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Living with the pain of home: An ethnography of political activism amongst Mexican migrants in Catalonia

Jamie-Leigh Ruse

This thesis is an enquiry into the emergence of forms of privileged migrant activism. It looks at the experience of middle- and upper-class Mexican migrants living in Barcelona, and explores the way they narrate the process through which they come to be involved in political activism directed at Mexico. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out with over twelve migrant political and cultural collectives in Barcelona, and opens an anthropological window onto understanding the intersections of privileged migration and political ways of being. It looks at the experience of migrants involved in campaigning against the war on drugs, electoral corruption, and political repression in Mexico. The account draws upon the extended interview narratives of individual migrants, and employs the concepts of affect emotion and cosmopolitanism as interpretive tools through which to understand their experiences. It argues that our analyses must look at the individual aspects of experience which influence migrant subjectivities. This includes looking at ambiguous implications of migrating, the emotionally complex ways in which migrants relate to home from abroad, and the impact that multiple inhabitations of cosmopolitanism can have for the way political subjectivities are articulated. The account shows how affect, emotion, and cosmopolitanism interact within migrant narratives in diverse ways. It demonstrates their importance in transforming the way migrants think about home and political action, in revealing migrants' own implications of structures of inequality at home, and in solidifying the political commitment of some activists. It also highlights their importance in shaping the form of protests which were enacted by migrants, and in influencing the likelihood of sustained political collaboration being practiced between individuals.

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Jamie-Leigh Ruse

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Anthropology

University of Durham

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Declaration

The work and contents of this thesis have not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or qualifications.

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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In memory of my grandmother

Lilian Ruse

(1928-2004)

Dedicated to my mum

Vanessa Ruse

My heroines

The light that you shine will never cease to guide and inspire me

Thank you for showing me the meaning of love

And of bravery

If my footsteps fill even half of your own

I will be proud

Table of organisations, groups and projects

Name of organisation in Spanish	Name in English	Brief description of activities
Nuestra Aparente Rendición (NAR)	Our Apparent Surrender	NAR is a peace association with members working from within Mexico, Catalonia, the USA, the UK and other countries. It publishes testimonies, articles, poetry, books and interviews about the violence in Mexico. It also manages a number of projects aimed at increasing awareness of the violence and its victims. It is working towards a future truth or peace commission in Mexico.
Menos Días Aquí	Fewer Days Here	This is a project which is run by NAR. It is staffed by volunteers who, each week, compile a list of victims who have died as a result of extreme violence in Mexico. It records details about the victim and the way in which they were killed on a centralised blog. This count is intended as a way of remembering and honouring the victims of the violence, whilst at the same time creating the possibility of generating statistical insights into violence patterns.
Movimiento de Ciudadanos Mexicanos en Barcelona (MCMB)	Movement of Mexican Citizens in Barcelona	This group was a mirror-group for the Movement for Peace, Justice and Dignity (MPJD) in Mexico, which was founded by the poet Javier Sicilia when his son was murdered by members of organised crime in 2011. The movement protested against the violence and disappearances, demanding both an end to the violence and for the return of disappeared relatives. In Barcelona, members organised mirror-demonstrations to those being held in Mexico.
Mexicanos en Resistencia	Mexicans in Resistance	This group was formed in

		<p>response to the alleged electoral fraud which occurred during the 2006 Mexican presidential elections, and to violent government repression of protestors in the town of Atenco, Estado de Mexico and in the city of Oaxaca in 2007. The group carried out demonstrations, marches and events designed to protest against, and raise awareness of, those issues.</p>
L'Adhesiva	The Adhesive	<p>This group was formed by members of Mexicanos en Resistencia who had also been active in a Catalan group which supported the Zapatistas, along with members of another group dedicated to challenging high energy prices in Mexico. It became a platform in which people interested in the Zapatistas, indigenous rights, and combatting state repression both in Mexico and Catalonia could come together.</p>
#YoSoy132 Barcelona	#IAm132 Barcelona	<p>This group was founded as a mirror group for the “#YoSoy132” student movement in Mexico. This movement began in response to media bias in favour of the PRI candidate during the 2012 Mexican Presidential elections. It later protested against the alleged electoral fraud which occurred. The group in Barcelona organised mirror-marches in support of the demonstrations as well as their own demonstrations, protest marches and awareness-raising events.</p>
MORENA (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional) Barcelona	MORENA (Movement for National Regeneration) Barcelona	<p>Barcelona cell of a movement supporting the left-wing PRD candidate (López Obrador) in the aftermath of alleged electoral fraud during the 2006 Mexican Presidential elections. The Barcelona group was</p>

		founded in order to garner support for López Obrador in the build up to the 2012 elections.
Bordamos por la Paz Barcelona	Sewing for Peace Barcelona	This was the Barcelona cell of a transnational movement which began in Mexico. The names and details of victims published on Menos Días Aquí, and other victims who had disappeared, were sewn onto white handkerchiefs which were then displayed in public areas in Mexico and around world.
No Nos Cabe Tanta Muerte	We Can't Hold So Much Death.	This was an art exhibition held in L'Hospitalet, a satellite city of Barcelona, which explored the impact of femicides in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.
MEXCAT	MEXCAT	This is a Mexican-Catalan group founded to promote Mexican culture in Catalonia, and Catalan culture in Barcelona.
El Grito Colectivo	The Collective Shout	This was a platform which was set up in order to encourage collaborations between different Mexican activist groups in Barcelona.

Chapter One:

Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

The heat of the July sun blasts through the open windows of a half-filled lecture theatre in the Autonomous University of Barcelona. A few low-powered fans churn out wisps of cool air over the heads of delegates here to attend a “peace in Latin America” conference. We have been waiting for the next talk to start, but so far there has been no sign of the presenters. There is a murmuring amongst those in the audience who are tired of waiting, and the conference organisers are looking annoyed since they haven’t yet received word of the speakers’ whereabouts. They begin to whisper about what they should do next. I am sitting next to Geo and Buddy, who are two members of one of the activist groups I am working with. We are here to represent NAR, a peace association founded in Barcelona in order to make visible the violence of Mexico’s drugs war. We steadily ignore the muttering about the lateness of our friends who are due to present now. Suddenly, in rush Lolita (the founder of NAR) and Elena (a member visiting from Mexico). They are both panting, and appear with their hair quickly brushed back into ponytails. Their outfits have been thrown on at the last minute, and they still have sleep in their eyes. “I’m sorry for our lateness,” says Lolita breathlessly to the audience. “We were up until 5am this morning trying to confirm the murder of a journalist with a newspaper he worked for.” They promptly sit down to begin their presentation. As Lolita speaks, the mutterings of the attendees quiet and a horrified silence descends. Lolita tells them that four brains

had been found the day before, abandoned in a bread-delivery van in Mexico. The day before that, the bodies of two men were found decapitated. A month or so earlier, the bodies of nine people were left hanging from a bridge in Nuevo Laredo. That was after forty-nine massacred bodies were found near a town named Cadereyta. The stories continue, and she tells of the daily horrors which occur as a result of the drugs war in Mexico. "We are hurt, and we are bleeding," she says. "Mexico is hurting. We have seen children playing piñatas with dead bodies, and we have seen our society torn apart". "In six years," she says, "over a hundred thousand people have been killed, and hundreds of thousands have disappeared." She describes the work of NAR, explaining "we try to provide a forum within which we can understand what is happening, and where we can provide support for the victims and activists. We try to create a place in which we can accompany one another in our pain". Her presentation ends, and the facilitator asks the shocked audience for a minute's silence "for Mexico". Lolita thanks him and says that she always requests that after her presentations. She tells him that she is touched he has asked for it before she could do so. The room descends into silence. When the minute is over, Lolita catches my eye and, speaking into the microphone, asks if someone can hug Geo. I glance to my side and see that Geo is crying. I put an arm around her."

(Reflections from the field based on field-diary entries)

Some sources estimate that at least a hundred and seventy thousand people have been killed in Mexico's drugs war since 2006. Others claim that around three hundred thousand people have disappeared (Martínez 2013) and that an additional quarter of a million people have been displaced, including entire towns (Hernandez 2012: 244, 245)¹. In the face of these numbers, and events like those described by Lolita in the excerpt above, it might not seem very surprising that a Mexican living outside of Mexico would feel compelled to speak out. Indeed, people like Geo and

¹ There are in fact no 'proven' statistics about the number of victims of Mexico's drugs war. Figures given by different sources vary widely, and the reliability of most is questionable. These figures, then, should be taken more as indicators of the scale of the violence rather than as concrete evidence.

Buddy said that such information had led to feelings of grief and anger so strong that they could only deal with them through long distance activism.

Their reaction, however, was not the norm.

This account is an enquiry into the emergence of forms of privileged migrant activism. It explores the ways in which Mexican migrant activists living in Barcelona account for their own political activation and participation with the homeland from abroad. It does so by focusing on the specificities of experience of one set of migrants (privileged Mexicans) to a particular destination (Barcelona and a nationalist Catalonia) and at a specific time in history (at a time of economic crisis and effervescence of social moments in Spain and a time of violence and political upheaval in Mexico).

The activists I met in Barcelona were from middle- and upper-class backgrounds in Mexico and had moved to the city as postgraduate students and professionals, or with their spouses. This is the common pattern for Mexican migrants living in Europe (Ley Cervantes 2012). They were attracted to Barcelona due to its pull as a vibrant 'city of culture', with its museums, galleries and theatres. The thought of the beach, bustling night-life and being close to El Barça (the football team many had supported since childhood) added to this, giving the impression of an urban idyll. Imagining Barcelona as the centre of Republican activity during the Spanish Civil War, and the place of anti-Franco protests during his dictatorship, led to hopes of coming to a left-wing haven. Its status as a major focal point of the urban squatter scene and hub of community politics gave it a cool, hip edge. For students who wanted to immerse themselves in another language and culture (without having to pay the high tuition fees of France and the UK), Barcelona provided an attractive alternative to Madrid. They ranged in age from students in their mid-twenties to fifty-year old professionals. Some of those aged 30 and above had been involved in political activism within Mexico in support of the Zapatistas, or as part of the student movement in Mexico City during the 1990s. Some had held official positions for the left-wing government in Mexico City. However, they did not come to Barcelona with the intention of pursuing political concerns oriented towards

Mexico. Instead, they sought to ground themselves in the city and in Catalonia. Others had never been involved in any kind of political action at home. This included students in their twenties and some of the older professionals. A number of them said they had had 'some' political consciousness before leaving Mexico, even though they had never acted upon it. Others claimed that they had simply been politically 'unaware'. They too came to Barcelona with the intention of immersing themselves in the life of the city. Some had lived in Barcelona for more than a decade, others for just over a year.

What they had in common was the fact that, at some point during their time in Barcelona, they felt compelled to become politically involved with Mexico. This was in spite of their original intentions to distance themselves from 'home', and to focus on getting the most out of living in another country. Their activism focused on three main issues: campaigning against the war on drugs and making the victims of the violence visible, supporting the Zapatistas and protesting against government repression of vulnerable groups, and contesting the results of the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections. Whilst they formed a number of different activist groups within Barcelona, memberships of those groups would often overlap.²

In terms of the number of Mexicans living in Catalonia, my participants formed a minority. Out of almost eight thousand Mexicans living in the region (Idescat 2011), only a handful were involved in long-distance activism. Studies of underprivileged Mexicans in the U.S. have shown participation in homeland politics to be common (Boehm 2008; Delgado Wise and Ortega Breña 2006; Goldring 1992; Goldring 2002; Gutiérrez 1999; Hirsch 2002; Kearney 2000; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Stephen 2007). However, the only ethnographic studies of privileged Mexicans in Europe have shown them either not to be involved in challenging the status-quo in Mexico (Ley Cervantes 2012) or to wish to preserve and even further it (Napolitano 2009). I discuss these studies

² The term 'activist' is one which I have chosen to describe my participants. Not all those I worked with styled themselves as 'activists', seeing their activities instead simply as something which they 'did'. However, I find the term descriptively useful. It allows me to group together those migrants who were in some way politically engaged with Mexico from abroad. By 'politically engaged' I mean those who regularly attended meetings, organised and participated in protests and demonstrations, and carried out events and projects to raise awareness of different issues on a continual basis.

in more detail later in this chapter. For now, I want to highlight the fact that it is not common for a privileged Mexican living in Europe to actively challenge political events happening at home. My participants' activism becomes even more surprising when we consider that the drugs war – which is a major locus of migrant activism within Barcelona - is not commonly acknowledged as a conflict which affects all sectors of society within Mexico.

For example, Grillo claims that “in a country of 112 million people, this war is one of low intensity” (2012: 26). He writes that whilst “the massacres in Mexico are comparable to barbaric war crimes” they are in fact “everyday spectacles in Mexico. The country is bathed in blood and it hardly shocks anymore” (2012: 18). Similarly, he notes “the conflict is everywhere and nowhere. Millions of tourists happily tan on the beaches of Cancun without realising there is a problem. In the capital there are fewer homicides than in Chicago, Detroit or New Orleans. Even in the most dangerous zones the situation can seem perfectly normal” (2012: 19). This problem is compounded by the fact that, at an international level, the violence receives little attention from the press. It is still viewed as an internal problem to do with fighting criminals (2012: 174). Often the authorities imply that victims ‘must have been involved in something’ i.e. they must have had some link to organised crime otherwise they would not be dead or disappeared. Not only does this tar the name of the victims, but it also reduces the likelihood of any investigation into their case being taken seriously. The problem is worsened by collusion between the state and organised crime. This means that local authorities often have a vested interest in ensuring that cases remain unresolved (Washington Valdez 2005: 85). It also creates a scenario in which many people in Mexico consider themselves to be distanced from the war and its effects (since it occurs only amongst ‘lower-class criminals’).³

³ This situation has changed radically since September 2014. After the abduction and disappearance of forty-three students in Ayotzinapa, in the state of Guerrero, state involvement in the violence became much more apparent. This event made Mexico's conflict visible within the international arena, and shifted perceptions of its causes from isolated ‘narco’ episodes to extensive corruption and a lack of democracy.

Whilst at first glance it might seem unsurprising that a middle/upper class Mexican living in Europe would become involved in activism directed against this situation, those that do are actually the exception rather than the norm. How, then, do such migrants account for their involvement in long-distance activism? This leads me to the central theme of this thesis: How do some privileged migrants account for the emergence of privileged migrant activism?

This question has not yet been fully addressed by anthropologists. The literature on transnationalism and long-distance nationalism tells us how migration can affect the political sentiments of migrants, and the way they continue to relate to the homeland (Baker-Cristales 2004; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Kearney 2000; Pessar 2001; Stephen 2007). However, this literature focuses on underprivileged migrants facing structural oppression in both their homeland and destination societies: this was not the case for the Mexican activists I met in Barcelona. On the other hand, much of the literature on privileged migrants has tended to focus solely on how they are, or are not, able to achieve a sense of belonging through migration (Amit 2007; Fog Olwig 2007; Ley Cervantes 2012; Margolis 1990; Torresan 2012). Or, it looks at how their actions can shape the parameters of international citizenship (Ong 1996; Ong 1998). The focus of this account seeks to provide a bridge between the two bodies of literature by describing the experiences of middle- and upper-class Mexican migrants and the way they describe the development of their political activism. Throughout the chapters of the thesis I argue that migrants account for their questionings of Mexican society through dwelling on the ambiguities generated by individual migrational experiences. Their narratives express this through evocations of intense emotional reflection and transformation. Such expressions of emotion are used to demonstrate a new sense of cosmopolitan 'openness' on the part of privileged Mexicans in Barcelona towards various 'others' within Mexico. They lead to assertions of equality and sameness which cross ethnic and social divides. In the process, this undermines (at least discursively) the structural inequalities maintained by mainstream Mexican nationalism. Thus the process of emergence for privileged migrant activism in this context becomes intrinsically linked with particular narratives of strong emotion arising from within and cosmopolitanism.

Throughout the chapters of this thesis I demonstrate how privileged Mexican migrants in Barcelona account for their political activation through emphasising the importance of strong emotion rising uncontrollably from within. Through such narratives, emotions become the link which bridge different sectors of Mexican society in common cause, and come to form part of a particular cultural trope of social justice. This is a kind of trope which has a particular kind of

historicity within the country. Indeed I would argue that Mexican activists' evocations of emotions as determining action form part of a particular historical milieu of social action within Mexico, and in some ways represent a continuation and extension of that milieu into the current social context of the country. This is a particular cultural trope which builds links between different sectors of society through the expression of strong emotion.

During the Mexican Revolution of 1910 – 1920, Noble argues that emotions “and their enactment within culture were the very stuff of revolution”. In her analysis of the acts of public crying carried out by Pancho Villa, Noble argues that shows of emotion “fostered fellow feeling across social and political divides. These fledging sociable feelings were also...crucial in the subsequent formation of national sentiments that came after the Revolution” (2013: 250). In this way, shows of emotion were they key to the “reconfiguration of the social compact that took place during the profound transformations wrought by the Revolution”. A focus on emotions can therefore reveal “*how disparate social groups made common cause*” (Noble 2013: 251). Given the importance of emotional displays at a time of such profound change within Mexican society, the feeling-accounts of my participants take on a particular cultural significance. Once again they become a mechanism through which new forms of national cosmopolitanism (and connection) can take place.

Noble argues that the accounts of crying in the memoirs of Pancho Villa signal “the power of emotion to exceed and extend pre-established forms of sociality” (Noble 2013: 256). She also claims that “attention to matters of emotional practice not only sheds light on how political communities were forged in Revolution....it also highlights the tensions that coursed through those communities”. She argues that emotional displays became a way of crossing class and gendered lines of division (Noble 2013: 267). The cosmopolitan transformations which became evident through the narratives of my participants give force to such an argument as applied to impact of the social and political upheaval taking place in Mexico today. They show how the way migrants perceived their own reactions to news of what was happening in Mexico rooted the possibility of crossing social and ethnic divides within experiences of specific emotions. Rather, then, than representing something irrational, or beyond the control of individual, the strong emotional displays of my participants actually display a form of continuity with processes of social and cultural change which have taken place during certain points in the history of the country. They are narratives or life stories which form part of a continuing cultural milieu of revolutionary social change within Mexico (Linde 1993: 11). They are accounts which seek to explain personal change and, in the process, enact social ones (Linde 1993: 16, 20). Coherence within the narrative, and with regards to activists' views as to why

new senses of self are being formed, is based within accounts of emotions arising from particular and affective reactions to the news and to the migrational experience (Linde 1993: 122). It forms part of the way migrants claim membership to the new national community they now find themselves to inhabit (Linde 1993: 219). As such, intense displays of emotion also become ways of rhetorically declaring their own membership in the newly connected nation of which they feel themselves to be a part. Having their assertions of feeling deeply about, and suffering as a result of, the violence in Mexico recognised by others became a way of having others acknowledge their membership within that community, and their right (as privileged migrants) to belong (Carrithers 2005; Carro-Ripalda 2009). As they did during the Mexican Revolution, assertions of uncontrollable emotions influencing the actions of individuals became a way of asserting solidarity and connection across multiple lines of difference.

I begin the remainder of this introduction by clarifying what I mean by 'privileged' migration. I then give an overview of the anthropology of migrant political activism, highlighting how this has often been tied to experiences of poverty and discrimination in both sending and receiving societies. I move on to discuss how anthropologists have tackled the migration experiences of elites, showing how they have focused exclusively on questions of belonging and citizenship. I then argue that something more is needed if we are to create a bridge between these two literatures and understand the emergence of specific forms of privileged migrant activism. In the body of the thesis, I show how this 'something more' follows two strands. The first relates to the phenomenon of migrants accounting for their political implication with the homeland through emotion and affect. The second relates to differential expressions of a cosmopolitan openness towards different kinds of 'Other' by migrants. This was intimately connected with their different ways in which individual migrants would emphasise the importance of emotions from within for political action. I conclude my discussion of the literature by clarifying my understanding of the terms 'cosmopolitanism', 'affect' and 'emotion'. I finish with a description of the chapters that structure this account.

1.2 What is privileged migration?

The Mexican middle-classes are different from the European bourgeoisie in that they do not represent a class which is 'in the middle' of working and upper classes. Nor do they represent an average national income. Inequality is such in Mexico that the 'middle-classes' have access to economic, cultural and social resources which put them in the position of quasi-elites when compared to the working classes and indigenous groups. Variations within the middle-classes tend to represent variations of the upper-end of the scale rather than reflecting the 'middle' point (Gilbert 2007: 15, Walker 2013: 3)⁴. Whilst 20% of the population in Mexico could be classified as middle-class (Gilbert 2007: 15), 51.3% of the population (around 112 million people) live in poverty. An additional 25 % live in extreme poverty (Cockcroft 2010: 80). Around 50 million people in Mexico live on less than \$2 per day (Gibler 2011: 200; Watt and Zepeda 2012: 168). Meanwhile, a mere 0.07% of the population owns around 40% of the total wealth (Cockcroft 2010: 80). Indeed just thirty-nine families own 13.5% of Mexico's national wealth (Gibler 2009: 14). My participants did not belong to the wealthiest and most powerful sectors of Mexican society: they were not part of the elite 0.07%. However, their middle-class status and the fact that they had the economic and social resources to reside legally in Europe meant that, in relative terms, they were an extremely privileged group. Their privilege also became apparent in terms of their migrational status. Mexicans in Spain are not subject to the same processes of structural violence encountered by those in the U.S. (Benson 2008). Since my participants had work permits, student visas, residency and even Spanish citizenship, neither did they suffer from the effects of everyday deportability and illegality like other migrants living in Europe (Sigona 2012).

I prefer to use the term 'privileged' rather than 'elite' in order to describe the migrants with whom I worked. Amit notes that "if on a global scale the availability of these resources may

⁴ In anthropological terms the meaning of the term 'class' is multiple and varied. Marxist perspectives tend to see class as referring "to a structural position within a production system". Others view class as "a category of people defined by their occupation or income level" (Pratt 2003: 14). As well as referring to economic markers, however, it can also be constructed discursively and politically as well as being lived through cultural practices (Pratt 2003: 15).

demarcate these people as among the world's relatively affluent, they could not be described as members of its most powerful elites" (Amit 2007:2). Others have described this sector as "middling-migrants" (Ley Cervantes 2012). This means that they are "often, but not always, well educated. They may come from wealthy families, but more often than not they appear to be simply middle class" (Conradson and Latham 2005:229). However, I shy away from the term 'middling' in this account. It is unclear if such a term merely reflects European judgements of class, or is relative to the specific country in question. As I have already indicated, the level of privilege of the Mexican middle-classes is quite different to those in Europe. In Mexico they enjoy social, economic and cultural privileges which are denied to the majority of the population. I prefer to avoid the complexities of using the notion of 'middling migrant' as an international measurement since what constitutes 'the middle' differs between countries. The use of the term 'privileged migrant', however, allows this ambiguity to be retained.

1.3 Politics and Class in anthropology's approach to migration:

1.3.1 Poverty and migrant activism:

The idea that migration can lead to the expression of new political identities is nothing new in anthropology. However, much of this literature has tended to focus on the political identities of underprivileged groups. In this section I outline the relationship between migration and politicisation identified by a number of theorists. I then discuss the problems such works represent when it comes to relating them to the experiences of privileged groups. I end this section with a discussion of the insights which we can take from this literature.

Anthropologists have argued that migration can change how individuals understand their political positioning and situation in the world (Alleyne 2002: 123 - 131; Basch, et al. 1994: 275; Pessar 2001: 461). This is because "they leave and enter a variety of social and political spaces,

acquiring and creating new formal and informal identities, and modifying previous ones. This reestablishment of identities and the corresponding social cleavage have deep implications for the political dispositions of migrants in both their places of origin and arrival and the larger (often transnational) spaces that encompass them” (Kearney and Beserra 2004: 11). This has led some theorists to assert that “the role of mobility in one form or another would be difficult to overestimate in spreading as well as transforming or containing ideologies and strategies of dissent and direct action” (Fox and Starn 1997: 9). By existing “in-between” places, living in both and yet not belonging completely to either, Kearney argues that migrants may experience an “ambiguity” with regards to their social positioning. This allows them to “escape the defining power of any single determining subject position” and to become consciously aware of alternative subjectivities (2000: 190). Experiences of migration and transnational involvement have been identified as leading to the development of ‘self-conscious’ group identities. Migrants may come together and identify shared experiences of oppression in both their home and host societies and then creatively act upon them (Baker-Cristales 2004; Billings 2000; Nagengast and Kearney 1990).

Ethnographically, these studies are based on the experiences of migrants who have lived through oppression in their home and host societies. For example, one of the most far-reaching works in terms of our understanding of long-distance nationalism is the study carried out with Haitian migrants living in the U.S. by Glick-Schiller and Fouron. They argue that through the inhabitation of “transnational social fields”, migrants remain connected to the homeland. This involves ties of kinship, economic practices and political engagements (2001: 3). As a result, they argue, migrants live their lives in the social worlds of both their destinations and their homelands (2001: 11). This means that the homeland is not so much a “site of nostalgia” as it is “a location of ongoing experience” (2001: 2). The three strands to Haitian long-distance nationalism identified by Glick-Schiller and Fouron, however, are deeply related to the realities of living in the U.S. and to specific social mechanisms for survival in Haiti. One strand is related to experiences of racism and exclusion in the U.S on the part of migrants. The second is their ongoing maintenance of

relationships to Haiti through family relations, the media, and travel home. The third relates to poverty experienced by relatives remaining in Haiti, and their constant calls upon relatives living abroad to remember their obligations to poor kin who need their financial support (2001: 93). Articulations of long-distance nationalism in this context are heavily implicated with poverty and discrimination in both Haiti and the U.S. – they are based on tangible ties to suffering kin and personal experiences of structural oppression.

Michael Kearney similarly identified the political potentiality latent in transnationalism in his study of indigenous Oaxacan migrants living in California. By describing their experiences of racism and oppression in Mexico and the U.S., he was able to show how they came to see themselves as belonging to neither. The resulting ambiguity created a context in which ethnicity came to be self-consciously regarded as a basis of “peoplehood”. The migrants set up activist organizations in the U.S. which addressed immigrant concerns within California, worries over border abuses, and development issues in their hometowns in Mexico (Kearney 2000: 177; Nagengast and Kearney 1990: 62). In her study of Mixtec and Zapotec migrants from Mexico to the U.S., Stephens also argues that migrants do not merely cross national borders. Instead, they cross multiple borders of race, class, ethnicity, colonialism, culture and gender (2007: 6). She shows how movements between such borders can lead migrants to invoke “shared experiences of racial oppression as a basis for constructing broader panethnic and panindigenous identities” (2007: 212). This can lead to the creation of organisations which help migrants to navigate the borders they cross at the same time that they seek to eradicate them (2007: 230). Once again, these studies show how migrant activism is dependent upon lived experiences of poverty and discrimination. In addition, the form of activism which arises from such experiences often focuses on oppression in both the homeland *and* the destination society.

In other situations, migrant activism can arise as a result of direct experiences of violence and war in the homeland. Billings, for example, demonstrates the way in which Guatemalan refugees’ experience of exile in Mexico led to solidarities emerging between different ethnic groups.

This resulted in the generation of a pan-ethnic Maya identity as well as a sense of being Guatemalan refugees 'together' (2000: 79). The experience of exile resulted in the politicisation of many refugees as they became familiar with the language of human rights and gender rights (2000: 91). Again, these were refugees who had suffered directly and physically at the hands of violence, and the activist participation which resulted from their migration was intimately tied to personal experiences of suffering. However, it is important to point out that experiences of suffering in the homeland or destination society do not necessarily result in the further politicisation of migrants. Indeed, as has been shown for Palestinian refugees in Jordan (Achilli 2014) and homeless Mexican migrants in San Francisco (Napolitano-Quayson 2005), they may act to silence underprivileged migrants as much as politically empower them.

What then to make of privileged migrants in Barcelona who became engaged in activism directed at Mexico? In a few cases, individuals had suffered personally as a result of the violence. However, the majority of people had not experienced the war (or poverty) directly. If they had not personally experienced that which their activism was directed against (as the literature on migrant activism would generally seem to necessitate), how then to account for their political concerns? The key to understanding the emergence of their activism, I would argue, is an exploration of the way migrant narratives focus on the importance of particular (and uncontrollable) emotions arising from within (or arising from affect). Specifically, this relates to the emotions which are expressed by individual migrants when describing their reactions to alternative, revaltory and disturbing views of their homelands. This forms part of a particular cultural trope within Mexico which centres the realisation of social justice on emotional connections between different sectors of society (Noble 2013). Emotion provides a way of (and is a symptom of) breaking down certain social forms (Noble 2013). Hence, the emergence of privileged migrant activism in this case is intimately linked with emotional narratives which, following tropes of revolutionary social change in Mexico, provide a cultural coherence and a rationality to newly imagined national communities. I discuss this point further on in the introduction. For now, I would like to highlight an important insight provided by

the literature on migrant activism and long-distance nationalism. This is the assertion that migrants do not live their lives in one place only, and are connected to a number of localities in various ways (Basch, et al. 1994: 7; Vertovec 1999: 447). As a result, “personal identity formation in transnational social spaces can best be understood as a dialectic of embedding and disembedding....of situated selves” (Guarnizo and Smith 1999: 21). This refers to the ways in which the lives of migrants remain embedded within both destination and homeland contexts. Their migration is experienced through their particular positioning in both places (Bauböck 2003; Hamilton and Stoltz Chincilla 2001; Levitt, et al. 2003). As such, the specific contexts in which migrants are placed will affect how they experience their identities (Guarnizo 2003: 690; Guarnizo and Diaz 1999; Guarnizo, et al. 1999). One question to consider in this account is how the worlds which Mexican migrants inhabited at home and in Barcelona might have influenced their activism, and the way they viewed the homeland.

1.3.2 Elites, citizenship and finding the self:

In this section, I discuss the way anthropologists have addressed the study of privileged migration. I show how existing studies do shed light on the ways in which privileged migrants may undergo changes in how they view home. Such experiences, I argue, are reflected in the experiences of my participants. However, when reconciling these changes in how home is viewed with participation in long-distance activism, we reach a stumbling block. The literature on privileged migration does not address how it can result in an emergence of activist involvement. How then are we to understand the process through which my participants account for their need to turn towards political action?

Questions around privileged migration have mostly been directed at how it can impact upon an elite’s sense of self and how it can contribute to the maintenance of a middle-class lifestyle. In this view, migration and travel are seen as allowing for personal growth and the assertion of status.

Amit explains that “travel has been a long-standing cachet of cultivated tastes; that is to say, has been one of the grounds for demarcating or claiming, first, elite status (as in the European Grand Tour of the nineteenth century) and, more recently, middle-class standing” (2007: 6). This association has been further heightened by the elaboration of a public discourse within many industrialized countries that trumpets “the importance of ‘international experience’ within a globalizing economy” (Harrison and Hoyle 2003: 11). In this context, travel is seen as a source of new experience and potential new insight (Oliver 2007). It represents an opportunity to grow as individuals and to expand one’s knowledge of the world (Conradson and Latham 2005a: 291). Temporary migration thus becomes a route for the “acquisition of symbolic capital through a path of self-realisation and a need to have more do-it-yourself biographies” (Ley Cervantes 2012: 73). Through this experience “the search is, in fact, for the authentic self rather than authentic Other” (Harrison and Hoyle 2003: 34, see also Bruner 1991: 239).

This view imbues privileged migrants with the possibility of “constructing narratives of personal identity through a search for human connections across time, space and cultural difference” (Harrison and Hoyle 2003: 53). Such a view also ties with the “Western” notion which states “curiosity about other places and people is a good, responsible, potentially even enlightened cultural value” (Harrison and Hoyle 2003: 209, 210). This occurs in a context in which skilled migration is now an everyday undertaking for members of the middle-classes (Scott 2006: 1105). As a result, status may be furthered or improved for some middle-class migrants through the very act of migrating (Fog Olwig 2007: 100; see also Torresan 2007; 2012). Similarly, Ley-Cervantes argues that “failing to make oneself at home in the world goes against the values of cosmopolitanism and ‘openness’ that middling migrants are supposed to hold in high regard” (2012: 140). Hence, a number of studies on privileged migration have tended to focus on the realisation of the self it involves and the kind of lifestyle which can or cannot be achieved through movement.

In her study of expats living in the Cayman Islands, Amit describes the unexpected isolation which many felt as a result of their migration. She describes how life for her participants was “a

lonely business full of unexpected ruptures which in themselves are hard to overcome.” It was not a site of exciting new opportunities for self-realisation (Amit and Rapport 2002: 37). Here, the experience of migration acted to “dislocate a sense of belonging and rootedness as [much as] redirect it” (Amit 1998: 54). Amit allows us to see that loneliness and unmet expectations can have an enormous impact upon privileged migrants and the way they evaluate their lives. Such feelings were also present amongst my participants when life in Barcelona didn’t turn out to be all they expected it to be. However, such feelings did not encompass the entirety of their migration experiences nor, according to migrants’ narratives themselves, do they account for their ultimate participation in activism.

Although privileged migration does not always “result in a strong or enduring identification with one’s nation of origin” (Colic-Peisker 2010: 467), some studies have focused on how it can cause individuals to re-evaluate home (Conradson and Latham 2007). Wiles argues that amongst New Zealanders living in London, the idea of ‘New Zealand’ as ‘home’ became one of the main structuring factors of the migration experience. She describes how home was reproduced through conversations about values like the family and living outdoors, through activities such as playing sports, or by viewing media relating to New Zealand. Wiles notes that New Zealand was not viewed as a static entity and that not all migrants thought about it in the same way. Rather, she argues, discussions about home created a discursive space in which “new understandings of home and self in relation to home” were allowed to develop (2008: 127). Here, then, “New Zealand as home” was defined “through the experience of being elsewhere”. As a result, home became a “slippery, multi-layered, ongoing process” as migrants questioned what it meant to them (2008: 116). Similarly, and as I will show, my participants also questioned what Mexico meant to them as a place. This was an important contributory factor to their felt needs to become involved in activism. However, it occurred in tandem with other experiences relating to a transformation in their understanding of politics and a sense of somehow being altered by the news coming out of Mexico.

A study carried out in Madrid by Ley-Cervantes has already highlighted the fact that middle- and upper-class Mexicans living in the city underwent changes in how they understood 'home'. She describes how they experienced their migration as inherently contradictory. They missed the privileges they were entitled to in Mexico (living in gated communities, not having to use public transport and having domestic help). At the same time, they appreciated certain aspects of life in Madrid (like feeling less vulnerable to violence and sexual-harassment in the street and free from the constraints of following a conservative familial model). The result of having to adapt to a less privileged life in Madrid - what Ley-Cervantes terms a "bath of reality" (Ley Cervantes 2012: 147; see also Margolis 1990) - was a "process of estrangement from Mexico that allowed them to re-evaluate it as a place to live". Due to this, she argues, "home stops being an unselfconscious process" (2012: 180).

Her informants seem to be evaluating Mexico as a desirable place to live for them *as individuals*, and within the context of their belonging to a privileged social group (a practice which has been noted by others writing about the experiences of middle-class migrants, such as Kurotani (2007)). In doing so, they acknowledge the presence of poverty, racism, insecurity and sexism in Mexico. However, they do not seem to take these realisations further by becoming involved in long-distance activism (or at least, Ley-Cervantes gives no indication that they do). They may talk about 'home' in newly critical ways, but they do not then try to change it. Instead, they search for the most comfortable ways to *live out their own lives*. This, then, is a position which contributes to the maintenance of the status quo. It is a practice which allows for a Foucauldian preservation of privilege whilst seemingly acting to criticise it. How, then, do such questionings of 'home' form part of a process which culminates in political action? The differences between Barcelona and Madrid as places most certainly play a role here. Also, as I argue in the body of the thesis, the key differences between the two groups are the way they portray the role of strong emotion in making living in Catalonia, and reading the news from home, transformative and intensely personal experiences.

Another locus of anthropological interest in privileged migration has been tied to its potential to redefine notions of citizenship. In her study of transnational elite Chinese families, Ong argues that “advanced education, capital accumulation, hyper-mobility, and flexibility are the passports not only to wealth production but also to the power to rule others”. This means that “transnational skills, not intra-national suffering, have become the moral capital of citizenship” (2007: 64). In a context in which people increasingly form part of transnational networks, Ong argues that the notion of citizenship as a “watertight category” becomes diffused. As a result, “norms of belonging” become defined through forms of “everyday behaviour” (2007: 55, 56). Chinese kinship and familial regimes, along with nation-states and the market, all affect the ways in which elite families are able to “to both circumvent *and* benefit from nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation”. Ong describes them as enacting a “flexible citizenship” (1998: 136). For less privileged members of such family networks, however, they can become a scene of violence and exploitation due to the deleterious conditions their relatives oblige them to work in (Ong: 139).

Ong’s work very much highlights the power of privileged migrants, and their capacity not only to transform the terms of international citizenship, but also to create new spaces of discrimination. However, the experience of Mexican activists in Barcelona tells us that it is not always the case that the activities of privileged migrants lead to an expansion of personal power and a transformation of the moral capital of citizenship. Rather than being a redundant base for the articulation of citizenship, “intra-national suffering” in Mexico was at the heart of my participants’ activism. The intra-national equality they asserted, as I will argue in later chapters, arose from the particular (cultural) importance which emotional ways of relating to news from the homeland took on with regards to creating new spaces of cosmopolitan solidarity between different sectors of Mexican society.

