Mexico responds to several factors. Some of them lie in the history of Mexican politics, and its relation with organized crime. Nonetheless, since peace is not

only the absence of violence, a more integral approach is required. Through such a holistic view, not only the negative aspects of peace (absence of violence) are addressed, but also its positive components, such as taking care of relations, the creation of harmony, integration, and positive coexistence, as well as the material structures such as economic development, employment, and infrastructure. These factors become a conceptual framework of the topic of peace.

Thus, understanding more on how a society socially constructs its ideas, values, and perceptions about organized crime violence, the role of the government, and peacebuilding possibilities, becomes essential to diagnose Mexico's current state of affairs, and could offer evidence that would inform policies, programs, and future research. A comprehensive review of the literature on this topic shows that this had not been previously done.

This dissertation consisted of 15 qualitative interviews with residents of a neighborhood in Mexico City. The interview questions were designed with the purpose of understanding the process through which participants socially construct their values, conceptions, and perceptions, about organized criminal violence, as well as the possibilities for peace in Mexico. Although this qualitative case study is in its nature a limited project that circumscribes to a specific area inside Mexico City, it has heuristic value. The study provided signs to feed immediate recommendations as well as future larger research projects.

Chapter 2 will offer a literature review on social constructivism, peace, peacebuilding, the case of Mexico, the history of its violence, and how these topics have

been addressed in several different countries. I will show how this dissertation fills a gap in this literature and provides a significant advance into a potential line of research in order to make dreams of peace somewhat more achievable. In Chapter 3, I will explain the methodology in detail, and how the research questions were explored. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of the research and provide evidence of its trustworthiness. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will (a) discuss the results and interpret them, (b) address the implications of the study and its results for public policy and social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Despite the Mexican government's fight to restore stability and institutional bureaucratic rule, criminal organizations have taken control of force in several zones of the country (Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011). According to different theories, such as social constructivism (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986), or to an integral perspective of peace (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985; 2003; 2008), some of the key elements to peacelessness rest deep inside the values, perceptions, and conceptions that social actors construct among themselves. Until the present study, there was no qualitative research in Mexico on the process of forming values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and the possibilities for peace in country. Finding how the inhabitants of a particular neighborhood in Mexico City, socially construct their ideas about the current state of violence, the role of the government, the role of criminal organizations, and the possibilities for peaceful coexistence, proved to be helpful in understanding how a culture of hostility has been built, and provided some clues to transform it.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what socially constructed values, perceptions and conceptions about violence and peace are, how they are socially constructed, and how they have influenced the culture in a specific urban population. The study also explored the role of the government, the role of criminal

organizations, the role of mass media, and peacebuilding possibilities, according to the socially constructed perceptions in a neighborhood inside Mexico City.

Peace and peacebuilding have been studied from different perspectives. This area of inquiry has been linked in the past to war studies and how to avoid conflict between nation-states (Niebuhr, 1932; Morgenthau, 1948/1954/1973; Waltz, 1979; Doyle, 1983). Other authors have addressed the topic from the angle of conflict resolution possibilities (Derouen & Wallensteen, 2009; Harbom, Högbladh, & Wallensteen, 2006; Jung, Lust-Okar, & Shapiro, 2005; Marenin, 2005; Rank, 2010; Sikkink, & Booth Walling, 2007; Stanley, 2008; Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2010). The most important limitation about those studies is the fact that the subject of peace has been mostly applied to clashes between countries, between nations, between national, ethnic or political groups within a territory. However, since Mexico is not a country at war with other nation-states, nor it has political factions fighting against each other, or ethnic groups in combat, a great effort of adaptation needs to be made to understand the nature of the conflict in that country, and adjust peacebuilding notions to its particularities.

These particularities include the growth of criminal organizations, the fight of the government to regain control, and the increase of violence throughout the different states of the country (Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011). Some of this violence includes the government fighting with cartels, and some of it consists of criminal organizations fighting against other criminal organizations for portions of the territory. Underlying what is called *direct* violence (Galtung, 1985), nevertheless, other kinds of violence

existed within the structures of the country, from decades ago. What peace is, in other words, needs to be redefined.

As I will argue below, most of the information which has been written to explain why the Mexican situation has deteriorated throughout recent years into a large scale violent conflict relies on journalists' investigations, on historical interpretations, and some studies related to different types of violence such as family and gender (Agoff, Herrera, & Castro, 2007; Enríquez, 2002), or gang related violence (Perea, 2008). There are some publications that use the quantitative methodology to explain Mexican perceptions (Consulta Mitofsky, 2010, 2011), or the general increase in frequency of criminal incidents (Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011). Up until the present research, there was no qualitative study to explain the process of social construction of values and perceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities among Mexicans.

The research questions this dissertation examines, thus, deal with recognizing in what ways Mexicans socially construct values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities. These questions involve two basic suppositions. First: there are indeed processes of social construction of values, perceptions and conceptions. In simple words, worldviews, assumptions, and understandings are socially constructed. Secondly: deconstructing such processes of social construction could help foster social change in Mexico.

This chapter focuses on those two assumptions, explaining in detail how previous knowledge has been built in the past as related to those subjects, and the way it has been

applied to the Mexican case, showing why this investigation addresses a gap in the research of that area.

Since social constructivism is one of the important pillars of this dissertation, I will first explain in detail what this theory is, how it has been developed from various disciplines, and I will connect those studies to the subject of peace. I argue in that section of the chapter, that since realities such as peace or violence are not given facts, but social constructs, then the process through which these concepts are built by societies, matters towards understanding how a culture of hostility has been formed, and the possibilities to transform it.

The other pillar of this dissertation's conceptual framework is what could be called the *integral perspective of peace*. In the initial paragraphs of this section, I focus on the texts that have dealt with peace from the perspective of nations and conflicting groups, involving international and civil or domestic war. I will explain how realists and liberals have understood peace possibilities and how this has been applied to international politics. I will then explain how these concepts have evolved to what is known as a holistic or integral approach to peace. I will document why peace cannot be understood simply as the absence of war or violence, but its many positive components must be incorporated towards promoting the conditions under which it relies. To do that, I will show how peace has been addressed from areas such as ethnopolitical disputes or development implementation throughout several cases around the globe.

The role of women in politics and public policy will be then examined in order to explain why gendered public policy is a topic that has to be incorporated into an integral

theory of peace. Similarly, I will explain why mass media matter towards a broad understanding of peacebuilding. I will describe what peace journalism is, and how it has been applied in different countries, to justify, then, the role that the mass media could play in the social construction of values and perceptions of Mexicans, the core issue this dissertation sought to investigate, so that it can be then contrasted to the results of the research. To complement that, I will also value the role of community activism and determine in what ways this subject can be influential towards understanding peace and a culture of nonviolent participation.

The next section of this literature review deals with the concrete case of Mexico. I will address how the issues of violence and peace have been studied in the country and in other places of the world, explaining the relationship with the Mexican experience. I describe in detail core issues such as organized criminal violence and the impact it has had upon the Mexican society. In that section I argue that there is a gap in the literature that justified the need for the qualitative case study I conducted. Most of the scientific research that has been carried out in Mexico is related to different kinds of violence such as gang or gender violence, as opposed to organized criminal violence. Gangs are different from cartels as they are understood as small urban youth groups (Jütersonke, Muggah, & Rodgers, 2009), that commit crimes without forming the complex networks (national and transnational) as cartels do. The studies related to organized crime are either historic or news analyses, opinion surveys, or quantitative investigations that measure the frequency and amount of organized criminal acts. There was no qualitative research to

assess the process through which Mexicans socially construct their values and perceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities.

Research Strategy

This literature review started with some of the classic texts on war and peace (Morgenthau, 1948/54/73; Niebuhr, 1932; Waltz, 1979), as they have been studied from the perspectives of international relations and history.

From that point, I used the following databases, EBSCO, SAGE, and PROQUEST, with the following keywords: *peace, peace-building, peace construction, violence, Mexico, organized crime, terrorism in Mexico, organized criminal violence in Mexico*, as well as the name of classic authors: Vygotsky, Piaget, Alinsky, Freud, Niebuhr, and Schneider. Articles on the conceptual framework were gathered by using these key words: *social constructivism, social construction, gendered public policy, and media peacebuilding*. Some of such key words were crisscrossed to find what had been written on such topics. For example, I used *social constructivism* together with *peacebuilding* and *Mexico*. I also searched using the same words in the Spanish language (*paz, construcción de paz, violencia, crimen organizado, violencia criminal, violencia del crimen organizado, construcción de paz en México, terrorismo en México*) to get some texts related to Mexico in their original language. The Mexican case was enriched by different experiences throughout the world, and thus, enough literature related to the topic of peace and violence as it has been applied elsewhere is included in this review. After that, I searched for the historical aspects of the Mexican situation in order to help enrich the knowledge to support the present dissertation.

Finally, research related to violence and peacebuilding efforts in Mexico was reviewed with a focus on the methodologies used by the researchers. The conceptual framework of this research was built on this platform.

This literature review begins with a discussion of the two pillars of this dissertation's conceptual framework: social constructivism and the Integral Peace Perspective and Grassroots Approach.

Conceptual Framework I: Social Constructivism

This dissertation starts with the assumption that realities as we know them, such as violence or peace, or the possibility to transform them, are not given facts which come naturally, but are socially constructed within societies. This supposition lies upon certain worldviews related to the philosophical backgrounds of social constructivism. I will, therefore, first explain how social constructivism challenges the notion that things such as violence or peace are born from something called "human nature." I will show how the social constructivist tenets have been approximated from different disciplines, including public policy. Then I will assess the subject of peace as it has been previously studied; I will explain how its understanding has evolved towards what has been called the integral approximation of peace, and I will connect those concepts to the social constructivist approach.

Before entering the topic of social constructivism, I must establish that the research questions that guide this dissertation sought to dig into socially constructed perceptions and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities. Perceptions and conceptions are two distinct cognitive processes. Perceptions, initially,

come from the sensorial experiences with the environment; that is, the way in which a person organizes visual-spatial representations (Suwa, 2003), whereas a conception is how the person interprets those perceptions, and generates new ideas from that point. A perception is how a person regards certain context, and a conception is how that person thinks (Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007). However, research shows that sometimes previous conceptions can guide or lead perceptions (Conception and perception of ambiguous figures, 2011; Halberstadt, Winkielman, Niedenthal, & Dalle, 2009), which means, previous knowledge can be determinant to how realities are perceived. That is why in this research, some consideration must be given as to how social constructions can impact upon both, perceptions and conceptions.

On Human Nature

Stenmark (2009) described the core tenets of social constructivism as a worldview against competing worldviews. According to this author there are essentially three perspectives about human nature, which can be subdivided into some others: One of them, based on Judeo-Christian tradition says that humans are created in God's image; yet they have freewill and a natural tendency to sin. Darwinism explains that there is indeed a human nature based on evolution and pre-printing of human biological tendencies. Finally, the blank slate or *tabula rasa* view, states that any imprinting is socially conditioned through history. Stenmark (2009) restated some of these views as follows: The true debate about human nature is between those who believe there is one, those who believe there is none, and those who believe it is irrelevant.

To this debate some more perspectives must be added. Freud (1929/2005) said that there is a natural instinctive tendency in humans towards aggression. In fact, there is a human need to control that aggression, and we turn it inward, redirecting the aggression towards ourselves, a factor that shapes human existence. Violence, in that sense, satisfies a need, according to Freud's perspective. This is projected by our social arrangements, that is, civilization. The way through which we rule our coexistence is the alternative to war of all against all. Civilization is human violence redirected to itself, a phenomenon of repression, not a social manifestation. That means that although violence, aggression, and fight for power are innate in human beings, civilization saves us from ourselves. From a different approach, Niebuhr (1932/2002) thought that morality can be best understood in the sphere of individuals, not societies. Even so, as long as these individuals act within societies, such societies obey to a collective egoistic impulse, which is the product of the various individual egoisms. Therefore, human collective behavior and needs must be properly assessed, when dealing with subjects as violence. To Fox (1986), Niebuhr has been misunderstood. Fox argued that the idea, which says that Niebuhr saw violence as something inescapable is an incorrect understanding of that thinker. In contrast, Niebuhr challenged that notion, stating instead that violence as an option cannot be ruled out, but it is not unavoidable, and its use can be inserted into an ethical strategy. However, Niebuhr does understand a sinful and egoistic human nature which impacts upon the social behavior. That is why democracy and politics are needed. Morgenthau (1948/1954/1973) saw human nature as flawed, an inexorable selfish will to power, a trait that impacts upon the international sphere. Niebuhr, instead, saw morality as something

possible in the sphere of individuals, but since the actors acting in collectivities are struggling for power, the possibility of morality becomes incompatible with vested interests. Morgenthau and Niebuhr had an enormous impact on political realism, as will be discussed below, but their main concern regarding the impact that human nature bears upon the international system, and a perpetual state of wars has been challenged by Marmor (1964). According to Marmor, it is incorrect to assume that there is a correlation between human natural aggression, as viewed from the individual perspective, and a modern institution such as war. Perhaps, the author said, in certain periods of the past, a link could be established between the natural instinct of aggression and war, but not in modern times. The distance between combatants has been widened due to modern technology, and the process of killing has been mechanized. The interesting part is that this author said that emotions such as rage and hate are not only not needed now, but also become an obstacle, for example, when operating a machine or a computer. The question this raises as it regards to Mexico is in what ways, when executing certain crimes as the ones I describe below, combatants are actually returning to the previous situation in which rage and anger were in fact, required for efficient fighting. In the end, Marmor (1964) not only contended the theory that war is the product of an intrinsic human behavior growing from natural aggression, but also stated that there is a true danger in advancing such theories: “The danger of this belief is that by creating a widespread expectancy that war is inevitable it contributes to attitudes of apathy and futility which can constitute serious obstacles to the efforts necessary for the eradication of war” (p. 19). To Marmor, a more complex understanding of Freud’s theory (1929/ 2005) is

needed. Freud said aggression was a natural instinct in human beings, but mostly as an act of self-assertion. The misunderstanding, in Marmor's opinion (1964), is that this concept of natural aggression or violence has been extrapolated from the individual towards the complexity of a modern institution such as war. Marmor's view regarding Freud, nonetheless, could be questioned by incorporating into this debate, the correspondence that Einstein held with Freud in 1931-1932 (Einstein & Freud, 1932). Freud makes it clear in his letters to Einstein, that human original aggressive impulses is seen at war –even when applying law and the rule of state- although in different shapes. Moreover, when discussing the possibility to eradicate war through institutions such as the League of Nations, Freud wrote:

The upshot of these observations, as bearing on the subject in hand, is that there is no likelihood of our being able to suppress humanity's aggressive tendencies. In some happy corners of the earth, they say, where nature brings forth abundantly whatever man desires, there flourish races whose lives go gently by; unknowing of aggression or constraint. This I can hardly credit; I would like further details about these happy folk (Einstein & Freud, 1932, p.10)

Whitney (2007) sought to study human nature in an environment such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. In a country in which after the Belgian colonial rule, an efficient administrative and governance body was never established, conflict characterized human relations. In that country there has not been enduring stability or

peace. Such circumstances invited the author to question in what ways the cause for that is human natural behavior. The explanation that Whitney provided is the breakdown of culture. In other words, culture does help humans contain their violence, but it can be disrupted or broken. The author argued that this breakdown of culture causes human beings to go back, as he said, to our “biological inheritance” (p. 2). Once we as humans are deprived of our cultural inheritance, according to Whitney, we see some behavioral patterns that remind us of subhuman groups. Our nature is thus exhibited.

Entwistle and Moroney (2011) explained that the clinical psychology and the religious thinking have focused on what is incorrect about human behavior, and more concretely with human nature, whether its sins or the aggression towards it's behavior are naturally driven. Instead, these authors focused in what is positive about human nature, its capability of help and cooperation; that is the image of God. Humans, are not only sinners, but also capable of great good. The balance, in other words, has been too charged to the dark side of human nature, as opposed to its positive scope. So whether from its positive side or its dark side, this text shows that in several schools of thought, human nature is something, which is innate, that pushes people to act in certain directions.

On Social Constructivism

Arguing against such views is the cultural or historical perspective, as well the social constructivist approximation. Violence, per Lipowetsky's (1983/2002) discussion, is not the product of the individual impulses or drives, but the product of history, of an entire system of which the individual is only a part. According to this understanding, violence would not be innate, but produced by an articulated arrangement including

values, moral conceptions, social understandings, and has varied from honor codes and revenge, to a modern process of civilization. The author explained that in some societies of the present, which have been able to overcome distress and underdevelopment, individuals seek for leisure, entertainment, and self-realization, not to confront each other. Violence, thus, is not immanent to social coexistence.

In a similar fashion, social constructivists believe that human traits and behaviors are socially constructed, which means, they are the product of a cultural process (Stenmark, 2009). Among them, nevertheless, there are the modernist, who think there is a human nature, but it has been socially constructed (as the product of history and culture), thus malleable or plastic (as opposed to fixed), and the postmodernist view which thinks there is no human nature at all such as Foucault. Stenmark (2009) defended the modernist view, because he explained that there are indeed some traits of the Homo Sapiens as rational animals, which are producers of culture. That is the nature of a species. Nevertheless this nature can be flexible. Human nature, in Stenmark's (2009) opinion, is essentially, but not solely, a product of learning and socialization, or is socially constructed (p. 903). If we thus assume that this sort of "nature" can be malleable, then we can conclude that it can change, or it can be educated to change. This statement can have serious implications for a subject such as peace and for social change. Violence and peace would not be natural conditions, but socially constructed circumstances towards which education would be crucial. This dissertation seeks to explore into those possibilities, in the case of 15 participants from a specific

neighborhood. Although it assumes social constructivism as a framework, the research process proved to shed light on its own about these topics.

Two seminal authors that were born in the same year constitute some of the basic principles of the constructivist approach. These are Vygotsky and Piaget.

Vygotsky (1986) posed a fundamental thesis: man is a social creature; therefore, it can only develop in a social interactive context through the contacts of an environment, the family, the school where the person learns the ideas and the world. Through language, humans apprehend signs and meanings that explain their reality. Thus, an interpsychological process coexists with an intrapsychological activity, once the person internalizes signs and significances.

According to Marin, Benarroch, and Jimenez, (2000) there might be an apparent tension between the Vygotskian historical or cultural approximation, and the cognitive science which posed the notion of genetic or inherent development. This is due to the fact that Piaget (1955) the other seminal author of constructivism, in contrast to Vygotsky, developed the concept of cognitive structures, determined patterns of behavior that were present during the child's development. These were the stages during which the basic human cognition was developed, and varied according to the age of the child, which ended around the age of 12 with abstract thinking. Per Piaget and Inhelder, (1969), children will understand and explain reality, and solve problems in different ways according to the stage of development at which the person is. This approximation is similar but differs from the Vygotskian social constructivism in that the latter is dependent upon social interactions. These concepts have been applied to areas such as the

ethical development (Cottone, 2001), or education (Marin, Benarroch, & Jimenez, 2000; Powell & Codi, 2009). Genovese (2003) explained that today, these tenets have been mostly tested with studies that demonstrate the principles across cultures, except the concept of formal thinking stage, which has not been empirically proven. Therefore some of the skills that were argued by Piaget as structurally developed are in fact culturally produced abilities. Intrinsic motivation is therefore not enough for students. This statement has important conceptual consequences for studies such as this dissertation as it would imply that human behavior is in fact a product of culture, and not nature. The way we behave, in other words, does not emerge naturally, but is produced through cultural interaction. If that is true, then the way Mexicans perceive their circumstances and the way they understand what peace and its possibilities are, is indeed a product of their culture, or their agreed upon considerations.

In spite of the differences between these two seminal writers, Frawley (1997) attempted a reconciliation of Piagetian and Vygotskian constructivism by establishing that Vygotsky saw the language as the way in which the internal architecture of the mind is linked with the external context. According to Frawley, the internalization process is not a simple copy of the outside signs or understandings, but an entire process leading to the construction of an inner plane. It is like thinking in abstract terms, only in thoughts in contrast to thinking in terms of language. The main work of Vygotsky (1986), *Thought and Language*, merges into understanding how the social factors influence and alter inner thoughts through language.

These tenets have immediate applications for learning, teaching, and for a dissertation such as this one. Teaching exists thanks not only to genetic developments (which are now proved to be slower in isolation contexts through experimental designs [Ivic, 1994/2000]), but thanks to contexts and social environments. Knowledge does not exist in itself, but it is formed through human interaction. Therefore, our understanding of violence and peace is not naturally born, but it is produced through the social interaction with the other human beings that coexist within our environment.

Marin, Benarroch, and Jimenez (2000), through a qualitative research on students, made a good attempt to reconcile social constructivism (SC) and Piagetian constructivism (PC) in a complex way, as they are approached through education. To the authors' view, the common ground between these two otherwise opposed philosophies is very vast. The individual cognitive part of human beings is not separated from the interaction that takes place. SC is focused on responses, and PC is focused on the cognitive. To these two schools of thought, knowledge and learning is constructed through time. To PC one assimilates new ideas, which are deformed and integrated to old preexisting schemas. To SC this process takes place through interaction with others, whereas to PC it is a cognitive stage of each individual. To the authors' view, this can take place simultaneously as the learner is constructing knowledge and learning all the time. This integrative perspective can inform my theoretical framework by incorporating both the individual and the social aspects reviewed by the authors.

Contrasting this vision, Zahavi (2009) argued against the notion that the self or the subject is only the product of a social construction. In this author's opinion, there are

more elements to consider. According to constructivism, the self is an intersubjective experience socially constructed. The author challenged social constructivism regarding this matter because it minimizes the main structures that lie behind the self: the “mineness” and “for-me-ness” (p. 551), as well as the primitive forms of self-referentiality, and the first person perspective. The author proposed integrating what social constructivists say with the experience of self.

Khalifa (2010), in a theoretical article, brought more light into the issue. To this author, social constructivism is many things, for example, a philosophy of science. In this author’s words: “Social constructivism is a position endorsed largely by historians, anthropologists, and sociologists of science [which]...holds that things we typically take for granted (e.g. the objectivity of scientific facts) are actually product of contingent social processes” (p. 46). According to him, social constructivism argues that science aims should not be the sought of truth or empirical adequacy, but its aims should be social-epistemic values. The author contended for a *middle ground* social constructivism in contrast to a radical one (which claims that facts are constructed) or a modest or weak version of constructivism that says that facts only emerge in social contexts.

There are more fields which social constructivism is connected to. In a text by Assman (2008), social constructivism is assessed from the viewpoint of history, historiography and collective memory. The author contended the arguments that say that there is no such thing as a collective memory. It is within human interaction where societies share, verbalize, narrate, exchange, corroborate and connect with symbols, signs, and meanings. Human beings do not live in singular, according to Assman (p. 51),

but in different formats of the first person of the plural. We share concerns with others, and we name and convey those concerns. One as an individual, incorporates larger identities such as the community, the nation, or the culture, and names them as “we.” “Each ‘we’ is constructed through shared practices and discourses that mark certain boundaries and define the principles of inclusion and exclusion” (p. 52). To do that, we use signs, symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments which help us to build or construct an identity.

Similarly, social constructivism has been addressed from the perspective of philosophy of science (Fagan, 2010), or education (Harkness, 2009; Marin, Benarroch, & Jimenez, 2000; Powell & Cody, 2009; Stears, 2009; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 1997). Stears (2009) conducted a qualitative study on 45 students, applying social constructivist tools for education. According to the author, learning, in social constructivism’s view does not happen in cognitive isolation. Skills and knowledge are developed through interaction. This approximation values a classroom or a learning atmosphere as a space in which teacher and students exchange values, perceptions, and ideas through language and thus, they build together an understanding of something that can be called knowledge. The social environment is mutually and actively created by teacher and learners. Knowledge is, thus, socially constructed in a socially interactive way in which there is a greater participation and a learner centered focused teaching methods. This could have tremendous implications for my dissertation. First of all, applying such concepts to the field of peace, it could be said that our current understanding of what peace and its possibilities are, has been socially constructed through agreed upon considerations and

understandings. Secondly, and most importantly, it could be argued that a different idea about peace possibilities can indeed be socially constructed through educating about its values or new understandings. These notions, however, will have to be tested with further research. Chapter 5 offers a discussion on this matter in light of the present research.

Social constructivism has also been applied to psychotherapy (Cottone, 2007, 2001). Cottone presented the results of how this worldview has been utilized during therapy sessions, by getting patients to construct and consensuate decisions. To Cottone, what is real is not an objective fact, but evolves through intersubjective interaction and agreement. “The reality of the individual is giving way to relational reality” (Gergen, cited by Cottone, p. 4). Decisions, in this view, are placed in a social context, not in the head of the decision maker. Decision making is interpersonal, not internal. The concept of self is moved out of the head and towards the sphere of social interaction. Social constructivism is then “a philosophical framework that proposes that reality is a creation of individuals in interaction –a socially, consensually agreed-on definition of what is real” (Cottone, 2001, p. 279). Objectivity is placed “between parentheses” (p. 9), in which the parentheses are the borders of human interaction. Consensus, thus, is an interactive process. “When the individuals declare right and wrong in a given situation they are only acting as local representatives for larger relationships in which they are enmeshed. Their relationships speak through them” (Gergen as cited by Cottone, p.24). These conclusions have some applications to the field of psychotherapy. For example, Steigerwald & Forrest (2004), based on Cottone’s (2001) writings, developed an application of a social constructivism model of ethical decision making. When applying

this to values and interventions such as this family counseling, the intention is to allow for a consensus to occur in different areas between partners who can then construct a reality. In this dissertation, according to this view, I had to find out the processes of interaction in which the participants are involved, and ask them whether such processes could be switched, moved, balanced, or consensuated, towards peacebuilding. This was part of what the interview questions were comprised of.

Derivations of social constructivism have been made into the field of politics and International Relations as well (Reus-Smit, 2005). Social constructivism has also been applied to the discipline of public policy. Following the notions that constructivist authors have advanced in the fields of psychology, philosophy, and education, Schneider and Ingram (1993) explained that policy design is too the product of social understandings and shared knowledge about realities within human groups. To Schneider and Ingram, policy has its own architecture, and is based on underlying assumptions, values, norms, rationales, and understandings which inform and impact upon its design. Policy is the product of a political and social process, but then it also nurtures society and politics. Understanding social constructions about how humans interpret their surroundings and the world, and how this has resulted in the formation of rules, norms, laws, and identities, is crucial for scholars who seek to study and have an impact upon policy issues, design and acceptance.

According to Schneider and Sidney (2009), further empirical research should assess the process through which social constructions are formed and through which these constructions affect understandings, assumptions, norms and rules, which in turn

may mold policy issues and design. This last aspect was fundamental for this dissertation, as the present research sheds light on the process about values and perceptions construction regarding violence and peace in Mexico. This research informs policy makers about substantial elements for future policy issues and designs.

There is a link between those applications of public policy and the possibilities to merge this perspective into the field of peace, even in International Relations. Houghton, (2008) presented an interesting attempt to do that. In his paper, the author analyzed the possibility of combining the psychological approach to foreign policy analysis with the social constructivist approximation. It is based upon the fact that individual and collective beliefs matter when making decisions. It recognizes that social constructivism derives from the sociological tradition but combines it with the psychological approach in reviewing the intersubjective beliefs, the role of identities, norms, and representations.

The diverse perspectives outlined above are not mutually exclusive, but they may well be complementary. Freud argued there are social constructs that mediate natural instincts, which will inform the social constructivist authors later in time. However, to most constructivists, behavior is not the product of natural instincts at all, mediated or not, but the result of social interaction.

To summarize, social constructivism has been developed from the fields of philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, education, politics, public policy, and International Relations. There is not one single way to use this perspective. Applied to the topic of peace, a social constructivist approach would mean that the state of violence or peaceful coexistence and stability, are not given but socially constructed conditions. They

are what they are because human beings, through their historical interactions, have agreed upon what they consider to be facts or reality. This, however, does not mean that human beings cannot behave as rational or independent actors once that interests have been built. *A transdisciplinary* (*trans* means through, which implies transversal application of several disciplines [Morin, 1999]) and complex view of peace should include the process through which human or group interests are constructed and also how they behave once these interests exist. That is why social constructivism is not at odds with the rationalist views about peace. If that is true, then, peace is a state that can be achieved at some point, through interaction, consensuation, education, and intervention. To do that, nevertheless, a diagnosis is required to understand how peacelessness has been socially constructed in time. This dissertation was written to contribute in that direction.

Once I have described social constructivism as a worldview, the second pillar of the conceptual framework of the dissertation will be examined in the coming section.

Conceptual Framework II: Integral Peace Perspective and Grassroots Approach

In this section I concentrate on the second core conceptual framework for this dissertation: the outline of an integral theory of peacebuilding. This dissertation had the purpose of finding out what the process of social construction of values, perceptions and conceptions about violence and peace is in a specific community. In order to support and explain the concepts upon which those sorts of questions rely, the issue of how peace has been previously studied and defined must be addressed first. Then I will show how the concept has evolved into the integral perspective and grassroots approach to peace. I will explain how these topics can be connected to social constructivism. Finally, before

addressing the specificities of Mexico, I will direct the attention of the reader towards other aspects of peacebuilding, which are also important issues to consider when approaching violence, peace possibilities, and public policy on the area, such as conflict resolution, gendered public policy, peace journalism, and community activism. After including those elements in this literature review, the Mexican case will be examined in detail.

Peace, War, and International Relations

The topic of peace was first addressed from the perspective of wars between nation states, or between political or ethnic groups. Some of the questions that had been formulated, dealt with trying to find out whether the human nature lead nations to fight one another endlessly, or whether peace was achievable through international cooperation or law. Those questions were answered from different theoretical interpretations, which assess conflicts between nations or countries. Realist schools on one hand (Morgenthau, 1948/54/73; Niebuhr, 1932/2002), have said that due to man selfishness, evil ways, and international anarchy, war is a natural condition in the international system, to which the only alternative is a balance of power. Neorealists (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001), focusing not on human nature, but on the structural anarchic characteristics of the world system, have reached similar conclusions. Liberal and neoliberal schools (Doyle, 1983; Keohane & Nye, 1977/2001), on the other hand, relying on human capability for dialogue, cooperation, and pacific resolution of controversies, have argued that peace is possible in such context, as the result of cooperation, negotiations, and international agreements.

