

**THE AFFECTIVE AND EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES OF THE SECONDARY
WITNESSES OF DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE IN SINALOA, MEXICO**

by

Valente Soto Cortés

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Valente Soto Cortés, titled “The Affective and Emotional Geographies of the Secondary Witnesses of Drug-related Violence in Sinaloa, Mexico” and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Jeffrey M. Banister Date: (5/25/2017)

John Paul Jones III Date: (5/25/2017)

Elizabeth Oglesby Date: (5/25/2017)

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director: Jeffrey M. Banister Date: (5/25/2017)

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DEDICATION

To the memory of Javier Valdez Cárdenas,
who recovered the voices of the victims of violence in Sinaloa.



Demandamos justicia y exigimos...

¡PAZ!

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ABSTRACT

During the last three decades, Mexican drug-trafficking organizations have expanded their operations in North America, while drug-related violence has intensified in different regions in Mexico. Since 2006, more than 100,000 people have died as a result of the constant re-organization of Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs), as well as a national security strategy that aims to reduce their power through direct confrontation. Drug-related violence is affecting the lives and livelihoods of Mexican citizens who get caught between the conflicts, and who are not always accounted for in the official data on victims. Drawing on postcolonial theory, affect theory, the growing field of emotional geographies, and critical studies of trauma, this dissertation examines the effects of drug-related violence on secondary witnesses—that is psychologists, social workers and journalists—based in the northwest Mexican city of Culiacán, the state capital of Sinaloa. This group represents a small sample of ordinary citizens whose daily work brings them into regular contact with some of the outcomes of violence as it relates to the so-called drug wars and its politics—what some have referred to as necropolitics and narcopolitics. Through the analysis of open-ended interviews, findings show that the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Culiacán are experiencing symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress. At the same time, they are coping with those effects through individual and collective strategies that result from a long-term social and spatial proximity with the phenomenon. In this sense, drug-related violence is a spatial phenomenon that produces traumatic events where affective and emotional effects are collected and stored as traumatic memories. Those memories are critical to understanding the symptoms of job-related stress affecting the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence, as well as the creation and development of coping strategies. The findings of this research are significant for efforts to improve the mental and emotional health of ordinary citizens who inform and offer care and support to the multiple victims of violence in Mexico.

Keywords: *drug trafficking, narcopolitics, violence, trauma, affect, emotions, Mexico.*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Violence has a geography, and for this reason, geography must lie at the center of any discussion of violence."

Tyner 2012: 14.

1.1 Background

On July 18, 2014, I arrived at a Starbucks around 11:00 am. The coffee shop is located at a busy intersection on what has become the main commercial area in Culiacán, Sinaloa, México. I got there 10 minutes before the appointment with a journalist. I was nervous. Months before, this person had suffered gunshot wounds in an assault that took place under bizarre circumstances. After a short wait, an SUV parked in a double-line space, followed by a police patrol that did the same. Initially, I looked away; I thought it was a usual stop to inspect the vehicle and its occupants. Seconds later, as I looked back at the SUV, trying to be discrete, I saw the journalist get out. Immediately, I felt relief, until I saw the journalist limping between the tables as he made his way towards me. He was still recovering from the gunshot wounds. I tried to remain calm and rushed to greet him.

After a brief introduction and a short description of my research project, I asked for his permission to record the interview. I pressed the record button and started reading the oral consent form. After 10 minutes into the interview, I looked back towards the street, and the police patrol remained there—in fact, it stayed at the same place for the whole interview. From time to time, I looked towards the police patrol and a few times I locked eyes with the police officers. My hands started sweating, but I tried to remain focused on the interview. More than an hour

into it, a police officer holding a yellow folder stood on the side of our table and greeted the journalist. I looked at the police officer, and as he was talking to the journalist his sight was focused on the object lying on the table. It was a bulky audio recorder with dual microphones that from a distance probably looked suspicious to the bodyguards who were assigned to protect him. We continued the interview for another 10 minutes, with the police officers always watching us from a distance.

By the end of the interview, I experienced an unfamiliar fear that made me realize the risks of doing research in and on a city where the networks of corruption reached deeply into the police and the military forces patrolling the streets. I left the coffee shop taking care not to be followed. I spent the next half hour driving around the city and avoiding any routes to frequent destinations. I constantly checked to see if I was being followed. Finally, I decided to return to where I was staying, but I was feeling nauseated. I went to the bedroom and started to reflect on the affective and emotional impact of the experience of doing research on the effects of drug-related violence on secondary witnesses—that is social workers, psychologists, and journalists, people that ordinarily deal with similar affective and emotional effects as a result of their daily routines and responsibilities.

I was born and raised in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Throughout my life, I have been in contact with local representations of violent events, as well as stories involving leaders and different actors involved in or affected by the development of the illicit drugs industry in Sinaloa. *Sinaloenses*¹ have developed a close yet ambiguous

¹ Term that refers to people born or who are residents of the northwestern Mexican state of Sinaloa.

relationship with drug trafficking, as well as the actors, economies, and the sociopolitical practices tied to it. On the one hand, sinaloenses suffer from and are forced to cope with the effects of violence. On the other, they enjoy the economic benefits that result from the profits of the illicit economies and money laundering (Zavala 2012). The social distance² and perceptions of drug trafficking reflect a substantial acceptance among different generations of sinaloenses (Moreno and Flores 2015), while the effects of drug-related violence are simply perceived as side effects of illicit practices that are nonetheless socially and morally accepted (Guevara and Reyes 2012; Moreno and Flores 2015).

Collective memories of the different activities associated with drug trafficking and the violent events that have taken place in Sinaloa are preserved through oral histories and cultural products that include *narcocorridos*, books, novels, movies, videos, and clothing styles. Situated knowledges inform a common sense that some have conceptualized as *narcocultura* (narcoculture), briefly defined as the subculture of drug trafficking, illicit drugs, and related violence that takes the form of cultural representations, but also everyday practices, attitudes, and behaviors (Córdova 2012; Enciso 2011; Maihold and Sauter 2012; Sánchez 2009). Yet, the effects of drug-related violence have inflicted profound wounds on thousands of individuals and families that have suffered the disappearance and loss of relatives, as well as those that have been physically and emotionally injured.

² Social distance refers to the levels of empathy and understanding between individuals and groups, and specifically to establishing relationships between them (Moreno and Flores 2015).

David Riches (1986) notes that there are three main perspectives on acts of violence: offender, victim, and witness. My research focuses on the latter. Giorgio Agamben (2004) goes further and identifies two distinct forms of bearing witness. First, witnessing as a form of testimony on a particular event or process. And second, witnessing as a form of personal and embodied experience. For the purposes of my research, psychologists, social workers, and journalists constitute *secondary witnesses* of drug-related violence, and I asked them to provide their testimony on the multiple affective and emotional effects that have touched them personally as a result of their daily routines and work-related activities.

I became interested in exploring the effects of witnessing drug-related violence after a relative's close encounter with a shooting on a street while stopped at a traffic light. That event stimulated my interest to explore the affective and emotional effects that emerge while witnessing the multiple forms and expressions of drug-related violence, which includes public shootouts, executions, *levantones* (kidnappings), *narcomantas* (banners with violent messages), extortions, and multiple expressions of terror ranging from mass executions, *narcofosas* (mass graves), mutilated bodies, and decapitations, to the public display of bodies attached to threats made against rival cartels and authorities.

The multiple forms and levels of violence produce landscapes and geographies that affect city life at different but interconnected scales, ranging from human bodies to the larger scale and morphology of city space. Drug-related violence is a spatial phenomenon wherein different bodies and objects converge in space and time, producing assemblages that enable the emergence of affective

and emotional effects. The clash between different bodies and objects produces violent landscapes wherein affective and emotional effects are inscribed as traumatic memories, and which are recalled by the different participants in the events (Figure 1). In this sense, drug-related violence is indeed part of everyday life in the city as it affects the way people interact, move through, identify with, and shape the urban landscape.



Figure 1. One of the landscapes produced by drug-related violence in Mexico. This is a photograph by Christopher Venegas, from the Mexican Newspaper *La Vanguardia*, that was awarded the third prize in the category “Contemporary Issues” of the 2014 World Press Photo Contest.

During the last three decades, Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) have expanded their operations in North America. It is estimated that Mexico’s illicit drugs industry generates between US\$11 billion and US\$39 billion in profits annually (Mercille 2011: 1637). Mexican DTOs and their associates dominate the supply and wholesale distribution of most illicit drugs in the United States (Mercille 2011; Morton 2012). The growth of Mexico’s illicit drugs industry is directly linked to structural changes in the political economy of the country, but

also to the reorganization of Mexican DTOs, the trafficking networks, alliances, modes of operation, as well as to a national security strategy that purports to curtail the power of Mexican DTOs through the arrest and extradition of their leaders.

The fight against drug trafficking in Mexico has been historically tied to the interests of the United States (Boullosa and Wallace 2016; Enciso 2003; Grillo 2011; Valdés 2013). Particularly since the 1970s, when the increasing demand for illicit drugs and the growth of Mexican DTOs became a great concern for Richard Nixon's administration. It promoted a series of policies and programs aiming to facilitate the globalization of drug war governance through punitive criminalization and the militarization of the "war on drugs" in Latin America (Corva 2008; Paley 2014). Since then, the United States government has committed significant resources to fight the growth of the drugs industry and the development of Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) in Latin America (Paley 2014).

The violence affecting many regions in Mexico is associated with two different conflicts, known as the *Drug Wars* in Mexico. On the one hand is "*La Guerra del Narco*" (the War on Drugs), and on the other is "*La Narcoguerra*" (the Drug War). Both are deeply related and have at their center the relationship between necro and narco-politics. The *Guerra del Narco* refers to the use of the police and the military forces to seize drugs and debilitate Mexican DTOs through the arrest and extradition of their leaders. The *Narcoguerra* refers to conflicts and battles of extermination between trafficking cells and DTOs seeking to influence the networks or establish alliances with officials at federal, state, municipal, and local levels, aiming to get access to or control over the trafficking corridors that

these allow (Boyce et al. 2015: 10). Yet, in addition to the previous conflicts, the effects of drug-related violence have expanded towards the use of different forms and levels of violence that have affected the lives and livelihoods of thousands of Mexican families.

Drug-related violence has intensified since 2006, when the newly elected president, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, decided to implement a national security strategy based on law-enforcement and the militarization of Mexican cities, aiming to curb the power of Mexican DTOs that were framed as a critical threat for national security and the preservation of the public order. A decade later, drug-related violence in Mexico has resulted in more than 100,000 deaths. So far, most academic research has focused on exploring the causes and the material effects of the drug wars across different regions in Mexico. We nonetheless know little about the *everyday effects* of drug-related violence, and even less about how it touches those to whom people turn for counsel and information—that is, social workers, psychologists, and journalists.

Recent studies on the emotional and mental health of journalists in Mexico show that the rates of PTSD symptoms in reporters who cover the drug wars are significantly higher than in journalists covering other assignments (Feinstein 2012; Flores et al. 2012, 2014). Studies conclude that news coverage of drug-related violence represents a psychological risk factor that must be considered in the study of PTSD, depression, and anxiety among journalists in Mexico. Still, it is important to note that those studies have used quantitative methods and have focused mostly on providing evidence on the emotional effects of covering drug-related

violence. In other words, the descriptive nature of the studies does not allow for etiological inference as there are not sufficient data quantifying the severity of the threats or the frequency of the symptoms (Feinstein 2012).

Research on the affective and emotional effects experienced by the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence is significant for two main reasons. First, it demonstrates that the effects of drug-related violence are far more complex than the official count of deaths and the support offered to affected families. The Mexican government must acknowledge that the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence—which might include first responders, forensics technicians, doctors, social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and journalists—constitute a vulnerable group that must be considered among the victims of Mexico’s drug wars. Second, the findings of this dissertation might be useful for identifying strategies to improve the overall quality of the care and support offered to the different victims of drug-related violence. This is a critical issue that deserves further analysis and examination because the effects of violence over different subjects are complex and far from homogenous.

1.2 Research problem and questions

The study of violence has attracted the interest of geographers who have focused on the intersectionality of violence, space, and place. Geographers have made significant contributions to the study of the aftermath of violence (Hupy 2006, 2008; Inwood 2012; Laketa 2016; Tyner 2010); responses to violence (Blomley 2003; Garmany 2011; Wright 2011); crime and the criminalization of violence (Boyce et al. 2015; Corva 2008; Gilmore 2007; Holloway and McNulty 2003;

LeBeau and Leitner 2011); the fear of violence (Pain 1991, 2009; Sandberg and Tollefsen 2010; Valentine 1992); representations of violence (Gallaher 2004); as well as the landscapes and memorialization of violence (Foote 2003; Inwood 2012; Till 2012; Tyner et al. 2012). Yet, the act of violence and the social conditions that produce and are produced by violence are rarely theorized by geographers in a way that affords a critical evaluation of its constitution (Tyner and Inwood 2014). This omission often results in the naturalization and normalization of different forms of violence, obfuscating the fundamental sociospatial relations and processes that give violence its meaning (Tyner and Inwood 2014).

According to Jeff Garmany (2011), few geographers have studied the ways in which homicides and death may induce changes in space, as well as in the sociospatial structures and practices of different populations. Drawing on postcolonial theory, affect theory, the growing field of emotional geographies, and critical studies of trauma, this dissertation examines the affective and emotional effects experienced by the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Culiacán, Sinaloa, México. To that end, social workers, psychologists, and journalists are secondary witnesses who, as a result of their daily routines and work related activities, are directly in contact with and often tasked with aiding different actors involved in the acts of violence, as well as the landscapes that emerge within the different conflicts. This dissertation seeks to address the following research questions:

- *How do secondary witnesses in Culiacán, Sinaloa, perceive and understand drug-related violence and its effects?*

- *What are the affective and emotional effects being experienced by the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence?*
- *How do secondary witnesses cope with the multiple effects of drug-related violence?*

Findings suggest that secondary witnesses of drug-related violence are experiencing symptoms of *Secondary Traumatic Stress* (STS). Yet, there are differences associated with one's psychosociological and psychospatial proximity to traumatic events and experiences. I argue that drug-related violence is a spatialized phenomenon that merges affective and emotional effects that circulate among bodies and materialities, creating emotional registers that are collected, stored, and recalled through traumatic memory. Yet, those memories are also shaped by time- and place-specific narratives that influence perceptions of secondary witnesses and enable the formation of coping mechanisms, ranging from individual to collective strategies that result from a long-term social and spatial proximity with the phenomenon.

1.3 Analytical framework

Tyner and Inwood (2014) note that the social sciences, and particularly geography, need to produce new understandings of violence to increase our knowledge on its effects over different bodies and subjectivities. I study the effects of drug-related violence in Mexico through the dialectical relationship between *necropolitics* and *narcopolitics*. More specifically, I draw on the contributions made by feminist geographer Melissa Wright (2011), who developed an analytical framework to study the effects of and responses to the different forms and levels

of drug-related violence in Ciudad Juárez. Following Achille Mbembe's (2013) conceptualization of necropolitics, briefly defined as forms of governance where the exercise of sovereignty consists in the control of mortality through the definition of life through the deployment of necropower, Wright (2011) affirms that the political struggles around death and its meaning in Mexico have become a central element in the functions of the Mexican state.

In the previous context, historical materialism becomes an epistemological tool to understand the dialectical relation between necropolitics and narcopolitics in Mexico. Dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world (Ollman 2003). In the dialectical method of investigation, empirical facts have to be gathered first, the given state of knowledge has to be fully grasped, and only when this is achieved can a dialectical reorganization of the material be undertaken to understand a given reality (Mandel 1976); which from a dialectical vantage point consists not simply of disparate events but rather processes and relations shaped by the underlying capitalist structures (Tyner and Inwood 2014).

The study of violence in Mexico demands a critical and exhaustive exploration of the geohistorical processes that have shaped the regional configuration of narcopolitical networks that operate a territorial hegemony through the use of different forms and levels of everyday violence. Overall, I argue that drug-related violence and its effects must be understood as both the outcomes of global geohistorical processes that have transformed the functions of the modern capitalist state, as well as a set of policies and programs implemented since the

1970s that aim to facilitate drug war governance in Latin America. In order to understand the micropolitics of drug-related violence, particularly its effects on everyday life, the object of analysis should be the material and symbolic relationships that constitute necro/narco-politics in a particular region. Next, I provide a brief discussion on the two larger geopolitical processes that are shaping the necro/narco-politics of drug-related violence in Mexico.

In 1941 the political scientist Harold D. Lasswell published a paper titled, *The Garrison State*, where he presented the hypothesis that world politics were moving toward the domination of specialists trained in the use of violence for political and social ends. At the time, Lasswell (1941) formulated the notion of “garrison state” as a developmental construct aiming to describe a predictable world system where states resort to extreme measures of coercion in order to maintain or create the conditions that facilitate governance. In a garrison state system, the use of violence is a permanent state of affairs associated with two predominant features: first, elites value power enough to resort to large-scale coercion when coercive strategies are useful for the maintenance of their ascendancy. Second, elites accept that the retention of power depends upon the capability and willingness to contend with external and internal threats (Lasswell 1997).

The origin of the garrison state is tied to a new punitive common sense that was forged in the United States by a network of conservative think tanks, which during the Reagan era envisioned the “penal state” as a weapon to dismantle the welfare state. This idea was exported to other parts of the world, alongside a

neoliberal economic ideology that reconfigured regimes of capital accumulation (Wacquant 2009). The passage from a social state model of inclusive community to a penal exclusionary state is marked by a shift in the state's *raison d'être*, from a focus on processes and events it can do nothing about to those it can at least make a show of being able to handle and control (Bauman 2004).

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, the capitalist state focused on creating the conditions that enabled capital accumulation while facilitating the conditions for social reproduction and maintaining the social order. But, starting in the 1970s, the capitalist state progressively retreated from the economic arena and asserted the necessity to reduce its social role to the widening and strengthening of its penal intervention (Wacquant 2009). Having abandoned most of its previous economic and social functions, the contemporary capitalist state selected “national security” as the hub of its strategy, which aimed at recouping its fallen authority and legitimacy through the restoration of its protective importance in the eyes of the citizenry (Bauman 2004).

The penal state focuses on the implementation of hyperpunitive criminal justice policies and practices aiming to punish offenders so people will avoid criminal behaviors (Corva 2008). The application of coercive power requires that subjects be constructed as a population that cannot be governed through the administration of freedom: they are deviant, oppositional, and criminal, and thus in need of direct control (Kearon 2005). Corva (2008) identifies two strategies that are applied to the “surplus” populations: (1) the strategy of warfare that implies the application of the military apparatus to maintain public order; (2) and the strategy

of policing citizens that involves the application of the criminal justice system. In this sense, skills in the management of violence continue to play a prominent role in countries where the “penal state” aims to control specific sectors of the population that have been excluded from the re-organization of capitalist relations of production (Bauman 2004).

Paley (2014) notes that the war on drugs is a long-term fix to capitalism’s woes, combining terror with neoliberal policymaking to gain access to populations and territories once unavailable to global capital. For Paley (2014) the connections between drug wars, the state, paramilitary violence, and natural resources are increasingly evident (see also Ballvé 2012; Laudati 2016; Rettberg and Ortiz-Riomalo 2016). In the context of Mexico, drug-related violence and domestic security have become the target and tool to secure the Mexican state (Wright 2011). Yet, the Mexican government is facing a legitimacy crisis tied to the implementation of structural reforms that have resulted in economic instability and public unrest, alongside the prevalence of corruption and impunity.

The different forms and levels of drug-related violence have been normalized in some regions in Mexico, where the hegemonic order operates at an ontological level, shaping everyday practices, attitudes and behaviors, such as the case of Sinaloa. But, there are other regions in the country where the effects of necro/narco-politics are being contested through different strategies and forms of resistance, ranging from public manifestations to the organization of paramilitary forces that aim to recoup the peace in regions that have been abandoned by Mexican authorities, or in some cases that are governed through the networks and

alliances associated with the necro/narco-politics that shape the lives and livelihoods on those regions.

1.4 Organization and structure of the dissertation

The rest of the dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter two examines the geohistorical context to understand the drug wars in Mexico. I argue that the current articulation between necro/narco-politics in Mexico is tied to the re-configuration of the central function of the Mexican state, which changed its role from a paternalistic state to a neoliberal state focused on securitization and the control of surplus populations, as well as the implementation of a set of policies and programs that aimed to facilitate drug war governance in North America. To that end, I organized the geohistorical review into two periods: (1) shifting routes and dynamics of drug-trafficking in North America: 1970-2000, and (2) the “drug wars” in Mexico: 2000-2015.

The first period explores the geopolitical processes that facilitated the globalization of drug war governance in Latin America. Starting in the 1970s, the U.S. government implemented a series of policies and programs that aimed to militarize the approach to drugs in Latin America—hence the coining of the phrase, “war on drugs.” The U.S. government committed material, financial, and human resources to enable the use of state violence to control the surplus populations that were increasing as a result of the reconfiguration in the regime of capital accumulation and the *raison-d’être* of the capitalist state. The second period examines the evolution of drug-trafficking in North America. A period where the increasing demand of drugs in the United States enabled the growth of the drugs

industry and the development of Mexican DTOs, while the U.S. and Mexican governments reinforced cooperation through the Merida Initiative aiming to confront the different threats associated with drug trafficking in North America.

The third chapter reviews the literature on trauma studies and discusses the relevance of affect theory and emotional geographies to study the effects of drug-related violence over different bodies and subjectivities. First, I situate this research into a larger conversation on critical trauma studies, which represents a growing body of literature that examines alternative approaches to conceptualizations of suffering and trauma. Then, I explore the conventional theory of trauma that led to the formal recognition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a syndrome that might result from traumatic experiences. PTSD treatment often involves working traumatic memories through the support offered by therapists and health care personnel. This condition exposes trauma personnel to increasing job-related stress that has been studied as burnout, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress. I review the different conceptualizations and describe the different methodologies that have been used to study job-related stress. Then, I discuss the potential contributions of affect theory and notions of emotional geographies to study secondary traumatic stress.

The fourth chapter describes the research methods that were used to collect and analyze the data. First, I describe the geographical location of Culiacán and provide some context to understand the significance of doing research in a city where the prevalence of violence is tied to the historical presence of drug trafficking organizations, as well as the necro/narco-politics around it. Then, I explain how the

data were collected through open-ended interviews and field observation, while describing some of my experiences doing fieldwork in Culiacán and providing insights on significant events that shaped the outcomes of this research. In the last subsection, I describe the coding techniques used to analyze the data.

The fifth chapter discusses the working conditions of secondary witnesses in order to understand their exposure to traumatic experiences. Based on the psychospacial proximity to the effects of drug-related violence and the psychosociological proximity to traumatic experiences, I organized analysis into two groups of participants. On the one hand, social workers and psychologists are exposed indirectly to traumatic experiences through the testimonies of victims, offenders, and witnesses. On the other, journalists have contact with different participants in the acts of violence, but they also experience directly the landscapes of drug-related violence, landscapes that at various times might be packed by flying bullets, littered with death, often times mutilated bodies, or later, memorialized with cenotaphs, flowers, or offerings. For each of the groups the discussion is organized around three main topics consistent with the research questions: (1) the perceptions of risk and violence; (2) secondary traumatic stress; and (3) coping strategies. The final thoughts follow a compare and contrast format that is based on the differences and similarities between the two groups of participants.

In the last chapter, I provide final thoughts on the significance of continue studying the incidence of secondary traumatic stress among the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Mexico. This research is significant because

it contributes to improving our understanding of the affective and emotional effects that result from witnessing the multiple forms and effects of drug-related violence. The research findings make an empirical contribution towards the study of the mental health of secondary witnesses of drug-related violence, particularly for the study of secondary traumatic stress. Yet, further research is necessary to improve our understanding of the frequency and prevalence of STS symptoms. Overall, this research also raises a central question that deserves further analysis and discussion, which is related to the quality of care and support offered to the multiple victims of drug-related violence in Mexico.

CHAPTER 2

THE NECRO/NARCO-POLITICS OF DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

2.1 Introduction

During the last three decades, social scientists have produced different approaches to understanding the intensification of drug-related violence in Mexico. Starting in the mid-1990s academics from different disciplines made significant contributions to exploring some of the factors behind the growth of the drugs industry (Astorga 1995; Patenostro 1995). More recently, analysis and discussion have focused on understanding the increasing violence in many regions in Mexico through representations of a *failed state* (Grayson 2010; Jiménez del Val 2011; Morton 2012, 2011; Villamil 2014); *narco-state* (Astorga 2007; Bayer 2010); and even, *narcoterrorism* (Campbell and Hansen 2014; Etter and Lehmuth 2013; Flanigan 2012; Knowles 2008; Pacheco 2009; Williams 2012).