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, I dwell on the ways in which privileged migrants account for their political activation. I focus on the way their descriptions of the emotional ways

they relate to home form part of a wider cultural trope of social justice through which strong emotions provide the possibility of engendering new cosmopolitan feelings of connectedness to different 'others' within Mexico. This results in feelings of equality and shared belonging which are not encouraged by mainstream nationalism in Mexico. I also argue that the form of activism enacted, and the duration of an individual's willingness to continue to participate in political collectives, was intimately related to different inhabitations of cosmopolitanism, and different understandings of the significance or purpose of emotion. Carro-Ripalda argues that "certain kinds of pain happen in specific socio-cultural and historical circumstances. Not only do those historical conditions have an impact on the day-to-day lives of people, but also persons themselves engage in constant dialogues and interactions about the kind of world into which they have come and the one they would like to inhabit. People bring cultural resources available to them to these ongoing conversations (Shotter 1993), and use those "resourced", culturally significant conversations, to open up different orders of possibilities" (2009: 9). Hence, migrant participation in historicised tropes of social justice were not homogenous but were in fact subject to individual consideration and interpretation. This, I claim, is the key to understanding the emergence of certain forms of long-distance activism amongst privileged migrants. I will now clarify my understanding of the terms 'affect', 'emotion, and 'cosmopolitanism' in preparation for their theoretical deployment in the rest of this account.

1.4 Emotion and Affect

Within the literature there tends to be a split between studies which focus on 'emotion', and those which dwell on 'affect'. Whilst often taken to be the other's equivalent, the two terms actually refer to different (yet inextricably connected) aspects of experience. Whilst 'emotion' is a feeling for which there is a culturally acknowledged descriptive word, such as anger, fear, or

happiness (something which is both felt and *acknowledged* as such), affect relates more to an embodied aspect of experience which is not articulable and is pre-conscious. Both concepts have a long history within anthropology. Here I will briefly consider their meanings in order to clarify my own understanding of the terms.

1.4.1 Emotion:

Much of the work done in anthropology around emotions has focused on understanding their source and their role in social life. Culture and Personality theorists, such as Mead (1949 [1928]) applied a psychoanalytical perspective to their understanding of emotion and “claimed that personality structures, which partly reflected emotional dispositions, were strongly shaped by cultural forces”. Inspired by Freud, such theorists looked for universal psychological patterns underlying human behaviour (Svašek 2005a: 6). Later researchers took a cognitive stance towards emotion, arguing that emotions reflected a biologically-rooted and universal human potential reproduced within individuals. As such, they were seen as pertaining to inner and private cognitive states (Myers 1973: 343 cited in Svašek 2005a: 8).

From the 1980s, however, biological and universalist perspectives were criticised by theorists who viewed emotion as being culturally constructed (Lutz 1986; Lyon 1995: 245). This work focused on the self as being socially constituted, and emotions were taken as culturally-influenced signs to be read by others (Lutz and White 1986: 417; Solomon 1984). In this view, “thought is always culturally patterned and infused with feelings, which themselves reflect a culturally ordered past” (Rosaldo 1984a: 137). Such an understanding of emotion also viewed it as inherently communicative, where an individual’s relationship to their social context was expressed through feeling. This view understands emotion as a “social performance” (Levy 1984: 222). Levy argued that “the emotional feeling...serves to *mobilise* culture...both as an internalised system of representations in response to the problem produced by the feeling and as the responses of others

to the manifestations of that feeling” (1984: 224). The constructionist perspective, however, has been criticised for relativizing *and* exoticising emotions, - “putting them on a level with other cultural categories and thus presenting the ethnographer with what is essentially a problem of translation in a field of limitless difference” (Beatty 2005: 19).

Other anthropologists took the view that common experience could generate emotional understanding between people *despite* cultural difference (Rosaldo 1984b). Beatty calls this “the new universalism”, in which the researcher engages “in empathy, a resonance, even intuition; a feeling-with the native based on common or analogous experience” (2005: 20). A problem which Lutz and White identify in this view is, however, relates to the fact that “the concept of empathy presumes what it is often used to prove, which is the universal and transparent nature of an emotional experience construed as internal” (1986: 415).

Another anthropological perspective on emotion has focused on the significance of language (White 1993). It explores “how emotional meaning is externalised in social situations to become evocative and socially persuasive” (White 1993: 36). In discussing the “politics of everyday life”, Abu-Lughod and Lutz argue that emotions are constructed within the ongoing context of social life, and especially within discursive practices (1990: 1). They claim that the meaning of emotion is therefore located within the public performance and articulation of discourse (1990: 8). Applying a Foucauldian perspective to their analysis, they argue that a focus on discourse can be particularly illustrative of the role of power relations within a society in driving emotional expressions (1990: 14). The emphasis here is on emotion as being an inherently social phenomenon (1990: 10). However, such an emphasis on discourse alone has been criticised, since it “largely ignores the fact that emotions are generally experienced in the body.” As such, it “potentially misses *experiential* differences and similarities” of certain emotions (Svašek 2005a: 12). It also seems to imply an intentional deployment of emotions, giving them an instrumental quality and functional role, which is not always the case. It does not make the unexpected emergence and individually felt aspect of emotions visible.

Other theorists prefer to emphasise the importance of social structures in affecting emotions (Lyon 1995: 248). This is seen to necessitate the inclusion of the body in emotion, without giving “priority to an innate biology of being” (Lyon 1995: 256). Indeed phenomenological approaches to emotion within anthropology have sought to reincorporate the bodily dimension of experience into our analyses (Becker 1994; French 1994; Low 1994; Lyon and Barbalet 1994). These perspectives view the body as social and relational, and therefore see emotion as being inherently embodied (Jenkins and Valiente 1994: 176; Lyon and Barbalet 1994: 55). Csordas describes this aspect of experience as pertaining to “somatic modes of attention”, which are “culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others”. In such a view, “to attend to a bodily sensation is not to attend to the body as an isolated object, but to attend to the body’s situation in the world” (1993: 138; see also Csordas 1994b: 270).

Scholars such as Leavitt tried to bridge the two perspectives of universalism and constructionism, recognising that any understanding of emotion needs to incorporate both aspects (see also Josephides 2005; Shweder 1985:207; Svašek 2005b). Leavitt argued that emotion “involves both meaning and feeling” (1996: 518). In acknowledging the social *and* biological nature of emotions, she claims that we “would have to see emotions as primarily neither meanings nor feelings, but as experiences learned and expressed in the body in social interactions through the mediation of a system of signs, verbal and nonverbal. We would have to see them as fundamentally social rather than simply as individual in nature; as generally expressed, rather than as generally ineffable; and as both cultural and situational. But we would equally recognise in theory what we all assume in our daily lives: that emotions are *felt* in bodily experience, not just know or thought or appraised” (1996: 526). Similarly, Tonkin notes that “We have evolved as social beings who must connect with others to survive, and some of the ways to do so are below the thresholds of consciousness.” This occurs alongside our “bodily intuitions” (2005: 64, 65).

Such bridging attempts have been furthered by others, significantly so in Milton’s notion of the ‘ecology of emotions’. She argues that “emotions are what link us, as individuals, to our

surroundings” and that they play an important role in knowledge creation (2005c: 25). Milton observes that viewing emotion as *both* “meaning and feeling, is itself a product of a system of a language and thought which separates these things in the first place” (2005c: 26). In other words, the conceptual split in anthropology between viewing emotion as either biological or cultural (or a combination of both) is still embedded in the Cartesian dualisms of Western thought which separate the mind from the body, and culture from nature (Leavitt 1996: 515; White 1993: 29). In arguing for an ecological understanding of emotion, Milton claims that emotions “are mechanisms through which an individual human being is connected to and learns from their environment” (2005c: 31). An ‘environment’ in this context can refer to both social and non-social surroundings (2005b: 203).

What can we take from this rich history of anthropological studies of emotion? I would argue that perspectives which bridge the different thematic threads within the literature provide us with a practical understanding of emotion; one which encompasses multiple aspects of human experience. Each theoretical tradition adds an important facet to our understanding of emotion, including its discursive, social, empathetic *and* bodily dimensions. However, isolating one aspect of experience as the root of emotion eclipses its embeddedness in other experiential avenues. Svašek argues that “it is useful to regard emotions as dynamic processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves *vis-à-vis* others, and shape their subjectivities....The self, in this perspective, is neither regarded as a closed container of passions, nor as an entity that simply reacts to forces from outside, but rather as a multiple, relational being-in-the-world that is captured by his or her surroundings, engaging with past, present, and future situations” (Svašek 2010: 868). To this I would add the need to consider the corporeal dimensions of emotion, and the way in which its embodiment is a reaction to, and action upon, the world. As such, its physicality cannot be ignored (Csordas 1993; Lyon 1995). Similarly, this ‘world’ relates to both social and non-social indicators (Milton 2005c). It is also, however, important to consider the pre-cognitive aspects of emotion – that is, the role of *affect*.

1.4.2 Affect:

Whilst it is usually taken to signify 'emotion', there is in fact "no stable definition of affect" (Thrift 2004: 59). It relates to the way our bodies subconsciously react to the world (Conradson and Latham 2007: 236). When those affects are felt, and are consciously registered, they become emotions. However, it is not necessary for affect to be actively 'felt' in order for it to influence the way we react to the world (Bertelsen and Murphie 2010: 140). Neither does it have to be consciously articulated in order for it to be felt (Clough and Halley 2007: 2). Affect does not refer to stable, concrete states (Bertelsen and Murphie 2010: 146). Rather, it is located in the "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing". In this way, it is "beyond emotion" (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 1). It is not "something individuals straightforwardly have", since "affect produces subjectivities; it does not just reflect them" (Rutherford 2012: 689). It exists within the relations between things, rather than "within the interiority of a subject" (Parreñas 2012: 674).

Massumi, who refers to affect as 'intensity', argues that it is manifested within the body "at its interface with things" (1996: 219). It is so rapidly produced that it becomes virtual. He argues that "since the virtual is unliveable even as it happens, it can be thought of as a form of superlinear abstraction" (1996: 224). Therefore, naming an emotion means "the taming of an affect" (Rutherford 2012: 689). Massumi argues that "an emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativisable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognised" (Massumi 1996: 221). As such, affect is an emotion's "point of their emergence". It is "immanent" to experience, "always in it but not of it" (Massumi 2002: 33). In this sense, "emotion is the most intense (most contracted) expression of that *capture* - and of the fact that something has always and again escaped. Something remains

unactualised, inseparable from but unassimilable to any *particular*, functionally anchored perspective.” This, Massumi argues, is “the autonomy of affect” (2002: 35). As Crapanzano notes, “interior experience always exceeds exterior expression” (Crapanzano and Jackson 2014: 774).

Segiworth and Gregg argue that, since affect is inherently open-ended and located in-between things and relations, it is integrally related “to a body’s perceptual *becoming*” (2010: 3). Not dissimilarly, a naturalistic approach takes its inspiration from the work of Spinoza and Deleuze “and hinges on adding capacities through interaction in a world which is constantly becoming” (Thrift 2004: 61). In this view, mind and nature, body and world are merged in a way which means that “knowing proceeds in parallel with the body’s physical encounters, out of interaction” (Thrift 2004: 61). Hence, subjectivity is constantly changing as a result of encounters with other individuals and things. As such, “things are never separable from their relations with the world”. Affect is thus constantly being created whilst also creating (Thrift 2004: 62).⁵ This is an understanding of affect or “sensual intensities” which “may move through human bodies, but that do not necessarily emerge from them” (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 12). Massumi refers to this as “the incorporeal dimension of the body” (2002: 14).

Richard and Rudnyckij argue that affects can have repercussions for the way we act within the world and for how we react to our relations with others (2009: 59). Rather than being found only in discursive or bodily language, it is to be found in both. It is inherently relational (Brennan 2004: 3) whilst also being historically and politically contingent (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 9; Parreñas 2012: 683; Richard and Rudnyckij 2009: 61). Navaro-Yashin argues that affect comes from

⁵ Another perspective on affect uses a psychoanalytic approach based around the idea of physical drives and affect as determining behaviour. Discussing the work of Sedgwick and Tomkins, Thrift explains that drives relate to meeting physical and short term needs within the body. Meanwhile, affect impacts upon behaviour over a much wider time scale, and much wider range of behaviours (2004: 61). In contrast, a Darwinian approach to affect sees emotions as being universal, and a product of evolution. This argues that certain expressions are shared cross-culturally and, indeed, across certain species. These relate to physiological changes relating to specific emotions which are universally experienced (such as anger and fear) (Thrift 2004: 64).

subjectivities as well as being generated by objects, documents, environments and institutions (2012: 33). However, it is important to remember that “affect is produced neither by materialities nor by the inner world alone; it is produced through their interaction” (2012: 162). The affect discharged by such materialities, she argues, is inherently politicised and historically dependent. She argues that “affect is to be researched not only as pertaining to or emerging out of human subjectivity (or the self), but also as engendered out of political engagements with space and entanglements in materialities” (2012: 134). In this scenario “affects are complex and changeable phenomena” and “may also transform, metamorphose, and take new shape or colour through time” (2012: 215).

It therefore becomes apparent that, when considering experience, both affect *and* emotion can implicate subjectivities in different ways. When our bodies react to the world in ways which are not consciously felt (but which nevertheless influence our actions within it), affect takes on a significant role in driving our experience. When those reactions become *felt* and acknowledged, i.e., when they become identified as emotions, their importance in influencing actions within the world, and our interpretations of it, remains strong. In this thesis, the duality and mutual implication of affect and emotion becomes visible in the way migrants continually evoke a sense of strong emotion arising uncontrollably from within when describing their political activation. In the chapters which follow I show how they become mutually implicated in migrant narratives, and so become part of a transformative process which contributes to the forms of privileged migrant activism which emerged amongst Mexicans in Barcelona.

1.5 Defining Cosmopolitanism:

Throughout this thesis, I argue that the emotional ways in which some privileged Mexican migrants related to news from home created the possibility of expressing a form of cosmopolitanism which recognised equality amongst all members of the nation. This was asserted

through solidarity, and was an equality based on feelings of co-humanity and mutual belonging. Such cosmopolitanism was inherently humanistic and rooted in the way migrants described themselves as relating to the victims of events happening at home on an empathetic basis. As a result, uncontrollable emotions and cosmopolitan assertions of equality formed part of a particular, historicised and revolutionary cultural trope within Mexico based around the pursuit of social justice. It is this, their accounts suggest, which could lead to participation in activism oriented towards Mexico from abroad. They formed part of a particularly Mexican rationality of revolutionary change within the social order. I also argue that different inhabitations of cosmopolitanism were rooted in the different ways individual migrants viewed the importance of emotion, and could affect the way migrants evaluated the effectiveness of certain protests and the way they judged the actions of other activists. Hence, forming part of a particular trope of social justice by no means meant that such tropes were homogeneously enacted or understood by migrants (Carro-Ripalda 2009; Noble 2013). Before we come to see how this developed, however, a discussion of the various ways that 'cosmopolitanism' has been approached in the literature is necessary. This will allow me to contextualise the meaning with which I apply the term to my arguments in this account.

Some anthropologists have described cosmopolitanism as an aesthetic horizon based in a desire to participate in the cultural worlds of others (Hannerz 1990: 240). Hannerz describes it as involving "a stance toward diversity itself", in which coming to know other ways of life is viewed as inherently desirable." It is based on an aesthetic "search for contrasts rather than uniformity" in which individuals come to be "aficionados" of cultures which themselves are seen as "art works" (1990: 240). Such cultural competence, according to Hannerz, inherently affects one's understanding of the self. Each encounter with the Other means that individual horizons are expanded and "a little more of the world is somehow under control" (1990: 240). This has connotations with the idea of mobile, un-rooted elites searching for a certain kind of aesthetic (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 6) - those 'citizens of the world' (cf. Calhoun 2002: 91; Friedman 2007:

184 - 192; Hannerz 2007: 74) who are detached “from the bonds, commitments, and affiliations that constrain ordinary nation-bound lives” (Robbins 1998b: 1). Ethnographic studies have shown that there are people who actively inhabit a cosmopolitan persona through which they try to enact this kind of aesthetic ideal (Colic-Peisker 2010; Ong 1996; Ram 2008). However, it is important to remember that whilst this kind of cosmopolitan cultural aesthetic may be openly expressed by some, it is an openness to a specific kind of ‘other’ which is partial. It does not signify ‘openness’ to all ‘others’ (Latour 2004; Van der Veer 2002; Werbner 2008a). Other scholars, however, have taken alternative approaches to the study of cosmopolitanism; approaches which reach beyond an aesthetic appreciation of other cultures.

Beck claims that cosmopolitanism “means a *recognition* of otherness, both external and internal to any society” (2004: 438, my emphasis). As a stance towards the world which carries political implications, such an understanding of the term implies “an affirmation of the other as both different and the same” (2004: 439). Latour, however, critiques the western ethnocentrism he perceives in Beck’s argument, and argues “there are more ways to be other, and vastly more others, than the most tolerant souls alive can conceive” (2004: 453). As such, the potentiality (and likelihood) of such an ‘open’ state-of-being is reduced. Werbner similarly claims that “in its most fundamental sense, cosmopolitanism implies an openness to strangers and strangerhood or difference” (1999: 26). This refers to a willingness to engage with, rather than exclude, those who are different to oneself. However, Van der Veer applies a post-colonial perspective to such definition and argues that, when engaging with the other, we need to “ask what intellectual and aesthetic openness entails and on what terms one engages with the other” (2002: 165). His suspicions converge with a point made by Robbins, who refers to the fact that “no one actually is or ever can be a cosmopolitan in the sense of belonging nowhere....Nor can anyone be a cosmopolitan in the sense of belonging everywhere....The interest of the term *cosmopolitanism* is located, then, not in its full theoretical extension...but rather (paradoxically) in its local applications” (1998a: 260). This problematizes the possibility of an individual pursuing an aesthetic cosmopolitanism by

appreciating a multitude of cultures (and being tied to none), or of being able to connect with all Others simply by inhabiting a stance of openness towards difference. It calls into question the notion of any one individual being in a state of constant, un-rooted openness. Robbin's acknowledgement of the need to consider the "local applications" of cosmopolitanism creates the possibility for ethnographic explorations of how it plays out on the ground.

Anthropological studies of cosmopolitanism have shown how different kinds of 'others' exist and are produced according specific social and historical contexts (Malkki 1995). They have also highlighted how different ways of being 'open' can create their "own exclusions" (Kahn 2008: 266). Anthropological explorations of cosmopolitanism show that it "is always, in some sense at least, vernacular, historically and spatially positioned, and hence also necessarily political, contested, dialectical" (Werbner 2008a: 13). One's ability (or even willingness) to engage with an Other is dependent upon one's emplacement in specific social, historical and political contexts, and so the practice of cosmopolitanism by any individual will be inherently partial. That does not mean to say that more than one form of cosmopolitanism cannot be enacted at any one time (Robbins 1998b: 2). At the same time, then, that enactments of cosmopolitanism can be multiple (and 'discrepant' – cf. Clifford 1998), they do not exist independently of experience. Cosmopolitanisms, or practicing openness towards those who are different, are built up out of the specificities of lived experience (Malcomson 1998: 240; Robbins 1998b: 6, 260).

Thus, we arrive at the understanding of cosmopolitanism which I apply in this account. In its most basic form, cosmopolitanism represents being 'open' to an 'other'. An 'other' in this context may refer to someone of a different social class, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, religion or political belief (and so on). This does not mean that a cosmopolitan is someone who is open to all forms of 'otherness', since cosmopolitanism is inherently partial *and* multiple. An individual can be open to one kind of 'other' at the same time that they preclude that possibility for different 'others'. They can also be 'open' in different ways. Openness may imply a willingness to understand and learn from difference. It may also mean recognising that someone is, in fact, an equal or 'the same'.

It is this idea of cosmopolitanism as being open to different kinds of others in multiple, varied, and politicised ways which I would like to take into the chapters which follow.

1.6 Structure of the thesis:

How do privileged Mexican migrants in Barcelona account for their own political activation?

In order to answer this question, each chapter focuses on a specific sub-question. These are:

1. How do privileged Mexican migrants portray the the personal implications of migrating to Barcelona?
2. Why were emotional reactions to the news implicated in a sense of politicised, personal transformation amongst individual migrants?
3. How do migrants portray emotion as cementing political commitment?
4. What were the implications of asserting emotional *or* cosmopolitan tropes of experience when conversing with other Mexicans?
5. How was an individual's engagement with activism shaped by cosmopolitanism and differential understandings of the place of emotion in political action?

I begin by giving an account of my time in the field. In chapter two I describe each of the activist groups I worked with, and explain the ways in which memberships could overlap. I discuss the kinds of relationships I was able to build with my participants. I describe the qualities which our interactions assumed, and how they allowed emotion to become visible in their interview narratives. I also explain my decision to dwell on the extended interview narratives of my participants in this account. I then discuss the difficulties which participating in the activism of those

I worked with presented me with as a researcher. I do so by describing the problems I faced in finding an analytic route which did not simply reproduce the narratives of my informants. I also describe the challenges presented by the guilt I felt in shifting from an activist to researcher position. I explain the problems I encountered when coming to terms with the idea of conducting research on 'elites', and the role my data played in contradicting my original preconceptions.

In chapter three I explore the implications of migrating to Barcelona for individual migrants. I focus on the migration narratives of a number of activists, and show how they belie a sense of ambiguity with regards to life in Catalonia. This ambiguity, I argue, had the ability to engender both a strengthening of attachment to Mexico *and* a newly articulated sense of critique against Mexican society within their narratives. I discuss the extent to which their accounts suggest that this ambiguity arose from Barcelona specifically, or whether it referred to a generalised condition of modernity and city life. I then focus on the specific characteristics of Barcelona as a place and its capacity to generate some of the ambiguity present in activists' interview narratives. I also ask whether it could be related to the condition of 'being a migrant' in general. Ultimately, I argue that the narratives of individual migrants dwell on the innerliness of migration's impact (its ambiguity and resulting emotions), and show how it could provoke changes in the way in Mexico was viewed.

Chapter four moves on to look at the way emotional discourses and performances permeated the way migrant activists thought about and discussed what was happening at home. By analysing the words individual migrants chose to describe their feelings upon reading the news, the tones in which those narratives were delivered, and their reactions to events unfolding in Mexico when amongst other migrants, I show how they experienced the news as a site of intense personal transformation. I argue that emotionally reacting to the news meant that it became a sight of self- and societal-critique in which individuals felt a need for the comfort of others undergoing similar intensities of feeling. This formed part of a continuation of a particular cultural milieu of revolutionary social change within Mexico, and charged such narratives with a certain cultural coherency containing within it the potential for politicised and cosmopolitan social action. I

demonstrate how the ambiguities of the migration experience as described by individuals were important in framing the way in which news from home was received by migrants, and became part of the transformative process in which Mexican society, and personal complicity with structures of inequality, became visible to individual migrants.

Chapter five then addresses the extent to which emotional narratives played a role in solidifying the political commitment of my participants. It does so by focusing on the experience of activists participating in the project 'Menos Días Aquí'. This carried out a daily count of those who had died as a result of the drugs war in Mexico. I explore how activist accounts emphasise the role of engagement and detachment in influencing how they related to the victims of the conflict. I show how participants in the project describe the count as a site of closeness with those who were suffering in Mexico. By emplacing themselves in lives of those they counted, I argue that individual activists suggested that they came to 'know' the victims. As such, emotional experience became a site of knowledge creation. I also describe how practices of detachment became important in ensuring the completion of the project's aims. I argue that the overall experience of the count meant that individual activists experienced it as a sight of privileged knowledge about the conflict, and as a sight of increased personal responsibility to act. I end the chapter by discussing the potential of the project, and the emotions it engendered, to create a form of cosmopolitanism amongst counters, in which an openness to unequal others within Mexico could be asserted on the basis of shared suffering.

In chapter six, I discuss the implications of emotional and cosmopolitan tropes of experience amongst migrants. I describe the way some migrants carried out protest events in ways which heightened the emotional intensity of their activities. I show how their emotional responses to their activism could overlap with, and engender, assertions of the legitimacy to act from abroad. However, I also argue that not everyone related to their activism in this way. The political life-histories of individuals were important when it came to articulating protests. This meant that some activists sought to reduce the emotional content of certain events in an attempt to achieve other

aims. I show how such desires were implicated in universalised inhabitations of cosmopolitanism which sought to include local people in Mexican struggles (and vice-versa). As a result, I argue, multiple forms of cosmopolitanism could come into friction with one another, and create a forum for the critique of the activities of others. As such, both emotional and cosmopolitan tropes had repercussions for the way in which activism was experienced by individual migrants, and for how it was interpreted (or intended to be interpreted) by others.

Chapter seven extends this theme and asks how cosmopolitanism could shape the experience of activism. I discuss the conflicting viewpoints which could exist amongst the members of a group, and which became apparent during my interviews. By bringing the perspectives of multiple individuals into conversation with one another, I show how debates about class and political affiliation could preclude the possibility of mutual comprehension between group members. I also illustrate how individuals could end up talking past one another when it came to reaching consensus in group assemblies. However, I then show that, in some cases, tolerance between activists of different political sensibilities was possible by practicing a politics of patience. In the act of reaching consensus, certain activists could try to overcome intra-class differences in the interest of getting things done. I argue that looking at the way activists related to one another highlights the presence of multiple forms of cosmopolitanism within the same field of action. These could act to truncate or extend one another depending on the individual perspective in question. It is important to understand the influences of such different cosmopolitanisms, I argue, since they affected individual desires for continued collaboration – the existence or decline of activist groups depended upon them.

In chapter eight, I return to the central question of the thesis: how do privileged Mexican migrants account for their political activation from abroad? I argue that a focus on emotion, affect and cosmopolitanism opens a window onto how migrants themselves understood and articulated their own experiences. I argue that a focus on the interview narratives of my participants throughout this account allowed the importance of emotion (and the sense of it rising from within)

to become ethnographically visible. It also brought into view the multiple forms of cosmopolitanism which were being practiced at any one time. Ultimately, I highlight the importance of affect, emotion and cosmopolitanism within migrant narratives, and emphasise their cultural coherence within a historicised milieu of processes of social change within Mexico. As such, migrant narratives take on a particular coherency when relating instances of emotion rising uncontrollably from within to experiences of politicisation and long-distance activism.

Chapter Two:

The Field

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter will describe my field experience. I begin by introducing the collectives with which I worked in Barcelona. In the text-boxes provided I describe the main aims of each group and give an account of how they were founded. In the main text, I explain why so many activist groups existed when so few Mexicans in the city participated politically with Mexico. I also give an idea of the similarities and differences between their approaches to political protest. I then proceed to describe the complexities of negotiating the anonymity of my participants in this account. I describe the kind of data I was able to gather in the field, and explain why I have chosen to build this account around my interview data. I discuss the potential of my interviews to create spaces for the emotional narration of activists' experiences and offer some thoughts on why that was so. I reflect upon the difficulties I experienced in distancing myself from the political anxieties of my participants, as well as from the topics of their activism. I describe the analytic process I went through after leaving the field in order to be able to 'see' my data from an ethnographic, rather than activist, perspective. I also describe the guilt I felt when attempting to do so and how I tried to overcome it. Finally, I reflect upon how I experienced the field as a site through which to overcome my prejudices about studying 'elite' groups. I discuss the impact this has had upon the way I view

the approach taken towards the study of elites within anthropology, and give some thoughts on how this could be conceptualised alternatively.

2.2 The field:

In contrast to other Latin American groups in Catalonia, who represent a largely underprivileged migration, Mexicans form a privileged sector of the immigrant population. The majority are aged between 20 and 49 years of age (Idescat 2013). They are generally postgraduate students, professionals, or the spouses of European citizens. They reside in the country legally, and have access to visas and residence permits (Ley Cervantes 2012: 37). There are just over three hundred thousand Latin Americans in Catalonia, and they account for almost 28% of the region's total foreign population. Within this population, however, only seven and a half thousand are Mexican. They account for merely 0.65% of the total foreign population of the region. Within Barcelona there are around a hundred thousand Latin American immigrants, four and a half thousand of whom are Mexican. As such, Mexicans form a tiny minority of the total number of Latin American migrants living in the city, and in the region as a whole (Idescat 2013). Due to their relatively small representation in the region, I originally feared that I would be unable to find any Mexicans willing to participate in my research when I first got to Barcelona.

I had come across the web pages of a number of activist groups before leaving the UK, and tried to contact them by email. When I left for Catalonia, I still hadn't heard anything from them. However, on my second day in the city, I received a reply from two of them inviting me to their meetings and to participate in their activities. The first email was from Cristina, a Catalan member of two anti-war groups named Nuestra Aparente Rendición (see Box 1) and the Movimiento Ciudadano de Mexicanos en Barcelona (see Box 2). The second was from L'Adhesiva, a group which focused on indigenous rights and anti-repression in Mexico and Catalonia (see Box 3).

Box 1: Nuestra Aparente Rendición (NAR)

NAR began life as a blog in September 2010 in reaction to the massacre of San Fernando, Tamaulipas. This incident involved the discovery of the abandoned bodies of 72 Central American migrants killed by members of organised crime in Mexico. In reaction to this event, Lolita (a Mexican-Catalan writer and founder of NAR) posted a letter on the internet calling for action. It was addressed to other writers and intellectuals. The post became a blog in which people contributed articles, testimonies, poetry, and interviews about the violence. The page was soon so swamped by responses that it became both a website and a peace association. As an association, it is composed entirely of volunteers who work from outside and within Mexico. Its members analyse and provide information on what is happening as a result of the drugs war. They do this by publishing testimonies, information, discussions, investigations, and letters on its website. Behind the scenes NAR gives psychological help, support, and advice to victims and other activists. It is also working to set up a community radio station in Mexico to give further information on the dead and disappeared. Each member of NAR also works on their own projects, be that writing, journalism, academia, or community work. NAR also runs a project named Menos Días Aquí, which provides the only publicly available national count of the dead in Mexico. It counts and names those who have died as a result of extreme violence in Mexico on a daily basis (see Box 5). The database featured greatly in the development of the Bordamos Por La Paz movement in Mexico. This involved groups of people coming together to sew the names and stories of victims onto white handkerchiefs. A Bordamos Por La Paz group was also set up by members of NAR in Barcelona.

I met with NAR and L'Adhesiva during my first week of fieldwork. I was bowled over by the generosity of spirit shown to me, and the ease with which they incorporated me into their activities. They in turn introduced me to a number of political and cultural associations operating in the city. In total, this amounted to twelve groups. These groups responded to particular political situations

within Mexico. They were founded at a time of corruption scandals (and a general lack of trust towards the government) in Mexico, and in the context of disputes surrounding elections in 2006 and 2012 (Gibler 2009; Gibler 2011; Hamnett 2006; Hernandez 2012). This culminated in the eventual return of PRI, the party which had ruled Mexico for 71 years until 2000. They were formed within a context of governmental and state collusion with *el narco* (the drugs industry), an ever increasing state emphasis on neoliberal politics, and rising levels of inequality (Gibler 2009; Gibler 2011; Watt and Zepeda 2012). Increasing involvement of civil society in protests had also led to brutal state repression of such movements, which acted to further mistrust of the state (Denham and CASA Collective 2008; Gibler 2012; Turati 2012; Watt and Zepeda 2012). The combination of these issues formed a constant backdrop to the concerns of the groups I worked with.

Box 2: Movimiento de Ciudadanos Mexicanos en Barcelona (MCMB)

The MCMB was set up as a mirror group for the Movement for Peace, Justice and Dignity in Mexico (MPJD). This movement began when the poet Javier Sicilia made demands for peace after his son was murdered in 2011 by members of organised crime. A series of marches for peace ensued, as did the establishment of a movement which provided victims with support and demanded to know the whereabouts of those who have disappeared. In response to the marches for peace carried out by the MPJD in Mexico, a number of Mexicans living in Barcelona came together via social networking sites to organise a mirror-demonstration. They convoked a general meeting where it was decided that group would continue with the name 'MCMB'. They continued to protest against the violence in Mexico by carrying out marches and symbolic events in support of peace. Most of its activities had occurred before I arrived in Barcelona, since by that time it had run into serious problems. According to the members I interviewed, this was due to internal conflicts about the purpose of the group.

I limit my discussion in this account to an additional three groups together with those already mentioned. This will allow me to focus on those groups which focused solely on political issues. These were Mexicanos en Resistencia (see Box 3), #YoSoy132 Barcelona (see Box 4) and MORENA Barcelona (see Box 4). I spent nine months in Barcelona, carrying out intensive participant observation with these collectives. Since then I have continued with my own activist commitments which began in the field, and have received visits from some of my informants. I keep in touch with them over skype, email, and social networking sites. This has amounted to an additional twenty months of prolonged contact and activist participation.

Box 3: L'Adhesiva and Mexicanos en Resistencia.

Mexicanos en Resistencia was formed in response to the alleged electoral fraud which happened during the 2006 presidential elections in Mexico. This also coincided with brutal state repression of a protest in a town called Atenco, Estado de Mexico. A protest which began with the eviction of flower sellers from a market town had led to residents blocking the highway to Mexico City. Police met protestors with bullets and tear-gas. A number of protestors were killed, and women detained by the police were sexually assaulted. These events caused a number of people in Barcelona to come together and create a space where they could protest. A year later they would also centre their activities on state repression of protests in the city of Oaxaca, which occurred in response to the violent eviction of a teachers' union sit-in. The group carried out demonstrations, protest marches and events designed to raise-awareness of the issues they focused on.

L'Adhesiva was formed by members of Mexicanos en Resistencia who had also been active in a Catalan group which supported the Zapatistas, along with members of another group dedicated to challenging high energy prices in southern Mexico. It was conceived of as a platform where people interested in the Zapatista movement, indigenous rights, and combatting state repression in both Mexico and Catalonia could come together. It had a mixed membership of Mexicans and Catalans, and had strong links to the local squatter movement. They carried out protests and held

discussion events where they would raise awareness of the issues they tackled. They also organised concerts, parties and meals in order to raise money in support of indigenous communities and political prisoners in Mexico. Often these would be held in occupied community centres or form part of neighbourhood celebrations oriented towards social justice and community solidarity in Barcelona.

It is important for me to emphasise that my research captured a unique moment of effervescent political activity amongst Mexicans living in Barcelona. I arrived soon after the founding of NAR and the MCMB. This meant I was there in the aftermath of people's initial reactions of shock and anger to developments happening in Mexico. As such, it was a perfect time to capture the emotional impact which the conflict had upon my participants. This also happened when I was able to witness the birth of MORENA Barcelona and #YoSoy132 Barcelona whilst in the field. These were two groups which protested against electoral corruption in Mexico's 2012 Presidential elections (see Box 4). However, a large number of my participants were also coming to the end of their time in Barcelona (after six or seven years of postgraduate study). This meant that an already small ethnographic field became even more reduced. My field was somewhat transient in that it coincided with a build-up of migrant political activity in Barcelona (and its partial reduction). However, this actually makes it a perfect window through which to understand the immediate impulses behind an individual's turn towards activism. Capturing my participants' reactions to events happening in Mexico *as they unfolded*, and discussing their feelings about life in Catalonia *as they were living it* (or preparing to leave), meant that the emotional build-up created by these experiences became ethnographically visible. Seeing the pervasiveness of these reactions in the field has allowed me to understand its importance in the emergence of privileged migrant activism.

Box 4: #YoSoy132 Barcelona and MORENA Barcelona

#YoSoy132 Barcelona: In 2012, a mass student movement named #YoSoy132 (#IAm132) spread across Mexico. It began as a protest against media bias in favour of the PRI candidate - Enrique Peña Nieto - during the build up to the presidential elections. It later protested against the alleged fraud and imposition of Peña Nieto. The movement got its name when protests made by students from the most exclusive private university in Mexico City (Universidad Iberoamericana, commonly known as Ibero) forced Peña Nieto to flee the campus. His campaign later discredited the protestors claiming that they were not really students at Ibero and that they had been paid to be there. One hundred and thirty-one of those students then appeared on a video on YouTube, holding up their campus ID cards and stating that they had protested as part of their own free will. That then sparked a largely student-based movement across Mexico, called #YoSoy132 – the hash tag signifying the importance of social networks in the spread of the movement. Mexicans in Barcelona began holding mirror-marches in support of the demonstrations happening in Mexico and founded a Barcelona cell of the movement. They held bi-monthly assembly meetings and organised protest marches, demonstrations, and awareness-raising events within the city.

MORENA Barcelona: In the aftermath of the 2006 presidential elections, a movement supporting López Obrador was set up in Mexico. This was called MORENA, Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement). In the build up to the 2012 elections, the activities of MORENA intensified in order to gain as much support for Lopez Obrador as possible. In Barcelona, a cell of the movement was set up (MORENA Barcelona) as a way to garner support from abroad. The group carried out demonstration events and generated campaign material to be distributed in Mexico via the web, and protested against electoral fraud after the electoral results were announced.

The field was also transient due to the nature of my participants' lives. The fact that my participants had work, family and personal commitments outside of their activism meant that I did not participate in, or have access to, every part of their lives. As professionals pursuing business, artistic or third-sector careers, many of my informants were required to travel frequently. Others would return to Mexico periodically to visit friends and family. This often meant that people would be coming and going between Barcelona and elsewhere, and so the faces I met in the field did not stay the same throughout my time there. I got used to interacting with people with different frequencies of intensity. If they were in Barcelona, we would participate in the activities of political collectives together. We would socialise together and in groups. I would ask for interviews, and they would be given. Then that person might have to leave for a month or so and another would return after an absence. I do not believe that this transience or instability of the field was a drawback to gaining insights into migrant activism. It was a reflection of my participant's worlds and the way they engaged in them. By remaining in Barcelona myself, I was able to see the multi-sitedness of my purposefully bounded field site (Candea 2007).