These theories, although they address the condition of war and peace, are not directly applicable to a case as Mexico, since they consider the nation-state as a unit or single actor conflicting or cooperating with other actors which are either different nation states or international organizations. In Mexico, as will be covered below, what exists is a domestic conflict between criminal organizations, and between them and a government trying to regain its control over the country.

To focus in cases as Mexico, an effort of adaptation must be made. For example, Lejano (2006) described what he called the *rationalist* view towards peace. This slant sees people, organizations, and nations, as rational actors, who are always making choices. They do so by balancing and counterbalancing the costs and risks against their benefits and gains for the potential decisions they make. People, and countries, for that matter, make selections according to their best interest. They might choose conflict or cooperation depending on the outcomes they expect to get from that choice. Therefore, peace is a product of negotiation for the best profit of the parts. Actors will strive for peace only if it will produce to them more gain than what conflict would. In that sense, trying to apply rationalism, as described by Lejano, to certain criminal organizations in Mexico, might be useful. That would be done by considering them as rational actors seeking to reach out their interests, and promoting incentives that could lead them to modify their behaviors. Some authors, however (Hope, 2011), have argued that not all cartels can be seen as rational actors, as they are not always making rational choices out of a full array of alternatives, but act more emotionally or intuitively, so to speak, besides

the fact that many of such so called “organizations” are not unitarian entities, but dispersed criminal groups.

There is a version of liberalism that has been applied to peace, called *the liberal peace theory*. Doyle (1983), one of its most important authors, made an attempt to link liberal theories to foreign affairs. The argument that this thinker made was against those theories that separate so strongly international from national issues. Liberalism is not only “peace-loving”, the author said, but by promoting stability and engagement between liberal societies, it does tend to achieve peace more strongly. The liberal peace view that Doyle updated is based on Kant’s (2003) classic perpetual peace, which says that in a republic there is separation of powers, and the consent of citizens is required for governmental action. That theory says that republics bring peaceful relations. Doyle (1983) added that in republics there is rotation of public servants, which leads to deter personal animosities between them. Doyle accepted that there is an international anarchy, but its effects can be tamed through international law and organizations. To support this argument Doyle demonstrated quantitatively that the tendency shows that liberal states do not go to war between them, but they mostly fight with nonliberal states. Although there are exceptions, according to the author, evidence shows that liberal states are predisposed against war. Even when there is a multi-state war, liberal states end on the same side. War, according to this theory is explained by: (a) The absence of international law and order, (in which case they will go to war for rational choice reasons), (b) not being armed has further costs than arming the state, (c) prestige reasons, as showing the power of arms will enhance their credibility. According to the author, the international realist view

remains in a state of war, but by furthering liberalism among nations, wars would be less frequent.

Later, Moravcsik, (1997) developed the *societal liberalism*, a theory that although not directly applicable to the Mexican current situation, did contribute to the debate about how peace is achieved internationally. Moravcsik (1997) proposed some core assumptions: First, the primacy of societal actors. These are individuals and private groups who are on the average rational actors and risk-averse. They promote their interests under the constraints, and material scarcity. This is a bottom-up view of politics. Defining societal actors' interests, however, is essential (Reus-Smit, 2005), which is not done by Moravcsik (1997). Moravcsik (1997) said that the state is not an actor, but a representative of societal agents. In that way, states do not represent or maximize fixed conceptions of security, "interests" or views, but certain interpretations of those. Interests are socially grounded, a view which is closer to social constructivism. Finally, the configuration of interdependent state preferences determines state behavior. Liberalism is hereby viewed by Moravcsik from a systemic perspective. To this author, bargaining and negotiation according to stakes and interests among rational societal actors are the true determinants of international politics. Moravcsik said that domestic institutions, ideas, and conflict between internal actors must be considered when understanding conflict and cooperation between states. National interests are not fixed. Although Moravcsik expressed some concern on how interests are shaped, the view that this theory fosters is still one in which rational actors make choices according to circumstances. Social constructivism, as explained above, will focus on how these interests and circumstances

are socially built before the actors select their choices. This last assertion is crucial to this dissertation, since the way through which different actors socially construct their values and perceptions, might impact upon what is understood as “interests” or “risks.”

The two variants of liberalism I have explained in this section, once more, deal with conflicts between nation states, and if the definitions these theories formulate about what peace is were to be applied to the Mexican case, then it would need to be considered that Mexico is not a single actor or unit, but one in which several actors operate. Therefore, it does not seem that democracy on its own would bring about a peaceful condition, although it would very possibly help.

As a result, this dissertation explores different conceptions of what peace consists of. The ideas that this investigation uses are based on social constructivism, as well as on an integral perspective of peace. I will now explain the latter and its links to the first part of the conceptual framework that was presented earlier.

The Integral Theory of Peacebuilding and its Connections to Social Constructivism

Peace, according to Galtung (1985), is usually defined for what it is *not*. In other words, peace is seen as the absence of something, such as war, or violence. It is like health, the author said, which is usually defined in terms of the absence of disease. This incomplete definition does not include the positive side of the concept, which consists of assessing what should be done to foster and construct what peace is actually composed of. The challenge is valuing how the role of basic needs satisfaction operates in regards to violence.

This idea would imply the possibility of extending what the topic of peace includes towards other spheres such as peace education, and creation of human spaces for development. Galtung (1985) concluded that peace must be addressed in its integral view. Solving conflicts does not only consist of eliminating the traditional kind of violence we know (what is called *direct violence*), but it also requires a holistic scope in which human development is included. Some of the most valuable aspects of Galtung's 50 years perspective (Galtung 1985; 2003; 2008; 2011) are the incorporation of peace in its positive sense: "(the) building of a healthy body capable of resisting diseases, relying on its own health forces or health sources" (Galtung, 1985, p. 145).

Galtung also explained the birth of the concept of *structural violence*, in contrast to direct violence. The first kind is unintended (such as underdevelopment) but it still produces harm. In that way, peacebuilding includes educating and promoting policies towards human betterment. Dissociative strategies for peace involve separating the parts, whereas associative strategies consist of getting them together. In sum, a peacebuilding integral approach includes fighting against direct violence and against indirect or structural violence at the same time.

In 2003, Galtung (2003) updated his vision on the subject of peace. At this opportunity, through describing and analyzing dozens of conflicts around the globe, the author said that there are no greater or lower level conflicts: they all matter to people involved in them in their fight for "Survival-Wellbeing-Freedom-Identity, the basic human needs" (p. 13). Conflicts, in this author's perspective should be solved by transcending and transforming. In other words, going beyond, and utilizing their own

energy to solve them. Peace is only achieved when the specter of alternatives is opened. In that way, the situations must be addressed at the micro level, that is, conflicts within and between persons, at the *meso* or middle level, conflicts inside societies, at the macro level, which means conflicts between states or nations, and at the mega level, between regions or civilizations. Only by addressing a deep culture, a deep behavior, and transforming the deep structures will peace be truly achieved. The methodology of this author, thus, involves the analysis of specific conflicts at the micro, meso, macro, and mega levels.

Whereas Galtung (2003) focused on opening the specter of alternatives addressing the multiple complex levels that conflicts are composed of, Alger (1987) advanced a different perspective, the *grassroots approach* to a life in peace. To Alger, although conflicts and wars are not usually born inside the bottom of societies, but among the big leaders of the world, an effective and enduring peace should come from below, through grassroots movements and civil society organizations. Alger's view, however does compare to Galtung's (1985) in that Alger (1987) linked *peacelessness* to broader causes than only political conflicts. More aspects such as poverty and underdevelopment, oppression, and cultural factors, seem to impact on this matter as well. Since this perspective also understands peace in its wider scope, then it follows that its conditions are not attainable by just a few leaders negotiating among themselves. As the author said: "When we use the word peace in the full sense that is now emerging, peace cannot be imposed. It must grow from the grassroots" (p. 378). Consistent with this view, a few years later, Alger (1991) analyzed global policies for development, which are born from

the grassroots into global organizations. In this latter article, Alger presented several cases seeking to answer the question about the possibility to achieve full development of human potential through participatory grassroots actions and what the role of global organizations is regarding this issue. The paper examined the role of Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) and International Nongovernment Organizations (INGOs). Alger demonstrated that grassroots activity does exist around the globe.

These two core authors (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985) can be immediately linked to social constructivism. Material peace or violence would be the product of a social construction that is formed at multiple levels, sometimes generated by the leaders, and sometimes within communities. Perceptions and ideas of peace should be modified from the bottom of societies, and should be impacted upon if someone were thinking of fostering social change in a collectivity. Such statement is supported by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (2010), which wrote a report on the 2010 reunion of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). In the report, several policies towards fostering peace around the planet are analyzed. The PBC was created in 2005 as an institution to help countries that are emerging from conflict in topics such as reconstruction, recovery, and reintegration in order to foster sustainable development within them. Focusing on how peacebuilding is conducted includes multi-actors consultations. The need of integrated strategies is stressed. The ultimate goal is strengthening institutions and abilities to manage peace processes.

As understood in this dissertation, thus, an integral peace perspective assesses peace not from its negative, but from its positive side. More examples of this

approximation were provided by Lejano (2006), Nathan (2006), and Portilla (2010). The first author (Lejano, 2006) demonstrated the use of territory as an instrument for peace. In this approach, relations and the ethics of care are emphasized. Peace, under this view, is not seen as something negotiated through interests, but constructed through interaction, very consistent, as well, with social constructivist approaches. To the author's viewpoint, peace parks can serve multiple models because they provide benefit and gain (rationalist approach), and they help in developing interrelation between former enemies. To Nathan (2006), a part of peace endurance among different actors includes mutual trust and the generation of collective identities. By using such constructs Nathan trespassed into the realm of social constructivism, per which shared norms and knowledge are the basic ingredients for mutual identities to be formed. Portilla (2006) conducted a qualitative study, which consisted of 60 interviews to prominent peacemakers, or conflict resolution scholars and practitioners. Underpinning the whole study is a deep belief about how change is possible, providing proper conditions are adequately met, as the author said: "Our field is dedicated to positive change, and perhaps the first step in making that change begins by adding these essential missing ingredients. If what exists is possible, then there is reason for hope everywhere" (p.247).

In sum, peace is a reality that exists in many places around the globe. Therefore, peace is possible (Portilla, 2006). To achieve it, though, it cannot be simply understood from its negative side, as the absence of war or violence (Galtung, 1985, 2003). An integral approach must be stressed in which the positive side, what builds peace and its circumstances, is enhanced. This includes but does not limit to economic and human

development, social cohesion and integration, association between conflicting parts. Structural violence, is therefore, seen not as the cause of violence or conflict, but it is violence in itself. If that is true, then the Mexican case would have to be studied under a critical scope, setting aside those views that say that Mexico was a “peaceful” country throughout 70 or 80 years, as will be discussed below. It must be understood that underlying that absence of violence, deep and structural conditions were being built towards the explosion of the conflict. Those conditions include poverty, underdevelopment, hunger, the lack of social integration, the lack of a rule of law, democracy, transparency, and accountability, among many others. Therefore, in order to build structural peace, a long term, integral scope should be addressed. A part of this is included in the core topic of this dissertation: the social construction of perceptions and values about violence and peace. Finding out the nature of such process is crucial from the viewpoint I have now emphasized. But there are more issues to be addressed before I review the Mexican case.

Peace and Conflict Resolution

Finding how to solve conflicts implies first a correct assessment of what causes them. Harbom, Högladh, & Wallensteen, (2006) conducted a quantitative study to analyze conflicts in the world, their evolution, and behavior. The authors explained that in 2005 there were 31 ongoing conflicts throughout the planet. In contrast to the previous year, nine conflicts restarted, out of which four included action from new rebel groups. Since the end of World War II, there is record of 231 armed conflicts; 121 of those have taken place after the Cold War. In 40 of this last category, there have been peace

agreements; many of them were part of a peace process, which contained more than one agreement. There have been conflicts over government and conflicts over territory. In conflict over governments the key issue is elections. Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska (2010) explained that by the year 2010 there are more than 30 violent conflicts in the planet; some of them have lasted for over 10 years, and 25% of them have lasted over 25 years. The website of Global Security (GlobalSecurity.org, 2011), corroborates that information periodically, and demonstrates that conflicts of different kinds prevail throughout the entire world. That site, by the way, categorizes the Mexican conflict as a drug war existing from 2006 up until today. Therefore, it could be said that solving conflicts around the globe should be one of the most important priorities.

Solving conflicts can be approximated through politics and negotiations of the issues. For example, Derouen, Lea, and Wallenstein (2009) examined and discussed civil war peace agreements duration from 1989 to 2005. The center of their text is that current theory says that the more power sharing provisions are included in an agreement, the more it will last. However, if these power sharing provisions are costly to a government, and difficult to implement it will damage the duration of the agreement, because the government will seek to renegotiate, and rebels might have more incentives for pre-emptive attacks. The crucial point is that conceding too much for the rebels will not let the agreement live long, or the rebels will abandon the agreement because of the failure to implement those difficult provisions. Asking too much from one of the parts will cause that they will not have enough incentives to maintain an agreement, as the empirical evidence from this study showed. Military integration, according to the research,

(integrating rebels to the military), reduces the risk of peace failure if a formal agreement is signed. The type of conflict in which this article is focused, nevertheless, is related to rebels, governments, and civil wars. The applications for the Mexican case are only in terms of possible negotiations with cartels, as discussed below. Most of these kinds of texts focus on rational choice theories as regards to peacebuilding or peacemaking, in contrast to social constructivist theories that go beyond actors' interests. This would be fine, perhaps, if all actors were rational at all times. Hope (2011), however, has said that the Mexican cartels are neither rational nor unitarian actors (meaning, they can be very diverse organizations with several command lines and channels). Therefore, rational choice theories can sometimes be useful, but not necessarily in all cases. Flores and Nooruddin (2009), on the other hand, conducted an investigation on why an economy must go well for a post conflict stability to endure, and for a peaceful politics era. In that sense, a circle of interactions is formed between economy and stability. The first helps the second, and the second helps the first. That is essentially because the conflict produces economic problems, but these in turn can generate more civil conflict.

Negotiating with cartels has been a source of controversy in Mexico. Chabat (2010) explained that at certain phases of the development of criminal organizations, their power is so vast that negotiations become impossible. Therefore, Chabat said, the frontal all-out war against cartels was inevitable. More authors such as Guerrero (2011) or Hope (2011) have argued in favor of using dissuasive instead of punitive strategies. Cockayne and Lupel (2009) did address the topic of possible negotiations with criminal organizations in the Bosnian case as will be covered below.

Peace has been also addressed from the perspective of ethnopolitical disputes, and other areas as applied to many places in the world. Öberg, Möller, and Wallensteen (2009) focused on preventive measures on the escalatory phase prior to the outbreak of war. The authors developed a numeric dataset about data on conflict prevention in 67 ethnic conflicts. Per their view, evaluating different prevention measures can help determine the best potential strategies. The authors found that preventive activity is not very common in its use. The preventive stage is the one in which third parties such as some European nations or the UN use intervention and facilitation, not coercive strategies. Mexico is almost not focused on prevention, and my argument is that it should, mostly using the experiences of other countries such as Bosnia, Iraq or Afghanistan. Öberg, Möller, and Wallensteen (2009) found that prevention measures such as the diplomatic have positive effects towards de-escalating conflict, while inducements (vg. economic rewards for laying down arms) generally not. Third parties, however, only tend to intervene on those countries that show a most extensive risk of war. The value of this article is that previous studies focus on a case base level. This text, instead, compares 67 different cases. One interesting result: some of the crises that deserve most attention (as in Asia or Africa) do not get it, while some other conflicts such as Europe or the Middle East get most attention. Same goes by region. Results show that taking preventive measures is no panacea. It does not prevent conflict. But this does not mean that taking some preventive measures could not have a positive effect on diminishing the potential impact that conflict has. Relief efforts diminish the likelihood of crisis escalating to conflict or war, as the study showed. This type of texts demonstrate the importance of

studying international issues to imagine possibilities that could be adapted to the Mexican case, although understanding that things are different in that country. To that regard, Pearson, (2001) discussed several approaches on conflict resolution in ethnopolitical disputes. The discussion compares a grassroots approach versus elite agreements, and identity versus an instrumental nature of agreements. Other factors are also contrasted such as the need of pre-bargaining, the degree of dialogue, the involvement of officials, or civil society participants. The article used a comparative case methodology. The findings point to the need of grassroots participation in the negotiation process. This article is important because it is evidence based. In Mexico there is an insufficient evidence based research regarding topics as peace. This dissertation is a contribution in that direction.

The next element I will explore is the question of how gendered policy may impact upon policy outcomes regarding the subject of peacebuilding.

Politics and Policy: The Role of Women within Peace Issues

The topic of gender, as it relates to peace, has been addressed by Welton and Tastsoglou (2002), who conducted interviews with peace activists regarding the need to incorporate women's voices on the topic of peacebuilding. The authors argued that if women are heard, it would be seen that they have something important to say about issues such as nuclear weapons, or others. The core theme of these interviews is peace and social justice, as a complement to the integral peace approach that I maintain through this dissertation. These interviews also show disenchantment on the interviewees about the amount of wars that have taken place despite the activism for peace by several actors.

The interviews related a grassroots gendered organization for peace, a web of women fighting towards that purpose. These activists, without any scientific background or support, believe that “peace-making” starts at home (p. 119). They fight for equal representation of women in international negotiations, such as the UN committees. Regarding that matter, there is a UN Council resolution passed in the year 2000, number 1325, which says that women should be increasingly represented at all decision making levels. Guerrero and, Ballén (2009) documented the formation of a *Women's International League For Peace and Freedom* section in Mexico, a women oriented movement fighting for equal rights for the gender. The article raised the point of how women have been marginalized by violence and poverty in that country. The text, although not academic, argued for more participation of women in the efforts of peace in Mexico.

These ideas are scientifically supported by various research projects (Dolan, 2001, 2004; Hannagan & Larimer, 2010; Kathelene, 1995; Keiser, Wilkins, Meier, & Holland, 2002; Moloney, 2007; Naff, 2010) addressing two core questions: (a) How well represented women are in bureaucratic bodies? And (b) how does that representation affect public policy? I will summarize the conclusions these authors achieved, making a connection to the Mexican case.

The first of the two questions was studied by Dolan (2004), Keiser, Wilkins, Meier, and Holland (2002), and Moloney (2007), among others (Naff, 2010; Poloni-Staudinger, & Orbals, 2011). These quantitative studies concluded that there has been a notable increase in women participation in the public service in the US, and in many

other countries around the world. Some of them, however, found that at the municipal and state level, women participation does not correlate with influential positions in order to fulfill the same responsibilities as men (Dolan, 2004). Sometimes they are even put in “stereotypical feminine areas” (p. 300), such as education, health or social services, that is, less powerful positions. However, at the federal level, as this text demonstrated, that changes substantially. Women are not placed in token positions as a result of affirmative action, but at high responsibility levels, equally as men. Furthermore, women perceive themselves as more influential than men do. This of course, speaks about the top of American bureaucracy. Regarding the Mexican case, however, Stevenson (2004) examined qualitatively what the impact of feminist civil society movements and NGOs has been as reflected by gendered policies in Mexico and reached not very similar conclusions. The author showed how women have increased their representativeness in Mexico. The writer’s argument challenged the idea that the more democratic a society is, the more gender equity is achieved as an automatic principle. A question Stevenson wanted to answer is how the role of *Machismo* is affected through women participation in politics and policy. The author found that in Mexico’s public administration and legislative branch there has been a substantial increase of women participation. As a result of this, some gender issues have been advanced, but those are mostly symbolic. Reaching deeper into the issues, Stevenson (2004) found that it has been the civil society movements the ones which have truly pushed gender equity issues. Therefore, the author concluded that alliances between women who work in the public sector and women who work in non-institutionalized politics must take place in order to foster gender issues.

Machismo, prevails in Mexico, which means that the need for women representativeness, in order to foster peacebuilding issues, might encounter deep obstacles in the Mexican society.

But the main question remains: How does the fact that women are more participative in public policy have an impact in the quality or the nature of policy designs, and secondly, how can that be of use towards this dissertation and research project as applied to the Mexican case?

Kathelene (1995), on one hand and Hannagan and Larimer (2010) on the other, examined two different angles of possible effects that women representativeness could have upon policymaking. Kathelene (1995) presented different visions between women and men (specifically in the Congress of the state of Colorado) regarding crime as a concept and what should be done about it. Hannagan and Larimer (2010), in turn, dealt with what the different processes and strategies are between women and men in decision making. Both qualitative studies concluded that behavior and outcomes differ between women and men, when participating in politics and policy making. Hannagan and Larimer (2010) showed that men inside groups composed of men behave in a different ways than when women participate in the group, and that women and men use different strategies in decision making process. Women have better strategies to reach a median point. Women have a more democratic negotiating style, whereas men have a more authoritative style. Women show more collaboration and more cooperation, which is reflected in the outcomes. (Note: this does not mean that every woman or man would behave in such a way; the study just demonstrated a tendency that is consistent with

previous literature). According to Hannagan and Larimer (2010) this is due to different ethos: women are more collaborative; men are more competitive. Nevertheless, they both seem to adapt to context. Regarding criminality, Kathelene (1995) proved that men tend to see people in more individualist terms. Consistent with that, men tend to see criminals as responsible for their own paths. They are autonomous decision makers and they are where they have chosen to be. That has important repercussions. Women, conversely, see criminals as people, immerse in a social environment. Previous literature (corroborated Kathelene's study) said that men have a tendency to think in justice orientation terms, more consistent with universal principles, whereas women are more concerned in helping others, with more case orientation thinking. According to the results of Kathelene's (1995) study, men tend to be more instrumental, view people as self-centered self-serving and are consistent with objective thinking. This leads them to protect individual rights and guarantee invasion of freedom. Women are more contextual; they think in terms of links and connection, interdependence, more relation oriented. Kathelene also showed that women are more specific, focus on connections and people. Crime is seen as a social problem that needs such solutions. Men go more punitive. Women see society as responsible. Solutions, to women, lie in education and better opportunities for people. Men, in contrast, tend to think in more punitive terms.

Although such studies are far from conclusive, they suggest potential lines of research. The sixth research question of this dissertation explores such matters in the following terms: First, women might have provided different answers to the questions in the interviews I conducted. Secondly, the view that is presented by both studies

(Kathelene, 1995; Hannagan and Larimer, 2010) point to the direction that women might think more consistently with the integral perspective of peace, as they tend to encourage social cohesion through education, opportunities, collaboration, and negotiation.

This dissertation could have found some evidence to determine whether Mexican women socially construct their perceptions regarding violence and peace in a different way than men. The issue matters as it might have influenced the final conclusions and their implications for social change. Although the results of the dissertation, presented in Chapter 4, do not confirm or deny the previous research, they point, indeed, towards the need of further research on the topic of gendered public policy for peacebuilding in Mexico. I will next examine the topic of mass media in relation to peacebuilding.

Media Peacebuilding and Peace Journalism

Some of the questions about the subject of peace deal with the role that mass media play regarding perceptions about the existing situation, whether the media can actively promote peace, and how.

According to recent investigations in which I have been engaged (Meschoulam, 2012b), there is a statistically significant correlation between stress and trauma symptoms among Mexicans, and the degree to which they have been exposed to mass media. In other words, the team in which I work and I have demonstrated that mass media do have a negative effect upon the mental health of the population, and more so during violent times. This is consistent to other investigations that have been conducted in other places of the world. An important study on this topic was carried by Cho, Boyle, Keum, Shevy, Mcleod, Shah, and Pan (2003). These researchers sought to analyze what were the

audience reactions to the media coverage during the 9/11 events. The study was based on the theoretical framework which maintains that TV broadcasting is more emotional and produces very different results in audiences than print news. The study was conducted to present evidence to support that assertion. That is called *narrative emotionality*, and includes visual images, tempo, and rhythm, news stories, personalities, dramatization of human emotions, and live broadcasting of events. The article explored the differences between TV and newspapers because of those factors. Emotional elements in coverage produce emotional responses on viewers. These emotional responses are conceived by the authors as later developed effects (as opposed to immediate), namely secondary emotion. Conclusions include that the greater exposure to TV news, the stronger negative emotional response was.

Besides my team's recent contribution, the debate about the role of the media in the coverage of violence has been raised in Mexico in the past few years. Vega-Montiel (2010) talked about violence against women in that country and the role that media have in representing the gender. The author defined several kinds of violence: physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, and economical violence, labor violence, and community violence. According to this author, mass media do have a responsibility in eradicating violence against women. They are, the author said, a source of education, (formal and informal), and they have a central task in the search for solutions. International organizations have issued recommendations to mass media in terms of how they reproduce a sexist stereotype, and they should promote respect and equality, towards peace in nations. There is a task in promoting non-stereotyped images

of men and women, and should erase behavioral models that generate violence. The author stressed their investigation as related to agenda setting and the way that media construct a discourse of violence. Media do have a role in their power of building beliefs and opinions, which are then structured as social norms, according to the author. Media therefore are capable of transforming reality. The research was a content analysis in Mexican television, including advertisement. Although my dissertation will not cover specifically the topic of gender violence, the general ideas that Vega-Montiel (2010) provided can be adapted to the way Mexicans are generating their understanding of violence in general, and the role that the mass media could be playing to build such perceptions of reality.

According to Reyes-Heroles (2010), Mexico's situation can be compared to terrorism. This is because there are dozens of circumstances in which human heads are left inside bags in the middle of the roads, dead men hung in bridges or people being killed in the middle of the streets. There is, as the author said, a terrorist strategy on the side of criminal organizations. The author accepted that Mexican media are not responsible, but they do play a role in reporting terrorism. The problem with Reyes-Heroles's (2010) text is that the author did not define properly what terrorism is –he used a common dictionary definition- and therefore, he did not relate in which precise ways the media do play a role. Terrorism is not any kind of violence, but a specific category of violence (Gerwehr & Hubbard, 2007). In this dissertation, terrorism is understood as the psychological manipulation of a violent act in order to produce a state of massive panic and sense of helplessness (Moghaddam, 2007) in audiences that have only an indirect

contact with the violent act (through the media, traditional and nontraditional, such as YouTube). Such act is intended to produce a change in opinions, decisions, attitudes, and/or behaviors. When a cartel sends a car-bomb into a police headquarters, or when a criminal organization not only kills its opponents, but uploads a video in YouTube, about how it is cutting the bodies in pieces in order to convey a message to broad audiences, then violence can be assessed as terrorism. This has important implications for my project, as it was assumed that at least part of what people perceive is gained or acquired through traditional and nontraditional mass media. The extent to which that was a correct assessment is one of the aspects that were explored in the present study.

The value of the Reyes-Heróles's (2010) article is that it explains what was done in Colombia some years ago. "We prefer to lose a note than a life," was the Colombian motto when media representatives signed a pact in 1999 (p. 6). Summoned by the Facultad de Comunicación Social y Periodismo of Universidad de Sabana in Bogotá, many media managers decided they had a common objective: to raise the quality and assume responsibility for the coverage and diffusion of violent acts in their country. The proposal included the commitment for each medium to write an ethical code with norms and behavior standards. This idea is based upon the fact that media are a service for society, not a business. The general codes agreed upon in this pact include: to report violent events in true and opportune fashion, but also in a responsible and balanced way, not to present rumors as facts, contextualize events as a primary criterion rather than fast reporting of news, establishing definite criterions as to when to publish images, pictures

and videos so as not to provoke repulsion, contagion, or indifference, and the use of a discourse that fosters pacific coexistence among Colombians.

I have also contributed to this debate in Mexico (Meschoulam, 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2012a). My position has been that as long as the mechanics of violent acts follow the pattern of terrorist attacks, even though the motivation of cartels is not necessarily ideological, then there can be a psychological manipulation of violence in order to produce a generalized feeling of stress and terror. In such instances, whether terrorist or quasi-terrorist attacks, the mass media, as well as the non-traditional media such as social networks, are playing a crucial role in the reproduction and retransmission of mass panic. To that effect, I suggested that media must be trained in order to be aware about different possibilities for the coverage of violence, while fully respecting their freedom of expression. Some examples of these alternatives include de-centralizing or de-mainstreaming the drug related violence agenda, or providing news with international discussions about how some other countries have dealt and succeeded in the combat against organized crime. There are many options that Mexican media could learn to implement. As of this writing, however, this is an ongoing discussion in Mexico. That is why the subject of peace journalism becomes relevant.

Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick (2006) said that peace journalism exists when conflicts are covered with the focus not only on the violence and aggression, but on what caused the situation to be the way it is, and what potential solutions can be fostered. According to these authors, mass media should not address only the fighting or the violent aspects of a war zone or region, but they should assess the subjacent structures

that provoked the conflictive circumstances, and stress on what should be done to create a different scenario. Such perspective is also endorsed by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP, 2010). This institution published an international report covering violence and peace broadcasting. The study is quantitative and is based on the idea that if people really wish to have peace, then the media must cover what creates peace. Peace is important, the report said, because it is the precondition before a society can achieve anything else it desires. That was the original objective of peace studies, which were born by the 1950s. Consistent with the literature review offered above, the IEP argued about the strong relationship between economic development and peace. According to the text, the connection between violence and economics is bidirectional. On one hand, violence is a direct or indirect consequence of economic underdevelopment. On the other hand, when an environment is perceived as violent, the investment flow decreases. The study compared the Global Peace Index (GPI) with the Media Tenor's database, covering news and information programs around the globe. Iraq is at the bottom of the GPI and New Zealand is at the top. The study contrasted the level of GPI that a country has against the news coverage of violence and determined whether it was accurate or not. Then the study analyzed whether media covered the structures of peace. The study does consider the fact that media is based on "a set of market dynamics that include newsworthiness, consumer demand, timeliness and the uniqueness of the event" (p.4). For example: Israel is an outlier. It ranks as 144 on the GPI, and yet, the coverage on violence was only 40%. The rest of news reports were on state visits, peace negotiations, and other stories. The same happens with Sudan, which in spite of being ranked as 145 of the GPI, it exhibited

plenty of coverage on news such as humanitarian missions, peace negotiations, diplomacy, among others. According to the results, United States TV networks broadcast more violence than other countries, and in other relatively peaceful countries, violent events tend to get the majority of international coverage. The structures of peace (such as education, functioning of government, business environment, flow of information, low levels of corruption, treatment of the rights of the other, relationships with neighbors, distribution of resources), are mostly not reported. Coverage of places such as the Middle East tends to focus on violent events more than in histories of peace. The study reveals that only 1.6% of examined stories are positive stories. In this dissertation I will ask participants about the process in which they have built their perceptions about violence and peace possibilities in Mexico. Therefore, I assume that news coverage will arise. These kinds of studies help me understand what has been investigated elsewhere.