There are three main criticisms to the previous approaches. First, they are based on discursive-ontological binaries that tend to isolate drug trafficking and drug-related violence from a larger social, political, cultural, and institutional context (Boyce et al. 2015). Second, the narratives are based on a notion of “territory” that naturalizes and normalizes a state-centered epistemology. Territory is commonly assumed as a bounded discrete space. Yet, a territory must be conceived as a historically and geographically specific form of sociopolitical organization and political thought that is actively produced and negotiated through sociospatial practices and techniques of governance (Elden 2010). And third, the

obsession with the notion of territory as nearly the exclusive spatial modus operandi of world politics, ignores other spatial modalities that are not necessarily static, such as networks and flows that are more relevant to understanding the shifting dynamics of Mexican DTOs (Agnew 2015).

In contrast to those approaches based on state-centered epistemologies and discursive-ontological binaries, Melissa Wright (2011) examined the discursive wars over the political meaning of death and the search for justice in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, arguing that the necro/narco-politics politics circling around the meaning of drug-related murders and femicide must be understood in relation to gendered violence, and its use as an instrument to secure the Mexican state. Yet, Wright (2011) does not provide a clear conceptualization of what is meant by narcopolitics, a question that is more relevant as recent events in Michoacán, Guerrero, and Veracruz have reopened the public debate on the Mexican government's responsibility for the disappearance of citizens in collusion with state and local authorities, as well as criminal organizations.

Wright (2006, 2011, 2012) has extensively documented the responses and struggles of anti-femicide activists in Ciudad Juárez who use different strategies to cope with the government's responses, and in some cases with the lack of responses. Her work brings attention to the study of the political agency among ordinary citizens that have been affected by necropolitics, narcopolitics, and drug-related violence in Mexico. In fact, the political struggles studied by Wright (2011) are the basis of her implicit notion of narcopolitics. More recently, Boyce et al. (2015) have shown that the relationships and networks between members of the

institutions of the Mexican state and members of drug trafficking organizations are much more fluid and flexible than assumed by the failed state, narco-state, and narcoterrorism narratives.

Drug-related violence is a complex phenomenon that challenges conventional approaches that objectify the causes of violence into singular and categorical units that tend to fall into the territorial trap identified above (Agnew 1994; Elden 2010). The intensification of drug-related violence in Mexico is tied to geohistorical processes that have shaped territories and regions where different social actors use multiple forms and levels of violence to defend their interests. But it is also the product of coping strategies and responses that societies have developed to deal with the effects of necropolitics and narcopolitics. In this sense, a geohistorical perspective focused on the regional study of the dialectical relationship between necropolitics, narcopolitics, and drug-related violence offers a nuanced and flexible framework to examine the effects of different forms and levels of violence.

Campbell (2009) proposes the term *Drug War Zone* (DWZ) as a framework to explain how political and cultural connections and separations are materially and discursively produced and reproduced through drug trafficking and law-enforcement activities. DWZ refers to a fluid cultural space where contending forces battle over the meaning, value, and control of drugs and territories. Hence, it refers not only to a historically contingent and constructed geographical location, but also to a mental space and symbolic domain that connect drug producers, drug

smugglers, and drug consumers to their police, military, and intelligence counterparts in a strategic, tactical, and ideological fight (Campbell 2009).

The DWZ framing is useful for understanding the context of drug-related violence in Mexico, as it partially addresses the processes of (re)territorialization that result from the formation of networks of cooperation, as well as the disputes between and within the different actors involved in the drug wars. As Campbell (2009) acknowledges, DWZs are characterized by a sense of insecurity as powerful forces impinge on the lives of individuals and communities. Still, his conceptualization presents two limitations. First, he reduces the tensions and struggles, and consequently the analysis, to the participants directly involved in either the institutions of the repressive apparatus of the Mexican state or the members of the Mexican drugs industry. In Mexico, however, those boundaries are not as evident as Campbell (2009) suggests. Second, the DWZs leave aside ordinary citizens who constantly get caught up in the conflicts and are forced to cope with the multiple effects of necropolitics, narcopolitics, and drug-related violence. Campbell (2009) does not address the political subjectivity of ordinary citizens, notwithstanding that there are multiple studies that discuss the different responses and strategies that have been used to cope with the different effects of drug-related violence.

For these reasons, I suggest that drug-related violence must be studied both historically and geographically in order to understand the acts of violence, as well as the social conditions that produce and are produced by the shifting assemblages that are formed in different regions in Mexico. As historian Alan

Knight (2012) notes, any study of violence needs to be disaggregated and contextualized. Violence cannot be treated as a generic phenomenon obeying common identifiable causes. To understand violence, we need to look at particular cases in particular contexts. In this sense, drug-related violence must be understood as a spatial phenomenon that results from the dialectical relationship between necropolitics and narcopolitics. This, in turn, shapes regional networks and dynamics among the different materialities that constitute the assemblages and the landscapes of drug-related violence.

While many scholars and politicians often use 2006 as the starting point of the drug wars in Mexico, this chapter explores the origins of the war on drugs in North America since the 1970s. To that end, I provide an overview of the context to understand the relationship between necropolitics, narcopolitics, and drug-related violence in Mexico. Following that is a geohistorical overview, organized in two periods. The first period, from the 1970s to 2000, is characterized by the growth of drug consumption and the expansion of drug trafficking in North America. During this time, the U.S. government implemented a series of policies and programs to facilitate the militarization of the war on drugs in Latin America. The second period, from 2000 to 2015, saw the intensification of drug-related violence, which is largely associated with the drug wars in Mexico. The final section examines the significance of studying violence and its effects through the lens of a dialectical relationship between necropolitics and narcopolitics, which I argue is critical to understand the effects of and responses to different forms and levels of everyday violence affecting multiple regions in Mexico.

2.2 Shifting routes and dynamics of drug-trafficking in North America: 1970-2000

During the 1960s and 1970s the demand for drugs in the United States increased drastically. Marijuana became an item of mass consumption, providing Mexican growers with a stable price and steady demand that offered higher profits than traditional crops like beans and corn (Boullosa and Wallace 2016). Prices for it increased tenfold by the end of the 1960s, facilitating the expansion of drug plantations in northwest Mexico, particularly in the region known as *El Triángulo Dorado del Narcotráfico* (The Golden Triangle of Drug Trafficking), a region where the states of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua come together. In 1968, during the presidential election in the United States, Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, concerned with the increasing consumption of drugs, promised that if elected he would increase the number of border, customs and immigration agents to “move against” the sources of illegal drugs (Enciso 2003).

Nixon was sworn in as the 34th President of the United States on January 20, 1969. Two months later, he established the Special Presidential Task Force Relating to Narcotics, Marihuana and Dangerous Drugs that included representatives from ten different federal agencies. The purpose of the task force was to assess the dangers of marijuana and the flow of drugs over the Mexico–U.S. border, in order to identify strategies to control drug smuggling and marijuana cultivation (Doyle 2003). When its report was released on June 6, it singled out Mexico as the primary supplier of marijuana and a source for a large amount of other dangerous drugs, including heroin (Doyle 2003). Representatives of the U.S.

and Mexican governments met in mid-June and agreed to cooperate to fight drug trafficking across the border (Enciso 2003).

Three months later, Nixon ordered the implementation of Operation Intercept, which required a close inspection of all of the automobiles crossing the border to detect and reduce drug trafficking (Astorga 2005). The measure created political tension between the two countries, as Mexican authorities reacted with horror to a measure that was perceived as a unilateral decision and a betrayal of the implicit understanding between the two nations to cooperate on border issues (Doyle 2003). The Mexican government sent a delegation to Washington, led by the assistant attorney of the *Procuraduría General de la República* (PGR)—David Franco Rodríguez—to discuss the impact of Operation Intercept on the bilateral relationship. The Mexican delegation then announced it had successfully convinced the U.S. government to cancel the unilateral measure, replacing it with Operation Cooperation (Enciso 2003).

The diplomatic meeting reestablished the bilateral approach to the fight against drugs and drug trafficking across the Mexico–U.S. border. The change in the discourse was accompanied by the establishment of a binational task force, led on the Mexican side by Sócrates Huerta Grados, the Mexican Attorney General, and Jack B. Kubisch the U.S. Deputy Chief of the Mission. The task force made several recommendations to the Mexican government and released its final report on December 15, 1969. Three months later, on March 5, 1970, Huerta Grados and George H. Gaffney—the Chief of the Narcotic and Dangerous Drugs Section (NDDS) of the U.S. Department of Justice—signed an agreement where

the U.S. government committed one million dollars in the following two years to help the Mexican government in its efforts to eradicate drug plantations and centers of drugs production (Enciso 2003).

As a result of the maneuvers of the U.S. government, the Mexican government entered the 1970s with a strong commitment to the fight against drug trafficking (Enciso 2003). Once again, as a result of the pressure exercised by Nixon's administration, the Mexican Secretary of Defense—Félix Galván López—on September 30, 1976, ordered the implementation of Operation Condor, which aimed to eradicate marijuana and opium plantations in the Northwestern Mexican states of Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua. One of the effects of *Operation Condor* was that most of the leaders of the DTOs moved to other regions in Mexico, particularly Jalisco and Michoacán.

Mexican counternarcotic operations were used by the U.S. government as an example of what a country might do to fight drugs and criminal organizations. On March 5, 1970, the U.S. government committed to providing one million dollars in the following two years to help the Mexican government to fight the increasing cultivation and production of drugs (Enciso 2003). Notwithstanding the previous governmental efforts, during the 1970s Mexican DTOs became the main suppliers of marijuana and heroin in the United States. Guillermo Valdés Castellanos (2013), ex-director of the *Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional* (CISEN), estimated that between 1962 and 1980, 43.6 million U.S. citizens—representing 27 percent of the population between 15 and 64 years old in 1980—had smoked marijuana.

In the early 1980s, around 80 percent of the cocaine supply going to the United States passed through Dade County, Florida, but by the early 1990s, 90 percent of the supply arrived across the US-Mexican border (Morton 2012). This shift in drug trafficking routes is linked to the global restructuring of the drug trade that took place after the 1980s campaigns against the Medellin and Cali cartels in Colombia, which effectively closed off traditional smuggling routes throughout the Caribbean and southern Florida (Carpenter 2010; McDonald 2005; Morton 2012). The Colombian DTOs rerouted drug shipments through Mexico, taking advantage of the existing routes used by marijuana traffickers.

The 1982 Department of Defense Authorization Act enabled the U.S. military forces to cooperate with civil authorities, including participation with other countries under three primary conditions: (1) the military had to be invited by the government of the host country; (2) the military forces would be directed and organized by U.S. civil agencies; and (3) its role would be limited to support functions (Enciso 2003).

After the murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena on February 7, 1985, the U.S. government intensified its pressure on the Mexican government. Camarena was an agent of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) who, while working undercover in the Mexican state of Chihuahua had revealed networks of corruption within the Mexican state. This included federal authorities, military forces, as well as state and local officials (González 2009). The relationship between the two countries collided as Mexican authorities rejected the accusations.

During the 1990s, the U.S. government committed significant material resources, military training, and intelligence to fight the Andean cocaine trade and the Colombian DTOs. The battle lines were redrawn and Mexico became a critical partner for the war on drugs in Latin America, as it became a transit zone for the cocaine coming from Colombia (Gonzalez 2009). However, by the mid 1990s Mexican DTOs set up their own supply networks, increasing their profit and control over drug trafficking in North America (Carpenter 2010). In this context, Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, amid the negotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), allowed DEA agents to operate in Mexico while increasing public spending to strengthen the capacities and material resources of the military and the federal police in their operations against Mexican DTOs (González 2009).

Mercille (2011) affirms that the implementation of NAFTA and the neoliberal reforms in Mexico increased the size of the drugs industry by facilitating the inclusion of Mexicans who were adversely affected by the reorganization of the economy. He notes that NAFTA and the Mexican government have failed to generate job growth and increase wages; moreover, the loss of about 2.3 million jobs in the agricultural sector forced thousands of farmers to abandon their land and look for any kind of work out of desperation. In addition, as discussed earlier, there are regions across the country where the historical prevalence of the drugs industry has enabled a rapid expansion driven by the increasing consumption of drugs in North America.

2.3 The “drug wars” in Mexico: 2000-2015

The fight against criminal organizations intensified after the terrorists’ attacks that took place on September 11, 2001. The U.S. government increased security measures at the border and the Mexican authorities cooperated in the implementation of coercive measures aiming to prevent the expansion of Mexican criminal organizations into the U.S. side. However, by the mid-2000s Mexican DTOs had evolved into highly sophisticated, vertical enterprises bringing in revenues estimated at \$142 billion a year resulting from trafficking cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamines (Carpenter 2010). The more powerful Mexican DTOs became Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) that, in partnership with their associates, dominate the supply and wholesale distribution of most illicit drugs in the United States (Mercille 2011; Morton 2012). Opium production increased from 71 tons in 2005 to 425 tons in 2009, and Mexico surpassed Burma as the world’s second largest producer that year. Cannabis cultivation also increased from 5,600 hectares in 2005 to 17,500 hectares in 2009 (Mercille, 2011).

Until this point drug-related violence had been centered on some regions in Mexico, particularly in Baja California, Sinaloa, and Chihuahua. From 1990 to 2007 the number of homicides in Mexico had been decreasing, with slight variations, reaching its lowest number in 2007 with 8,867 homicides (Figure 2). In 2008 the number of homicides almost doubled, beginning a decade that has resulted in more than 100,000 deaths. In addition, there are thousands of affected families and collateral victims that are not always visible or accounted for in the official numbers of the Mexican authorities.



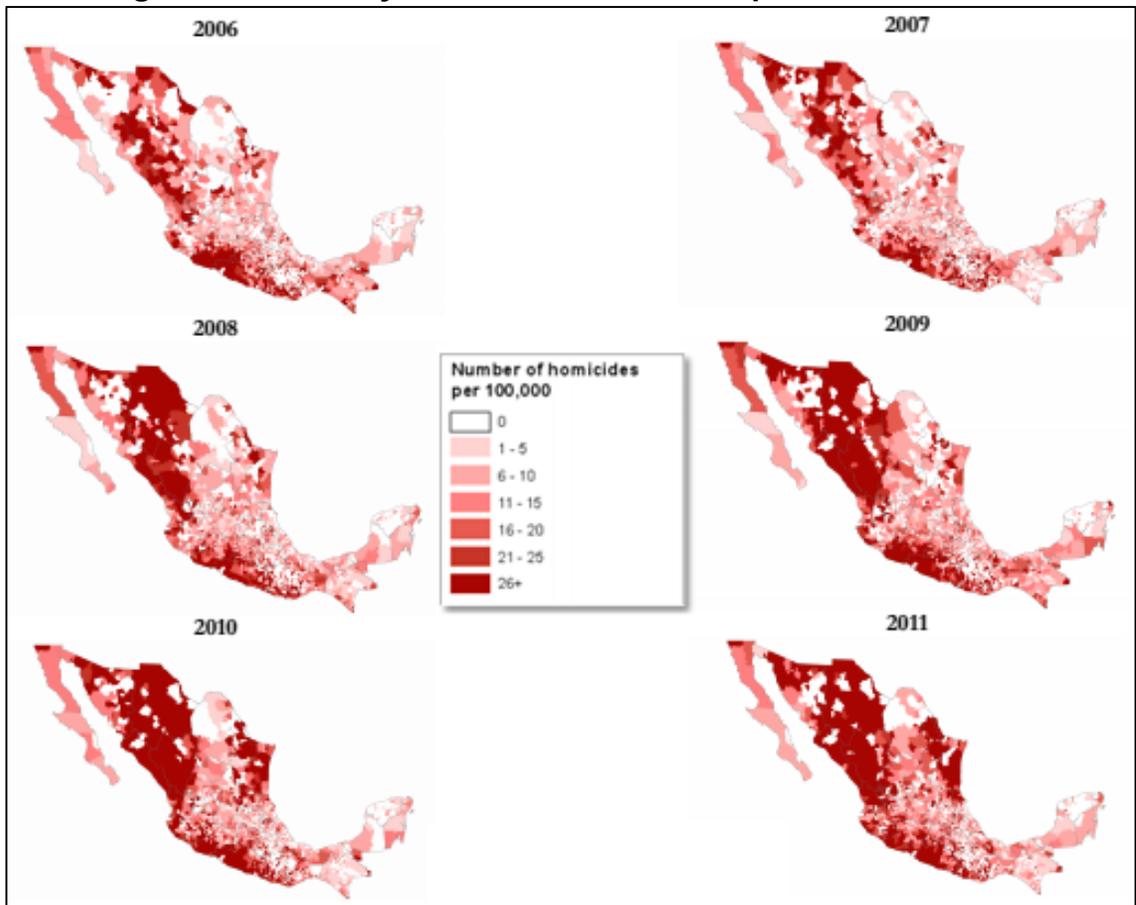
Source: Elaborated by the author with information from the Sistema Estatal y Municipal de Base de Datos, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

The situation changed drastically in the years following the presidential elections of July, 2006. After a close and controversial result, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa became the 56th President of Mexico on December 1, 2006. Ten days later, Calderón announced that the Mexican government would assume a responsibility that had been avoided by previous governments: the fight against drug trafficking would become national priority. *Operativo Conjunto* (Joint operation), which mobilized 4,200 army soldiers and 1,000 marines to Michoacán to destroy drug plantations and fight drug trafficking organizations, became the first action of a war on drugs that progressively intensified and expanded into different regions across the country.

According to the 2012 World Drug Report, in the period between 2006 and 2010, the Mexican government eradicated 71,268 hectares of opium poppy

cultivation. In 2010, Mexican authorities eradicated 15,484 hectares of poppy cultivation and 18,581 hectares of cannabis cultivation, reflecting the significant growth in cultivation and production across the country. That year, Mexico led the world in seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants, representing 20 percent of the world supply (12,936 kg), while cannabis represented 37 percent of the world total (2,313,115 kg). Seizures of cocaine represented only one percent of the world total (9,893 kg), and opium even less than that at 1,195 kg. These results came at high cost with more than 95,646 deaths from 2007 to 2011, an average of 19,129 per year, or more than 50 people per day (Molzahn et al. 2013).

Figure 3. Deaths by homicide at the municipal level, 2006-2011



Source: Molzahn, O. et al. 2013. *Drug violence in Mexico: Data and analysis through 2012.*

Figure 3 shows the growth in the deaths by homicide at the municipal level during the Calderón administration. It is estimated that between 45 and 60 percent of the 106,098 intentional homicides committed in Mexico between 2006 and 2011 were associated with drug trafficking and organized crime, as the bodies showed typical features of actions committed by organized-crime groups, including the use of high-caliber automatic weapons, torture, dismemberment, and explicit messages (Molzahn et al. 2013). As cartels fight for the control of different territories and trafficking routes, rural communities and Mexican cities have been severely affected by the increasing violence.

Mexican municipalities are coping with the effect of drug-related violence with limited capacities and resources as municipal police only have jurisdiction to “prevent” crimes and maintain the public order. In addition, it is common that the municipal police operate with limited personnel, equipment, training, and salaries, making them more vulnerable to corruption and unable to represent a real threat to the necropower of Mexican DTOs (Widner et al. 2011). Thus, municipal governments depend on the federal government to investigate and prosecute members and associates of drug trafficking and criminal organizations (Shirk and Rios Cazares 2007).

In December 2008, the U.S. and the Mexican governments signed the first Letter of Agreement for the Merida Initiative, where the U.S. government made the commitment to transfer \$1.4 billion dollars over the following three years to support the Mexican government in the confrontation of criminal organizations (Morton 2012). According to the U.S. Department of State, since its approval the U.S.

Congress has spent \$2.5 billion dollars supporting the war on drugs in Mexico. This unprecedented partnership aims to disrupt organized criminal groups, institutionalize reforms to sustain the rule of law and support for human rights, the creation of a secure border, and building of stronger and resilient communities.

Some of the programs and activities supported through the Merida Initiative include: (1) supporting Mexico's implementation of comprehensive justice sector reform through training of personnel, including police, investigators, prosecutors, and defense counsel, as well as support in critical areas that facilitate the transition to a new accusatory criminal justice system; (2) increasing police capacity building through courses for Mexican law enforcement agencies; (3) establishing anti-corruption programs; (4) enhancing air mobility of Mexican police forces through the delivery of specialized aircraft and training for pilots and technicians; (5) developing training and improving equipment to enhance the Mexican government's ability to detect illicit goods at international checkpoints and ports of entry; (6) delivering of over 400 canines trained in the detection of narcotics, weapons, explosives, ammunition, currency, and human remains to the Mexican federal agencies; (7) establishing a secure cross-border telecommunications system between border cities to facilitate request and exchange of information on active criminal organizations; (8) organizing interagency task forces incorporating trained personnel from municipal and state police, as well as state attorney general offices in key Mexican states to better share information, develop intelligence operations, and foster greater coordination in law enforcement operations; (9) supporting efforts by Mexican prisons working to achieve independent

accreditation from the American Correctional Association (ACA); and (10) establishing Drug Treatment Courts across five Mexican states that approach addiction as a public health issue and provide viable alternatives to incarceration for drug abusers.

Paley (2014) affirms that the Merida Initiative, or Plan Mexico, is the overarching policy and legislative framework that established drug war capitalism in Mexico. In the period between December 2006 and January 2012, the number of homicides allegedly linked to organized crime increase to more than 47,500 deaths (Moloeznik 2013). Violence increased to levels never seen before in different regions across Mexico, but particularly in the northern state of Chihuahua. In the ten years before the region was militarized, the state average 586 homicides a year, and never went above 648; but the escalation of violence lead to substantial increments in the number of homicides. In 2008 it reached 2,601 deaths, and 6,407 in 2010 (2010). Meanwhile, the Mexican government increased security spending, which reached \$320,000 million pesos, or close to nineteen times the support provided by the U.S. government through the Merida Initiative.

2.4 Situating necro/narco-politics and drug-related violence in Mexico

Historically, death and its meanings have played a significant role in Mexican society, where intimacy with death, dying, the afterlife, and commemorations of death provide a rich repertoire of figures, images, and representations that are constantly deployed in Mexican culture (Lomnitz 2005). More significantly, the administration of death through the use of multiple forms and levels of violence has been at the center of the formation of the Mexican state,

so much so that cultural anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz (2005) considers death as the predominant “totem” of Mexican nationalism. According to Lomnitz (2005), Mexican nationalism is the tentative and self-conscious cult of survival, a testimony to the viability of the postcolonial condition where death has been a looming and key presence in the formation of the modern Mexican state.

In recent years, there are regions in Mexico where citizens face the reality of death on a daily basis, and it is death that is the best representation of sovereignty in Mexico (Bastante and Dickieson 2013). The Mexican state is no longer the absolute symbol of sovereignty, as the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die is contested by drug trafficking and criminal organizations (Lomnitz 2005). Mexican DTOs operate as a sort of war machine with a flexible form of organization that allows their members to move across the country to avoid being captured by the institutions of the Mexican repressive state apparatus. It is this new form of operation and organization that allows Mexican DTOs to control territories in complicity with members of the institutions of the Mexican state.

The drug wars in Mexico have produced multiple processes of (re)territorialization that rely on the use of *everyday violence*³ to produce the reorganization of space and sociospatial practices. In doing this, they reshape political subjectivities in a given territory by subjecting them to the material, symbolic, and sociospatial effects of different forms and levels of violence. Yet, it

³ Following Philippe Bourgois (2001), everyday violence refers to routine practices and expressions of violence that serve to normalize different forms of aggression and brutalities taking place at the community level, creating a common sense or ethos of violence.

is important to note that those processes are not homogeneous across Mexico. Rather, there are significant differences that must be studied historically and geographically in order to understand the necropolitics and narcopolitics in the different regions of Mexico.