The high number of political collectives (relative to the number of Mexicans in Barcelona who were long-distance activists) reflected the multiplicity of political sensibilities which existed. Each group focused its activities around particular issues. Although memberships tended to overlap, individuals often had different ideas about the form of actions which should be carried out (and why). Having a number of groups whose *raison d'être* were clearly delineated meant that spaces for collaboration were created. At the same time, those who wanted to carry out actions which others did not agree with had their own spaces in which to do so.

The MCMB, for example, was a group which made demands for peace in Mexico without wanting to blame one group or political party directly for the violence. Its membership was composed of people from across the political spectrum. What they had in common were desires for an end to the war on drugs. This meant that those who wanted to directly criticise the government, or incorporate other concerns into their demands, met with difficulties in achieving group

consensus. NAR was also an association which focused on the violence spreading through Mexico. However, by forming a central node which brought different voices together, it was able to publish a variety of political stances (and critiques) as individual contributions made by its members. Therefore, unlike the MCMB, it provided a space for critical analyses of what was happening in Mexico. However, as an association it was still non-partisan. This meant that those members who were keen to take a stance on electoral politics had to do so by participating in groups such as MORENA Barcelona and #YoSoy132 Barcelona.

The Zapatista collective, in which some members of Mexicanos en Resistencia had previously participated, was felt to be too restrictive in terms of the breadth of issues it focused on. By founding a new group, they could incorporate a much larger number of issues into their activities. Mexicanos en Resistencia focused its energies on contesting electoral corruption and state repression. However, when the violence in Mexico became more severe, it was felt that the group could be seen as being too allied with the left-wing candidate who was ousted by the alleged electoral fraud in 2006 (Andres Manuel López Obrador). If they incorporated demands for peace under the name of that group, the number of people willing to join in could become limited. Therefore, they joined the MCMB. Neither group, however, provided an outlet for concerns about local issues in Barcelona or a clear stance in favour of the Zapatistas. In forming L'Adhesiva, another platform was created which could incorporate such concerns. It also allowed its members to participate in more radical forms of protest not approved by members of groups like the MCMB and #YoSoy132 Barcelona. This included carrying out protests and occupations without official permission and putting themselves at risk from being fined or arrested by the police. The official stance of the group was non-partisan, and its members preferred to abstain from voting in national elections. This meant that those people who were interested in electoral issues once again needed to find an alternative outlet.

Whilst it rejected the imposition of the PRI candidate, #YoSoy132 Barcelona was still a non-partisan group. Neither did it address issues such as drug war violence or indigenous rights in

Mexico. Those members who wished to explicitly support López Obrador had to do so elsewhere, as did those who wanted to expand the range of issues with which they worked. Hence, the multiplicity of activist groups which existed reflected the variety of political concerns held by my participants.

Individual members of one group sometimes participated in an additional one or two groups. Some participated in only one. Through social gatherings and attending events held by other collectives, however, the core members of each group became known to one another. In some cases this overlapped with the creation of friendships; at other times they were simply aware of one-another's existence. This meant that each group was broadly aware of the activities carried out by other collectives and the differing motives behind individual members of those groups. It was important for me to participate with all of these groups to be able to understand how their members related to one another and how they understood the problems they sought to tackle.

Whilst in the field, my weeks would be split into attending the meetings and assemblies concerned with the day-to-day running of the groups I worked with. I would also attend the protest marches, demonstrations, talks, and events which they organised. Some weeks would be full of so many meetings and events that I would have to choose between participating with one group over another. Other weeks would be filled not so much with face-to-face participation but with counting the dead for *Menos Días Aquí* at home in my flat (see Box 5). Others still would be dedicated to carrying out in-depth interviews with my participants. I would also attend parties, go to concerts, watch football games and go for drinks and meals with the members of different groups. This meant that the bonds of friendship and research often overlapped. Whenever I got home, I would turn on my computer and write up my fieldnotes from that day. In them, I would describe places and events, what people had said, and what they did. I would take pictures and make video recordings of certain events (which I always shared with my participants). I preferred not to take out a notebook and write down my observations in front of people so as not to disrupt the flow of interaction happening around me.

Box 5: Menos Días Aquí

Menos Días Aquí was set up soon after the creation of NAR, on the 12th September 2010. It acts as a way of creating a national testimony to the violence happening in Mexico by naming and counting those who have died as a result of extreme violence in the country each day. It took its inspiration from a count carried out by a journalist in El Salvador, Mayra Barraza, called “100 days in the Republic of Death”. This was a list of those killed in conditions of extreme violence composed from articles written in the two main national coverage newspapers, and then published online. *Menos Días Aquí* works in a similar way, but by having a permanent maintenance team (first run by a woman named Alicia, then Lolita, and eventually by myself and Geo). This administrative team coordinates volunteers who pledge themselves to count the dead using national and local online news sources for one week at a time. At the time of writing (08/01/2015), 53,574 victims had been counted by the project. Each night, a volunteer who has signed up to count for one week works their way through a list of around a hundred links to national and local online news sites in Mexico. They make a note of each death caused as a result of extreme violence. They record as many details as possible about each victim. This includes their name, age and gender; the date and place of their death (including date of disappearance or date on which the body was found; the State, municipality, neighbourhood and street of discovery etc.); cause of death (tortured, strangled, decapitated, beaten, shot, if a weapon was used, calibre of bullets etc.) and the time at which it happened. They must also make note of details such as the victim’s address, any signs or referential markers (like tattoos, piercings, skin colour and height), the clothes they were wearing, their profession, details of their vehicle, and if they were pregnant. At the end of each day, the count is published on the blog in the form of short, narrative descriptions of the death of each victim. After finishing their count on the Sunday, the volunteers then add up the total number of victims which they have counted and send it to the administrators (myself and Geo). We then update the running total of dead on the blog. After publishing each day’s count on the blog, the volunteers have to log in to MDA’s twitter account, and publish each entry again on Twitter, summarised in 140 characters.

My participants were aware that I was attending 'official' events such as meetings and planned activities as an anthropologist. They would often take the time to describe things to me which they thought would be relevant to my fieldwork. They would point things out and tell me to include them in my research. At NAR meetings, I was told that I could record what was being discussed on my Dictaphone. I did so on three occasions (placing the Dictaphone in the centre of the table and turning it off should anyone request it). But my participation with the activities of different groups also required that I actively contribute to them. This meant helping out with event organisation, participating in protests and contributing to the discussion during meetings. It also led to me taking charge of the project 'Menos Días Aquí', alongside another member of NAR after I had been in the field for three and a half months. Therefore, whilst my participants did not lose sight of my presence as a researcher, this came to overlap with my equally important position as co-participant. The merging of these two positionalities created a specific kind of space when it came to carrying out my interviews. It meant that the feelings and narratives of my participants could be shared with me in ways not so easily done with someone located entirely 'on the outside'. I discuss the complications of such a position for my analysis later on in this chapter.

When it came to socialising together 'after hours', it was not always clear in what capacity my participants were seeing me. In these scenarios, people would share private aspects of their lives with me as a friend, and I instinctively knew that this information was not to be included 'as data'. Sometimes they would explicitly tell me that what they were saying was not for inclusion in my research. At other times they just simply talked, and I had to draw the boundaries between being a confidante and being a researcher. Therefore, it was important that I was able to "step-out of the role of researcher" as an "intentional ethical stance" (Lavis 2011: 57). This meant recognising that there were things which "I didn't need to know" (Lavis 2011: 58). As Candea observed in his study of scientists working with meerkats in the Kalahari, "consciously giving people space and, indeed, abstaining from being interested in certain things [remain] an important part of being an ethnographer"(Candea 2010b: 247). Indeed, "it may be precisely by giving up the scientific

detective's urge to know 'everything' that we gain access to those very partial vistas that our informants may desire or think to share with us" (Malkki 1995: 104).

I have faced significant challenges with regards to preserving the anonymity of my participants in this account. At all times the safety of each participant has been the utmost of my priorities. However, the best way to ensure their safety has not always been clear. Each participant was adamant that the names of the groups they had formed should not be anonymised. They wanted recognition for their work, and for the issues they were fighting against. Some participants had artistic and intellectual rights over their work which added to the complexity of imposing anonymity. Similarly, naming a group or individual could actually be a means of protecting them through giving them a place within the public sphere. Hence, naming could make it harder for repercussions to be easily taken against them. As a result of on-going discussions with my participants, I have decided to keep the real names of the groups I worked with in this account. Because they would be easily identifiable, then, I have also used the real names of the founders of those groups. Since they themselves discuss their work openly within the public sphere, and indeed seek as much impact for their work as possible, seeking to anonymise them would be an act of imposition which would take away their right to chose and which would negate the intention of the work they carry out at great personal risk. Naming, here, becomes an act of reconition *and* an attempt to increase safety through increasing visibility. I have also preserved the names of those whose intellectual and artistic work depend upon direct (and named) recognition.

At the same time, however, the safety of those participants whose actions within groups were not as public facing could not be so easily guaranteed by increased visibility. Similarly, there were a number of activists who told me that they wished to remain anonymous in this account. Naming some members and not others could create complications in terms of making those who wished to remain anonymous more easily identifiable by association. As a result, I have taken the decision to anonymise the names of all participants who were not publicly facing group founders in order to respect the wishes, and attempt to preserve the safety of, those who did not wish to be

identified. Anonymity within this account, then, has been a heavily negotiated and ongoing process filled with complexity. The path I have chosen is one which negotiates participant safety whilst leaving space for the recognition of individual agency. It represents a combination of attempting to preserve safety whilst not clouding the political messages for which such individuals risk so much. It is a negotiation of a participants' right to chose, and the need to protect those who wish to be protected.

2.3 Interviews and Ethnography

In this section, I discuss the presence of emotional intensity in the narrative forms of my participants' interviews. I describe the dynamics which were present within the interview space and how they contributed to intense displays of emotion. I then discuss the problems posed by choosing to focus on my interview data in this account, and explain my decision to do so. I then bring into the discussion the complications which the emotionally intense modes of expression of my informants had upon my ability to conduct a distanced analysis. I discuss how this was further compounded by my own activist involvements in the field. Not only did my activism influence my ability to remove myself from the discourses of my informants, but it also led to feelings of guilt when I was eventually able to do so.

2.3.1 Emotion in the interview space:

This thesis shows how emotionally rooted knowledge of the world (Milton 2005c), translated into political action, became a structuring element of migrant activists' interactions with one another and how they thought about their own actions. This centrality of emotion has necessitated a specific analytic focus in this account. The majority of the data which I have included here is taken from the in-depth interviews which I carried out with each of my participants. Over the

course of my fieldwork, I was able to interview all of my participants at least once, and some were interviewed twice. The interviews were all digitally recorded on a Dictaphone, and lasted from 40 minutes to anything up to four hours. By the end of my fieldwork, I had over 100 hours of recorded interview material with which to work. They provide essential insights into how my informants experienced their activism along two lines. The first relates to the intensity of experience which was displayed when discussing their time in Barcelona and the emotional impact of coming to terms with the problems unfolding in Mexico. The second relates to the conflicts and differences of opinion between individuals which were voiced in the interviews. These revealed the multiple forms of cosmopolitanism which existed within the same activist field.

Shweder identifies six aspects of research on emotions which should be considered within any study. These relate to the kinds of emotions experienced, the context in which they arise, their semantic meaning or implication, the way in which they are expressed or communicated, the responses received and the way in which they are managed (Shweder 1985: 184 - 191). It is difficult or even nigh impossible to take such a checklist into the field and record each aspect for each instance of emotion. Life is simply not like that. As Beatty notes “ uncertainty about what constitutes emotion in the field cannot be dispelled *in theory*: we cannot specify in advance what aspects of emotion are pertinent in a given case” (2005: 22). Emotion was observable in the field, and it permeated the actions of migrant activists and their conversations with one another. However its theoretical importance only really became visible to me after having left the field. It was then that I could see the full effects of its emergence and deployment across a range of themes. This became most visible when examining migrants’ interview narratives which, in themselves, were emotionally saturated.

Beatty observes that emotion “defined in word-sorting tasks and semi-structured interviews – does not prepare us for the flux and re-flux of emotional practice.” He claims that “only fully contextualised, naturally occurring instances will do, or else what we are getting is inconsequential talk about talk about emotion” (2005: 19). However, my interviews were not simply ‘talk about

emotion' but, rather, individuals talking about emotions through emotionally saturated and embodied narratives of feeling and experience. When listening to the recordings of my interviews, I realised how the narratives they contained were often related to me in a heightened emotional state. Both the language and tones of voice used were pained and even distraught. People would speak with anger, with despair, and with tears in their eyes. Replaying their recordings makes for an uncomfortable experience which can feel even voyeuristic at times. In this sense, dwelling on the narratives of migrants not only involves discourse analysis in order to decipher their meaning and their effects (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990), but also necessitates an examination of the space the interview itself created, and the embodied ways through which individuals expressed themselves (Leavitt 1996). These interview narratives were 'doing something' in the sense that they seemed to allow individuals to make sense of their feelings and to express them within a space in which it was deemed safe to do so. They were a scene for introspective reflections rooted in the experience of having migrated which were then shared with me. As such, I believe that talking about their feelings also became a factor in migrants' own senses of having been transformed by their experiences (Carro-Ripalda 2009). They reflected the intensity with which individuals experienced their activism and thought about home, and in some ways acted to increase it.

Brennan has argued that affect need not only become visible in the behaviour of individuals: it can also be traced through their language (Brennan 2004: 3). This moves beyond looking at discourse as a public performance, or as a sign of an individual's emplacement within particular power structures (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990: 8, 14). Instead, it incorporates a more bodily aspect into language: it can illustrate the personally felt nature through which individuals engage with the world – it's inwardness (Josephides 2005) – at the same time that it demonstrates the social roots and impacts of such expressions (Levy 1984: 222). My interviews were not structured so as to elicit emotional narratives or discourses from my participants. I asked questions in the interviews about why people decided to become involved in activism, about how they had responded to news coming from Mexico, and how they experienced their activist commitments. I asked about their

experiences of living in Catalonia and how they felt about going back to Mexico. In each interview, my input was minimal, and their course very much followed the direction in which my participants wished to take them. I would ask a one-line question, and the answers given would be twenty to thirty minutes long. People needed no encouragement to speak, and indeed I had the impression that pent-up thoughts would simply gush out. I believe that having the freedom of a time and space dedicated entirely to them, and which focused on their own thoughts and experiences, was an opportunity for them to be honest with themselves and to work out how they were feeling. I did not intentionally create an emotional interview space but, because they were troubled by the information they faced in their work, people talked about their experiences in emotional ways. It is possible that rhetorically expressing themselves in such emotional ways became a means through which individuals could move others (like an interviewer or other activists). These movements formed part of the process of their own transformations. It became a way for others to bear witness to their experiences (Carrithers 2005). Such expressions formed an integral part of the emotionally-rooted personal (and painful) transformations which individual migrants were experiencing. Seeing their pain reflected in those with whom they shared it became in itself a confirmation of their own suffering, and allowed them to articulate their sense of having been transformed by it (Carro-Ripalda 2009). This highlights the communicative and interactive aspects which are involved in the expression of emotions, and the importance which they can acquire within an interview context (Carrithers 2005: 578; Carro-Ripalda 2009).

Beatty is quite critical of the possibility of an interview to capture an instance of emotion – he claims that what counts “is the embedding of emotion in interwoven lives, not its remembrance in the bubble of an interview” (2014: 552). He argues that we cannot learn about what they “think or feel in practice; much less how emotions occur, are subjectively experienced, how they filter, frame, or direct sequences of action” (Beatty 2014: 553). However, I believe that Beatty is being somewhat unfair and premature in his critique of the possibility of interviews to reveal emotion. My interviews were emotional in content and expression, and revealed the wider experiences of my

informants in a context in which I, as an ethnographer, did not have access to them. I was methodologically constrained in terms of the kind of access I was able to gain into participants' lives. Opening a dynamic conversational space in which individuals could reflect on past feelings, and express present ones, gave insights into those experiences which I could not access by pure observation. I did not have daily access to my informants, nor was I able to share in every part of their lives. In addition, experiences which became personally meaningful in their narratives of migration and activism had occurred over an extended time period, mostly before I had entered the field, and often happened when individuals were alone. Interviews thus allowed for an extra temporal dimension to be added to my understanding of migrants' experiences. Whilst it is preferable to combine interview data with other ethnographic information, our ability as researchers to do so extensively can be limited by the ways in which our field sites can be bounded (Candea 2007; Candea 2010a). Interviews became a way of gaining access to accounts of the way my informants made sense of the world when that information was not always accessible in other contexts. They give important insights into the personal processes which were behind the placards, slogans and discussions occurring at protest events and group meetings. There were many instances where I was able to see emotional interactions in the field. Indeed I describe a number of them in this account. However, my very interpretation of what was going on during those instances was steeped in the knowledge gained through personal conversations (and interviews) I had already had with individual activists. They were part of the "agency-cum-patency" which we had shared (Carrithers 2005: 578). The result of the merging of these two kinds of data, (interview data with ethnographic observation) has in fact allowed for a greater understanding of emotions in the field than that which a focus on only one aspect would have provided.

Relying on this kind of data does present certain problems in terms of the kind of knowledge it makes visible, and that which it obscures. Les Back has argued that "we pay less attention to contextual texture because we think it is preserved in the recordings and photographs". He asserts that it is important to remember that "transcription is not description" and that focusing only on

what we hear on a tape can give the impression that “if it is not on tape it does not exist” (Back 2014). There are also difficulties when it comes to relying purely on what people say, as opposed to what they do. As Tonkin notes, “an analysis of verbal interaction (on which anthropologists rely) shows the complexity of presupposition. Meanings are not purely semantic, nor does defining other components simply as expressive or emotional capture non-semantic meaning” (2005: 63). Similarly, Josephides argues that “for some, meaning and intent [can reside] in the pragmatics of the ‘unsaid’” (2005: 79). She also observes that “ethnographers should beware of ready-made assumptions about the fit between outward appearance of emotion and inward feeling, or facial expressions and emotional or psychological states” (2005: 80). Hence, it has remained important for me to continue to contextualise my interview data within the wider ethnographic observations I was able to make in the field. Nonetheless, my informants interview *were* revealing in the kind of subjectivities they made visible: in creating a space in which migrants could talk, they opened up the possibility for the expression of emotion, as well as the possibilities of individuals reflecting upon the significance of their own experiences. This in itself provided important ethnographic insights into how migrants’ need to engage in activism had emerged. They also allowed the individually *felt* nature of those experiences to become apparent (Josephides 2005).

Emotions need to be situated within their wider narratives. This is because they “are not the creation of a moment; they participate in manifold relationships formed over periods of time” (Beatty 2010: 430). They need to be situated within a wider understanding of the life-history of the individual experiencing them, and the contextual build-up to their particular expression – “it requires an attention to character and circumstance that goes well beyond the ethnographic vignette (Beatty 2010: 433). Emotions are “personal and biographical as well as shared; they are of the moment but reference the past; they are ‘in here’ as well as ‘out there’. Mostly they fall outside the ethnographic frame” (Beatty 2010: 437). Thus an account of emotion should situate it within a wider contextual frame which acknowledges the subjective, historicised and temporal nature of its development. Even though I have chosen to dwell on extended interview narratives within the body

of this account, then, it has still been important to locate those narratives within the larger ethnographic frame which encompasses them. It remains important to incorporate other aspects of our participants worlds, to ensure that the “social vitality” of their lives is not lost (Back 2014).

The interviews of migrants, then, cannot be set apart from their wider interactions with other activists and their experiences over time. However, it is also imperative to highlight the emergent and personally felt nature of emotions. A focus on interview narratives allows for this. Individual interview narratives made visible the ‘first-person-ness’ of emotional expressions. This is important since individual experiences were an integral part of the process through which migrants became involved in long-distance activism. Emotions “might be *third-person constructions*, a collective product, but they are *first-person experiences* and not reducible to any of their ingredients”. Indeed, “their particularity is to do with their subjectivity, their *me-focus*....Emotions are particular or they are nothing” (Beatty 2014: 551). My interviews provided a space for the individual particularities of experience to be asserted, and hence brought to the forefront the role of emotion in influencing migrants’ political subjectivities. The fact that I was able to interact with migrants in settings other than those of the interview meant that I could situate what they had said into the wider behaviours and interactions with others which I was able to observe over time.

Focusing in-depth on the extended interview narratives of individual migrants in this account, then, has been an intentional analytic decision. A focus on one specific kind of data (interview narratives) can create its own problems in terms of the kind of ethnographic knowledge generated. I have chosen to do so, however, because such narratives were extremely important in revealing both the ambiguous dimensions of migration *and* the ways in which migrants understood their own emotional transformations in how Mexico was viewed. Such experiences and narrative patterns *were* visible in other contexts in the field, *and* in activists’ interactions with one another. Indeed I have included descriptions of such instances alongside the individual narratives featured in each chapter. However, I have chosen to dwell on migrants’ own narratives since they were particularly illustrative of the way they themselves understood what had happened to them, as well

as always revealing something *more* than was intended. Indeed it was in interview conversations (which often continued, extended, and reiterated conversations which had occurred outside interviews) that the ambiguity of migration and the multiplicity of cosmopolitanisms in existence became most visible. As such, I have found my participants' narratives to be an insightful part of analysis.

2.3.2 Finding a space for anthropology:

After I had been in the field for three and a half months I was asked to take over the running of the project 'Menos Días Aquí' alongside another member of NAR. This carried out a daily count of those who had died as a result of extreme violence in Mexico (see Box 5 for more details). I had already counted for the project a number of times before being asked to do so, but taking charge represented a new level of activist commitment for me (which has continued to this day). I did not hesitate to accept the offer when it was made. By that time, I had come to identify with the concerns of my participants so much that just being there as an anthropologist was simply not enough. I needed to feel that I was actively participating and contributing in some way. This means, however, that at the same time I seek routes of analysis for my data, I am active in co-producing it (Falzon 2009: 10; Law and Urry 2004: 393; Merry 2005: 249,250). In this section I discuss the complications which the position of researcher/activist presented for my analysis.

Adam Reed describes how he felt so numb when conducting his fieldwork in a Papua New Guinean prison that "accounts of violent or disturbing events after a while left me completely unmoved". He describes how, "when I heard about the stabbing and death of a prisoner with whom I had worked closely I was surprised that I felt nothing" (2003: 55). His analysis was "in part an attempt to recover that missing emotion, to convey the fears, the shock and the pain of these encounters and express what I couldn't feel at the time" (Reed 2003: 55). I experienced the reverse of this both whilst in the field and after having left it. The emotional content of the issues my

participants worked with, and the intensity with which I engaged in them, made it extremely difficult for me to extricate my analysis from that emotion. I would find myself caught up in the narrative content and discursive analysis used by my participants in the field, rather than looking for the insights which my own anthropological analysis could provide. It took me quite some time after having left the field to be able to begin to distance myself from an activist perspective (which requires direct political critique, and which I shared with my informants), and approach my data in a different, more analytical, way (Green 2005:123,1240). In this way, I became caught up in the rhetorical movement of shared emotional narratives with my participants (Carrithers 2005). At the same time that such expressions formed a part of their own transformations, I was also being transformed by them (Carro-Ripalda 2009).

When I began analysing my interview recordings and fieldnotes, I would write in emotional tones similar to those used by my participants. I was so embroiled in activist practice that I unquestioningly accepted their behaviours and political discourses without realising they were productive points of analysis. I was “repeating their views as social theory” (Berglund 1998: 148). The result was an inability to “separate data and analysis” (1998: 28). Such an account simply rendered the opinions of my informants back to them rather than providing an analysis which incorporated my own insights (Strathern 1987: 18). Riles picks up on this difficulty in her study of transnational women’s rights activists. She argues that when anthropologists reproduce the words of our participants as social theory, “anthropological analysis is reduced to restatement, to repetition, to generating reflexive modernity’s ‘doubles’.... This does not transform the subject, however, as we imagine academic analysis transforms ‘data,’ so much as it replicates the work this ‘data’ already has done” (2001: 5). In non-auto-ethnographical accounts, Strathern argues that “indigenous reflection is incorporated as part of the data to be explained, and cannot itself be taken as the framing of it, so that there is always a discontinuity between indigenous understandings and the analytical concepts which frame the ethnography itself” (1987: 18). The problem for my analysis lay in working out “how to render the familiar accessible ethnographically” (Riles 2001: 6). I

needed to gain from my data “some sense of the productive activity which lies behind what people say, and thus their own relationship to what has been said” (Strathern 1987: 19).

Berglund discusses how she went through such a process during her analysis of environmentalists in Germany. She realised that “to have analysed Mittelstadt’s civic action groups’ weekly rituals, would have required me to ignore the most striking thing that the field research itself provided: activists’ frequent and sometimes anxious concern for self-understanding” (1998: 197). Similarly, Riles argues that we should not “treat cultural phenomena as uninteresting or undeserving of analysis because they are already understood, elaborated on, and even critiqued by those who used to provide the raw “data” of our analyses.”(2001: 4). In seeking to apply this kind of perspective to my data, I tried to distance myself enough in order to view it from a different angle. I found that by doing so I was able to keep activism “as an ethnographic category” in the same way that Candea argues we should do for anthropological studies of politics. By trying to suspend my sympathies with my participants, I was able to see those behaviours and discourses which were most salient in revealing the process of emergence for forms of privileged migrant activism. (2011: 14). I learned to look at the spaces produced between those discourses and *who* was producing them, and *why*; to make the emotional and political self an ethnographically salient object of study. As Riles describes, “one could also state the ethnographic problem in reverse: when phenomena are too well known to be described, what is needed is not greater detail but a selective erasure thereof, as, for example, the abstractions of modern art have brought modernity itself into view.” (2001: 20). By distancing myself from the emotional narratives and activist discourses of my participants, I was able to understand the implications of what they were doing and saying, as well as the motivations behind them. Focusing on activists’ experiences with a researcher’s eye made the emotional states of my participants an ethnographically interesting phenomenon.

Finding a space for ethnography within my data did create its own problems. Precisely because I was so immersed in participating in the activism of my participants, I experienced the processes of analysis as a site of intense guilt. Interpreting my informants’ narratives from a

distance meant that I couldn't help feeling I had betrayed them in some way (Jean-Klein and Riles 2005a: 184; Jean-Klein and Riles 2005b: 174). I worried about being criticised by them for focusing on their personal experience rather than the topics of their activism (Hale 2006: 100; Tate 2007: 23). However, this thesis should be seen as an additional account of my participants' worlds, one which can co-exist alongside their own interpretations and arguments. It should not be seen as a belittling or abandonment of the social problems which my participants sought to remedy through their activism (Strathern 1987: 26 - 33). Instead, it should be seen as an account which seeks to make the gaps, discordances, and agreements between the things that people say and do productive points of analysis. Jean-Klein and Riles argue that "relevance to the world comes if anthropologists manage in a disciplined manner to make the world truly relevant to themselves, to their own objectives". Therefore, "exercising care toward subjects such as violence and rights by no means entails ceasing to care for anthropology as a discipline or exercising discipline in ethnographic practice. On the contrary." (2005b: 190). By coming to understand this, I have been able to inhabit a contradictory yet essentially productive position of methodological activism and ethnographic analysis (Hale 2006: 108). Those feelings of guilt which I experienced are assuaged in some way by continuing to run *Menos Días Aquí*. This means I do not feel that I have abandoned all direct engagement for academic analysis (both of which are nonetheless important and valid positions). I would argue that the duality is one which is inherent to the combination of activist engagement and the production of an anthropological knowledge which seeks to escape folk categories of analysis. Whilst such a duality is difficult - if not impossible - to overcome, that does not mean it cannot be productively embraced.

In the next section, I move on to discuss the difficulties of conscience I initially suffered when studying a privileged sector of the Mexican population. I describe how my participants' discourses made me question the way in which anthropology has approached the study of elite groups, and to face my own prejudices. I discuss my position as someone belonging to each of the groups and yet still existing 'in-between' them. I describe how this often made people willing to

comment upon the behaviour of other activists and other groups, revealing to me the multiplicity of political opinions which existed within a relatively small group of privileged migrants.

2.4 The anthropology of elites

In this section, I focus on another uncomfortable aspect of my fieldwork: coming to terms with the study of elites. I arrived in the field with certain prejudices about the Mexican upper-classes, and did not expect to find the multiplicity of political subjectivities which I encountered there. Indeed my understanding of 'elites' was transformed as a result of my field experiences.

When I first realised the social status of the people I would be working with, I questioned my decision to carry out fieldwork with them. Up to that point, all of my experiences in Mexico had been working with working class communities in the central state of Jalisco, or with indigenous communities in the south, namely in the state Chiapas. Privileged or middle-class Mexico was a world which was unknown to me, far removed from my everyday encounters with poverty, discrimination and marginalisation amongst the poorest sectors of Mexican society. I was deeply critical of 'wealthy Mexico' without ever having experienced it directly. After realising that my participants were upper- middle-class, highly educated and, often, lighter skinned, engendered in me a feeling that I was betraying the roots on which my first relationship with Mexico was built. Having been a firm believer in the militant, bare-foot anthropology advocated by anthropologists like Scheper-Hughes (1992; 1995), I experienced a somewhat existential crisis with regards to the moral grounding of my research - surely there were other more 'oppressed' people I should be working with? How could I justify to myself working with 'elites' who, until now, I had only critiqued in abstract terms in my discussions of Mexico?

However, after a decidedly short time in the field I realised that this was a group of people with whom I shared all of those critiques. In participating with activist groups I sometimes felt myself to be not so much the resident anthropologist but an active participant, and I deeply enjoyed

taking part in group meetings, events and social activities. At an ideological and social level, I very much felt at home (cf. Berglund 1998 14). My initial preconceptions were most challenged during interviews, where the multiplicity of my participants' political subjectivities became apparent. Everyone was aware that I was working with a number of different groups. As such, I occupied a position of being an insider who provided a neutral bridge between collectives. Since memberships overlapped and individuals were familiar with the work of other groups, my presence often served as a catalyst for commenting on the forms of politics enacted by others. It also created a space for justifications of individual positionalities. The interviews provided a space in which to confide doubts about the dedication or methods of other collectives. They also provided a space to vent frustrations and to critique others more openly than they would have done so at a group meeting. This meant that I was able to see the extent of the variety of political attitudes which existed within a relatively small ethnographic field. I was also able to contrast individual perspectives with one another in an attempt to understand the extent to which activists were 'open' to the subjectivities of other activists. As such, my interviews provided me with an opportunity to address the extent of cosmopolitanism being practiced between activists at the same time that it was being enacted towards others within Mexico.

Edelman argues that since social movements are "ephemeral and factionalised" with "major discrepancies" existing between members, the ethical commitment of an anthropologist to a single faction can "limit" their ability to understand "alternative histories, political projects, or forms of cultural transformation" (2001: 310. 311). Indeed "when multiple political subjectivities and discourses exist within a single ethnographic field", it is important that 'politics' "be retained as an ethnographic category" (Candea 2011: 14). Candea argues that this does not entail a suspension of critique, but rather a curtailing of a "premature critical reflex" by the anthropologist. Not doing so could cut off our participants without crediting them "with the capacity to think through their own problems". Instead, we need to recognise that critique is often "immanent in the ethnographic context" and "examine what is taken to be truth by different social groups and why" (2011: 14).

Malkki also speaks to the importance of focusing on individual perspectives in her study of narratives of national identity amongst Burundian Hutu exiles in Tanzania. She argues that “different regimes of truth exist for different historical actors, and particular historical events support any number of different narrative elaborations” (1995: 104). Focusing on the variations in what constitutes ‘the truth’ for different political actors can shed light on how different individuals within the same ethnographic context experience and understand their lived worlds in relation to one another. Realising the variety of political subjectivities which existed amongst my participants meant that I also had to learn to be fair to different positions.

I had my own opinions about what was happening in Mexico and what forms of activism would be most effective. However, my opinions evolved when opening myself to the rationalities of different attitudes. By letting my informants speak for themselves, and without letting prior judgements cloud my approach to understanding their narratives, my attitude towards the study of ‘elites’ became radically transformed. I believe that this also speaks to the way anthropologists have approached the study of elites. As it became clear to me that not all members of the privileged classes in Mexico were the enemies I had blindly envisioned them to be, I realised that such an attitude is a common practice in anthropological approaches to the study of elites. When working with privileged groups, explanation is often swapped for critique. This precludes understandings of the complexities and nuances involved in the experiences of *any* people we study. As Yarrow argues, we do not need to be apologists or advocates for everyone we work with. However, we should always try to be faithful to the complexities of their lives, elite or not (2011).

This is often overlooked by the literature on social protest, which tends to “present society as being divided into two largely homogeneous and clearly differentiated sectors whose interests are radically opposed: the elite and the dominated. The former seek to increase their control and over and exploitation of the latter, who consistently resist these efforts.....the elite class is the personification of evil, whereas all acts of resistance by the subordinate classes are good” (Viqueira 2012: 63). Marcus argues that “the concept of elite in general usage has a certain force; it locates

agency in social events by evoking the image of a ruling, controlling few, while being intractably vague. In everyday use, a reference to elites suggests an image of inequality and the wielding of power in interpersonal relations while remaining moot about whether an elite is an empirically more or less self-reproducing fixture of social organisation” (1983: 7). Shore and Nugent, for example, define elites as those holding the most power in society, and who have the ability to shape it (2002: 4). However, such definitions often gloss over references to both the middle and upper classes whilst not distinguishing between economic, professional or cultural elites. In this sense, not all ‘elites’ actively try to preserve their privilege. A large proportion of them are also trying to understand the world and trying to change injustices they see (a position occupied by many anthropologists themselves) (Yarrow 2008:335, 353). Referring to all members of society who are not poor simply as ‘elites’ in this sense of the word turns a large proportion of society (including ourselves as anthropologists) into a homogeneous, privilege-protecting group, when that is simply not the case. In addition, Harvey argues that defining elites is “a contextual issue” (2002: 74). She explains how “local elites can be seen as marginal in wider contexts” whilst still being able to exercise power in certain situations (2002: 77). In her study of mestizo traders in a southern Peruvian town, Harvey shows how the positionality and advantage of elites can change with time and their relative position within a locality This shows how “the promiscuous use of the term ‘elite’ obscures as much as it reveals” (Spencer 2002: 107). Therefore “although a focus on elites, especially when hedged by qualifiers, can be informative, it can sometimes be conceptually difficult to offer a satisfactory account of who constitutes the elites and what power and influence they exercise and how permanent they are” (Watson 2002: 122).

Walker argues that the neglect of the middle-classes in the literature is in fact due to the political projects of analysts themselves. Here, “middle-class fears and insecurities do not fit well with a romantic, revolutionary narrative of political change” (2013: 17). Research is sometimes made difficult by the perceptions of others judging work on elites. Marcus argues that “elite researchers are likely to be tagged as a either elitist or anti-elitist....elite research of any kind has so

routinely been based in an ideological atmosphere” (1983: 23). As a result, “historians use the term ‘middle-class’ as a descriptive adjective rather than a historically contingent category requiring analytical engagement. Indeed, some scholars perform strenuous contortions to *not see* the middle-class status of those they study” (Walker 2013: 17). Recent historical studies have demonstrated that the “misunderstood” middle-classes in Mexico are, in fact, extremely diverse in their economic possibilities, political views and forms of responding to a crisis (Walker 2013: 1). Such works also demonstrate how the positioning of the middle classes has changed over time, challenging, responding and adapting to new situations as they have arisen (Gilbert 2007). Throughout the various economic and social crises which occurred between 1940 and 2000, members of the Mexican middle classes responded by veering both to the left and to the right. Walker demonstrates how ultimately middle-class discontent from both the left and the right signified the end of the PRI (the party which ruled in Mexico for 71 years until 2000, and which recently came back into power in 2012).

It is therefore important to realise that when pitting ‘the state’ against the rest of the population, or when pitting ‘elites’ against ‘the rest’, that members of political parties and public servants also belong to the middle-classes, and that privileged groups and members of the middle classes have historically participated in anti-state and anti-oppression protests (Walker 2013). It is also important to remember that some ‘subaltern’ groups have also participated in pro-state movements or have not supported rebellions or protest groups in the past (Castro Gutiérrez 2012; de la Peña 2012; Gledhill and Schell 2012; Gutmann 2012; Viqueira 2012). Neither the poor and working classes nor the privileged classes represent dichotomous homogeneity between ‘good and bad’, ‘leftist or conservative’ or ‘pro- and anti- establishment’.

Throughout the economic and social turmoil of the last decade of the twentieth century, the middle classes in Mexico were highly differentiated in their responses to various crises. Some moved towards the left, becoming increasingly radicalised, whilst others sought to maintain their privilege (especially access to education) within the current system by seeking reform from within.

Others moved towards the right, increasingly supporting moves towards more stringent forms of neoliberalism and a dismantling of state intervention in the economy (Walker 2013). Therefore we cannot expect, as I initially did, that individuals belonging to the same privileged class would share the same world view or outlook. We must bring subjectivities which fall on all sides of the political spectrum, and practices which both contest *and* preserve privilege, into our understandings of 'elites'. I would argue that anthropologists can be 'fairer' to those we study by being faithful to the complexities of their lived worlds. By trying to be faithful to the complexities of my participants' subjectivities during analysis, I have been able to see the variety of cosmopolitanisms which can exist within an ethnographic field. It has also opened my own horizons.

2.5 Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of my field experience. I have discussed how the transient nature of my field-site and my position as researcher/activist/friend created a context in which interviews became a space for emotional narrations of experience. These have provided particularly valuable insights for understanding the activism of privileged migrants in the rest of this account, and allowed certain forms of cosmopolitanism to become visible. I also included a discussion of my own shifting subjective positions throughout the different stages of fieldwork and analysis. By doing so, I wanted to highlight the fact that this research has been an intense journey for me as an anthropologist at the same time that it has traced the political journeys of others.