Once that mass media is assumed as a role player in terms of contributing to the generation of stress and trauma (Cho et al., 2003; Paton, & Violanti, 2007), some considerations must also be given regarding the work media can develop in terms of assisting peacebuilding in a society. This question has been addressed before by authors as Terzis (2008), and Adam and Holguin (2003). Through experiments and case studies, the conclusions are similar. The authors argued that the role of journalism is to expose deeper complexities to war than simplicities such as “this versus that”, or goodies versus baddies, in which one side wins and the other one loses (Adam & Holguin, 2003), or that journalists can *de-mainstream* the binary oppositions that conflicts generate (Terzis, 2008). It has a deep application to the topic of the dissertation, as I assume that part of the

problem as it relates to the social construction in perceptions, is the mainstream mass media which is dedicated to cover the violent events, very distant to what Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick (2006) suggested as peace journalism. Using the argument of Terzis (2008), might initially suggest that part of the coverage should *de-mainstream* violent news and events and also focus on covering the state of peace structures in Mexico. Adam and Holguin (2003) said the following: the journalist cannot be fully objective as she only watches a fraction, not the whole battle; the reporter cannot be but reporting a partiality of the event. Sometimes that distorts truth. The journalist is involved in the conflict, as some events are generated precisely so they can be reported. Reporters are not outside of but involved in the dynamics of events. Flores (2011) documented this fact with a mixed method study conducted on Mexican reporters covering violent incidents. The investigation used validated surveying instruments to determine stress and trauma symptoms among Mexican journalists. According to this study, the prevalence of PTSD for reporters covering violence in Mexico has increased so much between 2006 and 2011 that it now overcomes that of the reporters who have covered regions such as the Middle East, Bosnia, or Africa. That is why in certain countries, some media, have decided not to report violence in the name of peacebuilding (Adam & Holguin, 2003). For example, Bush Radio in Cape Town has been involved in mediation since 1988. Vigilante gangs were killing and terrorizing residents, and the Bush editors decided not to report those killings, which had become routine. Their justification was that the killings were no longer news, and they could play an active role in transforming the “warrior” culture. Another initiative in Canada has to do with media educating people on conflict

resolution, while maintaining the “entertaining” trait. The role of journalists, according to Adam and Holguin’s (2003) view, is developing a thorough understanding of the conflict and convey it to the public, a proactive media peacebuilding. That goes beyond reporting war and skips into being an active agent of peace. This information is useful as anecdotal data, but is not supported on scientific evidence. The value of these texts, however, lies on the imagination that these examples can detonate towards thinking what the role of media is in the social construction of perceptions. As described in my research questions, in this dissertation I explored what space the mass media occupy in the interviewee’s understanding and construction of reality.

The role of Community Activism for Social Change

The final section regarding the subject of peace is the role of community activism and social change and how it could impact the area of peacebuilding in general. Alinsky (1971) based his writing upon his own experiences as community organizer. He developed a number of tactics to build organizations, and participated actively towards social transformation. Mayo (2004) explained that his proposals are confrontational and controversial but effective, as he begins from the understanding that conflicts of interest are inherent in social relations and must be engaged. Mayo explained the influence of Alinsky in GB, and detailed a number of critiques that Alinsky’s text has received: (a) It overemphasizes the use of conflict strategies instead of viewing a wider strategy with several options, (b) the strategies were designed to increase efficiency, but they do not guarantee democratic participation, (c) the nature of some of this rules such as

personalizing the target can also be criticized, (d) the proposal is intrasystemic as Alinsky (1971) said he wants to fight for the true democratic free market society.

Alinsky (1971) said that there are four phases in social activism: (a) Initiation, (b) specification (the need to translate the issues into specific demands), (c) expansion (rallying for support), and (d) entrance (to formal agenda). In Mexico, community activism regarding drug related violence is only at the initiation stage, but there is a lot to be learnt from this particular approximation. The violent situation in the country has produced a large social activism movement called *Movimiento por la paz, con justicia y la dignidad* (2012; Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity), centered on the victims of violence and promoting a change of agenda in the way that the government is fighting criminal organizations.

Alinsky (1971) believed in the power of grassroots insurgency to counteract structural disadvantages. Power, to Alinsky, meant the ability to act and participate successfully at the local, citywide, and even national level as to decision making processes. These actions could foster social change, in which the full potential of people with dignity, security, happiness, and peace, could be fulfilled (Miller, 2010). Marquez's (1990) case study, however, showed in the 1990s the limits of these ideas, mostly when these movements are too local and do not consider the national environment (national alliances), and more importantly, free market issues that could act against minorities and the poor. Specific programs to counteract the market decisions must be designed, Marquez wrote. Some critics say Alinsky and his followers are indeed too conservative as they do not seek for radical economic change, but only specific and winnable issues (not

structural problems) which lead them to compromise and reach agreements. Marquez (1990) explained the different schools of thought on the topic of community activism: (a) The pluralist school believes that individuals are independent agents and decision makers. Thus, they are free to participate in local politics when they believe it's proper. There is no group or class pattern, and organizations dissipate when the issue ends. That school is based on a capitalist economy, and gets critiques from other schools, (b) the elitist school believes that community power is actually constrained by elites who have more capacity to contain the effects of mobilizations at the community level. Elites have the power of demoralizing the poor, and it makes insurgency difficult and impossible, (c) neomarxists maintain that the political-economic order is power determined. Authorities thus, collaborate with upper classes and resist change, and (d) radical urban analysts like Alinsky think that minority political power lies not only in criticizing, but understanding the extent to which urban political organizations can increase power (participation) of the poor and better their lives. It trusts on grassroots organization and action, so it can actually democratize local politics. Insurgency comes at neighborhoods, which self-manage. To demonstrate these theses, the author probed the case of the IAF in Texas, which pursued these actions. Out of it, the author concluded that the IAF was very successful, but some lessons and critiques must be drawn. Alinsky fails, Marquez (1990) said, in formulating a specific political strategy to counteract economic processes and market decisions, thus its power is limited. In other words, this criticism goes back to the core issue: Alinsky's proposals are intra-systemic. As Obama (1988) said, the problem is not the lack of ideas or alternatives, but the lack of power to implement them. Only

organizing a community empowers them along a vision. There needs to be neighborhood empowerment and grassroots movements. Community organizing focuses thus on power. Alinsky (1971) shared the vision that change comes from below. Schutz (2011) emphasizing Alinsky's argument, said that progressive forces must integrate into their knowledge the experiences and power lessons of the less privileged, because otherwise, they will lack enough information to actually value social transformation and empowerment. The most important learning: they must be a strong force, so that they will be taken into consideration by other actors. There are natural conflicts for power and resources, and these organizations enter into the realm of those conflicts. Public realm under this view is marked by inequality and danger. According to Schutz (2011) the public sphere is filled with conflicts over power and resources; the actors are self-interested and should not trust more than they should. Organizing groups means taking all of that into consideration.

For this dissertation, I assumed that in Mexico, the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about the violent situation and about peace possibilities, is already impacting and will continue to have an effect upon social and community activism movements. Consideration to those these elements informed my questions, my sample, and my analysis of participants' answers. Two participants were purposively selected to be social activists in order to explore in what ways they influence and are influenced by the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities for Mexico. I will now examine the Mexican case.

Studying Violence and Peacebuilding in Mexico

In this section I assess the topic of organized crime violence and the many perspectives through which it has been addressed in the specialized literature, as well as the subject of peacebuilding related to the Mexican case. This is precisely one of the areas in which I have detected an important gap. Up until this dissertation, there were not enough research scientific projects that could help understand in what ways Mexicans have arrived at a certain mentality or social construction of reality that could explain their perceptions or values related to violence and peace. There is instead, abundant literature based on anecdotal facts, or historical explanations about the growth of organized criminal organizations and their power in the country.

There are some examples of authors who have directed their research towards the political history of OC in Mexico. According to Snyder and Duran's (2009) two case comparison (Colombia and Mexico), the Mexican case responds to a historical evolution in which the state protected and sponsored the "criminal rackets" (p.61), or criminal organizations for years. In their view, therefore, there is no direct connection between illegality and violence, because, as it happened in Mexico, illegality was abundant all over the country, but it was sponsored and protected by the state, which resulted in a low violence condition. These authors said that three circumstances influenced towards the rise in the generalized violence: (a) The monopoly that the PRI held was broken after it was democratically defeated, (b) administrative reforms, which decentralized power, making more difficult for the cartels to negotiate with a single entity, and (c) there was an

influx of Colombian traffickers due to the historic conditions that this country experienced in its turn. As a result, cartels have disaggregated and multiplied.

Perea (2008) said that violence is always the product of contextual and historical conditions. To this author, Mexico used to be a most peculiar instance, which had shown very low or attenuated violence, even with delinquent juvenile groups. To demonstrate this, the author qualitatively compared Central American gangs that migrated to the US, against Mexican gangs in similar conditions in Tijuana. His conclusion is that there are three connectors that strengthen the Mexican social tissue and aid in containing the development of violence: (a) The Mexican state and negotiations with it, (b) cultural symbols such as the Death Day ritual, and (c) the Virgin of Guadalupe and all the religiosity that this symbol involves. This attenuated violence condition might have, however, changed after Perea's investigation. The reasons why this has happened has been the purpose of different texts that I will review next.

Chabat (2010) studied President Calderon's war against drug cartels, arguing that although the results have been poor, the war was inevitable. To present his argument, the author examined various alternatives that the Mexican president could have taken in order to fight OC. Before doing that, Chabat placed responsibility on the PRI governments, which tolerated drug cartels and the *Pax Narcotica* (narcotics peace; the name given by Chabat to the state of absence of violence during the PRI era, in which cartels operated at their leisure [p.1]). According to Chabat, there is evidence of complicity between government authorities and drug cartels that goes back for decades. The state was not always promoting this activity, but the state did tolerate it through

complicity. During the 1980s and 1990s, the government simulated a fight against OC, and maintained a discourse that expressed the need to combat cartels. According to Chabat (2010), there were pacts between authorities and the four main drug organizations, and violence was kept at a minimum or tolerable level. Thus, the power of cartels increased.

As soon as he was in office, President Calderon launched a frontal campaign against OC. Some have suggested that this was due to political reasons, but Chabat (2010) argued that the actual motive was that cartels were becoming too powerful and were becoming increasingly violent. The goal of the campaign against drug dealers was to reduce the effects of OC and regain the monopoly of force for the state, in order to make life livable for common citizens. This meant making criminal organizations return to Lupshka's predatory phase (as cited in Chabat, 2010, p. 9). In the predatory phase, according to Lupshka's classification, organized crime does not challenge the state and is liable to be controlled by police. To do that, criminal organizations must be fragmented and weakened. To Chabat, there was no viable alternative but to make crime face the rule of law. Chabat argued that there were, in fact, three options: (a) tolerating crime, as in the past, thus facing the expansion of the problem; (b) combating crime with the instruments that the state possesses, facing an increase in violence; and (c) modifying laws or the state and its institutions in order to make it capable of enforcing the law (p. 11). This last option was not viable, in Chabat's perspective. Therefore, he concluded that there was no choice but to combat crime and face a raise in violence. The population of

Mexico in 2009 was in favor of the strategy according to polls presented by Chabat (p. 12).

This argument, nevertheless, needs to be contrasted with current data, which shows that this approval has decreased to a point in which most Mexicans do not believe this strategy has been correct, nor do they think that the government has been successful in its fight against organized crime (Buendía & Laredo, 2010; Consulta Mitofsky, 2010, 2011). These polls might explain why the cartels have been prone to implement what I have called terrorist strategies, or *quasi-terrorism* (Meschoulam, 2010a; 2011).

This idea is directly connected to the following: In a journalistic recount, Bussey (2009) explained that although Mexico has been seen as a *failed state*, that term does not reflect what happens in reality; the country follows a normal life in most of its regions, only around 2% of deaths are civilians caught in cross-fire, the most important fights are between cartels and drug gangs. Bussey also wrote that 95% of murders in Mexico are executed with American weapons, and Obama's administration has committed to help and not to be the adverse effect in its relationships with Mexico. What Bussey said is important in terms of what actually takes place in the streets in contrast to how that is perceived by the society at large. It is precisely there -in the field of perceptions- where terrorist strategies are most effective. Up until now there is no research related to how Mexicans socially construct their perceptions about such organized criminal violence.

As I explained above, terrorism exists when there is a psychological manipulation of a violent act in order to produce a state of massive panic and sense of helplessness (Moghaddam, 2007). I argue (Meschoulam, 2011) that terrorist or quasi-terrorist

activities have taken place in Mexico with the purpose of producing a perception of loss and fear within broad masses of audiences. Examples of such activities include detonating grenades in public places, exploiting bomb cars against police stations, attacking journals and TV stations facilities, and uploading YouTube videos in which criminals are torturing army soldiers and then sending e-mails to national broadcasters who retake such images and build TV programs around them.

The conclusion that Chabat (2010) arrived at is not enthusiastic: The war against OC was inevitable, but might not be sustainable due to the persistence of corruption, human rights abuse, and the increase in violence that includes civilians. The main problem with Chabat's article is that it does not focus on any other alternative but those which he mentions. Combating crime with dissuasive instead of punitive strategies (Guerrero, 2011; Hope, 2011) and the use of efficient intelligence, is not talked about in this text.

As a natural effect, some discussions have taken place regarding what the true historical and political roots of organized criminal violence are. Zepeda (2010), for example, argued that the political violence in the state of Chihuahua has not been the responsibility of a single political party. Even when the government was out of the hands of the PRI, it was unable to contain criminal organizations. In fact, it was during Barrio Terrazas administration under the National Action Party (PAN) when feminicides deeply increased. Violence, as the author said, has notably incremented. Juarez is at the present of this writing one of the most dangerous cities of the world (CCSPJP, 2011; Gandiara, 2011), a place in which most of Mexican cartels concur and fight. The author failed,

however, to understand that the phenomenon as an integrated body of manifestations did start, though was sustained and contained during the PRI era (Snyder & Duran, 2007). Most of the cartels are not the product of solely what happens in Juarez, but the country as a whole.

After a literature review, Gutiérrez, Magdaleno del Río, and Yáñez (2010) concluded that violence can be physical, moral or psychological; it uses the force and causes damage. Organized Crime (OC) is understood by these authors as group of illicit activities performed by groups in seek of economical profit and a piece of social power, or as defined by the FBI: three or more people joined together, coordinated to commit a crime (Gutiérrez, Magdaleno del Río, & Yáñez, 2010). These authors tried to demonstrate through the content analysis of public documents, that the violence coming from organized crime is viewed by the public sector as failure to comply with the law. Violence in the government's perspective is equated to organized crime, which must be contrasted to Snyder and Duran's (2009) argument. According to the latter, in Mexico there were decades in which OC coexisted with a nonviolent atmosphere. Illegality does not immediately result, as Snyder and Duran (2009) demonstrated, in direct violence. That condition of a non-violent illegality, nevertheless, cannot be either understood as peace. As I have explained above the school of integral peace studies (Alger, 1987; 1991; Galtung, 1985; 2003) has argued that structural peace did not really exist in countries as Mexico, in spite of the nonviolent environment in which the government tolerated organized criminal activities.

Regarding the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and the roots of direct violence, Méndez and Berrueta (2010) studied the city of Juarez, as I said, one of the most dangerous place in the planet (CCSPJP, 2011). Arzate, Castillo, and García (2010) asking similar questions as Mendez and Berrueta (2010), conducted a qualitative investigation of 40 interviews in Mexican young people between 16 and 25 years from diverse social classes at the specific zone of Toluca, Mexico, among youth from different social classes. Whereas Mendez and Berrueta (2010) explore the material concept of *territoriality*, (the structural relation between spaces, and sense making through the social construction of those spaces: Culturally occupied space), Arzate, Castillo, and García (2010) found that material conditions do matter, but mostly as a network of exclusion and discrimination in which violence is constantly present as the key factor in participants' narrative. Arzate, Castillo, and García's (2010) main hypothesis was that poverty and violence are two distinct phenomena, but which are articulated in the same exclusion context. Consistent with the integral peace perspective (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985), the main argument of Arzate, Castillo, and García's (2010) text is that inequality is violence in itself, as a form of exploitation, exclusion, and discrimination.

Violence is conceptualized by Mendez y Berrueta (2010) in a broad sense, as well, but in a different scope: territorial de-structuration. Not physical violence, but the violence exerted by the structural normative system, the internationalization of capital processes. Although Mendez and Berrueta's study is very specific to Juarez, it adds to our integral view the element of territoriality, the idea of how international capitalism has played a role in generating a very concrete model of production that rips a place of its

cultural roots, thus generating the proper conditions for the flourishing of organized criminal activities. That has an impact upon the social construction of the human condition. Both texts (Arzate, Castillo, & García, 2010; Mendez & Berrueta, 2010), recognize that Mexico has been vulnerable to definitive material conditions that have affected subjectivity and a broader conception of violence. The opposite side, structural peace, should be therefore fostered if anyone at some point would want to see these conditions corrected from their roots (Alger, 1987).

Some authors have documented quantitatively the increase of violence in terms of the statistical increment in homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in Mexico. Escalante (2011) and more solidly, Merino (2011) have demonstrated that the military strategies conducted by the Mexican government have been responsible in increasing the levels of violence in the country. Other authors as Ovalle (2010) have addressed the issue from a different perspective. The attempt in this last case was to overcome what has been written in statistics and numbers, seeking to explore the symbolic dimension of deaths associated to drug trafficking, and the way in which this might be interpreted. The study analyses a sample of images and videos that have circulated through Mexican media. The argument is that the victim is made invisible while the borders between victim and perpetrator are very blur. The author said that the language of violence and the use of images have been trivialized in Mexico. The text penetrated into how the OC transcends the killing of people into something else. Ovalle wanted to put on the table the need to restore the dignity of the victims. The article does refer to the use of messages being transmitted through images and victims, but does not penetrate into the social psychology and the

effects this may have upon secondary audiences. The emphasis that the author made was on human dignity, on the faces that are lost, and the names that are not told. In Mexico, the author said, there is a violence that does not remain satisfied with just killing, but dehumanizes the bodies. My argument (Meschoulam, 2010a, 2011, 2012a, 2012b) is that the consequences of such behavior are not only symbolic. When criminal organizations seek to destroy the human body of their victims and then place them in public roads, avenues, or hang them from bridges, they want their criminal act to be highlighted and broadcast by the media, so that it can then produce a sense of helplessness within broad audiences. That this is having an impact on Mexicans' perceptions is currently unquestioned (Buendía & Laredo, 2010; Consulta Mitofsky, 2010, 2011). Finding out the process through which such perceptions are socially constructed was thus, one of the purposes of my investigation.

Perez-Zavala (2010) wrote an essay seeking to answer how new imaginary significations that citizens have constructed have an effect in the context of current violence in Mexico. Most importantly, the author asked what citizens can do regarding the climate of violence. The roots of the problems in Mexico, the author said, lie in the political and economic system of Mexico. The breach in the political system has been exacerbated after the elections of 2006 in which the process was deeply questioned by society. After Calderon brought the army to the streets two things were evident: (a) The inability of the government to fight against organized crime, and (b) the appearance of an uncontrollable wave of violence throughout the country. According to Perez-Zavala in wars between states there are certain rules that are respected on both bands. However,

when it comes to the fight against crime and wars between cartels there is no mercy at all. This author argued that cartels are composed in big part of ex-police members or even of active police members. It could be said that the vision of Perez-Zavala is slanted because the writer assumes that president Calderon got the power through an electoral fraud, something that has never been proven,. The central argument, although without scientific demonstration, is that a social citizenship is being built and it will positively impact on future outcomes.

Some specialists have started addressing the topic of drug trafficking and its impact upon violence since several years ago. In a presentation with practitioners and members of the civil society, Benitez (2009) quantitatively through the use of statistics and geographical location of events, demonstrated the increase of activities of cartels through the years in various zones of the country that include the northern coasts and the north of the country, all the borders, now including Michoacán and Quintana Roo, and increasingly Central America. General drug consumption has not importantly increased except for cocaine in the case of Mexico and amphetamines in Central America, but the levels of violence have indeed increased. The document established as well, the increment in arms trafficking between the US and Mexico and Central America, arguing that as their operations grow, cartels need arms to fight against other organizations and the government. The levels of violence and regional activities by the cartels have also been continually documented by Guerrero (2011), who has showed that the increase in the number of violent municipalities in the country has been a constant throughout Calderon's administration.

Regarding the specific case of Mexico City, which is the city in which the present study was conducted, Vite-Perez (2010), has explained that in this capital there is a segregation of identities due to the marginalization and separation of communities. There is a vast predominance of irregularity and illegality, which in turn has contributed to both, peripheration (human activities in peripheral areas of the city) and segmentation, in contrast to a social cohesion and integration (Galtung, 1985). As a result, under those circumstances in which there is economic deprivation, there can be an increase in violence and criminality, causing that its inhabitants adapt to the environment by segregating themselves physically, moving to fortified structures and constructions, and by abandoning public spaces. Vite-Perez (2010) said that government intervention might consist of fostering social links by promoting public spaces in which the social tissue can be reconstructed. Some proposals include collaboration projects between the public and the private sector to recuperate public spaces as one of the strategies. The historical center is only one example within the city in which this has started to occur.

There were, nevertheless, no qualitative studies concerning organized crime related violence in Mexico City, and more specifically, the way in which this specific type of violence might be having an impact upon people's perceptions and social construction of values about peace. This is what this dissertation was all about.

Comparing and Contrasting Organized Crime in Mexico to Other Places: The Need to Study Different Areas of the World

The rise of violence in Mexico leads me inevitably to address the subject of organized crime. The purpose of this section is to provide more information on how

organized crime (OC) has been studied in different areas of the world in order to understand more on this crucial topic related to peacelessness in Mexico, how it has impacted upon violence, and in what ways this theme may emerge during the interviews. An additional consideration: this dissertation did not seek to research organized crime as a phenomenon occurring inside the selected neighborhood, but how participants perceive and conceive such phenomena, and their effect on peace possibilities for the country. In that way, this section offers more in-depth data so that the concept of organized criminal violence can be better understood, and then related to how participants socially construct their ideas about what it is and how this connects to peace possibilities for Mexico.

Organized criminal violence, or organized crime related violence is understood in this dissertation as that specific category of violence associated with criminal organizations, either as a result of the government combating these organizations, as the product of them fighting between themselves, or as the result of them performing aggressive or unlawful activities against members of society (Cockayne & Lupel, 2009).

Understanding what the risk factors for the rise of OC are, matters in determining what public policies best serve towards containing the phenomenon. Albanese (2001) proposed a systematic analysis of opportunity factors in an organized crime environment, through estimating the true harm potential of organized crime in a region. Risk assessment must prioritize these areas: (a) Improvement of data collection, (b) team approach to gather information, (c) identify common elements in OC groups, (d) parameters of risk assessment of OC, and (d) connecting risk assessment to law and policy in order to determine the true size of OC in the country. The proposal of this

author is to anticipate, investigate, and prevent, utilizing different sources of information such as offenders, victims, and police agencies. The article also discussed three types of OC: illicit goods, illicit services, and infiltration or abuse of legitimate businesses. Other authors (Curtis, Gibbs, & Miró, 2004) have spoken about which nations are more hospitable to organized crime. Although the studied cases are not directly related to Mexico, one of the most important jobs would be adapting such issues to the Mexican situation. For example, one of the conditions that make that criminal organizations proliferate in certain countries is weak police departments. Mackenzie, and Hamilton-Smith (2011) have emphasized the need to use policing strategies to combat criminal organizations. Following that line, Mohar (2010) talked about an evaluation conducted to determine the value of a program that was carried out with the Querétaro (a very important Mexican city) Police Department. Mohar's (2010) study shows the need of instruments to measure and evaluate what is being done with security forces. Mohar's study exhibited a valuable instrument since usually police departments in Mexico are not open to scrutiny and it demonstrated that some progress can be made through proper means. Learning from that, I could say that more such standardized measured evaluation tools should be applied in order to determine the effectiveness of policing as a means to combat criminal organizations, and the effects that such strategies can have in broader populations. Risk assessment is one of the topics that have not been seriously dealt with in Mexico at the moment of this writing.

From a different approach, Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers (2009) spoke about urban violence and gangs in Central America, not in Mexico. This might be an interesting

approximation since the type of zone I researched was the city, and it was expected that there be some urban violence in such particular environment. The argument advanced by these authors is consistent with some of the substantial notions that I have described earlier as the integral peace approach (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985, 2003). The authors suggested an integral approach on the part of states seeking to deal with the issue. It is important, the writers said, not to overlook the root causes, the core motivations of organizations. These urban gangs are usually labeled as “new urban insurgency”, because they threaten the integrity of governments and public order. In the case of Central America, the failure to control this problematic in an effective way has resulted in radicalized gangs “pushing them towards more organized forms of criminality” (p. 373). This might possibly suggest for the Mexican case, that if the government strategies do not succeed, the result could be in radicalized criminal organizations, or radicalized methods of criminality. The Central American gangs studied by Jütersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers (2009), are mostly involved in local small crime criminal activities, according to the research, something like the local drug vendors. The core argument advanced by the authors said that there is a wider phenomenon of social exclusion in which *pandillas* (gangs) are immerse with problems such as competition and survival. El Salvador adopted *Mano Dura* (Tough Hand) as a strategy against them in 2003. Then more states followed. The United States also linked gangs in Central America to terrorism, Al Qaeda, the Colombian FARC, and funded FBI activities in these countries. This also happened in Mexico as documented by Meschoulam and colleagues (Azúa, 2010; Meschoulam, 2010). The conclusion from this investigation draws back to similar issues as discussed

earlier: the lack of attention to structural problems will make that any attempts to control violence will not succeed.

Other areas of international investigations related to OC deal with the intervention with children involved in gangs (Ward & Bakhuis, 2010), or the transnationalization of organized crime in the Balkans case (Hozic, 2010). Ward and Bakhuis (2010) found that in South Africa, children's involvement in criminality begins around the age of 12. The attractive part of their qualitative study is that it produced similar findings as I have explained in the integral peace perspective: the causes of children's involvement with gangs, as viewed by participants, lie in the social structures of the system, meaning lack of opportunities for economic and human development. The authors reached a dramatic conclusion: focalized programs, in contrast to integral or holistic ones, will not succeed in the combat of gang criminality. A broad intervention to reestablish social structures must be proposed. These findings are consistent with my conceptual framework. Further investigations should be conducted to assess whether the Mexican case shows similar conclusions. In this dissertation I asked participants about their views on the social construction of violence and peace possibilities.

The argument posed by Hozic (2010) is that the informal economy is a part of a much larger system, a world economy that is ready to demand what this market has to offer. That might resemble in some way Wallerstein's (1979) world-economy theory, except that Hozic's (2010) text was specifically applied to criminal organizations in how they make use of the world-economy for their purposes. In a somewhat similar line of thinking, Mc Dougall (2007) spoke about another interesting case, Australia. That

particular country seems to have understood that criminality is not a local problem, but a regional and even an international issue. Strategies to solve such complex problems need to involve groups of countries collaborating with each other. Mc Dougall (2007) demonstrated this argument by explaining the Australian intervention in Salomon Islands, during 2003, which resulted in a more enhanced regional cooperation. This can certainly be related to the Mexican case, as Mexican cartels supply the drug demand that comes from the United States. International cooperation, although existing, is not enough. The diminishment of drug demand is a key solution to the never ending criminal providers, and this is only reached through international cooperation. However, despite Mc Dougall's (2007) argument, international cooperation is not enough without the betterment of structural socioeconomic conditions of the population, as it has been covered above (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985).

A crucial use of the international experience to understand and eventually foster solutions on the Mexican case is to know how certain strategies have worked in different countries when dealing with criminal organizations. Friesendorf and Penksa, (2008) addressed the limits of militarization to combat OC in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, something that could explain the political errors that have been committed in Mexico. Friesendorf and Penska explained that in their studied case, the gaps in security had to be filled through other means, as the military showed it was not trained to fight organized crime. Other alternatives to combat crime were implemented in this country such as hiring more auditors and accountants, and combining competition with cooperation with punitive and military strategies. The argument is that there should be no over

simplification of what crime problems are, to understand how law enforcement must be implemented in those places in which it has not existed for decades. An official from the European Union was quoted by the authors as saying: “Bosnia-Herzegovina has a *small town organized crime* problem” (Friesendorf & Penska, 2008, p. 87). The United Nations (UN) data on organized crime corroborates this (p.88). To assess such difficulties, more flexible means must be used than militarized law enforcement. The authors suggested for example, strengthening community police corps, chasing money laundering, tax evasion, business regulation and administrative reform. Information intelligence was much more effective than military means. The Bosnia Herzegovina case, thus, illustrates that prevention strategies must be implemented to avoid crisis responses. Instead of utilizing excessive force to law enforcement, governments facing these problematic should consider the use of dissuasive forces which are strong enough to solve security problems. Combining such strategies with an integral scope to peace, should not only deter criminals from escalating the levels of violence, but should also promote root solutions.