Necropolitics is a theoretical concept, first used by postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe (2003) in reference to the use of necropower as a mechanism of governance that facilitates the exercise of control over the morality of particular sectors of the population. More specifically, he defines necropower as weapons that are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons, aiming to produce new and unique forms of social existence in which populations are subjected to the status of bare life or living dead.⁴ The monopoly on coercive power has been a technique of governance historically used to control territories and populations. Yet, different forms of violence have also been used by groups seeking to take control of state functions in order to establish a different order. In this sense, the struggles around the exercise of necropower are particularly evident in postcolonial countries, such as Mexico, where the administration of death over life remains as a recurrent technique of governance (Mbembe 2003).

Delgado Parra (2011) notes that governments around the world constantly adopt exceptional measures, which by definition would have to be provisional, and suspend individual rights and guarantees. Article 29 of the Mexican Constitution defines the conditions under which the *state of exception* could be established as:

⁴ Drawing on Schmitt (2000) and Agamben (1998), Mbembe (2003) notes that the state of exception is a political and juridical structure where inhabitants are deprived of political status and reduced to bare life, as a result of a spatial arrangement that remains outside the normal state of law.

(1) when a foreign invasion occurs; (2) when there is a serious disturbance of public peace; (3) when society is in great danger; and (4) when society is in a great conflict (Valadés 1974). In practice, as noted by Delgado Parra (2011), the national security strategy implemented since the government of Vicente Fox, but particularly since the time of president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), operates through a de facto state of exception where basic guarantees and human rights are almost systematically violated by the institutions of the Mexican state (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Mexican soldiers were checking the documents and inspecting the pickup truck of a civilian who was passing by one of the military checkpoints that have become part of the daily life in Culiacán (Contraluz 2017).

Since 2006, more than 30,000 people have been reported missing; 40,000 have lost their lives due to security operations to combat drug trafficking and organized crime; and more than 31,000 people have been forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of widespread violence. Meanwhile, the Mexican

authorities' unwillingness to accept criticism from Mexican civil society and international organizations has catalyzed public interest for the creation of a new internal security law to regulate the role of the military forces in the provision of public safety while providing a legal framework for their operations.

So far, the national security strategy in Mexico has been heavily dependent on the material and symbolic administration of death and its meaning. The drug wars have not been fought exclusively on the ground, as their representations in the national and international media also play a crucial role in their development (Jiménez del Val 2011; Mercille 2014). Mexican TCOs have used mass media coverage of drug-related violence, as well as other forms of “narco-propaganda”⁵ as a way to send messages to rivals and Mexican authorities (Cerdeña et al. 2013; Campbell 2014). In this sense, the administration of death and control of its meaning are critical components of the necropolitics and narcopolitics in Mexico.

Narcopolitics is a framework I have developed to explore the material, symbolic, and sociospatial relationships between the people and places that aim to facilitate or restrict the operation and expansion of drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). It also involves the different responses and struggles that result from the effects of those relationships. In other words, narcopolitics focuses on the shifting regional assemblages of material, symbolic, and sociospatial relations, as well as the networks that have been historically developed to facilitate or restrict legal and illegal practices that are ruled by the political economy of international drug trade.

⁵ Following Campbell (2014), narco-propaganda refers to organized acts of violence, videos, graffiti, signs and banners, blogs, narcocorridos, clothing, social networks, and control of the mass media.

In this sense, the micropolitics of drug-related violence is part of a process of (re)territorialization that constantly reorganizes space, sociospatial practices, and political subjectivities.

The constant reworking of space is based on the use of different forms of violence and the formation of complex networks that enable processes that reshape the political subjectivities in a territory through their subjection to new ways of living where everyday violence is used as an instrument of control. Zavala (2012) notes that drug trafficking is an economic activity based on the construction and operation of social networks among different agents that contribute directly or indirectly, materially or intellectually to the execution and operation of different activities that are considered criminal behaviors in a particular time and space. Those networks constitute a form of social capital that enables the operation of different agents, processes, and dynamics that are perceived as normal, and thus, morally acceptable (Campbell 2009; Zavala 2012).

As a conceptual framework, narcopolitics acknowledges that there are differences in socio-spatial practices tied to geohistorical processes and events that produce and delimit different sites and forms of struggle. Narcotics production and drug trafficking in the developing world are frequently conceptualized within the framework of rural underdevelopment, economic inequality, and globalization (Malkin 2001). Conventional discourses conceive of narcotics production as a “logical” response of rural peasants to economic problems, and in the case of Mexico that perception has gained traction after the radical transformations produced in rural Mexico through the 1992 agrarian reform and the implementation

of a set of neoliberal policies—including the privatization of land, water, and resource extraction, market liberalization, and the decentralization and withdrawal of the Mexican government from the social role—that transformed the Mexican political economy and the lives and livelihoods of Mexican families in the late 20th century. Yet, multiple studies have also shown that the emergence and development of drug trafficking in Mexico is far more complex than simply a mechanism to cope with economic problems or the transformation of subsistence economies, it involves a series of socioeconomic factors that have enabled the growth of the illicit economies around drug production and trafficking (Campbell 2009; Malkin 2001; Zavala 2012).

The responses and strategies used to cope with the effects of necropolitics, narcopolitics, and drug-related violence vary across Mexico. There are regions where the historical prevalence of drug trafficking and the development of networks have contributed to the formation of social capital that enables operation of illicit economies associated with them. In other regions, the state monopoly on violence has been temporarily challenged by war machines that challenge state authority. The clearest example took place in Michoacán, where residents of different rural communities organized so-called *autodefensas* (self-defense brigades). These were later co-opted by the Mexican government and transformed into community police units. Paradoxically, these non-state entities are simultaneously outcomes and causes of the continuous erosion of state sovereignty (Bauman 2004). Yet, in the context of counterinsurgency warfare, Mexican authorities have engaged in a series of political and discursive strategies that aim to recover the trust and

empathy of most of its citizenry (Pawley 2014). So far, it seems they are failing in their efforts.

2.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I examined the relationship between necro/narco-politics and drug-related violence in Mexico. In contrast to the conventional notion that situates 2006 as the crucial moment to understand the violence affecting different regions across Mexico, I showed that the current dynamics are tied to a larger trend of drug war governance that, starting in the 1970s, transformed drug trafficking dynamics in Latin America. Therefore, a geohistorical revision of the different policies that have been implemented since the late 1960s and early 1970s provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the political economy of drug trafficking in North America.

A major proposition in this chapter is the necessity for researchers to shift our attention from abstract categories to the complex networks and relationships between different actors. In this sense, the geohistorical events discussed in this chapter are useful for understanding why the dialectical relationship between necro/narco-politics involves an epistemological shift, focusing largely on understanding the temporal and sociospatial arrangements that shape a social order where the exercise of different forms and levels of violence enable the control a particular region in Mexico.

The drug wars must be studied at the regional level, instead of recurring to narratives that tend to focus on abstract ontological constructions, such narco-state and narcoterrorism. Understanding the driving factors behind the

narcopolitical networks operating in different regions in Mexico might offer a better opportunity to define strategies that enable a more successful disarticulation of the political order that facilitate the growth of criminal organizations. The challenge for people interested in understanding the narcopolitical order in a particular region in Mexico is having access to information that is controlled through bureaucratic practices that serve the interests of specific groups.

For the purposes of my research, having access to multiple sources that allowed me to grasp the dialectical relationship between necro- and narco-politics was largely possible by the work already made by different scholars and journalists. Yet, it is important to note that this task might be more challenging when studying the topic in other regions of Mexico where the state of knowledge is not as comprehensive as the one that is available on the case of Sinaloa. That might be the task for new scholars.

The discussion presented in this chapter has situated the research problem of my dissertation into a larger conversation on violence in Mexico. So far, the discussion was focused on providing the geohistorical context to understand the political economy of drug trafficking in North America. In the following chapter, I turn the conversation into the theoretical framing that I used to study the effects of witnessing drug-related violence in Culiacán, Sinaloa.

CHAPTER 3

AFFECT THEORY AND EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES: TOWARDS A CRITICAL STUDY OF SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS AMONG THE SECONDARY WITNESSES OF DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE

3.1 Introduction

In an attempt to explore the affective and emotional effects experienced by secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Northwest Mexico, the participants in this research constitute a group of ordinary citizens who are in permanent contact with the effects of drug-related violence. Social workers, psychologists, and journalists bear witness to the terrible and traumatic events experienced by persons that—voluntarily or involuntarily—have been involved in acts of violence taking place in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Likewise, journalists also offer their testimonies on violent events and experiences that they have lived through while covering the drug wars in Mexico.

This dissertation is part of a larger conversation about the affective and emotional effects that emerge from experiencing and being in contact with different forms of violence (Laketa 2016; Williams and Boyce 2013). To that end, I explore what has been conceptualized as *Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder* (STSD), an emotional and behavioral condition that results from working with victims and knowing about traumatizing events experienced by a significant other (Figley 1995). STSD is similar to *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD), but exposure to knowledge about a traumatizing event is indirect, usually through the support

offered to people who have experienced a traumatic event directly, from the beginning to the end (Figley 1995).

Effective treatment of PTSD often imposes an emotional burden on professionals offering care and support to people who have experienced traumatic events. Repeated exposure to stories of human cruelty inevitably challenges the emotional and behavioral balance of crisis workers who deal with traumatized victims (Canfield 2005). Starting in the 1970s, the mental health literature has developed three different notions for the study of job-related stress: burnout, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress. This group of potential occupational hazards are increasingly recognized as emotional and behavioral disorders, but they should be regarded as a “normal” consequence of working in a caring and helping profession (Nimmo and Huggard 2013). It is important to note that the conceptualization of STS is constantly evolving as scientists continue to work in the development of instruments that facilitate the assessment of the different symptoms.

This research aims to participate in that conversation through the potential contributions of affect theory and emotional geographies to the study of STS. I argue that the transitions from affect to emotions are mediated by traumatic memory, which involves embodied experiences of violent events, as well as situated knowledges that shape and are (re)shaped by individual and collective memories that are socially constructed. Collective memories of violent events and traumatic experiences circulate and shape the perceptions of individuals, but also enable the formation of coping mechanisms. In this sense, affect theory and

emotional geographies offer a theoretical framework to study the spatiality of STS. In other words, it allows us to inquire into the affective and emotional effects that result from experiencing landscapes of drug-related violence.

The discussion in this chapter begins with a review of the trauma literature. First, I frame the discussion within the growing literature on critical trauma studies, which involves recognition of the fact that theories of trauma cannot be reduced to the idea of trauma as a singular experience. On the contrary, trauma theories are an array of perspectives that have been developed within diverse disciplinary traditions (Traverso and Broderick 2010). Next, I explore the origins of the conventional theory of trauma, associated with the theory of subjective dissociation that results from the pervasive and involuntary irruption of disturbing memories. This framework became hegemonic in psychological discourses and practices around trauma, leading to its formal recognition as PTSD in 1980. The following subsection examines the relationship between PTSD and secondary traumatic stress, looking specifically at the three main conceptualizations that have been developed to study the effects of job-related stress—burnout, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress. Then, I discuss the potential contributions of affect theory and emotional geographies to the study of STS among the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence who have exposure to traumatic events and experiences as a result of their daily routines and working activities.

3.2 Critical trauma studies

The relationship between violence and trauma has attracted the attention of different disciplines, and the field of trauma studies is full of tension and

controversy (Ley 2000). Trauma is a concept with multiple meanings and connotations; yet, modern societies accept the hegemonic notion of trauma as a given category without questioning the regime of truth that lies behind its conceptualization (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). The conventional theory of trauma is based on the theory of subjective dissociation derived from Freudian psychoanalysis, which serves as the basis of the clinical definition of PTSD, with only limited attempts to develop alternative frameworks applicable to localized, and culturally specific representations of suffering (Traverso and Broderick 2010).

According to the *American Psychiatric Association* (APA), trauma is a disease of the mind formerly recognized in 1980 as PTSD by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). But PTSD is also the product of history and politics, and socio-cultural notions of trauma are constantly subject to reinterpretation, contestation, and intervention (Ley 2000; Casper and Wertheimer 2016; Young 1995). Therefore, the analysis of the social construction of meaning and the political uses of trauma is significant for understanding how a particular system of knowledge and values of human suffering is produced, and how it becomes socially accepted as a truth that shapes social relations and practices around victimhood.

A critical reading of trauma that rejects the naturalization of the concept is significant for examining the relations of power that shape a particular understanding of the effects of violence in different bodies and subjectivities (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). The multiple socio-cultural conceptualizations of trauma not only describe the effects of violence on subjects and collectivities, but

also shape a particular understanding of victimhood that is commonly used as a reference to claim justice. In this sense, the evolving field of critical trauma studies explores the notion of trauma as a social construction. It interrogates the methodological limits of the dominant theory of trauma as a way to critically engage with alternative socio-cultural notions of suffering (Traverso and Broderick 2010).

Critical trauma studies emerged from twentieth-century movements and ideas, including structural functionalism, psychoanalysis and its interlocutors, postmodernism and poststructuralism, as well as identity politics, the turn to affect and emotions, critical body studies, critical race theory, and the new materialism (Casper and Wertheimer 2016). As a set of intellectual and methodological ideas about ruptures in lived experience and transformations of self and being, critical trauma studies engages with the very meaning of our existence. Therefore, investigations of trauma are both ontological and epistemological, assemblages and intersectionalities, modes of being and ways of knowing (Casper and Wertheimer 2016).

Jenny Edkins (2003) notes that what we categorize today as symptoms of trauma are generally associated with physical violence. The victims of trauma are often seen as helpless subjects in their enforced encounter with death, violence, and brutality. Yet, she argues that so-called traumatic symptoms are not only the result of a situation of utter powerlessness but of betrayal of trust as well. In her words: “what we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the

community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger.”

Edkins’s (2003) approach to the study of the relationship between violence and trauma is particularly relevant to Mexico, where the state of fear is the product of the multiple effects of the drug wars hitting many regions, as well as the general despair and vulnerability that results from the prevalence of corruption and impunity among the different institutions of the Mexican state. The increasing distrust of Mexican institutions has led to a crisis of legitimacy and the Mexican government has responded with the use of the repressive apparatus to contain the growth of criminal organizations. This approach to national security is affecting the lives and livelihoods of Mexican citizens and the effects of violence are far more complex than the simple tally of deaths by homicide suggest—that is, the number of people who are missing, the number of presumed offenders put into jail or that have been deported to other countries. In the following sections, I explore the relationship between violence and trauma to explain the significance of doing research on the multiple effects of drug-related violence in Mexico.

3.3 Traumatic memory and post-traumatic stress disorder

During the nineteenth century, *trauma* was used in reference to physical injuries that produced a “shock effect.” In 1866, the British surgeon and professor of surgery, John Eric Erichsen, published *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System*, where he discussed the physical injuries and symptoms presented by persons who had experienced railway accidents. Erichsen found that

his patients suffered a nervous shock that was similar to the surgical shock, which he described in *The Science and Art of Surgery* in the following form:

[The effects of shock] consist in a disturbance of the functions of the circulatory, respiratory, and nervous systems, the harmony of action of the great organs being disarranged. On the receipt of a severe injury the sufferer becomes cold, faint, and trembling; the pulse is small and fluttering; there is a great mental depression and inquietude; the disturbed state of mind revealing itself in the countenance, and in the incoherence of speech and thought; the surface becomes covered by a cold sweat; there is nausea, perhaps vomiting, and relaxation of the sphincters... (Erichsen quoted in Young 1995).

As the previous quote reflects, Erichsen's conceptualization of nervous shock identified sets of symptoms but not causal mechanisms (Young 1995). A year after Erichsen's contribution, another surgeon, Edwin Morris (1867) defined shock as an effect produced by violent injuries from any cause or from violent mental emotions—such as grief, fear, horror, or disgust. Morris conceived the shock effect as a bodily response connected to the brain through the nervous system. Up to that time, it had been assumed that nerves function only to excite action, but after three decades of experimentation by the end of the 1880s, it was finally confirmed that vagal inhibition could result from an “eventual effect” that produces a shock within the self-regulating organ system, formed by the inhibitory (parasympathetic) and excitatory (sympathetic) nervous systems (Smith 1992: 82).

The discovery that connected the effects of surgical shock to effects that could be produced via nervous shock, enable the emergence of what might be called an “affective logic” of trauma (Young 1995). The starting point in this approach is the experience of *fear*, conceived as a memory, both individual and collective, of traumatic pain (Young 1995). Fear is commonly conceptualized as

an emotion with embodied sensations and material implications that are highly situated and contextual (Pain 2009). However, people actually experience a range of emotions and affects linked to violence that vary in nature, intensity and duration, but also from one situation to another (Bannister and Fyfe 2001). Shock was then linked to the idea of fear and to a corporeal memory system capable of memorializing the experience in ways that suggested not only how the body is ordinarily mobilized to respond to danger but how extreme terror might even induce death (Leys 2000).

The more familiar version of traumatic memory, the notion of thoughts and images located in the mind, was born during the following decades when its distinctive affective logic was conjoined with the practices and proofs of clinical hypnosis (Young 1995). By the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of traumatic memory emerged at the intersection of two evolving fields of medical knowledge: (1) knowledge of how trauma affects the nervous system, and, consequently, the rest of the body; and (2) knowledge of how pathogenic secrets impact the mental life of their possessors (Young 1995). By 1914, the notion of traumatic memory was familiar to medical personnel working in Europe and North America, who understood that the memory of an experience can produce syndromes resembling hysterical and neurological disorders (Young 1995).

Initially, medical interest in the study of traumatic memory was lackluster, but the situation changed after the First World War, when 80,000 cases of “shell shock” were treated by the Royal Army Medical Corps, and 30,000 soldiers were diagnosed with nervous trauma (Young 1995). In the following years, the number

of publications on traumatic neuroses increased, but the interest reached a new level in 1941, after the publication of the book titled, *The Traumatic Neuroses of War*, by Abraham Kardiner. This book represents the first systematic account of the symptomatology and psychodynamics of war neuroses published in the United States, to the extent that it continues to be a source for PTSD symptoms in the current psychiatric nosology (Young 1995).

PTSD was finally incorporated in 1980 into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association. PTSD is essentially a disorder of the memory that results from emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events that produce a dissociation of the mind, which is unable to register the wound in the psyche because ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are damaged (Leys 2000). As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience into normal consciousness; instead, the subject is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories (Leys 2000). PTSD symptoms include: flashbacks, nightmares, re-experiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence, hypervigilance, and the intensification of affective aggression, among others (Leys 2000; Young 1995; Figley 1995).

Different methodologies and instruments have been developed to improve the diagnosis and assessment of PTSD (Brewin 2005; Jones et al. 2003; Moreno-Jiménez et al. 2004). The diagnosis of PTSD is commonly based on structured clinical interviews, screening instruments, and different measures of physiological factors such as cortisol and clonidine. Unlike the interviews, screening instruments

need to include items corresponding to specific diagnostic criteria based on measures that successfully predict the criterion diagnosis (Brewin 2005). Yet, some of the risk factors are difficult to measure or are not always applicable to all types of trauma (Brewin 2005).

The vast majority of screening measures are symptom-based (Brewin 2005). Some of the most common screening instruments are the Mississippi Scale for Combat-related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Keane et al. 1988); the PTSD Symptom Scale (Foa et al. 1991); the PTSD checklist, which is one of the most commonly used self-report measures (Maslow et al. 2015; McDonald and Calhoun 2010; Wilkins et al. 2011); the Primary Care–PTSD (Tiet et al. 2013); the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (Mollica et al. 1992); the National Women’s Study Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Kilpatrick et al. 1989); and the Penn Inventory for PTSD (Hammarberg 1992). According to Brewin (2005), the performance of a PTSD screening instrument is generally assessed by reference to several criteria, of which two are the most common: (1) sensitivity, which refers to the probability that someone who has a PTSD diagnosis will have had a positive test result; and (2) specificity, which is the probability that someone who does not have a PTSD diagnosis will have had a negative test result. Hence, a good screening test will have a reasonable balance of sensitivity and specificity.

In contrast, qualitative methodologies are based on structured clinical interviews and include the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Interview (Watson et al. 1991); the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-III (Spitzer et al. 1986); the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV (First et al. 1995); the Clinician

Administered PTSD Scale that is often referred to as the “gold standard” measure for PTSD (Blake et al. 1995); and the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview Plus (Sheehan et al. 1998). Some of the challenges associated with the use of interviews as a diagnostic instrument for PTSD are the time and training required to complete them (Kok et al. 2013).

Current treatment strategies of PTSD combine patient education, pharmacologic interventions—such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, trazodone and clonidine, and psychotherapy (Lange et al. 2000). Traumatic memory plays a critical role in all of the instruments and treatments, but particularly in psychotherapy, which is the most common strategy. Memory usually refers to: (1) the mental capacity to retrieve stored information and to perform learned mental operations; (2) the semantic, imagistic, and/or sensory content of recollections; and (3) the location where recollections are stored (Young 1995). The conventional theory of trauma has focused on understanding the effects of traumatic events through the theory of subjective dissociation, initially derived from Freudian psychoanalysis. But recent studies on traumatic memory have focused again on the study of the body by providing an explanation in neurobiological terms.

Alternative approaches to the study of trauma suggest that traumatic memory may be less related to declarative or narrative memory, which involves the ability to articulate words and consciously narrate events, than implicit or non-declarative memory that involves bodily memories of skills, habits, reflexes, and conditioned responses that lie outside verbal, semantic, and linguistic representations (Leys 2000). In this sense, affect theory offers a theoretical

framework to study the bodily responses that may not always be accessible through the conventional methodologies that have been developed to study PTSD.

Young (1997) defines psychogenic trauma as the power of experiences to cause intense emotions that produce fear, pain, and even disease. He notes that the extension of trauma from the body to the mind is not a direct process; rather, it is mediated through the intervention of traumatic memory. Consequently, trauma is not only the result of physical and biological responses produced by violent injuries; it is also the product of a set of emotions, particularly fear and pain, that constitute a bodily knowledge that locates the signals of injuries and the events that caused them. In this sense, fear is constituted from a bodily response to a particular memory, more precisely, phylogenetic memory.

According to Young (1997), phylogenetic memory begins as an individual experience that leaves a neurological trace. Those traces tend to fade over time unless they are periodically recalled and/or reenacted, in which case a trace evolves into a permanent neural pathway. Young (1997) concludes that the victims of traumatic memory seek out in fear a memory of pain that allows them to define future actions (fight or flight) to avoid pain, injury, and even death. In this sense, the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence develop a social and spatial proximity by working with offenders, victims, and witnesses, but also from experiencing landscapes of drug-related violence.

As I suggested earlier, drug-related violence is a spatial phenomenon where by different materialities converge in space and time, enabling the emergence of affective and emotional effects that circulate among different bodies and

materialities. The different bodies involved in a given act of violence create emotional registers of affective and emotional effects that are collected, stored, and recalled through phylogenetic memory. Yet, those traumatic memories are also shaped by time- and place-specific narratives that influence perceptions of secondary witnesses, enabling the formation of coping mechanisms that result from long-term social and spatial proximity to the phenomenon of violence and its effects.

3.4 Secondary traumatic stress

Effective treatment of PTSD often involves a process in which the affected subject repeatedly recalls memories of traumatic events in order to bring closure. It is through this process that therapists are exposed to traumatic experiences, which increases the risk of significant emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effects on professionals that have contact with people who have experienced traumatic events (Bride et al. 2007; Canfield 2005). Empirical studies show that professionals—such as, physicians, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, journalists, rescue workers, and first responders working with traumatized populations frequently share the emotional burden of the traumatic events (Beaton and Murphy 1995; Meda et al. 2011; Nimmo and Huggard 2013; Canfield 2005). The effects of the traumatic experiences are often reflected in outcomes of emotional distress, pain, and suffering, which may manifest in increased rates of absenteeism, reduced service quality, low levels of efficiency, high attrition rates, and, eventually, workforce dropout (Nimmo and Huggard 2013).

The behavioral and emotional effects experienced by those who provide care and support to the victims of traumatic events have been classified into three potential occupational hazards: (1) burnout; (2) vicarious trauma; and (3) secondary traumatic stress. Job burnout was first recognized as a psychological problem among healthcare and social service professionals in the 1970s (Pines and Maslach 1978). Initially, research and discussion identified burnout resulting from job stress as an important area for treatment and prevention (O'Halloran and Linton 2000). Extensive interviews with healthcare and social service professionals reveal that they often experienced emotional depletion and loss of motivation resulting from prolonged emotional stress encountered in their jobs (Galek et al. 2011). "Burnout" was originally conceptualized as a response to job stress produced by the demands of helping others (Maslach 1982). But, early contributions demonstrated that institutional and organizational factors also contribute to burnout (Maslach and Florian 1988; Maslach and Leiter 1997). In this sense, burnout is a framework that focuses on the study of external causes of workers' stress. It is defined as the dislocation between what people are and what they do. The resulting stress is therefore the product of the social environment in which people work (Canfield 2005). Symptoms of burnout include depression, cynicism, boredom, loss of compassion, and discouragement (Freudenberg and Robbins 1979).