Chapter Three:

Ambiguous Migrations

3.1 Introduction:

It is early evening on a grey, windy day. I have been invited to dinner at Maria's flat along with other members of NAR. Clutching a plastic box filled with some home-made guacamole, I get to her flat for six on the dot. I forget that of course no-one else will be there yet, and yet again everyone will laugh at me for my "very British" punctuality. Maria opens the door, still in the middle of getting dressed and clearly surprised to see me there so early. She invites me in and tells me to come into her room and sit on the bed while she finishes getting ready. She has lived in Barcelona for quite a while by now, but her room is still filled with open suitcases; their contents spill out over the sides. She jokes saying that she has still never got round to unpacking properly, though she doesn't really know why. As the others begin to arrive we move into the kitchen and, whilst crammed into the tiny space, start cooking a plethora of Mexican dishes to be served up at dinner. The atmosphere is fun and jovial, and it feels good to be among friends. When the food is almost ready more people appear. They are recent arrivals to Barcelona from Chile and Venezuela who Maria has made it a point to invite. She explains that she likes new people to feel welcome rather than excluded and alone in the city (a sentiment which is also the source of my own invite). She tells me that she knows only too well how that feels. As we sit down to dinner the conversation turns to politics. The woman from Chile begins to speak about the need to forcibly redistribute wealth between social sectors and the

experience of dictatorship in Chile, whilst the woman from Venezuela decries the violence which prevails in Caracas. Maria and David, both members of NAR, begin to explain that as Mexicans they feel that they are experiencing for the first time the violence and dictatorships which may have already been lived in other Latin American countries. For them, the unleashing of extreme violence in Mexico is something new, unexpected and totally unreal; they say that they don't know how to handle it. David begins to argue with the Chilean woman about the effectiveness of the forcible distribution of wealth, citing George Orwell's Animal Farm. He claims that for him, if there is to be a revolution, it will be a fractal one, coming from all sectors of society.

(Reflections from the field based on field-diary entries)

This is a scene from quite early on in my fieldwork, yet it displays aspects of the migrant experience which were common for many of my informants. The image of Maria's unpacked suitcases is indicative of a sense of impermanence and of not belonging to Barcelona which many other migrants also felt whilst living in the city. Her need to invite new arrivals to make sure that they felt welcome speaks to the fact that she already knew from her own experience that life in Barcelona could be very lonely and isolating, and the camaraderie and friendship felt whilst preparing dinner demonstrates the importance of finding friendship groups which worked towards overcoming that loneliness. The lively political debate about the different experiences of violence and dictatorship across Latin America illustrates the way in which, through interacting with others from elsewhere in Latin America whilst living in Barcelona, some migrants' knowledge and perspective of the continent itself had the potential to grow or change.

This chapter looks at the way activists discussed their migration experiences during interviews. When my participants reflected upon their experience of living in Catalonia, their narratives would display a particular kind of sentiment. I argue that this was rooted in a sense of migrational ambiguity which in itself became transformative (Kearney 2000) . It had the ability to

engender both a strengthening of attachment to Mexico *and* critiques of Mexican society. Migrants experienced an estrangement from their idea of 'home' at the same time that it became newly valued (Wiles 2008). Similarly, although their original expectations of what life in Catalonia would be like were challenged, other aspects of life in Barcelona provided a sense of satisfaction and politicised potentiality.

What I wish to show in this chapter is that particular aspects of life in Barcelona had particular effects in terms of the way migrants related to home and how they viewed their own political identities. This was a continuous process and did not happen at a specific moment. Rather, migration experiences over time, and the concomitant evaluations of both Catalan and Mexican societies, formed integral parts of the process leading to the emergence of migrant activism. Each section within the chapter focuses on a particular aspect of the migrant experience in order to show how a range of factors contributed to the process of re-evaluating home. I show how the presence of transformative ambiguity was a common thread across migrants' interview narratives, though the experiences which engendered it were particular to an individual.

3.2 Cities, Modernity and Reflective Nostalgia

In this section, I focus on the extended narrative of one activist and highlight the way feelings of ambiguity became visible during their discussion. I do so in order to dwell on one particular aspect of migrating to Barcelona which their narrative makes apparent: the contradictions of city life and modernity. I discuss the potential of ambivalence towards life in Barcelona to generate specific reflections on Mexican society which were at once nostalgic *and* critical. This was an important part of a process which transformed the ways in which home was understood by certain individuals, and led to aspects of life there being questioned. In later sections I focus on other aspects of life in the Catalonia in order to demonstrate alternative ways through which similar feelings of ambiguity were produced.

3.2.1 Loneliness and contentment in the city

Maria was a member of NAR, and one of the founding members of #YoSoy132 Barcelona. She was twenty-nine and had moved to Barcelona four years earlier. She came to Catalonia after breaking with her career as a lawyer in Mexico City. She had decided, in her words, “to take the plunge” and pursue her dream of becoming a writer. After completing an MA degree in Barcelona, she decided to stay on and write her first novel whilst also working as a translator. Catalonia had not been her first choice of destination – she would have preferred France or England, where she could “live in a different language”. However, after finding the perfect course, and finding the visa regulations to be easier (as the granddaughter of Spanish Civil War exiles she was granted the right of return by Spanish immigration rules), she chose Barcelona.

The second time I interviewed Maria we discussed her experiences of living in Barcelona. She looked extremely tired. As well as working in her day job, she had recently begun writing her novel. She was also only just finding some breathing space after an intense few months of participating with NAR and co-founding #YoSoy132 Barcelona. She was going through a period of feeling depressed about her time in Barcelona; she wanted to go home but felt unable to do so. At the same time, she wanted to experience new things and visit new places. She was at a crossroads in deciding what to do next with her life. Most of the Mexican friends she had made through being involved with activism in Barcelona were going back to Mexico. She envied them and yet was also relieved not to be joining them. These feelings showed through in her evaluation of Barcelona as a place to live.

Maria would alternate between emphasising the good points of the city and describing in quite abject terms the loneliness which she felt there. By doing so, she outlined a very specific picture of Barcelona as a unique city which had very particular traits. In the first part of this section I tease out the continuous presence of ambiguity within her narrative. This will allow me, in the second part of this section, to show how such ambiguity was important in creating a context in

which Maria could begin to critically evaluate certain aspects of Mexican society. It allowed her to question home in new (and personally disturbing) ways.

During our interview, the very first thing she said was:

“Barcelona has always given me that feeling of love-hate, but I think that happens to everyone. It’s just something which happens in Barcelona, but it takes a while to understand that. Once you understand, you don’t blame yourself. It’s the city.”

After creating an image of a strange city which had its own character, she went on to describe the aspects of living there which she enjoyed:

“It’s a comfortable city- easy to navigate - with short distances and good infrastructure. It’s got a huge network of libraries, and there are expensive things to do and free things to do. It’s got that aspect of multiculturalism, so it can be quite easy living here - especially when you come from Mexico City. So in that respect it makes you love it, you feel really comfortable.”

After highlighting the positive and more enjoyable aspects of life in the city, she went straight on to paint a picture of place whose character she was unable to pin-point, whose emptiness in turn made her feel empty. This is an important pattern which was repeated throughout her narrative. She constantly swayed between contentment and despair at her life in Barcelona:

“But then there is the other side of it. It’s got like a really hard energy, a lot of identity issues which seem to be never-ending. Everyone is sort of here one day, gone the next; so it’s actually quite ephemeral, and that can be really exhausting. And I don’t like the noise. I mean Mexico City is noisy, but it’s another kind of noise here, sort of superfluous. It’s like you feel that deep down there’s nothing here, that there’s no substance. I find it quite tiring.”

Maria's account juxtaposes images of Barcelona as a good place to live and as a place of loneliness. She alternated between emphasising the benefits of life in Barcelona to explaining in very specific terms why the particular character of the city and its people let her down. She explained how:

"I feel bad for complaining because it's always gone well for me here – I've always had a job, friends, and things like that. I feel really thankful towards Barcelona because I've been able to find work at a time when even Spanish people are finding it difficult. I wrote my first book here, and I've made some incredible friends. But at the same time it's been really hard living here; it makes me miss being in Mexico a lot. The thing is Barcelona is a really deceitful city. On the surface, it seems great. But when you scratch it, not everything is how you imagined. And then eventually you think you're finally going to leave but then something else happens to keep you here, and it all begins again. I just feel that everyone who comes here wants to leave but then doesn't leave.

Here, the mentioning of beneficial aspects of Barcelona (employment, meeting new people) is once again followed by a more depressive evaluation of the city as a place where she doesn't truly wish to be. Towards the end of her narrative, she seemed to ultimately evaluate Barcelona as a place of abjection and disappointment:

Just when I think I'm starting to feel like I belong here, that's when I most want to leave. It's a really hard city, and I've felt very lonely at certain points. And it's a kind of loneliness that can't be solved by going out for a coffee with someone. I've never lacked for that kind of company. But I just feel extremely lonely. People are really careful with their friendship groups here. They don't mix them. Then there's the whole thing with Catalan and it being imposed on you everywhere you go. That can get really tiring. It's like you feel you can't talk about anything; people are really rude. Whenever I hear of someone who has recently arrived, I invite them over for dinner because I think it's

important. I always remember one friend who told me, 'if it hadn't been for you, I would only have one friend - a football called Wilson, you know like the one from the shipwreck movie.' Another friend was going crazy because in seven days the only person she spoke with was me. That's really bad. It's really hard city."

But, once again, she ended by displaying her ambiguity:

"Like I said, I'm thankful to the city. It's always gone well for me, and there is a freedom here which I could never have in Mexico. I don't know. I've just got to the point where I take what the city gives me, but I don't really feel like I belong here or that I'm happy."

Maria swayed between states of despair and states of (almost) contentment throughout her narrative. Just when she seemed to stop and favour one of those states in her ultimate evaluation of Barcelona, she added remarks which would indicate the opposite point of view. The alternations between such positions within her narrative indicate that she experienced her life in Barcelona as one of ambiguity. Like Amit (1998) found amongst expats in the Cayman Islands, the picture Maria painted was one of a lonely restlessness which was interspersed with moments of friendship, happiness and satisfaction. In the end, she was not happy. But neither was she unhappy. Or, rather, she was both almost-happy and unhappy at once.

The words Maria used to describe Barcelona resonate quite strongly with what others have written about loneliness in cities. Georg Simmel noted the potential of cities to overstimulate the senses to the extent that they become mundane. This means that in the modern metropolis "the self-preservation of certain personalities is brought at the price of devaluating the whole objective world, a devaluation which in the end unavoidably drags one's own personality down into a feeling of the same worthlessness" (Wolff 1950 : 416). "Self-preservation" in such a context necessitates an attitude of "reserve," "indifference" and "antipathy" towards one's fellow urban-dwellers (Wolff 1950 : 416). However, the city can also become a site of potentiality, since "it grants to the individual a kind and an amount of personal freedom which has no analogy whatsoever under other

conditions" (Wolff 1950 : 417). Isolation and alienation are "the price the individual pays for the independence which he enjoys in the metropolis" (Wolff 1950 : 420). We see these attributes of city life coming through in Maria's narrative. On the one hand, she described sites of enjoyment in Barcelona such as the attractions on offer, the fact that she had not lacked for work and that she had been able to start her career as a writer there. This made her feel "grateful" to the city for what it had given her. At the same time, those points of satisfaction seemed fleeting. She was still unhappy and constantly wanted to leave. A real sense of apathy and dejection arises from the words she used to describe Barcelona. It is clear that whilst she enjoyed certain aspects of what Barcelona could offer her, she could not be easily described as being 'happy' there. Ultimately, Simmel notes, "the metropolis reveals itself as one of those great historical formations in which opposing streams which enclose life unfold, as well as join one another with equal right" (Wolff 1950 : 424). The ambiguity experienced by Maria in reflecting on life in the city illustrates the confusion which those "opposing streams" can generate.

However, it is important to remember that the combination of innovative potential and destructive alienation, as noted by Simmel and illuminated by Maria, is not reserved for cities alone. Indeed it resonates with the very characteristics of modernity itself. Berman claims that "to be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction" (1982: 13). It is "to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens everything we have, everything we know, everything we are... it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air'" (1982: 15). In such a context "we look back for something solid to lean on, only to find ourselves embracing ghosts" (1982: 333). The notion of 'all that is solid melting into air' resonates quite graphically with Maria's description of Barcelona as a place. She described it as "ephemeral", and as having "no substance". The noise of the city was "superfluous" and she felt as if "deep down there is nothing here".

Her narrative, then, resonates with descriptions of the general affects created by cities and modernity itself. At the same time, she was adamant that her impressions arose from a very specific quality of Barcelona itself. Remember that Maria was from Mexico City. Living in a large urban metropolis was nothing new to her. When describing her feelings about Barcelona she made it clear that “it’s just something that happens in Barcelona” and that “once you realise it you don’t blame yourself”. Indeed it is important to note that the specific feelings evoked by modernity are dependent upon the context in which they are lived. This means that individual cities have the potential to engender specific modernisms and individual reactions to them (Berman 1982: 229 - 231). In this sense, there were particular characteristics of Barcelona which both inspired her attachment and engendered her dissatisfaction.

The ambiguity towards Barcelona experienced by Maria had a particular effect on the way she thought about Mexican society. Within her narrative, it becomes one of the key factors in the transformative process which led to her becoming involved in long-distance activism. By creating a context in which she felt suspended between places, and unable to fully locate herself in either, Maria was able to critically evaluate her home and destination societies in new ways.

During our interview, she would constantly alternate between feeling at home in Barcelona and longing for Mexico. At the same time, she would be critical of both places:

“The thing is I like it here because I come from a place in Mexico where people don’t mix. But here I can be sat at a table with people from different socio-economic backgrounds and no-one cares. It’s not like that in Mexico. Since I decided to stay on and be a writer, Barcelona is a good place to be a writer. No-one cares what you do, how much money you earn, or anything like that. But then at the same time it feels quite boring. People aren’t very ambitious; the conversations are just too “every-day” for me. I miss the intensity of Mexico. I just find the people here a little insipid sometimes.”

We can see here that a particular aspect of life in Barcelona acts to reveal a facet of life in Mexico with which she is not comfortable. At the same time, feeling dissatisfied with people in Barcelona has the ability to engender a longing for Mexico. An image of Maria as being suspended between the two places arises. This became even more apparent during the rest of her interview:

“Being away from Mexico makes you want to go back. You miss it. But at the same time, it makes you realise that there are things about your homeland that you don’t choose, which are very painful. I don’t want to go back to Mexico and see that nothing works there; that there is so much corruption. No-one trusts anyone else, values and morals are just doing down the drain. The most valuable and important things which Mexico represents are slowly being lost. It’s a shame. After four years of being outside, returning would mean facing up to that. It would mean facing those values, the classism. I’ve realised how much I hate the classism there. I’m scared to go back but then again I’m also from there. But then again neither am I so impressed with the people here. They seem to be waking up a bit more after 15-M [the Occupy Movement], but still...they don’t debate much; they don’t argue. People don’t get passionate about anything. It’s a surprise when you hear someone speaking in a raised voice – not in an argument but in a way which says ‘I’m alive.’ In Mexico you never know where you’re gonna find yourself. You can get in a taxi and be robbed, or you can have a talk about politics or just have a crazy driver. Here I always feel like I know what to expect.”

She seemed, then, to be existing in-between places. The positive and negative aspects of living in each place created confusion for her as to where she would prefer to be. It is clear that she was beginning to criticise certain practices and structures within Mexico, and that this disrupted her sense of comfortably belonging there. Indeed, she showed reluctance at the thought of returning. However, she still came to value the idea of ‘Mexico’, and of ‘being Mexican’ whilst in Barcelona:

“I think your origins become more and more important, whatever they are, and whether you like it not, it’s part of who you are. There are certain codes which come back to you. When you’re here and feel lonely, and you feel you don’t belong anywhere, your codes come back to you, you remember

who you are, what you are, where you come from. It makes you think about where you come from. Not that I'm a fan of mexicanismo, it's just that it's what I've known all my life. I guess it's natural for people to stick together outside of their own country. With 132, it was really nice because we became friends, and our lives suddenly became Mexicanised again. I think that was really important for us all - to feel really Mexican again. It was really nice. Not that I organise my life around Mexicans, it's just NAR and 132 and that's it."

This combination of feeling estranged from Mexico *and* longing for it resonates with a particular kind of nostalgia described by Boym (2001). Whilst the idea of nostalgia itself refers more to longing for a home, this is more often than not directed at memories or imaginings of a place which may not actually exist in the same way that it does in individual fantasies (Boym 2001: XIII). Reflective nostalgia, however, takes on particular characteristics which resemble the ambiguous ways in which migrants like Maria related to home. This kind of nostalgia is ambivalent, and recognises the contradictions which someone may feel in terms of where they belong, and the places they long for. It is rooted not only in memories of 'home', but also in the contradictions of wherever a person may be living at any given time (2001: XVIII). Most importantly, Boym argues that reflective nostalgia "reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection" (2001: 49, 50). This means that simply longing for home does not prevent one from reflecting critically upon it.

In Barcelona Maria found freedom in being able to mix with people from different socio-economic backgrounds. But this also made her miss "the intensity of Mexico". Her loneliness in Barcelona engendered a nostalgic longing to feel as if she "belonged" somewhere. She told us that "when you're here and you feel that you don't belong anywhere, your codes come back to you, you remember who you are, what you are, where you come from". Meeting other Mexicans in the context of her activism was important in allowing her "to feel really Mexican again". However her

experiences in Barcelona also meant that she developed newly critical perspectives on Mexico. Maria claimed that “being away from Mexico” can “make you want to go back.” But, she immediately moved on to reveal that “at the same time it makes you realise that there are things about your homeland that you don’t choose.” Returning “would mean facing up to” those aspects of Mexico which were “painful”. However, realising that there were uncomfortable aspects Mexico did not mean that she was content with people in Barcelona. She disliked that lack of passion in social interactions and feeling like “I’m alive”. Despite the negative evaluations she made about Mexico, neither did she like the fact that in Barcelona “I always feel like I know what to expect”. Her narrative represented a longing for home and reluctance to go back. It showed dissatisfaction with the present (in Barcelona) yet an unwillingness to move on from it. The ambivalence towards Barcelona which was so visible in the first part of her narrative re-asserted itself in her feelings towards Mexico.

What becomes apparent throughout her narrative is that her migration was experienced through multiple fragmentations of belonging. Feeling suspended between places whilst in Barcelona translated into feeling confusion about home. Whilst certain aspects of Mexico were longed for, others were newly understood as undesirable, and hence reduced her desires to return (Ley Cervantes 2012). It disrupted her sense of belonging in Mexico, and of being solidly located within Barcelona. The ambivalence which was discussed in the first half of this section had a transformative potential. By enabling Maria to feel herself to be in-between places, criticisable aspects of Mexico were actually made visible to her. It disrupted her idea of home as a singularly longed-for entity at the same time that it increased her attachment to it.

3.3 Radical Barcelona

In this section, I look at the narratives of two people who participated with #YoSoy132 Barcelona. I tease out the impact which the political history of Barcelona could have upon the way

migrants thought about home and political action in general. I show how this aspect of life in the city contained a similarly transformative potential to that which was discussed in the previous section: it led to feelings of ambivalence towards life in Barcelona and critical estrangement from Mexico. These were, I argue, an important constituting factor in the gradual emergence of individual desires to engage in activism.

3.3.1 Unmet expectations:

Here I explore the impact which disappointed hopes for finding a certain image of Barcelona could have upon the way some migrants experienced life there (Amit 1998). A number of my participants had come to Barcelona with a fixed image of the city in their minds (Conradson and Latham 2007: 231). To them, Barcelona was the cradle of Republicanism during the Spanish Civil War. It was the centre of anti-Franco protests and attempts to undermine the dictatorship. It was a place to immerse themselves in a haven of socialist sentimentalities and discourse. Upon arrival, however, they received a shock to find that their images of Barcelona did not quite live up to the realities they would find on the ground. This had a particular impact upon migrants by disrupting their sense of being grounded in Catalonia. Being obliged to confront the reasons why their original fantasies of place did not exist created a state of societal questioning which was reproduced when thinking about home. This was, I argue, important in bringing uncomfortable aspects of Mexico to the fore in individual imaginaries of place.

This was especially the case for Antonio, who displayed the disappointment generated by such experiences very poignantly during our interview. Antonio was in his late twenties and had joined #YoSoy132 Barcelona just four months before I interviewed him. He had been living in Barcelona for just over a year when we met. Antonio had worked as an adviser in urban planning for the left-wing government in a district of Mexico City, before deciding to move to Barcelona in order to study for his Ph.D. in geography. He told me that, at first, he had not wanted to mix with any

other Mexicans in the city since he had wanted to experience “living in Catalonia”. After becoming increasingly worried about the developments happening during the 2012 Mexican general elections, he decided to join the #YoSoy132 Barcelona group. As such, he had only recently made contact with other Mexicans in Barcelona. During our interview, it became apparent that Antonio had been thinking hard about his experiences of living in the city, and how he viewed the political dedication of others in #YoSoy132 Barcelona. There were certain topics which he wanted to get across to me and which were clearly important to him. He seemed to view the interview as a chance to express views which he had been personally formulating for some time.

When I asked him about his experiences of living in Barcelona, the first thing he wished to emphasise was the fact that he felt very at ease in the city:

“In Mexico I live in Mexico City, which has 20 million people. It’s like a chaos which somehow works. But I loved living there because you never know what to expect, it’s like a labyrinth. At the same time, you suffer a lot. It’s takes forever to travel in-between places, I didn’t earn much money, and I worked long hours. Here in Barcelona I have a quality of life which I would never be able to have in Mexico City. You can walk wherever you want and arrive within 40 minutes. You can walk around at 3am and still feel completely safe.”

Despite this, he explained to me that he had been extremely disappointed upon his arrival:

“I arrived imagining that anti-Franco, rebellious Barcelona of left-wing struggles. Then I realised that it’s not like that. I realised that that image relates more to the [civil] war, and a bit to the transition but that now the right is in power. The right is in power and with it come all the right-wing discourses, neoliberal discourses, racist discourses and politically conservative discourses. With that, my image of rebellious Barcelona came tumbling down. At the end of the day, if they are in power,

it's because the people voted for them. Now I see that they are going to win again in the elections in November too....I think it has to do with that part of Catalan conservatism mixed with nationalism."

Although he felt comfortable in Barcelona, then, it did not live up to his initial fantasies of what he would find there. He explained that a short time after his arrival he began reading about the recent history of the city:

"I realised that up until the 80s Barcelona was just a Third World city; a grey, third world city without an interesting cultural life or society. Then I found out that, after the 90s, there was lots of immigration from the third world. Combined with the Olympics and the democratic transition, it caused the Catalans to close-in on themselves and to focus on their identity. I've realised that the result of that is racism and fear of the other, as well as a sense of superiority."

The absence of the kind of political scene he had expected to find in Barcelona actually obliged him to question the current structure of Catalan society, and to seek to understand why things were as he found them. Disappointed hopes created the possibility for critical understandings of Catalan society, and resulted in an analytical stance towards what he was seeing there. This stance, as I will show, was reproduced in the way he thought about home.



Fig. 1: #YoSoy132 Barcelona protest in the Plaça San Felipe Neri. It was here that in 1938 fascist forces bombed the church, killing 42 civilians (including 20 children). It is also often attributed with being the scene of Falangist executions carried out during Franco's regime.

The disappointment which Antonio felt upon not being able to see first-hand the Barcelona of the 1930s was further compounded by the fact that his original expectations of ‘fitting-in’ and of making a new life for himself within Catalonia were not so easily realised. Antonio described how his new understanding of the city fit in with his experiences of trying to build friendships with Catalans:

“I think that the whole thing with Catalan as a language is a really big barrier to being able to interact with people. I don’t have classes in my doctorate, but I go to some of the MA classes to listen, and the other students just don’t speak. They don’t make an effort to speak with you, first of all because they just don’t speak, and secondly they don’t want to interact with you because you don’t speak Catalan. It seems like they just want to form ghettos, like they just want to exclude you due to a fear of alterity and the barrier of Catalan”.

This narrative shows that, at the same time he expresses feelings of exclusion, he is also trying to explain their causes. He is attempting to critically understand why things are as he has found them. This was an important positionality for thinking about home.

Despite his unmet expectations of what life would be like in Catalonia, his narrative did not reveal feelings of longing for ‘Mexico’. In fact, he was just as keen to emphasise to me the way his experiences in Barcelona had made him question certain aspects of Mexican society:

“To come here and find myself in a society where the least qualified jobs – workers, cleaners – are done by people who aren’t immigrants and who are white.... that was really strange for me. In my mental schemes it just doesn’t fit in that someone who is white would be a worker, sweeping the street, or that someone who is blonde could be a rubbish collector. That’s just unthinkable in Mexico. Or that the people who serve you at the cafeteria in the university are also white. In Mexico, there is a really marked structure in that sense. Lower-class jobs are done by people who are dark-skinned, generally from an indigenous or rural origin, or from the lowest and most precarious sectors.... So for

me it was such a shock, and it really impacted me. That I was shocked that bus driver could be white made me make a comparison, and it made me realise just how racist Mexican society is."

Though Antonio's narrative differed in tone and content to Maria's, we can see a similar pattern emerging. His narrative also displayed feelings of ambiguity towards the city and its people. In Antonio's case, he felt happy in Barcelona as a space. He enjoyed its rhythms and the quality of life he was able to have there. However, the new understanding of its history, which he rapidly assimilated, meant that his original impression of its people "came tumbling down". His narrative conveyed feelings of exclusion and, also, a hint of indignation at such exclusion being imposed by a politics of identity which he did not agree with. Whilst the kind of longing-for-Mexico apparent in Maria's narrative did not show through in that of Antonio, an aspect of critical reflection did reveal itself. In reflecting upon Mexico in newly critical ways in light of his experiences in Barcelona, Antonio showed feelings of estrangement - "that was really strange for me, in my mental schemes it just doesn't fit that someone who is blonde could be a rubbish collector" - and of jarring realisations - "it was such a shock, and it really impacted me....it made me realise just how racist Mexican society is". His experience of living in Barcelona provided a source of insight into aspects of Mexico with which he was not comfortable. This formed part of an ongoing process in which Mexican and Catalan society would be compared with one another.

Such a process involved a delinking of people like Antonio from the kind of future they had imagined themselves to have in Barcelona – they became detached from their original fantasies of the city (see also Amit 1998). Barcelona was not the same as it had been in the 1930s, the local government was right wing, and everyday expressions of Catalaneity could be experienced as exclusionary. This did not, however, result in an unquestioning reattachment towards Mexico or the idea of home. Instead, a context was created in which individual migrants, like Antonio, would be suspended between their imagined destination and what was actually found. They found themselves evaluating Catalan society and asking why things were as they found them. The

disrupted expectations of migration resulted in a certain kind of critical, societal awareness. This state of questioning was also applied to aspects of home which were brought into focus by Catalan social structures which differed from those they remembered in Mexico. Therefore, just as the fantasies of life in Barcelona could not be maintained, neither could an uncritical longing for home be articulated – not when life in a disappointing Barcelona was shining a light on undesired (and previously unquestioned) aspects of home. Migration became transformative because its unexpected ruptures brought into sharper focus those less pleasant and unlooked-for aspects of both Barcelona and Mexico.

3.3.2 The Barcelona of community organising:

Apart from being a site of nostalgic disappointment for unmet expectations and a site of new, more critical understandings of Mexico, contemporary Barcelona could also be a source of political inspiration. Whilst Republican Barcelona may not have been immediately visible to the naked eye, the city was in fact teeming with a variety of new social movements and modes of community organising. Some of my participants picked up on this and were inspired by it. Here I discuss the effects of such inspiration on individual migrants. I show how they experienced their migration to Barcelona through ambiguity: in feeling excluded by racism and discrimination towards immigrants, such individuals would reach out towards Mexico as a locus of belonging. At the same time, feeling inspired by new social movements in Barcelona could lead them to rethink the ways they understood the possibility of political action in Mexico. Before I do so, however, I give a contextual overview of the kind of street-level political action taking place in Barcelona at the time of my fieldwork.

I carried out my research during a time of economic crisis in Spain. In 2010 the country had had “overall unemployment running at almost 21% (including 45% unemployment among under-25s), a national deficit of more than 11% of GDP in 2009, and estimates of a total capital shortfall in

the Spanish banking system of (potentially) €100bn” (Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2011: 20). The austerity measures which were imposed by the government lead to widespread distrust of political and economic institutions across Spain (Fernández, et al. 2012 : 15). Between 2007 and 2011, half a million families were evicted, around five million people were unemployed, and the cost of living almost doubled (Madrilonia 2012: 53). In response to this, thousands of *indignados* (outraged ones) took to the streets across Spain, occupying town squares and streets. This pattern would eventually be replicated in neighbourhood or *barrio* assemblies (Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2011: 19; Madrilonia 2012: 54).

What later became known as the Occupy Movement began on the 15th May 2011 (hence the abbreviation *15-M*). It had been organised by various social movements who came together just before the regional elections were due to take place on the 22nd May (Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2011: 19). It called upon people to protest against “the perceived corruption of the political classes, the rise in unemployment, the state’s reduction of social welfare benefits, and a general transfer of wealth to the rich” (Madrilonia 2012: 55). Beginning on the 15th May, protesters occupied the Plaza del Sol in Madrid, Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona and other squares across Spain. They stayed there for almost a month, holding people’s assemblies during the day. Eventually, these would be divided into permanent work commissions (Madrilonia 2012: 55). In Barcelona, the potency of the sight of protestors occupying a square which was the symbol of the seat of capitalist economic strength and power was very strong. Social networks were instrumental in ensuring the momentum of the movement continued, despite police attempts to evict the demonstrators violently (Antebi and Sánchez 2012: 68, 80; Madrilonia 2012: 60; Zapata 2012: 87). Even after the camps were dismantled, the various work commissions carried on their work in people’s assemblies spread across local neighbourhoods or *barrios* (Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2011: 20; Taibo 2013: 155).



Fig. 2: A photo taken from behind a placard at a demonstration against the economic crisis which took place in Barcelona one year after the Occupy movement began.

Corsín Jiménez and Estalella note that the name used by the protestors to describe themselves –*acampados* - “forms part of a long and still-vibrant national traditional of *okupaciones* [squatter occupations]” (2011: 20). Indeed Barcelona is a city famous for the strength of its squatter movements. The proliferation of *okupaciones*/squats in Barcelona since the 1980s (Martínez López 2003) involves the occupation of abandoned or empty urban buildings and “directly questions ‘the way of life’ (and, therefore, the system of production which sustains it) of the very centre of power: the city” (Adell Argilés and Martínez López 2004: 22). Within *okupas*, anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist discourses are common (Martínez López 2003). These “neo-anarchist and situational philosophies especially emphasise the politics of daily life (in domestic production, anti-authoritarian, assembly-oriented practice, in art and bodily aesthetics, etc.), promote the demystification of politics (parties, etc.), and facilitate spaces of disinformation and communication between social movements (thus fulfilling the basic idea of a social centre where various people can meet, organise talks, debates, conferences, etc.)” (Adell Argilés and Martínez López 2004: 23). Many participants in *okupaciones* reject the label of a unified social movement, and instead they tend to focus on issues embedded in local neighbourhoods, dealing with community issues and orienting

their activities towards the cultivation of personal autonomy. Their activities often include “public diffusion of counter-cultural activities (alternative music, social and political workshops, auto-financing of occupying people and collectives, etc.) and more recent projects (urban ecology, cyber culture, bartering networks, solidarity with immigrants, etc.)” (Martínez López 2003).

Such social movements and community-level political projects were not only being carried out as a result of recent economic upheavals in the region. Community organising and neighbourhood associations have a long history in Catalonia as a whole. They were a very common form of local political activism in Catalonia under Franco, and Spanish migrants moving to urban areas lacking in basic services would often come together to demand access to those resources (García 1995: 65, 67). Indeed, García argues that “the rise of urban movements was closely related to the end of the dictatorship, which had repressed political action but had been unable to control social discontent. In this sense, it is argued that social rights became very important issues for local politics” (1995: 68). During the transition period, these community groups were co-opted by more formal modes of politics. Combined with increasingly mobile populations in urban areas, this meant that local associations became based upon other non-community interests such as feminist, ecological and anti-war movements (García 1995: 69). However, local communities did continue to come together in the face of threats to traditional industries or urban redevelopment programmes. Community associations also took on an important role in organising local cultural events and activities. García additionally argues that, in this period, community organisations more often than that took the form of voluntary neighbourhood or civic associations aimed at the provision of social services (1995: 70 - 73).

I want to focus on the narrative of another individual here – that of Diana. Her interview explicitly conveyed the hope and inspiration which such social movements could generate within some migrants. It also displayed the ambiguity towards Catalonia and the critical reflections of Mexico which were expressed in the narratives of both Maria and Antonio. This was yet another

aspect of life in the city which could change the way some migrants thought about home, and thus formed part of the transformative process from which migrant activism emerged.

Diana was a dancer and had been living in Barcelona for five and half years when I met her. Originally from the Maya Riviera in southern Mexico, she had moved to Barcelona with her Catalan husband and five year old daughter. She had wanted to move to Barcelona, she told me, so that her daughter “would have the chance to learn about the other side of her heritage”. She also felt that there would be more cultural possibilities for her work in the city. Diana was a member of dance troupe focused on transmitting political messages and protests through the medium of dance. She had also participated with #YoSoy132 Barcelona. I first met her during a meeting to organise a protest event to be held during the 2012 Mexican Independence Day celebrations. The meeting would later lead to the development of a platform named “*El Grito Colectivo*” (the collective shout) which aimed to encourage collaboration between the different Mexican activist groups in the city. Her narrative of her experiences of living in the city demonstrated a series of ambiguities which made it a place of disappointment but also of politicised hope.

She began by telling me:

“It’s been very interesting for me here. In the beginning, it cost me a lot personally to adapt to the change. I came with a number of preconceptions about Barcelona, imagining it to be at the vanguard of everything. I thought the society would be really open. But, when I moved here, I found a lot of surprises. I found the education system to have systematic faults which I found really surprising. The way people from the outside were treated put a lot of obstacles in my way, and it told me a lot about open the society really was. I was shocked to find traces of racism and groups which reject immigrants. They even blame you for the current crisis! So it was really hard for me to accept that all those positive preconceptions I had of the place had been made without really knowing it. Coming to live here was like taking a bath of cold of water. You learn to live with it, but it never stops being

difficult. That was one of the reasons why we formed our dance troupe here – we were a group of people feeling out of place, and it gave us a chance to do something constructive together.”

Despite these disappointments, she also greatly admired a number of local political movements. Discussing the things she admired about Catalonia, she said that she felt that:

“They have resisted a lot, especially the Catalan culture which has always been characterised by its resistance to a system which they feel oppresses them - not all of them, but a large sector. So in that sense they’ve worked and vindicated their language, which is something that made me fall in love with this land when I first got here. They have been able to educate both children and adults in Catalan, and well, that shows that the society has fought for it and that it hasn’t just fallen from the sky. I think we can learn a lot from that.... At first it was really hard for me personally to adapt to the change.....but the same time I also had to recognise that Catalonia has a lot to give and a lot of strength, and that’s the part we need to link ourselves with, at least for me personally”

She described how this filled her with a sense of political potentiality which had not been possible in Mexico:

“I’ve always been a dancer, but in Mexico I always felt different because, in the dancing or artistic scene, political themes are seen quite badly. Art is supposed to be your thing, and that’s not supposed to have anything to do with politics. But here, being abroad, I’ve realised that there are people who have achieved that integration of politics and their daily life, and that it isn’t badly looked upon like they make you believe in Mexico. So, whilst in Mexico I always felt different, here I see it as something normal. I can touch those subjects because there is more conscience here, more involvement. I think that by being outside it’s a lot easier because you find more people who are also angry, and they openly say it. But what goes against us as are our own personal histories, because at the end of the day we are Mexicans, and we still have still been conditioned to think that there are certain things that you can’t do and that you have to be very careful because otherwise they will

persecute you. So if anything happens, it's your own fault because you went looking for it. So we have to get rid of that, and continue working."

We can once again see feelings of ambivalence shining through Diana's narrative. When she first got to Barcelona she was "shocked" by the fact it wasn't as she expected. Like Antonio, she was disappointed to be met with racism and exclusion instead of finding herself at the vanguard. At the same time, her narrative expressed great admiration for the political mobilising which she saw going on around her. It is clear that this infused her with a sense of hope and potentiality – "I can touch those subjects because there is more conscience here". Sassen argues that this is a common feature of global cities, which become "sites for the most diverse mixes and growing concentrations of people from all over the world, whose daily life practices reinscribe the urban context with many partly reterritorialised and partly reinvented cultures, including political cultures" (2007: 172). Sassen argues that in this way, cities are "a type of postmodern frontier zone where a variety of often non-formal political subjects engage in types of politics for which the rules of engagement have not quite been shaped or fully formalised" (2007: 169). In this respect "they are also the sites for new types of politics that allow the latter to emerge as political subjects" (2007: 170).