As I explained above, negotiating with cartels has been an issue in which Mexicans have not come to an agreement yet (Chabat, 2010). To that effect, I argue that the international experience can nurture the debate in Mexico. Cockayne and Lupel (2009) wrote that Organized Crime (OC) can be an enemy but also an ally in peace processes. That is due to the social and economic power that organized crime possesses. Although Cockayne and Lupel (2009) referred to United Nations (UN) peace operations, the article can be adapted to the Mexican circumstances. Especially because the peace operations that the text mentioned had to be implemented in places in which the

organized crime is so strong that it has threatened the states. The most important point that this study made is to take advantage of the opportunity spaces that peace operations open, because a range of tactics can emerge. The authors argued for law enforcement strategies, which should be viewed integrally as broad international projects. Organized crime is a tag that should be used with care, authors said, because labeling it as such, might obscure the opportunity spaces for them to become allies. Some of these groups are truly heterogeneous and complex. For example, they might take part in activities of corruption and bribery that are illegal but normalized, even legitimate at the local context. Sometimes criminal organizations provide social functions, such as protection. “What is labeled ‘organized crime’ may at times manifest a deeper politico-economic system that satisfies the needs and interests of extensive constituencies straddling the state–society boundary. ‘Organized crime’ may thus provide a cohesive force between state and society” (p. 153). There is a need for analyzing the microeconomic incentives that exist between confronted actors, to determine whether they might chose to operate within a legal economic atmosphere or chose conflict instead. There is “double-edging” (p. 153) when understanding organized crime. They might help communities by providing opportunities, but they might also undermine competition and investment. The cases of Iraq and Afghanistan are examples of using organized crime as allies. The Iraq case was a failure, while the Afghan case was successful. What needs to be understood is that there are some variables between society and state such as commercial networks, religious organizations, and kinship. There are some rational choice models using economic explanations in connecting crime and conflict. Some strategies need to work with, not

against existing networks. The case of Bosnia also shows how organized crime can become an ally (Cockayne & Lupel, 2009). The authors did recommend caution, however, of a dangerous symbiosis between peace operations and criminal organizations. When intervening, the phase in which OC operates must be considered, by distinguishing between the predatory, the parasitic and the symbiotic stages, as Chabat (2010) also did. Predatory organizations, which operate at the initial phases of OC, are less likable to accept political solutions. These groups are inevitable enemies of peace processes. Studies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sierra Leone, prove it (Cockayne & Lupel, 2009). In the Balkans and Liberia, the strategy included decapitation of leaders married to important economic incentives to their cohorts. This strategy was successful. In Guatemala the peace agreement was the pretext for criminal organizations to go symbiotic with the government. Danger arises when symbiosis goes on to “capture” of state by criminal organizations. Congo is an example of that (Cockayne & Lupel, 2009), and according to Chabat (2010), Mexico was in the road to becoming one such case. The risk emerges when symbiotic stability is confused for peace, as I explain with detail in the section of the grassroots peace theory. In the words of Cockayne and Lupel (2009):

The policy implications are clear. First, for co-opting tactics to be ‘safe’, peace operations require a detailed knowledge of the motivations and *modi operandi* of peace spoilers. Second, even as accommodation of symbiotic organized crime may prove to be a beneficial tactic for peace operations in the short term, containing apparent harms, it should not be accepted as a long-term strategy. At the strategic level, containment cannot be allowed to substitute for transformation

without ‘someone’ – usually the local community – suffering considerable harm” (p.157).

The strategy of containment accepts the existence of OC, but contains its costs. There are more tactics such as co-opting and transforming or at least taming the OC. West Africa is an example. OC provides usually immediate services to their communities: Protection, status, income, credit, and rough justice. Thus, the transformation must exceed incentives and benefits while maintaining those. There is also something that Cockayne and Lupel (2009) called the transitional strategy, which includes understanding that criminal organizations will not be eradicated immediately. There must be a kind of transitional accommodation, which does not stand for impunity, but an intermediate stage that should end in the long term towards law enforcement. This has been tested successfully in West Africa, Afghanistan, and Haiti, while at the same time implementing crime analysis and criminal intelligence as tactics. This goes along only with preventive interventions addressed according to the information that has been gathered, and transitional law enforcement. These authors suggest that dealing with organized crime must be done under a flexible approach and studying each case at a time.

There are more perspectives as to how to address the problematic of conflict related to violence. Some authors have studied the possibility of building a global police (Marenin, 2005), or how decentralization, as it is the case of policy in the US, can be a promoter of peace (Ben-Meir, 2008).

I will, however, concentrate on a text that I consider one of the most important theories I have found to enrich this dissertation project, as it deeply relates to its

theoretical framework: the *dynamics of systems and attractors* (Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2010).

There are many examples of enduring conflicts around the world, some of them, are called by Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska (2010) as *intractable conflicts*, which have posed insurmountable challenges for peace resolution. Under such conditions, Vallacher et al. (2010) sought to answer why these conflicts become intractable and enduring. The theory these authors developed says that conflicts, although not always negative, are inherent to human relations, but some of them become irresolvable. Wars between nations, territorial disputes, ethnic or social fights, sometimes adopt such characteristics, until they become almost fixed schemes. Since conflicts emerge when the interests between the parts seem incompatible, theoretically they should not be that difficult to solve. One should simply be able to find common interests or goals, and the conflict should come to an end.

Intractable conflicts, however, develop their own dynamics, which makes them last seemingly forever. Certain forces, which Vallacher et al. (2010) called *attractors*, develop their own force that does not let the conflict be solved. The authors use the metaphor of a well, one which it becomes impossible to get out of, because of the attracting gravity force. An attractor can be a fixed idea, a historic narrative, a worldview, or a conception of the other, which operates as a preconceived notion that operates on the individual and the collective level (as the attractors are retransmitted through social communication). The key to the attractor is its behavior within the conflict. It presents a coherent view of how things are, and a stable platform for individual or collective action.

For example, a historical explanation of how a conflict came to be what it is. In such case, any alternative vision that does not suit to what the attractor presents is automatically rejected by the subject and the collectivity. Attractors act dynamically so that the conflict persists. In order to solve intractable conflicts, these attractors must be identified and solved. Adapting such tenets to the Mexican case is of primary importance. This dissertation is directed towards finding out what the process of social construction and social communication is regarding elements that could be operating as attractors in the Mexican conflict, such as values and perceptions. Determining the process of social construction of such attractors could be essential in designing possible ways out of them. That is what this dissertation is all about.

The texts I have discussed in this section serve as examples to demonstrate the need for the use of international experience when understanding, diagnosing, and proposing public policy for peacebuilding in Mexico. I will now summarize this chapter in order to proceed to discuss and describe the methodology for the dissertation.

Summary

In this chapter I explained two basic suppositions under which this dissertation relies: First, that values, perceptions, and conceptions are not given, but are socially constructed through human interaction. Second, that deconstructing the process through which values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence, and the possibilities for peace in Mexico, are socially constructed among Mexicans, can help foster social change through building peace from the grassroots. To support those assumptions, I explained the conceptual framework of social

constructivism, as a worldview that comes from the fields of psychology, philosophy, and education, and merges into those of politics, international relations, and public policy. I documented that such worldview understands realities not as something exogenous to societies or as naturally given circumstances, but as the product of social interaction and agreed upon considerations, understandings, and assumptions. Then, I showed the integral peace perspective as one which views peace not as the absence of violence, but as something positive that must be promoted, fostered, and built through its many components, such as human and socioeconomic development, integration, collaboration, harmony, and social cohesion.

Blending those two core conceptual frameworks, I explained that peace or violence are not given circumstances, but are socially constructed through history, culture, and human interaction. Therefore, in order to foster social change, peace needs to be understood under its integral scope, as something complex that is built from multiple levels, including the ways in which the society members perceive its meaning and its possibilities. Concepts related to those topics were also examined in this chapter, such as conflict resolution, gendered public policy, peace journalism, and community activism. I then showed what has been studied in Mexico in relation to its current state of organized criminal violence, and explained why most texts which explore Mexico's circumstances are either journalistic or historic accounts. Few studies related to gang violence or family and gender violence, approach the topic in some fashion, but up until this dissertation, there was no qualitative study seeking to understand in what ways Mexicans socially construct their shared values and perceptions about violence and peace. That is why this

research was needed as a first step, one which sought to deconstruct the process of social construction of values and perceptions around organized crime related violence and peace among inhabitants of a specific neighborhood inside Mexico City. In that sense, this study informs future research for further replications into other cases, and eventually to develop an instrument that could be applied nationally to verify the transferability of the findings.

I maintain that the qualitative case study approximation was ideal for the type of research I am proposing. First, because it filled a gap in the literature as no qualitative study had been conducted regarding the social construction of values and perceptions about organized crime related violence and peace possibilities in Mexico. Second, because it addressed the topic of peacelessness from a different perspective, not directed towards the numbers and frequency of events, but towards the process through which Mexicans socially build their understandings on the subject. And third, because in order to really penetrate into this process of social construction, I had to get involved with the surroundings and the participants of a very specific neighborhood inside Mexico City and see how the state of affairs in the country was –or was not- affecting their values and ideas about violence and peace possibilities.

In Chapter 3, I will explain the methodology in detail.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the process of social construction of values, perceptions and conceptions about organized crime related violence and peace, in a specific urban population. The study also explored the role of the government, the role of criminal organizations, the role of mass media, with respect to peacebuilding possibilities, according to the socially constructed perceptions of participants living in a neighborhood inside Mexico City.

The way values, perceptions and conceptions are formed is a matter of discussion that was covered in the literature review. Accordingly, the methodology intended to find out what feeds not only individual ideas, but socially agreed-on and shared ideas. For example, do people form their perceptions through what they read, listen or watch in mass media? Do they talk to each other in conversations? What do they talk about at family dinners? What is taught at schools regarding organized crime violence and peace possibilities? Do they attend to meetings? What is spoken about in those meetings? What happens in cafes and public squares? What stories are told about the cartels? What stories are improvised regarding peace and security?

This chapter is organized as follows: Research questions are first presented. The research tradition I selected is then explained and justified. The role of the researcher is then assessed. Next, the chapter discusses the setting, access to participants, criteria for participants' selection, sampling size, and sampling strategy. Then, data collection and analysis procedures are described.

I will finally refer to the trustworthiness of the study detailing some of the most important threats to the validity of this research, which in qualitative language are named credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The ways in which those were confronted will be also assessed.

Research Questions

This dissertation was guided by the following research question and subquestions:

Main Question: What is the process by which values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico are socially constructed among the inhabitants of a specific neighborhood in the capital of the country?

Subquestions:

1. What role does the government play in the participants' perception of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?
2. What role do criminal organizations play in the participants' perception of violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?
3. What is the role of mass media in their social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?
4. What is the role of oral conversation in their social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?

5. How has the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence been influential in the awareness, or production of peacelessness in that particular area of the country?
6. In what ways does gender impact responses as to how violence and peace are defined, and how peace might be fostered in the country?

Qualitative Paradigm, Case Study Tradition

This dissertation used the qualitative methodology under the case study tradition. Before explaining what the case study tradition consists of, I will mention different alternatives to address the main topic of this dissertation. Then, I will make the case for the specific tradition I selected.

Alternative Methodologies for Addressing Peace and Security in Mexico

Some authors are currently studying the Mexican case, the state of violence, and the perceived risk it poses through quantitative methods. Most of these authors are measuring violence through quantitative methodologies such as surveys (Buendía & Laredo, 2010, 2011, 2012; Consulta Mitofsky, 2010, 2011 [Consulta Mitofsky is an organization that conducts public opinion surveys]), the number and frequency of crimes (Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Hope, 2011), the geographical extension of organized crime (Guerrero, 2011), or the amount of homicides and crimes per 100,000 inhabitants as well as the increment in the number of cartels and their operations (Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011). More concretely, Escalante (2011) and Merino (2011) have explained the rise in violence saying that these numbers have increased in the last years and

advancing potential hypotheses for this rise. Guerrero (2011) has explained the growth in terms of the geographical advance of cartels and the increment in the number of criminal organizations now operating in the Mexican territory.

Arguing for the Qualitative Paradigm

My argument is complementary to the quantitative studies, but it differs in perspective. The numbers do not explain why a city such as Tijuana, with 53 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants per year during 2010, had a perception among its citizens as a much safer city than Monterrey, with only 13 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants during the same year (CCSP, 2011). As I have stated before (Meschoulam, 2011), it is the type of deaths that matters. This means that citizens might not only perceive the frequency of violent acts, but they react to the way in which these acts are committed and publicized. For example, two bodies are executed, dismembered, and then they are hung on a public freeway from a bridge, in front of the view of bystanders and the public in general. Regarding numbers, these are only two homicides. My contention, however, is that people might suffer a psychosocial impact when watching these bodies, which might lead them to perceive things differently (Gerwehr & Hubbard, 2007; Meschoulam, 2012b). That is why a qualitative methodology was required to understand more about the process by which Mexicans socially construct their perceptions about violence, and how this affects their views on peace possibilities.

Qualitative methodology related to exploring the subject of violence, and perceptions, although not perceptions about organized criminal violence and peace, has been successfully applied in Mexico before. For example, Agoff, Herrera, and Castro

(2007) used narrative interviews of women to understand the nature of the violence directed at them. They used a purposeful sampling method on 26 women of the socioeconomic population they wanted to study, i.e. living under conditions of poverty. Aguilar (2002) conducted an investigation to understand attitudes and behavior towards the environment in Mexico. In this case, rich information was sacrificed in favor of a greater number of interviews: with the sample population consisting of 100 participants. This study was done again in Mexico City, with a nonrandom stratified sample, according to gender, socioeconomic level, and age, aided by key informants, who were interviewed on a different approach. Poverty and violence were studied in Guadalajara, the second largest Mexican city, by Enríquez (2002). His purpose was to understand the meaning urban poor give to poverty and the way they face it. The author interviewed 60 women, under conditions very similar conditions to the site I intend to use as the subject for this proposed case study.

Howell (2004) used an ethnographic approach in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, emphasizing the role of the researcher as a “friend” of the participants. The topic was, once again, gender and violence, and with her approach, she sacrificed the number of participants (only 7 were interviewed) in favor of the rich information that was drawn from each of them. Sexual violence was the main topic of this study. In this case, the ethnographic methodology was essential since only by really gaining the confidence of the participants, they were willing to share her accounts. Another delicate issue discussed by Howell is the need of preserving the participants’ privacy, since there is concern about her accounts becoming public.

To understand the meaning of emotional ailments in a community inside Mexico City, Mora-Ríos, Medina-Mora, Ito, and Natera (2008) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study focused on a specific site and population inside the big city. These authors wanted to understand what distress and wellbeing mean in the context of a marginalized community inside Mexico City. To answer their questions the authors used a multimethod approach, conducting in-depth interviews combined with free association, ethnographic description, and feedback to the community. They used a snowball sampling strategy, which lead them to 16 participants. The research team performed an individual analysis of the interviews, and then a group analysis in which they contrasted their results. Mora-Rios and colleagues (2008) found that to their participants, feeling good or bad implied more cultural elements than what is commonly understood by suffering or wellbeing. Their social health conceptions are, to Mora-Rios et al. (2008), more complex and heterogeneous than what is usually thought of. A more integral approach towards these notions must include understanding them through multimethod approximations, incorporating the socio-cultural context, and accessing participants' subjectivity in order to apprehend not only the negative connotations of distress such as gender or family violence, but also the positive aspects of wellbeing, as this specific community understands it. As a conclusion, the authors mentioned that there is a lack of a culture that views health as a right, an insufficient asset in the marginal Mexico City, more concretely in terms of mental health. Health care services should be promoted through collaboration between governmental and nongovernmental organizations collaboration projects. Although this particular study does not only address violence, but

suffering in more general terms, it does serve to support the value of the ethnographic approach in trying to understand how a marginalized community constructs their perceptions and meanings about what distress and wellbeing are. The value of the study in terms of methodology is their multimethod approximation, a combination of research techniques in order to reach more solid conclusions. A possible problem with their sample is that they used a snowball technique, not considering any sort of stratification or control on the part of the research team. A snowball might slant results towards similar points of view, as the participants might have offered contacts that think or react in similar ways than they do. However, since the methodology they chose (multimethod approach) was already too complex, a snowball sampling technique suits best for their purposes in terms of logistics and feasibility.

Padlog (2009) addressed the power of qualitative methodology to study the perception of risk in Mexico. This is a research consisting of several focus groups interviews to participants about risk perception. This research was conducted in the Mexican state of Jalisco. The author argued in favor of the qualitative approach as it develops intimacy and closeness with participants and the phenomenon itself. The study used an emic perspective, watching the world through the eyes of the actors being researched. The person and her perceptions is, to this approach, a starting point. This kind of research is suitable for small groups or case studies. This project used interviews to focus groups of 10 members, observations, document analysis. The author used the snowball sampling technique, and theory based sampling.

The Case Study

A case study is a blend of qualitative methods applied to a very specific location (Patton, 2002). This dissertation could not have been an ethnography, because I did not spend a long time living in the setting with participants. However, I did examine the process of social construction of symbols, meanings, and significances as related to a specific culture represented in the citizens of a very concrete location inside Mexico City. This dissertation was not narrative (Patton, 2002) as it did not seek to get the discourse of a single person or some individuals, but the collectively shared meanings and interpretations that might feed a social perception in a location. I did, nevertheless, use the narrative of the individuals to gain knowledge about the collectivity. This dissertation was not of the phenomenology tradition either; as such a tradition seeks to find out how the collectivity makes sense of an experience or a phenomenon in order to reach out for the essence of that phenomenon (Patton, 2002). This dissertation was not looking for an essence, but for social constructions, instead. Social constructivism says that realities are not given facts, but historically and socially constructed (see Chapter 2). Therefore, according to this view, the essence is not a static, but a social construction in permanent motion. What this dissertation sought to find, instead, was what precipitates the dynamics of how people feel, and whether that dynamics could be impinged upon, in order to foster social change through a culture of peace. I did, however, use participants' accounts as to how they experience their reality, and more concretely, what feeds their perception of that reality. The case study approach allowed me to penetrate into a specific and perfectly safe location, and interview participants, as well as observe them, and watch for more

signs in their surroundings. The findings that this case provides, might serve other research projects in the future. More exercises as this one could be replicated in different zones of the country, perhaps even in more violent municipalities, or a quantitative instrument could be developed for future application in broader areas of Mexico or in other countries as well.

I maintain that the qualitative case study was ideal for the type of study I conducted. First, it fills a gap in the literature as no qualitative study had been conducted regarding the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace in Mexico. Second, it addressed the topic of peacelessness from a different perspective, not directed towards the numbers and frequency of events, but towards the process through which Mexicans socially build their understandings on the subject. And third, in order to really penetrate into this process of social construction, I had to get involved with the culture and the participants of a very specific neighborhood inside Mexico City and see how the state of affairs in the country was –or was not– affecting their values and ideas about violence and the possibilities for peace in the country.

Methodology

In this section I will provide details about the methodology that was be used for this study. To do that, I will first explain how I gained access to the setting and participants, and provide the rationale for the sampling size and strategy. In the next section the exact instrumentation aspects will be covered. Then I will speak about my

role as a researcher in this dissertation and face some of the subjectivity and ethical issues I encountered.

Access to Participants and Setting

Two years ago I made the acquaintance with a former member of the Mexico City Commission for Human Rights (CDHDF). When I told him about my research project, he immediately mentioned that he had access to several neighborhoods of the City because of his job, and that he would be happy to provide me access to any number of participants as my project required. After some time, he left the CDHDF, and he worked in different citizenship projects in various areas of the city. He invited me to visit a number of neighborhoods, and we picked a specific one for my case study.

Mexico City is the capital of Mexico. Similar to Washington, DC, Mexico City is located inside a Federal District (DF). The DF is divided into 16 municipalities or counties. Not all the demographic information or data about criminal activities is available regarding the specific neighborhood I studied in this dissertation. This is due to how the Federal District is organized. Information is provided by municipalities. Therefore, most of the demographic data is provided by and related to the municipality. I compiled data about the municipality in which this neighborhood is located, and some data about the neighborhood itself by requesting it directly to the public offices and accessing Federal databases (INEGI, 2012). The delegation comprises an area of 32 square kilometers, which is only the 2.2% of the total area of the DF (INEGI, 2012). The DF has nearly 9 million inhabitants (without considering the neighboring states with which the city forms an entire urban conglomerate, just as happens in the case of

Washington, DC with Virginia or Maryland; INEGI, 2012). The municipality in which the setting of this research was carried out has 530,000 inhabitants (INEGI, 2012), living in 168,000 homes. In 2010 the delegation had 10,211 births against 4,437 registered deaths (INEGI, 2012), which means that either it is growing or some people move elsewhere in the city or the country. Out of the 530,000 people that live in this municipality, only 100,000 with over 5 years have completed basic school. In the whole DF, nearly 7,000 crimes under federal jurisdiction are committed per year (SNSP, 2010). In the same area 163,000 common law offenses are committed per year. However, the DF homicide rate per each 100,000 inhabitants is relatively low, when compared to more violent areas of the country. The DF presents less than 8 homicides per each 100,000 inhabitants per year, a much lower rate than cities such as Acapulco, Monterrey, Veracruz or Juarez in Mexico, or cities such as New Orleans, Baltimore, or Detroit in the United States (CCSPJP, 2011). It could therefore not be said that Mexico City is unsafe or dangerous more than most of major cities in the world. The municipality in which the research took place presented 28,000 common law offenses in 2010 (information about the crimes under federal jurisdiction is not available), which is 15% of the entire DF, a high rate considering that this delegation has less than 6% of the inhabitants of the nation's capital (SNSP, 2010).

The neighborhood under study is a beautiful very traditional spot. It is one of the oldest areas of the city, and it has its own square and kiosk (Rivera, 2004). People that live there are usually born there and spend their entire life living in that area of the city, so they feel very attached to their neighborhood (Rivera, 2004), and develop community

and cultural activities. That neighborhood has 31,000 inhabitants, out of which 53.38% are women and 46.62% are men. It has an economically active population of 49.7%. Its age composition is as follows: It is populated by 11.3% people from 18 to 24 years; 53.6% from 25 to 64 years of age; and 10.3% people 65 years old or more. This data will be considered when stratifying the sample.

The person I used as a contact is a former member of the DF Commission for Human Rights, who ran for office as the municipal delegate as a citizen candidate. Through his work in neighborhoods such as the one I selected for my study, he assisted me in gaining access to social leaders, teachers, parents, and other citizens who live in the neighborhood, and who were asked for consent to participate in the study. This person, however, did not participate in the recruitment process but only provided me with contact information of potential participants, who were recruited directly by me. A copy of the e-mail in which this citizen agreed to contribute to the research project is available in the Appendix B of this dissertation.

Sample Strategy and Sample Size

Consistent with previous investigations and sampling strategies and sizes utilized in Mexican cities, and Mexico City in particular (Agoff, Herrera, and Castro, 2007; Aguilar, 2002; Enríquez, 2002; Howell, 2004; Mora-Ríos, Medina-Mora, Ito, and Natera, 2008; Padlog, 2009) my dissertation used the case study approach, and interviews of 15 people, until saturation of themes was reached. I conducted the interviews, and then proceeded to do the data analysis to verify in what ways the theory based and emerging categories had reached saturation. After saturation of themes was reached, I determined

that 15 participants were enough to fulfill the purpose of this project. I sacrificed a high number of participants in order to gain in-depth knowledge about the process of social construction of values and perceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico. I used a combination of sampling strategies which included the following: (a) Theory sampling: I purposively selected participants according to some of the theories I used as conceptual frameworks (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985). Thus, the 15 participants included two community leaders, two teachers, two local business owners, two parents, and seven citizens from different jobs and professions. The criteria for selecting such type of citizens were based upon social constructivism and the integral peace perspective: It was expected that people such as parents, community leaders, and teachers exert certain influence upon the social construction of values, conceptions, and perceptions. Therefore, at least a part of the sample was purposively selected to include such influential persons. However, the 15 participants also followed the stratification criteria as explained in “b,” (b) Purposive stratified selection of participants. According to the demographic data provided below, around 25% of the population of the neighborhood is less than 18 years old. Therefore the percentages that were used for stratification considered the deduction of that sector of the population. My participants were 54% female (8 people) and 46% were male (7 people). Out of the 15 participants, 14.6% (2 people) were from 18 to 24 years; 70.8% (11 people) were of 25 to 64 years of age; and 13.4 % (2 people) were 65 years old or more. Through these techniques I reached a total of 15 participants.

As I describe below, previous qualitative research that has been conducted in Mexico City has shown that no more than 20 participants are usually required. I conducted interviews lasting approximately 1 hour with each participant. The goal of the interview protocol was to penetrate deep inside their impressions of the themes central to this study. My sample was designed to be purposively varied in order to get different perspectives and points of view. Once that the saturation of themes is detected I stopped looking for additional themes. This was found out due to the concurrency between the interviews and the data analysis.

As previously noted, these strategies are supported by different studies conducted in Mexico. Agoff, Herrera, and Castro (2007), used narrative interviews on women to understand the nature of the violence directed at them. They used a purposeful sampling method on 26 women. Aguilar (2002) conducted an investigation to understand attitudes and behavior towards the environment in Mexico. In this case, rich information was sacrificed in favor of a greater number of interviews: 100. Poverty and violence were studied in Guadalajara, the second largest Mexican city, by Enríquez (2002). His purpose was to understand the meaning urban poor give to poverty and the way they face it. The author interviewed 60 women, under very similar conditions to the site I intend to explore. Howell (2004) used an ethnographic approach in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. The topic was gender and violence, and with her approach, she sacrificed the number of participants (only 7 were interviewed) in favor of the rich information that was drawn from each of them. Mora-Ríos, Medina-Mora, Ito, and Natera (2008) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study focused on a specific site and population inside Mexico

City. To answer questions regarding participants' perceptions on emotional ailments, the authors used a snowball sampling strategy, which led them to 16 participants on which they conducted in depth interviews combined with free association techniques.

Furthermore, Padlog (2009) addressed the power of qualitative methodology to study the perception of risk in the case of Mexico. This research was conducted in the Mexican state of Jalisco. The author argued in favor of the qualitative approach as it develops intimacy and closeness with participants and the phenomenon itself. This kind of research, the author said, is suitable for small groups or case studies. This project used interviews on 10 members, observations, and document analysis. The author used the snowball sampling technique, and theory based sampling. Theory based sampling (Patton, 2002) means to draw some participants purposively according to the theories that the researcher is using as part of the conceptual framework.

Instrumentation

In this subsection, the research instrument will be described. I will also detail how the interviews were conducted and what they consisted of.

Data Collection: Interviews

As explained above, access to participants was provided through the citizen candidate I met with, and who is actively participating in the neighborhood with many of its leaders. He mentioned this study to some of the residents of the neighborhood and they were supportive of it in concept. I began contacting participants once the project was approved by the IRB. I made appointments with participants and moved to the neighborhood under research, at a location of their choosing.

I used semistructured interview questions containing topics and general ideas to discuss and explore, beginning with general open-ended questions, flexible enough to move towards the areas to which participants led the conversation, but rigid enough at the same time in order to maintain a predesigned path and respond to research questions upon which this study is based. Appendix C contains the interview protocol.

Interview Topics

The interview started with an explanation of the research project, its purpose, ethical considerations such as the confidentiality of the name and participant's identifying information, and the possibility to withdraw the study whenever the participant wished to, or the possibility to reconsider the publication of certain information relevant to the person's viewpoint. After that, I proceeded to explain that I had certain guiding questions but the participant was free to deviate from them if he or she considered that it helped provide information relevant to the study. The participant read and signed the informed consent in Spanish contained in Appendix A of this dissertation, which was previously approved by the IRB, both in English and its Spanish translation. I then started recording the interview with a digital recorder.

The interview questions were only guiding questions. If the participant already started talking about the topics I was mentioning, I did not continue with the exact phrasing of the questions. The purpose of the interview was to collect information that did include every topic I will state in the following semistructured interview protocol. The objective was to lead the interviewee to describe the process through which he or she has socially constructed, or participated in the social construction of values and perceptions about

organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico. Each of the interview questions was related to and designed to answer the research questions, or some aspects of those. I will now explain how I identified the relationship of the interview questions to the research questions. This is further discussed below, in the Content Validity section of this chapter.

Interview Questions and their Connection to the Research Questions and the Conceptual Framework

Each of the interview questions was designed to connect directly with the research questions based on the conceptual framework that was presented in Chapter 2.

Accordingly, after each interview question, a brief note and citation will be added to show what connection it has to the concepts described in Chapter 2, as well as a simple code to show the connection that they have to the research questions of the dissertation.

The code is designed in the following way: as stated above, this dissertation is based on one main research question, which will be coded as Main Research Question (MRQ), and six research subquestions, which will be coded, according to the order in which those were presented above, as RSQ1 (Research Subquestion 1), RSQ2, RSQ3, RSQ4, RSQ5, and RSQ6. After each interview question, a code will be added to show which of the research question or questions it is related to.

These are the interview guiding questions:

1. How would you describe what you believe is currently taking place in Mexico regarding organized criminal violence? (MRQ, RSQ6) (This question is related to what has been reviewed in Chapter 2 about organized crime and the kind of

violence has been taking place in Mexico in recent years [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011], but was intended to explore how it is perceived and conceived by the participant [Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007])

2. Would you consider that Mexico is peaceful? Why? Can you explain how you come to think that? (MRQ, RSQ5, RSQ6) (This question is connected to the concepts of peace [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985, 2003, 2008], as well as the social construction of perceptions, conceptions, and values [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).
3. To your understanding what does peace consist of? How is peace defined? (MRQ, RSQ5, RSQ6). (This question is connected to the concepts of peace, the integral perspective of peace [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985, 2003, 2008], and mostly to explore how this subject is perceived and conceived by the participant [Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007]).
 - a. Do you believe that peacelessness is related to poverty or underdevelopment? (MRQ, RSQ5, RSQ6) (This question is related to the integral perspective of peace as described in Chapter 2 [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985, 2003, 2008]).
 - b. Do you think that underdevelopment is correlated to direct violence? (MRQ, RSQ5, RSQ6) (This question is also connected to the integral perspective of peace described in Chapter 2).
4. Please describe how you have come to those conclusions. (MRQ, RSQ6) (This question is connected to the social construction of perceptions, conceptions, and

values as described in Chapter 2 [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).

- a. Do you watch TV (what programs or channels)? (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ6)
(This question is connected to media peacebuilding as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick, 2006; IEP, 2010; Vega-Montiel, 2010]).
- b. Do you listen to the radio (what stations)? (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ6) (This question is connected to media peacebuilding as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega-Montiel, 2010]).
- c. Do you read newspapers (which)? (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ6) (This question is connected to media peacebuilding as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega-Montiel, 2010]).
- d. Do you talk about these things with your family? At home? With friends? Where? (MRQ, RSQ4, RSQ6) (This question is connected to the social construction of perceptions, conceptions, and values as described in Chapter 2 [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).
- e. Did you talk about these topics at school? (MRQ, RSQ4 RSQ6) (This question is connected to social constructivism and education as described in Chapter 2 [Harkness, 2009; Marin, Benarroch, & Jimenez,

2000; Powell & Cody, 2009; Stears, 2009; Stetsenko & Arievidt, 1997]).