"Vicarious trauma" is a term first used by McCann and Pearlman (1990) in reference to the transformations in cognitive schemes and belief systems that result from empathic engagement with victims of traumatic experiences. Those

transformations may result in significant disruptions to an individual's sense of meaning, connection, identity, and worldview, as well as in affect tolerance, psychological needs, beliefs about self and other, interpersonal relations, and sensory memory (Bride et al. 2007; Canfield 2005). Therapists who work with victims may find their cognitive schemes and imagery system of memory altered or disrupted by long-term exposure to traumatic experiences of the affected subjects (McCann and Pearlman 1990).

In contrast to burnout and vicarious trauma, Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), also known as compassion fatigue, is an emotional and behavioral condition that results from working with victims and knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other (Bride et al. 2007; Figley 1995; Galek et al. 2011; Nimmo and Huggard 2013). The resulting stress is the direct outcome of hearing emotionally shocking material of traumatic experiences and the desire to help a traumatized or suffering person (Canfield 2005). Without self-care practices and preventive care, STS can result in Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD). The clinical difference between secondary traumatic stress reactions (STSR) and STSD lies in the duration of the symptoms (Canfield 2005). Symptoms of under one-month in duration are considered normal, acute, crisis-related reactions. Symptoms lasting for six months or more, following the triggering event, are associated with STSD (Figley 1999).

STSD is a syndrome of symptoms nearly identical to PTSD, except that exposure to knowledge about a traumatizing event is indirect (Figley 1995). STSD symptoms include: recollections of events and/or traumatized persons; efforts to

avoid thoughts and feelings; efforts to avoid activities or situations; diminished interest in typical activities; diminished affect; and hypervigilance (Figley 1995). STS develops over consecutive interactions with traumatized individuals, and studies indicate that therapists and counselors are more likely to have STS symptoms the more they work with trauma victims (Galek et al. 2011; Kassam-Adams 1999; Flannelly et al. 2005). More recently, it is being recognized that STS might be also driven by the fear that arises from a threat to one's personal safety (Huggard et al. 2013).

Canfield (2005) notes that the prevalence of STSD symptoms has been studied mostly through the use of quantitative methods based on self-assessment scales and specific samples of adult psychotherapists. Few studies have used qualitative methods, and these were done with small samples of psychotherapists who discussed their work with clients more than their personal experiences. Quantitative instruments include the Compassion Fatigue Self-Test (Figley 1995); the Compassion Fatigue and Satisfaction Test (Figley and Stamm 1996); the Secondary Trauma Questionnaire (Motta et al. 1999); the Compassion Fatigue Scale (Baranowsky and Gentry 1997); the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al. 2007); the Professional Quality of Life Scale (Stamm 2005); the Compassion Fatigue Short Scale (Adams et al. 2006); among others.

Qualitative studies generally use smaller samples than quantitative studies, but explore the material in greater depth, allowing for unexpected material to arise, including the observation that therapists feel they have become "unshockable" after hearing traumatic stories (Canfield 2005). Further research is necessary to

improve the theoretical and methodological instruments that strengthen our understanding of the symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, particularly research focused on improving our knowledge of the causative effects (Moreno-Jiménez et al. 2004; Nimmo and Huggard 2013). An additional area of research relates to the effects of preventive or mitigating interventions aimed at assisting care personnel to cope with the effects of burnout, vicarious traumatization, and STS (Nimmo and Huggard 2013).

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) define coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts. Coping efforts serve two main functions: (1) the management or alteration of the sociospatial relationship that is the source of stress, and (2) the regulation of stressful emotions (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). According to Felipe Castaño and León del Barco (2010), coping strategies could be active (confrontational, problem solving, positive reappraisal, expression of emotions, and social support) or passive (distancing, self-control, escape-avoidance, self-criticism, social withdrawal).

STS studies have identified that therapist strategies include managing and tolerating the affective and emotional effects that result from working with trauma victims, particularly through affective distancing; collegial support systems; drawing on a sense of altruism or a higher purpose in life; regular exercise; and having a supportive and empathetic supervisor to whom the therapist could reach out in times of stress (Canfield 2005). Overall, the existing literature on STS points to the need on continue to study adaptive coping strategies that might reduce the

negative effects of trauma treatment in order to improve the care and support offered to victims (Canfield 2005; Nimmo and Huggard 2013).

3.5 The significance of affect theory and emotional geographies to the study of secondary traumatic stress.

Since the 1980s there is a growing literature that explores new ways of understanding space in social, cultural, and political terms (Thrift 1983; Certeau 1984; Cosgrove 1989; Marston 2000; Said 2000; Woodward et al. 2012; Massey 2005). During the 1980s and 1990s, social constructivism was the dominant mode of social and cultural analysis within human geography. Non-representational theory emerged from this tradition (Anderson and Harrison 2010). Social constructivism is distinguished by a particular interest in the structure of symbolic meaning; it looks at how symbolic orders of the social or the cultural realize themselves in the distribution of meaning and value; reinforcing, legitimizing, and facilitating the unequal distribution of goods, information, opportunities, and power (Anderson and Harrison 2010).

The primary ontological object for a social constructivist view is the collective symbolic order, understood as a set of control mechanisms by which members of a particular society make sense of the world, organize their experience, and justify their actions (Anderson and Harris 2010). It is from this cultural turn that non-representational theory emerged as a practical and processual basis that accounts for the social, the subject, and the world. Non-representational theory focuses on the backgrounds, the bodies and their performances; it situates the construction of meaning and signification in the great

diversity of actions and interactions, rather than in discourse, ideology, or symbolic orders (Anderson and Harrison 2010).

Related to this, work on emotional geographies began in the late 1990s when geographers started to reflect on the extent to which the human world is constructed and lived through emotions (Anderson and Smith 2001). Bondi (2005) notes that the affective and emotional turn in geography is tied to the contributions made by three pre-existing and overlapping geographical traditions: humanistic geography, feminist geography, and non-representational theory. Each of those traditions has laid important foundations but they have also imposed significant challenges (Bondi 2005).

An emotional geography attempts to understand emotion—experientially and conceptually—in terms of its sociospatial mediation and articulation, rather than as entirely interiorized subjective mental states (Bondi et al. 2005). In contrast to Nigel Thrift (2004), who uses the terms “emotion” and “affect” more or less interchangeably, Bondi (2005) notes that there are clear connections between them. She argues that emotions must be approached not as an object of study but as a relational, connective medium in which research, researchers and research subjects are necessarily immersed. In this sense, feminist geographers have suggested that emotions be understood as generated by and are expressive of wider social relations (Bondi 2005). This work thus conceptualizes emotion as intrinsically fluid, embodied, and relational, but also inextricable from sociospatial processes that shape landscapes and places (Bondi 2005).

Emotions form a rich moral array through which and with which the world is thought; emotions can sense different things even though they cannot always be named (Thrift 2004). There is little we do with our bodies that we can think apart from feeling, and emotions can clearly alter our perceptions of the world; thus, our subjectivities are continually shaped and reshaped by how we feel (Davidson and Milligan 2004). However, emotions are understandable only in the context of particular places and they might be seen as a form of connective tissue that links the experiential geographies of the human psyche and physique with broader social geographies (Davidson and Milligan 2004).

Drawing on Spinoza's conceptualization of *affectus*, Thrift (2004) explains that affect is the property of the active outcome of an encounter, resulting in an increase or decrease in the ability of the mind and body to act. In other words, affect is understood as sets of impersonal intensities that do not belong exclusively to a subject or object, nor do they reside in the mediating space between them; rather, it is a transpersonal capacity of bodies to affect and be affected (Anderson 2010, 2006). The Spinozist tradition understands affect as part of an ontology of material force relations unfolding between bodies, whereby each exerts a causal effect and is constantly impinged by others, fostering a basic sociality that is inseparable from individuality (Woodward and Lea 2010). In short, affect emerges from relations between bodies and from encounters that those relationships evoke, making the materialities of space and time always already affective (Anderson 2006).

Thrift (2004) notes that affect is continually manifested in the city, whether it takes place at a large scale or simply as part of everyday life. Yet, affective registers within cities remain relatively unexplored. The articulation of affect and emotion is spatially mediated and our emotional relations and interactions weave through and facilitate the formation of our unique personal or emotional geographies (Davidson and Milligan 2004). The challenge, as noted by Pain (2009), is not to focus only on the analysis of emotions, risking their depoliticization or trivialization, but to demonstrate that they and their spatialities are fundamental to the layout of society and vice versa.

Affect has ontological and epistemological orientations towards the analysis of dynamic processes often overlooked in structuralist and categorical accounts of the social (Woodward and Lea 2010). Affect is the driving force in the collectivization and singularization of bodies; it is the medium through which bodies sustain and transform each other, as well as the fundamental materialist account of bodily association (Woodward and Lea 2010). As discussed by Anderson (2006), the capacities to affect and to be affected are enacted in everyday life as two sides of the same dynamic shifts in the body. In other words, when you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself to being affected in turn (Massumi 2002).

The biggest difficulty in exploring how affect enacts space-time is the tendency to reduce the movement of the capacities to affect and be affected back into a subject-object ontology (Anderson 2006). To think through affect is to untie it from that ontology and instead attune oneself to how affect inhabits the passage

between contexts and through various processes of trans-local and trans-situational movements (Anderson 2006). Mazzarella (2009) notes that the study of affect points us toward a terrain that is pre-subjective without being pre-social. Affect is not the unconscious; it is too corporeally rooted for that. Nor can it be aligned with any conventional conception of culture, since the whole point of affect, according to its most influential theorists, is that unlike emotion it is not always semiotically mediated (Mazzarella 2009).

Affect theory and non-representational theories have been criticized because there is a fundamental disagreement on the relationship between affect and emotions, as well as the understanding of the relationship between mind and body. Pile (2010) affirms that emotional geographies have failed to take into account the relationship between thought and affect, as well as its representation. He argues that non-representational theory's approach to affect is fundamentally a representational practice that does not recognize itself as such. Similarly, Jones (2011) critiques the way in which geographers have underplayed the role of memory in non-representational theory. He notes that memory is a fundamental aspect of becoming and its role in the performative moment has to be considered in order to capture the complexity of subject formation.

For the purposes of this research, I argue that affect is mediated through memory, particularly traumatic memory. Traumatic experiences are always charged with high emotions, and traumatic memories are always associated with a series of affective and emotional effects that condition the responses to perceived dangers or situations (Young 1995). Reactions to them—ranging from

tears to acts of revenge—have the effect of discharging the attached affect. When this happens, memories of the events become ordinary recollections and are accessible to the conscious mind.

Greenberg (1989) notes that understanding the effects of violence is not an easy task for those who experience it as part of their daily life because their perceptions of violence are often distorted by denial, ideology, and passion. Similarly, Garmany (2011) notes that perceptions of violence and threats influence daily actions and changes in sociospatial practices in order to avoid the risky areas, sites, and places. In the case of Culiacán, different narratives and historical practices have normalized the multiple forms and effects of drug-related violence, as they are perceived as side effects of an illicit practice that is socially and morally accepted (Zavala 2012). Moreover, proximity and familiarization with the effects of drug-related violence have produced changes in people's practices and attitudes towards the transgression of the law, up to the point that transgression is becoming a habit in Culiacán (Guevara and Reyes 2012).

This dissertation explores the affective and emotional registries of traumatic experiences through memory recollection. Hence, it explores affect as representations of proprioceptive movements and visceral shifts in the background habits and postures of the body that are described as feelings (Anderson 2006). In other words, the affective and emotional geographies of drug-related violence explore the role of memory, particularly traumatic memory, in the transitions from affect to emotions and feelings that emerge from the material and symbolic assemblages of sociospatial relations that constitute the landscapes of drug-

related violence. Following Anderson (2006), I understand feelings as instantaneous assessments of affect, which correspond to a bodily and mental state prevailing between emotions and their expressions. In other words, feelings always imply the presence of affect; thus, an affection is a literal impingement of the emergence and movement of affect in the body. In this sense, feelings constitute a proxy to identify the affective responses that emerge from witnessing the effects of drug-related violence.

Raymond Williams suggests that lived experience can be explored through transformations in the “structures of feelings” that capture the meaning and values of societies as they are actually lived and felt through their interaction with systemic beliefs. The structures of feelings have specific internal relations that interlock and at the same time are in tension (Hunt 2012). Hence, emotionality lies at the intersection of individual and collective memories, as individuals are linked to society and to other subjects through both self-feelings and collective structures of feelings (Hunt 2012). In this sense, this research examines representations of affect and emotional effects that result from working with the actors involved in violent events, as well as from the embodied experience of the landscapes of drug-related violence.

In order to avoid privileging the gaze over embodiment and experience (Csordas 1994; Low 2003), the study of the affective and emotional effects of drug-related violence follows a site ontology focused in the exploration of the affective and emotional registries of sensory and cognitive processes that emerge from the shifting assemblages that constitute landscapes of drug-related violence (Jones et

al. 2007; Dixon and Jones 2015). This is significant because the sites and the landscapes of violence are dynamic assemblages where the interactions between bodies and objects enable the emergence of affective responses that might not be limited to the gaze, but rather to a series of sensorial responses that might be preserved as traumatic memories.

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I explored the conventional theory of trauma in order to understand the overall logic behind the conceptualization of secondary traumatic stress, which I argue is useful to study the effects of witnessing drug-related violence in Mexico. So far, the literature on STS has focused mostly on the development of a consistent theoretical conceptualization that clearly distinguishes it from other kinds of job-related stress, such as burnout and vicarious trauma. To that end, STS studies have used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, playing a critical role for the empirical validation of the major assumptions of the dominant conceptualization of STSD. Most of the empirical studies have explored the effects of job-related stress on the mental and emotional health of professionals that offer support to the victims of traumatic experiences, and limited studies have explored the prevalence of STS symptoms on other professionals.

STS is relatively a new conceptualization that refers to a series of symptoms similar to those of PTSD, resulting in a kind of job-related stress that requires further attention as the symptoms will not fade away on its own. It is in this context that the efforts to improve the screening instruments through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies continue, and their significance has

increased as mental health issues become more relevant for public health. The findings of this dissertation aim to contribute to those efforts by exploring the prevalence of STS symptoms among the secondary witnesses that work with victims, witnesses, and alleged offenders. This is a critical task because it involves an exploration of the emotional and behavioral effects that are being experienced by professionals that help ordinary citizens to cope with the effects of different forms and levels of violence.

STS studies have traditionally followed the conventional theory of trauma, leaving behind the significance of space in the prevalence of some of the STSD symptoms. Therefore, I argued that the contributions made by affect theory and emotional geographies might be relevant to develop an epistemological approach to study the spatiality of STS. Since the early 1990s, geographers have been interested in the relationship between affect, emotions, and space. Yet, geographers have struggled to explain the role of memory in those relationships. For the purposes of this research, I argue that traumatic memories constitute a representation of affective and emotional registries that inform the embodied experience of the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence.

Affect and emotions are constantly emerging on the sites where violent events took place. Therefore, affective and emotional effects are embodied in the subjective experiences of space. In this sense, traumatic experiences are deeply informed by affect and emotions, and the recollection of traumatic memories might be triggered by the sites where violence took place, or even by elements that constitute the different landscapes of drug-related violence. Overall, the discussion

in this chapter shows that affect theory and emotional geographies open new areas of research in the study of STS, particularly offering new avenues to improve the mental and emotional health of the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Mexico. In the following chapter, I expand the discussion on the different factors that produce the landscapes of drug-related violence in Culiacán, and describe the data collection process as well as the strategies that were used to analyze the open-ended interviews.

CHAPTER 4

A REFLECTION ON STUDYING THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHIES OF DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE IN A NORTHWEST MEXICAN CITY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the significance of doing research in Culiacán, Sinaloa, a northwestern Mexican city where the prevalence of drug trafficking and illicit activities, as well as the necro/narco-politics associated with them, have resulted in different forms and levels of drug-related violence affecting the lives and livelihoods of thousands of families. In order to understand the material and emotional effects produced by the dialectical relationship between necro/narco-politics and drug-related violence, I draw on David Moreno's (2014) notion of "psychosociological proximity" to drug trafficking and propose the concept "psychospacial proximity" to drug-related violence. I argue that both kinds of proximity constitute the psychogeographies of drug-related violence in Culiacán, which are helpful for understanding the coping strategies that have been historically developed by residents of Culiacán, including the secondary witnesses who participated in this research.

The discussion is organized in six sections. First, I describe the origin and development of the drug trafficking industry in Sinaloa, which is critical to understanding the necro/narco-politics that produce the landscapes of drug-related violence in Culiacán, which are examined in the third subsection. Those landscapes are significant because they constitute the assemblages that enable

the emergence of affective and emotional effects that shape the traumatic memories of the people involved in acts of violence, as well as those of the secondary witnesses who have direct or indirect access to them. In the fourth section, I discuss the significance of psychosociological proximity to drug trafficking and psychospacial proximity to drug-related violence, which are helpful to understand the formation of coping mechanisms. In the fifth section, I describe the data collection process and provide details on events that shaped the outcomes of this research. Then, in the sixth section, I explain the techniques that were used to analyze the data and information that were gathered during the summer of 2014. The last section offers final thoughts on some of the challenges of doing research on this difficult and critical topic for my hometown.

4.2 A brief review of necro/narco-politics in Sinaloa.

Sinaloa is located in northwest Mexico along the coast of the Gulf of California. It is bordered on the north by Sonora and Chihuahua, on the south by Nayarit, and on the east by Durango (Figure 5). Ioan Grillo (2011) affirms that the three geographical regions of Sinaloa—coastal plains in the west, mountains in the east, and valleys between them—facilitate the operation of DTOs and the development of illicit activities. The Sierra Madre Occidental stretches 932 miles from the U.S. border at Arizona deep into northwestern Mexico, crossing the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua. It offers a large and complex terrain in which to hide the marijuana and opium crops that provide the means of subsistence for thousands of families in rural and urban areas in Sinaloa (Astorga 2005; Osorno 2009; Grillo 2011; Smith 2013).



Figure 5. Location of Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico (elaborated by the author, 2015).

Sinaloa has been labeled the "cradle of drug trafficking" in Mexico because it is the birthplace of the nation's oldest and most powerful network of traffickers, known as the Sinaloa Cartel (Grillo 2011; Osorno 2009). Yet, as the local historian Ronaldo González notes, this stereotype has been reproduced without questioning its assumptions. Drug trafficking and money laundering are critical to Sinaloa's economy. The influence of the drug industry in the state is pervasive and complex, often described by its actors as "a way of life," one that shapes the region's political and social equilibrium, and also the life choices and living conditions of sinaloenses generally (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014).

It is believed that the Pacific trade routes allowed Chinese immigrants to introduce the use of opium and marijuana as recreational drugs into northwestern Mexico during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Astorga 2005; Osorno 2009; Valdés 2013). According to Grillo (2011), Chinese immigrants brought opium gum,

poppies and seeds, gradually disseminating their knowledge of the use and production of gum. The first Chinese immigrants arrived in Sinaloa following the trade route between San Francisco and Mazatlán, which at the time was the main port in northwestern Mexico for the commercialization of Mexican agricultural products to California (Román Alarcón 2014). In 1854 Mazatlán had 6,733 residents, of which 231 were foreign. Among the latter, 20 were Chinese (Román Alarcón 1994). More than thirty years later, according to the 1886 Census, Sinaloa had a total population of 223,685 inhabitants, of which 461 were foreign born, and among them 70 were Chinese (Román Alarcón 2014).

Historical records from 1886 on the flora of Sinaloa show the existence of *Cañamo Indio* (Indian Hemp) and *Adormidera Blanca* (White Poppy) in the region, which were classified as fiber plants or oilseeds but not as medicinal plants (Astorga 2005; Osorno 2009; Váldez 2013). According to Luis Astorga (2005), opium consumption as *láudano* (laudanum) and other opiate compounds were legal and common among the Mexican population. Similarly, marijuana cigarettes were sold in drugstores for medicinal purposes to control asthma, cough, insomnia, and rheumatic pain (Váldez 2013). From 1888 to 1911 the amount of opium imported to Mexico oscillated between eight hundred kilograms and twelve tons (Astorga 2005). Yet, Astorga (2005) affirms that part of the opium and marijuana was already produced in Sinaloa.

During the 1900s Chinese migration to Mexico increased significantly as a result of the *Tratado de Amistad, Comercio y Navegación* (Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation) that was signed between Mexico and China on

December the 14, 1899 (Jingsheng 2006). It is estimated that from 1902 to 1921, when the treaty was terminated, thirty to forty thousand Chinese had immigrated to Mexico (Jingsheng 2006). By 1920, smoking places were created in different parts of the country, including Sinaloa (Astorga 2005). But it was not until the 1930s onwards that the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics affected all social tiers of Sinaloa society, providing a stable income for peasant growers, as well as economic opportunities and consumer goods for ranchers, and capital for large landowners (Smith 2013).

The foundation for bringing narcotics and politics together was most likely poured during the period of Mexico's social revolution (1910 to 1920s). The revolutionary era in northwestern Mexico was characterized by the mobilization of multiple nationalist imaginaries that were geographically and historically contingent at the regional and local levels (Banister 2007). The postrevolutionary Mexican state was initially nourished by the government's everyday engagement with a diverse array of groups through distinct projects that aimed to pacify the country, such as official *agrarismo*, education, and *indigenismo* (Banister 2007; Fallaw 2012; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Smith 2013; Perramond 2008). The relative success of these arrangements in terms of propping up a centralizing political structure depended not only on the strategies of state agents to tie their efforts into each region's distinct political culture; but also on the use of violence and the establishment of alliances between different local actors (Smith 2013; Bobrow-Strain 2007; Rus 1994; Harvey 1999).

Benjamin Smith (2013) notes that in Sinaloa the pacts created among federal authorities, regional politicians, and various local interest groups not only involved arrangements for land, cash crops, and the implementation of state policies and programs, but also on the regulation of illegal activities like drug trafficking. More specifically, Smith (2013) argues that opium growing and trafficking formed a key part of what he calls the “narcopopulist” arrangement that facilitated social equilibrium through the control of both right-wing and radical groups. In basic terms, from the 1930s to the 1970s, state governors, rather than traffickers, controlled the Sinaloa drug industry, regulating production and trade, manipulating its economic and political benefits, and using the state police to protect their interests and investments (Smith 2013).

It is in the previous context that the first criminal gangs in Sinaloa were formed during the Mexican revolution to challenge the land reform process initiated by the postrevolutionary government, which attempted to destroy *latifundismo*⁶ through the redistribution of land to peasants and indigenous communities. The *latifundistas* in Sinaloa hired criminal gangs to protect their properties from the *campesinos* claiming the promises made by the Mexican revolution (Osorno 2009). Those gangs used violence to induce fear among the rural populations and progressively, with the tolerance of local governments, expanded their criminal activity into the production and commercialization of marijuana (Osorno 2009). Ranchers like Manuel Sandoval “El Culichi” and Rodolfo Valdéz “El Gitano” (The

⁶ System of land ownership based on the existence of large estates that were primarily destined to provide food and animal products to the labor force working at the mines (Brinsmade and Flores, 1916; Sanders and Price, 2003).

Gipsy) burned down peasant houses, raped women, killed socialist teachers and prospective *ejido*⁷ owners (Smith 2013).

The Mexican government implemented its first counternarcotic operations during the 1930s (Osorno 2009). By this time, the increasing production and commercialization of marijuana had attracted the attention of officials in the United States, and in 1937 the U.S. Congress approved the Marijuana Tax Act prohibiting the production, consumption, possession, and commercialization of marijuana in the country (Osorno 2009). Yet, the 1940s saw a significant increase in the demand for opium and its derivatives that were used in medications, as well as marijuana that was consumed by soldiers and civilians (Astorga 2005). Prices increased by as much as ten times and the profits facilitated the expansion of drug plantations in northwestern Mexico, particularly in Sinaloa, Durango, Sonora, and Chihuahua.