However, Diana's narrative also shows how the inspiration which she felt by observing social movements in Catalonia actually revealed the limitations which she believed are imposed upon political expression in Mexico. Hence, not only did her experiences in Barcelona engender a new and more hopeful sense of what can be achieved through political mobilising at an individual and community level, it brought into focus the fact that she felt such potentiality was missing within Mexico. Whilst Sassen relates this to global cities in general, it is the specific social history of Barcelona and its political landscape which particularly influenced Diana. At the same time, the sense of exclusion which she experienced within Catalonia meant that she inhabited a partially detached position in terms of the connection she felt to the place. Whilst she admired the social and political mobilising going on around her, she did not feel welcomed as a part of it. The politicised

potentiality for action which she felt, then, was directed towards that which she considered herself to be a part – Mexico. Feeling excluded in Catalonia did not result in an unquestioning nostalgia for home. However, it did reaffirm an attachment to *acting upon* home in the new ways which had been brought to light through encountering certain political practices within Barcelona. Barcelona, in this view, becomes a place of disappointment, of hope, and of critical reflections about Mexico. Like the experiences of the other migrants discussed in earlier in this chapter, the ambiguity with which Diana experienced her migration illustrates how fragments of diverse migration experiences could rub against one another to create multiple forums for the rethinking of home and the meaning of political action.

3.4 Exclusion and discovery:

It is two weeks since the results of the Mexican Presidential election were announced. YoSoy132 Barcelona has just held a protest march from the main square in the centre of Barcelona down to Plaça Sant Jaume, the seat of the Catalan regional government. After the protest, I go for a bite to eat with some members of NAR and the MCMB. Sitting in the cold, stone cellar of our chosen bar, the conversation turns to discussing the difficulties of dealing with the Catalan character. Sara, a fellow anthropology student from Mexico City, begins to complain about the lack of hugs. She says that she comes from a country of hugs, where people smile at you and touch you without hesitation. "Here", she exclaims angrily, "people don't even hug you on your birthday!" She makes a pouting face and drops back into her seat making a gesture of defeat with her hands. Rosa, who is a member of NAR, contradicts her, and says that that's actually what she likes about living here – she hates gratuitous physical contact and hugs. Everybody laughs because that kind of dry remark is so fitting with Rosa's sense of humour. Later on in the evening, I sit chatting with Buddy. He tells me that he just went to get his visa renewed. He laughs with pleasure when recounting how he smugly told the Spanish immigration officers that he had a study grant from the Catalan government: "those fucking idiots can't stand the thought of an immigrant being paid to be here", he howls. Some weeks later,

however, he will go as far as to tell his mum back in Mexico to hang a Catalan flag from the window at home in order to show solidarity with the Catalans on Catalan Independence Day.

(Reflections from the field based on field-diary entries)

The individual descriptions of living in Barcelona featured so far in this chapter have revealed the ways in which different aspects of the migration experience could generate ambivalence towards, and newly articulated critiques of, both Catalonia and Mexico. However, as the above excerpt shows, the *condition* of being an immigrant in Catalonia stimulated very particular reactions among migrants (see also De Genova 2002; Sigfrid Grønseth 2010; Sigona 2012; Ticktin 2006). Adapting to different modes of sociability, and adjusting to certain attitudes towards immigrants within the context of the fight for Catalan independence, formed part of continual process on the part of migrants in which they evaluated their 'place' within Catalan society. In this section, I look at the way the position of 'being an immigrant' in Catalonia impacted upon the way individual migrants thought about home. I focus in particular on the narrative of Laura, who dwelt upon experiences of racism, exclusion *and* multiculturalism in Barcelona during our interview. Her words reveal another facet of living in the city which could result in feelings of ambiguity and critical reflection towards Mexico. Before doing so, I give a description of the kinds of identity politics going on in Catalonia at the time of my fieldwork.

In a context in which Catalans seek to defend their cultural practices and language from what is seen as Spanish hegemony, the successful integration of immigrants within Catalonia is often seen as their acquisition of Catalan cultural attributes (Brandes 1990: 24, 25). In this way, Brandes argues that Catalan identity "can be acquired through learning and then internalised to the point of thorough identification" (1990: 35). This means that, with ethnicity being enacted upon the basis of cultural attributes, attempts to suppress Catalan culture are "equivalent to their annihilation as a people" (1990: 35). As a result, demonstrating linguistic or cultural proficiency can often be understood as an expression of "solidarity" with the Catalan people. However, Brandes

notes that those who are not able to demonstrate detailed cultural competency may, as a result, continue to be excluded (1990: 39). This makes it more likely that those immigrants who maintain their own cultural practices or who do not display a high degree of fluency in Catalan and other signs of cultural competence will find integration more difficult (Collins 2007: 15; Woolard and Gahng 1990).

Catalan ethnicity, which can in many ways be seen as acquisitive, can also become essentialised when it overlaps with understandings of race. This can prevent foreigners from being seen as 'Catalan' even after they acquire linguistic and cultural fluency (Brandes 1990; i Salamé 2004: 435; Miley 2002). Indeed, Subiros notes that there are "contradictions between the constant rhetorical calls for integration from the host society and the real obstacles of all kinds that in practice almost always make this impossible both at work and in the personal sphere" (2011: 438). Even though migrants to Barcelona may see themselves as being *from* Catalonia, as *being* Catalan, they often experience negations of these identities by other (white) Catalans based on essentialised notions of race and belonging. This then translates to exclusion from the workplace, discrimination in school and exclusionary practices in social contexts (Solé 2005: 17; Subiros 2011: 440 - 444).

In many ways, the somewhat contradictory enactment of Catalan ethnicity as both acquisitive *and* racially essentialised means that it cannot be divorced from the wider historical understandings of race in Spain as a whole. According to Martin-Marquez, "the conceptualisation of race has always played an essential role in constructions of identity in Spain, particularly since the modern nation-state was founded upon a brutal effort to 'purify' Spanish blood after eight centuries of Muslim, Jewish and Christian coexistence" (2001: 7). Many immigrant groups in contemporary Spain, especially those which are "non-Spanish, non-Christian, non-Western origin" (Vilaros 2003: 239), are constructed as "cultural others" and even 'invaders' (Dietz 2004; Rogozen-Soltar 2007: 865; Zapata-Barrero 2007: 9). Suárez-Navaz, however, claims that Latin American migrants living in Spain hold a particular kind of post-colonial positionality within the national Spanish imagination of alterity. They are grouped together and homogenised as "Latino" or "Hispano", categorisations

which can act to “whiten” them as “others”. Similarly, “in public discourse, references are made to metaphors of kinship and blood, alluding to the cultural proximity between the two groups (2012: 43). Despite this, Latin Americans living in the country still experience high rates of racialised and cultural discrimination. This translates to their economic stigmatization, exclusion from local businesses and also experiences of violence (Breton 2007: 255-257; Lucko 2011: 213; Pedone 2007: 258; SOS Racisme Catalunya 2009; Subiros 2011: 437).

This also fits into wider trends in Europe with regards to the treatment of immigrant groups, where an emphasis on cultural differences construes them as a problem of national import (Silverstein 2005: 366) . This can mean that they are excluded on the basis of their ‘otherness’ (Linke 2004: 209-212; Porqueres i Gene 2007; Ticktin 2006; Tsuda 2000). Rather than being openly racist, this discourse is based on an essentialist assumption of the incompatibility of reified cultures. It discriminates against the stranger and the foreigner (Stolcke 1995: 1-8). At the same time, “not all strangers are equally strange” (Fitzpatrick 1995: 15). This indicates that this form of cultural fundamentalism still acts as a form of racism (Garner 2007: 62). In this kind of scenario, even when migrants do achieve some measure of political inclusion, it is often on the basis of their status as an ‘immigrant’ and they are expected to act upon immigrant interests (Subiros 2011: 443).

I do not mean to categorise Catalan society *as racist*. Following Candea’s description of the “shifting politics of victimhood” in Corsica (2006: 372), I recognise that, in cases of minority/majority divisions (in this case those of Spain: Catalonia: immigrants), the assertion of one kind of victimhood (in opposition to the Spanish state) can have negative effects for other members of a society (in this case, immigrants). What is important, however, is the fact that the articulation of such identity politics created a specific social and political context to which my participants migrated. In the final part of this section I focus on the experience of Laura, whose interview narrative went into particular depth about the ambiguities engendered by Catalan identity politics and experiences of racism. I do so in order to highlight the thread of continuity between her narrative and those

discussed earlier in the chapter, and to tease out the ways they could result in more critical understandings of Mexican society.

Laura was a member of the MCMB (who had also counted for *Menos Días Aquí*) and had been living in Barcelona for ten years when I met her. Originally from a wealthy neighbourhood in Mexico City, she had gone to Catalonia as an exchange student for six months. She decided to extend her stay and complete the rest of her degree in Art rather than go back to Mexico. After graduating she decided to stay on, began working, and moved in with her Catalan partner (who she later broke up with). She told me that she had never planned to stay in Barcelona indefinitely - she simply never got round to leaving. Eventually, she opened a cultural centre which combined her two great loves – art and cookery. When I interviewed her about her experiences of living in the city she had just received Spanish citizenship, and was making preparations to marry her Mexican fiancé (who she had met there). Her narrative of her time in Barcelona displayed an ambiguity with regards to her feelings about the place and shifted from feelings of anger and negativity to reflective evaluations of the positive influences she had received there. It was particularly illustrative of the ambivalence which racism and assertions of Catalaneity could engender. I reproduce large sections of her narrative here, before discussing its implications in detail at the end of the section. This is because the flow of her narrative reveals particular ambivalences towards home *and* Catalonia, the significance of which becomes most apparent after having viewed her narrative in its entirety.

She began by making an observation which indicated to me that she was not completely at ease with her status in Catalonia.

"I think that wherever you are, if you're an immigrant, you're always going to be on the outside. No matter how many people you know, even if you have a partner from there, even if you speak the language and everything, there is always going to be something. You're always going to be in that position of belonging and not belonging. Sometimes you think you belong, other times you don't..."

Laura, then, felt uncomfortable with her status as an immigrant. At the same time, her feelings about living in Catalonia demonstrated at once an appreciation for local culture and unease with its politicised undercurrent:

“Specifically in Catalonia, it’s been quite interesting for me because I didn’t realise that I was coming to such an independent culture. I knew that they spoke Catalan and that there was a difference in their traditions, but I didn’t know I was going to find that separatist or independence intention. It has been interesting to get to know it, to see how the implementation of a culture works. But, I think it’s gone to an extreme. I speak Catalan, and I like to speak it. I really like Catalan culture, and I think it’s very defined with regards to its characteristics. It’s a very individual, independent culture. But, they’ve taken advantage of the culture in order to implement a political ideology which is extremist and which excludes a lot of immigrants. Catalans. In their fight to Catalanise themselves, don’t see that. They do and say things which push us to one side.”

Hence, the way she felt about Catalan culture was inherently ambivalent: she both appreciated certain aspects of it, and yet resented cultural impositions which were related to particular independence politics. She also, however, displayed an ambiguity towards the people:

“On the one hand, I do like it here because the people can be quite open minded. You know, in terms of gay rights, thinking liberally, things like that. But at the same time their way of interacting with people is really closed off. It’s just like a different mentality. It’s simply a question of cultural understanding, but it’s really hard. Especially as a Mexican, I mean I think it’s hard for all of us Latin Americans because we expect Spain, Catalonia, France, Italy to all be more open because they are Latin. But it’s a totally different mentality. You hug in a different way, people hardly touch one another, and eventually it infects you”.

Despite the unease she felt when it came to certain Catalan forms of sociability, she found in Barcelona a multicultural potential which allowed her to discover unknown aspects of home. She

believed that she would never have had access to this potential in Mexico, and so Barcelona became a place of pleasurable discovery:

“One thing I think which has to do with Barcelona – not with Catalonia but with Barcelona specifically – is....well, I’ve said it many times: I came to Barcelona in order to find Latin America, and Barcelona has been a place which has allowed me to discover many Mexicos. I come from a very closed, and very conservative society in Mexico which has a lot of double moralities. It’s very hypocritical and very traditionalist in certain things, and very Americanised in others. In my family there is a profound love for Mexican art, especially popular art. So, in a strange distanced way I knew Mexico a lot culturally. But it was difficult to coexist with people from outside my own society. Mexico is very stratified. The societies or ‘classes’ – although that word pisses me off – are very divided, and there is a lot of contrast. No matter how hard you try, it’s really hard to leave your own bubble and connect with other circles without there being discrimination or differentiation. But being in Barcelona allowed me to get to know all those different Mexicos which, being over there, I wasn’t able to know. In Mexico, I didn’t know anyone from Monterrey, or Chiapas, or Veracruz, or Guadalajara – everyone was from my lifelong circle. What Barcelona has allowed me to do, by being a receiving city, is to get to know all of those different Mexicos. Similarly in Mexico if Central American migrants arrive, they stay in the lower straits of society. So in Mexico I had never met someone from El Salvador, or Guatemala, or Costa Rica. There just isn’t that possibility which exists here of being able to go into a house and find a mix of different nationalities. That’s something really specific to Barcelona, but especially with regards to Latin Americans. So to be honest, the longer I stay in Barcelona, the thing that keeps me here the most is that diversity.”

This emphasises the importance of the particular characteristics of a given locality in influencing the subjectivities of migrants (Basch, et al. 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001). The tone of her narrative at this point opened out here into one of discovery, and indicates a sense of having been transformed in the way she thought about home. When discussing the multiculturalism

on offer in Barcelona, her voice took on an animated and enthusiastic quality. As such, she experienced her migration as having given her the chance to encounter home in new ways (Ley Cervantes 2012; Wiles 2008). But, this discussion then led her to angrily reflect on the negative feelings which assertions of Catalaneity on top of such multiculturalism could create:

“I think it’s really important that the Catalans seek to preserve their culture and that they want to Catalanise things. I think it’s a dignified and necessary struggle. But, in their fight to Catalanise themselves, they don’t realise that the jewel in the crown of Barcelona is actually its diversity. But they are so preoccupied with making everything which is Catalan shine that they forget what Catalonia actually looks like today. They forget that it is really diverse. At what fucking moment have those who defend Catalan so strongly ever thought to learn Urdu or something? They never fucking think about that. It’s just all ‘Catalan! Catalan! Catalan’ and the rest of us don’t exist. That’s really fucked up, right?”

She extended this theme, becoming more agitated as she did so. Her voice became raised and took on an angry quality:

“Now that I got my nationality in May, it was so brutal, because I went to pick up my passport and everything went so well. I didn’t have to wait at all, and when I told my friend how surprised I was, she said ‘Are you stupid? Haven’t you realised? You did the paperwork as a European’. And then I realised – I had done the paperwork as a Spaniard. That’s why I had an appointment. They didn’t make me wait. There was air conditioning. They didn’t make me run here and there for a stamp. They only took five minutes and then I had my passport. What a fucking difference to the three fucking hours I had to stand outside; the misery of having to try to get my work visa; putting up with the stupid security guard outside who looks like he should be guarding a club. All just so that they can give me a fucking number so that I can wait another three hours in a room without air-conditioning, without heating....and you just can’t believe that they want to treat you like that even when you pay your taxes and you are there legally. They are literally sons of bitches.”

However, the anger which she displayed at such treatment also gave way to a new kind of reflectivity extended towards the subjectivities of other migrants:

“I think that until I lived here, I didn’t understand what that was like [being an immigrant]. My parents had worked for a charity which helped Mexican children who had been deported by the United States, so I was aware of the issue. But it’s not the same when you live through it yourself as an immigrant – and that’s with me being a privileged immigrant. I’ve never had legal problems with my visa. I’ve always had papers. They’ never denied my anything. But, even as a privileged immigrant, which is migration by choice - I decide to be here - you still suffer the migrational processes. Imagine being an immigrant who isn’t privileged, who can’t choose...I can’t even imagine what their experience must be like. I know I couldn’t even begin to understand it. I can try to empathise, but it must be so shit. Totally shit.”

Although she was angered by the treatment she had received in Barcelona, this opened up the possibility of considering the experiences of others who did not share in her privileges. She also felt that interacting with other Mexicans and Latin Americans in Barcelona had given her a new appreciation for the different realities faced by others at home. As a result, there were aspects of home, and of her life there, which became extremely uncomfortable to accept:

“There are a lot of things which I can’t see in the same way when I go to Mexico. Now I feel like I don’t fit in when I’m there, I don’t know how to stay quiet in the face of certain things. But, then again, I know that if I spit on something I’m also spitting on myself, on my society which, I mean, I do it, and at first I did it with a lot of anger, but now I have learned that no matter how angry I am I still have to be respectful because it’s hard for someone to change their point of view.”

She turned to me, and asked:

“How do you fight against machismo? How do you fight against homophobia, against racism, abuse and discrimination against indigenous people? In Mexico, they don’t recognise those things, how do you fight those things in your own culture?” She went on to explain that “you can’t see those things clearly until you live outside, and you can analyse it and live in another way. It’s an intellectual and emotional journey.”

Throughout Laura’s narrative, it became clear that she had a love-hate relationship with her life in Barcelona. Ambiguity shone through, as did the duality of the nature of her responses. The way she expressed her feelings of exclusion and racist discrimination show that she was made angry and resentful by the behaviour of certain Catalans. However, that very discrimination also opened a window onto her being able to imagine the experience of other migrants who were less privileged than her – something which she “had never experienced” before. She claimed that she admired Catalan culture and appreciated the freedom of expression which she has found there. She enjoyed speaking the language and respected the reasons for the pursuit of Catalan independence. At the same time, the assertion of the Catalan language also made her feel excluded. Whilst she eventually came to understand the cultural differences between Catalonia and Mexico, which could manifest themselves in different forms of sociability, she did not enjoy them. The tone of her narrative here was angry and indignant. However, it was perhaps in that very exclusion that she found the reason which compelled her to remain in Barcelona: its immigrant population. Her tone swiftly changed to one of wonderment and discovery. She told us that living in Barcelona opened up a whole new world to her. It allowed her to meet people from elsewhere in Mexico and Latin America whom she did not think she would have otherwise been able to meet. As such, her narrative also showed how Barcelona could become a place of friendship and enjoyment. It became a place where she could discover new aspects of her homeland.

Once again, though, ambivalence and a critical reflexivity came to the surface. By interacting with other Mexicans in the city, she was exposed to alternative understandings of the

country. Her narrative shows how this could result in critical new interpretations of Mexican society, as well as leading her to express discomfort at the thought of returning. She didn't "know how to act" when she visited Mexico. This did not, however, result in a new sense of comfort with her life in Barcelona. If anything, being able to enjoy Barcelona's multicultural potentiality only increased her anger towards exclusionary assertions of Catalaneity. Her narrative revealed a constant shifting between ease and happiness, anger and disappointment. Each of these states had the potential to impact upon the other – making critiques or celebrations of Mexico and Barcelona more likely. She did not experience her migration in one static moment – it was a processual and ever-changing locus of experience.

What becomes most noticeable here is the thread of continuity with the narratives discussed in the rest of the chapter: the main feature of her migration experience was ambiguity and critical reflections about Mexico. She felt somewhat dislocated within Catalonia, and unable to stop feeling like an immigrant. This combined with the insecurity which was generated by the newly articulated understandings of Mexican society which occurred as a result of her interactions with other immigrants. An image of Laura as being suspended between Mexico and Barcelona, feeling dislocated from both and yet intimately connected to them arises from her words. Her narrative shows different avenues of longing: longing for less discrimination and more friendliness within Catalonia, and a longing for the comfort of Mexican forms of sociability. Like Sara, she desired those Mexican hugs which she felt were lacking in Catalonia. However, it also shows various fragments of dislocation: she is unable to feel securely rooted within Catalonia as a result of her immigrant status and the exclusions she feels are created by certain enactments of Catalaneity. At the same time, she doesn't know how to act when she goes back to Mexico: she can no longer view home in the same way, or behave in the same ways she used to. The image which comes to the fore, then, is that of being suspended between places. This is the result of the ambivalent and critical reflections which have taken place as a result of her migration experience. It is precisely that suspension between

places and sense of ambivalence which made uncomfortable aspects of both Mexican and Catalan society visible.

3.5 Conclusion:

This chapter has revealed the ways in which individuals experienced migration as a site of ambiguity (Kearney 2000). It was a source of despair but also of potentiality. From their narratives, we can see that people missed aspects of home which were lacking in Barcelona. At the same time, facets of their lives in Barcelona revealed to them new understandings of home which were much more critical than before. The narratives presented in this chapter display feelings of ambivalence on the part of migrants when it came to evaluating Barcelona as a place to live. My participants constantly alternated between positive and negative states in each of the interviews I carried out. Sometimes they would demonstrate contentment with the city and its people, at other times disappointment and anger. Though the focus of each narrative presented was slightly different, they all illustrate how, for each individual, life in Barcelona was not all it was expected to be. The descriptions of feeling lonely in the city, being excluded by racism and politicised assertions of Catalaneity, and of not finding what they had hoped to find all convey a sense of estrangement from how they had originally 'imagined' Barcelona to be. It also becomes apparent in those narratives that this estrangement did not result in uncritical nostalgia for Mexico. Instead, they show how life in Barcelona could provide different contexts through which Mexican society could be critically re-evaluated. The voices of my participants are ambiguous. They are not happy in Barcelona, but neither do they want to return to Mexico. At the same time, certain aspects of the city could provide them with satisfaction and pleasure. Neither did life there result only in critical interpretations of Mexico. Their narratives still convey a sense of appreciation for those aspects of Mexico which they miss and which Barcelona is lacking.

Boym notes how immigrants from the former Soviet Union lived 'home' whilst abroad through "double estrangement and affection" (2001: 258). This certainly resonates with the narratives explored in this chapter. My participants displayed feelings of estrangement from Mexico at the same time that they showed affection and longing for the country. The migrants whose narratives I have discussed in this chapter spoke about home through "double-voiced discourses of belonging and not belonging to the homeland" (Andits 2010: 991). In discussing Australian-Hungarians' experiences of exile, Andits claims that the disappointed hopes for being welcomed by 'the homeland' in a post-Soviet era led exiles to imagine Hungary in specific ways. Their hopes for being connected to Hungary became "dialogically intertwined" with anxiety for what such links actually brought (2010: 1002). As such, Hungarian exiles came to speak about their homeland in a "double-voiced" way. However, this chapter has shown that migration does not lead to ambivalence being directed only towards the homeland. Instead, ambivalence can become the structuring experience of living in the destination society.

What happens when migrants experience ambiguity towards their homeland *and* towards their destination society? I argue that they become suspended between multiple fragments of belonging *and* un-rootedness. The migrational experience can disrupt and make visible certain structures of inequality within the homeland (Dyrness 2014: 64). It can change the way migrants imagine and think about their homelands (Jeffery 2010: 1107). However, fantasies of life in the destination society, and the ways in which such fantasies can be disrupted, also make visible unsatisfactory structures within the destination (Amit 1998; Dyrness 2014: 78). In this way, the experience of migration can transform the way in which sending and receiving societies are viewed, along with the way migrants imagine their movements and their futures (Baker-Cristales 2004; Jeffery 2010: 1104). Mexican migration to Barcelona, in this view, becomes a space which creates the possibility for critical questionings of the world. As individuals search for points of meaningful belonging in multiple spaces, they become caught in the revelations of structures and practices of which they do not wish to be a part in *either* place. The result was a migration which was

experienced through fragments of belonging. It is here that the political potential of ambivalence became most potent (Muehlebach 2012; Parreñas 2012; Richard and Rudnyckij 2009; Thrift 2008: 240).

Sigfrid Grønseth, in her study of Tamil refugees in Norway, argues that their migration led them to undergo “abrupt crises in sense of personhood, identity, spirituality, and cosmology” (2010: 81). This is because life in a Norwegian context lacked the comfort of familiarity and those wider familial and cosmological structures which were seen as necessary to the completion of the Tamil self. As a result, a number of refugees experienced “life in exile as fragmented and threatening to their existence of social persons”. In addition to losing their sense of “Tamil wholeness”, they were only able to experience and integrate themselves into parts of a “Norwegian wholeness”. The result of life in-between ‘wholes’, argues Sigfrid Grønseth, was a search for new practices which gave meaning to new forms of daily life experienced by the refugees. This was most significantly articulated in a renegotiation of religious and ritual practices (2010: 127). Migration here became a source of “agency and creativity” in which refugees looked for new ways of experiencing community” (2010: 218). The fragments of belonging experienced by Mexicans in Barcelona not only came into friction with one another, but they were able to reveal aspects of everyday life of which individuals became newly critical. Migration became transformational by creating a context in which individuals could reassess and evaluate their fantasies of Catalonia and memories of Mexico. They opened up the societies where migrants lived to critique. They became transformative by engendering new ways of seeing the world. The sense of fragmented emplacement in Catalonia and Mexico was not one that would be partially ‘resolved’ by renegotiations of practices of belonging (Ehrkamp 2005; Sigfrid Grønseth 2010). The sense of being suspended between places would remain with migrants throughout their time in Barcelona. However, it did create the possibility of *acting upon the world* in new ways. By revealing previously unconsidered structures of inequality and exclusion in both Mexico and Catalonia, the ambiguity of migration opened up a space for seeking to change the world, rather than adapt to it (Kearney 2000).

It is this ambiguity and critical reflection which I want to take with us into the next chapter. There, I argue that particular ways of emotionally responding to news from home would create a context in which the desire to engage in activism directed at Mexico emerged. This chapter has shown how migrating to Barcelona was important in creating a continuous backdrop of ambiguity, vulnerability, and social critique amongst migrants. This created a particular sense of fragmented belonging which, as I will argue, was important for the way in which news from home would be received by migrants. Boym states that reflective nostalgia “can be both a social disease and a creative emotion, a poison and a cure.” (Boym 2001: 354). In chapter four, I show how it became both emotionally disabling *and* politically enabling. It was an essential part of the process through which the activism of privileged Mexican migrants in Barcelona emerged. The potential of the ambiguity of their migration experiences to highlight aspects of Mexican society with which they were unhappy created an opening for the emotional reactions to the news from home which will be discussed in the next chapter. As I will show, it created an opening for asserting new kinds of equality and sameness with others in Mexico (cf. Noble 2013)

Chapter Four:

News Affects

4.1 Introduction:

It is the day of the 2012 Mexican general election. Lolita has invited the members of NAR to spend the night at her night house so that we can “live through the moment together”. We get to her house in the early afternoon. There are eight of us in total. Almost immediately our computers are set up around the dining table so that we can get constant news feeds about what is happening in Mexico. Before that, people had been constantly checking their phones on the train in order to get news updates. The atmosphere is strange. Everyone seems to be simply living the moment and trying to find as much information as possible. Every now and then someone reads a headline or news story out loud, or pauses to watch a YouTube video of ballot boxes being stolen or burnt. It is an afternoon filled with suspense and nervousness. I get the impression that we have come together with a sense of purpose, of witnessing the events together. At the same time, everyone is wrapped up in an intensely personal moment. Each person is obsessively searching for information, utterly absorbed in their tasks. People make jokes, we eat a lot of food, and sometimes we speak of other things. But, overall, it is tense night. At 3am, the first preliminary results are announced. Enrique Peña Nieto, the leader of the PRI, has already been declared the winner despite the fact that less than 2% of the votes have been counted. Everyone is shouting at the TV, their voices indignant. When the first results are announced, a shudder of shocked disappointment runs through the room. There is also,

however, a sad acceptance that deep down, everyone knew what would happen. Most people now sit quietly, absorbing the news. When the new PRI governor of Jalisco is interviewed on television, and he makes it clear that his focus will be on 'security', Lolita begins to cry. She repeats "poor Jalisco" to herself over and over again. We go to bed at 4am. Maria, David and Buddy, however, won't sleep for another hour. They continue to look at the news feeds on their phones. Maria then wakes up at 7 to see how events are unfolding. Late on in the morning, we all reconvene on the patio of Lolita's house. We once again spend the day sitting around the table, following what is happening in Mexico. Everyone is quiet. The atmosphere is very subdued. The conversation centres around what will happen now, and what might be done within Mexico to challenge the results. We start to compare a map of the election results with a map of the drugs cartels. Lolita once again starts to cry about what will happen with the war now that the PRI is back in power. David and Maria hug her, but no-one mouths any platitudes, knowing that her concerns are valid. An atmosphere of disbelief and dejection pervades the air. Buddy and Maria begin to emphasise the need to go on. As the afternoon continues, we have lunch and prepare to be filmed by a Catalan news crew who are doing a piece about the elections. At 7pm, after a long and intense day, we take the train home.

(Reflections from the field based on field-diary entries)

This scene, whilst occurring in Barcelona, was host to emotions inspired by what was happening in Mexico. The news featured as a major source of information about events which were unfolding there, and provided my participants with a sense of connection to something about which they cared a great deal. The pervasiveness of needing to feel informed, and of reacting strongly to disturbing content in the news, became visible in the obsessive searching for news updates which occurred over the two days. The day of the elections was an especially tense time during my fieldwork, since it represented a watershed in terms of the return of the party responsible for a seventy one year *de facto* dictatorship in Mexico. Despite the importance of that specific event,

however, the pattern of obsessively following the news, searching for information about ‘what was really happening’, and of being emotionally affected by that news, occurred on a daily basis for many of the migrants I worked with. Indeed, the central focus of this chapter explores why emotional reactions to the news were implicated in a sense of politicised, personal transformation amongst individual migrants.

In the previous chapter, we saw how migrants’ narratives of life in Barcelona displayed a certain ambivalence. They conveyed critical reflections of Mexico and Barcelona, indicating feelings of dis-location from both. At the same time, their narrations indicated a sense of belonging to the two places. By experiencing migration through fragments of belonging and critical questionings, I argued that the experience itself became transformational and opened up both societies to newly articulated critiques by migrants. In this chapter, I trace the ways in which such fragmented loci of belonging resulted in specific readings of the news from Mexico. By analysing the words individual migrants chose to describe their feelings upon reading the news, the tones in which those narratives were delivered, and their reactions to events unfolding in Mexico when amongst other migrants, I argue that they experienced the news as a site of intense personal transformation. It also resulted in an emotionally intense rethinking of the nation; a process through which the structures of Mexican society - and migrants’ personal implications in those structures - became visible to individuals. I argue that emotionally reacting to the news meant that it became a sight of self- and societal-critique in which individuals felt a need for the comfort of others undergoing similar intensities of feeling. It thus contained the potential for politicised action, and became an important constitutive factor in the emergence of Mexican activism in Barcelona.

4.2 Ways of Reacting to the News

The focus of this section is divided into two parts. The first looks at the narratives of migrants who did *not* become involved in political activism oriented towards Mexico. I look at the

attitudes towards the news which their interviews revealed, and show how certain individuals demonstrated a tendency to become distanced from the news, rather than to further emotionally implicate themselves with it. My purpose in doing so is to highlight the difference between such reactions and those of my participants. I move on to describe the ways individual activists reacted to information coming out of Mexico in extremely emotional ways. I then ask what impact such emotionally saturated narratives of reading the news had in terms of an individual's desire to engage in political action.

4.2.1 Avoiding the news:

During my time in the field, I was able to build relationships with some migrants who were *not* involved in political activism. Instead, they focused on promoting Mexico culturally from abroad. This implied an avoidance of politicised topics. I was able to interview them about their migrational experiences, and their narratives are particularly revealing as a point of comparison with those of my informants. During my interviews with such individuals, I broached the issue of what they thought about political developments happening in Mexico. I include their responses here so that I can highlight the extent to which my participants' responses diverged from them.

Pablo was in his mid-thirties and had been living in Barcelona for over a decade. After retiring from a career in dance, he co-founded an association which promoted Mexican culture in Catalonia, and Catalan culture in Mexico. This association was very keen to keep political discourses out of their activities, and its silence on political issues often came under fire from Mexican activists in Barcelona. I interviewed Pablo about his experiences of living in Catalonia, and about why he had decided to set up the association. His answer is revealing since it portrays a particular kind of attitude towards the news coming out of Mexico.

He explained that:

“When I arrived here thirteen years ago, the perception that people had of Mexico was really positive. Basically they saw it as a holiday paradise. But, in the past four years, only negative views have been portrayed in the media.”

This is a very revealing quote. The equation of Mexico with images of a ‘holiday paradise’ is seen as a positive one. However, media portrayals of events occurring in the country since his arrival (i.e. the beginning of the war on drugs and the return of the PRI) are seen as something negative. Rather than implying an emotional shock and transformation in how Mexico is viewed, his attitude reflected an intentional strategy to keep such views of the nation separate to his own. He went on to further describe how he felt about the media’s portrayal of what was happening in Mexico:

“From my point of view, the war on drugs has been very positive because at the least the government has been strong in confronting a scourge of society, which is what drug trafficking is. It hasn’t all gone well for them, it has had a lot of negative consequences, but at least it has tamed something which, if it hadn’t been attacked, maybe people wouldn’t even realise what was going on. It’s just a shame that it’s the negative part of this which is the bit that sells most in the sensationalist press and that it’s the bit which has been exported.”

This view associates the drugs war with criminality, and very much reflects ‘the official’ line taken by the government. The fact that he sees media representations of the “negative part” as “a shame” implies that his own view of those involved in the war has not changed in light of such news stories. Instead, he prefers to challenge such portrayals by reasserting what he sees as the benefits of the war. This position is in direct opposition to that taken by my participants, who, as I will show in the following section, completely reevaluated their understanding of the war as a result of their encounters with the news from abroad. In light of his frustration with how people’s perceptions of Mexico were changing, Pablo explained that:

“The association emerged in an attempt to tackle the negative image of Mexico abroad. The impression that I have at the minute is that there is a lot of ignorance regarding what Mexico actually is.”

Pablo’s answer showed that he was more comfortable with Mexico being perceived as a tourist paradise than he was with perceptions of it as a country of drugs trafficking. For him, those involved in the drugs war were the “scourge of society” and, as a result, were not part of the Mexico which he considered to be most ‘real’. The press coverage of the war on drugs was, in his opinion, sensationalist, and he made it clear that such sensationalism made him uncomfortable; it conveyed a false impression of what Mexico “is”. As such, he preferred to challenge its impact. This position represents a particular political stance, and a particular position of ‘closure’ towards others who were suffering within Mexico: it does not show a development of empathy with the victims of the war. It shows that the critical questionings of home which occurred as a result of migration in the previous chapter did not happen for all migrants. This highlights the importance of the ambiguities which could be generated by migration to the process of emergence of certain forms of privileged migrant activism.

Such attitudes towards the news emerged time and time again amongst migrants not involved in political activism. Isabel, for example, was a new recruit to Pablo’s cultural association. She had moved to Barcelona less than a year earlier, accompanying her husband whose firm had transferred him to the region. The first time I met her was in a corridor outside the room where the association’s weekly meetings took place. She had been discussing with a friend the spread of violence in Mexico. They were sharing stories about relatives who had heard shoot-outs happening nearby, and who had to check to make sure the motorways they wanted to travel on were safe. They were complaining about how inconvenient it was that people had to take such things into account now. I joined the conversation and asked if they were planning to attend a demonstration

which was being organised by the MCMB the following week. Isabel paused and, looking a little awkward, said no. She added that they preferred to keep themselves at a distance from those things. She made it clear to me that, whilst she may acknowledge the fact that the war was happening, that did not mean that she wished to become involved in any political activities aimed at challenging it. At a later date, I asked Isabel if I could interview her about her experiences of living in Catalonia, and about her work with the cultural association. During the interview, I asked why she felt her cultural work was important.

She began by telling me that:

“Unfortunately Mexico is constantly going through a problem, quite an unpleasant and crude situation, a problem which makes all the journalists and the press become quite sensationalist, in red alert, saying that people shouldn’t visit and that kind of thing, and well, you know that the press often tends to be quite sensationalist in order to sell news.”

This quote implies that, whilst she is aware of what was happening at home, its representation in the media had the effect of annoying rather than disturbing her. She doesn’t like the fact that the press tells people not to visit Mexico as a result of the danger. She told me that she was annoyed that people tended to have only negative views of Mexico. As a result, she explained:

“What the association looks to do is, while it’s true that Mexico is going through a situation, but in Mexico that isn’t the only thing that happens. We also have artistic and cultural things which are very good, of a very high level, and we want to make those known and to share them with others. So it’s really gratifying, to be able to show and present your project, ideas or activities, and for those people to like it”.

Isabel, then, was aware of what was happening in Mexico. As evidenced by her conversation in the corridor that day, she was aware of the adjustments which certain people had to make to their lives as a result of the violence. Her responses in the interview also indicate that she was aware of the information contained in the news coming out of Mexico. What is important for my purposes here is the fact that she chose to describe such news as mainly sensationalist. She also preferred to focus on cultural activities which would promote a positive image of Mexico. Hence, rather than feeling compelled to protest at the news in a political way, she preferred to distance herself from it and highlight other aspects of Mexico.

A similar approach towards the news was displayed by Daniel, who had been a member of the association for just over a year. He had come to Barcelona in order to study for a Ph.D. in economics, and worked in catering in order to help fund his studies.

He told me that:

“When I first got here I used to read the newspapers a lot. But then, after seeing so much bad news, I stopped looking at them. They only write things about drug trafficking, and that’s the only image that people have of Mexico. Everyone thinks that we are all killing each other over there...well on the one hand, they are, but I like to see the positive side of things and not the negative side”.

In the responses of both Pablo and Isabel it is clear that, while they were aware of political developments happening in Mexico, they disregarded the news as sensationalist. Instead, they focused on other activities which they felt could give a ‘truer’ image of what they felt Mexico ‘is’. Meanwhile, Daniel’s narrative shows that whilst he was aware of the conflict in Mexico, he eventually decided to stop reading the news because he did not like the fact he only ever read negative stories. The general pattern here is for the severity of the news to be challenged, or for individual migrants to try to distance themselves from it.

It would be impossible for me to make a generalised claim that all Mexicans living in Europe who are *not* involved in activism share such opinions. The individuals whose narratives I have included here were involved in specific projects of promoting Mexico culturally from abroad and had explicitly decided not to become involved politically with events unfolding at home. As such, they represent very particular viewpoints and very particular experiences. Of course, the fact that I was a foreigner asking about the situation in Mexico may have provoked some people to take up a defensive position, and to try to emphasise to me that Mexico is not all bad. Even if that were the case, though, the fact that my participants did not take up such a position is revealing in itself. What impact, then, did reading the news from home have upon those migrants who *did* become involved in activism directed at Mexico? I explore this question in the next section.