5. What do you think the role of government should be in responding to organized crime? (RSQ1, RSQ6) (This question is connected to organized criminal violence in Mexico [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011], as well as the role of social constructions in public policy [Schneider & Ingram, 1993], but it is intended to explore how these topics are perceived by the participant [Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007]).
 - a. How do you think they are doing in this effort at this time? (MRQ, RSQ1, RSQ6) (This question is connected to organized criminal violence in Mexico [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011], as well as the role of social constructions in public policy, but it is intended to explore how these topics are perceived by the participant [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009]).
 - b. Why do you have this opinion? (MRQ, RSQ1, RSQ6) (This question is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values, as described in Chapter 2 [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).
 - c. What different strategies or suggestions do you have that would combat OC? (RSQ1, RSQ6) (This question intends to explore socially constructed perceptions, and conceptions, in connection to public policy and peacebuilding [Schneider & Ingram, 1993]).

6. Please describe how you have come to those conclusions (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ4, RSQ6). (From that point I will inquire into the same topics to find out more on the process of social construction of those ideas and perceptions): Do you watch TV (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ6) (what programs or channels)? Do you listen to the radio (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ6) (what stations)? Do you read newspapers (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ6) (which)? Do you talk about these things with your family? At home? With friends? Where? (MRQ, RSQ4, RSQ6) Did you talk about these topics at school? Did you read articles, papers or books on those issues? (MRQ, RSQ4, RSQ6) (This group of questions is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values, and the role of mass media in peacebuilding, as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega-Montiel, 2010]).
7. What role do you think that criminal organizations play in how we perceive our realities? How did you come to those conclusions? (MRQ, RSQ2, RSQ3, RSQ4, RSQ6) Have you read about this? (MRQ, RSQ2, RSQ3, RSQ6) Where? Have you had any contact with mass media on these issues? (MRQ, RSQ2, RSQ3, RSQ6) Have you talked about this at home or at public spaces? (MRQ, RSQ2, RSQ4, RSQ6) (This group of questions is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values about organized crime, about organized criminal violence in Mexico [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011] , and the role of mass media in peacebuilding, as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).

8. Do you think that peace is possible in Mexico? How? (RSQ5, RSQ6) When do you think that will happen? Or (depending on the answer), Why do you think it will not happen? (RSQ5, RSQ6) Do you think that organized criminal violence and the fight that the government is conducting against it have any effect upon your views about peace possibilities? (This question is connected to social perceptions, conceptions, and values [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986], as well as the integral peace perspective as described in Chapter 2 [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985, 2003, 2008]).
9. Tell me how have you come to those conclusions? Have you heard or read about that in the media? (MRQ, RSQ3, RSQ5, RSQ6) Perhaps you have read books about that? Do you talk about this with friends or at home? (MRQ, RSQ4, RSQ5, RSQ6) (This group of questions is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986], and the role of mass media in peacebuilding, as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).
10. Would you like to add anything to this interview?

From that point, the interviewer assessed whether the information was enough, or whether the interview needed to continue to dig further into the process of social construction of values and perceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico.

Once the interview was completed, I made sure that the participant understood that he or she would be contacted afterwards for the member checking as it was explained in the informed consent.

Frequency of Data Collection Events and Duration of Data Collection Events

I conducted approximately three or four interviews during a single week. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. I anticipated that after 15 or even 20 interviews, I could still find new themes and the project could require another 3, 4 or 5 participants. In that case, I was going to use the gained access to the population to reach the required number until saturation was reached. This was not required, however, as saturation was reached even before the 15 interviews were completed. According to the patterns that became evident, more interviews would only have added redundancy to the themes that were already saturated.

Content Validity of the Instrument

The interview questions were based upon the conceptual frameworks of social constructivism (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009, Vygotsky, 1986), and the integral approximation of peacebuilding (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985). A detailed description of the two conceptual pillars of this dissertation was provided in Chapter 2. To summarize, social constructivism explains that realities are not given but socially constructed and agreed upon considerations and understandings. Connecting those elements to peace would imply that violence and peace possibilities are not predetermined factors, but socially constructed through human interaction. The interview questions explored the process of social construction of these ideas and

perceptions. The interview questions asked participants not only to describe the way they value and perceive organized criminal violence, the role of the government and criminal organizations, and the possibilities for peace, but they also sought to enter into the realm of their social construction of such perceptions and ideas. The interview questions provided as well, an in depth knowledge about how the people in a specific neighborhood of Mexico City that I selected participate in the social construction of understandings about what has happened in the country and whether and how peace is possible.

The main research question asks about the process by which values, perceptions, and conceptions on the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico are socially constructed among the inhabitants of a specific neighborhood in the capital of the country. This was answered through the interview questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 (which asked the participants to describe what they believe is taking place in Mexico regarding organized criminal violence, whether they believe Mexico is peaceful, how they define peace, and mostly how they have come to those conclusions, meaning, how they have socially constructed their perspective on what is taking place in the country), although all the interview questions asked about the process of social construction of such values, ideas, and perceptions. From there, the research subquestions asked about the process of social construction about the role of the government, the role of criminal organizations, the role of mass media, and the role of mouth to mouth, in the social construction of values and perceptions about organized crime violence, and about peace possibilities. These subquestions were answered through the interview questions 5 (which asked about what the role of the government should be

in responding to OC), 7 (which asked about the role that criminal organizations are playing), and 8 (which asked about what peace is and how the person has come to those conclusions). Finally, the last subquestion asked in what ways women's responses vary from men's responses as to what violence and peace are, and how should peace be fostered in the country. This was not determined through a specific interview question, but by differentiating between men's and women's responses during the data analysis.

The Role of the Researcher

The research was conducted within a specific neighborhood in the heart of Mexico City. I, as researcher, was only an observer, not a participant in any activities of the community. As explained in detail, I previously arranged appointments with participants, attended to the interview sessions, conducted the interview, and withdrew from the setting.

I am a Mexican citizen, and I live in Mexico City, in a completely different area than the researched location. I do watch the same TV channels, however, and read the same newspapers, and listen to the same radio stations as many of the interviewees, because we live in a relatively integrated city, ruled by the same government, and we are subject to many similar realities. I, nevertheless, had no previous acquaintance with or professional relations to any of the participants, I belong to a high income socioeconomic level, and I am the son of Jewish immigrants. I, therefore, look different, situation which might have created a sense of distance between me and the interviewees. That could have helped strengthen the researcher role as an observer, but it could have also acted adversely as the interviewees might have felt less confident with someone who looks like

a “foreigner”. I worked, thus, on generating confidence with participants, a task which was not particularly difficult, as I live in the same place as them, and am subject basically to similar environmental circumstances as them. I have taught in public universities, I write in the newspapers, manage a very popular blog, and participate on TV and radio stations, which helps me speak a very basic and understandable language for common citizens. The rapport that was created during interviews helped conducting them in a smooth and deep fashion with all of them.

My bias towards peacebuilding was something that I needed to speak about, confront, and handle before conducting the interviews. Since I started my studies at Walden, I have been publishing partial pieces of knowledge as I have been reading and analyzing it, because I believe that Mexico’s situation requires the aid of scholars and researchers. These journalistic publications have been quite popular, and I have tended to participate in public debates (in mass media and also in social media as it is Twitter) regarding the topic of peace and security in Mexico. After some time, I was invited to form part of an academic group engaging in sharing their research with policymakers, politicians, activists, universities, and mass media. We have been very active in the past two years, and we have impinged very much upon the public debate, and upon the electoral campaigns of 2012. The risk of all that activity, as it regards to this dissertation, is that I might have tended to prejudge or infer the answers of participants, or predict their attitudes and opinions before actually conducting the interviews and the research. Becoming aware of that was a first step towards managing any potential biases regarding such issues. I needed to be aware of cues that might have indicated to me that I was

objecting to the thinking of the respondent. Then, I kept a journal during and immediately after the interviews (Janesick, 2004). This helped me reflect whether my own biases or prejudices impacted upon the participant's responses immediately after the interview finished. The next step was describing the exact procedures and questions that I asked. Besides the interviews I conducted a member checking with each participant. This triangulation of methods provided additional information to contribute to and balance the interview findings (Patton, 2002). I processed everything through NVivo software, and had my dissertation committee to read the findings of the interviews so that an academic dialogue could help me spot any biases if they had been present.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained according to Walden University standard procedures (approval number for this study is 03-08-13-0154608). The interviews and observations took place in Mexico City, Mexico, and did not violate any of the Mexican laws. Participants signed an informed consent written in Spanish (as that is the language the participants speak), which contained the purpose of the study, information about the procedures, contact data in case someone needed assistance, and stated that at any point the participant could have exited the interview or the study. They were told that their data was fully confidential; no names or identifying information would be published. They were briefed as to how the qualitative procedures use the transcripts of the interviews in order to detect themes and patterns, which will be published as a finding of the project. They were also informed about what the IRB is, and how it works to ensure ethical concerns be addressed from an institutional viewpoint. In

Appendix A, the informed consent is attached in its English and its Spanish versions. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, as that is the language that participants speak, as well as my mother and day to day language.

The data from this dissertation is anonymous. The neighborhood under research was not named or identified. Participants' names and addresses were not named or identified. For purposes of the dissertation, participants will be numbered according to the order in which I interviewed them. The first interview participant was named IP01; the second participant was IP02, and so forth. In that way, quotes or pieces from the interviews are easily identified for purposes of research and data analysis. The recordings and transcripts are secured in a safety box I own at my address, which is protected by security officers. Only I have access to that safety box. The dissertation does not include any identification information, but once the results are obtained and these data is exposed to Walden faculty, participants still have the opportunity to delete the results referring to them, as noted in the informed consent. The information which will be published by Walden does not identify any participants or their locations.

Data Analysis Plan

For the data analysis I used the NVivo software. This software allows researchers to file and code texts, images, and videos. By utilizing pre-coded categories and emerging codes, the program allowed me to classify and determine patterns in the participants' narrative. A copy of the preliminary coding framework is provided below, as well as in Appendix C.

After conducting the interviews I transcribed them for analysis. Once the transcript was ready, I started coding according to the following pre-existing categories, related to the conceptual framework, and then noted and assigned emerging categories if I valued that the pre-existing ones did not fit or match what the participant was saying.

Preexisting coding categories

The first codes are directly related to the research questions that are connected to the process of social construction of values, perceptions and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace. By coding participants' responses I established certain categories to understand whether they have socially constructed their values, perceptions, and conceptions through the family, through education and/or learning, through religious institutions, through the mass media (specifying which), and/or through conversation. My research questions also asked about the role of mass media and the role of mouth to mouth in the social construction of such values, perceptions, and conceptions. Thus, these are the preexisting coding categories:

- Family social construction (Steigerwald & Forrest, 2004)
- Education and learning social construction (Cottone, 2001; Marin, Benarroch, & Jimenez, 2000; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 1997; Vygotsky, 1986)
- Religious social construction (Fagan, 2010; Stenmark, 2009)
- Oral conversation social construction (refers to the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions as the product of social interaction with other members of society through verbal communication in day to day life, about news, politics, organized crime, violence, among other topics).

- Public spaces interaction social construction
- Mass Media social construction (Adam & Holguin, 2003; IEP, 2010; Terzis, 2008)
 - Newspapers
 - Television
 - Radio
 - Movies
 - Social Media Facebook
 - Social Media Twitter
 - Social Media Other
 - Internet Websites
 - Internet Blogs
 - Other

The next codes were used to establish the concept of peace possibilities, according to the main research question, and to the subquestion 5 (How has the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence been influential in the awareness, or production of peacelessness in that particular area of the country?). According to participants' responses I sought to establish whether they expressed or not conceptions that could match the structural peace or the grassroots approximations. These codes also helped to draw conclusions about social

change, and where peacebuilding public policy should be directed to. These were also preexisting coding categories:

- Structural peace conception (Galtung, 1985)
- Structural violence conception (Galtung, 1985)
- Grassroots peacebuilding approach (Alger, 1987)

Emerging Categories

Rationale for Coding

The rationale for utilizing such preexisting codes plus any emerging categories was to determine their weight in the process of social construction of values and perceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico. It was also a starting point in order to develop the most adequate coding categories.

This investigation sought to assess how much (and which of) the mass media are used to generate such social constructs, or how much of those perceptions comes from schools, or from family. By detecting certain patterns, and by saturating those themes, plus any other emerging ones, I assumed that certain conclusions might arise.

Discrepant Cases

In this research project, I assumed that some of the participants would answer differently, not necessarily following the common patterns. This might have happened due to actual variations in values, conceptions, or perceptions, or as the product of untruths offered by participants as responses. I intended to detect those from the moment when the interview took place, and I sought to conduct the interview so as to explain why and how this had become a discrepant case by asking questions about how the participant

had come to such diverse conclusions (without challenging the participant's response or data). In other words, investigating the roots of such discrepancy might have also provided contrasting data as to why the repeated patterns occur. For example, I included as a part of the literature review a number of recently conducted studies which show national tendencies regarding public opinion as to the fact that the government is losing the war against the organized crime (e.g. Consulta Mitofsky, 2010; 2011). I would have reported any discrepancy I would have found, and if I considered it proper, I would have extended the sample of participants to confirm patterns and code saturation. However, the patterns of this research did not need for any sampling extension and did not present discrepancies as to the main patterns that were detected. This is further explained in chapter 4.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

In this section of the chapter I will explain how the trustworthiness of this study was assessed.

I used a methodological triangulation consisting of confirming the patterns I found in the interviews with member checks (Patton, 2002). This consisted of sharing the results with the participants I interviewed, and confirming whether those made sense. This procedure was conducted as follows. Once the data collection and analysis phases were conducted, I sent an e-mail with the results to all of the 15 participants in order to ask for their input. I shared the findings obtained in the investigation and asked the participant whether those made sense and reported the answers in chapter 4. In case the participant would have not confirmed the results I would have asked her or him the

reasons for that. If I would have found that the majority of members did not confirm the patterns, I would have searched for four or five interviewees more and continue with the interviews. This, however, was not needed. As reported in Chapter 4, the member checking confirmed the validity of the results and there was no need for extending the sample.

Transferability

Until further investigation is conducted, the findings of this investigation cannot be immediately transferable, i.e. the results only speak about the neighborhood that was investigated. This research project did not seek to find generalizable data, but its results are heuristic and they may certainly contribute towards generalization in the future. This investigation might generate hypotheses that could be quantitatively tested at a later time. One of the uses of the results of this research will consist of feeding future case studies to be replicated in other places of Mexico and around the world. The next use of this dissertation may be assisting in the development of instruments such as questionnaires built with themes and patterns extracted from the findings, that may then be applicable to different regions of the country through quantitative methodology and then determine whether these findings are transferable or not. This dissertation provides researchers with suggesting evidence obtained from participants' thick descriptions, in order to develop those instruments out of solid data, especially when those instruments do not exist in Mexico, as I have shown in Chapter 2. This last use might contribute to positive social change as it can produce new policy decisions and collaboration projects between the

public sector, the private sector, the nongovernmental sector, the mass media and the academia, through the use of evidence regarding violence and peace.

Dependability

To ensure dependability I kept journals and notes (Janesick, 2004) about things I noticed during interviews, as well as the early detection of potential themes and patterns that would later be verified during the data analysis phase. In that way, I corroborated from the beginning of the research whether the repeated patterns were actually repeating, and whether the research questions were getting appropriately addressed, or if I should have thought in different approaches or questions. I also used triangulation of data collection techniques through member checking, as explained above, besides the peer review provided by Walden University through the dissertation committee and the IRB.

Confirmability or Objectivity

Although I recognize that I cannot be fully objective, I reflected on those areas in which I believe that my subjectivity might have imposed itself upon the research. These areas could be summarized in me living in the same city as participants, and thus being subject to similar circumstances, reading the same papers, and watching the same TV programs. Those conditions have resulted in orienting my skills and knowledge towards actively participating in academia and mass media to foster peace in Mexico. As a consequence of such circumstances, the study could have been leaned towards predetermined understandings that I have developed about the topic of peace. However, by reflecting in those issues, I was able to confront them, recognize them when they appear, and ensure that my study was based upon empirical findings, and not otherwise.

Besides that, I conducted the research in a different neighborhood than where I live or work. I listened to participants, took notes, and wrote a daily journal for verification purposes. I was not educating, but recording information that was later analyzed and processed with the help of NVivo software.

In addition, this dissertation, as any other one, also had peer reviewing provided by my chair, my committee, and by representatives of Walden University. This was not a minor element, as it proved helpful to spot certain factors that could have made this study less confirmable.

Summary

This qualitative case study was conducted in a particular neighborhood of Mexico City. It used semi structured interviews with 15 participants in order to explore their process of social construction of values, conceptions, and perceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities for Mexico. Access to participants was gained through contact with a former member of the CDHDF. The study used a stratified sample, as well as a theory-based sampling strategy (extracted from the conceptual frameworks of social constructivism and from the Integral Peace Perspective). Data was analyzed with NVivo software, using preexisting and emerging codes. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking on each participant, as well as peer-review provided by the dissertation committee. Ethical considerations were addressed and Walden University's IRB approved the conduction of the interviews.

In the next chapters I will explain and discuss the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what socially constructed values, perceptions and conceptions about violence and peace are, how they are socially constructed, and how they have influenced the culture in a specific urban population. The study also explored the role of the government, the role of criminal organizations, the role of mass media, and the possibilities for peace, according to the socially constructed perceptions in a neighborhood in Mexico City.

Research Questions

This dissertation was guided by the following research question and subquestions:

Main Question: What is the process by which values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico are socially constructed among the inhabitants of a specific neighborhood in the capital of the country?

Subquestions:

1. What role does the government play in the participants' perception of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?
2. What role do criminal organizations play in the participants' perception of violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?
3. What is the role of mass media in their social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?

4. What is the role of oral conversation in their social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?
5. How has the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence been influential in the awareness, or production of peacelessness in that particular area of the country?
6. In what ways does gender impact responses as to how violence and peace are defined, and how peace might be fostered in the country

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I present the results of the study. But first, I discuss the setting and demographics, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis stage. I then restate the precoded categories, describe the emerging themes (including brief definitions), and offer direct quotes from the interviews as examples. As part of the data analysis, I offer a note on discrepant cases.

Before the results, evidence of trustworthiness is presented. This includes explaining what steps were taken to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Next, I offer an overview of the results and frequencies. Each research question is addressed; I explain how they were answered and present findings that support the answers to those questions. I do so by listing (a) the number of times each precoded category or emerging theme was repeated in the interviews, (b) the number of

participants that raised those topics, and (c) specific quotes to exemplify the theme being discussed.

Setting

I contacted all participants for this study directly and invited them to participate in an interview. Appointments were made individually with the setting for the interview chosen by the participant. All the interviews were conducted inside the target neighborhood. Locations included the participants' homes or offices, or a local café with very private seating. An informed consent form was signed by each of the participants before the interview was conducted. There was no noise or public interference; all the interviews took place under calm circumstances without any stressing elements. Every participant spoke freely as much as he or she wished to and the interview was ended only when participants felt they had said everything there was to be said. The location, therefore, was not considered a factor that could influence the interpretation of the results.

Demographics

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who represent the target neighborhood demographics. Of the 15 participants, 54% (8) were female, and 46% (7) were male. Of the 15 participants, 14.6% (2) were between 18 to 24 years of age, 70.8% (11) were between 25 to 64 years of age, and 13.4% (2) were 65 years old or older. In addition, per theory-based sampling –one which is based on the conceptual frameworks of social constructivism and the Integral Peace Perspective- (Patton, 2002),

participants included two community leaders, two teachers, two local business owners, two parents, and seven citizens performing other types of jobs.

Data Collection

The data collection consisted of 15 face-to-face interviews, conducted in Spanish, the native language of participants, one at a time. According to their schedules, I coordinated every appointment with each of them and I was able to conduct an average of three interviews per week, completing the data collection in about five weeks.

The interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. All the interviews were digitally recorded. I keep that data under safe conditions exactly as planned and approved by the IRB. No unusual circumstances took place during the data collection stage.

A semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix C), was used. According to the participant responses, some variations were introduced in order to get the participant to provide more details or to answer more in depth in order to make sure that the research questions were adequately addressed in each of the interviews.

Besides recording the interviews, I took careful notes and signaled elements that I thought could be of use for later analysis. After each interview I wrote a journal in which I summarized what I noticed during the interview and what I believe was relevant for further analysis. As recommended by Janesick (2004), I also wrote what I personally felt after each one of the interviews to become aware of any personal biases, so that the data analysis stage would be conducted with as much objectivity as it could be reached. These notes and memos were all consulted when analyzing the data so that no details would be missed

Data Analysis

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used for codification and analysis. As data was encoded, preliminary themes and emerging themes were detected. In that way, words, sentences or entire paragraphs of the interview were selected and codified with the purpose of finding patterns and repetitions in the participants' discourses. If the words or sentences of the interviewee were adequate to match the pre-existing categories, then those words or sentences were encoded into them. When a new theme emerged, a new category was created to encode that piece of the discourse into it. NVivo software allows the researcher to include a piece of the participant's discourse into two or more categories if required, which was common during this data analysis. This feature has strengths as it allows the researcher to include a piece of the participant's discourse in several categories being analyzed at the same time. For example, for purposes of this investigation, certain experience can refer to an event of corruption that the participant personally observed. This would be encoded under "Experience/Observation," but also under "Corruption." Because of their constant repetition by the interviewees, some of the themes reached fast saturation, whereas other themes received only few mentions. In the results section this is fully covered.

Appendix D contains the preexisting coding categories and the rationale for their selection. These categories include mass media, religious, conversational, educational, and family social constructs, as well as peace related social constructs. After analyzing the data, some of these categories remained valid, and were used constantly to make

sense of the participants' discourse. Some, however, were only mentioned a few times during the interviews.

Emerging themes

As interviews occurred, more themes emerged and were added to the existing ones. With few exceptions, by the first five or six interviews, the great majority of the emerging themes had appeared, and the rest of the interviews consisted of repetitions of those themes. At this time, the number of repetitions of the emerging themes is not included. The emerging themes are shown in Table 1.0 and explained below:

Table 1

Emerging Themes

Parent Code	Emerging Themes
Experience/observation	Experience and personal observation Experience someone close One specific experience Experience at work
Mass media	Mass Media: Distrust Mass Media: Little or very little Mass Media: Music or Cultural programs Mass Media: They exhibit too violent images or notes Mass Media: Not Interesting Mass Media: I used to watch (read/listen) them, but not anymore Mass Media: Analysis programs are interesting
Government	Corruption Government not succeeding, not efficient, or negligent Distrust of government Security forces out in the streets produce me stress or impact my perceptions
Family or values	Principles and values as components of peace Lack of family care or lack of parents' care Loss of values

Peace	Education as a peacebuilding factor, education investment Participation, engagement as citizens in public issues Peace understood as links and relations Peace understood as respect or absence of violence/ not “messaging” with one another Peace is possible Peace is not possible or too difficult Inner peace Peace understood as tranquility, calmness Mexico is peaceful Mexico is not peaceful Frustration, Impotence Lack of social interaction, lack of links Mexicans are naturally violent Peace not related to poverty underdevelopment Mexicans are naturally peaceful Mexico City is less violent than states Mexico or Mexicans are passive
Organized Crime	Ambition Situation deteriorating Tough approach to OC/ we should not negotiate OC too powerful OC normalized Long time problem Excessive violence Fear or terror OC is an international problem OC is not violent/lives in peace within communities
Social construction	Books social construction
Other	Old age social construction Social or political meetings social construction

Emerging Themes Order of Occurrence

Table 2 presents the emerging themes in order of occurrence. After the table, an explanation of each of those themes is offered.

Table 2

Emerging Themes: Order of Occurrence

Order of occurrence	Emerging Themes
First interview	Ambition Experience and personal observation Experience someone close Lack of family care or lack of parents' care Loss of values One specific experience Fear or terror Government not succeeding, not efficient, or negligent Experience at work Mass Media: Distrust Mass Media: Not Interesting Mexicans are naturally violent Mexico is not peaceful Long time problem OC normalized Peace understood as tranquility, calmness Mexico is peaceful Mass Media: Analysis programs are interesting OC is not violent/lives in peace within communities Books social construction
Second Interview	Excessive violence Mass Media: Little or very little Mexico City is less violent than states Peace not related to poverty underdevelopment Principles and values as components of peace Situation deteriorating Tough approach to OC/ we should not negotiate Social or political meetings social construction Participation, engagement as

	citizens in public issues Lack of social interaction, lack of links Corruption Mexico or Mexicans are passive Education as a peacebuilding factor, education investment Distrust of government Inner peace Mass Media: They exhibit too violent images or notes Old age social construction Peace is possible
Third Interview	
	Peace is possible Mexicans are naturally peaceful OC too powerful Frustration, Impotence Peace understood as respect or absence of violence/ not “messaging” with one another
Fourth Interview	
	Mass Media: Music or Cultural programs Peace understood as links and relations
Fifth Interview	
	Peace is not possible or too difficult Mass Media: I used to watch (read/listen) them, but not anymore OC is an international problem Security forces out in the streets produce me stress or impact my perceptions
Sixth Interview	

Note By the sixth interview all themes had emerged. The rest of the interviews consisted of repetitions of preexisting and emerging themes.

Emerging Themes Explained

Emerging themes are now explained. Direct quotes from the interviews are used to exemplify them. Since the interviews were conducted in Spanish, language structure may sound strange in the English translation of the direct quotes. These are the emerging

themes, defined and explained in order of importance as to the frequency of mentions during interviews:

Experience and personal observation. All mentions referring moments or incidents which the participant personally experienced or observed. Example:

Well, I have travelled to other states of Mexico: Guerrero, Baja California, I went to Morelia [Michoacán] once, and my perception was that people lived in constant fear; the fact of being in Tijuana [Baja California's capital city] witnessing how the police cars are watching the street with highly armed policemen, well, that is something hard to see. (IP09, personal communication, April 18, 2013)

Corruption. Specific mentions of corruption as the cause for organized crime.

Example:

“Many natives commented what I have said: that there is governmental protection to the drug lords, about the corruption and so forth” (IP05, personal communication, April 9, 2013).

Experience someone close. Mentions including events that the participant did not personally experience but were experienced by someone close and thus, influenced the perception or opinion of the participant. Example:

“Because each day besides watching the violence at the TV or hearing it in the radio, I hear it from very close people” (IP07 personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Government not succeeding, not efficient, or negligent. Mentions to the perception that the government is not being successful to combat organized crime and diminish violence or bring forth peace. Example:

I would describe it as a struggle with few results; as a lack of will from the authorities and the institutions involved. The results are worse than yesterday, the day before yesterday, than ten years ago. (IP13, personal communication, April 30, 2013)

Mass Media: Distrust. Participant mentions he or she does not trust the mass media. Example:

I believe none of the traditional media are neutral. Some are sold out to the government, the majority; or the others that are quite leftists and want to sell the idea that things are dramatically wrong, but they are not neutral either. I recently saw my Facebook profile and I saw a receipt showing how the Ministry of the Interior is paying over 400,000 pesos (35,000 USD) to [Joaquín] López Dóriga [the most famous TV anchorman]. It is in Facebook, it has the date of May 3 2012. How should I believe in what the media say? (IP08, personal communication, April 16, 2013)

Principles and values as components of peace. Participant mentions that principles or values are part of what peace is. Example:

I say it is a matter of principles, whether I raised my kids with values; I say that I should teach through the example; otherwise, how am I supposed to tell my kids ‘Don’t smoke!’ if I am smoking? If I have a crooked life and I stop paying the maintenance fee where I live in, whatever, the kid learns that, and a small thing turns into a big one. (IP02, personal communication, March 27, 2013)

Education/education investment. Participant mentions the specific need to invest in education in order to build peace or diminish violence. Example: “[...] so the paramount thing is to invest on education, a lot of investments to have well prepared men and women” (IP04, personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Lack of family care or lack of parents’ care. Participant believes that one of the causes of organized criminal violence is that parents or families are not taking care of their children. Example: “That the parents are not focused on their children, they don’t do the parenting anymore, but instead, they let them be. They think school educates them and that is a complete lie” (IP03, personal communication, March 29, 2013).

Distrust of government. Participant distrusts the government, believes it is not behaving honestly, or that it is colluded with organized crime. Example:

“Well, I have the idea that the government is deeply involved [in criminal activities], though I can’t corroborate that” (IP12, personal communication, April 26, 2013).

Participation, engagement as citizens in public issues. Participant believes that in order to foster peace or solve the problems of the country, the citizens should be more active and participate in public issues. Example:

I believe with our attitude, being good neighbors we contribute... If I see something is happening to someone, well I call the police... I believe what is remaining is that we could get organized as that, as citizens. Why does the organized crime triumph? Because it is organized, and the citizens are not. We don’t know each other, we don’t know anyone’s telephone, and we don’t care [...] Additionally, the authorities have to do their job. But we want the government to do everything... we don’t want to get involved, we don’t want to participate. I need to take part on this, I am alive, I have to participate. (IP02, personal communication, March 27, 2013)

Ambition. Participant believes that one of the main causes for organized crime and its violence is ambition, people wanting always more or getting rich fast.

Example:

“Now the youth want to be rich immediately, without working” (IP04, personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Situation deteriorating. Participant believes that the situation used to be better and it has been deteriorating with years. Example:

“Well when I was at school, I hardly ever heard about violence. It was not as bad as it is now” (IP05, personal communication, April 9, 2013).

Mass Media: Little or very little. Participant says that has almost no contact, or very little contact, but does have contact with mass media. Example:

“[...] A little. I watch only a little TV, I watch with my parents López Dóriga’s TV news program. I am not so fan of the way he informs, though” (IP14, personal communication, May 2, 2013).