During the 1940s, Mexican drug trafficking became a major industry with a distinct hierarchy, comprising, in ascending order peasants, pickers, and seasonal workers, intermediaries, capos, political contacts, and protectors (Smith 2013). The increasing profitability and the division of labor drove Sinaloa's economic growth in the following decades. Between 1950 and 1960, the number of cattle rose from around 590,000 to over a million, and the number of cars and trucks more than doubled from 16,743 to 35,539 (Smith 2013). By the mid-1940s the former leaders of the *anti-agrarista* paramilitary groups headed the industry in

⁷ Form of communal land that received legal status in Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution. It grants usufruct rights to ejido members to the land and waters redistributed by the Mexican government during the postrevolutionary era (Perramond 2008).

partnership with local politicians—that is, until tensions began to mount with Sinaloa governor Rodolfo T. Loaiza (1941-1944).

On February 21, 1944, Loaiza was murdered during the Carnival festivities in Mazatlán by Rodolfo Valdés, known as *El Gitano* (Córdova 1992; Osorno 2009). After being accused in the 1930s of committing several murders across the state, El Gitano became the leader of the band that controlled the opium trade (Smith 2013). During the initial proceedings of a court martial, Rodolfo Valdés confronted General Rafael Cerón Medina and sublieutenant Jesús Vázquez Castillo, confessing that he had killed the governor by orders of general Pablo Macías Valenzuela, in an act of revenge for the governor's neglecting to protect the opium industry as he had promised (Aguilar 1999; Smith 2013). The murder of governor Loaiza constitutes an early example of the links between necro and narco-politics in Sinaloa, particularly in terms of the close, historical relationship between criminals and the military.

In the 1950s, heroin processing laboratories were moved from Sinaloa's mountain region into the growing urban sprawl of Culiacán (Smith 2013). In the municipalities of Badiraguato and Culiacán, families from similar social strata also controlled the opium trade (Smith 2013). Led by famous local *narcos* like Pedro Avilés Pérez, Eduardo "Lalo" Fernández, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, and Lamberto Quintero, the narcopopulist regime functioned with minor changes until the late 1960s. As the heads of Sinaloa's drug trafficking industry, successive governors controlled and regulated the trade, ensuring limited internecine warfare and the division of territories (Smith 2013). According to Smith (2013), the relative success

of the narcopopulist regime was dependent on two mechanisms that facilitated political power and the control of the population. On the one hand, they maintained local popularity through inflated wages and ambitious community construction programs. On the other hand, they dominated local appointments for municipal governments.

The 1970s witnessed one of the most violent periods in the history of drug-related violence in Culiacán. Historian Froylán Enciso (2015) estimates that 1976 represents the most violent year in Culiacán, where the murder rate increased to 224 homicides per 100,000 persons, a rate only surpassed by Ciudad Juárez in 2010. The peak in violence during the early 1970s was the product of a declining state hegemony, as well as increasing international demand for federal intervention to control the growth of the drugs industry (Smith 2013). The Sinaloa Cartel, led by Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, Rafael Caro Quintero, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, Juan José Esparragoza, and Manuel Salcido Uzeta, became one of the most powerful DTOs. Yet, the Mexican government operations, supported by the U.S. government in the 1970s, aiming to eradicate, intercept, and apprehend drug traffickers in the golden triangle, resulted in a diaspora of narcos to other parts of the country, particularly to cities in Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guerrero.

The 1980s was a decade of increasing violence as the pressure of the U.S. government resulted in a series of operations that disrupted the regional agreements between DTOs and Mexican authorities. During this time, moreover, violence became the preferred mechanism by which to resolve internal and rival conflicts, as well as a way to confront the Mexican government (Enciso 2003).

Since that time, the drug wars in Culiacán have resulted in broad array of violent acts as well as an increase in levels of violence, levels that were at first steady, followed by a spike after 2006. I discuss this shift in the next section.

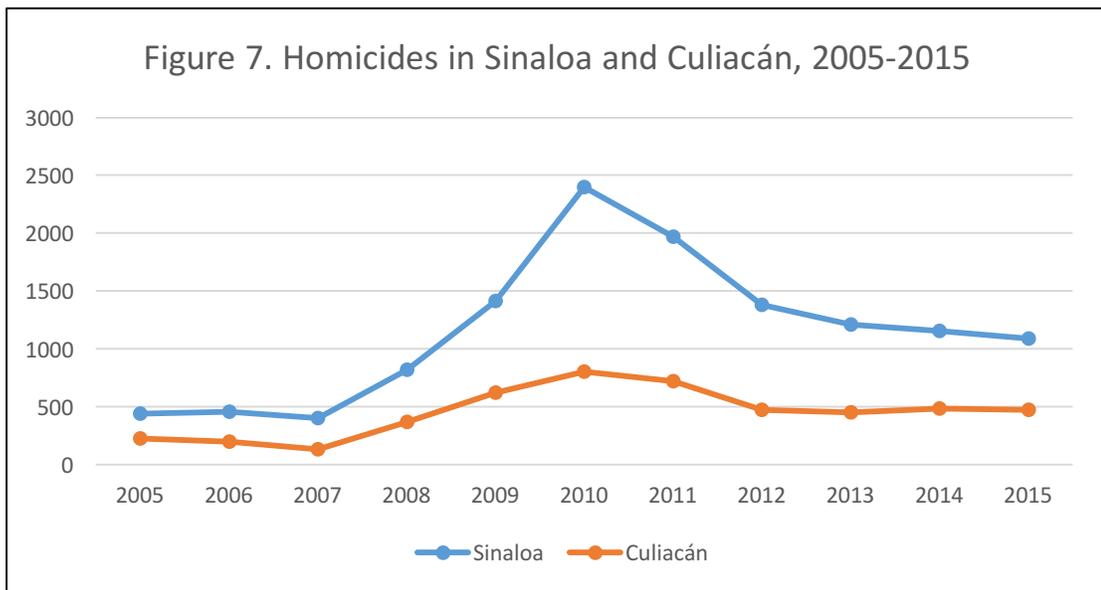
4.3 The landscapes of drug-related violence in Culiacán

Culiacán is the state capital and main city of Sinaloa. It is one of the three major cities in “*el triángulo dorado del narcotráfico*” (the golden triangle of drug trafficking), a region formed by Sinaloa, Durango, and Chihuahua, which is traditionally associated to drugs production and the operation of drug trafficking organizations (Figure 6). According to the 2010 Census, the total population of Culiacán was 858,638 residents, representing 31 percent of the state’s population (INEGI 2010). The main economic activities are farming, ranching, commercial activity, government and financial services, as well as primary sector industries.



Figure 6. The golden triangle of drug trafficking in northwest Mexico (elaborated by the author, 2017).

Drug trafficking and money laundering are critically important to the local economy in Culiacán, and illicit practices have become deeply embedded in popular culture, as well as in the attitudes and behaviors of culiacanenses, particularly on those towards the transgression of the law (Burgos 2012; Córdova 2012; Guevara and Reyes 2012; Sánchez 2009). Culiacán residents have historically experienced multiple forms and effects of drug-related violence, but never before has violence been as intense and devastating as during the last decade. Since 2006, the number of homicides in Sinaloa has reached to more than 13,400 people, and more than 38 percent took place in Culiacán. The participants in this research identified 2008 as a turning point for the escalation of violence in Sinaloa. The number of homicides doubled from 402 in 2007 to 837 in 2008, and the number of deaths by homicide continued to increase in the following years (Figure 7).



Source: Elaborated by the author with information from the Sistema Estatal y Municipal de Base de Datos, *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*.

A record number of homicides was reached in 2010, when Sinaloa ranked second in the country for the number of homicides allegedly linked to drug-related violence with 1,815 deaths, which represented 74.11 percent of the 2,449 homicides registered nationally that year. Culiacán ranked third among Mexican cities with 587 deaths, representing 70.29 percent of the 835 homicides registered in 2010, just behind Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua. Yet, perceptions of violence and death in Sinaloa are shaped by local narratives and historical practices that have normalized its multiple forms, as they are perceived as side effects of an illicit practice that is otherwise socially and morally accepted (Zavala 2012).



Figure 8. On February 7, 2017, Mexican marines clashed with members of a criminal organization that were heavily armed and traveling around Culiacán in thirteen vehicles. The confrontation resulted in the death of five presumed criminals and one soldier, as well as damage to at least twenty houses and seven vehicles (Contraluz 2017). This photo illustrates the psychospatial proximity to the landscapes of drug-related violence.

The photograph above illustrates the spatial proximity of ordinary citizens to the effects of violence in Culiacán. In this case, mother and son on their way to

school simply turn away as they pass by a space transformed by drug-related violence. Proximity and familiarization with the effects of drug-related violence in Culiacán have produced a sort of numbing that operates as a coping mechanism. Ordinary life in Culiacán goes on as thousands of families try to distance themselves from the different levels and forms of violence as a strategy to cope with their effects. Yet, those experiences inform individual and collective memories that tend to normalize everyday violence.

The multiple forms and expressions of drug-related violence in Culiacán produce landscapes that enable the emergence of affective and emotional effects that are experienced by the actors involved in violent events, as well as the secondary witnesses who have access to them. A broader landscape of drug-related violence is part of the spatialization of the effects of necro/narco-politics and the drug wars in Mexico. It is an assemblage constituted by different materialities that enable the emergence of affective and emotional effects that shape traumatic memories. Following Massey (2005), a landscape of drug-related violence is constituted by multiple trajectories coming together at one point in space and time with the unavoidable challenge to negotiate a present. Simultaneously, those assemblages generate new trajectories and (re)configurations that shape the necro/narco-politics in Culiacán.

Landscapes of drug-related violence are never the same. From a geographical perspective, “landscape” has been used to refer to a portion of the earth’s surface that can be viewed from one spot (Cresswell 2004; Cosgrove 1985). It refers to a “way of seeing” that implies ideological overlays that,

themselves, must be subject to historical interrogation (Cosgrove 1985). Carl Sauer (1996) argued that landscapes are made up of a distinct association of forms that are both physical and cultural in nature. Therefore, the analysis and interpretation of a landscape is a geographically specific exercise that requires interrogating the role of the landscape within social and cultural reproduction, as well as understanding the landscape within wider social and cultural contexts (Schein 1997).

Landscapes reflect the ideologies and powers that support the organization of society (Haraway 1996; Monk 1992; Rose 1996). Acts of violence in Culiacán are produced by the shifting dynamics of necro/narco-politics, while landscapes of drug-related violence are preserved through material and symbolic representations that circulate through cultural products, shaping sense of place (Figure 9). The places where violent events have occurred are preserved through visual representations, but also subjectively through oral histories and narratives of the events. In addition, the militarization of the city and the permanent presence of police convoys largely contribute to the state of fear and vulnerability affecting everyday life in Culiacán.

The landscapes produced by drug-related violence are more than physical settings of tragedies. They constitute spaces where events are experienced and re-experienced across time and those spaces are full of visual and sensory triggers capable of eliciting multiple affects, emotions, and feelings (Tumarkin 2005). It is by looking at the forms of urban political life, everyday survival, resistance, insurgency, and creative practices that animate the city and make it livable for most people that we can identify and understand the coping strategies that have been developed to deal with the effects of violence (Till 2012). Therefore, I now turn the discussion into the psychogeographies of drug-related violence in Culiacán.

4.4 Psychosociological and psychospacial proximity to drug-related violence in Culiacán.

Drawing on the contributions of the literature on social distance and collective memory, the social psychologist David Moreno Candil (2014) developed the concept “psychosociological proximity” as a theoretical framework to understand the positionality of sinaloenses in regard to drug trafficking. In this dissertation, I follow the contributions of Virginia Blum and Anna Secor (2014), to propose the concept “psychospacial proximity” to drug-related violence as a way to understand the significance of space in the study of traumatic memories. I argue that psychosociological and psychospacial proximity *together* constitute the psychogeographies of drug-related violence in Culiacán.

According to Moreno (2014), social distance is a concept that was created by Bogardus, who defined it as the levels of empathy and understanding between individuals or groups to establish and maintain relations between them. In other

words, social distance refers to the consent to establish relations with other individuals that might have different conditions and experiences, such as gender preferences, education, occupation, etc. Different methodologies have been developed to estimate social distance through the identification of perceptions, prejudices, discrimination, and conflict; hence, social distance might be interpreted as a form of rejection or acceptance of the other group, including its attitudes and behaviors (Moreno 2014).

Moreno (2014) affirms that in Sinaloa, psychosociological proximity to drug trafficking reflects the historical interaction and coexistence with narcos and people that might be involved in the drugs industry. Social or collective memories play a critical role in the perceptions of individuals, and consequently their references used to make sense of their place in the world. Psychosociological proximity is significant because it allows us to identify the multiple situated knowledges around necro/narco-politics in Culiacán. It is an instrument to measure the perceptions of different social groups, but more significantly to assess the level of interaction between them. Those situated knowledges shape a kind of common sense that some scholars have conceptualized as *narcoculture* (Córdova 2012; Enciso 2015; Maihold and Maihold 2012; Sánchez 2009).

The effects of necro/narco-politics and drug-related violence on ordinary life in Culiacán are indeed part of the cityscape. Tuan (1975) notes that places are known directly through the senses and indirectly through the mind. Places are lived and experienced in the movements and flows of everyday life (Certeau 1984). They play a fundamental role in the construction of meaning and society; therefore,

places are socially constructed, maintained, and contested (Cresswell 2004). People commonly confer meanings to places, as well as subjective and emotional attachments that Agnew (1987) understands as “sense of place.” In Culiacán, that sense of place is something already deeply rooted in cultural representations associated with narcoculture and the meaning of death.

Patricia Price (2005) explored one of the most iconic places of Culiacán (Figure 10), “*La Capilla de Malverde*” (Jesús Malverde’s chapel). According to local narratives, Jesús Malverde was a sort of local Robin Hood whose persona has been appropriated as a symbol and saint of drug traffickers. Malverde’s chapel constitutes part of an iconographic landscape that is both the locus and the means of struggle over place, identity, historical memory, and belonging in Culiacán (Price 2005). Malverde has become a central figure of the so-called narcoculture that accompanies drug trafficking and necro/narco-politics in Sinaloa.



Figure 10. La capilla de Jesús Malverde endures as one of the historical places that bear witness to the transformations of the urban landscape of Culiacán. It remains as a central place to venerate the legend of a figure that provides visibility and voice to those who are part of the illicit economies linked to drug trafficking.

During the 1990s, Mexican intellectuals and scholars started to discuss the existence of “narcoculture” in Mexico (Enciso 2011). Despite some differences in its conceptualization, there is consensus that narcoculture is constituted by the different expressions resulting from the experience of trafficking illegal drugs (Enciso, 2011). Narcoculture is defined as the subculture of drug trafficking, illegal drugs, and related violence that take the form of cultural representations that include narcocorridos, novels, clothes, and also everyday practices, attitudes and behaviors (Córdova 2012; Enciso 2011; Maihold and Sauter 2012; Sánchez Godoy 2009). The major difference between narcoculture and narcopolitics is that the former assumes the existence of a coherent unity of attitudes, practices and behaviors. By contrast, I argue for the concept of narcopolitics which starts by recognizing that there are differences in the sociospatial formations that produce multiple common senses around drug trafficking, illegal economies, and drug-related violence. In other words, narcopolitics is at once time- and space-contingent, and also tied to the broader structural conditions of the illicit drugs economy.

The meaning of death in Culiacán is constantly negotiated between the affected families and the state and local authorities. The hundreds of cenotaphs around the city represent the memorialization of citizens who have lost their lives as a result of violent events, but they also constitute a public condemnation of violence and a claim for justice (Figure 11). The significance of the city council program that aims to exchange the cenotaphs as a way to make death less visible, is also mechanism to silence the voices of the affected families, as the program

requires the families' consent to remove the cenotaphs. In this sense, necropolitics continues to play a central role in the victimization of ordinary citizens that have lost their lives as a result of the drug wars in Mexico, as well as the affected families.



Figure 11. In March 2013, the municipal government of Culiacán began a program to substitute the cenotaphs⁸ around the city with less visible placards. According to the city council, the program aims to change the image of Culiacán as violent city. The man in the photograph is a city worker taking down a cenotaph in order to replace it with the new placards.

Historically, the incidence of violent events in Culiacán has fluctuated, depending on the spatiotemporal arrangements established by the dominant narcopolitical networks and with members of different institutions of the Mexican state. The increase in the frequency of violent acts produces a state of fear that affects the sociospatial practices of culiacanenses. Fear is commonly associated with movement and the experience of moving between spaces of safety and protection. It is defined as an intense emotional reaction to a real or perceived danger, something that causes us to either fight or take flight (Nyers 2006). The

⁸ A cenotaph is a tomblike monument erected in honor of a person or group of people whose remains are buried elsewhere. In Mexican culture, it is a sort of empty tomb for the spirit or soul of a person who died in that place.

effects of fear on everyday life in Culiacán were described to me by a journalist in the following example of a false alarm:

In 2008 at Plaza Forum [shopping mall], there was a brawl between... a guy people said was from Guamúchil, who was recording video of some girls, because many high school, middle school, and college girls go there. He began to record them and apparently he was recording their legs... Then, the girls started to complain and some guys that were around started to chase the other guy, who ran. All it took was a guy running when someone screamed: ¡shooting! ¡shooting! ¡shooting! ¡shooting! Spreading all over the mall and people began to run, getting into the stores, people at the movie theater got under their seats. It was at the time when people were hysterical. (Interview 13, Journalist, July 21, 2014)

Pain (2009) notes that fear is an emotional response tied to existing lives, their topographies, histories, experiences and daily insecurities. Fear is not a random response of the body; rather, it is a condition embedded in and focused on complex places and identities that are simultaneously entwined with local, national, and international histories of risk and threat (Pain and Smith 2008). According to Green (1999), fear is a response to danger that is based on subjective personal experience but also on social memory. It destabilizes social relations and divides communities by creating a sense of insecurity that permeates the lives of ordinary citizens. The routinization of terror, moreover, forces people to live in a chronic state of fear behind a facade of normalcy; it is a state where the mundane experience of chronic fear wears down the individuals' ability to interpret violent events (Green 1999).

Acts of violence in Culiacán are often preserved by individual and collective memories that are shaped and re-shaped by embodied experiences but also through perceptions and beliefs. In the case of Sinaloa, the memorialization of

violent events, and particularly deaths, are preserved materially through the hundreds of cenotaphs that decorate the city space, but also through cultural representations that include narcocorridos, books, novels, media representations, chronicles and oral histories. In this sense, it is both the psychosociological proximity to necro/narco-politics and the psychospacial proximity to drug-related violence that allow us to better understand the psychogeographies of drug-related violence in Culiacán.

Blum and Secor (2014) note that within the conventional theory of trauma, the unconscious is portrayed as an atemporal apparatus that calls for alternative spatialities. Consequently, this body of work assumed that the unconscious determines the spaces of safety and danger in traumatic experiences. Essentially, trauma works to fold together both space and time and it is through the topological operations of the unconscious that materially safe locations become psychically dangerous and dangerous spaces are reimagined as safe locations. Blum and Secor (1994) refer to that kind of spatial memory as the central component of the psycho-material spatiality of trauma. Following their contributions, I propose the concept psychospacial proximity to drug-related violence, which refers to the traumatic memories that are preserved in part as an effect of the spatial proximity and relationship to landscapes of violence. In other words, it is an analytical tool to explore the role of affect and emotions in the preservation of the psycho-material spatiality of trauma. Grasping this, I argue, is critical for understanding some of the STS symptoms that are experienced by the secondary witnesses who participated in this research.

4.5 Interviews: A reflection on studying violence and organized crime in the midst of narcopolitics.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, few studies have used qualitative methods to explore job-related stress. So far, clinical structured interviews have been used as the basis to examine the prevalence of STS symptoms. These studies generally find that specific areas were disrupted in people working with victims of traumatic experiences, particularly in regards to feelings and beliefs around dependency, safety, control, self-esteem, regard or esteem for others, and intimacy in relationships (Canfield 2005). Studies also found coping strategies that mitigate some of the negative effects of exposure to high levels of traumatic material, such as affective distancing, the creation of collegial support systems, regular exercise, and having a supportive and emphatic supervisor to whom therapists could reach out in times of stress (Canfield 2005).

For the purposes of this dissertation, open-ended interviews were used to explore the affective and emotional effects of witnessing drug-related violence. In this type of interview, predesign questions were prepared based on the research questions, but often they might have been reformulated during the course of the interview as information provided by the interviewee made some of the questions no longer appropriate. New questions were necessary to explore the issues or topics covered in the conversation (Herod 1993). This flexibility in the design and implementation of the interview allows further reflection and analysis during the interview.

The findings discussed in this dissertation are the result of twenty open-ended interviews and detailed field notes taken during the summer of 2014, when I interviewed secondary witnesses of drug-related violence (Figure 12). The duration of the interviews varies between 25 and 140 minutes. All the participants were asked for authorization to audio record the interviews; two journalists did not provide authorization to record but allowed me to take notes. In all the interviews, I first read the oral consent form and asked participants for their approval.

Figure 12. Interviews conducted in Culiacán, Sinaloa (n=20).

Occupation	Gender	
Psychologists (n=7)	Women = 4	3 work with aggressors
	Men = 3	2 work with victims
		2 work with both
Social Workers (n=6)	Women = 5	3 work with aggressors
	Men = 1	3 work with victims
Journalists (n=7)	Women = 2	
	Men = 5	

The semi-structured interviews were based on a series of predefined open-ended questions that aimed to explore the participants' thoughts on topics and issues relevant to the research questions, but the format of the interview was flexible enough to incorporate themes not considered during the design of the interview questionnaire (Dunn 2010; Rubin and Rubin 2012). The open-ended questions allowed participants to be as explicit as they wanted to, while simultaneously giving me the opportunity to ask questions aiming for more detail or further reflection (Gustafsson Jertfelt et al. 2016; Hoffman 2007; Herod 1993).

The basic open-ended questions that were used to build rapport at the beginning of the interviews were: (1) What is a normal day at work?; (2) In your perspective, what are the causes of violence in Sinaloa?; (3) Do you consider

Sinaloa a violent society? Why or why not?; (4) Do you consider Culiacán a violent city? Why or why not?; (5) What do you think about the cartels' preferences to commit and publicly display violent acts?; (6) What are the effects of the increasing violence over everyday life in the city? This set of questions is mostly focused on collecting data to address the first research question: How do secondary witnesses in Culiacán, Sinaloa, perceive and understand drug-related violence and its effects?

The second set of open-ended questions was used as a guide to explore the affective and emotional effects of witnessing drug-related violence. The questions were: (1) As part of your professional activities, how often do you interact with victims of drug-related violence?; (2) How would you describe that experience?; (3) Have you witnessed any of the multiple forms and expressions of drug-related violence?; (4) How would you describe that experience?; (5) Have you felt at risk or have you been threatened in the fulfillment of your professional responsibilities?; (6) If the response is positive, how has it affected your work?; (7) Have you had any medical problems resulting from your professional activities?; (8) How do you cope with the violence personally?

The interviews with psychologists and social workers were conducted at their workplaces: The *Instituto Sinaloense de la Mujer*—ISMUJER (Sinaloa Institute for Women); the *Consejo Estatal para la Prevención y Atención a la Violencia Intrafamiliar*—CEPAVI (State Council for the Prevention and Treatment of Domestic Violence); and the *Centro de Ejecución de las Consecuencias Jurídicas del Delito*—CECJUDE (Center for Enforcement of the Legal

Consequences of Crime). The journalists were interviewed in public places selected by each participant, and most of the time the interviews took place at a coffee shop or restaurant.

For the recruitment of social workers and psychologists, I benefited from the support of Estéban Carrasco, Martha González, and Sofía Martínez⁹ who offered their advice and support to contact potential participants. In this research, I was particularly interested in interviewing social workers and psychologists who support the visible or official victims of violence in Culiacán—that is, individuals who have experienced violence as well as their families, but also families that have lost one or several of their members. During the first week of fieldwork in Culiacán, I visited the *Centro de Atención a Víctimas del Delito*—CAVID (Center for the Attention of Victims of Crime) to get authorization to recruit participants for the interviews. Access to the center is highly controlled, which to a certain extent is understandable due to the risks involved for the persons looking for support, as well as the personnel working at the center.