4.2.2 Emotional responses to the news:

When I asked my participants how they felt about events happening in Mexico during interviews, their answers would focus on their feelings upon reading the news and discovering information about the political situation in the country. When I listened back to their responses, I realised that the content of their narratives and the tones in which they were expressed were literally dripping in emotion. The interviews were carried out not long after my informants had formed or joined activist groups. They were given at a time when my participants were still dealing with the information they had encountered. Since the information was fresh in their minds, I was able to capture their feelings about it as they were unfolding. Indeed their responses now appear to me as being emotionally saturated. Similarly, those who had been involved in activism for a longer period of time still conveyed the importance of the news in creating such emotional responses in their narratives. It featured greatly in their memories of that time and was explicitly linked with their desires 'to do something'. Their answers in interviews, and their behaviour on occasions such as the day of the Mexican general election, made the emotional impact of reading the news

ethnographically visible. Later in this chapter I discuss the significance of such reactions to information about what was happening in Mexico. For now, I want to describe the saturation of emotional discourses and behaviours in the narrations of my participants, in order to show just how ethnographically pervasive they were.

The first time I interview Maria, who was a member of both NAR and #YoSoy132 Barcelona, I was impressed by the intensity of her narrative. Maria had just opened the section of NAR called 'anonymous dreams.' She published the dreams which victims of the war sent to her in an attempt to highlight the psychological impact of the violence upon the population. She had spent weeks reading and editing dreams of violence and suffering. News from Mexico seemed to be getting more and more turbulent. It was the week that I counted the dead for the first time in *Menos Días Aquí* and, in the space of less than two weeks, nine people had been hanged from a bridge in Nuevo Laredo and the massacred bodies of at least forty-nine people had been discovered in Cadereyta. The images shown in the papers left nothing to the imagination, and they were fresh in both our minds.

When I asked what she thought about what was happening in Mexico, she described how:

"I'll go home and read Mexican newspapers and see all the terrible things that are happening, and then I realise I'm sat alone in front of a computer screen crying. But I mean that's what it's like from the outside. That's how you live Mexico from the outside. I didn't come from a Mexico that was in so much pain, but now I realise that she is in pain and that Mexico is hurting. Then other people there are saying it's not so bad....I don't know how to deal with it sometimes".

The image she creates here is one of a personally disturbing transformation: when reading the news she sits at home and cries. Her sense of connection to the upsetting information is so strong that it engenders a profound emotional response, compounded even further by the

realisation that she is separated from home by physical distance. She *feels* what is happening in Mexico, and expresses that through sadness and tears. However, her words also convey a sense of transformation. Whilst at first she gives the impression that it is Mexico alone which has changed – “I didn’t come from a Mexico that was in so much pain” – the fact that she follows this with the assertion “but now *I realise* that she is in pain and that Mexico is hurting” indicates a sense of having changed at a personal level. Is it Mexico that has changed here? Or is the change located in the fact that she now *realises* what is happening there? The emotional impact of the news is not only apparent in the behaviours and description she describes. The very tone of her narrative was extremely sorrowful. When speaking to me her voice increased in pitch, and she herself became distressed. As she was explaining how she felt, her voice took on a desperate quality and at one point her eyes began to well up. She experienced the news as a site of emotional intensity, and that affected the way she was able to talk about Mexico. Her image of the country became imbued with grief. I would argue that this had the effect of further compounding the fragmented sense of belonging which she experienced when living in Barcelona. It instilled a deep sense of connection to Mexico at the same time that it highlighted her physical distance from it. It not only made visible aspects of her homeland which could be questioned: it confronted her with violent imagery which doubly disjointed her previous understandings of the country. That double disjointment was experienced as profoundly painful.

On another occasion, I went to with her to see the film ‘*Miss Bala*’ (Miss Bullet) at a local cinema in the neighbourhood of Gràcia. The film portrayed how a young woman became forcibly involved in the drugs trade in northern Mexico. It was very realistic and hard-hitting, especially since it replicated scenes and scenarios which can be seen in real news footage from Mexico (such as bodies hanging from bridges, the scenes at a night club during and after a shooting, and the way in which the police often force accused criminals to pose for pictures to the press). Once the film had finished, Maria had a very strange expression across her face and was completely silent. When I asked her what she thought of the film, she just made a noise and stayed quiet. As soon as we got

outside, she began saying to me and a friend of hers (who had been waiting for us) that she was *angustiada* (in anguish), and that she couldn't believe that that was actually her country. Stood in the middle of the crowded street, full of people beginning their evening out, she said to us both in a very pained voice - almost crying - "What is happening in Mexico? What's happening to us? That's my country! I feel so *angustiada!*" She was clearly upset, and there was not much I felt I could do other than hug her. Her response to the film shows how the Mexico with which she was confronted in Barcelona was one which was entirely divorced from her previous experiences there. Her thinking about the country became intertwined with painful realisations which were extremely difficult to cope with. Mexico was lived at a distance through "anguish" – which in itself indicates a transformation. Because the way she understood Mexico had changed so much, and those realisations were so jarring, it became a source of anguish. Mexico was lived at a distance through emotional distress.

Similar responses to information about what was happening in Mexico occurred time and time again during my interviews with different activists. This repetition of emotional ways of thinking about Mexico demonstrates the way that, although experienced as something profoundly personal, they represented a certain commonality of experience amongst migrant activists. Adriana, for example, was a member of #YoSoy132 Barcelona. She was in her late thirties and had spent six years in Barcelona whilst studying for her Ph.D. in Maths. She left Mexico just after López Obrador lost the general election in 2006. She told me that she would have preferred to stay in Mexico if the left had won. When I interviewed her, we had just attended an event hosted by NAR in which members of the group gave presentations detailing the impact of the drug war violence in Mexico. Adriana was clearly disturbed by the content of the talk, and she explained to me that she had attended a similar event the year before. She attributed that talk, along with what she heard in the news, with her changing opinion of the situation in Mexico. When I asked if she could elaborate further, her narrative became very sorrowful and her voice took on a desperate quality:

“I remember the bombing in Michoacán on the 15th September in 2008, and it just seemed so strange to me, like a sort of terrorist attack, which was just really weird. Then I started to hear about more and more deaths, more people becoming involved with drug trafficking, more civilian deaths, and it was sort of like, I sensed that it was changing, but the context with my friends and family wasn’t telling me that. They just saw the situation in a totally different way – my family used to say ‘yeah but it’s just a war between drug traffickers’ and I explained to them that that wasn’t what it looked like from here. From here you see that a lot of deaths are happening and that a lot of them are civilians. You just get this feeling that you can see the change more from here than you can from there.”

A sense of double-disjointment from Mexico once again emerges here. Not only are her own impressions of what is happening in the country changing, but her sense of sharing an understanding of the country with friends and family who remained there has changed. She is no longer able to think about Mexico in the same way. Neither can she share in the opinions of those close to her. In a way then, she is doubly divorced from the Mexico she ‘knew’ at the same time that she becomes intensely connected to new ways of seeing it. Her narrative firmly locates her changing opinions of home in the experience of being away from it – “you get the feeling you can see the change more from here than from there”, highlighting the importance which a distanced view of home can have for a migrants’ ability to question it (Billings 2000; Jeffery 2010). Her voice then became extremely anguished when she went on to describe how she felt after listening to members of NAR speak in 2011:

“I left a country where, well maybe I didn’t pay enough attention; I didn’t realise. But, people hanging from a bridge, three men and two women, without any arms and things? I had never seen anything like it, and I just couldn’t believe it. When I went to that first talk, I touched reality; I realised that the reality is lot more drastic. Afterwards, I said to my family ‘you just don’t realise that

the country is literally drowning in blood. There are people who are suffering, and we don't even realise'. When I first heard about NAR's website, that's when I realised that my perception of the conflict in Mexico, of drug trafficking there, didn't come close to reality. But over in Mexico, I think people know the violence is happening, but they don't really take any notice. I don't want to generalise, but it really does seem to me that there is a large part of the Mexican population which just doesn't realise what's happening."

What becomes most apparent here is the sense of painful transformation rooted in the graphic and disturbing information she has been faced with. Indeed, her own narrative has become extremely graphic: she describes the country as "drowning in blood". The jarring nature of such realisations is revealed in the disbelief which Adriana displays – "I just couldn't believe it". In addition, she now sees her new understandings of Mexico as being based in "reality". However, this means that if she has only recently discovered the 'realities' of Mexico, her previous experience of living there becomes divorced from reality. Her sense of rootedness in Mexico has been dislocated from her previous life, and replaced in much more painful and disturbing images of life there. Her voice at this point was high pitched, and her words were drawn-out. It would be impossible to describe her tone as anything other than anguished. This continued throughout the interview, especially in her description of her reaction to the news that López Obrador had lost the 2012 elections. When I asked her why she had decided to join #YoSoy132 Barcelona, she responded with an emotional account of how she had felt that day:

"On the Sunday of the elections I was at home, following what was happening over the internet. I saw how people had died, how voting cards had been stolen, how the PRI bought votes or ID cards... I followed the day of the elections until around 3 or 4 in the morning. I woke up at 7am like a zombie, and in the papers here they were already saying that Peña Nieto had won when only 35% of the votes had been counted. If here they had declared him as the winner, obviously in Mexico the papers

had done it even more so. I don't know why but I still thought that Obrador could win. In that first instance when I realised he hadn't, it was like being punched in the stomach. It was a big punch. I was restless, depressed; I couldn't work at university. I ended up coming home. I just felt really bad. Then I saw on the internet that YoSoy132 was having an urgent meeting the next day at 5pm outside my university. I spoke with my parents, and I started crying when I heard them. I was just so disappointed. I was just inconsolable, and they were quite worried for me I think. I was just so upset that they had cheated us. In the end I just lay down on the bed and I thought 'if I don't go out to speak with other people who are at least talking about the same thing, I'm going to go crazy'. So I went to the meeting, and saw that the people who were as inconsolable as I was, and it helped me. I felt relieved".

The resonance with the behaviour of the members of NAR with whom I spent the election night is strong here. The obsessive following of the news into the early hours of the morning, and the desolation and shock which occurred upon realising that López Obrador had not won the elections, are repeated in Adriana's narrative. The immediate and embodied nature of reactions to the news, and how Adriana as an individual experienced them, becomes most apparent (see also Heatherington 2005: 146). Receiving news of the election was like "being punched in the stomach". She described herself as being "inconsolable" and "distressed". Her need to find others who were feeling the same way illustrates the way the news could lead to a double estrangement from Mexico for migrants like her. Not only had she undergone a transformation in how she viewed Mexico, but the strength of her emotions upon reading the news in light of those changed understandings impeded her ability to extract herself from those feelings. If migration resulted in feelings of being suspended between Barcelona and Mexico then emotional encounters with the news led to a sense of being trapped within those new and more painful readings of Mexico. It seems that one way of trying to alleviate the distress this caused at a personal level was to find others who were feeling the same: that is why the members of NAR came together in order to live through the elections

night together, and it is the reason why Adriana went to her first meeting with #YoSoy132 Barcelona. Emotional readings of the news were experienced at a profoundly personal level, and they could result in a sense of personal entrapment in an individual's new and distressing ways of living the nation. However, one way of dealing with such emotions was to be amongst others who shared in them: a personal and individual experience thus became a collective one which was rooted in emotional rethinkings of the nation.

This sense of being estranged from Mexico *and* painfully connected to it could also be seen in the account given to me by Paula. Paula was a forty-year old freelance artist from Mexico City. She had moved to Barcelona almost ten years earlier with her first husband, who was Catalan. When I met her she had recently given birth to her first child, who she had with her second husband – a Mexican writer whom she had met through participating in Mexicanos en Resistencia. She was a member of the MCMB and had recently set-up an exhibition named “*No Nos Cabe Tanta Muerte*” (We can't hold so much death). The exhibition explored the impact of femicides in Ciudad Juarez. One evening during the exhibition I stayed behind after the screening of a documentary in order to speak to Paula. When I asked her how she had felt when producing her pieces for the exhibition, she began to explain the “*pain*” she felt when researching the femicides. Describing some of the pieces which she produced (see fig.1 and fig.2), she explained how she didn't know how to deal with the information she was seeing. She described how she was “*filled with such a sense of grief and desperation*” that the only way she felt she was able to represent it was to:

“fit as many crosses as I could within a box, within a delimited space, and to show that no matter how much I tried to fill it with crosses to represent each of the women who had been murdered, the space just couldn't hold so much death, and neither could I”.



Figs. 3 and 4. Artwork produced by Paula for the exhibition “No Nos Cabe Tanta Muerte”.

The way Paula described her feelings at the point of encountering information about the violence in Mexico gives the impression of someone who is suspended within distressing understandings of home. She felt so trapped by that distress that she felt the need to visibly translate it into her artwork: neither she, nor the box she had drawn, were able to contain the grief she felt. Her artwork is a material manifestation of her entrapment in emotion. This is information which *does something* to migrants. It inspires a profoundly felt pain in which violence happening within the homeland is translated into personal sorrow and distress from which migrants find it difficult to extricate themselves.

When we left the exhibition together that evening, we moved on to a nearby bar where I would be able to interview her in more detail about her experiences of activism in Barcelona. By that point, she had been involved with the MCMB and Mexicanos en Resistencia for a number of years. However, the tone of her narrative, and the language she used to describe her motivations for joining those groups, highlighted the continued importance of feeling when responding to news from home. Her account also demonstrates the importance of individual experiences in driving emotional reactions to the news: feelings are rooted in specific histories and emotions and, whilst they may be collectively shared, are still particular to an individual (Josephides 2005: 84).

She described how she came to Barcelona with her first husband, who was Catalan. She explained that she had felt “completely isolated” from Mexico, and from “the life and the person” that she was there. She told me that her husband’s family wasn’t interested in Mexico, and viewed her as someone from the “third world” who they had “adopted”. She claimed that they never saw her as her own person (and thus treated her accordingly). She said that she couldn’t express who she was – “even my sense of humour” - and that “they didn’t understand it.” On top of that, she was in a controlling relationship with her husband, and she had gotten to the point where “I no longer recognised myself”. At that point, when she had the opportunity to interact with something ‘Mexican’ - like going to see a *lucha libre* in Barcelona - she claimed that she clung to the idea as “a way to connect with home”. However, going to see the show was unable to satisfy her because she felt that it was not real *lucha libre*, and that it had been “orchestrated as a means to show the exoticness of Mexico to the Catalans”. She explained how she was extremely disappointed, since she saw it as the trivialisation of something which for her was important. Soon after, when she found out about what had happened with the violent repression of protests in Atenco in 2006, she explained that *“it hurt me quite a lot.”* She described how:

“I questioned myself a lot, asking what I was doing here – I’m very conscious about the things that happen in Mexico, but I felt so disconnected, and I felt a need, a true need, to do something. I couldn’t stay there with my arms crossed.”

The impact of news of the repression in Mexico overlapped with her feelings about being away from home at the time. In a context in which she already felt “disconnected” from Mexico, finding out about disturbing events happening there engendered a sense of double disconnection, and a ‘need’ to overcome her feelings of estrangement from Mexico. The pain which she felt engendered a need to recover a connection with Mexico. Her emotional reaction to the news, however, was intimately linked with her life in Barcelona, and the disrupted belonging it had

created. It was rooted in her particular migration experience, and the effects which being alone and in an abusive relationship had on her. Her story shows the way disturbing information can engender a new kind of need to reconnect with the homeland. Feeling pained by what is happening at home can renew individual desires to be implicated once again in home's story, despite the feelings of disconnection from the homeland which migration experiences may previously have created (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Skrbis 1999).

This potential for a reaching out towards home through pain also became visible in the next part of her narrative. After she found out about what had happened in Atenco, she attended a talk given by two Catalan women from the Civil Commission for Human Rights who had been raped there. When describing how she felt at the talk, she explained how:

"I don't think I have ever been so ashamed of my country. I felt the actual need to go up to them and tell them that I was so sorry that that had happened to them in my country. And that was the point at which I took up activism again in Barcelona. From that point on, I started meeting more Mexicans".

This indicates a new sense of belonging and ownership over the country which Paula had been able to recover. This was in spite of her initial sense of disconnectedness. Jarring information and shocking encounters with disturbing news actually had the potential to engender a need to belong to Mexico in *new* ways, and to act upon those changing understandings. Emotional ways of reacting to the news had both the potential to entrap individual migrants in such feelings *and* transform them.

The accounts and behaviours of the people presented in this section give a sense of being swept up in events beyond their control. They responded to information about the spread of violence and electoral corruption in Mexico with an "intensity" (Massumi 2002) so strong that it *could* be interpreted as being the immediate "trigger factor" for wanting to do something (Shore

1990: 75 - 77). However, that would imply a much more immediate effect than was actually the case for my participants. Anthropological studies of activism have emphasised the historically contingent nature of decisions to become involved in political participation (Alleyne 2002: 14; Wood 2003). Within a specific context, an individual's reaction to certain events can lead to a sense of "moral outrage" which ultimately results in more concrete forms of action (Erickson Nepstad and Smith 2001: 158). However, my participants' reactions to the information coming out of Mexico do not so much convey a sense of moral outrage, or even a response to an immediate trigger factor, as a general outpouring of emotion. Their felt need to be amongst other Mexicans experiencing the same thing, and to influence what was happening in Mexico in some way, was intimately linked to their sense of double disjointment from Mexico, and the profound emotional consequences which this had at an individual level. Action, in this context, arises "from a personally felt emotion" (Josephides 2005: 72). This was not an immediate or singular event: it occurred over time, and was intimately linked to personal histories of migration. Activism became a channel for emotions which had come to saturate an individual's thinking of the nation. Herein lies the productive capacity of both affect and emotion: they have the potential to continuously extend further (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 2). In this case, the ambivalence resulting from migration engendered emotional ways of living the homeland within which individual migrants felt suspended or trapped. The process, however, did not stop there, but extended into new forms of social relations, and new forms of acting within the world. It created a specific context in which migrants began to feel the need to become involved in long-distance activism. In this way, emotion, and the sharing of that emotion with others, became a way of affecting those events which had provoked such feelings in the first place: they provided an opening for political action alongside other migrants. It created the possibility of crossing established divisions between social groups in Mexico through shared political participation (Noble 2013).

It is here that the political potentiality of affective and emotional experiences becomes apparent (Anderson 2010: 166); they are an integral part of the process through which forms of

privileged migrant activism emerge. But, why did my participants react to the news in this way? What is the source of such strong emotional outpourings? I suggested in this section that such outpourings were intimately related to the fragments of belonging, and critical re-questionings of the nation, which had occurred as a result of migrating to Barcelona. However, there is something more happening here: I would argue that the reason why critical reinterpretations of Mexican society were translated into such pained and anguished feelings upon reading the news is located within the self-doubt which such reinterpretations had engendered. This self-doubt became apparent in their narratives.

Napolitano has shown how a rethinking of the nation occurred amongst the Roman Catholic Mexicans she worked with in Italy. However, this rethinking of the nation occurred in radically different ways to those experienced by my participants in Barcelona. Napolitano describes how the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Rome displayed conservative Roman Catholic concerns about the Mexican nation. In 2006, the performance of the virgin intentionally excluded its indigenous aspects. Napolitano argues that this exclusion was indicative “of an anxiety that required a performance of a nation ‘purged’ of its own indigeneity. The indigeneity in question – a performance of indigenous dances – is a ‘problematic’ one that has shifted from being portrayed as an ‘innocent’, mythical cultural heritage that is folklorised and made ‘proudly national’, to being somehow purged when it may evoke contemporary socio-political formations involving both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples” (2009: 104). By rejecting the use of the virgin by the Zapatistas, the left-wing candidate making accusations of electoral fraud in 2006, and followers of indigenous theology (which emphasises liberation and autonomy), Mexican Catholics in Rome were affectively asserting desires for “a *mestizo* Christianity, a Catholic citizenship (‘she is for all of us’) based on the phantom of a unified nation ‘purged’, at certain conjectures, of aspects of its own complex indigeneity” (2009: 104). Hence, privileged Mexicans living in Italy *did* relate to the nation in politicised and affective ways. However, this was a politicisation which sought to further entrench the status quo in Mexico, and exclude unequal others. In the following section, however, I show

how privileged Mexicans in Barcelona began to experience their new understandings of unequal and exclusionary structures within Mexico as a site of self-doubt and critique. Their emotional reactions to the news, I argue, are profoundly implicated with such experiences of self-critique and the realisation that 'home' is not as one believed it to be. Emotion, here, comes to form part of a pathway to engendering social change within Mexico by making visible (and hence, allowing for questionings of) certain structures of inequality (Noble 2013).

4. 3 Encountering the the news

In this section I explore the reasons why the news had the potential to stimulate such strong emotional reactions within individual migrants. I begin by describing the kind of news sources they had access to in Barcelona, and the way in which information about the war on drugs in particular is often presented in the Mexican press. By employing insights from Sontag and Berger, I argue that the content of news stories about the violence in Mexico need not automatically generate emotional responses on the part of their readers. I move on to consider why they did so on within this particular context. I discuss Hage's concept of migration guilt before addressing the role played by the ambiguities of migration as discussed in the previous chapter. I show how migrants' reactions to the news must be situated within the self-doubt which their new understandings of Mexican society brought about.

4.3.1 The Mexican press:

The first thing which we need to consider when understanding migrants' emotional reactions to the news is the nature of the media available to Mexicans living abroad. As has been shown extensively in studies of transnationalism, access to media through TV and the internet allows for a ready availability of information about happenings in one's homeland (Bauböck 2003:

714; Levitt, et al. 2003: 569). Mexican activists in Barcelona had online access to Mexican national newspapers such as *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, *Proceso* or *Sin Embargo*, as well as international newspapers such as *El País*, *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*. People would try to read at least *La Jornada* and *El Universal* every day in order to get a view from the ‘the left’ and ‘the centre-right’, and then “decide for themselves” what was happening. Some read *El Blog del Narco*, a blog dedicated to news about organised crime. Others listened to radio discussions by an independent, left-leaning and anti-establishment journalist called Carmen Aristegui, which were available online. By continuing to follow the news through these mediums, “the consciousness of the homeland [was] never completely missing” (Safran, et al. 2009: vii). As such, migrants had constant access to information about what was happening in Mexico, and were able to follow events there as they unfolded.

Coverage of the war on drugs in Mexico is widespread in both the local and national press. Stories about murders, disappearances, shoot-outs, police operatives and corruption appear every day and in more than one article per newspaper. It would be safe to say that some newspapers are often overflowing with pieces about violence and insecurity. However, the way in which those items are reported is quite standardised. Gruesome murders are described in minute detail, though information about the victims, the parties responsible, and the actions to be taken against them are sparse. Local newspapers will sometimes publish the names of unidentified victims some days after their deaths are reported, though follow-up articles giving information about police investigations are rarely published (indeed, more often than not there are no follow-up investigations). These stories are almost always accompanied by explicit photographs of mutilated bodies and crime scenes. These kinds of stories are often termed “*la nota roja*” (the red press). Some papers even run execution-o-meters as a means to keep a record of the number of executions which have taken place in a specific locality. At the end of each week, national newspapers will publish stories giving brief figures of how many people have died (these figures are often grossly understated). It is important to point out that newspapers are often limited in the information they can publish, as are

the lines of investigation which journalists can take. Threats from both organised crime and the state have made Mexico one of the most dangerous places in the world to practice journalism (Gibler 2012: 134).

The possibility of media images and information to induce affective and emotional states is highlighted by Clough, who argues that digital technologies are able to “expand the informational substrate of bodily matter....and thereby mark the introduction of a ‘postbiological threshold’ into ‘life itself’” (2010: 208). However, we should not assume that the stories and photographs featured in the Mexican press are automatically able to generate the emotional reactions discussed in this chapter. Sontag argues that war photographs have the power to “haunt us” (2003: 80). She claims that “the images say: this is what human beings are capable of doing – may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don’t forget” (2003: 103). Similarly, Berger argues that looking at such photographs means that “the moment of the other’s suffering engulfs us. We are filled with either despair or indignation” (1980: 42). However, they do not produce this effect in everyone. Sontag makes an important point when she notes that:

“The more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying” (2003: 63). “These sights carry a double message. They show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired. They confirm that this is the sort of thing which happens in that place. The ubiquity of those photographs, and those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward – that is, poor – parts of the world” (2003: 64).”

Many of the articles about the victims of the war on drugs relate to poor (and darker-skinned) Mexicans. They are people who are socially, economically, and ethnically divided from privileged Mexican migrants in Barcelona. Inequality is such in Mexico that the gruesome portrayal of poorer victims in the media does not translate to making a statement ‘they are the same as us’,

or 'everyone could be a victim'. Narratives of criminalisation mean that such victims are often viewed as being separate to the rest of the population which is law-abiding (Grillo 2012; Washington Valdez 2005). Hence, it is not inevitable that someone reading the news would feel an automatic identification with the victims it describes. Similarly, when the information presented is divorced from the identity of the victim, and from the presumed social-context of its readers, the social distance of the victims from the reader is once again increased. This means that the content of 'la nota roja' can actually encourage "the atrophy" of memory rather than assert it (Berger 1980: 60).

In addition, Berger notes that for those who do respond to such imagery with grief and despair, their reactions may not necessarily lead to politicised, affective action:

"But the reader who has been arrested by the photograph may tend to feel this discontinuity as his own personal moral inadequacy. And as soon as this happens even his sense of shock is dispersed: his own moral inadequacy may now shock him as much as the crimes being committed in the war. Either he shrugs off this sense of inadequacy as being only too familiar, or else he thinks of performing a kind of penance – of which the purest example would be to make a contribution to OXFAM or to UNICEF. In both cases, the issue of war which has caused the moment is effectively depoliticised. The picture becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody." (1980: 44).

Hence, even when someone is affected by the information they encounter in the news, it does not necessarily follow that their reactions will be politicised. We saw at the beginning of the chapter how the news did not generate emotional reactions amongst all Mexicans in Barcelona. Or rather, it brought about a rejection of the news content, and an individual distancing from 'that particular view' of Mexican society. Why, then, did my participants react to the news so strongly?

4.3.2 Migration guilt?

Pessar and Mahler argue that the way people connect with the homeland through migration is intimately related to the “mindwork” of individuals, i.e. the way they imagine what is happening there (2003: 817). In a context in which “political convulsions” are taking place at home, this means “it is likely that immigrants remain morally tied to kin and communities left behind and, hence, are more likely to engage in a variety of activities to bridge the gap and sustain a common bond” (Portes 1999: 464). The experience of long-distance nationalism in this sense “generates an emotional attachment that is strong enough to compel people to political action that ranges from displaying a home country flag to deciding to “return” to fight and die in a land they may never have seen” (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 4). Benedict Anderson was one of the first theorists to identify the link between the printed press and nation building (1983). This connection between the news and a sense of belonging to the nation has since been extended to include the impact of reading the news upon migrant populations. Hage, for example, argues that people are affected by news coming out of the homeland in different ways (2002: 193). By continuing to read news from home, migrants are able to feel in some way still “connected” to it, and “implicated by what is happening in it” (2002: 194). He argues that migrants reading the news as it is produced in their homelands experience it in its “contextual setting”. As a result, it becomes an experience entirely of the homeland, and one’s occupation in the space of the host society “becomes immaterial and suspended” at the moment of reading (2002: 196).

Discussing Lebanese migrants in Australia, Hage argues that “the totality of the relations between the different articles in it become a metaphor for the totality of the relations that constitute Lebanon as an imaginary nation” (2002: 196). This means that “in reading the newspaper, one does not read about the nation, one reads the nation” (2002: 197). Because people are still reading the news at a distance, however, Hage argues that they employ “strategies of intensification” which allow them to narrow “the physical and symbolic gap between the news

event and the reader, and in the process augmenting the intensity of this reality for that reader” (2002: 200). These strategies - which include arguing over the news, slapping newspapers, and shouting out loud what one thinks of the information in the story - are part of “a desire to be more implicated by the news/event”. This allows for “a sense of involvement in it, of being part of its unfolding” (2002: 200). Such intensification strategies permit migrants to overcome the physical distance they feel from ‘home’ and the migration-induced ‘guilt’ which they may feel as a result of having left while there is a crisis at home (2002: 203).

I do not feel that the answer to my participants’ emotional responses to the news lies entirely in Hage’s concept of “migration guilt”. Earlier in this chapter we saw how Maria and Adriana both had the impression that their families did not seem ‘as aware’ about the impact of violence spreading through Mexico as they were. In many ways, this kind of sentiment was related to the newly critical opinions about Mexican society which their migration experiences had engendered. In the previous chapter, we saw that people were feeling ambivalent about both Mexico and Barcelona as a result of their experiences in the city. However, the ambiguities of living in Barcelona had the capacity to generate a critical nostalgia which was at once an estrangement from Mexico – people would question aspects of Mexican society which had previously gone unquestioned. This was an important positionality for receiving news from Mexico.

In a context in which individual migrants were already questioning aspects of the homeland, disturbing news had the effect of doubly estranging migrants from their old ideas of life there. The effect of violent imagery and information in the news became emotionally jarring – reading the nation with new eyes meant migrants had to accept and truly acknowledge what was happening there. They became aware of tragedy unfolding at home in a context in which they felt partially disconnected from it. Their re-evaluations of home became translated into extensive self-doubt by forcing migrants to question their place in Mexican society. Acknowledging their own participation in the structures they now critiqued was an uncomfortable and transformative experience. It amplified the intensity with which they received news from home, and forced them to

confront the way others experienced life there. This was a painful experience, and meant that individuals became suspended within their new and emotionally distressing ways of living Mexico.

Jackson argues that we must take into account the power of migrant stories “to remind us what it is like for a person to become unhinged from the traditional cultural and moral frameworks that he or she internalised from early childhood and once orientated him or her as an adult” (Crapanzano and Jackson 2014: 778). He also asserts that “most people’s life experience involves critical moments when conventional wisdom does not make sense, or when they doubt the truths to which they have previously referred” (Crapanzano and Jackson 2014: 780). We can see such a moment unfolding in the migrational experiences of Mexicans in Barcelona. This soon became apparent in the discourse of my participants both during interviews and in conversation with one another. However, whilst the personal transformations engendered by the critical nostalgia of migration and the disturbing nature of the news from home represented an unhingement from familiar ways of viewing Mexican society for individuals, their emotional reactions formed part of an on-going cultural trope of revolutionary social change within the country (Noble 2013). Migrant narratives, then, take on a particular cultural coherency through evocations of such emotions (Linde 1993).

Lolita, for example, was Mexican-Catalan writer and the founder of NAR. When I met her, she had been running NAR for just over a year. At that time, she was extremely busy coordinating the activities of NAR’s members, running *Menos Días Aquí*, and constantly looking to set up new projects within NAR. She was also at the end stages of finishing a novel which she had written about the history of the drugs war in Mexico. I interviewed her three times over the course of my fieldwork, and in each interview the emotional impact of her work with NAR became apparent. In her words, tone of voice and behaviour (she cried on numerous occasions), she demonstrated the intensity with which she related to news coming out of Mexico. However, her responses were also threaded through with critiques of the sector of society to which she belonged. The first time I interviewed her, she explained that:

“I began with NAR on the 25th August 2010. I remember waking up in the morning when I was here [in Barcelona]. I opened up the internet page, and I saw that they had found the bodies of 72 migrants in Tamaulipas. I saw the photo, and I said to myself I can’t do this anymore. I had already spent years following el narco because it’s been my literary topic for the past eight years. I couldn’t believe that the privileged intellectual class in Mexico, not privileged economically, but privileged intellectually, wasn’t declaring itself on the side of the victims. That it wasn’t...and I felt ashamed to carry on being silent...it’s shameful to remain silent. So I sent out a letter.”

Here, we see that it is not only the ‘facts’ of what was happening in Mexico which affected Lolita so strongly. Events which occurred there had the effect of making her own silence, and that of other members of her social class, visible. The result was feelings of shame. Hence, her distress was not related to a reading of events alone; it was rooted in her realisation that she herself, and those of the social group to which she belonged in Mexico, were implicated in them. She expanded upon those feelings further in the interview:

“It’s really painful because I feel very ashamed of my country, I feel very ashamed of my people – and I have always been so proud of both. It’s leaving me in pain. I always upheld that strange law that Mexicans have, about not speaking badly of Mexico outside of your country if there are no Mexicans present.... now, I can’t forgive it. I can’t forgive Mexico. That’s really complicated at a personal level because it creates a rift with a lot of people. I’m not willing to say that the victims are just ‘naquitos’ [pebs] who fight amongst themselves; what I want to do is to tell the people who say that to go to hell. I’ve been polite for twenty years, but now, no more. I’ve got a right to be angry; I’m very angry. I’m angry with el Chapo [a prominent Mexican drugs lord], I’m angry with Calderón [the PAN President who declared the war on drugs in 2006], and now I’m angry with those people – and I have the right to be. And that’s how it is”.

Her narrative shows that the transformation in how she viewed Mexico was not experienced at an abstract, analytical level. As Josephides argues, “emotions make these links between the self and others because they are part of our very selves, not simply constructs of social conventions” (2005: 87). Lolita lived Mexico as a sight of intense personal experience: no longer being able to think about Mexico in the same way resulted in feelings of loss and a sense of having been betrayed. These are not detached questionings of the nation: they are changed understandings which are lived at an individual level through anger, through shame, and through grief. Her own sense of belonging becomes implicated with what Mexico *‘is’*, and she feels betrayed by the fact that Mexico *is* actually something which she does not want it to be. The result is an inability “to forgive Mexico”: she is no longer able to accept her position there without pain and disappointment. She distances herself from her previous life there, and from those people who do not share in her critique. The “innerliness” of her emotions, here, cannot be ignored (Josephides 2005: 81). Her critiques of the nation are felt at a deeply personal level.

When I asked her to expand upon the reasons behind those feelings of anger, she explained that *“those of us living here in Europe are the rich ones, and we need to become responsible for what has happened”*. She described her disgust at examples she saw of “writers and educated people” participating in acts which perpetuated the system, such as buying cocaine with “Z” (for Zeta) written on the packaging, or in paying people tiny amounts of money to clean their houses and drive their cars. This is an important feature of her narrative, since it shows how emotionally disturbing questionings of the nation became directed back onto individual migrants themselves. They began to include themselves in their questionings of Mexico, and criticise their own place within Mexican society. Lolita further argued:

“We are responsible for what has happened. We have maintained those structures of extreme poverty, and yet we feel so good when we act as godparents at the christening of the child of our muchacha [female domestic worker – literally ‘girl’]. We have no right to maintain them in poverty

and then, when the country falls to pieces, to insult them. I refuse to insult the poor of Mexico. People criticise them in the election because they sold their vote for a sandwich. Of course they did! They are hungry. They call them ignorant – well of course they are, and malnourished on top of it, full stop. I'm sick of the attitude of rich people. When it comes to education, the people that need to be educated are the members of the upper and middle classes. Who are you going to educate? - Peasant women in Veracruz? They could give us a lesson in morality which would bring us to our knees – they are mothers; they are poor; they are rural; they are everything. We, educate those people? – No! We need to feel ashamed of ourselves. When we pay someone 2000 pesos a month, we have no right to insult them.”

The tone of her narrative is angry and indignant. Her response to my question is interwoven with a direct critique aimed at herself and the sector of Mexican society to which she belongs – “we need to feel ashamed of ourselves”. It extends the critical nostalgia displayed towards Mexico in the narratives of the previous chapter. It gives a detailed and specific judgement made against the privileged classes – “we are responsible for what has happened”. This suggests that the news, interpreted through the lens of such questionings of Mexican society, provides a source of critical introspection through which an individual migrants’ emplacement in certain structures of inequality becomes visible. This is not felt from a detached position, but is an intensely personally experience within which individuals question their lives and their implication in the violent events they are now reading about. The news has the potential to engender distressing emotional reactions within migrants because it intensifies their new understandings of Mexico *and* of themselves. This means that her narrative is not just emotional: it is also critical and political.

This was a pattern which would be repeated time and time again in the field. It was expressed by Maria after she had confided to me that she did not want to go back to Mexico. She explained that:

“It really hurts me - what’s happening in Mexico. I mean, beyond what’s happening right now. It angers me that we’ve reached this point. I don’t mean in political terms but in social ones. I mean, at what point did we become so classist? At what point did we become so selfish, to look down on everything? Mexico is the country with the richest man in the world and yet there is so much poverty. It’s just absurd, right? What I’m getting at is that I’m talking about a society which is badly built. I just wonder, what has made us think like we do? I mean right now there are people in Mexico sat at home without knowing anything about what’s happening. There are things about Mexico which I’ve realised make me feel very conflicted. Like classism – we have girls working in houses, right, and all the stories about abuse and things...it’s terrible, and that’s part of a reality that I’m just not accustomed to any more. At what point did we get like that? At what point will I become like that again? At what point did I become like that? That’s why I don’t want to go back, because all of that....life is just more than that.”