One specific experience. Participant relates one specific and meaningful experienced that greatly impacted her perceptions or conceptions. Example:

“In addition, I went to live to Playa del Carmen, and one day I could see a huge military convoy escorting a group of **Zetas or Pelones** [a local criminal organization]” (IP07, personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Tough approach towards OC/not negotiate. Participant believes that a tough or hard line should be adopted against organized crime and that the government should not negotiate with them. Example:

I approved in part what [President] Calderón did, because I don't think it is possible to have a cup of coffee with the organized crime and tell them: 'you have to understand that what you are doing is wrong, eh? You better behave yourselves'. I believe that if they kill, it would be necessary to use violence. Of course, there may be collateral damages, well that is true, but that is the natural risk. (IP02, personal communication, March 27, 2013)

Excessive violence. Mentions from participants to high impact violence or terrorist tactics, incidents that are regarded as too violent in the participant's view, or the use of a tactic that resembles terrorism or a manipulation of a violent act in order to produce fear or terror in the society, usually politically motivated (Moghaddam, 1987). Example:

Facts such as when, a month and a half ago, **at Toreo** [the border limits between Mexico City and State of Mexico], I could see there were some officers of the PGR [Republic's General Attorney], and I was shocked on what I saw: a police picket. I immediately thought a crash had occurred, but when I realized I saw two human bodies hanging at a bridge with a message saying: "We are already here, bear in mind the consequences". (IP08, personal communication, April 16, 2013)

Fear or terror. Participant mentions that the current situation or a specific incident is provoking on him or her a state of fear or terror. Example:

“Right now, my fear comes from my own personal experience –I was robbed at my business” (IP07, personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Mass Media: Music or Cultural programs. Participant says that he or she does have contact with mass media but only to listen to music or watching cultural programs. Example:

“A little. When I watch TV I like to follow cultural programs” (IP13, personal communication, April 30, 2013).

Mass Media: They exhibit too violent images or notes. Participant says that the mass media show too violent images or notes and that acts as a stressing factor towards him or her. Example:

“Not too much. In the past they were less sensationalist, now they are all very graphical. I don’t like to read them, always the same: complaints, murders, and so on” (IP11, personal communication, April 23, 2013).

Peace understood as links and relations, social cohesion. Participant believes that peace is related to social links, and cohesion, improving relations one another. Example:

“[Peace is...] to get along among Mexicans. That is to say, to have a good relationship and kinship within the Mexican community” (IP05 personal communication, April 9, 2013).

Peace understood as respect or absence of violence/ not “messaging” with one another. Participant believes that peace is respecting other people and letting them live without interfering with their affairs. Example:

“[Peace is:] I don’t mess with you and you don’t mess with me, until something is affecting us” (IP11, personal communication, April 23, 2013).

Peace is possible. Participant believes peace is indeed possible in Mexico.

Example:

“Of course; peace is possible in any country; with solidarity. If I gave a person what he needs, there would be more harmony within the society” (IP11 personal communication, April 23, 2013).

Loss of values. Participant believes that the root of organized crime and its violence is that the Mexican society has lost its values. Example:

I believe it is a question of values. I believe we, as a society, are losing many of them. I talk about this with my grandparents -who are already over seventy years old- or friends of a similar age, and realize they were poor but with principles and values. (IP07, personal communication, April 15, 2013)

Organized Crime (OC) too powerful. Participant believes that the organized crime is too powerful or invincible. Example:

“To me it is a thousand-headed monster that each day is getting more difficult to defeat. Each mafia is taking care of its own territories and its own power. Unfortunately we are in the middle of the conflict” (IP08, personal communication, April 16, 2013).

Mass Media: Not Interesting. Participant says mass media are boring or not interesting. Example:

“[I watch mass media...] each time less and less. There are not interesting proposals; everything is the same” (IP10, personal communication, April 19, 2013).

Mass Media: I used to watch (read/listen) them, but not anymore. Participant says that he or she used to have contact with mass media, but due to not trusting them, or them not being interesting or stressful, does not have contact with them anymore. Example:

“Well, I used to watch TV news programs in **Televisa**, **TV Azteca**, and *CNN*, but given my experience watching this programs I have given up watching them” (IP12, personal communication, April 26, 2013).

Mexico is not peaceful. Participant believes Mexico is currently not peaceful. Example:

Because each day besides watching the violence at the TV or hearing it in the radio, I hear it from very close people, and, well, we have experienced violence near my house or at my business. I believe nowadays Mexico is not peaceful at all. (IP07, personal communication, April 15, 2013)

Inner peace: Participant believes that the inner peace or the peace that comes from within us is as a component of peace. Example:

I believe by doing and insight, to acknowledge the way I am; but nobody does it. We don't know who we are, ourselves. We realize what happens in the external world, but we don't see what happens in ourselves. I like to predict, and to have some insights, and from time to time I get to interesting conclusions. (IP03, personal communication, March 29, 2013)

Peace understood as tranquility, calmness. Participant believes that peace is related to tranquility or calmness. Example:

I believe peace is not that everyone should be happy like in Disneyland, but to have certain tranquility on how relaxed are you while doing your shopping, or going out at night, or when... I don't know, so many things. You don't have to be worried about who is next to you or who is staring at you. (IP02, personal communication, March, 2013)

Mexico is peaceful. Participant believes Mexico is currently peaceful. Example:

“Mexico is a peaceful country in comparison with some other countries in true war. Here we don’t have a war; war is to be attacked by another country” (IP05, personal communication, April 9, 2013).

Security forces out in the streets produce me stress or impact my

perceptions. Participant believes that the fact that security forces are out in the streets is a generator of stress or fear. Example:

“[...] the fact of being in Tijuana [Baja California’s capital city] witnessing how the police cars are watching the street with highly armed policemen, well, that is something hard to see” (IP09, personal communication, April 18, 2013).

Frustration, Impotence. Participant mentions she or he feels frustrated or impotent against the current situation of violence. Example:

“Well, the situation in which Mexico is generates me impotence and frustration” (IP09, personal communication, April 18, 2013).

Experience at work. Participant refers to one or more experiences he or she has had at work. Example:

“Every client talks about non satisfaction. My clients with a job say they are just surviving, that they have to work all day and stuff like that. On the other hand, the ones without a job are desperate” (IP15, personal communication, May 7, 2013).

Lack of social interaction, lack of links. Participant believes that some components of peacelessness is that the social links have broken and there is a lack of social interaction among Mexicans. Example:

“And socially, well each time we know less about the other , we don’t know anything about other people’s life, each time we talk less and less among us” (IP04, personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Mexicans are naturally violent. Participant believes that Mexicans are inherently violent. Example:

“[...] and I find that in our genetics there is presence of violence and the no-peace gens” (IP01, personal communication, March 26, 2013).

Peace not related to poverty underdevelopment. Participant believes that peace is not related to poverty or underdevelopment. Example:

“I mean, peacelessness is not directly related to poverty or underdevelopment. It is very complex but to be poor is not a synonym of being violent. We can have both cases, a poor being or not violent” (IP09, personal communication, April 18, 2013).

Books social construction. Mentions to books as a social construction factor.

Participant says that he or she has formed a perception or a conception because he or she has read it in a book. Example:

“I have read some books as well, Cecilia Falcón’s book on the Lecumberri jail; David Kaplan’s book about his prison break of Santa Martha” (IP05, personal communication, April 9, 2013).

Mexicans are naturally peaceful. Participant believes that Mexicans are inherently peaceful. Example:

“Yes, I do consider Mexican society is peaceful; because the population is still good-hearted” (IP08, personal communication, April 16, 2013).

Mexico City is less violent than states. Mentions to the fact that there is more violence in the states of Mexico, than in the capital of the country. Example:

“I feel other parts of the Mexican Republic are more conflictive than the Mexico City” (IP02, personal communication, March 27, 2013).

OC normalized. Participant believes that the OC is part of the Mexican life and has been normalized into the Mexican culture. Example:

“It is difficult because I think the organized crime is already attached to the Mexican society; it is part of our idiosyncrasy” (IP06, personal communication, April 12, 2013).

Long-time problem. Participant mentions that violence is a long time problem. Example:

“The role of the government which missed to perform for many years ago, not since these last twelve years but since a long time ago” (IP01, personal communication, March 26, 2013).

Peace is not possible or too difficult. Participant believes that peace is not possible for Mexico or it would be too difficult to achieve that it would not be possible. Example:

“It seems a utopia to end this problem for once and for all” (IP06, personal communication, April 12, 2013).

OC is an international problem. Participant believes that organized crime is not a Mexican problem but an international one in its causes and potential solutions.

Example:

It is not as simple as to change the national political system; on the contrary, we have to deal with the organized crime from abroad, political systems and politics from other countries. (IP12, personal communication, April 26, 2013)

Mexico or Mexicans are passive. Participant believes that Mexicans do not act or engage. Example:

“I don’t know if Mexico is pacifist or, how do you say, that stays without doing anything... Passive, yes we are” (IP06, personal communication, April 12, 2013).

Old age social construction. Participant mentions that he or she has such a perception or opinion because her or his old age. Example:

Maybe it is also something generational, I think this way because of my age; right now the children, are different, they don't see as an option to study hard but instead to have the best car or the biggest house, as soon as possible. (IP12, personal communication, April 26, 2013)

Religious social construction. Participant mentions that he or she, or the society has formed its perceptions, conceptions or values through his or her religion.

Example:

“[...] our live is based on idols, which has to do with ancestral roots that influence us to seek out a symbol. The same if it is the **Virgen de Guadalupe** [...]” (IP01, personal communication, March 26, 2013).

Mass Media: Watches analysis programs/analysis programs are interesting.

Participant says that she or he watches TV analysis shows because they are interesting. Example:

“They are quite interesting though [referring to TV analysis programs], because I can understand how the current society is, in other parts of my country, for example” (IP04, personal communication, April 8, 2013).

OC is not violent/lives in peace within communities. The participant believes that the organized crime does not exert violence against communities and lives in peace with them. Example:

It is curious because before -I don't know if nowadays- the people were happy with the 'Godfather', let's call him that way. Why? Because while he did his activities -that was not violence, but just drug trafficking in diverse manifestations-, at the same time he took care of the town's main needs: he fixed the street, paid a new bell for the church, helped with the football court, with the school [...]. (IP01, personal communication, March 26, 2013)

Social or political meetings social construction. Participant says that his or her perception and ideas come from social or political meetings. Example:

"Well, I attend to the meetings are held in the neighborhood" (IP04, personal communication, April 8, 2013).

Before presenting the repetition of these patterns, I will mention a note on discrepant cases, and assess how trustworthiness of the study was ensured.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepancies in this investigation are few and only related to the less frequent categories. The most important findings presented no discrepancies in this sample of 15 participants. The entirety of participants showed the basic same pattern. The most

frequent subjects such as “Experience/observation” (111 mentions), “Structural peace conception” (96 mentions), and “Oral Conversation” (79 mentions), were confirmed throughout the sample, regardless gender, age, or profession. There were a few cases that varied only in some aspects. For example, participants below 40 years old showed more proneness to use Internet and social media than the rest of participants. In spite of such variations, they agreed with the rest of the sample in that they use Internet or social media as alternative sources, because in their view the traditional mass media such as the TV is not entirely credible, which confirms the main pattern. Moreover, the main source of social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions, even for participants below 40 years old, is their own experience and conversation with family, neighbors, friends, and associates.

Two participants noted that they did not believe that peace is really possible in Mexico, whereas the rest of the 13 participants said it is. However, they coincide with the majority of the interviewees in the ways through which they socially construct their values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities. Other discrepancies that may be possibly related to gender, age, or profession are discussed below, and might be the subject of future research. Since the most frequent categories in this investigation present no major variations regardless of demographic factors, the sample of this study did not require to be extended.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I conducted a member checking on each participant in order to confirm the patterns that were found in the data analysis. An e-mail was sent to every one of them with the results. I asked if there were any questions and I asked whether those results made sense to them. Some of them answered in writing and some of them chose to call me with their feedback as they said they preferred talking to me than answering the e-mail. I took note of each response.

The answers of 100% of the participants confirm the validity of these results. None of the participants thought that the results did not make sense. On the contrary, some of them expressed excitement and emotion because they thought that this was a clear picture of how they think, and they believed this should be transmitted to mass media representatives, authorities, and decision makers. Here are some extracts of responses to the member checking:

I think your results are really interesting, I mean to this level, to the level of my own experience, they do make sense. What you found is correct. I question what I watch on TV. I do watch it but only as a provider of information, I do find out about news through it, but only in that way. My own experience matters much more. (IP01, personal communication, May 24, 2013)

You should certainly put this to practice and you should apply this to more neighborhoods and cities in the country. This is the real thing!! Experience is real. I don't trust the mass media. They get people to become skeptical about things. We don't trust them anymore. What matters is what you live, what you

experience, what you see with your own eyes. I really hope you do well with this study. Please keep in touch. (IP05, personal communication, May 23, 2013)

Whatta great job, Mauricio, I mean it! It really sounds interesting and it has impacted me a lot. Feeling that people are actually living this, is really amazing. I hope this has use for mass media, they should know what people think about them, and also with policy makers. I hope we can really do something with this. It really sounds to me that your work is very professional. It does shock to see such numbers, how much people distrusts of mass media and how much we value our own experience. But I am very impressed with how well done is your work. (IP07, personal communication, May 28, 2013)

These results make a lot of sense. They help us see where we are actually standing and where we are going to. When I see them I conclude that we don't think too differently, that we are not so far apart, we are connected. Your work helps us see where we should be looking for solutions and not waiting until the government acts. Instead, we ourselves should be getting the job done. (IP08, personal communication, May 27, 2013)

Very interesting results. These are great results because they say much about our country even though this is a small sample and only a neighborhood. To me, this should be the initial phase of a broader investigation because these first results

you got are very attached to what I consider we are living through. This investigation speaks about a national reality, not only local. There are more violent neighborhoods in the country, it is a national reality, and if we are feeling this way, then the people in the more violent areas must agree with your findings but even more deeply. (IP13, personal communication, May 27, 2013)

Member checking, as a methodological triangulation, helped confirming that these results are valid, but it also expressed that there is a feeling among certain interviewees about the possibility that these results could be transferred to other parts of the city and the country.

Transferability

The results of this research cannot be immediately transferable. The findings speak about certain participants who live in a specific neighborhood in Mexico City. Nevertheless, there is a heuristic value to these results. This methodology could be replicated in other areas of Mexico City, and then in other areas of the country. This would lead to data that would allow for contrasting with cases around the country. As one of the participants said, it is true that if such results were found in a relatively nonviolent neighborhood, it could be expected that very similar, and even stronger patterns about the role of personal experience and conversation, for example, could be found in more dangerous neighborhoods (IP13, personal communication, April 30, 2013).

In order to verify that, a quantitative instrument could be developed out of the answers of the participants from this research, and this could be applied either face to

face, or via e-mail to a larger sample of people located in different areas of the country. Only then could we speak about the possibility to transfer these results. Meanwhile, the value remains at the case level and the methodological and heuristic understanding that the present research can portray.

Dependability

Dependability is the qualitative counterpart for reliability (Patton, 2002), and is usually assessed through audits or methodological triangulation. This research's dependability was ensured through the member checking, which confirmed that results made sense to 100% of the participants. In addition to member checking, journals and notes were kept during and immediately after the interviews (Janesik, 2004). These notes helped during the data analysis stage, to ensure that no detail was missing and that what was observed during the interviews was considered during the analysis of the information. Through the journaling and memoing techniques, I kept noticing themes that were emerging, or their constant repetition. These are two examples of notes that I took immediately after interviews:

I have just come out of this interview. This was a participant below 24, and there are many similarities with other interviews at first glance, but there are some differences too. I would say that in the similarities, this young man showed similar appreciations towards values, home values, lack of structural peace as root factors for OC violence. He said that children are abandoned and then they are prone to crime. This person shows great distrust of mass media, as he says that they are too violent. He simply does not like to watch those programs. He turns to

Nat Geo or different programs such as Discovery Ch. Another similarity again is the experience factor. A great deal of stuff comes from own experience. But then, one difference. This is a young person and clearly uses social networks. Facebook came a lot during the interview. A great deal of stuff comes from You Tube. This person seems to believe more to a You Tube video than the TV. Amazing! This person thanked me, I felt great, he felt he needed to discharge or talk about all these things. Great interview. (Meschoulam, 2013, unpublished raw data from journal at NVivo software)

Felt much thanked once more. This was an older adult, and clearly his experience is crucial to his points of view. Again, repetition on mass media distrust, no connection to those. Used to read more previously. Situation deteriorating and mass media credibility as well. Forms conceptions through experience mostly. I felt very warm. Very rich interview, long and rich as to what people perceive. He thanked me so much for my work that it is clearly becoming a pattern as well. (Meschoulam, 2013, unpublished raw data from journal at *NVivo* software)

These kinds of notes were all used during the analysis and are a fundamental part of this research in order to make sense of the findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the qualitative counterpart for objectivity (Patton, 2002), and can be assessed through triangulation, reflexivity, and peer review. Full objectivity is

unachievable by a social researcher, but some strategies to diminish the risks of subjectivity were used. A reflection about my potential biases due to the type of work I perform as a journalist and scholar for peace was conducted by myself and expressed to my committee. In addition, I selected a far away and very different neighborhood than the one I live in. Third, I put attention to my notes as well as the records, which led to a different and new understanding than previous research conducted in Mexico. And finally, I am sharing these results with my committee and Walden University which provides peer review.

Results

A general overview of frequencies is offered before assessing specific sections of the sample and their responses. Then, a discussion will follow in which each of the research questions is addressed explaining how that question was answered, including evidence to support such answers. Direct quotes from the interviews are provided to stress the findings.

Table 3

Overall Frequencies

Categories (emerging or pre-existing)	Number of mentions during the interviews	Number of interviewees who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and personal observation	111	15
Structural Peace conception	96	15
Oral Conversation	79	15
Structural violence conception	64	14
Corruption	54	12
Mass Media: Printed	38	13

Grassroots peace conception	34	9
Experience someone close	31	11
Government not succeeding, not efficient, or negligent	30	12
Mass Media: Distrust	30	12
Family social construction	29	9
Mass Media: TV	26	9
Principles and values as components of peace	26	6
Education and learning social construction	24	10
Education as a peacebuilding factor, education investment	23	11
Lack of family care or lack of parents' care	22	7
Distrust of government	19	7
Participation, engagement as citizens in public issues	18	7
Ambition (wanting always more as a cause for OC)	17	8
Situation deteriorating	17	7
Mass Media: Little or very little	16	11
Mass Media general mentions	16	10
One specific experience	16	10
Tough approach to OC/ we should not negotiate	15	7
Mass Media: Radio social construction	14	8
Excessive violence	12	10
Fear or terror	12	7
Mass Media: Music or Cultural programs	11	8
Mass Media: They exhibit too violent images or notes	11	6
Peace understood as links and relations	11	6

Peace understood as respect or absence of violence/ not “messing” with one another	11	8
Peace is possible	11	10
Social networks social construction/Facebook or Twitter	11	6
Loss of values	10	6
OC too powerful	10	7
Internet social construction	9	6
Mass Media: Not Interesting	9	5
Mass Media: I used to watch/read/listen them, but not anymore	9	5
Mexico is not peaceful	9	8
Inner peace	7	3
Peace understood as tranquility, calmness	7	5
Mexico is peaceful	6	3
Security forces out in the streets produce me stress or impact my perceptions	6	2
Frustration, Impotence	5	3
Experience at work	5	4
Lack of social interaction, lack of links	5	4
Mexicans are naturally violent	5	3
Peace not related to poverty underdevelopment	5	5
Books social construction	4	2
Cultural social construction	4	3
Mexicans are naturally peaceful	4	3
Mexico City is less violent than states	4	2
OC normalized or part of Mexican life	4	2

Public spaces interaction	4	3
social construction		
Long time problem	3	3
Mass Media: Movies	3	3
Peace is not possible or too difficult	3	2
OC is an international problem	2	1
Internet blogs social construction	2	2
Mexico or Mexicans are passive, do not act or engage	2	2
Old age social construction	2	2
Religion social construction	2	1
Mass Media: Analysis	1	1
programs are interesting		
OC is not violent/lives in peace within communities	1	1
Social or political meetings social construction	1	1

Overview of Frequencies

As Table 3 shows, despite the high number of themes that emerged from the interviews, there is only a saturation of some of the categories, both preexisting and emerging. This saturation began from the initial interviews and was evident by less than half of them. The highest number of mentions (111) was received by the theme of “Experience and personal observation.” Participants were constantly repeating their life experience or their own observation of what they perceive as facts, as the main source of social construction of their values, perceptions and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace. The next most mentioned theme was “Structural peace conception,” a precoded category (96 mentions). The interviewees continually said that the main causes

and potential solutions for organized criminal violence rested upon the structures of the system, including the need to solve issues such as poverty, underdevelopment, inequality, democracy, transparency, among others as it is explained in Chapter 2. This is related to two other topics that were very much discussed by participants: “Structural violence” (64 mentions), and specifically “Corruption” (54 mentions). Structural violence refers to several factors that do not consist of direct violence, but still harm, dehumanize, and can even kill people such as hunger, inequality or the collusion of authorities with criminals (Galtung, 1985). It is directly related to structural peace as the negative side of the coin. The specific theme of corruption arose several times as well. Direct quotes from the interviews are provided at the discussion below.

Another vastly mentioned theme was also a precoded category: “Oral conversation” (79 mentions). Participants continually said that they build their perceptions and ideas through what they talk with their friends, their family, their coworkers, their customers, their neighbors, or people in general. As Table 2 shows, “Experience and observation” (111 mentions), and “Oral conversation” (79 mentions), received many more mentions than the mass media as social constructors of values, perceptions, and conceptions. “Printed media,” such as newspapers or magazines got 38 mentions; “TV” received 26 mentions, and “Radio,” 14 mentions. Furthermore, 12 of the participants said that they do not trust the mass media (30 mentions). Even though some of them do have contact with the news, they distrust what they watch or listen, especially when they personally experience something different in the streets. Only participants below 40 years old said they use Internet (9 mentions) or social networks such as

Facebook or Twitter (11 mentions), but when they did, they said they commonly used them as alternate ways to find about things. Social networks to these participants are more credible sources of information than the traditional media. Direct quotes from the interviews are provided below.

There are more themes that emerged, some of them did not have a large number of repetitions, but those are still noted in the table for contrasting purposes.

Figure 1.0 shows the saturation of the first 5 themes. This is a pattern which repeated regardless of age, gender, or profession. I will now describe a more detailed analysis of frequencies according to the various characteristics of the sample.

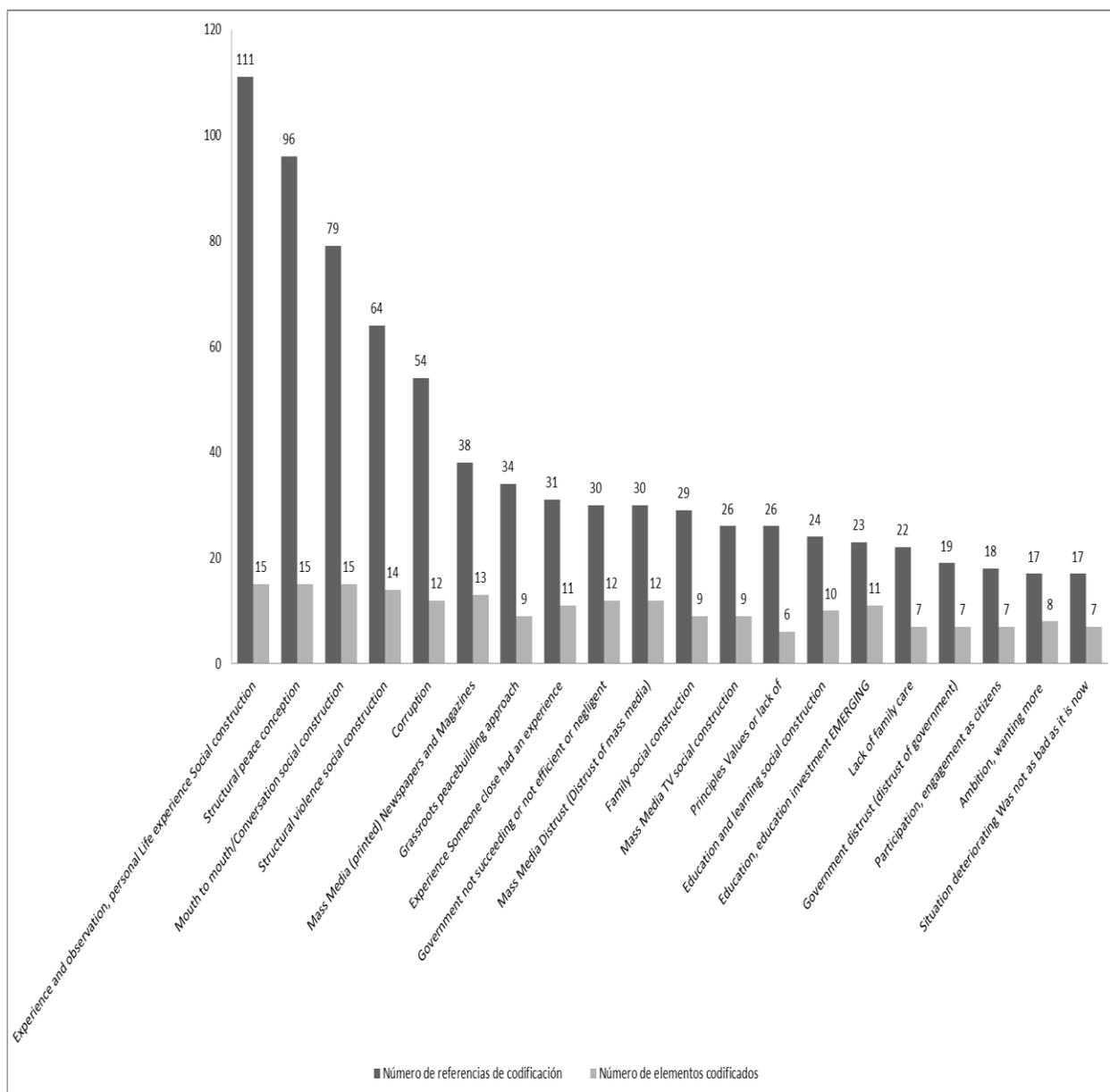


Figure 1. Overall frequencies. This graph shows saturation on the first five categories: Experience/observation, structural peace conception, oral conversation, structural violence, and corruption.

Frequencies according to sampling groups

This research does not show that there are substantial variations among participants of different age, gender or profession, as to the most mentioned themes

during the interviews. The categories of “Experience and personal observation,” “Structural Peace conception,” “Oral conversation,” “Structural violence conception,” and “Corruption,” remain among the most mentioned themes by these participants regardless of their gender, their age, or their professions. There are, nevertheless, some differences according to these sampling criteria in reference to some of the other categories and their frequencies.

Professions

The sample included two teachers, two community leaders, two business owners, two parents, and 7 people performing other types of jobs. Some differences include the following:

1. The theme of corruption was somewhat less mentioned by teachers and parents than the rest of the groups.
2. Teachers seem to be in more contact with printed media (newspapers and magazines) than the rest of the sample.
3. The community leaders show a higher inclination for grassroots solutions that include participation and establishing social links in the community, and engagement of people in public issues, whereas parents are less prone to these types of solutions.
4. The community leaders seem less prone to rely upon the experiences of someone close to them than the rest of the sample, which shows a higher inclination to form their opinion through the experiences of people close to them.

5. Business owners and parents presented more mentions on the fact that the government is being inefficient or negligent than the rest of the groups.
6. Although teachers seem to be more in contact with other types of media such as TV than the rest of the group, they express the same amount of distrust towards those media. Community leaders expressed they had no contact with mass media at all. Parents, in contrast, appear less distrustful of mass media than the rest of the groups.

These data is only meaningful to a limited way. The particular inclinations of specific groups do not alter the general patterns, but only reflect potential lines for future research on those sectors of the population, as it is recommended in chapter 5.

Age

The sample included participants of different ages. The research showed no substantial variations between ages as it refers to the five most mentioned themes by the entire sample. Some variations, however, were encountered. Table 4 shows differences among age cohorts. These differences include the following:

1. There is a higher inclination of participants from 40 to 60 years of age towards reading printed media, whereas participants below 40 are much more prone to use Internet websites, blogs, and social media as sources of information.
2. Participants below 40 years of age are more prone to distrust of traditional mass media. They referred to that theme as their 7th most mentioned theme, whereas participants from 41 to 59 mentioned as it their 13th, and participants above 60 mentioned as their 17th most mentioned category. Moreover,

participants below 40 say that they use Internet and social media as alternatives to traditional mass media, since the first are much more credible than the latter.

3. Participants above 60 years old tend to stress more issues such as family care and values than younger participants. In the view of the older participants, parents are leaving their children without enough care, and thus, kids are losing principles and values. That theme only received three mentions among participants below 40 years old.
4. Participants above 60 years old are more prone to focus on education investment as in their experience, potential solutions for peacelessness could be found in that area. This issue was their 8th more mentioned theme, whereas among participants between 41 and 59 years of age it was their 19th most mentioned category, and among participants below 40 years of age, it was only their 22nd.
5. Participants above 60 years old tend to speak less in terms of grassroots, engagement, participation, and local actions to foster peacebuilding, whereas participants below that age are more prone to a grassroots peace approach.

Table 4

Differences between age cohorts

Categories	Frequencies in participants below 40	Frequencies in participants between 40 and 59	Frequencies in participants above 60
Experience and personal observation	53	35	23

Structural Peace conception	48	26	22
Oral conversation	37	26	16
Structural violence conception	30	16	18
Corruption	32	12	10
Mass Media: Printed	17	17	4
Grassroots peace conception	22	10	2
Experience someone close	16	12	3
Government not succeeding	11	6	13
Mass Media: Distrust	19	7	4
Family social construction	7	14	8
Mass Media: TV, I watch it somewhat or a lot.	9	10	7
Principles and values as components of peace	12	4	10
Education and learning social construction	11	6	7
Education as a peacebuilding factor, education investment	8	5	10
Lack of family care or lack of parents' care	3	8	11
Distrust of government	12	3	4
Participation, engagement as citizens in public issues	11	6	1
Ambition	12	4	1
Situation deteriorating	7	5	5
Mass Media: Little or very little	9	3	4
Mass Media in general	5	9	2
One specific	12	2	2

experience			
Tough approach to OC/ we should not negotiate	5	7	3
Mass Media: Radio social construction	5	5	4
Excessive violence	6	5	1
Fear or terror	9	3	0
Mass Media: Music or Cultural programs	5	2	4
Mass Media: They exhibit too violent images or notes	8	1	2
Peace understood as links and relations	10	1	0
Peace understood as respect or absence of violence	6	4	1
Peace is possible	7	2	2
Social networks social construction	10	1	0
Loss of values	3	2	5
OC too powerful	5	3	2
Internet social construction	7	2	0
Mass Media: Not Interesting	5	3	1
Mass Media: I used to watch (read/listen) them, but not anymore	6	2	1
Mexico is not peaceful	4	3	2
Inner peace	3	0	4
Peace understood as tranquility, calmness	2	4	1
Mexico is peaceful	3	3	0
Security forces out in the streets	6	0	0
Frustration, Impotence	3	2	0

Experience at work	0	4	1
Lack of social interaction, lack of links		3	2
Mexicans are naturally violent	2	3	0
Peace not related to poverty underdevelopment	3	1	1
Books social construction	0	4	0
Cultural social construction	3	1	0
Mexicans are naturally peaceful	1	1	2
Mexico City is less violent than states	2	2	0
OC normalized	2	0	2
Public spaces interaction social construction	1	3	0
Long time problem	0	3	0
Mass Media: Movies	0	2	1
Peace is not possible or too difficult	2	0	1
OC is an international problem	0	2	0
Internet blogs social construction	2	0	0
Mexico or Mexicans are passive	2	0	0
Old age social construction	0	1	1
Religion social construction	0	2	0
Mass Media: Analysis programs are interesting	0	0	1
OC is not violent/lives in peace within communities	0	1	0
Social or political meetings social construction	0	0	1

Note: Table 4 shows frequencies among age cohorts. However, only two participants above 60 were interviewed, which causes the number of repetitions to be significantly

lower than the rest of cohorts. If the ranking in which each of the themes was mentioned is considered, then the conclusions from this table are clearer.