CAVID is located in the imposing structure housing the *Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de Sinaloa*—PGJE (Attorney General for the State of Sinaloa). In my first visit, I was only able to talk to the receptionist who kindly asked me to write a formal letter directed to the state attorney general, providing my contact information, as well as the objectives of the research and the questionnaire that I would use for the interviews. As frequently happens in Mexico, I left the PGJE building with more questions than answers: Why is access to CAVID

⁹ The names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants, as well as people that offered their support and contributed to the development of this research.

so controlled and restrictive? Why should I request authorization from the state attorney general and not the director of CAVID? Was CAVID functioning or was it only part of the official discourse that claims that the Sinaloa government offers support to the victims of crime?



Figure 13. The headquarters of the Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de Sinaloa (PGGJE), where CAVID is located.

I decided to focus on recruiting journalists, which I thought would be more challenging due to the risks associated with their professional activities, as well as the distrust and caution under which they work. On June 26, 2014, I got the confirmation to interview a recognized journalist who had been covering the effects of drug-related violence on ordinary citizens. In that interview, I realized that I also needed to interview social workers and psychologists who offer support to alleged offenders. This decision was significant because most of the studies on secondary traumatic stress have focused on exploring the mental and emotional health of healthcare and social service workers that offered support only to victims.

I paid a second visit to CAVID on July 2, 2014. I was optimistic about getting the authorization to recruit participants for the interview. I got into the reception area and handed over the documents they requested while explaining the reason for my visit. The receptionist spent a few minutes looking at the documents and proceeded to make a call. Then, she asked me to wait in the living room and requested an official ID in order to give me a visitor badge. Minutes later, they called me in and I went through the security protocols. The guard asked me where I was heading and provided directions to get to the office of the attorney general. I submitted my request to the receptionist who was sitting on a desk next to the glass door leading into the attorney general's waiting room. She reviewed the documents and signed one copy as a proof of reception. Then, she provided me a telephone number where I could follow the status of my request. I called several times throughout the summer, and the status was always "pending approval."

At the time I was doing fieldwork, the state government of Sinaloa was facing pressure from the media and civil organizations demanding accountability and better results from the criminal and penal justice systems, as well as the different institutions responsible for public safety. On August 1, 2014, the state congress of Sinaloa approved a new law that severely restricted access to information and the work of journalists. Now, they were limited to getting crime information only through official government press releases. Journalists were also banned from inspecting crime scenes, recording audio on site, taking testimonies, photographs, and video. In response, journalists, local media, scholars, NGOs and civil society organized a public manifestation that took place on August the 7, 2014

Enforcement of the Legal Consequences of Crime) was made possible by the support of Martín Pérez and Alberto Lascuráin who helped me gain the authorization to visit CECJUDE. On July 11, 2014, I visited CECJUDE and Alberto Lascuráin introduced me to the director of social work services. After a personal introduction, I proceeded to describe the objectives of my research project and answered the questions made by the director. She then offered her support and took me to the work space of the social workers. Once again, I introduced myself and proceeded to describe my research project and answer the questions from tentative participants. Four social workers manifested their interest to participate, and the director offered a private room to do the interviews.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked participants for their permission to audio record the interview. All of them provided their authorization, and I proceeded to read the oral consent form, which was also recorded. After the interviews with the social workers, I was escorted by personnel into the area of psychological attention, where I repeated the protocols. Three psychologists accepted the invitation to participate in the research, and, once again, I was offered a private room to do the interviews.

The recruitment of journalists was completely different. I used social media—particularly Facebook and Twitter—to make initial contact with tentative participants. I also benefited from the support of Francisca Hurtado who introduced me to several of her colleagues. After a short introduction and a brief description of my research project through private messages in social media, I asked each of the potential participants if we could make an appointment in order to provide them

with detailed information on the objectives and significance of my research project. I met individually with those who replied to my request, always giving them the possibility to select the place, date, and time for our meeting. During the introductory meeting, I asked each of the participants if they preferred to schedule a different meeting to conduct the interview or if they would like to continue and do the interview. Most of them decided to do the interview in the first meeting.

4.6 Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed using the software F5 Transcription Pro and coded using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti 7. Based on my research questions, I used three codes to analyze the data: the first code is based on the open-ended questions and a set of thematic codes were identified prior to conducting the interviews; the second code is based on the Secondary Traumatic Stress Symptoms identified by the psychologist Charles Figley (1995); and the third code is based on the canonical categories identified by Brown and Kulik (1977) in their study of “flashbulb memory.” Each of these codes offers a layer of analysis that allow me to address the research questions.

The basic questions of the interview questionnaire were used to identify and analyze the following common themes: (1) the causes and conditions relevant to understand increasing drug-related violence in Sinaloa; (2) the context, conditions and places in which professionals do their work; (3) the feelings, sensations and emotions that professionals are experiencing in their daily routines and sociospatial practices; (4) perceptions of risks, threats, and insecurity; (5) the

actions and coping strategies that have developed to respond to the perceptions and effects of drug-related violence.

A preliminary revision of the interviews while doing thematic coding allowed me to identify that participants were experiencing symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress; hence, I decided to use the second code looking specifically for STS symptoms. The symptoms that were used as labels are: (1) recollections of events, experiences, and/or traumatized persons; (2) dreams of events; (3) difficulty falling asleep; (4) fear and anger; (5) efforts to avoid thoughts and feelings; (6) efforts to avoid activities or situations; (7) diminished interest in activities; (8) diminished affect; and (9) hypervigilance.

A third code was used following the categories identified by Brown and Kulik (1977) in their study of flashbulb memory. The canonical categories are: (1) places, (2) affects, (3) emotions, (4) feelings, and (5) aftermath. This code was particularly useful to explore the role of flashbulb memory in the recollection of participants' experiences of violent events. In other words, this code was only used in accounts of direct encounters or experiences of violent events.

To analyze the data, I created a matrix that contained the differences and similarities between the two groups. The first group includes social workers and psychologists and the second group only journalists. This classification results from a major difference in the psychospacial proximity to traumatic experiences and violent events. On the one hand, social workers and psychologists have access to knowledge about violence and its effects through the testimonies of different actors involved in acts of violence—including offenders, victims, and

witnesses. On the other, journalists might also have contact with the different actors, but more significantly they experience the landscapes of drug-related violence.

4.7 Conclusions

Sinaloa is traditionally associated with the origins of drug trafficking in Mexico. For most of the 20th century the growth of the drug trafficking industry shaped many facets of ordinary living in Culiacán, so much that it continues to shape some of the attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of its residents. During the postrevolutionary era, the formation of narcopolitical networks between federal and state authorities, local politicians, and various local interest groups, facilitate the formation of a narcopolitical regime that controlled illegal activities, as well as rural populations that were claiming for the implementation of the land reform. During the following decades the narcopolitical regime controlled and regulated the drug trafficking industry in Sinaloa and was able to operate under a *pax mafiosa* that eventually facilitate the emergence and consolidation of the Sinaloa Cartel.

The historical prevalence of the drug trafficking industry in Culiacán has produced a subjective normalization of the effects of drug-related violence, which functions as a sort of collective coping mechanism that is tied to geohistorical processes that inform a common sense that some identify as narcoculture. During the last two decades the political arrangement in Sinaloa started to crumble as the Mexican government started to implement a national security strategy that aims to eliminate the leaders of the criminal organizations through a series of instruments that include the militarization of Mexican cities, the persecution of members of the

narcopolitical networks, and the use of financial instruments to diminish their economic power. The Mexican drug wars intensified across the country and Sinaloa, but particularly Culiacán, have been at the center of the conflicts. The residents of Culiacán are experiencing an escalation on the different forms and levels of violence used by criminal organizations and their effects are far more complex than the official account of deaths.

In order to understand the level of exposure and familiarity with violence in Culiacán, I argue that psychosociological and psychospacial proximity represent analytical tools that facilitate a more comprehensive understanding on the effects of witnessing drug-related violence. A challenging task methodologically but also risky for the researchers, and which demands interdisciplinary collaboration. For the purposes of this research, scholars from Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa were key in the development of a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework, aiming to explore the potential contributions of affect theory and emotional geographies to the study of violence and trauma. The psychologists Dr. Ambrocio Mojardín Heráldez and Dr. Carlos Zavala Sánchez introduced me to the literature on job-related stress, and Dr. David Moreno Candil from Universidad de Occidente allowed me to draw from his intellectual contributions to develop a more comprehensive framework to understand the spatiality of secondary traumatic stress.

Doing fieldwork in Culiacán was a stressful but exciting opportunity to work with some of the secondary witnesses who are in permanent contact with the multiple effects of violence in my hometown. My work aims to recover some of their

testimonies to bring attention to the traumatic experiences of ordinary citizens that are not always accessible through the official statistics. Those testimonies are critical to understanding the effects of violence on professionals that help others to cope and be informed about the shifting dynamics of necro/narco-politics in Culiacán. Moreover, their experiences also represent a small but significant sample of the effects of violence on the mental health of ordinary citizens, particularly those that have witnessed or experienced violent events. In the next chapter, I discuss the affective and emotional effects that are being experienced by the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Culiacán.

CHAPTER 5

THE AFFECTIVE AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF WITNESSING DRUG-RELATED VIOLENCE IN CULIACÁN

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is organized around two groups of participants. On the one hand, social workers and psychologists were grouped together because their proximity to traumatic experiences is mostly indirect as a result of their work with people who have experienced violent acts, including alleged offenders, victims, and witnesses. On the other hand, journalists constitute a different group because they experience directly the landscapes produced by drug-related violence, and in some cases, they can also bear witness to violent events that are personally experienced while reporting on violence in Culiacán. In this sense, the psychospacial proximity to violent events is a critical marker for the analysis of the STS symptoms that are being experienced by the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence.

The analysis is structured around axes that are based on the overall research focus: (1) perceptions of risks and violence; (2) STS symptoms; and (3) coping strategies. The discussion aims to contrast the findings for both of the groups described above. Therefore, the following section discusses the case of the social workers and psychologists. To that end, first I discuss what it means to be a victim of violence in Mexico, providing a general overview of the institutional mechanisms that have been created to provide care for and support to the different

victims of violence. Starting with the approval of the *Ley General de Víctimas* (General Law of Victims) in 2013, and the creation of the *Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas* (Executive Commission for Victims Support) in 2014, I examine some of the challenges and limitations that continue to affect the kind of support that is available to victims of violence in Mexico. Then, I describe the institutions that have been created in Sinaloa, and contrast the official data on the different services offered by CAVID with the perceptions and the testimonies of the journalists. After that, I focus on discussing the perceptions of risks and violence of social workers and psychologists, as well as on their STS symptoms and coping strategies. In the third section, I discuss the perceptions of risks and violence of journalists directly, as well as their STS symptoms and coping strategies. In the fourth section, I contrast the findings among the two groups of secondary witnesses. And in the last section, I share some reflections on the need for continued study of the role of space and social-spatial relations in traumatic experiences, particularly for the spatiality of STS.

5.2 Offering support to offenders and victims: Psychologists and social workers

On January 9, 2013, the Mexican government officially approved the *Ley General de Víctimas* (General Law of Victims), which establishes the principles and general guidelines for all the levels and institutions of the Mexican government to protect, provide assistance and integral reparations to victims of violence. “Integral reparation” includes measures of restitution, rehabilitation, compensation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition in their individual, collective, material,

moral and symbolic forms. Yet, in practice the care and support offered to thousands of victims across the country is highly uneven and largely dependent on the different states' commissions.

According to Julio Hernández Barros, who was member of the *Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas* (Executive Commission for Victim Support) since its creation in 2013 until January of this year, by 2015 only Coahuila and Nuevo León had complied with the federal victims' law, and another 18 states were in the process of harmonization with federal laws. In addition, there are fifteen regional delegations across the country that depend on the executive commission and that are responsible for processing integral reparations on federal offenses to the victims, which is the case of drug trafficking and drug-related violence. Between the end of 2014 and January 2016, the executive commission had a budget of \$1,536 million pesos (approximately US\$82 million dollars) to provide assistance and cover integral reparations; yet, it had only used three percent of its budget to support 138 victims across the country (Gallegos 2016).

One of the main challenges for the victims of violence in Mexico is to get formal recognition through their inclusion in the national registry of victims, which does not guarantee access to reparations. By March 2016, of 7,640 people who requested their registry as victims, only 3,875 had succeeded and 3.5 percent of those registered benefited from the assistance fund (Gallegos 2016). Another limitation is that victims have to cover all their expenses first, and then they are reimbursed; yet, most of the victims do not have the resources to cover such costs. In regards to the mechanism of integral reparation, victims must provide a final

sentence to the corresponding legal demand, which is very difficult when 95 percent of the cases in Mexico remain unpunished and/or without sentence (Gallegos 2016).

Journalists from Sinaloa openly shared with me their perceptions about the care and support offered to victims. Overall, they agreed that the attention of victims in Sinaloa is poor and very limited. The professional support is not enough, and there are no programs to help rural populations that were displaced by violence or “collateral victims,” as the authorities called them (Interview 13, Journalist, July 21, 2014). One of the journalists who has personally suffered the effects of violence described his experienced as victim in the following terms:

I think we are on the ground floor with that. And I tell you first hand, I have been a victim... Sinaloa is slow and outdated [in the implementation of the federal law] and this is not a minor thing; it is a clear legislative and executive omission on both sides, because neither the executive [branch] proposes nor does the legislative demand. Sinaloa's lack of alignment with the federal victims' law, a law that has also been criticized by many public opinion leaders on the issue for its complete non-application... The worst thing that can happen to you in Mexico is being a victim. The worst thing that can happen to you in Mexico is to be directly victimized to the level of physical incapacity, because if your work depends on your physical condition, you will be disabled for life. There are no real pension mechanisms, no real aid mechanisms. Our health services are particularly bad in normal services, now with victims... I give you a concrete example. The therapy I need, required for the first two months six hours a day. At *Seguro Social* (Mexican Social Security Institute) this therapy is given in two 45-minute weekly sessions. That is, my therapy costs \$400 pesos per session, which implies that you must have a salary of \$40,000 pesos monthly just to pay the therapy. Plus, medicines, living expenses, your family, etc. How much do you have to earn to be able to do it? (Interview 12, Journalist, July 18, 2014)

Two other journalists comment that state officials constantly re-victimize the victims and their families, providing different examples that illustrate the links

between necropolitics and narcopolitics, as discussed by Wright (2011) in the case of Ciudad Juárez. In the words of one of the journalist:

They [the authorities] even attack the victims. Recently there was a case of a mother who was shot to death, who was looking for her son. So, the Attorney General, who remained distant in the case of the disappeared son, always kept a distance. But someone killed the mother, and there is a detainee accused of the murder, and [the Attorney General] unveils all the information without hesitation, and that implies the criminalization of the mother who was also a victim, she was murdered, saying that she knew that her son was a criminal. (Interview 20, August 8, 2014)

Another journalist adds that the lack of care and support for victims is also linked to the lack of interest and empathy from other sectors of society:

No, there is no attention to victims. The present government [operates] with malice, insensitivity, [and is] even prejudiced towards them [victims]... It condemns them, sentences them before investigating and asks—but your daughter, how was she dressed? But your son, what was he up to? Who was he with? Why did he exchange dollars? Why did he have a pickup truck? No matter who they are, they are victims. You have to investigate. We all have the right to law enforcement, to justice, right? From that prejudice, from that sentence of the insensitive authority, [the case] is no longer investigated. There is impunity, there is no justice. Then, the dead are killed again. The missing person and his family live through multiple deaths. A death that multiplies, that does not end, that remains, that stays. Where do we go to pray, to cry, to bring flowers to the disappeared? If it is disappeared, if one assumes that he might be dead, but where do I pray to him? Where do I cry? Where do I say goodbye to him? Where do I find it? That is an unstoppable, countless pain. Then the victims are victimized many times by that insensitive authority, accomplice, murderer. And to that you add a society also indifferent, insensitive. You tell people they killed so-and-so and people answer you: what will he have done? With whom will he have gone? He did not mess with anyone, but also, if he had messed with someone, did he deserve to die just because he was a friend, acquaintance, or relative of someone? Society kill people again, the authority does it, so do we. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014).

A month after the previous interview, on July 30, 2014, the state congress of Sinaloa approved the *Ley de Atención y Protección a Víctimas del Estado de Sinaloa* (Law on Care and Protection of Victims of the State of Sinaloa). Article 3 defines as “direct victims” all physical persons who have suffered damage or impairment in economic, physical, mental, and emotional terms, or who have been endangered, or have suffered an injury as a result of crime or violations to the human rights recognized by the Mexican Constitution. The same article defines as “potential indirect victims” the direct blood relatives until fourth grade or by affinity until second grade, as well as those who are in charge and have an immediate relationship with the victim, and those who might be at risk for offering care and support to the victims of crime. It is within this conceptualization of indirect victims that the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence might have access to so-called integral reparations. Yet, as discussed earlier, the lack of awareness and the bureaucratic procedures render access to it difficult.

According to official information of CAVID (Figure 15), in 2015 the center offered support to more than 9,000 people. The table below shows the different services that were offered by CAVID during 2013 and 2015. The data are significant because they show variations in the demand for specific services, which could be summarized in two main trends. On the one hand, the increase in the number of those seeking legal advice, safety protection, and custody, reflects the level of exposure and victims’ vulnerability to possible recriminations from alleged offenders, their families, or their associates. Victims of drug-related violence usually require additional protection. In contrast, medical and psychological

attention, as well as economic support, show a dramatic reduction. However, it is important to note that these trends do not necessarily signify a decline in violence or a reduction in the number of victims; rather, as mentioned before, there are other state agencies that are fulfilling the demand for those services in Culiacán.

Figure 15. Services provided by CAVID, 2013 and 2015.

Services	2013	2015
Legal Advice	3813	4708
Safety Protection	640	2243
Custody	72	137
Medical Attention	300	223
Psychological Attention	3173	1112
Economic Support	6284	3585
Shelter for Victims	124	130

Source: Elaborated by the author with data retrieved from the Center for the Attention of Victims of Crime (CAVID).

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, I did not receive authorization to interview the social workers and psychologists working at CAVID. But I was able to interview social workers and psychologists who work at other state agencies who are also offering care and support to the victims of violence. The lack of awareness about the existence of CAVID, which was confirmed by the participants in the interviews, seems to be the main reason why some of the victims of violence resort to other state agencies. In addition, in order to have access to the services offered by CAVID, a person must formally receive the status of “victim” by the office of Sinaloa’s attorney general. This means that other state agencies are far more accessible and better positioned to offer care and support to the victims of violence, such as CEPAVI and ISMUJER.

One of the psychologists explained to me that these and other state agencies function as entry-level support for the victims, who receive initial psychological attention as well as legal counseling and orientation. She noted:

Yes, in fact agreements were made [with CAVID]. And for example, here we have the service of [legal] counseling by lawyers, from here they [victims] are accompanied... in case it is necessary to get an order of protection, [or] if you have to make a [legal] complaint. All that is advised here and we accompanied them [victims]. At the same time, I think [that it is] very important that they take a psychological evaluation so they have the [necessary] security if they are going to make a police report, so they [can] do it. (Interview 13, Psychologist, August 5, 2014)

The services offered by CEPAVI and ISMUJER thus play a critical role in the guidance of the different services that are available to victims of violence. Yet, oftentimes those state agencies struggle with the lack of resources as they were not exclusively created for that purpose. In the following section, I describe my findings related to the social workers and psychologists who work in those agencies offering support to victims and witnesses, as well as those who work with alleged offenders who are patients at CECJUDE.

5.2.1 Perceptions of risk and violence

The majority of psychologists and social workers I interviewed do not consider Culiacán to be a violent city, and most of them associate the increase of violence with changes in family dynamics and the loss of family values. The case of the social workers and psychologists who offer support to alleged offenders is particularly interesting because most of them confirmed that media sensationalism largely contributes to the normalization of violence (Interview 5, Social worker, July 11, 2014; Interview 6, Social worker, July 11, 2014; Interview 10, Psychologist,

July 11, 2014). One of the psychologists described the normalization of violence in the following terms:

I consider Culiacán to be dangerous, but I also consider that there is a lot of sensationalism in the media... I have lived here, and I can say that maybe we socialize violence... and to a certain extent you get used to it. I am not saying it is okay, but you get used to it and socialize violence. You start to perceive as normal what is not normal. (Interview 18, Psychologist, August 8, 2014)

The subjective or apparent normalization of violence was a common perception among the secondary witnesses. Yet, it was striking for me, as I was expecting that closer interactions with individuals who have personally suffered the effects of violence would result in higher awareness of the risks. Paradoxically, the majority of the social workers and psychologists interviewed distance themselves from violence and its effects through discourses that separate representation from experience, as exemplified in the following quote:

For the levels of violence handled by the authorities it is understood that it is a violent city [Culiacán]... I was born here in Culiacán, raised here in Culiacán and until now, thank God I have not had any problem. I have not been directly involved in a problem of violence... But it is well-known... that it is a violent city. Daily in the local newspapers you can find one dead, three dead, five dead, for different types of events, traffic accidents, shot to death, different forms. (Interview 5, Social worker, July 11, 2014)

Likewise, another participant who works at CECJUDE shared her perceptions on the fluctuations of violence in Culiacán, and how she feels more “safe” at her workplace because they do not have much contact with the outside.

When asked if she felt at risk in Culiacán, she responded:

Not anymore. At the beginning, the first few years yes... In the last six years [the period of Calderón’s administration] the environment was very ugly [violent]. Right now, things happen and that, but it is more calm. No more shootings or anything like that. Yes, a death

here and there, but that is among them [narcos], that's the way things are. But as far as witnessing shootings and that, it is calmer. Moreover, we are enclosed [at CECJUDE], we do not realize when things happen. (Interview 7, Social worker, July 11, 2014)

Perceptions of risk and violence in Culiacán are mediated by local narratives that historically have created a mythical separation between people that might be involved in the drugs industry and ordinary citizens, as described by one of the social workers:

I at least consider that if one does not walk in bad footsteps, you are not entangled with people who are involved in that kind of thing [drug trafficking], you are not really at risk... because if that was the case since long ago we would be all dead here in Culiacán. However, we have people who live at peace and very calmly because of the fact that we are not related and we are not involved in that environment. (Interview 6, Social worker, July 11, 2014)

Psychosociological proximity to the effects of necro/narco-politics in Sinaloa is in part created by those ontological separations between “good” and “bad” residents. The separation is both discursively created and spatial. In the case of the former there are a series of “myths” that have become deeply engrained in the subjectivities of culiacanenses, such as the idea that “if you do not have contact with them you are not at risk.” Yet, the problem, as explained by the journalists in the following section, is that those discursive boundaries are no longer useful or relevant. In the case of the latter, in the early eighties there existed narco enclaves around the city, and the residents of Culiacán knew the neighborhoods where narcos preferred to live. Thus, the sense of security and perceptions of risks also had a psychospatial component. Yet, notwithstanding how obsolete those discursive and spatial boundaries are, the social workers and psychologists who

work with alleged offenders continue to perceive violence and risk in those earlier terms.

The local media also plays a critical role informing the situated knowledges that shape the distinction between secure and insecure places in the city. This was explained by one of the participants: “Somehow you learn to live that way. I am used to it [violence] and I say that nothing happens. Maybe it is because if I know the neighborhoods that have more risks, I do not visit them at night. If I know which streets are riskier, I will not go down them. Somehow, I protect myself and protect my children. But I cannot deny that there are risks.” (Interview 11, Psychologist, July 11, 2014). It is through changes in daily practices that people are able to adapt to the shifting perceptions of risks.

A possible explanation for people’s continuous efforts to distance themselves from violence might be that the psychosociological proximity to necro/narco-politics in Culiacán shapes a kind of common sense, which subjectively normalizes violence and simultaneously informs the daily strategies of adaptation to the risks. Those mechanisms are reflected in the efforts of the secondary witnesses to avoid dealing with stressors associated with particular spaces, ways to protect oneself from the emotional or psychological damage that might induce an erratic behavior, such as paranoia, schizophrenia, or a persecution complex. I mentioned before that the intensification of violence in Sinaloa is usually followed by a general state of fear and a sense of vulnerability that temporarily puts everyone on alert. In some cases, that state produces panic attacks, such as the following:

I have that time so present [in my mind] because I remember that I had been with my daughters. We went to Mazatlán's carnival. And it was when it was said a lot that there would be shootings, that they will kill, I do not know whether the king or the queen... people were in a panic... I remember that we were along the carnival route, right at the front... I do not know what happened...but it seems that... a police patrol had the radio on speaker... and someone heard like there had been a shoot-out...Then all the people panicked... I remember that I grabbed my daughters... and we jumped and... we got behind some fences that were there... but it all was because the media sometimes causes you to create a certain panic about things. And sometimes even if it does not happen, you live with that [panic] and that causes you not to live at ease... something they heard produced that panic. (Interview 6, Social worker, July 11, 2014).