Her words here reflect the extent of self-doubt which thinking about Mexico in new ways could create. The disbelief shown in her narrative implies that she had never before realised the extent of classism or racism which exists in Mexico. Confronting that now is a painful experience in which she must come to view ‘home’ with new eyes. Thinking about home now makes her “feel very conflicted”. Indeed, it is so painful, and her new realisations of inequality there so jarring, that she does not want to go back. She then went on to reflect even more critically upon her position in Mexican society:

“I just wonder... if I went back to Mexico, would I be the same? I don’t think I’d know how to locate myself socially. I didn’t know everything I know about Mexico now. I was a certain way, and now I’m not. I’ve seen more things. I’ve spoken about them....and not just the violence, but everything. It would just be too complicated. What social group would I belong to? Here that doesn’t matter – you can be who you want to be. Over there, you can’t. And that scares me. That is Mexico. I think for

those of who do end up going back, we're going to have to learn to be different, to relate with one another differently...and we don't know how. We need to become more humble....more humble."

This speaks to the extent of transformation she had undergone since leaving Mexico. More than that, it shows her own awareness of that transformation. It is precisely because she is aware that her understandings of Mexico have changed that she no longer sees how she could fit in there. Inequality made visible has led to doubts over how she could *knowingly* reinsert herself in those structures. It is also precisely because she is aware of the changes which she has experienced that the news becomes a source of such distress: it reinforces the new understandings she has of Mexico, and adds to the pain and guilt of her own position there. She directly related the changes which she had perceived in her feelings towards Mexico to her experiences in Barcelona:

"It's been constructive for me. Here. It's helped me to understand a lot of things that are happening in Mexico. I feel so angry about the violence, but I also feel like it's made me more empathetic. It has made me do something. Those are things which in Mexico I would never have done."

Maria's narrative was expressed in quite depressive terms. It was filled with self-doubt, regret, and disgust. It also displayed a longing for things to be different and an uncomfortable recognition of her own implication in the structures which she critiqued. Her words give the impression that she felt guilty for having participated in practices she was now able to 'see' more clearly, and worried about becoming implicated in them again should she return to Mexico. Her account indicates a change in consciousness – "it has made me" - as well as a change in practice - "it has made me do". She was well aware of the transformations which had taken place in her thinking, and it was precisely that awareness which resulted in such jarring realisations that she could no longer be the same, or live in the same way, should she return. In some ways it could be said that the rhetorical force of the news moved her to a particular action, in this case that of a

change in personhood (Carrithers 2005). It is this which makes the news so painful for migrants: violent events happening at home only serve to increase the visibility of structures of inequality, and act as a challenge to migrants – they pose the question “why did you allow this to happen in your homeland”? Or, even worse, “how could you not even realise that this was happening?” It furthers their self-doubt, which is experienced in profoundly personal and emotionally distressing ways. It is this, however, which imbues migration and the experience of reading the news at a distance with political potentiality.

This resonates with what Navarro-Yashin terms “the affect of melancholy”. When individuals are exposed to their roles in the exertion of violence done unto others, they can experience “a loss of moral integrity” (2009: 16). Discussing the melancholy of affect experienced by Turkish Cypriots faced with objects left behind by fleeing Greek-Cypriots, she argues that “a self-critical moral discourse that associates abjection with the violation of the property of others; a characterisation of a political system as morally problematic” is created (2012: 158). Navarro-Yashin credits affect with the potential to reveal the politicised responsibility of those experiencing it, and we can indeed see such an effect in the accounts of Lolita and Maria. But Navarro-Yashin identifies the affect of melancholy as abjection. She argues that Turkish Cypriots would leave certain spaces in an abandoned state, or would preserve objects as they were at the time of partitioning. This is because “some spaces have to be left filthy or wounded so that the whole system does not appear to be so. This is a performative act” (2012: 160). Rather than resulting in abjection (or the exclusion of spaces and objects) as a means to acknowledge political responsibility - as Navarro-Yashin found in Cyprus - the emotional responses of my participants to the news were a symptom of their acknowledgment of guilt. They were part of their recognition that they had been implicated in the structures they now critiqued. The affect of melancholy in this sense resulted in a politicisation which was eventually channelled into being with other migrants who shared in those feelings, and into actions to be taken against the structures being re-evaluated.

Migration, and encountering the news at a distance, could bring uncomfortable revelations about Mexico, and migrants themselves, to light. In acknowledging the truth of those revelations, migrants exposed themselves to much harsher readings of the news, in which the violence unleashed across Mexico became a source of profound personal pain. Indeed, Jackson claims that “when reality appears to encompass more than our preconceived notions allowed, and demands words, explanations, concepts, we simply do not possess, we are thrown, and we desperately seek to reconfirm old beliefs or find new ones” (Crapanzano and Jackson 2014: 780). In the case of Mexican migrants in Barcelona, such a process created a situation in which individuals became suspended in their emotionally distressing ways of living home. Within such a context, they felt compelled to find others who shared in those feelings, and a group with whom they could act upon them, thus furthering the process of transformation in their political consciousness. Individually felt emotions, in this way, could become the basis for more collective forms of political togetherness and action (Heatherington 2005: 155; Milton 2005a: 220). They created the potential for undermining those very structures of inequality within Mexico which had engendered such emotions in the first place. Emotion and political action become heavily intertwined throughout such narratives (Noble 2013).

This also indicates the importance of widening the perspective with which we understand emotion (Leavitt 1996; Milton 2005b). Emotionally saturated discourses here, and emotional behaviours, reveal a number of things. They show that the embodied expressions of individuals were intensely related to their own social positioning: they emerge from having migrated, and are a reflection of migrants’ relationship to what is happening in Mexico. They lead to a new sense of politicised culpability, and can contribute to the formation of activist groups. As such, they are intrinsically related to the social in terms of both the roots of their emergence, and their effects (Levy 1984; Lutz 1986; Lutz and White 1986; Rosaldo 1984a; Solomon 1984). However, to locate this within the realm of the social alone is to miss important facets of experience (Leavitt 1996; Lyon 1995; Milton 2005c; Svašek 2005b). Migrants’ reactions to the experience of migration were also

bodily (French 1994; Low 1994; Lyon and Barbalet 1994). The transformations in their way of thinking about home actually meant that encountering the news became a disturbing and painful experience within individuals (Josephides 2005) – it became jarring, and meant that individuals became trapped in emotional outpourings from which they found it difficult to extract themselves. This personally *felt* nature of their reactions becomes visible from the very saturation of emotion during their narratives and when talking to one another. Hence, the effects of the emotional discourses of my participants were rooted in their bodily reactions to events going on around them, and to their own emplacement within the world (Csordas 1993). Looking at migrants' narratives does have the potential to reveal power structures within society (and the way individuals relate to them) (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990). However, whilst this can be detected within language, it is important to emphasise that such language is not only socially rooted (with social implications) (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; White 1993): it is language which belies the bodily and personally felt reactions individuals (Brennan 2004: 3). As such, the expression of emotion here is rooted in both the social and the bodily realm in ways which actually dissolve the boundaries between the two (Svašek 2005b: 196). It is particular way of responding to, and learning from, the world (Jackson, in Crapanzano and Jackson 2014; Milton 2005b).

4.4 Conclusion:

Skrbis argues that “distance is not defined in terms of miles but in terms of the cultural and symbolic detachment of the migrant setting from the homeland. This detachment appears to cause a tendency to amplify certain aspects of the homeland reality and to minimise or discard the significance of others” (1999: 84). This means that “the ‘distant view’ is crucial for an understanding of nationalism in diaspora settings. It produces a *sieve-effect* which encourages the selective flow of information. It is precisely this sieve-effect logic which has a capacity in the diaspora to put a different spin on the nationalist politics which dominates the homeland setting” (1999: 84). For my

participants, looking at Mexico with new eyes meant that disturbing news could no longer be brushed over, ignored, or set aside as something 'separate' to their individual worlds. New and more critical understandings of Mexican society which emerged through the ambiguities of migration created a space for self-critique. It meant that news from home was received within a particular emotional climate – one in which migrants were already questioning inequality at home, and beginning to uncomfortably acknowledge their own roles in perpetuating the system. Such a space of self-doubt and societal critique heightened the emotional impact of the news. It meant that the news was received in ways which were so disturbing that migrants felt compelled to seek out others who shared in those feelings. Activism became a channel for dealing with the distressing emotions in which individuals felt themselves to be suspended. Migration, affect and emotion in this context intersected in complicated and deeply personal ways (Andits 2010: 990; Svašek 2010: 867). This reflected a continuation of particular kind of cultural rationality within Mexico in which the expression of strong emotion has the potential to enact new social and political norms (Noble 2013). Like the tears of Pancho Villa, emotion in this context comes to form part of a cultural trope of revolutionary action (Noble 2013).

In the next chapter, I explore the ways in which emotion could solidify the political commitment of some migrant activists. I show how responding to knowledge about violence and suffering in one's homeland could engender new feelings of national belonging and solidarity. It could also transform the ways in which the realities of Mexico were understood. I look in detail at activists' experiences of working in a particular project – that of *Menos Dias Aquí*. I explore how the feelings generated through activist engagement, and encountering the news in new ways, could lead to assertions of national cosmopolitanism which emphasised shared belonging to the nation and asserted solidarity. This had the potential to solidify the political commitment of migrants, and created the possibility of achieving social transformation in the country.

Chapter Five:

Counting the Dead

5.1 Introduction:

It is two o'clock in the morning and I sigh. My arms fall forward onto the table with my head in my hands. I squeeze my eyes tightly shut, rubbing my temples. I have been in front of my laptop since 10pm, counting the dead for Menos Días Aquí. I still need to input the entries I have created so far into twitter. I take a sip of coffee. My whole body wants to move. I hate the walls in front of me, and the desk on which my elbows are resting; they are a symbol of the oppressive environment I feel confined to. The gruesome photographs included in the news stories imprint themselves onto my brain, ready to come alive again once I sleep. The fear that I will count somebody that I know, or a loved one of somebody close to me, never leaves me. Afterwards, I wake up every hour and in the end I have to sleep with the light on. After three or four days of doing this I begin to feel betrayed and resentful, feeling as if I am the only person in the world who seems to know what is going on. I am stressed; I cry easily and feel anxious when I think about people I have counted. I keep thinking about the young girl whose body they found abandoned by the side of the road. Her body was partially burned, and she had been left face down in the mud. My mind races with imagining what could have happened to that girl before her death, and what her parents went through upon being told the news. A couple of days later the image which sticks in my mind is the picture of the nine people who were found hanged from a bridge in Nuevo Laredo, cars travelling underneath it during

the early morning commute. I can't stop imagining those people driving under the bridge, before the sun had fully risen, and lifting their eyes to find such horrific scenes hanging above them. I have nightmares all night again.

(Reflections from the field based on field-diary entries describing my own experience of counting the dead in Menos Días Aquí)

So far, we have seen how the ambiguities of migration and emotional ways of relating to the news were important in engendering the potential for politicised thought and action amongst certain migrants. In this chapter, I focus on the ways in which particular emotions contained the possibility of solidifying the political commitment of migrants, as well as altering the way they thought about others within Mexico. I do so by focusing on the experience of several individuals who volunteered for the project 'Menos Días Aquí (See Box 5). This was a project in which a volunteer spent each night for one week recording details of those who had died as a result of extreme violence in Mexico, using information gathered from regional and national news sources. I myself counted for the project many times during fieldwork, and eventually ended up running it. Not all of my participants in Barcelona had volunteered to participate in the project. Those who had were members of NAR and the MCMB. Other volunteers working from within Mexico sent emails to the project describing their experiences and, sometimes, published their testimonies on NAR's website. I also interviewed several people in Madrid and the UK who were in some way affiliated with NAR, and who had decided to count for the project. I draw upon all of these interview and textual sources in this chapter since gaining direct observational insights into how other people experienced the count was difficult: it was an individual and solitary act.

I have chosen to focus quite specifically here on the way certain activists narrative their experiences of counting the dead. I do not intend this chapter to stand as a generalisation of the experiences of all the migrant activists I worked with. Instead, it acts as a very specific window

allowing us to see the importance of emotion in influencing the ways some migrants thought about Mexico in new ways, and in solidifying their politicised commitment to changing it. I look in detail at the way activists described their experiences of counting the dead for *Menos Días Aquí*. I show how their accounts revealed deeply emotional ways of relating to the victims they counted. This emotion, I argue, became apparent in the way migrants would evoke a sense of empathetic connection with the victims they counted. Their accounts suggest that such feelings of empathy enabled individuals to begin to comprehend the difficulties faced by others within Mexico. Their narratives show that being obliged to confront the suffering of others in this way further transformed the way they thought about home. As such, counting the dead came to be experienced as a source of privileged insight into Mexican society. This simultaneously engendered a felt responsibility to engage in some kind of politicised action. I therefore argue that emotional ways of relating to others were an integral part of the process through which some migrants changed the way they thought about home, and the kinds of actions they carried out. At the same time, they formed a necessary part of the process through which certain activist projects could be completed.

5.2 Empathising with victims:

In this section, I describe the way counters' reflections upon the experience of counting emphasised a sense of empathetic engagement with victims and their stories. Their narratives suggest that experiencing a sense of empathy with the victims provided counters with the desire and impetus to recognise their humanity. I show how they transformed victims from textual narratives on a page into 'known' subjects representing human beings who had been lost, and lives which had been taken away. The result was an overflow of grief for individual victims. I then show how this sense of grief and loss became politicised within the count by creating a forum in which their memory could be preserved. This was achieved through being able to name them and preserve

their memory. Emotionally connecting with victims' stories, then, became a political act, and imbued counters with a sense of obligation and responsibility to others within Mexico.

5.2.1 *Imagining victims:*

The first thing which became apparent when I spoke to people who had counted the dead was the emotional way in which they related to the experience. When reflecting back upon their count, the behaviours they described demonstrated the distressing impact of the work. In addition, the ways in which those narratives were expressed were, in themselves, extremely emotional. I begin this section by giving some examples of the ways in which individual counters related to certain victims.

Fabiola and Javier were a married couple living in the UK. Both were originally from Mexico City and had been living outside of Mexico for over five years. They were academics who had just received funding to set up an NGO which would attempt to create a civilian DNA database within Mexico to aid relatives of the disappeared. I was introduced to Fabiola by Alex, the co-editor of NAR, via Facebook. The two had been friends in Mexico City, and both Fabiola and Javier had ended up counting for *Menos Días Aquí*. When I returned to the UK from Barcelona, they started attending meetings of the local *Bordamos por la Paz* group which I had set up. Soon after, I asked if I could interview them about their decisions to found the NGO and their experiences of counting for *Menos Días Aquí*. I carried out the interview with both of them together, and they responded to my questions, and to one another's answers, during the interview.

When I asked them how they had felt when counting, Fabiola was the first to answer:

“Half way through the week I just couldn't stop crying. I mean I felt sad, really sad. I was with Sara [her daughter] and well, I would take her to school on a morning, and then be at home alone, just feeling sad, really sad, but I mean, without knowing the reason. And I told myself “it's just because

Javier isn't here" right? But it was like, I didn't even want to cook, just silly things but then with the benefit of hindsight it's like, you realise that that was important. I didn't want to cook, so I would eat out with Sara, trying not to think about it, but feeling really sad at the same time. And then by mid-week I just cried and cried. I said to Javier, I don't know what's wrong with me, I think it's because I'm counting, and so I cried and I cried, cried and cried, cried and cried, cried and cried. I cried and cried and cried and cried and cried and cried, and Sara would say to me, 'mum, don't cry, dad will be home soon' and I was thinking, 'I'm not crying for your dad'. And I think that was what made me...it wasn't until sometime afterwards that I realised that that's why I was like that, because I knew that people were dying, and well, you had to cry for them, te pega [it hits you, it sticks with you]. I think the thing that affected me the most was realising how it makes you cry, how it sticks to you, unconsciously, because it's quite an unconscious process. I just couldn't stop crying and I was just so sad, not wanting to do anything."

Fabiola's description was extremely emotive – both in the behaviours she described, and in the tone which she used to convey those memories. Her words suggest that relating to victims at an empathetic level engendered particular feelings within her: in this case these were expressed through grief and tears (see also Bertelsen and Murphie 2010: 140; Clough and Halley 2007: 2). She attributed that reaction to the fact that "people were dying". Her description of how she felt during the count becomes a language of grief and mourning – she is crying because other people have died and, perhaps more importantly for my purposes, *she has just realised that fact*. The intensity of her reaction to learning about the deaths of others relates to the fact that it is the first time she has been exposed to their stories in such a direct and detailed way. This was important for the transformations which would later occur in the way she thought about Mexico.

Javier's response to her answer also demonstrated the importance of connecting with individual stories in engendering particular feelings within him:

"I like to see the narratives. I feel that's what gives them dignity, and I think that's something beautiful about the count, that you can know the last moments of someone's life; even if it's tragic and terrible, it gives them dignity. For me, it gives them dignity. It's a narrative. So the guy who they killed on the bridge, then his rucksack falls down and inside there's a valentine's gift that says "I love you", that story just, I mean I read that, and there's something inside me that feels comforted. I can relate to that. I'm that guy with the I Love You valentine's gift wondering if she will say yes or no, I'm the guy walking across some bridge in Mexico, covered in graffiti. The thing I like about counting is that giving them dignity means that I can live through them. That's how I felt."

Here, then, his narrative implies that the experience of counting is one which allows him to imagine the life of someone else. It opens a window through which he can glimpse the lives (and deaths) of people who were hitherto unknown to him. Indeed, he goes as far as to claim that seeing their stories "means that I can live through them". This suggests that he experienced the stories of victims in vivid and intense ways - so much so that they became real people to him. Precisely because he has now imagined their lives (and deaths), counting becomes a way of "paying his respects". Like Fabiola, his language became intimately tied to expressions of grief. Whereas Fabiola's reaction was much more immediate, however, Javier's language became tied to that of funerary rites by discussing the need "to pay them his respects":

"I feel a moral obligation, like you say "you need to cry for them" [directed at Fabiola], I feel a moral obligation to understand their stories. That's one of the things about the count itself. At first I felt a moral obligation to have a story, an image of how they had died. It was like giving them a ritual of, well, not giving them a ritual, but more like paying my respects. I was getting lost in the stories, and I wanted to find them, so I would spend like half an hour looking for the story of some guy who had been gunned down with the rest of his family."

This gives a very specific and detailed image: he describes himself as being “lost” in victim’s stories, and as feeling an actual *need* to understand what had happened to them. This need was so strong that he described it as a “moral obligation”. There is a depth to the way the victims are imagined here which takes their ‘realness’ as people beyond the mere content of news stories: Fabiola told us that “I knew that people were dying, and well, you had to cry for them”, whilst Javier’s narrative shows how he relates to the victims *as people who could have been him*. These are profoundly *felt* reactions to accounts of the deaths of strangers. They show the way “emotional encounters are not only shaped by direct interaction, but also by memories and imagination...” (Svašek 2010: 868).

This intensity of grief for individual victims also appeared in the narrative of Alex, who was the co-editor of NAR. He had come to Barcelona in order to study for his Ph.D. six years earlier. After completing his doctorate, Lolita asked him to share the reins of responsibility in NAR, and he began to run a number of its projects and edit its publications. He was also a member of the MCMB, and he was one of the first people to count for Menos Días Aquí when it was set up in 2010. I interviewed Alex twice during fieldwork, and in the first interview we spoke about his experiences of becoming involved with NAR and the MCMB, and how he viewed the situation in Mexico. I also asked him about his experiences of counting for Menos Días Aquí. He began by explaining to me that:

“Each counter has at least someone you count that remains etched onto your memory afterwards. In my case it was a little girl who they killed in front of her twin. They killed her because some guy broke into the house to kill her dad, and her twin managed to hide under the bed, but her they killed. That was in Juárez. I remember it so clearly.”

Even though he was not present at the little girl’s death, he claimed to “remember it so clearly.” This kind of language implies a profound sense of connection with certain victims. Indeed,

in Alex's words, the stories of victims could remain "etched onto your memory". There is an intensity of identification here which goes beyond feeling sad about what one has read in the news. Specific individuals (who are strangers) are being mourned as *known* others. This suggests that the count became embodied as counters identified with the victims, and felt a sense of loss at their deaths. Within counters' narratives, then, imagining themselves as an 'other' created an intimacy with their story. This connection, once acknowledged, served to highlight the loss which had occurred upon that person's death. Because that person was now in some way 'known' to counters, they expressed that connection through grief. Empathy became embodied because participants were able to imagine themselves as another (Csordas 1993; 1994a: 135; 1994b).

Counters would also imagine how the families of those they counted must have felt. For example, in response to an email asking how she was feeling, a counter who had been suffering from high levels of stress during her count told us (myself and Geo – the project administrators):

"I keep thinking of all the unfinished conversations, the aborted plans, promises not kept, the families who were waiting at home or by the phone for someone who simply never returned..."

Imagining the emotions of victims' relatives resonates with Green's discussion of the death of illegal migrants in the Aegean. Here, at the moment when officials bury their illegitimate, anonymous bodies, the relatives of the person become visible through their absence, since 'no-one should be buried alone'. Thus, the death of migrants creates a sense of connection, a sense of relatedness, to the anonymous place of origin of the migrant (Green 2012). In a similar way, imagining the deaths of victims within Mexico brought into focus the feelings of their relatives and loved ones. Counters imagined what it would feel like in their place. Hence, counting had the capacity to bring other members of the nation, with whom counters had no previous connection, into their imaginaries of place. It brings them into a shared space of recognition and of loss (Massey

2004) Here, we can see how a “capacity for intimacy with absent others” can allow for “strong national imaginings of presence” (Kaplan 2008: 423).

This was not a neutral imagining. In counters’ narratives they are expressing feelings of empathy with the imagined subjectivities of victims of the war, and with people who had suffered violence. Such narratives of empathy contained the potential for a specific kind of politicisation. I discuss this political potential contained within the experience of counting in the next section. For now, I want to ask why it was that counters expressed such strong and thorough senses of empathy with people who they had only ever encountered through a newspaper. I want to explore why the count stimulated particular reactions within individuals.

Why did counters identify so much with people who were unknown to them? Why is it that reading about their deaths and seeing pictures of their bodies in the news had the potential to engender such intense emotional reactions? Why did it create a sense of empathy? Counters did not engage in direct intersubjective interactions with the victims they counted. Nor were the victims physical components of their own immediate environments, as some phenomenological accounts of coming to know the world would require (cf. Ingold 2000: 9, 55). They did, however, engage with photographs and newspaper accounts of people’s deaths. Such photographs and accounts provided the possibility of imagining victims’ worlds, and of imaginatively emplacing oneself within those experiences. Narrative immersion and emotional identification (cf. Lyon and Barbalet 1994) with the subject matter meant that grief could become embodied during the count through direct engagement with victim’s stories and their photographs. This is somewhat similar to the Reed’s description of how members of the Henry Williamson society come to see things from the perspective of Henry and how, by reading, they internalise the vision of another (2002; 2004; 2011).

Reed describes the way in which readers of Henry Williamson (a mid-twentieth century author) experience reading as an invasion of a foreign consciousness into their inner selves – that of Henry. He describes how they experience the dissolution of the subject-subject division between persons, and in fact come to experience two subject positions within themselves. Through intense

identification with Henry and his consciousness, they come to feel a sense of intense intimacy with him and his mind. He describes how, as a result, “they find themselves occupying or occupied by another consciousness and so looking at the world from a perspective that is not their own” (2011: 10). This is not exactly the same as the experience of counting. Henry Williamson readers experience the “sensation of being crucially acted upon, of being the recipient rather than the initiator of action”, whereas counters were not so much ‘acted upon’ as ‘acting upon’ the experience of the people whom they read about (2011: 11). Whilst Williamson readers are occupied by the consciousness of the author rather than the characters of his books, counters’ narratives imply an intense engagement with how they imagined the victims present in news articles felt, rather than their authors. They tried to reach beyond the limits of the text to imagine victims’ lives, their personhood, and the impact of that being taken away through murder. In this way, their accounts suggest that they were able to create felt intimacies with specific individuals, and used the details given in the text as a vehicle through which they could imaginatively inhabit the lives and subjectivities of those they counted. The victims themselves did not actively act upon the counters. Instead, reading about them propelled counters into imagining their lives (or deaths). The victims were brought closer to the counters themselves, and their loss was experienced as that of a person who *could have been them*: it was experienced through grief. The count was experienced as a process through which unknown victims became ‘humanised’.

The practice of projecting oneself into the imagined subjectivity of another resonates with Willerslev’s description of mimesis or double perspectivism amongst Yukaghir Reindeer hunters in Siberia. He describes this as “the ability to put oneself imaginatively in the place of another, reproducing in one’s own imagination the other’s perspective.” (2007: 106). By projecting oneself imaginatively into the subjectivity of another, Willerslev argues that empathy is established (2007: 104). However, since becoming a complete copy of the subject being mimicked would lead to a dissolution of the individual self, the hunters need to maintain a double perspective of “not me, not-me” (2007: 91). This partial empathetic relationship means that people can “occupy an

ambivalent position in between identities” without “losing sight of [their] own incarnate being” (2007: 108). Counters in *Menos Días Aquí* continued to retain a sense of separateness to those they counted. They knew that they did not become the victims they empathised with, and were aware of what they were doing. However, the idea of doubleness with which Willerslev provides us is important. Whilst counters may not have been trying to take on the perspective of the people they counted, their interview narratives give the impression of being unable to avoid imagining their experiences, and empathising with how it must feel to die in such a way. Whilst the process of identification with the consciousness of another are not the same as those of Williamson readers, or Yukaghir hunters, the effects of such empathetic emplacements in foreign experience are remarkably similar. The empathetic merging of subjectivities “allows them to inhabit geographical locations they do not know”, and to imaginatively experience a life which was previously unknown to them (Reed 2011: 32). Through occupying alternative perspectives, “individuals claim to know that multiple perspective” (Reed 2011: 32). This created a space for reacting to the experience of counting through physical manifestations of grief, as a result of having imagined the lives of previously unconsidered others.

Reed notes that “despite appearances, literature for them [readers] is not reducible to its content. Instead it is the event of reading – the state of being inhabited by alien states of mind – that produces a sense of revelation” (2011: 60). Similarly, counters narratives suggest that the emotional effects of empathy did not arise from the texts themselves but from their engagement with the narratives held beyond the page. This is mediated via access to the media and the violent nature of the information it contains. Relations with material objects and institutions can have certain affective repercussions (Navaro-Yashin 2012), and in this case we can see an emotional connection taking place between a subject and an imagined other. There is an intermingling of emotion and the role of the imagination here; the effect is the creation of an empathetic connection with another individual, an imagined subject, which is later expressed as grief. In the next section, I

explore how such identifications with victims contained within them the potential for politicised actions to be carried out on their behalf.

5.2.2 Making the dead count:

For Henry Williamson readers, the consciousness of Henry is kept alive through his presence in his novels and in the landscapes he describes. This can be activated through reading him (Reed 2011: 53). In this section I want to show how, for counters, the memory and even existence of victims was kept alive by creating narratives of their lives and deaths on the project's blog. Counting provided a vehicle through which narrative descriptions of the deaths of individual victims could be recreated on the blog. This then provided an opportunity for those who read the entries to experience the same thing as the counters, and to relate to the dead. This was felt by counters to reaffirm the existence of the victim, and was seen to provide an avenue for the preservation of their memory. As such, the feelings generated by the count became essential to the maintenance of aims of the project itself. It turned the count into a political act, since publishing entries became an intentional and desired way of reasserting the existence of the victim they had empathised with. It allowed them to continue to recognise them as people, even though they had been 'lost'. Empathy and politicised, commemorative action become heavily intertwined here. As Pedwell argues, "the relationship between empathy and social justice is not simply about the creation of affective connections and openings that allow 'difference', power and complicity by recognised and negotiated in the present. It is also about how empathy, in its interaction with other emotions, might function as an affective portal to imagining, and journeying towards, different spaces and times of social justice" (Pedwell 2014: 36). Therefore, the aim of this section is to show what such emotional implications of empathising with victims *do* in terms of the way counters understand the political significance of their work.

For example, one volunteer who had suffered personally as a result of close friends and family being murdered or disappeared told us that participating in the count was *“a way of making homage to my people”*. Similarly, in an email at the end of her count, a volunteer named Ada told us that she felt:

“Writing the names of people on the blog means that they are no longer numbers, and they become people again, with a story. It’s a way of humanizing the victim again, and even of humanizing the violence. Through that, the person takes up their place on the page, and they are given once again their place in time”.

These quotes suggest that the count itself, in the context of having empathised so deeply with victims, becomes a politicised tool through which counters can pay tribute to those people whose loss they now grieve. It becomes a space of memory preservation which is experienced as being personally significant, and necessary as a way of acknowledging a counter’s connection with a particular victim. It stands as the recognition of their obligation to *see* them and to *remember* them. It is an assertion that counters realise the existence of that person, and will no longer close their eyes and ears to their story. This resonates with Hacking’s argument that counting (and categorising) is a form of actually ‘making people’. Though writing in a different context (that of scientific categorisation of groups in society), he argues that the process of counting, naming, and categorising can actually realise persons (Hacking 2006). In the context of *Menos Días Aquí*, counting people and recognising them as victims forms part of a process through which they become recognised *as people* by counters.

Indeed, Fabiola experienced feelings of elation after the mother of a girl she had counted commented on the entry in the blog saying *“I’m so glad to have found you here my daughter.”* In another entry, the daughter of a man who had been murdered wrote *“I’m so glad that you guys are doing this. Dad, I’m so glad that you’re here”*. She described how seeing those comments made her

“realise that the count means something to people”. It confirmed for her that her felt need to commemorate those she had counted was correct. It was a reaffirmation of the personhood of that victim at the same time that it was a validation of her felt need to remember them. This was also demonstrated by an email from another counter whose mother had been killed some months earlier:

“As a relative, it’s good to know that she isn’t just one more dead person, that she is not just a statistic, and that without ever even having known them, there is a place where the dead matter to people”.

This illustrates the way in which the count is made into a political act by allowing counters to preserve the memory of those they have counted and with whom they have empathised as *known people*. Having that need to remember reaffirmed by others acted to solidify their conviction that the victims with whom they empathised were people who *deserved* to be grieved and remembered. The importance given to such effects of the count resonates with Tate’s description of human rights activism. This “involves more than simply counting the dead; it is also making the dead count” (Tate 2007: 26). Writing victims into the blog was seen to challenge portrayals as the victims of the violence as “blurred subjects”. It implied defiance against the institutions who, whilst charged with victims’ “recognition and authorization” as people and as citizens, simultaneously deny that citizenship through failing to recognise their victimhood and their personhood (Tabuenica Córdoba 2011: 76). The count became valued by volunteers precisely because they felt that they were in some way preserving the memory of those who had died, and with whom they had empathised so profoundly.

Counters’ narratives imply that their ability to feel empathy with certain victims was challenged when they were faced with counting someone who was not named. This meant that anger was often directed towards newspapers whose journalism was seen to be lacking, which

counters felt signified “a total lack of respect for people’s lives”. Julieta, Fabiola’s sister who counted from within Mexico, exclaimed that:

“My heart literally crumbles into dust when I see some of the terms used by reporters to describe the deaths.”

This kind of emotive imagery conveys the depth of counters’ desires to recognise victims as fellow people. When they were prevented from being able to do so due to a lack of information, the loss which they felt for that person became doubly tragic – they could only grieve for an unknown victim. The fate which they feared for their memory – being forgotten – was already cemented before counters had the chance to properly empathise with their individual story. In an email from another counter, we were told how:

“It seems that some papers consider the fact that a person was an addict to be more important than their name, or that a description of the position in which a woman dies is more important than her description; it’s horrific”.

The ability to confer a name on a victim was taken to be necessary for a full acknowledgement of their personhood, and for their memory to be wholly respected. Indeed “the recitation of names is a crucial aspect of memory, an active not-forgetting” (Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006: 2). Since names have the potential to “become identical with the person”, this “creates the simultaneous potential to fix them as individuals and as members of recognized social groups. It is their detachability that renders names a powerful political tool for establishing or erasing formal identity” (Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006: 4). Being able to name victims allowed counters to resist their quantification as ‘pure numbers’. In counters’ narratives, empathising with victims meant that preserving their memory became an intentional political and personally significant act. However,

the absence of a name, and an inability to confer full personhood to the victim, were experienced as both a personal loss *and* a politicised failure to preserve their memory. Geo, my fellow co-administrator in the project, argued that:

“When you manage to find the name, for me, it’s like...they exist! I mean, there is a record of them. That was what I found to be the most important thing about the project, to give the dead their dignity back by finding their name.”

Geo found that the more victims she counted, the more possibility there was for her being unable to engage with them all. So when she counted twenty victims in one day, which was significantly less than what she was used to counting, she became very *“upset, like feeling depressed all day”*. This was because *“twenty is something you can count on your hands. They are twenty people you could have known.”* The inability to confer a name on certain victims as well as the number of victims counted, then, had a politicised emotional impact upon counters. It led to feelings of distress and failure, a sense of having failed those who they now felt a responsibility towards. This meant that the count becomes a scene of constant emotional turmoil; it is a scene of grief *and* politicised satisfaction, of pain *and* disappointed frustration. At the centre of such emotional turmoil is an individual activists’ empathetic identification with those they count *as people who they have come to know, or could have known.*

In her analysis of testimonies of apartheid, Coombes argues that representations of violence which allow for an acknowledgement of “an incommensurable difference” between victims and those viewing such representations are important. She claims that “they do not entice us into the action and seduce us with a fantasy of shared experience” (2011: 107). Dickson-Gomez similarly notes how experiences of violence may be ranked hierarchically and morally by victims. He describes how, in El Salvador, victims are keen to assert that “one who doesn’t know war doesn’t know anything”. This relates to the feeling by victims that “only those who have experienced the

profound suffering of war see the world as it really is" (2004: 146). Coombes also argues that in memorials for women who suffered during Apartheid, we are never "permitted to suspend our distance" from violent acts. This means that we are prevented by engaging in either "voyeurism *or* narcissistic empathy" (2011: 107). Whilst recognising the importance of her message, I would challenge the idea that "fantasies of shared experience" have to be viewed as taking something away from victims' accounts and their right to an incommensurable experience. Counters were well aware that they were not the victims they empathised with (though they may themselves have experienced other forms of violence). However, by imaginatively sharing their subjectivities, the very victimhood of the dead person was acknowledged and recognised. This allowed not only for their remembrance but for protest actions to be made in their memory. As Bromwich claims, through sympathy (or in this case, empathy), "I can come to feel what it is for me to belong to humanity" (1991: 140). The recognition of the personhood of an unknown 'other' through empathy with their imagined subjectivities is rooted in a sense of connection with that person. Recognising such a connection implicates the counter in the obligation to preserve their memory, and to acknowledge their existence. It politicises the connection at the same time that it results in feelings of loss. Empathy, in this context, did not seek to suspend the difference between the victim and the counter, but rather to bring the counter closer to an understanding of the victim. This resulted not only in grief at their suffering, but also indignation. It politicised their actions (Clough 2010).

In this section I have shown how empathy became an integral feature counters' narratives. It was shown to make counters value the project, and actually wish to further its aims. In the next section, however, I show that the situation was not quite as straightforward as this implies. At the same time that counters empathised with victims, their narratives also contained a visceral rejection of any kind of connection with certain subjectivities. A denial of intimacy with some victims became an important factor in the continued participation of a volunteer in the count. As such, it was also an integral feature of their politicisation. Therefore, the next section dwells on the importance of

detachment when it comes to understanding the mutual implication of affect, emotion and political action.

5.3 The importance of detachment

In this section, I argue that the emotional responses of the volunteers during the count contained a duality. Whilst counters related to victims of the war through grief and empathy, their narratives suggest that this could be overwhelming. As a result, their descriptions of counting also contain accounts of looking for ways to maintain a distance from the dead, and to detach themselves. I argue that this duality (of engagement and detachment) was important for an individual's continued participation in the project, as well as the completion of the project itself. This had important ramifications for the realisation of the political potential contained within the count.

5.3.1 The wrong kind of engagement:

Monica was in her mid-twenties and a member of NAR, the MCMB, and L'Adhesiva. She was Catalan and had been heavily involved with the local branch of Amnesty International in Badalona, a satellite town of Barcelona. Through her personal relationship with Alex (the co-editor of NAR), and the friendships she developed with members of L'Adhesiva and the MCMB, her political interests became focused on Mexico (illustrating the way migrants can affect the life histories and political sentiments of people in the localities to which they migrate (Leinaweaver 2013)). I interviewed her about her experiences of engaging in activism directed at Mexico, and about her experiences of counting in *Menos Días Aquí*. One of the most poignant moments of the interview happened when she described her visceral response to certain victims and certain news media. She described to me how she felt after seeing a video of a beheading on the last day of her count:

“After seeing that video, I really felt that something inside me had broken. Something broke inside me. I really felt as if I had turned into a monster for having seen it. I couldn’t get that out of my head for days afterwards. I even got really angry because despite the fact that I remembered many of the dead whom I had counted - especially a young man who they had shot to death before he left his house - that fucking video made me just remember that. It was only some time afterwards that I managed to remember the others whom I had counted. It was like all of the work that I had done that week had been lost, because for me it was like, I had spent all week long speaking with the dead, trying to reach out a hand to them, doing the work of saying “here they are” - like virtual forensics - and then at the end of the week I become the eye which has possibly seen one of their deaths. I mean it’s not that far-fetched to think of it that way. I felt like that, like shit. I felt disgusted with myself. I was like, how could I have watched that? I felt as if the faces of that video were the faces of the 377 people who I counted that week...that video was so horrible; horrible, horrible, horrible.”