Gender

Since one of the research subquestions is related to differences in responses between male and female participants, that discussion is addressed below, at the research questions section.

Discussion by Research Questions

In this section, some potential answers to the research questions are offered. I begin with the main research question. Then I address each of the research sub-questions. Besides the frequencies of repetitions, direct quotes from the interviews are presented to support the findings.

Main Question

The main research question was: What is the process by which values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico are socially constructed among the inhabitants of a specific neighborhood in the capital of the country?

This research question was answered through the entire set of interview questions, whereas the research sub-questions are addressed through specific interview questions. In chapter 3, and Appendix C, more details on the interview protocol can be found.

Findings

The investigation found that participants socially construct their values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in

Mexico through a complex process consisting mostly of personal experience and social conversation. This process includes other kinds of interactions, such as the mass media, the family education, or the school, but to a much lesser degree than the personal experience or the social conversation. The latter two themes had several more mentions (111 and 79) during interviews than mass media or other factors of social construction.

These are some examples of such mentions:

Basically, my opinion is derived from my personal experience, not from the TV, the radio or the newspapers. (IP05, personal communication, April 9, 2013)

Each day we see and learn about this kind of characters [the kingpins]. We even see it in this neighborhood; every now and then we see the drug retailers at schools, but nobody speaks out. On this matter, I am practically speaking over my personal experience; nobody stops a patrol and says 'hey there is a guy on bike selling drugs'. We are afraid or indifferent. (IP06, personal communication, April 12, 2013)

By hearing each other; by hearing other people's opinion. There are some people that in spite of not been specialists they know about the topics, and I like to listen. Nowadays, I hear it at work, mostly. (IP04, personal communication, April 8, 2013)

Many participants expressed a single anecdote or experience that deeply impacts their perception or conceptions about violence or peace (16 mentions). This is an example:

I had a group, a difficult one; it was a third grade group. There were boys who didn't know how to read or write, but there was a boy in particular that every time when anyone came close to him he reacted in an aggressive way. Doing some inquiries, this boy had already been punished and even left out from the school. It occurred to me to ask him what the problem was and he answered: 'This is not your problem'. I kept investigating and I found out that the boy's mother left, the child was under the protection of his grandmother, and the biggest problem was that the father was a drinker, to the level of falling off in the street. All the neighbors and the entire neighborhood mocked this boy. So how could he defend himself? Attacking and not letting anyone come close because he would feel threatened. I went in as far as I could. I even managed to talk to the father and made him present at the school, to clean himself. Make the father understand that his situation was very painful but that someone was behind him, behind his steps, and that the aggressiveness in the kid was beyond the normal. It seems, I didn't know, that there was solution to the problem. So, the environment; the education; the emotional influence; the economic condition; the place where people work; and the Mexican attitude of 'I am very macho man, and I don't let anyone to go over me', that is the way to stand out in a certain way or not let being stepped over

by anyone. My career taught me very much. (IP01, personal communication, March 26, 2013)

A great deal of the conversation during the interviews was devoted to relating experiences of someone close that have somehow impacted their feelings or understandings about the current violent situation in Mexico (31 mentions in 11 participants). This is an example:

[...] and first he started to hear certain kind of music –*reggaeton*– and started to have bad companies [Literal translation; means to be associated with bad people]. I even went to talk to his parents, but nothing really happened either. One day I knew from a third person that he was robbing people. (IP11, personal communication, April 23, 2013)

These two themes (personal experience/observation, and oral conversation) can be contrasted to the reading of printed material, which had only 38 mentions, the viewing of television with 26 mentions, and the radio (news) which had only 11 mentions. Even the experience of someone close as a social construction factor had more mentions (31) than the TV (26). Furthermore, the theme of distrust of mass media received 30 mentions. During the interviews, many participants acknowledged that they do have certain contact with the mass media, and yet they express distrust of them as social constructors of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities. This extract of an interview shows a pattern that was constantly repeated:

The fact of watching constant expressions of violence on TV psychologically affects any person. I believe the media incepts anger purposively and many other

useless things. That is why to me a TV news programs is futile. (IP11, personal communication, April 23, 2013)

Other processes of social construction emerged during the interviews, but to a much lesser degree than personal experience and mouth to mouth conversation. Such processes include the family as a factor for social construction (29 mentions), education and learning (24 mentions), or social media (11 mentions). Table 5 offers contrasted categories that specifically refer to social constructors or builders of values, perceptions, and conceptions, both pre-coded and emerging:

Table 5

Social Constructors

Categories (emerging or pre-existing)	Number of mentions during the interviews	Number of interviewees who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and observation	111	15
Oral conversation social construction	79	15
Mass Media (printed)/ Newspapers and Magazines	38	13
Experience someone close	31	11
Mass Media: Distrust	30	12
Family social construction	29	9
Mass Media: TV	26	9
Education and learning social construction	24	10
Mass Media: Little or very little	16	11
Mass Media in general: My contact with mass media has impacted my	16	10

opinion/perception		
One specific experience	16	10
Mass Media: Radio	14	8
Mass Media: Music or Cultural programs	12	7
Mass Media show excessive violence or too violent images or notes	11	8
Social Media, Facebook and Twitter	11	6
Internet Websites	11	6
Mass Media are not interesting	9	6
Mass Media: I used to watch/read/listen them, but not anymore	9	5
Experience at work	9	5
Books social construction	5	4
Cultural social construction	4	2
Public spaces interaction social construction	4	3
Mass Media: Movies	4	3
Internet Blogs	3	3
Social or political meetings social construction	2	2

The participants appear to construct their values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities starting from what they experience in their day to day lives, what they see in their street and neighborhood, what they have seen in their trips, or what they talk about with their coworkers, family members, friends, customers and associates. These social constructions are influenced to

a lesser by other factors such as the mass media, education and among participants below 40 years old, by the Internet and the social media.

Subquestions

1. What role does the government play in the participants' perception of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?

Subquestion 1 was answered through the following interview questions (and their variations):

- What do you think the role of government should be in responding to organized crime?
- How do you think they are doing in this effort at this time?
- Why do you have this opinion?
- What different strategies or suggestions do you have that would combat OC?
- Please describe how you have come to those conclusions

Findings

Either as direct responses to those specific interview questions, or as part of different sections of the interviews, the government and its role was constantly present during conversations. Results show that the participants of this investigation generally believe that there is collusion between the Mexican authorities and the organized crime.

“Corruption” as a theme had 54 mentions in 12 of the participants, which is the majority of them. Seven participants specifically said they distrust the government at least once during their interviews (19 total mentions). Here is an example:

We know that the organized crime has been close to the government since a long time ago; the organized crime has been sheltered by the authorities. (IP13, personal communication, April 30 2013)

This was accompanied by a belief in most participants (12), about the government not succeeding or currently being inefficient to address the correct issues in order to diminish violence and foster peace. The latter theme had 30 mentions similar to this one:

It is the daily struggle of the common people without having results since a long time ago; all we hear are promises, bogus social programs, and apparently good intentions from the governments we have had. There are no results; on the contrary, each day it is worse. (IP13, personal communication, April 30, 2013)

To all of the participants (15 interviewees, 96 total mentions), the government should be addressing structural factors such as fostering economic growth, diminishing poverty and inequality, promoting democracy and transparency, among others, in order to build peace for the future. The need to invest specifically in education emerged as a theme among 11 of the participants (23 total mentions). Many of them, however, gauge this as very difficult as they think that corruption is one of the main causes for criminal organizations to succeed. Two quotes to exemplify this:

The penitentiaries are not enough; there are a lot of people there. Those prisons will turn into a hell. Who would have thought these places would actually prepare them for crime? Do we really have to begin a war in order this people to disappear? It is very difficult. The government has to invest a lot in the brain

production: education, employment, a better distribution of the income in the country. (IP04, personal communication, April 8, 2013)

It is very simple: to look after its people. Not for corporate interests. I believe the strategy to deal with the organized crime is not so difficult. The organized crime is not the problem; we need to attack the problem from its root. The root is the unfair policies. What does the government need to do? To work for its own people; stop being corrupt, avoid working for corporate industries interests, or the United States. (IP10, personal communication, April 19, 2013)

It appears that to the participants of this research, the government is playing a role of collusion with criminal organizations, or tolerance of them at best, and thus, is vastly inefficient to solve the problem from its roots: the structures of the system.

2. What role do criminal organizations play in the participants' perception of violence and peace possibilities in Mexico?

This research subquestion was answered through the following interview questions:

- How would you describe what you believe is currently taking place in Mexico regarding organized criminal violence?
- What role do you think that criminal organizations play in how we perceive our realities?
- How did you come to those conclusions?

Findings

This question was found to be directly related to the previous one. To most participants, it seems to be very difficult to separate criminal activities from government

corruption. Therefore, when most of them spoke about the role of criminal organizations, a mention about the government immediately emerged. This is the most repeated pattern as it relates to this research question. Corruption, as a direct cause for organized crime received 54 mentions.

The participant IP14 expresses in her words her suspicions in a similar way as many of the rest of interviewees:

I don't know. What if the government is the organized crime itself? I think there is a thin line between the easy [illegal way] and the governmental way. (IP14, personal communication, May 2, 2013)

In some instances, participants described more specifically what they believe takes place with cartels. Some interviewees mentioned the use of excessive violence by criminal organizations, or the use of terrorist tactics. This theme received 12 mentions, but it was raised by 10 of the 15 participants. Seven interviewees said at least once that they are afraid or terrorized. In the words of one of them:

They [criminal organizations] influence the society when they -besides having fights among themselves for territory-, want to go beyond with their cruelty by performing extreme violence. This, obviously, has an effect in the society. They transmit the internal violence –among cartels- to the population in general. (IP15, personal communication, May 7, 2013)

Although not very repeated as a pattern (only 10 mentions), seven participants expressed that criminal organizations are too powerful to be defeated. This is an example:

The organized crime controls basically everything; our country, the businesses, everything regarding the economy is controlled by the drug dealing. (IP11, personal communication, April 23, 2013)

Finally, despite the fact that only two participants raised this other topic, it is worth of mention that they believe or have heard that the criminal organizations are normalized, and mixed or intertwined with the communities. This is interesting because it matches what has been studied in other parts of the world. According to Cockayne and Lupel (2009), in some countries, criminal organizations tend to integrate to communities and normalize their activities. For example, they might take part in acts of corruption and bribery that are illegal but normalized, and can become legitimate at the local context. Sometimes criminal organizations even provide social functions, such as protection. This is an example from the interviews:

I don't know, since a long time we have coexisted with the organized crime inside the communities, to the point of turning them into homeland's leaders. Many people know better Chapo Guzmán than even Belisario Domínguez [a history hero]. (IP06, personal communication, April 12, 2013)

Criminal organizations are perceived by participants as acting under government's collusion or tolerance, to the point of becoming part of the government itself. They are perceived by many of the participants as very powerful organizations almost invincible, and prone to exert extreme violence if it fits their interests without concern of the consequences to society.

3. What is the role of mass media in their social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?

This subquestion was answered through the following interview questions and their variations:

- Please describe how you have come to those conclusions.
- Do you watch TV (what programs or channels)?
- Do you listen to the radio (what stations)?
- Do you read newspapers (which)?
- Why do you have this opinion?
- Have you had any contact with mass media on these issues?
- Have you heard or read about that in the media?

Findings

This is one of the core research subquestions in this dissertation. At least to the 15 participants, the traditional mass media (newspapers, TV, and radio) are definitely much less important than other means to build their values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities. Whereas “Experience and observation” as social constructors received 111 mentions, and “Oral conversation” received 79 mentions, the printed media obtained 38 mentions, the TV 26 mentions, and the radio only 14. Although 10 participants said that at some point the media has impacted in their opinion, that theme only received 16 total mentions. Furthermore, many participants (12)

expressed their distrust of the traditional mass media (30 mentions). IP10 expressed it this way:

We need a better way to get the information. I don't like to ingest trash, which is why I turned the TV and the radio off. (IP10, personal communication, April 19, 2013)

Some participants said that the mass media exhibit too violent images or notes (11 mentions), like this one:

For example, lately I was reading a note in a newspaper –I don't remember its name- which showed a decapitated head [person beheaded]. What a bad taste to show off those images in the newspaper, I didn't like it. (IP05, personal communication, April 9, 2013)

Moreover, many participants said they used to have contact with mass media but not anymore because they have become less interesting or not credible. Others said they still have contact but they do not necessary mold their values, perceptions, or conceptions. Here is the voice of IP13:

Not anymore. I used to read every day; I even used to get my subscription to some newspapers, but in the end I realized that the worst way to begin a day was by reading the news. Because most of the times the news only shows bad things, they are full of tragedy and menace: corrupt politicians, wars and so forth. That is why I seldom read the newspapers. (IP13, personal communication, April 30, 2013)

Even the ones who said they use Internet (6 participants, 9 mentions), or social networks such as Facebook or Twitter (6 participants, 11 mentions), expressed that they

used these alternative media because they trust them more than the TV or the radio. This is how IP10 put it:

In the society we can find better information, better food. I work at my local level, we organize debate rounds. I use social networks; the social networks are also an alternative to look for other things. (IP10, personal communication, April 19, 2013)

With those data, it is fair to say that the role of mass media in the social construction of values, perceptions and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities among the participants of this investigation is a very low one in contrast to other means for social construction such as the own experience and conversation with family, friends, coworkers, clients, and associates.

4. What is the role of oral conversation in the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime violence and peace possibilities?

This subquestion was answered through the following interview questions and their variations:

- Please describe how you have come to those conclusions.
- Do you talk about these things with your family? At home? With friends? Where?
- Did you talk about these topics at school?
- Why do you have this opinion?
- Have you talked about this at home or at public spaces?

Findings

In contrast to the earlier subject, the participants of this research use their daily conversation as a source of information, and therefore as a social constructor of perceptions, opinions, and ideas. This theme received 79 mentions in the 15 interviewees, several more than the mass media. This is a typical mention on this category:

[We talk about this] with everyone; there is no family talk in which we don't talk about such things: that the organized crime did this and that. With colleagues, since I have some friends that moved to Morelos state, Reynosa and so forth, and each time they come for a visit they always talk about these topics. (IP12, personal communication, April 26, 2013)

Participants constantly said that they are influenced by their family members talking about these issues (29 mentions), or experiences of people close to them (31 mentions).

This is an example:

Yes. I have relatives in other Mexican regions –particularly in Cuapiaxtla, Tlaxcala. I always do this little survey with an anthropological view I can't control; it is very interesting how in a family of eight brothers, the social fragmentation is present. (IP14, personal communication, May 2, 2013; Note: IP14 is an architect not an anthropologist)

Besides that, the findings of the interviews are complemented by my own journals during my several visits to the neighborhood. What I saw in the streets concurs with what is expressed by the interviewees. Per my observation, people were out in the streets

talking to each other any given afternoon or morning. This is an extract of one of my journals expressing what I witnessed:

Today I learned what is to be in a neighborhood. People coming and greeting the tacos man (he is a cook). ‘Hey compay’, they call him [Like ‘Hey brother’]. The streets are where they live. There is a neighborhood: social links, social networks. People out in the streets sharing an afternoon. Sharing the streets. That man hugged me, he almost kisses me for the job I am doing. He was at his kitchen. This is a typical low middle class Mexico City neighborhood. The man wanted to inquire more, wanted to know more on the study (Meschoulam, 2013, unpublished raw material from journal at NVivo software).

5. How has the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence been influential in the awareness, or production of peacelessness in that particular area of the country?

This subquestion was answered through the following interview questions:

- Would you consider that Mexico is peaceful? Why? Can you explain how you come to think that?
- To your understanding what does peace consist of? How is peace defined?
- Do you believe that peacelessness is related to poverty or underdevelopment?
- Do you think that underdevelopment is correlated to direct violence?

- Do you think that peace is possible in Mexico? How? When do you think that will happen? Or (depending on the answer), Why do you think it will not happen?
- Tell me, how have you come to those conclusions?

Findings

I have showed that for these 15 participants, the personal experience and observation, and the daily conversation are the primary factors for social constructions of values, perceptions, and conceptions. Therefore, if their own experience (through a single incident, observation, or contact with crime as in a personal robbery) tells the person that there is violence occurring in their streets and their surroundings, then a perception of peacelessness begins to build in their awareness. This personal experience does not have to be necessarily a direct contact with the organized criminal violence, but with a particular incident that is perceived as part of the entire violent situation. After that, the person talks about their experience with their neighbors, friends, family members or coworkers, and a social construction forms as the product of that interaction. This appears to be a new finding in terms of what has been researched in Mexico. Previous literature which is focused on the level perceptions about violence and efficiency of the government to fight organized crime (Buendia & Laredo, 2010; Consulta Mitofsky, 2010; 2011), has detected that most Mexicans are fearful and believe that the government is not being effective to combat cartels. According to the findings of the present research, however, personal experience and daily conversations, even when these are not directly related to organized crime, may have a high weight in what people build as their perceptions of violence in the entire country. Thus, the majority of participants (8) feel

that currently Mexico is not peaceful, whereas only 3 feel it is. IP07 expressed this in these words:

No [Mexico is not peaceful]. Because each day besides watching the violence at the TV or hearing it in the radio, I hear it from very close people, and, well, we have experienced violence near my house or at my business. I believe nowadays Mexico is not peaceful at all. (IP07, personal communication, April 15, 2013)

It is, however, interesting to note that to 10 of those 15 participants, believe that peace is possible. Nevertheless, this peace would have to be built from the grassroots (34 mentions), and from structural factors (96 mentions) such as investment in education (23 mentions), eliminating structural violence (64 mentions), combating corruption (54 mentions). They arrive at these conclusions mostly because they have lived those issues, they have observed them, or they talk about them. Here is an example:

Of course it is [possible to have peace in Mexico]. We need to get involved in our affairs as a society; peaceful participation. I don't know why sometimes social participation is interpreted as anarchy. I belong to a group which supports the self-sustaining economy, the low consumption, the local organization and so forth. (IP10, personal communication, April 19, 2013)

6. In what ways does gender impact responses as to how violence and peace are defined, and how peace might be fostered in the country?

This research subquestion was not addressed through specific interview questions, but by contrasting responses to the different interview questions according to the gender of the participant.

Findings

This research does not prove that there is substantial difference between participants of male and female gender as to the four most mentioned categories. Although the number of mentions varies according to gender because there were 8 women in the sample and only 7 men, the most saturated themes (“Experience and personal observation,” “Structural peace conception,” “Oral conversation,” and “Structural violence conception”) were proportionally identical in the overall ranking of categories in both, men and women.

There are, however, some differences that may or may not be caused by the gender of the interviewee, and could be the lead for further research, as recommended in Chapter 5. Because there were more female than female participants, I will not only use the number of mentions of these themes, but also their ranking in the table so that the two genders can be contrasted on the following variations:

1. Male participants mentioned the theme of corruption somewhat more than females. This theme was the 5th more mentioned by men (30 mentions), whereas it was the 7th more mentioned by women (24 mentions).
2. Women had more mentions than men about family being a social constructor of values, perceptions, and conceptions. Women placed the family as the 8th more mentioned theme (21 mentions), whereas men mentioned it only in 22nd place (8 mentions).
3. Men placed principles and values at their 10th most mentioned theme (16 mentions), and women mentioned it less, as their 18th (10 mentions).

4. Women referred a bit more to the experiences of someone close to them. They had this as their 8th most mentioned subject (18 mentions), whereas men as their 13th (12 mentions).
5. Whereas men mentioned the theme of education investment as their 11th most mentioned subject (14 mentions), women placed it at their spot 19th (9 mentions).
6. The women of this sample seem to be a little bit more connected to mass media than men. They mentioned printed media as their 6th most mentioned theme (26 mentions), whereas men mentioned it as their 14th (12 mentions). Women mentioned TV as their 11th most mentioned category (15 mentions), and men put TV at their 16th (11 mentions).
7. Men mentioned more the fact that they distrust the mass media; this was their 9th most mentioned subject (18 mentions), whereas it was women's 13th (12 mentions).
8. Women expressed more times the theme of fear/terror. It was their 16th most mentioned category (10 mentions), whereas it was men's 43th with very few mentions (2).

Summary

In this chapter the results of this investigation were presented. These findings may be only applicable to the 15 participants of this research, but they may lead the path for future investigation involving Mexico and other countries as well. The interviews indicate that the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about

organized criminal violence and the possibility of peace for the country, among these 15 individuals, is a complex process.

This process begins with what the participant personally experiences or observes, it is fed by both, his or her communication to others about these experiences and observations, and what he or she receives as conversation from the people close to her. In this process, the mass media play a role, but only a low one. The patterns show that the participants have distrust of what they watch, read or listen in the mass media, and prefer to form their opinions and ideas through other means such as talking about these topics with family, friends, coworkers, clients, or people they know who live in the most violent areas of the country.

Through this social construction process, these participants have built the perception that the basic causes of criminal violence are structural and systemic, and those include poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. In their view, these structural causes, if correctly addressed would foster structural peace, but only in the long term. However, that would be a difficult task, since they perceive that the Mexican government is part of the organized crime, it is colluded with them, or at best, it tolerates organized criminal activities through a complex system of corruption.

All those ideas lead the majority of participants to conclude that Mexico is currently not peaceful. Nevertheless, most participants believe that if those structural factors were adequately addressed, peace would eventually be built in the country. Peace, as understood by the participants of this research, is not something ethereal, or something that is produced in graphs, numbers, or mass media stories. Peace is something that must

be experienced in day to day life, in the streets, in the neighborhood, with family, with friends, at work. What they live, is what they talk about. Understanding those ideas has several connotations.

In Chapter 5, I will address the potential implications of these findings for the areas of policy design, mass media, organizations, for future research, and the consequences that these reflections could bear upon social change for Mexico, including suggestions and recommendations as a product of the findings presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what socially constructed values, perceptions and conceptions about violence and peace are, how they are socially constructed, and how they have influenced the culture in a specific urban population. The study also explored the role of the government, the role of criminal organizations, the role of mass media, and peacebuilding possibilities, according to the socially constructed perceptions in a neighborhood in Mexico City.

This chapter presents a summary and interpretation of the findings. Some limitations of the study are also addressed. A discussion of three different areas in which the findings may have different implications follows. These areas are: the philosophic and theoretical potential implications, as contrasted with the literature review; implications for policymaking in support of peacebuilding; and recommendations for future research. The chapter will conclude with comments on the connection between this dissertation and social change, and a conclusion that summarizes the study and what was learned.

Summary of Findings

The study consisted of interviews with 15 participants conducted in a neighborhood in Mexico City. The data was analyzed using precoded categories and themes were allowed to emerge in order to detect patterns and repetitions in the discourse of interviewees. In this summary, numbers that follow the categories refer to the number of mentions that each theme received. The most frequently mentioned theme was “Experience and personal observation” (111). That means that participants were

constantly repeating their life experience or their own observation of what they perceive as facts as the main source of social construction of their values, perceptions and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace. The next most mentioned theme was “Structural peace conception” (96). The interviewees continually said that the main causes and potential solutions for organized criminal violence rested in the structures of the system and included the need to solve issues such as poverty, underdevelopment, inequality, democracy, transparency, among others as explained in Chapter 2. This is related to two other topics that continually emerged in participants’ discourse: “Structural violence” (64), and specifically “Corruption” (54). Another vastly mentioned theme was “Oral conversation” (79). Participants expressed that they build their perceptions and ideas through what they talk with their friends, their family, their coworkers, their customers, their neighbors, or people in general. Those themes received many more mentions than the mass media as social constructors of values, perceptions, and conceptions. “Printed media” such as newspapers or magazines got 38 mentions; “TV” received 26 mentions, and “Radio,” 14 mentions. Furthermore, 12 of the participants said that they do not trust the mass media (30). Even though some of them do have contact with the news, they distrust what they watch or listen, especially if they personally experience something different in the streets. Only the 18 to 40 year old participant cohort said they use Internet (9) or social networks such as Facebook or Twitter (11), but when they did, they said they commonly used them as alternate ways to find about things. Social media to these participants seem to be more credible sources of information than the traditional media. Although more themes emerged, they did not have

a large number of repetitions. These other topics, however, tend to strengthen the most repeated patterns. An example is the theme of “Experience of someone close” (31), which adds to the themes of personal experience and conversation.

Discussion of Findings

Results show that the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico is a complex process, one that is built mainly by one person’s own experiences and observations in her own surroundings, and deeply nurtured by daily conversation with family, friends, coworkers, clients, neighbors, and associates. This process includes to a much lesser degree some elements that originate in other sources such as mass media, or among participants below 40 years old, Internet and social media. Nevertheless, the role of those social constructors is much less substantial as perceptions and conceptions builders than what participants live and experience in their lives, and what they talk about in their neighborhood.

It appears that through this process, participants have formed a shared understanding about organized criminal violence and peace, as conditions that are created and fostered within the structures of the system. The majority of participants believe that poverty, underdevelopment, and inequality, aided by a deep corruption in which the government is perceived to be colluded with criminal organizations, or tolerates their businesses, are the roots of peacelessness. Therefore, it appears that in the participants’ views, only addressing these factors from their origin would foster peace in the long term.

To the interviewees, true peace would have to be something that is experienced and lived in the street and in their neighborhood, and which would include social cohesion and participation. Participants seem to value much less what they watch, read, or listen in mass media, than what they see with their own eyes, or what they are told by someone close who they trust. Participants below 40 years old tend to use social media as alternative sources of information to traditional media, and they seem to assign a higher degree of trustworthiness to a YouTube video, rather than to a national broadcast news personality.

Although the findings are limited to a very specific area inside Mexico City, the high number of pattern repetitions indicates that there might be an initial tendency showing that people are prone to disbelieve any data that collides with the own experience and observation. Some participants even seem to form their perception through one single but meaningful event such as a direct robbery or having personally witnessed some beheaded bodies at a certain location. The strength of their own experiences seems to have an enormous weight in how these participants construct their understanding about what is taking place in the entire country.

Once that experience is internalized by the person, then it is assisted by the social communication in daily life, with family, at work, or in the streets. In this communication process, participants share what they experience and also receive the experiences of others or the hearsay about situations taking place inside or outside the neighborhood. It is through that process, and not through the contact with mass media, or other means such as reading books or watching movies, that the participants of this investigation arrive to

conclusions about what causes organized criminal violence, the possibilities that the country has to build peace for the future, the role of the government, and the role of criminal organizations.

These findings may have different implications in at least three different areas:

1. The philosophic discussion and reflection regarding the two basic conceptual frameworks of this dissertation: social constructivism and the integral peace perspective.
2. Public policy design to foster peacebuilding for Mexico.
3. Future research.

Limitations of the Study

This study is the result of 15 interviews in a specific Mexican neighborhood. Immediately assuming that these findings are valid for an entire country would be missing the nature of the qualitative case approach. Furthermore, reaching premature conclusions about the correctness of participants' responses would also exceed the study boundaries. These are 15 inhabitants of a concrete location inside Mexico City that apparently view peacelessness in Mexico in a similar fashion one another, in spite of their age, gender or occupation. They socially construct their values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities for Mexico through apparently related ways. These results may or may not be repeated in other parts of the country.

Media representatives or policymakers could always argue against a small study, suggesting that the answers of too few participants do not necessarily provide a picture of

the Mexican society. They could also say that Mexico City is much less violent than other areas in the country, and therefore, the study remains very limited in its scope.

However, the results of this dissertation do portray a heuristic value. First, the findings invite scholars to conduct further research as the answers on topics such as peacebuilding or mass media are suggestive of immediate action, should the patterns maintain in different locations of the country. The findings of the present study might be exhibiting a fast developing disease, regardless of the fact that the full examinations of the patient have not yet been conducted. Recommendations for further research are assessed below. Second, these findings can offer policymakers some immediate suggestions which do not collide with any national strategy or program that are currently being conducted. These suggestions, as covered below, do not harm current strategies, in other words, and their efficacy is not only supported by the findings of this study, but also by the conceptual frameworks presented in chapter 2. And third, the results of this research may open windows toward understanding more on how we humans socially construct our realities and form our conceptions about them. But that would require, certainly, much more research on the topic.

Philosophic Discussion: Results of this Research Contrasted to the Literature

Review on Social Constructivism and Peacebuilding

This dissertation started with the assumption that realities as we know them, such as violence or peace, or the possibility to transform them, are not given facts which come naturally, but are socially constructed within societies. The findings of this research

appear to confirm that idea, but dig deep into what this process is, at least among the 15 participants who were interviewed.

In Chapter 2, I explained that perceptions and conceptions are two distinct cognitive processes. Perceptions, initially, come from the sensorial experiences with the environment; that is, the way in which a person organizes visual-spatial representations (Suwa, 2003), whereas a conception is how the person interprets those perceptions, and generates new ideas from that point. A perception is how a person regards certain context, and a conception is how that person thinks (Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007). However, research shows that sometimes previous conceptions can guide or lead perceptions (Conception and perception of ambiguous figures, 2011; Halberstadt, Winkielman, Niedenthal, & Dalle, 2009), i.e. previous knowledge can be determinant to how realities are perceived. This dissertation confirms that among the 15 participants interviewed, their perceptions are deeply impacted by both, their own experience and observation, and social conversation in their daily lives. What they perceive is what they live and see with their own eyes, nurtured by what they hear and talk about at home, at work, in the streets, with their clients or friends. They incorporate other peoples' experiences to their own, forming a mixture of inputs that build their perception about reality.