Psychosociological and psychospacial proximity to the narcos is so tight in Culiacán that inhabitants generally do not seem to have a negative perception of people directly involved in the drugs industry. In fact, one of the psychologists I interviewed notes that some groups might even have a positive relationship with them, as they might offer additional protection to their neighborhoods (Interview 4, Psychologist, July 9, 2014). He shared a story from one of his clients that exemplifies the previous observation:

He told me [that] he has a cousin who lives here, near the soccer stadium. I am going to ask her if I can sleep there a few nights, and yes, he arrived [at the cousin's house]. Then, while talking with the cousin, he asked—hey, is this a safe neighborhood? Here it is quiet, here nothing happens, we are more than protected... ok. Happy, the guy had a few drinks with the cousin and went to sleep around one am, and about three am, an intense shootout out [starts] right there on the street where the cousin's house is. And he, all frightened, asks [her cousin]—hey, is it not safe [the neighborhood]? That is why it is safe, because those people live here, look there, in that house. Tell me who is going to come if we have these people here? (Interview 4, Psychologist, July 9, 2014).

The psychologist then added that it was at that point when he realized that people generate their own spatial arrangements in order to feel secure. The

residents of Culiacán interact and establish relationships with those who might offer some kind of protection. Paradoxically, oftentimes those subjects are also the ones responsible for the increasing violence. The increasing interaction with people who might be involved in criminal organizations is one of the main factors in the normalization of violence. More significantly, such interaction is a means by which illicit activities—lawbreaking and disruption of public order—become accepted and reproduced. This is made evident in part by the way that people interact with and lionize iconic figures such as Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán (Interview 4, Psychologist, July 9, 2014). However, those local arrangements are dependent on a series of social networks and situated knowledges that not always are effective mechanisms to prevent encounters with acts of violence. In other words, the psychosociological proximity which operates at a subjective level might be constantly disrupted by the psychospacial proximity which implies embodied experiences of violent events.

5.2.2 Secondary traumatic stress

The STS symptoms most consistent among the psychologists and social workers interviewed were: (1) recollections of events and/or traumatized people; (2) efforts to avoid certain thoughts and feelings; (3) efforts to avoid particular activities or situations; (4) diminished interest in activities; (5) diminished affect; and (5) hypervigilance. Most of the social workers and psychologists confirmed that the effects of witnessing drug-related violence get normalized. At least, those are the perceptions of most of the participants. Yet, those effects might have other implications for health and work performance. As noted by one social worker,

“What I have had is problems with colitis. [This come from our] environment... because sometimes the stress is too high and sometimes we are calm, but there are highs and lows. It is like that all time” (Interview 7, Social worker, July 11, 2014).

One psychologist shared a thought that exemplifies some of the affective and emotional effects that result from being in contact with victims, and particularly from having access to shocking or traumatic experiences:

I am going to be very honest: there were times when I vomited. There were times when the impact was so strong that, for example, I had to leave [the room] because the therapist, who at the time was the director, was responsible for the therapy, and it was a group therapy. I worked as a co-therapist and I was writing down what happened in there. I also intervened but there were moments that from there I went directly to the bathroom to vomit, and progressively I became used to it. In other words, I tell you this, you find a way... you learn to have this separation, maybe it was the impact of something that for me was very strong. And it happened to me. As time passed, because I worked there for eight years, the impact already was not so strong. (Interview 18, Psychologist, August 8, 2014)

As shown by the previous quote, affective responses might emerge while psychologists are listening and working through the traumatic experiences of their clients. According to the previous testimony, those visceral responses tend to diminish as professionals get more experienced and develop coping mechanisms to deal with those effects. Social workers and psychologists agreed that affective responses diminished with time, as noted by one of the participants:

In the beginning, it affected me. I took everything home... but after 15 years working here, not anymore. Yes, you feel [compassion] when you see the person [offender] crying, but you get used to the environment, you get used to what you are living, to what you are seeing because it gets normalized... We no longer take home their problems. We used to carry them for days or even months, *remembering what those people had lived through* [emphasis added], but you learn. You learn to cope with that. (Interview 7, Social Worker, July 11, 2014)

The idea that psychologists and social workers feel themselves immune to the effects of violence resembles the sense of numbing that trauma survivors often discuss, which is also considered an avoidance symptom in STSD. Moreover, as noted by Canfield (2005), avoidance symptoms tend to occur in conjunction with symptoms of intrusion and arousal in STS. In this sense, as shown in the quote above, the recollection of events or persons who have experienced traumatic events is also part of the STS symptoms experienced by the secondary witnesses. Yet, as social workers and psychologists have more contact with the persons who have been part of the acts of violence, those memories tend to fade away.

The short duration of the flashbacks experienced by social workers and psychologists might be explained by the mechanisms that shape phylogenetic memory. As explained by Young (1997), memory recollection is essentially the mechanism that determines the prevalence of traumatic memories. In this sense, understanding the role of psychospacial proximity to the traumatic events might be helpful for understanding why those traumatic memories tend to fade away among social workers and psychologists. Those memories might be recalled as long as social workers and psychologists interact with the victims, but as they did not experience directly those events, then the mechanism of recollection discontinues as they lose contact with their clients. This is different in the case of the journalists, and I will go back to this discussion in the following section.

The quality of care and support offered to the victims depends to a large extent on the working conditions of the centers that offer those services. As mentioned before, the social workers and psychologists who work at CEPAVI and

ISMUJER have limited resources as they were not created specifically to deal with the victims of drug-related violence. These two limitations are reflected in the anxieties of professionals that are offering support to the victims:

There are times when we struggle because we could not help people [victims] or because we helped them, but we know that the support was not as good as we hoped. So, many times we feel frustrated by all that. (Interview 12, Psychologist, August 5th, 2014)

Similarly, a psychologist who works with alleged offenders described his frustration for not being able to provide the kind of support required by his clients, or by not having available all the resources that they need. In his words:

When [someone is] telling a story, I see the need of the person and I find how to give him the tools through courses, or individual therapy... Sometimes... I feel short on what they need and I cannot grant it as department, as professional. (Interview 9, Psychologist, July 11, 2014).

The constant interaction with victims is a demanding task that imposes an emotional and physical burden on secondary witnesses. Another symptom of job-related stress is the diminished interest in activities, which is constantly followed by efforts to avoid ordinary situations and even mood changes that affect their interactions with their families, as shown in the following quote:

There are times where, for example, [my partner says] hey, let's go to the supermarket. [Psychologist answers] You know what, no, not today... I am tired. [My partner] tells me [about my mood changes], but also respects them. For example, I tell [my partner], give me some space. Let me rest for an hour, two hours and we go. There are times when I say—no, not today, tomorrow. Today definitely not, tomorrow. Then, yes, [my partner] has noticed. (Interview 18, Psychologist, August 8, 2014).

Another STS symptom experienced by social workers and psychologists who offer support to victims and alleged offenders is that most of them have

become hypervigilant, particularly after leaving their workplaces. One psychologist notes:

Yes, when I started to work in the field of public security I think I became very *paranoid* [emphasis added]. Yes, if you start to know how it works, how it develops, then you take your precautions. Sometimes young people do not understand it, until they start to become aware or start to grow. But yes, you have to take your own precautions... Of course there are risks and there is tension in this [professional] area... there will always be risks. On our part you begin to develop paranoia... you have to be alert to everything. (Interview 11, Psychologist, July 11, 2014)

As shown in this section, social workers and psychologists experience symptoms of job-related stress. But, according to their testimonies, the duration of most of the symptoms is dependent on the progressive familiarization with the working environment, as well as the contact with each of the clients, particularly those who are more demanding of care and support. Also, their training and co-workers' support allow them to cope with some of the effects of job-related stress. Next, I discuss some of those coping strategies in more detail.

5.2.3 Coping Strategies

Social workers and psychologists receive contention therapy, both individually and in groups. In addition, the support between co-workers is also essential in times of crisis or immediately after a demanding counseling session (Interview 18, Psychologist, August 8, 2014). Most times, the psychologists in different workplaces also provide counselling services to their colleagues and they all have received some kind of training to deal with critical situations, as explained by one of the participants when asked about their training to interact with victims:

Yes. I am going to retake therapy tools again. We have been trained a lot—when we are in a critical situation and we have a person in

crisis—on how to manage our emotional health to be able to give good attention. In my case, I have put them into practice: posture, seating, deep breathing or some other type of movement that helps me to be calm, but also so I can project security to the other person so they can speak calmly. (Interview 19, Social worker, August 8, 2014)

Social workers who work at CECJUDE also confirmed that they have developed a sort of psychoanalytical skill that allows them to identify threats, and, thus, to avoid risky situations in everyday life (Interview 6, Social worker, July 11, 2014; Interview 7, Social worker, July 11, 2014; Interview 8, Social worker, July 11, 2014). Other measures for personal security include making private the profiles in social networks, and not uploading or sharing photos of family members as that might increase their vulnerability for an eventual or possible retaliation (Interview 9, Psychologist, July 11, 2014). Social workers and psychologists are extremely careful when leaving their workplaces, as described by one psychologist:

Yes, I have taken precautions [as I get] out of it [the workplace], because somehow I have come across several unbelievable stories that somehow I say that it is impossible that it would have happened. But it is true; it can happen. Then as security measures... [I] verify that anyone [that might be nearby] is not intoxicated... I try to be watchful to see who is [with my family]...I try to see if there is someone following [us]. If there are any suspicious people, I'd better stay or I go back. (Interview 10, Psychologist, July 11, 2014)

Some ordinary practices to cope with job-related stress that are practiced by social workers and psychologists include doing exercise, yoga, meditation, and even dancing. Overall, it seems that social workers and psychologists have been relatively successful finding ways to cope with the effects of violence, and that is mostly the result of two factors: (1) their professional training and access to some kind of support at their workplaces that have facilitated the adoption of a series of coping strategies ranging from contention therapy to daily practices; and (2) an

indirect psychospacial proximity to violence enables a progressive assimilation of their work experiences. Now, I turn the analysis to the case of journalists.

5.3 Doing journalism on drug-related violence

Grillo (2011) notes that the story of “El Narco” (the world of narcotics trafficking) is also the story of Mexican journalists who risk their lives to cover it. For salaries as low as US\$400 dollars per month, reporters risk their lives, resisting attacks and intimidation to expose the networks of corruption in their efforts to inform the public and contribute to the general claims for peace and justice across the country. Mexican journalists pay a high price to keep society informed, and they are vulnerable to both criminal organizations and to the institutions of the Mexican state, particularly the military and the different police forces. According to the international organization, Article 19, since 2000, 126 journalists have been murdered in Mexico, and 23 have disappeared.

In Sinaloa, doing journalism is an activity that exposes one to multiple risks. The journalists I interviewed agreed that since 2008, the year when violence increased significantly across the state, journalism became *diarismo* – that is, a kind of journalism that limits its function to the coverage of most small-time daily events. In the words of one journalist:

Currently, journalism is, rather, *diarismo*, it is [basic] daily news. With the increment in violence in 2008, the media somehow got limited to doing... many [small] investigations... But there is no investigative journalism in Sinaloa. There is no follow-up. Just daily news. These are notes that reporters only make during the day. On the subject of violence, I always say that it is the dead of one day. In other words, for most of the press, they cover it, publish, and it's over. On a few occasions when the event impacts sometimes they try to follow up, but there is no research. Something that did not happen before 2007. In the years that I had to work before 2007, the reporters went to the

courts, we did research, we got into it more deeply, we went a lot to the communities, to the mountains when there was a violent event, and not only for [just] one day. Sometimes we went every week. I had to cover some events daily for up to a month in order to examine the problem of violence. (Interview 13, Journalist, July 21, 2014)

Similarly, another participant explained:

Look, as a journalist, I complain a lot about that [the kind of journalism in Sinaloa] because we have forgotten the substance, the spirit of journalism... Because they believe that to do journalism is to cover buildings, to be in an office, in a press conference. Reproducing what someone wants to say, you go from there to the writing room and you write it down and that is it. You did journalism. That is not true. You become a spokesperson of the speech of the powerful. I feel that... [journalism] became mediocre, it became a very bureaucratic job, and journalism in essence is research. They no longer wear [shoe] soles, they do not move their asses, they do not face power. They go to the press conferences, the acts of the government, smelling and kissing the footprints of the powerful, the politicians, the authorities. But [they] do not investigate. Then, it is a very superficial job. There is no social commitment. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014)

Attacks on journalists across the country have increased dramatically. In the last six years (2010-2016), the *Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos Cometidos contra la Libertad de Expresión*, FEADLE (Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression) of the PGR, received 798 preliminary inquiries for crimes against journalists in Mexico, the majority of them for threats and abuses of power. Only 101 of the cases resulted in the apprehension of the alleged offenders, but even worse, only two of them resulted in convictions (Ureste 2016). In other words, more than 99 percent of the aggressions against Mexican journalists remain unpunished.

In 2014, the international organization Article 19 documented 12 attacks on Sinaloa-based media and journalists during the last two decades, including two

murders, two arbitrary detentions, five physical assaults, two acts of intimidation and one death threat. In eight cases, the perpetrators were public officials, reflecting the vulnerability and the risks associated with their work. Since 1995, eight journalists have been murdered and two more remain disappeared in Sinaloa (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Journalists' homicides and disappearances in Sinaloa.

Journalist	Date	Place	Media	Status
Javier Valdez Cárdenas	5/15/17	Culiacán	Río Doce	Murdered
Mario Alberto Crespo Ayón	12/3/14	Mazatlán	Uno TV	Missing
Jesús Antonio Gamboa Urías	10/23/14	Ahome	Nueva Prensa	Murdered
Julián Bacasegua Castro	7/21/14	Guasave	Nueva Prensa	Missing
Alberto Angulo Gerardo	11/4/13	Angostura	DL Deportes	Murdered
Humberto Millán Salazar	8/24/11	Culiacán	A Discusión	Murdered
José Luis Romero	1/15/10	Los Mochis	Línea Directa	Murdered
Oscar Rivera Inzunza	9/5/07	Culiacán	Vocero	Murdered
Gregorio Rodríguez Hernández	11/28/04	Escuinapa	El Debate	Murdered
Ruperto Armenta Gerardo	2/5/95	Guasave	El Regional	Murdered

Journalists covering narcopolitics and drug-related violence in Culiacán face different pressures from members of the DTOs, as well as from members of different levels and institutions of government. Two out of the seven journalists who participated in this research shared their testimonies on direct attacks against them, their colleagues, and their offices, including the explosion of grenades that were thrown against the facade of two local newspapers buildings. One of the journalist notes:

We have more than eighty preliminary inquiries open in the state attorney's office, eighty. Ranging from thefts of motorcycles, cars, assaults, the incursion of an armed group on the house of a director. My attack, the beatings of journalists, photographers... They have not solved one, well, except mine with certain bias. And what does it mean? To send you the message that if it happens, nothing happens. You can turn it off. What happened, [police] captain? (Interview 12, Journalist, July 18, 2014).

We were interrupted by the captain of the police bodyguard assigned by the PGJE to protect the journalist who months ago had suffered an assault, a gentle reminder that we were being observed from distance by members of the state apparatus. Doing journalism becomes a more difficult task when there are two or more DTOs fighting to control a particular region (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014). The risks increase as a result of the disputes between cells of the different DTOs, or when the conflicts between different DTOs intensify, and journalists know they might get into trouble if they investigate and expose those conflicts, as well as their links to necro/narco-politics in Sinaloa. In addition, according to the participants, journalism in Sinaloa is also very limited in the assessment and corroboration of information (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014; Interview 13, Journalist, July 21, 2014; Interview 20, Journalist, August 8, 2014). Journalists continue to depend on the leaking of information and do not benefit enough from direct access to information, which constitutes another tool to do investigative journalism (Interview 20, Journalist, August 8, 2014).

In 2008, right at the intensification of the drug wars, the Mexican media became a kind of spokesperson for the DTOs. Without realizing that they were providing a public service to the main actors of the drug wars, the criminal organizations started to use media coverage to send messages to rival DTOs and state authorities (Interview 20, Journalist, August 8, 2014). Progressively, the national media became aware, and agreed to reduce the level and kind of exposure of violent events through the different platforms, including television, radio, press, digital media, etc. Local media in Sinaloa decided to make changes

in its coverage of drug-related violence, as explained to me by one of the journalists:

In Sinaloa... [we] stopped publishing full messages of the *narcomantas* [banners with violent messages], for example. We realized that every time someone put up a banner and we published it, the photo and the entire message, and even interpreted the phenomenon, what we were doing was magnifying the message, playing a role... in the communication strategy of the narco. Then, we did not stop publishing the event... [but] we stopped calling [the banners] *narcomantas* and we started to say that a banner was found... with messages on these subjects, without photos or with blurred photos so the message could not be read. And immediately, what happened in a clear [confirmation] that what they want is a strategy of communication, they started to leave them [banners] on the sidewalks of the newspaper [buildings] as a way to pressure [us] for them to be published. (Interview 12, Journalist, July 18, 2014)

A major site of struggle within the Mexican drug wars is therefore construction of meaning, and it is a dangerous field for journalists across the country. Journalism plays a critical role in keeping the public informed and helping society understand the effects of violence. Hence, journalists are permanently involved in the political struggles surrounding necro/narco-politics, a factor that significantly increases the risks for this professional activity, which is what I discuss next.

5.3.1 Perceptions of risk and violence

In contrast to some of the perceptions of risk and violence of social workers and psychologists, journalists are more critical of the current condition. To a certain extent this is understandable because they represent a critical actor directly involved in necro/narco-politics, but also because they work closer to the effects of drug-related violence. In this sense, a journalist explained how he always feels at risk:

I think... we are all in danger because we live here. If I were not a journalist, I would be at risk. A musician, I just interviewed him, he feels at risk and not because he goes to parties of narcos... He does not play narcocorridos, but he knows he can go to a graduation party and someone might ask for a song that he does not know or do not like, or someone asks for a narcocorrido. And he knows someone can get out a gun or can threaten them. It is a constant threat. We are all threatened for living here... there are people... who are in danger and who do not realize it, that is not entirely conscious. There are even some people who say, which I think is stupid, that while you do not mess with them you will not have problems. But you are not involved with them, they are involved with you, in your life. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014)

Then, he adds that violence in Culiacán is more than the official count of deaths:

You said a while ago, violence is not just the murders... Well, I say, violence is not only measured with dead; but through *the way of life* [emphasis added] that the narco imposes, because the phenomenon of narco is not a police matter between “good guys” and “bad guys,” it has long ago ceased to be that, it is a *way of life* [emphasis added]. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014)

The previous testimony reflects a significant distinction between the material effects of violence expressed as death and the effects of living everyday life under conditions of constant threat. The state of permanent fear is more intense on journalists, not only because of their psychospatial proximity to the effects of violence but because of the increasing risks associated to their work. Journalism in Sinaloa is under a constant threat since the conflicts and fragmentation of the Sinaloa cartel, which according to the testimonies of the journalists started with the murder of Edgar Gúzman, son of “El Chapo,” in the parking lot of a convenience store in Culiacán on May 8, 2008. That event constitutes a breaking point for the Sinaloa Cartel, and consequently for the level of violence in Culiacán. In the following months, the conflicts between different groups intensified and the

numbers of homicides doubled that year, but more significantly, the frequency and intensity of the acts of violence increased around the city. Once again, the shifting dynamics of necro/narco-politics in Sinaloa led to a reconfiguration of the regional drug wars, transforming the use of violence and everyday life in Culiacán. As explained by one journalist:

It increased a lot [drug-related violence]. But in addition, the danger, the *sense of danger*. In other words, it was not enough to see all this as dangerous, maybe I did not realize. *Now you feel in danger*. I believe that what has increased is terror, that psychosis, right? Paranoia as a collective form of life settled among us. In those days [May 2008], especially in those days [after the death of Edgar Gúzman], *fear* was the only feeling at wake up and when you were about to leave the house, because back then began all this, that it is not enough to kill. They [DTOs] had to announce it, to show the corpse, to cut it, decapitate it, hang it from the bridge. Put on a message, and a bloody banner. In other words, it was not enough to kill; the corpse itself was a canvas, it was a message. *An exercise of power*. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014; emphases my own)

The previous quote suggests that one of the main effects of the increase in violence in Culiacán was a generalized state of fear, where people felt at constant risk and where a sense of danger essentially paralyzed the city for a few days after the death of Edgar Guzmán – indeed, so much so that people did not even celebrate Mother’s Day that year (Interview 12, Journalist, July 18, 2014; Interview 13, Journalist, July 21, 2014). Another effect of this reconfiguration is that the power to decide who must live and who must die is, in obvious ways, no longer something to be understood as an exclusive capacity of the sovereign Mexican state. The drug wars have at their core a series of disputes between DTOs to show who is more powerful and who has the strongest capacity to kill, creating a state of fear that enables the control of a territory, both through the implementation of

illicit practices and the use of necropower. In this sense, necropolitics becomes a critical component of the armed conflicts and the political struggles over the meaning of the deaths, and in which local media plays a critical role in their interpretation. As explained by one journalist:

At some point what we [the media] did was covering dead and more and more dead, and to the extent that violence was rising in cruelty, in spectacle... no longer a head but two, no longer one executed but many, no longer executed but undressed and hanging, no longer two gunshots but forty-five [gunshots]... Messages started to appear even on the dead, such as cut fingers to say that [the person] was someone who in the jargon they call "fingers" and... had betrayed someone. Cut hands to say they were thieves... Gunshots in the back of the neck to send the message that he was someone of the structure and deserved to die respectfully... Absolute cruelty, torture... was someone who clearly betrayed the organization. Then, the issue is how you take distance... how you make editorial decisions with a more ethical approach. (Interview 12, Journalist, July 18, 2014)

As discussed in the previous chapter, journalists confirmed that variations in the levels of violence in Culiacán depend on the shifting dynamics within and between the DTOs, particularly in regards to the Sinaloa Cartel and the historical networks that have been developed with state and local authorities. For several decades the so-called *pax mafiosa*¹⁰ in Sinaloa was successful in keeping violence relatively stable. But in the last decade, the evolution of the DTOs, as well as the changing arrangements within and between the different groups have maintained a high level of violence in Culiacán, with a homicide rate of 51.4 murders per 100,000 residents in 2015. During the last eight years, the conflicts with rival organizations and the constant reorganization within different groups of the Sinaloa

¹⁰ Term that describes a state of relative peace and non-violence in the territories controlled by organized criminal groups in collusion and agreement with authorities not to interfere in the illicit activities (Tokatlian 2007).

Cartel—a result of the murders and arrests of some of their leaders—have produced waves of violence, as explained by a journalist:

When violence diminishes in Sinaloa, or in Mexico in general, it is due to the dynamism of the cartels [DTOs]. Sometimes the cartels are already working, drug trafficking, and all that. But then the fights start... and the homicides start to increase. Here in Sinaloa it is not the result of the authorities' success if the homicide [rate] is reduced; rather, it is an issue that has to do with the narcotraffickers themselves, with the dynamics that they play. (Interview 20, Journalist, August 8, 2014)

It is within this context that journalists got caught between different conflicts, informing about the daily acts of violence and providing information to help ordinary citizens understand the necro/narco-politics in Sinaloa, as well as their effects on the lives and livelihoods of its residents. Yet, the shifting dynamics of the drug wars in Culiacán have increased the risks for the journalists covering violence, causing a series of STS symptoms that I discuss next.

5.3.2 Secondary traumatic stress

STS symptoms as well as other health issues were specifically mentioned during the interviews. Yet, some of the participants do not necessarily associate them with their work, which is also part of a coping strategy. Journalists' symptoms include: (1) recollections of experiences; (2) dreams of events; (3) efforts to avoid thoughts and feelings; (4) fear and anger; (5) diminished affect; (6) difficulty falling asleep; and (7) hypervigilance. In the following paragraphs, I will provide evidence of those symptoms and I will discuss some of their emotional and behavioral implications.