Once that perception-building process takes place, as Vigotsky (1986) put it, language becomes essential in joining the interpsychological and the intrapsychological activity. This has been tested by more recent research (Genovese, 2003; Harkness, 2009; Ivic 1994/2000). According to Frawley (1997), the internalization process is not a simple

copy of the outside signs or understandings, but a process leading to the construction of an inner plane. This individual inner plane, as this research shows, is an essential piece of the social interaction that takes place in the daily life of the neighborhood researched. Even so, that inner plane is not only the product of the own experience, but is also the result of the multidirectional communication that occurs before and after the own experience of the participant.

Three elements, thus, take place in this process: (a) The personal experience and observation, (b) other peoples' inputs about their own experiences and observation, or the experiences and observation of others, and (c) the individuals' communication (outputs) to their counterparts about what they experience and see, and regarding the thoughts provoked by the interaction with others. How has this process impacted upon values, perceptions and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities among the 15 participants of this research?

The second conceptual framework of this dissertation is deeply connected to this process, because without having read books or articles on the subject, without having studied the topic or having received lectures, but only through their experience, observation, and daily conversation, participants seem to arrive at similar conclusions as some of the authors that were presented in the Chapter 2. As the interviews and their analysis show, some of the most discussed themes by participants are connected to structural factors related to violence and peace. In their view, violence is not only direct aggression to human beings, but also other kinds of conducts that damage people, such as corruption or lack of opportunities and inequality. This is connected to the integral peace

perspective as studied by Alger (1987, 1991) or Galtung (1985), two of the authors that were addressed in Chapter 2. In that same line, participants arrive at certain conclusions as the product of such reasoning: peace is possible -the majority of them said- but only if structural conditions are adequately addressed: Investment in education, promoting economic growth, reducing inequalities, fostering opportunities, are only some of the factors explicit in the interviewees of this research. The need to build links, to engage in active participation, and to promote peace from the grassroots, a concept addressed by Alger (1987, 1991), are some of the repeated patterns during the interviews as well.

The fact that these themes became so saturated from the beginning of the interviews suggests that policymakers should pay attention to those beliefs. Those have not only been the subject of study of scholars such as Galtung (1985) or Alger (1987), but are also topics that seem to be commonly discussed, at least in the neighborhood that was investigated.

These two main areas of discussion –social constructivism, and the integral peace perspective- may have implications as to policymaking in Mexico. That will be covered in the next section of this chapter. Before doing that, there is yet one more topic that was assessed in Chapter 2, which is a clear subject matter of the interviews that were conducted, and that is the role of mass media as to the circumstances under which Mexico is currently living.

As research in various countries shows (Brandon & Silke, 2007), some participants appear to have entered a phase of habituation-evasion of violence due to media exposure. This was explained in Chapter 2, and might be the result of mass media

causing stressful conditions on them (Meschoulam, 2012b). Thus, participants expressed that they are choosing not to turn the TV on, or not to read newspapers. Other participants simply do not trust what the mass media say.

If confirmed by further research conducted in more neighborhoods and other parts of the country, these patterns are showing that the connection between mass media and audiences is starting to disintegrate. This would mean that the mass media are each time less important social constructors of values, conceptions and perceptions in areas such as the organized criminal violence and peace possibilities for the country. Besides the fact that this confirms previous research (Brandon & Silke, 2007; Cho, Boyle, Keum, Shevy, Mcleod, Shah, & Pan, 2003; Paton, & Violanti, 2007), this topic portrays one more potential application of the present research: peace journalism or media peacebuilding.

In the coming section I will explain what implications this study might have for policymaking that could promote peacebuilding in Mexico, and I will, also address other areas, such as recommendations for mass media.

Implications for Policymaking Addressed for Peacebuilding

This dissertation does not intend to understand an entire society. It is only a case study and for the moment, the findings cannot be transferable to other territories of the country. However, two things must be already considered: (a) If results such as the role of experience and conversation as the most powerful social constructors are true for a relatively calm and nonviolent neighborhood, it might be assumed that such assessment may be even more present in places where the daily experiences of inhabitants involve gun shootings, beheaded bodies hanging on bridges, continual assaults and extortion to

local businesses, and kidnappings among other traumatic events, and (b) the fact that further research to verify if the results of this one can be confirmed in more areas of the country, has not yet being conducted, doesn't mean that the issues that are raised by the present study are not valid for other areas; that has just not been proved yet. Therefore, the first implication of the present study is that it shows a clear need to conduct more research on these subjects, the sooner the better. That will be covered in the next section of the chapter.

A detailed reading of the interviews that were analyzed in Chapter 4, combined with the concepts and theories presented in Chapter 2, suggests recommending a structural approach to foster peace in Mexico. This approach must not only include regional and national policies, but must include actions, which common citizens may have immediate contact and experience with. People seem to need to experience peace at the local level, in the streets, in the neighborhood, with family and friends. Any actions designed towards reaching that purpose may be deeply valued by the Mexican Society.

National security and law enforcement strategies must be accompanied by peacebuilding programs directed locally towards improving sustainable growth with human development, improvement of salaries and employment conditions, health, education, democracy, respect for human rights, combating corruption and enhancement of transparency and accountability, respect for the rule of law, justice and social cohesion. The following are some examples of concrete policies based on the literature review, and on the results of the interviews. These recommendations do not substitute for but add up to any nationally designed policy:

1. *Local diagnosis and policies.* Results of this investigation indicate that participants assign a high value to what they directly experience and observe in their surroundings (111 mentions). Thus, any action designed to impact upon citizens direct vicinity, might be deeply appreciated by people. According to Morse (2004), local policies should be assessed considering to the nature and size of communities. The purpose of such actions is to improve relationships and collaboration within specific areas so that communities are empowered, and people think less in individualistic and more in societal terms, building community strengths, getting people to work together, practice democracy at a local level and create their own leaders for the future. Issues, diagnosis, and solutions must be assessed locally.
2. *Local education programs.* Participants from the interviews mentioned structural factors (96 times), and specifically, the need of education policies (23 times) as relevant aspects of peacebuilding. Collaboration projects between the public sector, the private sector, the nongovernmental sector, and national education institutes such as Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) or the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) destined for the betterment of schools and colleges at specific locations with the purpose of students receiving quality education in their own areas. This may include incentives such as local programs for scholarships so that young inhabitants of the neighborhood can travel to receive education from a national or

international institution as long as they commit to return and apply their new gained knowledge for their neighborhood.

3. *Neighborhood activities.* Participants from the interviews mentioned the need to promote grassroots peace policies (34 times), and the need to participate in communities (18 times), as potential factors for peacebuilding. Adequately planned neighborhood activities intended to empower communities may help in this direction. These may include gender inclusive sports programs (Nanayakkara, Culpan, & McChesney, 2010; Reid, 2006; SDC, 2005; Wright, 2009), races on Sundays, bicycle tours, public concerts, arts and crafts workshops, and local meetings conducted at public squares in which people can express their ideas and feelings to public officials or representatives.
4. *Development of local commercial areas.* Promoting the development of commercial areas at the neighborhood, culturally sensible, adapting to the inhabitants' customs and practices, that can get people to go out to the streets and interact among them. This would also help increase the peace experience factor, the most frequent theme during the interviews, as well as promote participation and links (18 mentions). This recommendation can be implemented through market places, popular exhibitions of food, dances, among others, or even creating conditions for the investment in cafés, restaurants, and businesses if applicable, according to possibilities and needs of that particular neighborhood. The idea is promoting links and interaction between neighbors.

5. *Peace policing*. Participants from this research continually refer to personal experiences (111 mentions), and oral conversation (79 mentions) as the most important social constructors. They talk in the neighborhood about what they live or listen. Furthermore, some interviewees mentioned that security forces in the streets become a stressful factor to them (6 mentions), which is corroborated by the PTSD study conducted in 2012 on Mexican citizens (Meschoulam, 2012b). Therefore, peace policing, and local policing with the purpose of enhancing the links of citizenship with their security forces might prove helpful. An example of such policy was conducted in Brazil with the Pacifying Police Units (Turati, 2012). Specifically trained for this purpose, policemen and women could help providing a sense of security in the neighborhood without becoming a stressing factor on societies, but recovering the presence of state in public areas. These policemen establish a sense of credibility, closeness, and connection with people. Their function is not stopping criminal organizations or preventing crime from occurring, but only being there as a dissuasive factor that does not collide with society by becoming a stressor or a source of suspicions. According to the evidence provided in Chapter 4, the neighborhood inhabitants must perceive a diminished crime rate in their surroundings in order to experience the possibility of peace. This local policy does not collide with regional or national strategies, but adds to them the experience and personal contact factors.

6. *Local teamwork promotion.* Fostering teamwork at the neighborhoods, at local schools, and local businesses. Training for teamwork can be provided by the state, by scholars, or by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This can be then extrapolated to sports activities, but also towards developing actions for the benefit of the neighborhood such as remodeling a building, a park, or the public square.
7. *Crisis intervention strategies.* This recommendation is related to some results from this investigation, such as the need to build grassroots local activities (34 mentions), participation in public issues (18 mentions), and the sense of fear or terror (12 mentions), as well as the impact from excessive violence at the streets (12 mentions). The neighbors must organize as described by James (2004) in developing prevention, intervention, and postvention plans for the event of violent crisis at the local level. This can also be aided by the State, by scholars or by NGOs that are experienced on the topic. It includes designing and applying specific measures in the event of a violent incident, a gun shooting, or even a robbery. As this investigation shows, a common crime event might be as stressful to inhabitants, as a high impact incident. The community is then organized by teams and leaders that become active as the crisis erupts, provide psychological first aid as needed (James, 2004), and intervention strategies, so that the impact of a violent event at the local level diminishes its damage.

8. *Mass media-community dialogue.* Interviews indicate that among participants, there is a high degree of distrust in Mass Media (30 mentions). Moreover, some interviewees said they used to have contact but not anymore (9 mentions). In that way, mass media such as newspapers, TV and radio, need to conduct their own research and understand more about why some people are developing deep feelings against them. This could be done through launching teams of trained sociologists with the purpose of establishing a sincere and honest direct dialogue with their audiences. This might begin to tell them what people really need, why they have become so emotional about mass media, and what actions might help in modifying that perception. Based on the literature review and the participants responses, I here provide some ideas of such actions:
9. *Peace journalism.* To help advance peace, violent events must be treated by mass media as it has been covered by the thinking of several authors in peace journalism (Galtung, Lynch, & Mc. Goldrick, 2006). Focusing only on the violence in the incident usually stresses audiences (Cho et al., 2003). Therefore, without telling untruths, or without omitting important information about the event (or disguising it), the focus of coverage must also address the underlying factors behind the incident, i.e. structural causes, issues that may provoke such incidents in the future, and assess potential solutions to those issues. For example, a peace-focused coverage about a terrorist attack may include a consult with an expert or scholar asking about what measures should

be taken by the government in order to prevent such incidents, or what kind of factors should the government address in order to tackle the root causes of such incidents. This helps audiences focus in other areas than the violence and the blood of the incident. In Chapter 2, peace journalism was explained in more detail.

10. *Analysis TV or radio shows.* Those strategies are assisted by special TV and radio shows that deeply analyze current events. These shows should be perceived as effectively balanced in terms of opinion and ideas, and should be conducted in interesting ways so as to really captivate viewers or listeners. Peace is fostered not by promoting certain political views or postures, but by assisting in a truly democratic dialogue on the issues that are crucial for the country. Different views are expressed, opinions and policies are contrasted, but in the end, the media is discussing peace, and not only the violence that obstructs it.

The measures offered above are all connected to the conceptual frameworks presented in Chapter 2, and to the findings of this study. They are directed towards addressing peace at the structural and experiential level. The purpose of such suggestions is attending specifically to what the participants of this investigation refer as their main social constructors: experience, observation, and daily conversation as connected to structural and grassroots peacebuilding approximations.

Recommendations for Research

The results of this investigation suggest that similar patterns might be encountered in more areas of the country of Mexico, or in other cities throughout the world.

Therefore, more case studies similar to this one, could be conducted either inside big cities such as Mexico City, in different neighborhoods, or in small towns or places throughout Mexico and in other countries as well. In that way, research could show whether experience, observation, and conversation remain the main social constructors at other violent locations, or whether the citizenship living in such areas may tend to suggest less a structural approach towards peacebuilding and more a punitive or hard line approximation to organized crime.

Besides qualitative research, the results obtained in this dissertation may help researchers develop a quantitative instrument based on participants' responses that may be applicable in much larger sums of participants, which could be answered via mail or online solving logistic and security issues. This quantitative instrument could use the slight variations that were detected among participants of different age and professions in this investigation, to find out whether those variations can tell us more about those demographic sectors of the population. This type of research might provide a larger photograph, which could be more persuasive for media representatives or policymakers as to the need of fostering measures such as the ones recommended above.

Furthermore, replicating studies as this one in different parts of the world, could shed more light as to what kind of relationship is being established between mass media and their audiences, as well as exploring the actual impact that the mass media has upon the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions in the present era.

An additional area for research as a result of this dissertation's findings is related to the gender responses. Although this investigation does not show substantial gender differences regarding the most important patterns and repetitions, there is evidence of variations as to some of the themes that were analyzed. Future research could dig deeper into those variations assessing the potential impact that gender has upon those differences, and determining whether that knowledge could prove to be useful for peacebuilding.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This investigation provides substantial information related to social change in Mexico. First of all, it allows scholars to focus on certain subjects that require further research regarding violence and peacebuilding in a country in which these topics have not been scientifically investigated in sufficient manner. The present study provides a useful path to be replicated in other areas of the country or the world, qualitatively or converted to quantitative methodology. In that way, our knowledge about violence and peacebuilding in Mexico and in other countries would be increased. However, while this research is conducted or extended, this dissertation already points out specific actions that might be deeply valued by the Mexican society.

Addressing the structural causes of organized criminal violence, is not only something which is perceived as necessary by a sample of 15 inhabitants of a Mexico City neighborhood, but is also something that has been deeply discussed by a great number of authors as presented in Chapter 2. Therefore, some recommendations directed

towards combating organized crime in its roots, make sense, if Mexico wants to build peace from its structures. This dissertation provides findings that enrich such perspective.

An additional area in which the present study fosters social change is the suggestive evidence it provides regarding the need to act locally in order to impact upon peoples' experiences, and thus, their perceptions and conceptions about peace. This is something that might be intuited by some, but this dissertation contributes with findings to inform policies in that direction.

Another topic, for which this dissertation provides suggestive evidence, is the necessity for peace journalism or media peacebuilding, a subject deeply related to social change in Mexico. As discussed above, the mass media in Mexico might do well in implementing a different kind of violence coverage. This is something that may be appreciated by their already affected audiences (Meschoulam, 2012b). According to the literature review on the topic, enriched by the findings of the present research, a peace-oriented coverage of violence might help the Mexican society diminish the symptoms of PTSD among the population, and focus instead on the areas that need to be changed to foster peace.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding is in the blood of what social change is, and this dissertation is about peacebuilding for a specific country in which for decades, people did not seem to realize that structural violence was being rooted. After years of deaths and struggle, there are some realities to confront. Mexico is not a country at peace, nor is yet in the road to build it yet. Part of the problem lies upon the fact that there is not enough research on

those topics, as scholars used to be focused on different kinds of areas of investigation.

There was a need to begin somewhere. I decided to do it in a specific neighborhood of the city I live in. The study has proved useful. It is based on a vast conceptual framework that had to be adapted to a concrete space and time. The use of the qualitative approach also proved adequate for participants to speak out about their feelings and ideas. Experience, observation, and daily conversation came out as the most important social construction factors among participants of this research who expressed their deep concern about the government strategies and the need to address structural factors for peacebuilding.

The circle then closes. The theories and international peer-reviewed articles coincide with the interviewees of this research. This dissertation provides additional support, now applied to Mexico, to verify those theories. Galtung (1985), one of the authors presented in Chapter 2, taught us that peace is not only the absence of violence. The interviewees of this study teach us something else to confirm that. Peace, as it seems, is not something that is located in books, or idealized by gods, angels or ethereal philosophers. Peace is something to experience on a daily basis, something to be lived and observed in the streets, in our surroundings. Peace is not isolating the violent ones, but fostering conditions to integrate the society, to build links, relationships; peace is talking to one another, collaborating, participating, and erasing the lines that keep us apart.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study of a case study in Mexico City about how Mexicans construct their values, perceptions, and conceptions about the subject of violence and peace in Mexico. This study is conducted only inside a specific neighborhood in Mexico City and is addressed at people over 18 years of age who live inside that neighborhood. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Mauricio Meschoulam, who is a professor at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico and also a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand how Mexicans, and specifically the people living in your neighborhood socially form their ideas, their conceptions, their perceptions, and their values about organized crime violence and peace possibilities for Mexico. The study wants to understand in what ways the Mexican society should better address the topics of violence in order to promote peace for the country.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview of approximately one hour at a location of your preference. However, that location must be completely private. This will not take place at a public area.
- You will later on be asked to answer an e-mail in which you will be asked for your opinion about the results that were obtained after analyzing the data.

Here are some sample questions:

1. How would you describe what you believe is currently taking place in Mexico regarding organized criminal violence?
2. Would you consider that Mexico is peaceful? Why? Can you explain how you come to think that?
3. To your understanding what does peace consist of? How is peace defined?
4. Please describe how you have come to those conclusions.
 - a. Do you watch TV (what programs or channels)?
 - b. Do you listen to the radio (what stations)?
 - c. Which newspapers do you read newspapers (which)??
 - d. Do you talk about these things with your family? At home? With friends? Where?
 - e. Did you talk about these topics at school?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Walden University will treat you differently if you

decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as a minor upset for remembering something you did not like, or recalling an uncomfortable image from the TV or newspaper. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. However, information local psychological support is hereby provided and you may call there should you need to do so.

Psychological assistance free of charge: Línea UAM: 54 83 40 99

Clínica De Atención Psicológica Integral CAPI, Bolívar 1016, México, DF, México, 03440, Teléfono 56985624 y 62980837. www.capi.com.mx

Or you can call directly to Dr. Schneider at this phone, who will assist you free of charge: 5550723777

The study offers social benefits for your community and the country as it will provide scientific information in order to assist scholars, media representatives, politicians, and policymakers about how peace can be fostered in the country. The study might also make you reflect on those things and help you understand more about what is taking place in your society.

Payment:

There will be no payment for your participation in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by placing it under a safe box at a secret location under the floor of a private office. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via calling him at 5989 2801, or e-mailing him at Mauricio.meschoulam@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, "I consent" , I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix B: Acceptance of Citizen Contact Status

This is the e-mail in which the citizen who has been in contact with me accepts acting as a contact to facilitate entrance to the neighborhood and participants. It is in Spanish; the translation is immediately after the Spanish e-mail.

Estimado Mauricio:

He recibido con agrado la invitación que me has hecho en mi carácter de vecino de la delegación, para participar en tu proyecto de investigación sobre violencia y procesos de paz en la colonia de referencia, con el objeto de acercarte con algunos vecinos de esa colonia para que te puedas entrevistar con ellos.

Estoy convencido que este proyecto de investigación tendrá excelentes resultados.

Te envío un cordial saludo,

Nombre y apellido

English translation

Dear Mauricio,

I have received with pleasure the invitation you have sent to me in my position as a neighbor of the delegation, to participate in your research project about violence and peacebuilding in the selected neighborhood, with the purpose of getting you in contact with some citizens of that neighborhood so you can interview them.

I am convinced that this research project will have excellent results.

Best regards,

Name and last name

Appendix C: Data Collection tool
Interview Protocol (English and Spanish)

The following questions will be used to guide conversation with participants. (For a more detailed explanation on this tool and the rationale behind it, please refer to pages 113-120 of the attached proposal. The Spanish version of these questions is located below the English questionnaire):

1. How would you describe what you believe is currently taking place in Mexico regarding organized criminal violence? (This question is related to what has been reviewed in Chapter 2 about organized crime and the kind of violence has been taking place in Mexico in recent years [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011], but is intended to explore how it is perceived and conceived by the participant [Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007])
2. Would you consider that Mexico is peaceful? Why? Can you explain how you come to think that? (This question is connected to the concepts of peace [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985; 2003; 2008], as well as the social construction of perceptions, conceptions, and values [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).
3. To your understanding what does peace consist of? How is peace defined? (This question is connected to the concepts of peace, the integral perspective of peace [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985; 2003; 2008], and mostly to explore how this subject is perceived and conceived by the participant [Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007]).

- a. Do you believe that peacelessness is related to poverty or underdevelopment? (This question is related to the integral perspective of peace as described in Chapter 2 [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985; 2003; 2008]).
 - b. Do you think that underdevelopment is correlated to direct violence? (This question is also connected to the integral perspective of peace as described in Chapter 2).
4. Please describe how you have come to those conclusions. (This question is connected to the social construction of perceptions, conceptions, and values as described in Chapter 2 [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).
- f. Do you watch TV (what programs or channels)? (This question is connected to media peacebuilding as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).
 - g. Do you listen to the radio (what stations)? (This question is connected to media peacebuilding as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).
 - h. Do you read newspapers (which)? (This question is connected to media peacebuilding as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003;

Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).

- i. Do you talk about these things with your family? At home? With friends? Where? (This question is connected to the social construction of perceptions, conceptions, and values as described in Chapter 2 [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).
 - j. Did you talk about these topics at school? (This question is connected to social constructivism and education as described in Chapter 2 [Harkness, 2009; Marin, Benarroch, & Jimenez, 2000; Powell & Cody, 2009; Stears, 2009; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 1997]).
5. What do you think the role of government should be in responding to organized crime? (This question is connected to organized criminal violence in Mexico [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011], as well as the role of social constructions in public policy [Schneider & Ingram, 1993], but it is intended to explore how these topics are perceived by the participant [Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2007]).
- a. How do you think they are doing in this effort at this time? (This question is connected to organized criminal violence in Mexico [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011], as well as the role of social constructions in public policy, but it is intended to explore how these topics are

perceived by the participant [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009]).

- b. Why do you have this opinion? (This question is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values, as described in Chapter 2 [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986]).
- c. What different strategies or suggestions do you have that would combat OC? (This question intends to explore socially constructed perceptions, and conceptions, in connection to public policy and peacebuilding [Schneider & Ingram, 1993]).

6. Please describe how you have come to those conclusions. (From that point I will inquire into the same topics to find out more on the process of social construction of those ideas and perceptions): Do you watch TV (what programs or channels)? Do you listen to the radio (what stations)? Do you read newspapers (which)? Do you talk about these things with your family? At home? With friends? Where? Did you talk about these topics at school? Did you read articles, papers or books on those issues? (This group of questions is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values, and the role of mass media in peacebuilding, as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).
7. What role do you think that criminal organizations play in how we perceive our realities? How did you come to those conclusions? Have you read about this?

Where? Have you had any contact with mass media on these issues?) Have you talked about this at home or at public spaces? (This group of questions is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values about organized crime, about organized criminal violence in Mexico [Escalante, 2011; Guerrero, 2011; Merino, 2011] , and the role of mass media in peacebuilding, as described in Chapter 2 [Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).

8. Do you think that peace is possible in Mexico? How? When do you think that will happen? Or (depending on the answer), Why do you think it will not happen? Do you think that organized criminal violence and the fight that the government is conducting against it have any effect upon your views about peace possibilities? (This question is connected to social perceptions, conceptions, and values [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986], as well as the integral peace perspective as described in Chapter 2 [Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985; 2003; 2008]).
9. Tell me how have you come to those conclusions? Have you heard or read about that in the media? Perhaps you have read books about that? Do you talk about this with friends or at home? (This group of questions is connected to socially constructed perceptions, conceptions, and values [Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stenmark, 2009; Vygotsky, 1986], and the role of mass media in peacebuilding, as described in Chapter 2

[Cho et al., 2003; Galtung, Lynch, and Mc. Goldrick ,2006; IEP, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2010]).

10. Would you like to add anything to this interview?

From that point, the interviewer will assess whether the information is enough, or whether the interview should continue to dig further into the process of social construction of values and perceptions about organized criminal violence and peace possibilities in Mexico.

Spanish translation of the above questions:

1. ¿Cómo describirías lo que tú crees que actualmente está sucediendo en México con respecto a la violencia del crimen organizado?
2. ¿Consideras que México es pacífico? ¿Por qué? ¿Podrías explicar cómo has llegado a pensar eso?
3. De acuerdo a tu entendimiento, ¿en qué consiste la paz? ¿Cómo se define la paz?
 - a. ¿Consideras que la falta de paz está relacionada con la pobreza o con el subdesarrollo?
 - b. ¿Consideras que el subdesarrollo está correlacionado con la violencia directa?
4. Por favor describe cómo has llegado a esas conclusiones.
 - a. ¿Miras la televisión (qué programas o canales)?
 - b. ¿Escuchas el radio (qué estaciones)?
 - c. ¿Lees periódicos (cuáles)?

d. ¿Habras de estas cosas con tu familia? ¿En casa? ¿Con amigos? ¿Dónde?

e. ¿Hablabas de estos temas en la escuela?

5. ¿Cuál crees tu que debería ser el papel del gobierno al responder al crimen organizado?

a. ¿Cómo piensas que les está yendo con ese esfuerzo en la actualidad?

b. ¿Por qué tienes esa opinión?

c. ¿Qué diferentes estrategias o sugerencias tendrías para combatir al crimen organizado?

6. Por favor describe cómo has llegado a esas conclusiones. ¿Ves la televisión (qué programas o canales)? ¿Escuchas el radio (qué estaciones)? ¿Lees los periódicos (cuáles)? ¿Habras de estas cosas con tu familia? ¿En casa? ¿Con amigos? ¿Hablabas de estos temas en la escuela? ¿Has leído artículos, trabajos o libros acerca de esos asuntos?

7. ¿Qué papel crees que las organizaciones criminales juegan al respecto de cómo percibimos nuestras realidades? ¿Cómo has llegado a esas conclusiones? ¿Has leído acerca de esto? ¿Dónde? ¿Has tenido cualquier contacto con los medios de comunicación sobre estos temas? ¿Has hablado de estos temas en casa o en espacios públicos?

8. ¿Crees que la paz es posible en México? ¿Cómo? ¿Cuándo crees que ello sucederá? Or (depending on the answer), ¿Por qué crees que eso no sucederá? ¿Piensas que la violencia del crimen organizado y la lucha que el gobierno está

conduciendo en contra de él, tiene algún efecto sobre tu punto de vista al respecto de las posibilidades de paz?

9. Dime cómo has llegado a esas conclusiones. ¿has escuchado o leído acerca de esto en los medios? ¿Has quizás leído libros sobre esto? ¿Hablas con tus amistades o en casa sobre esto?

10. ¿Te gustaría agregar cualquier cosa a esta entrevista?

Appendix D: Preexisting Coding Categories

The first codes are directly related to the research questions that ask about the process of social construction of values, perceptions and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace. By coding participants' responses I intend to establish categories to understand whether they have socially constructed their values, perceptions, and conceptions through the family, through education and/or learning, through religious institutions, through the mass media (specifying which), and/or through mouth to mouth. My research questions also ask about the role of mass media and the role of mouth to mouth in the social construction of such values, perceptions, and conceptions. These are the first pre-existing coding categories:

Family social construction (Steigerwald & Forrest, 2004)

Education and learning social construction (Cottone, 2001; Marin, Benarroch, & Jimenez, 2000; Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 1997; Vygotsky, 1986)

Religious social construction (Fagan, 2010; Stenmark, 2009)

Mass Media social construction (Adam & Holguin, 2003; IEP, 2010; Terzis, 2008)

News papers

Television

Radio

Movies

Social Media Facebook

Social Media Twitter

Social Media Other

Internet Websites

Internet Blogs

Other

Oral conversation social construction (refers to the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions as the product of social interaction with other members of society through verbal communication in day to day life, about news, politics, organized crime, violence, among other topics).

Public spaces interaction social construction

The next codes are used to establish the concept of peace possibilities, according to the main research question, and to the sub-question 5 (How has the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence been influential in the awareness, or production of peacelessness in that particular area of the country?). According to participants' responses I intend to establish whether they express or not conceptions that could match the structural peace or the grassroots approximations. These codes will also help to draw conclusions about social change, and where should peacebuilding public policy might be directed to. These are also pre-existing coding categories:

Structural peace conception (Galtung, 1985)

Structural violence conception (Galtung, 1985)

Grassroots peacebuilding approach (Alger, 1987)

Curriculum Vitae

Academic formation

BA in International Relations, with specialization in International Politics. Thesis on “China’s cultural resistance to capitalism”, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico (1994).

Master degree in Humanistic Studies with specialization in History. Research project on Neoconservatism and the White House, a discourse analysis 2001-2008, Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (2008).

Phd Candidate on Public Policy and Administration with specialization on Terrorism, Mediation, and peace. GPA 4.0. Walden University (in progress).

Specialization courses and degrees

Specialization Course on Israel’s foreign policy. Hebrew University at Jerusalem, Israel (1989)

Degree in Political Analysis. Universidad Iberoamericana and Claustro de Sor Juana, Mexico (1995)

Degree in Middle East conflict. Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico. (1991)

Publications

Meschoulam, M. (2009). War and peace possibilities. A reflexive exercise from applied theory, in Férez, M. (Ed.) (2009). *El conflicto en Gaza e Israel 2008-2009*: México, D.F, Mexico.: Senado de la República

Meschoulam, M. (2011). De-constructing discourse on the Arab Spring. An alternative proposal for its analysis. In Férrez, M. (Ed.) (2011). *Revueltas árabes, ¿revolución, reforma o continuidad?* México, D.F, Mexico.: Senado de la República.

Professional activities

Professor at the International Studies Department, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico (1993-2013).

Columnist in *El Universal*, Mexican newspaper with printed and online weekly (and twice a week) collaborations. (2010-2013).

Analyst for Mexican and Latin American radio and TV news programs including CNN, Univision, Televisa, NTN24, and several others (2010-2013).