The coverage of drug-related violence is a deeply emotional activity that implies different levels of exposure to violence, and, consequently, different levels

of vulnerability. As explained by one of the journalists who covers violence in Culiacán:

Reporters and videographers or photographers... are always [working] together, and arrive at the same time [onto sites of drug-related violence]. At the site of the events, it might be riskier for the visuals [photographer or videographer] as we try to obtain the most precise image, the one that calls your attention, the one that might be the story line... There are times when we arrive at a certain place that has just been cordoned off, or a place where the perimeter is not well delimited yet. And getting there might cause you to be confronted by the cops [who try] to move you back. In this sense, there is a higher risk for the visuals, videographer and photographer, to be attacked, because the reporter... [immediately] starts asking for information... what happened and all that. And the photographer moves toward... the body, to see the event [more closely]. (Interview 16, Journalist, August 7, 2014)

The landscapes produced by drug-related violence are dynamic sites where different bodies and objects, but also sounds, and smells, enable the emergence of affective and emotional effects that circulate through the different materialities, facilitating the recollection of traumatic memories as the different bodies interact and constantly transform it. In this sense, the psychospatial proximity of the secondary witnesses is shaped by the multiple materialities that constitute the sites of violence, which are latter produced and reproduced as landscapes through the different representations produced by the journalist. Those landscapes heightens the recollection of affective and emotional effects and inform the phylogenetic memories of the journalists. Sometimes, those effects are reflected in their writing, as described by one journalist:

It's hard [witnessing the effects of violence]. It is difficult... I have a teenage son. He asks me things, he is aware [of violence]. I do not hide anything from him... he is aware of what is happening in the city. He knows, he suffers, he does not like Culiacán... and you cannot distance yourself from it... You try not to get carried away by

a feeling at the time of writing, but sometimes it is inevitable and sometimes it is good. Objectivity in journalism does not exist; it is a discourse... a personal decision, very personal. And you put there [in the text], somehow *you reflect your pain, your hope, your fear, your sadness*. You try to overcome what happened on the street... But you do not take it away completely; it is difficult to get rid of the violence when you have it all around, we are all surrounded by it. The bad guys are inside and outside the government. The bad guys rule, they have power and they are inside and outside the government. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014; emphasis my own)

Writing about violence and its effects is a demanding task. It usually involves intense emotional struggles with feelings such as anger, sadness, powerlessness, and frustration (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014). But it might be also a form to cope with traumatic experiences, a therapeutic mechanism to release the experience in a public form, and inform people about the effects of necro/narco-politics and drug-related violence in Culiacán.

Contact with victims of violence is also challenging for journalists. The participants confirmed that they have not received any training on how to deal with them, and most of the time it is a skill learned through experience. Yet, there are cases where contact with relatives of the victims increases risks for journalists because they might be intimidated or threatened as they are doing their job (Interview 16, Journalist, August 7, 2014; Interview 20, Journalist, August 8, 2014). Witnessing victims of violence is a hard experience for journalists, as described by one of them:

Working a lot with victims affects you. It has an impact on your emotions, your health, it impacts you. In fact, it can incapacitate you, if not for weeks, for days... Moreover, I am very sensitive towards such things [the effects of violence]. For example, [if] I am talking to a victim, it hits me hard. But when I write the story, I cry. I cry when I write it. And when I read it... it hits me again, and I cry. So, yes, it is difficult for me... Sometimes I have come to imagine even the tears

of the victims. I have seen when the relatives arrive. It marks you, they are, they are tattoos... for example, watching Sandra Luz Hernández¹¹ was devastating for me... (long pause). They are very shocking experiences. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014)

The emotional reactions that are mobilized in the landscapes of drug-related violence are tied to individual memories of the events and the sites where these took place. In this sense, the sites where drug-related violence take place become geographic reference points in the mental maps of journalists covering violence in Culiacán. Moreover, those sites also function as triggers that enable the recollection of traumatic memories. The memorialization of death through cenotaphs has become a distinctive feature of necropolitics in Culiacán, but also part of local narratives that inform sense of place and local identities. A journalist described how violent events and the sites where those took place become part of their psychospacial references in the city. In his words:

In Navolato, in what is known as Malecón, if I pass by, I remember the candles, the massacre that occurred there. In fact, that language is the nomenclature that we use. If you say, for example... to another reporter who was there—‘hey dude, what’s the area where they killed that guy, do you remember? Where they killed Victoriano Araujo’s brother... in Santa Elena.’ Yes, for reference you remember the violent event. For example, the pathway where they killed Rosalino Sánchez, Chalino Sánchez, where there is a cenotaph. (Interview 20, Journalist, August 8, 2014)

Witnessing the effects of drug-related violence and dealing with job-related stress have multiple effects on journalists’ physical and mental health:

I think I have gastritis... I think it is due to stress... I am very apprehensive. I have insomnia. Yes, I have insomnia. Depression. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014)

¹¹ An activist mother who, after two years of intense activism searching for her disappeared son, was murdered on May 12, 2014.

Another journalist described to me some of his recurrent nightmares:

You become paranoid; I had homicidal dreams. Once, I dreamed that I was walking down the street in a city. The truth is that it was not Culiacán, it was another city. I was walking down the street in slow motion, as if my steps were heavy. Then, there were soldiers lying down like this [gestures]. As I was walking, there was a soldier nearby, and I saw a guy coming out of a building with fan-shaped doors. This guy comes out shooting with two AK-47 rifles in his hands and kills some soldiers that were in front of the lobby. Then, he points towards me and the soldier that was next to me. I want to jump and I jumped, because there were some flowerpots, and as I am falling in the dream is when I wake up, sweating... Another recurrent dream was to look for corpses in the mountains, and I remember that in the dream I was on the back of a pickup truck, in the box, and I was looking at the edge of the mountain, until I saw the corpse below a *guamúchil* [tree]. Then I shout—hey, there it is! We go [towards the corpse] and when I want to touch the corpse, it becomes a stone... then I wake up. Night dreams of this kind were frequent. (Interview 20, Journalist, August 8, 2014)

In the conventional theory of trauma, anxiety dreams and certain types of recurrent nightmares play a critical role among the prominent symptoms of the survivor syndrome (Niederland 1981). Linked to the previous observation, another STS symptom experienced by journalists are “flashbacks” of affective and emotional experiences that were collected in the landscapes of drug-related violence. Flashbacks are constantly recalled and mobilized as journalists move through the city and pass by places where violent events have occurred. Sometimes, those flashbacks produce mood changes and affect the way the secondary witnesses interact with their surroundings, as described by one of the participants:

I get closer with the camera in my hand... when I realize that the passenger is alive. I called the Red Cross to get an ambulance. That is what I remember the most. After the call, I move back and I am recording with a zoom when I see the passenger's last breath... it is

one of the things that I also remember. (Interview 16, Journalist, August 7, 2014)

Journalists become hypervigilant in their daily activities, particularly during working hours. The increase in violence has transformed news coverage and working conditions for journalists. Previously, reporters and journalists rushed to get first to do the coverage of violent events. Nowadays, they form groups cover stories as a strategy to protect themselves. In some cases, journalists also become more violent as they interact with the different actors involved in drug-related violence (Interview 20, August 8, 2014). In the following section, I discuss some of the coping strategies that have been adopted by the journalists in their efforts to deal with the different risks associated to their work.

5.3.3 Coping strategies

Journalists have developed different strategies to cope with necro/narcopolitics and the effects of drug-related violence. Throughout the interviews there were three kinds of coping strategies associated with: (1) the perceptions of risks and violence; (2) the social and spatial proximity to violent events; (3) and secondary traumatic stress symptoms. Overall, the development and use of coping strategies depend on the psychosociological and psychospacial proximity to drug-related violence.

As mentioned in the previous section, the intensification of drug-related violence has transformed the daily practices of journalists, as well as their safety protocols while covering violent events. Preventive measures include avoiding the routinization of daily activities, such as commuting routes, visits to places for meals and meetings, and even the organization of the contacts on their cellphones and

other electronic devices (Interview 16, Journalist, August 7, 2014). One of the major changes has to do with the safety measures taken during the covering of violent events, as explained by one journalist:

Generally, nowadays, with WhatsApp we are in a group, almost the vast majority of those covering the police section of the different media companies. And that's where we communicate, if you find out [any information], you share it there or even the mortuary technicians, and police agents notify some colleagues, and the network starts to share the news. And, as I told you, if there is something at night, and at certain distance from the city, for example a town near here, we apply what I said before, we meet in one place and go all together, we try to go all together. We avoid to the maximum going alone to the site, even more when it is far away and at certain hours at night. (Interview 16, Journalist, August 7, 2014)

Another journalist adds:

As self-protection measures, when we are going to cover an event, for example, we no longer go alone. Before 2008... we rushed to get there faster and first, alone... In fact, I used to leave with the driver, since I did not need a photographer. I had my camera and I reported, and I went alone. But not anymore. Now the reporters have... to go in a group. They agreed, they communicate and go in group... to avoid problems... Nowadays, forget about the exclusive. Right now, [we] work together, talk to other newspapers, carry our IDs, [we] do not pass by, or do not pass the soldiers. If they [soldiers] stop you, [we] stop, and identify. We do not wear clothes that can draw attention, because sometimes there are vests especially for photographers that look like bulletproof vests, or sometimes [we used to] wear camouflage [clothes]. (Interview 13, Journalist, July 21, 2014)

Affect and emotions serve as markers to identify some of the risks of publishing specific information, including the risk of death. This function is critical because it usually involves affective and emotional responses to discourses and situated knowledges that informed the psychosociological proximity to necro and narcopolitics. In other words, the affective and emotional geographies of drug-

related violence are then useful to determine responses and coping strategies that allow journalists to administer information, as the following quote illustrates:

So yes, you self-censor. I'll tell you in an elegant way, we manage information, because to that extent you manage risks. If you can manage them. If it is possible to define [risks], because you say... in this story here is the *rage*, in another story it moves here, moves there. They are quicksand, but is finally it. I mean, you put on hold something strong [information] because if you publish it, it kills you. (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014; emphasis added)

Rage is a visceral and behavioral reaction that was used as an affective reference to identify the risks associated to publishing specific information. In this sense, the perception of risk determines self-censorship as a strategy to cope with the risk of death. Particularly interesting is the objectification of rage as a mobile marker in the text, which, according to the journalist, facilitates the identification of the risks. Those markers are primarily affective, but they are also dependent on the psychosociological proximity and the situated knowledges that determine the use of self-censorship as a coping strategy. In other words, the affective marker and the objectification of risk within a narrative are tied to possible or expected reactions from third parties.

The interviews reveal that there are different kinds and levels of censorship, ranging from self-censorship to editorial and institutional censorship. In all of the cases, censorship plays a critical role as a measure to cope with some of the risks of publishing informing about narcopolitics and drug-related violence. As explained by one of the journalists:

If you read a story right now on a dead man, it seems the same from yesterday [as if] they had just changed the name... time and place. It is like a predefined format. So... they [journalists] have limited themselves, but that is self-censorship. They limit themselves so as

not to do more professional or deeper work. And the working conditions are also relevant. The work of reporters is poorly paid, but above all the climate of violence is what makes many [reporters] self-censor. And not only reporters but also the media has censored itself [more broadly] for violence because there were... threats, [that is] the risk in covering the problem here, especially everything on organized crime is very risky. Currently there is a lot of risk; that is why there is self-censorship, and also somewhat [the reason] why there is no investigation and there is no follow-up because reporters are stopped if they start talking. They no longer want to explore some of the [more difficult] matters. (Interview 13, Journalist, July 21, 2014)

Two journalists have attended counseling services. One of them does it regularly as a way to cope with the emotional burden that implies the daily contact with the effects of drug-related violence. He explained: "I do it on my own. I go to [psychological] therapy. And I went to counseling for two years every week. And occasionally, when I am in times of crisis I have done it. I am well because I do it. I have someone [a psychotherapist] to go to and after many years of searching I found someone who treats me" (Interview 2, Journalist, June 30, 2014). Counseling services are not available as part of an institutional policy of media corporations, nor are they offered through government institutions, unless someone becomes a direct victim through the formal process of determining victims. In other words, although it is abundantly clear that the state cannot claim a monopoly on "legitimate" violence, it retains the right to determine who can be legitimately considered a victim of violence. This mechanism of officially determining victimization seems to shield the state from scrutiny and criticism of its role in protecting citizens from harm, providing a means for seeking justice for wrongs committed, and providing redress for victims. Put differently, controlling

the narrative and the political economy of victimization might be seen as a way to shore up broader claims about maintaining public order and the rule of law.

The limited access to counseling services and the lack of awareness of the effects of job-related stress have resulted in other coping strategies such as binge drinking (Interview 20, Journalist, August 20, 2014). This is one of the findings that deserves further exploration. So far, based on follow-up conversations with some of the journalists, it seems that binge drinking is a common coping strategy among the journalists who experience close psychospacial proximity with the different materialities that constitute landscapes of drug-related violence—that is among photographers and videographers. It seems to me that the proximity to corpses, injured bodies, guns, bullet casings, the blood of the victims and alleged offenders, while photographers and videographers are trying to capture the landscapes and their details, increases the propensity to experience flashbacks.

Every click of the camera is a series of images stored in both a digital file on the camera's SIM card and in the subject's phylogenetic memory. The storage of those images is also attached to a series of affective and emotional responses that facilitate the recollection of those memories as journalists cross by the sites where violent events have taken place. But sometimes, it seems as if some of those affective and emotional effects also become attached to visual representations of the landscapes of drug-related violence, mostly to the images and photographs that inform us about recent events. In this sense, videographers and photographers play a critical role in the reproduction and preservation of those

landscapes. Next, I will contrast some of the findings on both kinds of secondary witnesses.

5.4 Discussion

The secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Culiacán are experiencing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. Yet, there are significant differences associated with the psychosociological and psychospacial proximity to violent events. On the one hand, both groups of secondary witnesses have access to the effects of violence through the narratives and representations that inform the daily spatial practices of all the residents in Culiacán; but they also have access to the oral testimonies and traumatic experiences of people who have been part of violent events. On the other hand, in contrast to social workers and psychologists, journalists experience a closer psychospacial proximity to the effects of violence, as they personally experience the landscapes that are produced by the shifting dynamics of the drug wars, and that, unfortunately, have become part of daily life in many parts of Mexico.

Situated knowledge about violence circulates through different discourses and representations that become part of local identity and to a certain extent the sense of place in Culiacán. Those narratives that inform the psychosociological proximity to necro/narco-politics in Sinaloa, tend to facilitate the normalization of violence, to the extent that a series of “myths” around drug trafficking and insecurity continue to shape the subjective and sometimes paradoxical perception of violence and its effects by most of social workers and psychologists interviewed. In contrast, those secondary witnesses who have experienced more directly and

proximately the acts of violence or its landscapes, such as the case of the journalists, tend to be more emotionally and behaviorally affected.

Journalists are more vulnerable to STS symptoms that are linked to their embodied experiences of the landscapes produced by drug-related violence. Meanwhile, social workers and psychologists tend to distance themselves from the effects of violence, even though they have recurrent access to narratives of violent events through the testimonies of people who have been involved in acts of violence, including alleged offenders, victims, and witnesses. However, the case of these secondary witnesses who work with alleged offenders is informative. Most of the social workers and psychologists confirmed that violence in Culiacán is frequently exaggerated by local and national media, reflecting an acute tendency to avoid some of these stressors.

Overall, it seems that the STS symptoms experienced by social workers and psychologists are tied to working conditions, which is consistent with the notion of vicarious trauma. The constant frustration and guilty feelings experienced by psychologists working with both victims and alleged offenders are linked to the lack of resources and/or professional training that allow them to provide proper care and support to their clients. Another factor affecting their work performance is their mental and emotional health, as the prevalence of job-related stress progressively affects their professional skills, leading them to experience a sort of burnout that increases over time. In this sense, institutional mechanisms must be created to continuously assess the quality of support offered to those who have experienced traumatic events as a result of the drug wars in Mexico.

5.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analyzed the affective and emotional effects that are being experienced by the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence in Culiacán. Their testimonies reflect the daily risks and challenges that result from the prevalence of different forms and levels of violence. Since 2008, the drug wars in Sinaloa have produced thousands of victims and residents of Culiacán have developed different coping strategies, ranging from changes in daily practices to the creation of sociospatial arrangements that might “guarantee” them some level of security while they do their jobs.

Violence has transformed the lives and livelihoods of thousands of families across the country that have been directly affected by the disappearance or the murder of one or more of their members. Unfortunately, as discussed in this chapter, the institutional mechanisms that were created to provide care and support to different victims of violence have failed in their mission. There are multiple reasons, including juridical limitations, bureaucratic practices, limited personnel, and even misinformation and lack of awareness. Yet, other significant factors are the working conditions and the training of professionals who offer care and support to the participants in the acts of violence.

In the formation of coping strategies, it is not enough to have access to knowledge about violence, which refers to psychosociological proximity; the critical factor that determines responses to the perception of risks and threats is the embodied experience of violent events, which depends on psychospatial proximity to violence. In other words, while psychosociological proximity tends to induce

passive coping strategies, psychospacial proximity mediates active strategies. This is significant because those coping mechanisms might be part of strategies that have been historically adopted by most of the residents of Culiacán. Particularly, these are passive strategies—distancing, avoidance, self-control, and social withdrawal—that might be reflective of general strategies that enable sociospatial arrangements that subjectively produce “secure” spaces, making it possible to live in a permanent state of violence.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation shows that the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence are experiencing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress. Yet, further research is necessary to assess the frequency and magnitude of those symptoms. This task implies significant challenges that demand interdisciplinary collaboration. So far, the quantitative and qualitative methodologies used to increase our understanding of STS and STSD do not include the spatial dimension of traumatic experiences as a crucial element for understanding causality of some of the symptoms. This is a critical omission in the conventional theory of trauma that has been replicated in the study of job-related stress, particularly in the screening tests that have been designed to assess STSD symptoms.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the spatiality of trauma represents a research field where geographers might be able to make significant contributions through the theoretical and methodological tools developed within feminist geographies, affect theory, emotional geographies, and, more recently, by psychoanalytic geographies. This dissertation proposes a theoretical framing that aims to facilitate the study of the relationship between violence, space, and trauma, through the notion of psychogeographies of drug-related violence. To that end, the open-ended interviews allowed me to identify affective and emotional effects that are consistent with the STS symptoms experienced by the secondary witnesses of drug-related violence.

The analysis of the interviews also shows that there are significant differences in the causes of some of the symptoms. On the one hand, social workers and psychologists have indirect contact with the traumatic events through the testimonies of the victims, witnesses, or alleged offenders. And on the other, journalists directly experience the landscapes produced by violence. In this sense, the STS symptoms experienced by journalists tend to be more intense. In other words, as the journalists experience the sites and also reproduce the landscapes of violence through their images and videos, their affective and emotional memories are more susceptible to the intensity of affective memories that are constantly recalled as part of their working activities. In addition, the embodiment of those affective and emotional effects are largely mobilized and magnified at the sites where violent events took place. It is in this context, that I argue that a site ontology might offer new areas of research that might be worth exploring through the testimonies of direct witnesses and secondary witnesses of violent acts.

The findings of this research are timely and significant because they are related to a globalized phenomenon affecting other regions in the world, particularly in Latin America. Findings are particularly relevant for professionals working in violent environments, while they also contribute to a larger interdisciplinary dialogue on theoretical and methodological approaches to study violence and its effects on the mental and behavioral health of ordinary citizens. Further research is necessary in order to develop methodologies that allow us to increase our understanding of the prevalence of secondary traumatic stress. In this sense, another area of opportunity is to include other groups of secondary

witnesses who might be in frequent contact with the effects of drug-related violence, such as lawyers, forensic technicians, paramedics, ER doctors and nurses, as well as mortuary technicians. A larger sample would facilitate the assessment of STS symptoms and identify more consistent differences with other conceptualizations of job-related stress, such as burnout and vicarious trauma.

As mentioned above, the so-called war on drugs did not end with the government of Felipe Calderón, who is frequently singled out as the sole person responsible for high levels of violence in Mexico. In fact, the current administration of Enrique Peña Nieto is en route to surpass the number of deaths that occurred during Calderon's administration. As the number of victims continues to increase across the country, the demand for services for the victims becomes more critical. The evidence presented in this document is also a challenge to different authorities in Mexico, particularly in Sinaloa, to improve the quality of the care and support offered to the different victims of violence. To that end, a more systematic assessment of the operation of the institutional mechanisms that have been created since 2014 to provide assistance to the victims might be helpful to identify needs and propose tentative solutions.

Finally, this dissertation is also a desperate call for peace in Mexico. As I wrote my final thoughts, I received a text message announcing the murder of another journalist in Mexico. It was the sixth journalist murdered in 2017. But this time was different. It was a journalist who was murdered in Culiacán, someone I had the opportunity to meet and who devoted almost 30 years of his professional career to help us to understand the effects of violence on ordinary citizens in

Sinaloa, a journalist who recovered the testimonies of those who are usually ignored and forgotten by the Mexican institutions.

I must be honest. I am devastated. I have lost the faith that things might change in my hometown, in my country. It is very difficult to keep close track of my thoughts, and it is painful to have to go back and update the table with the number of journalists who have been murdered or disappeared in Sinaloa. I am trying to contain the anger, frustration, pain, and profound sense of desolation that follows the death of someone who has largely contributed to the public claim for peace and justice. I have failed. Tears are rolling down my face as I recall his voice. “*¡Qué onda bato! Esto está de la chingada.*” I start to recall his fears, his emotional struggles as he took down the oral testimonies of the victims of violence. I remember him saying how much he enjoyed making breakfast for his children. I am in shock. He is dead. Someone has killed him. Someone finally silenced one of the few critical voices that in Culiacán invited us to not give up in the effort to construct a better city, a better state, a better country.

I tried to catch my breath and find some inspiration to finish my dissertation. I go back and read some of his texts. There he is, lending his pen to those voices that are screaming but that nobody hears, or that we all ignore. Denouncing the networks of corruption, the impunity that prevails within the institutions of the Mexican state. Describing the pain and suffering of the victims of necro/narcopolitics in Sinaloa. Raising his voice and claiming for peace and justice. Then, I read a phrase that he told me and which gave me back the strength to finish: “*Yo no te puedo decir que ya me acostumbre [a la violencia], yo creo que quien dice*

eso se rindió" (I cannot tell you that I've grown accustomed to [the violence]. I think whoever says this has given up). I returned to writing, all the while with one last thought: In the end, we are all victims of the violence in Mexico, but we will not give up. This madness has to stop!

Gracias, Javier.

APPENDIX A HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM APPROVAL



Human Subjects
Protection Program

1618 E. Helen St.
P.O.Box 245137
Tucson, AZ 85724-5137
Tel: (520) 626-6721
<http://ocr.arizona.edu/hssp>

Date:	May 23, 2014
Principal Investigator:	Valente Soto
Protocol Number:	1405331660
Protocol Title:	Witnessing and dealing with the effects of drug-related violence in Northwest Mexico
Level of Review:	Expedited
Determination:	Approved
Expiration Date:	May 22, 2015

This submission meets the criteria for approval under 45 CFR 46.110, 45 CFR 46.111 and/or 21 CFR 50 and 21 CFR 56.

- The University of Arizona maintains a Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (FWA #00004218).
- All research procedures should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the Investigator Manual.
- The current consent with the IRB approval stamp must be used to consent subjects.
- The Principal Investigator should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that affect the protocol and report any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.
- For projects that wish to continue after the expiration date listed above please submit an F212, Continuing Review Progress Report, forty-five (45) days before the expiration date to ensure timely review of the project.
- All documents referenced in this submission have been reviewed and approved. Documents are filed with the HSPP Office. If subjects will be consented the approved consent(s) are attached to the approval notification from the HSPP Office.

This project has been reviewed and approved by an IRB Chair or designee.

No changes to a project may be made prior to IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazard to subjects.

**APPENDIX B
CONSENT AND RELEASE FORM FOR USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS**

I, the undersigned, hereby grant Valente Soto Cortés on behalf of the School of Geography and Development of the University of Arizona permission to use the photos—Figures 4, 8, and 9—for his research project titled “The Affective and Emotional Geographies of the Secondary Witnesses of Drug-related Violence in Sinaloa, Mexico.” The photos will only be used for academic purposes and for the presentation of research findings. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for photos or footage to be used in this research project. I also agree that there will be no residual or any other type of payment, royalty or fee due in connection with the rights granted herein. I agree to release Valente Soto Cortés and the University of Arizona from any and all claims for compensation, libel, false light, invasion of privacy, moral rights and rights of publicity.

JUAN CARLOS CRUZ
Contraluz

Signature

8/9/2017
Date

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