Her reaction to the video implies that watching one of the victims die made her feel as if she herself were implicated in their death. It changed her position from one of empathy with those she had counted to one of feeling responsible for their loss. This was not experienced lightly. It led to such disturbing feelings that she could no longer consider herself to be the same: “something inside me had broken”. By emplacing herself in the subjectivity of the wrong kind of other, she felt herself to be irrevocably damaged. Because the count involves such strong emotional involvement on the part of counters, it has the potential to become transformative in ways which may result in the politicisation of counters or a disintegration of their moral selves. The potential to lose herself within the count became even more visible in the next part of her narrative:

“I couldn’t watch the whole thing, but after watching about a minute I covered my eyes as a form of natural protection; if you force your eyes to watch that you have already died. If I had watched the

whole thing, I would have died inside, definitely, definitely. Because of everything it implies, seeing. I mean seeing it is to participate in it. I couldn't watch the whole thing, but I could hear it; I could hear it, I could hear it...it was awful. A lot of those videos are made so that you see from the point of view of the murderer; your eye is the camera, which is even worse. You can't see the camera - the camera is your eye, as if you were behind the camera, and that's how I felt. I felt dirty, betrayed. I was...broken. It was if I had suddenly become empty inside, and that I was never going to get over it. I'll never get over it, not after seeing that. You lose your innocence."

This is beyond feeling a connection to the victims. Instead, it emphasises the potential of the count to rupture an individual's sense of subjective 'wholeness' by placing them in the imagined subjectivity of the wrong kind of person (in this case, the murderer). Monica felt that she would never be the same after 'seeing' the death of one of the people she had counted. It altered her ability to think of herself as engaging in a moral and political action. Instead, she felt "dirty", "betrayed" and "empty". That sense of having successfully recognised the personhood of certain victims by counting, which we saw in the first part of the chapter, has been lost. In its place lies a rupturing of the *moral* personhood of the counter: empathy within the count contains the potential to become something she would not want to be. Empathy with the wrong kind of person, in this context, and from the wrong perspective, becomes dangerous to a counters' own sense of self.

Monica then went on to emphasise her desire to detach herself in order to counteract such a moral disintegration of her own personhood:

"You feel like you lose your innocence because your imagination can't take you there. You wouldn't want it to. I don't want it to. I don't want someone to show me that. I don't need to see it in order to be convinced that I need to do more or less to realise that the situation is getting worse. I don't want them to show me; I just don't want to see it, I don't want to. Something breaks within you. It breaks completely- because a person is doing it. The identification has nothing to do with Mexico. It's not

that Mexico is bad. It's one person killing another one. When you see it, you're not watching it as Mexican, you're not watching it as a Catalan. You lose your innocence with regards to the limits of cruelty which you thought human beings were able to reach. You lose it. And that's really tough, because it's like seeing beyond the limit, but beyond it. And beyond that limit is the abyss. And also, I think that in the end you also lose your innocence because you realise that you don't know what the limit is; you don't know it, you don't. But you've reached a little closer to it. I mean, you don't know the extent to which human beings can reach. You don't know. But precisely because you don't know it, you don't want to explore it. I don't want to explore it. I don't have an interest in exploring it. It doesn't give me morbid curiosity or anything. But now, I'm a little more immune. I've moved the limit. Now I know that it can go that far; which means as fucked up as we are, we've already assumed that the next thing we have to get through will be worse. You don't want to become immune to that. You always want to retain the capacity under which that will seem an atrocity."

This suggests that experience of the wrong kind of subjectivity, and the way in which that disrupted her own sense of moral personhood, actually provided Monica with insights into the human condition itself. Perhaps more importantly, it allowed her to realise that there were only certain aspects of that humanity which she could accept, or even wish to acknowledge. It obliged her to make a moral imposition as to what kind of knowledge she wanted to be party to, and what kind of humanity she was willing to recognise. Her desire to block out such a position represents a rejection of the existence of the kind of subjectivity which was responsible for the deaths of those victims, and the rupturing of her own sense of wholeness. Monica's narrative here illustrates the way in which an imposed differentiation between subjects is necessary in order to preserve the integrity of one's own self (cf. Fausto 2007: 503; Kohn 2007: 12; Viveiros de Castro 1998: 481, 484). The need to impose such subject differentiation can itself be based upon a moral distinction between desirable behaviour and the kinds of subjects one is relating to (Sulkin 2005: 20).

This again resonates with Willerslev's description of mimetic empathy. In describing the partial application of mimicry by Yukaghir hunters, he argues that during mimesis and the occupation of a double subjectivity, difference between selves needs to be maintained in order to prevent them from merging totally. Willerslev calls this "depth reflexivity," which is "a certain withholding or non-giving of the self" (2007: 12). Such a position allowed Monica to reject certain subjectivities and therefore prevent herself from partially becoming something which she would not like to be (cf. Fausto 2007: 504). In distancing herself from selective subject positions during the count, she was able to employ a form of emotional protection which allowed her to recuperate the memory of her empathetic relation with other victims, rather than that of the murderer. The desire for distance arose from not wanting to experience the feelings which seeing the video had generated. It prevented her from empathising with the other victims she had counted, and revealed to her aspects of 'humanity' which, she said, she "did not need to know". What becomes apparent here is the fact that in order for counters to be able to grieve for the victims they counted, and for them to empathise with individual victims' stories, they needed to be able to detach themselves from other kinds of subjectivities – those which inspired feelings which threatened the integrity of the self. This was founded in a visceral rejection of the 'wrong' kind of subjectivity. In the next part of this section, I focus on another problematic aspect of detaching oneself during the count which featured within counters' narratives, and the implications this had on the completion of the overall project.

5.3.2 Completing the count:

The desire to detach could create its own problems. This would be expressed as a tension on the part of counters between wanting to get the count finished as quickly as possible each day *and* to engage with victims as people. Here, I argue that this tension created a consciously employed interplay between engagement and detachment. This tension would allow participants to complete the count without losing the ability to empathise with individual victims.

For Javier, the need to finish on time and physical tiredness of the count interrupted his need to delve into the stories of victims:

“I took so long to count because I had to really make an effort to carry on. Suddenly it just all gets too much; you feel tired, the difference in time zones is horrible. You end up counting them like bread or chickens; one, two, three. So then I thought that by doing that you’re not giving the crisis enough respect. But you end up doing that because you don’t want to take even longer to do it, you’ve had it up to here with tiredness, and the dead still keep on coming. It’s as if the dead keep coming and coming, like they were coming out of a machine, and you want to give them dignity, you want to dignify them, give them a place. There was a change on the last day in comparison with the first. It’s no longer the same. You’re getting the last dead down as quickly as possible. Even so, there are some that stay with you.”

His tiredness, and the time it took him to complete the count, created a need to finish as soon as possible. However, realising that this prevented him from engaging with individual victims’ stories as much as he would like actually served to highlight the importance of that aspect of the experience to him. It made visible the potential of recognising their individual victimhood to give them “dignity”. The count became an interplay between feeling the need to detach, and desiring to connect. The awareness of that interplay, however, and what it signified, actually ensured that the political meaning of the count was not lost to volunteers.

The descriptions of counters would often take on this dual aspect. In their narratives, they would explain how they wanted to “mechanise” the count so as not to take so long, *and* to then re-engage themselves with it so as not to feel as if they were dehumanising the victims. Alex described that character of the count to me in detail:

“Another thing that happens to you is that you try to mechanise it, you try to normalise it so as to save time and not be in front of the computer for so many hours at a once. But in the end, that’s impossible, it really is impossible, you can’t do it. It’s not the worst thing you can do, but you are still trying to normalise the tragedy. They just become one more number, and you don’t realise you’re doing exactly what the government is doing - treating them just like one more number. The worse thing is that you end up using the same mechanisms as the hit men in order to protect yourself from drowning in hurt”.

We see an interplay between engagement and detachment taking place within this narrative. Detached urgency is necessary in order to actually complete the task at hand and ‘finish’ the count each day. However, this can also give a sense of dehumanising the victims. It once again leads to the inhabitation of the wrong kind of subjectivity (someone who does not want to relate to the dead, like a hit-man). But it was only by distancing themselves during the count, and becoming aware of detachments’ possible impact, that counters actively tried to ensure their engagement. This meant that detachment could become a means for ensuring a continuation of engagement.

Monica went on in her interview to tell me that:

“That’s why Menos Días Aquí needs to continue being a weekly project in which various people can participate. Human beings are adaptive...we’re capable of adapting ourselves to everything. But there are things which can never stop being an event, which can never be routine. That’s why I don’t want to count again right now, even though I could; I don’t want it to become routinized and for it not to affect me anymore”.

Here, Monica shows an awareness that she needed to employ a certain amount of both engagement *and* detachment in order to meet the aims of the project, and her own felt need to

adequately remember the victims. Both detachment and engagement, then, were implicated in the carrying out of the count. Each night was experienced as a conflictual interplay between desires for an enabling detachment (which would allow counters to count the maximum number of victims in the shortest time possible, and combat tiredness), and the practice of empathetic engagement with victims (as an ethical endeavour in which each victim was seen as being worthy of memory and grief). Counters themselves were intensely aware of this, and their awareness served to highlight the political potential of the project. It also intensified their own commitment to meeting those aims. Hence, counters “move[d] in and out of different relationships” with victims, and that movement was essential to the very completion of the count (Anderson 2001: 178). The cultivation of detachment (and engagement) in this context demonstrate the way both are, in fact, lived as “structure[s] of feeling” (Anderson 2001: 178).

Ingold argues that “life is given in engagement, not in disengagement”, and that it is through engagement that the world is “revealed to us” (2000: 60). However, recent studies have shown that detachment is not a negative practice which prevents our participation in the world. Rather, it is an integral feature of our very engagement with it (Anders 2010; Anderson 2001; Daston and Galison 2007). Indeed, Yarrow claims that “the theoretical privileging of engagement diverts attention from the productive aspects of various forms of disconnection, distance and detachment” (2013: 8). As we have seen so far, in the context of carrying out the count, both detachment and engagement became enabling *and* limiting in different ways. Too much of either was undesirable since it could curtail the very activity of counting. Hence, “although forms of engagement and detachment can curtail or truncate one another, they also extend one another and make one another possible” (Candea 2010b: 255).

Indeed, as the interplay between different states of distanciation and engagement during the count show, and as Yarrow notes for the stone masons working on Glasgow cathedral, “specific modes of engaging and detaching are mutually implicated” when it comes to completing the task in hand successfully (2013: 3). In her study of American expatriate food-bank volunteers in Florence,

Trundle argues that “knowledge and action, and means and ends” emerge together from daily practices of “getting the work done” (2012: 211). She shows how volunteers view charity work as representing the height of moral compassion but, in order to express that compassion and get the charitable work done, they were obliged to “value an ethic of disinterested equality.” Trundle notes that “this challenges an underlying assumption within development practice, which values ‘engagement’ and considers ‘detachment’ to be morally suspect” since “the two domains were experienced as inseparable.” (2012: 211). As such, behaviour, action, and feeling are as much influenced by differing forms of detachment as they are by engagement (Grassiani 2013; Harvey 2010). As a result, “once it is envisaged not as false consciousness but as a telos for people’s actions, and traced through every-day micropractices of the self, detachment emerges as the constant counterpart and complement of engagement, not as its radical alternative” (Candea 2010b: 244). The interplay between engagement and detachment during the count demonstrates its importance to the completion of the activist project itself. They gave counters room to sway between different emotional states and hence to cope with the demands of the count in ways which were both ‘ethical’ and ‘practical’. It allowed them to meet the political aims of the project *and* their own personally felt obligations to victims. In this case, such a process had both personal and political consequences (Navaro-Yashin 2012; Parreñas 2012; Richard and Rudnycky 2009).

This section has shown how particular emotions became implicated in the growth and articulation of specific forms of political commitment. They allowed for a deep sense of connection to individual victims to be articulated (and thus created a space for the acknowledgement of their existence). At the same time, emotional turmoil within the count, and an interplay between states of engagement and detachment, meant that the political importance of the project became both acknowledged and actively pursued. In the next section, I argue that this process was heavily implicated in the generation of a specific form of politicised knowledge.

5.4 Experiential Knowledge:

In this section I argue that counting was understood by counters to have given them a new perspective on, and understanding of, the war on drugs. Their interview narratives indicate that they came to understand the realities of Mexico differently after having *seen* the effects of the war. I show how counters felt that the insights they derived through their empathetic connections with the victims they counted, as well as from their obsessive searches for information, led them to occupy a position of informational privilege with regards to their own perspective on the violence and what was happening in Mexico. As such, it became heavily implicated in the process of solidification of their own political commitment. By revealing previously unconsidered aspects of power inequalities within Mexico, the count was experienced as a source of learning which brought with it both the felt desire *and* the obligation to act. Emotion, here, becomes intimately tied with learning (Milton 2005c: 33).

After a talk given by NAR at the Centre for Contemporary Culture in Barcelona, Alex told me that he felt like saying to people:

“Before you say anything about the current state of Mexico right now, count for one week, and then you will understand. Then you will be able to talk about it.”

This is an assertive position to take. Alex is telling us that unless someone has counted, he would doubt their ability to ‘know’ what was happening in Mexico. He is equating the process of counting with gaining a kind of knowledge which he feels could not be gained in another context. It implies an association of counting with learning *and* revelation. Similar sentiments were also expressed by Fabiola. In our interview, she confided that:

“On any given day you can open up the newspapers and see what’s happening in some places, but you’re never able to find out such detailed information state by state, in such a systematic way. So it’s like a really forceful window being opened onto the reality of what is really happening in Mexico. It makes you see what is happening in Mexico in a different light”.

Here, she attributes the count with the ability to ‘reveal’ things about Mexico – it forcefully “opens a window” onto the conflict. Her responses give the impression that she had changed as a result of counting and that her understanding of the conflict’s impact had been radically altered. The idea of a window being opened onto her own sense of reality once again implies an association of counting with revelatory knowledge. Counting was experienced by volunteers like Fabiola as a source of privileged insight which brought with it the moral responsibility to act. It imbued the count with a politicised obligation to make use of their learning.

The way counting affected how counters understood Mexico was emotively described in the testimony sent to us by Mauricio. He was a journalist who had counted from inside Mexico, and sent us a text which had written a couple of weeks after he finished counting. He wrote:

“Something changes; the world cannot be seen in the same way. Every night I published the information on the blog and twitter. Afterwards, I turned off the computer and drove home. With both hands on the wheel, I couldn’t stop thinking about the murders described by each article....Now I go out onto the street, and I am not - I cannot be - the same. I think of that reality, of the impunity, of the lie in which we live and of which we form a part in one way or another...my perception of the world has been distorted”.

This narrative implies that the count not only acted as a source of revelatory knowledge which counters ‘acquired’. It shows that such knowledge actually transformed the way individual volunteers existed within the world: it transformed their sense of self, and ruptured their feelings of

living in a place that was 'known' to them. It changed their feelings of being 'rooted' in Mexico by challenging the presumed foundations upon which their knowledge of the society was built. By revealing previously unconsidered and unexperienced happenings in Mexico, it made volunteers interpret their life there in radically altered ways. His account was very emotive and, like Fabiola, he felt that the experience had changed him. The count did not change the way Mauricio viewed Mexico in abstract terms - it transformed the way he inhabited physical space such as the street. It changed the way the country was *lived*.

The notion of seeing Mexico in new and transformed ways appeared time and time again in counters' interview narratives. In chapter three, we saw how Laura had experienced her migration to Barcelona as a site of ambiguity. She was happy with the multicultural possibilities on offer in the city and yet felt rejected by politicised assertions of Catalaneity and discrimination towards immigrants. After counting for *Menos Días Aquí*, Laura explained to me that she felt she could no longer speak about Mexico to non-Mexicans in the same way:

"I remember that that week I went out a few times with some friends, and they said to me 'stop talking about that already' you know? It was all I could talk about right then; I needed just to get it all off my chest. And it just so happens that in one bar a girl heard me speaking with a Mexican accent and she says 'oh, they've just given me a grant to go to Mexico, I'm going to Saltillo'. And you can imagine my face. I had just counted however many dead there, and my friend was like, what's wrong? And I was like but, but, but...well I mean I've always said that going to Mexico as a tourist isn't dangerous, it's not the same as living there, you're not a target, etc. There is no reason for anything to happen to you, but that time, I remember I felt cold inside. I couldn't say to her 'that's great'. I just couldn't".

Her narrative here gives an indication of her emotional state after having counted. She was unable to speak about Mexico in the same way as before. She felt fearful for other people who were

going there – indeed she described herself as feeling “cold inside”. Her words suggest that the experience of counting could act to extend the ambivalence and critical nostalgia which her migration experience had engendered. We are seeing an interplay here of different planes of experiences which transform the way Mexico as a place is understood. These changes are *felt* at an individual level, which means that migrants actually embody the transformations which have taken place in their understandings of home. They *live* the changes, rather than merely contemplating them at a cognitive level.

The narratives of my participants show that their understanding of Mexico as a place was reconfigured as a result of counting. Within their narratives, empathetic relationships with the victims they counted became “a form of remembrance” (Reed 2011: 148). However, like Reed describes for Henry Williamson readers, “in this situation who owns memories or remembers what is thrown into confusion. Between the recollections of the author and those of his solitary readers there also appears to emerge a shared memory, at once intensely personal and reassuringly collective. At times individuals seem to believe that as well as accessing the historical consciousness of Henry they can, through him, access the memories of a region and even those of the nation” (2011: 148). Similarly, counters’ accounts imply that they interpreted the war in Mexico and the realities of the country differently precisely because they had identified with national others in ways they had never before experienced. Coming to ‘know’ Mexico, and coming to ‘know’ the war through imaginative emplacement in the lives of others gave them a sense of having acquired knowledge which was felt to have radically transformed them. Therefore, “they do not create a shared memory together through the deployment of social categories or the outcome of social interaction; instead they believe they find it separately in the experience each has of being occupied by the war memories (subjectivity) of Henry” (2011: 152) or, in the case of counters, through imaginative, empathetic emplacement in the experiences and subjectivities of victims. The experiencing of “a second self” (Reed 2002: 51) via empathetic emplacement in the imagined subjectivity of another changed not only the way in which Mexico itself was perceived, but also “the way they perceived

themselves in the world” (Reed 2002: 188). It had specific implications for the kind of cosmopolitanism which counters displayed towards others in Mexico, and radically altered the form of openness which they were able to display. I discuss this aspect of the count towards the end of the chapter.

The bodily knowledge of counters, gained through empathetic engagement and detachment, overcame the notion that “statistics hint at the extent of a social wound but say nothing of the instrument used to make that wound, or the surgery required to close it” (Gibler 2009: 9). This is because, as Green notes when discussing the complexities involved in reading maps and statistics on the Greek-Albanian border, “the numbers that actually appeared always revealed traces of other things that went into arriving at those particular numbers.”(2005: 160). The knowledge gained through counting, and the reformulation of understandings of society as a result of such knowledge (cf. Geismar and Mohns 2011: 135), turned the process into one of perceived informational privilege *and*, as we shall see, “a political act” (cf. Tate 2007: 31). It revealed more than the names and quantities of victims: it allowed for insights into power structures within Mexican society to be observed, and for critical observations about the nature of the violence to be made. In the next section, I focus of this political potential of such feelings.

5.4.1 Re-politicising the conflict:

In this section, I argue that the sense of personal transformation and informational privilege which counters experienced led them to interpret the conflict in more critical ways. This was important in solidifying their political commitment as it led to new interpretations of who could be considered ‘guilty’ of crimes, and where responsibility for the violence lay. Such sentiments could give a new sense of having a responsibility to act, and further altered the ways in which they thought about the nation.

Luis was a lawyer investigating human rights abuses committed by the Mexican army. After

observing my work with Menos Días Aquí for a number of months, he told me that he would like to count for the project. He did so, and I asked him how he felt about the experience. Despite the fact that he was already familiar with the history of the conflict, he talked about how counting had allowed him to: *“understand that the situation is much more difficult than I thought”*. He argued that it allowed him to see *“the extent of dehumanisation which has occurred”*. When I asked him if he could explain further, he told me that:

“There are little details which make you say it’s a total massacre. I’m convinced that everyone who says that the situation is bad but not that bad, well they just aren’t informed. If you make yourself read the papers for a whole week, if you make yourself read the reports from organisations like Human Rights Watch, like Amnesty International, if you make yourself read reports, testimonies, if you go into YouTube and see videos of shoot-outs in secondary schools, even in nurseries, the people hanged from bridges, the beheaded, well I mean you have to ask, what is happening? I think that precisely by counting, it makes you aware of what Mexico today actually is - a laboratory of dehumanisation, an authentic butchery, which has an underlying socio-economic context and a backdrop of disastrous values. I would tell all Mexicans to count for one week and I’m sure that millions of people who right now won’t wake up - not even with a fucking whipping - would open their eyes and they would realise the true extent of this country’s reality”.

His response mirrored that which Alex had told me months earlier – that it was only by counting, and reading about what was happening in-depth, that someone could really claim to ‘know’ what was going on. Luis attributed counting with the ability to politicise people who otherwise *“won’t wake up – not even with a fucking whipping.”* Like other counters, the experience had revealed a social reality which meant that *“you have to ask what is happening.”* This suggests that his previous assumptions about what was happening in Mexico had been drastically ruptured. Encountering information about the violence was not enough: such information led to questions

about *why* such events were happening, and served to highlight the *lack* of alternative information which was available in respect to those underlying causes. He associates counting with having the potential to reveal 'the truth' about Mexico: it reveals "the true extent of this country's reality". The process of counting and the (rupturing) potential for learning become heavily intertwined here.

The experience of counting also led Fabiola and Javier to question the state of impunity in Mexico. During our interview, Javier explained that:

"There are things that you only see when counting that make you say shit, like the geographies of death, like there's a fucking motorway where they always go to dump bodies, and it's like, what the fuck? What are the police doing? If you know that they dump the bodies there, you don't exactly have to be a genius to stop it".

Here, then, the patterns he has observed whilst counting have actually led him to question the state's tactics. It brings the police under suspicion and brings into sharp focus the idea that they may in some way be implicated with the violence. It forces him to question the power structures within the country. Fabiola agreed with him, and added:

"I thought that too. Like if we, just normal people, can count and realise those things....it's like, you realise how much corruption there is. It's ridiculous."

Here, then, it is the 'normal' people who are faced with the truth about what is happening. More specifically, it is 'normal people' who have counted. They take on the critical knowledge provided by the experiencing of counting. This knowledge imbues the count with the ability to surpass official versions of events, and observe the realities underneath. As such, it brings the institutions of the state under the critical gaze of "normal" people. Javier observed:

“All the crap just becomes more visible through doing it, you see the system.”

This idea of being able to “see the system” was an important one for counters. It gave the impression of a curtain having been lifted, and of being faced with that which they were unable to see clearly before counting. It is transformative knowledge because it shifts the loci of guilt for the violence and social inequality in general. It also changed the way volunteers viewed the victims. Fabiola, for example, confided that:

“I always thought that in general those that were dying were involved with organised crime, but then when you count and you see that there are children, or fifteen year old kids which could be in basically any classroom, it’s a good way of being able to lift the lid on Mexico and see what’s really happening”.

Here, she is implying that her understanding of the conflict changed as a result of counting. It was a way to “lift the lid on Mexico”, and to see things which others were unable to see. It also changed the way she understood the culpability of victims – she no longer viewed them as all belonging to organised crime, and instead saw them as young people who could “be in any classroom”. This has particular cosmopolitan implications: the way she understands the nation has shifted in such a way that she now questions the culpability of those the media and the state attribute with the responsibility for the violence. There is now a new kind of other within Mexico with whom she feels connected: the victims of the violence. Such a sentiment also became apparent in Luis’ description of counting:

“Few things annoy me more than seeing those who justify the deaths of so many people in this war by saying that most of them are criminals. Even the capo of the most dangerous cartel is a Mexican just like me; he is someone who is part of my country who in some moment had to make that

decision. It might be that he is an asshole with no soul, who can mutilate, decapitate, rape and torture, but at the same time, he is also a victim. That person has such a grade of insensibility and hate due to his own marginalisation, lack of education and the environment without values in which he has grown up. He is also a product of social marginalisation which has terrible effects."

Hence, not only did the count result in new understandings of the conflict in Mexico, it also changed the way criminality and victimhood could be understood – and where blame was attributed. This signifies a transformation in the kind of cosmopolitanism inhabited by counters: it changes the way different kinds of others within Mexico are viewed. These are cosmopolitan shifts which in themselves are politicised: the 'real' culprits, and the 'real' victims, have shifted position within individual imaginaries in such a way that power inequalities within Mexico are revealed.

Robbins argues that after the critiques levelled against anthropology in the post-Writing Cultures era, "it has often been the suffering subject who has replaced the savage one as a privileged object of our attention" (2013: 450). He claims that "it was only when trauma became universal, when it came to define a humanity without borders, that anthropologists found a foundation for their science that allowed them to dispense with the notion of the other completely" (2013: 455). This was anthropology based on the notion that "trauma was indeed becoming the bridge between cultures" (2013: 453), and that traumatic suffering was something "beyond culture". In this way, it did not "require cultural interpretation in order to render them sensible" (2013: 455)., Robbins argues that this is an approach to ethnography "in which we do not primarily provide cultural context so as to offer lessons in how lives are lived differently elsewhere, but in which we offer accounts of trauma that make us and our readers feel in our bones the vulnerability we as human beings all share" (2013: 455). Whilst Robbins offers these insights as a commentary on the current state of anthropology, his discussion resonates ethnographically with the processes I have described in this chapter. In the same way that some anthropologists have treated suffering as something "beyond culture" and which links people together "as humans", it was also treated as

such by those counting the dead. Like Throop argues, “while our various modes of being with others are clearly patterned by personal, interpersonal, and cultural assumptions concerning the regulation and control of empathy and empathic-like attunements, empathy itself at times escapes the limits of our personal, interpersonal, and cultural emplacement, spilling over, even if fleetingly, to new horizons of intersubjective understanding” (2010: 773). It was through such connections that counters were able to empathise with the experiences of victims whose lives may, in multiple ways, have been completely alien to them. Such a projected inhabitation of another ‘self’ allowed for an opening towards those ‘others’. This could lead to a critique of the root causes of the violence in the country, as well as an acknowledgement that one must look beyond immediate assertions of guilt and responsibility. At the same time, the ability to inhabit strong emotions as a means of crossing social divides fits with a particularly Mexican trope of social revolution which simultaneously adds a specific cultural coherency to the emotionality of activists’ narratives (Noble 2013). They at once transcend, and yet dwell within, particular localised tropes of political action.

Their empathetic, embodied knowledge, then, was not to be divorced from its political causes (French 1994; Jenkins and Valiente 1994; Turner 1994). By recognising the political nature of the causes of the deaths they counted, counters experienced their informational privilege as creating a moral obligation to act. The victims with whom the counters empathised were people who had suffered as a result of violence and conflict. The way counters came to *know* and *relate to* the dead was also a result of the context in which they were placed. Their bodily knowledge was an outcome and symptom of the violence (and its multiple contemporary and historical causes). It was also a critique of such processes via the uses to which such bodily knowledge was put, and the very context in which it was experienced i.e. counting and peace activism. As such, the mutual implication of engagement and detachment during the activist experience became integral to the completion of the activist project itself. It also became a solidifying element to the politicisation of individual volunteers.

5.5 Cosmopolitanism transformations:

In this section, I discuss how the process of counting could result in the inhabitation of a new kind of cosmopolitanism amongst counters, and so provide the possibility of overcoming divisions of inequality between different groups within Mexico through emotionally experiencing political acts (Noble 2013). I begin by discussing the kinds of societal divisions created by mainstream nationalism in Mexico. I finish by suggesting that the empathetic (and detached) experiences of the count result in a cosmopolitanism which could help to overcome such divisions (at least at a discursive and individually desired level). As such, the emotional experience of counting can have politicised effects which result in the solidified commitment of individuals to acting *and* to a shift in the kinds of 'others' within the nation which they are open to. They represent a continuation of particular cultural tropes of revolutionary social action within Mexico (Nobel 2013).

5.5.1 Societal divisions within Mexico:

What kind of national divisions were overcome (at least at a discursive and affective level) by assertions of a new kind cosmopolitanism? The following section gives an overview of the ethno-racial hierarchy in Mexico and the separation of society into economic groups which overlap with skin tone and ethnicity. This is necessary in order to understand how cosmopolitan transformations could act to overcome such divisions.

Mexican society is built upon an ethno-racist hierarchy, and articulations of mainstream nationalism involve what I would term a contradictory national cosmopolitanism which privileges certain groups whilst excluding others. An understanding of the hierarchical divisions within Mexican society is important if we are to understand the significance of the way the intersections of migration with emotional ways of relating to home could change how unequal others in the homeland were understood.

The colonial order in Mexico divided society along ethnic lines. These overlapped with social and economic hierarchies which placed “Indians” at the bottom and “Europeans” at the top of the social ladder. After independence, members of the upper classes in Mexico sought to implement Enlightenment ideals of a ‘white’, European modernity in an ethnically mixed population. This resulted in a process of ‘mestizaje’ (mixing), which sought national progress through a gradual whitening of the population (Appelbaum, et al. 2003:4; Larrain 2000: 9; Wade 1993: 11). During the Porfirio Díaz regime in late 19th-century, indigenous people were seen as an ‘antinational’ group, impeding the development and progress of the population, who needed to be assimilated (Gibler 2009: 198). In post-revolutionary Mexico (1920s onwards) the state pursued a policy of indigenismo which sought to assimilate indigenous groups into mestizo society whilst simultaneously celebrating a shared, pre-Hispanic past (Appelbaum, et al. 2003: 6-7; Cook and T. 1995: 33). The ideal racial ‘type’ was perceived as being the fusion of ‘Indians’ and whites to create a (whiter) mestizo population (Gall 2004: 240, 241). As a result, “the choice of the mestizo as the new protagonist of nationality allowed both for the construction of a strong national state which buffered the influence of foreign power and for a retention of the Eurocentric goals of progress. Moreover, indigenistas used the image of the Indian community...as a model of nationality” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992: 279).

However, whilst assimilation through mixture was celebrated as part of Mexican national identity - which Gall calls “mestizophilia” - what often resulted was segregation *and* racist assimilationism of indigenous and Afro-descendent groups (2004: 242). Indigeneity was associated with a backwards past, and assimilation was tied to progress. This ensured the maintenance of racial, economic and social divisions (Appelbaum, et al. 2003: 198; Cook and T. 1995: 33; Larrain 2000; Wade 1993: 20). In this scenario, “in order to be Mexican you have to become a mestizo” (Gall 2004: 243). Gibler argues that “the conquest never finished, but evolved and transformed from Spanish imperialism into an internal colonialism combined with forms of economic domination imposed by the United States. Mexico’s political class uses various nationalist, economic, rule-of-law, and poverty ideologies as catechisms for converting and dominating the still uncolonised

sectors of the population, both indigenous and nonindigenous” (2009: 17). In addition, “colonial authority in New Spain laid the foundations for several pillars of contemporary Mexican politics: centralised power, monopoly capitalism, corruption and cronyism, caciquismo, racism, class stratification and labour exploitation” (2009:29).

At the same time, there has been a development of an anti-imperialist, defensive national identity in Mexico which rejects a privileging of U.S. influences and values (in the face of repeated conflict with the US and its attempted challenges to Mexican national sovereignty) (Brandes 1998; Gutiérrez 1999a; Gutierrez 1999b). Whilst a *mestizo* (and white) modernity was pursued, a defensive national identity was built which simultaneously denied the superiority of Mexico’s ‘white’ neighbours over the border and highlighted the superiority of *mestizaje* (mixture) in creating a superior “cosmic” race (Alonso 2004: 462). In this way, nationalism after the Mexican Revolution “continued to value “whitening” for the community as a whole, but it was against merely turning the community over to the “whites” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992: 279).

Therefore Mexican society is built upon an ethno-racist hierarchy in which, despite discourses of multiculturalism and *mestizaje*, white Mexicans remain at the top of the social order and belong to the country’s most economically privileged groups; black and indigenous Mexicans remain at the bottom and live in the most disadvantaged conditions. Whiteness is something which is desirable to pursue and inhabit; indigeneity is not. Unless, that is, when discussing ‘the nation’, in which pre-Hispanic traditions, and the benefits of racial mixture (*mestizaje*), are celebrated. This leads to a situation in which multiple divisions of race, ethnicity and class overlap in complex ways within the nation.

Why, then, are the emotional experiences described in this chapter important in challenging the societal divisions created by these hierarchies?

5.5.2 Counting and cosmopolitanism:

Six men hanged on a bridge in a poor, rural and indigenous area of Michoacán may have seemed socially, ethnically and economically distanced from counters' own social circles whilst living within Mexico. However, through the emotional impact of the count, a poor, rural and indigenous victim of such a crime was *mourned*. Counters felt grief for people hitherto unknown to them (and who they may have before imagined as criminals). As such, counting had the potential to homogenise the nation through empathy with another's suffering. Indeed this is why it is "important to view the homeland as a constructed and imagined *topos* rather than a clearly definable entity" (Skrbis 1999: 38). The experience of counting led to a shift in the way Mexico was understood and, as such, ruptured the way in which volunteers thought about power, culpability and victimhood. Mookherjee argues that "pain is a medium through which the nation establishes ownership in individuals, and reminds and guarantees an individual of his or her belonging and witness to a moral community" (2011a: 7). In her discussion of the reactions of visitors to the genocide display of the Bangladeshi War Museum, she shows how the "disturbing contemplation" of genocidal accounts and objects in the museum "triggers various affective and visceral resonances among the visitors, primarily that of melancholic loss and hope" (2011b: 73). This leads to the development of "genocidal cosmopolitanism", which implies an aesthetic, ethical position located in wider global genocide tropes of "never again" whilst at the same time it increases attachments to the nation itself (2011b: 80). This resonates with the potential of the count to engender empathy between counters and unknown others. By empathising with an unequal other as a fellow human, counters were able to begin to overcome national divisions and hierarchies within Mexico (at least at an emotional and a discursive level). However, whilst the grief engendered by the process of counting did strengthen an individual's connection with others within the nation, it also transformed the kind of "moral community" they felt themselves to belong to. Rather than asserting a straightforward belonging to the nation, it changed the way an individual perceived it, and led to

new kinds of bonds with imagined others there. Hence, it transformed the basis of national belonging at the same that it strengthened it in newly politicised ways. Emotion became a tool through which structural inequality within Mexico could begin to be transformed (cf. Noble 2013).

The emotions engendered during the process of counting, then, not only became an important factor enabling the continued political commitment of my participants (and the continued existence of MDA); it also altered the way counters related to others within 'the nation'. It could engender new forms of cosmopolitan openness towards national others whom otherwise would be considered as separate and unrelated to my participants on social, class, and ethnic terms. It allowed them to "acknowledge the pain of the other" through the breakdown of "established genres", and in doing so created the potential for individual (and social) transformations which took on their own particular cultural coherency (Kleinman, et al. 1997: xvi).

5.6 Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have shown how the emotions experienced when counting the dead played an important role in solidifying the political commitment of some activists and in meeting the aims of the project itself. When describing the way they related to the victims they counted, volunteers in *Menos Días Aquí* evoked feelings of closeness to unequal others whose subjectivities were previously unknown to them. Their narratives suggest that, by imaginatively inhabiting the lives of victims, counters came to grieve for them. They also came to attribute the count with the possibility of preserving the memory of those individuals. As such, their commitment to the project could become solidified. Their sense of connection and *obligation* to the victims also became necessary to the continued existence of the project, since the interplay between states of engagement and detachment was required in order to complete the count each day. This entire process could give a sense of occupying a position of informational privilege with regards to knowledge about the war on drugs and its victims. With such privilege came the moral responsibility to act. It also resulted in new

forms of openings towards unequal others in Mexico founded in the feeling of mutual human belonging. Experiences of strong emotion, then, could result in the further politicisation of individual activists, as well as expanding their own cosmopolitanisms and commitment.

In the next chapter, I look at the implications of migrants asserting emotional *or* cosmopolitan tropes of experience when conversing with other Mexicans in Barcelona. I do so in order to explore what such tropes of experience *do* in terms of an individual's engagement in long-distance activism. I argue that emotional displays could overlap with, and generate, assertions of the legitimacy to act from abroad. However, I also show that political life histories of individuals were important when it came to judging the validity of different kinds of activism. This meant that some activists sought to reduce the emotional content of certain events in an attempt to achieve other aims. I show how such positions were rooted in universalised inhabitations of cosmopolitanism which sought to include local people in Mexican struggles (and vice-versa). As a result, I argue, different forms of cosmopolitanism could come into friction with one another, and create a forum for the critique of the activities of others. I argue that both emotional and cosmopolitan tropes had repercussions for the way in which activism was experienced by individual migrants, and for how it was interpreted (or intended to be interpreted) by others. Hence, whilst emotionally-infused political acts took on their own particular coherency with regards to tropes of revolutionary change within Mexico (cf. Noble 2013), the meaning and significance of such tropes continued to be differentially interpreted and negotiated by individual activists (Carro-Ripalda 2009, Noble 2013).

Chapter Six:

Acting from a Distance

6.1 Introduction:

In the previous chapters, we saw how the ambiguities of migration could result in questionings which were capable of producing critical estrangement from Mexico. We also witnessed how they had the potential to engender self-critique and emotional reactions to the news. Such reactions became transformative by creating a space in which migrants could begin to articulate politicised feelings together and engage with Mexico in new ways. Emotional ways of experiencing projects such as *Menos Días Aquí* also had the potential to solidify the political commitment of some migrants, as well as leading to assertions of alternative national cosmopolitanisms. The narratives of migrants which accounted for their activism via a sense of strong emotion arising uncontrollably from within took on a particular cultural coherency which extended existing tropes of social change and revolution within the Mexican context. In this chapter I focus on the implications of asserting emotional *and* cosmopolitan tropes of experience amongst migrants, in order to demonstrate the ways in which such a process was both heavily negotiated and contested by individual migrants.

Some migrants carried out protest events in ways which heightened their emotional intensity, and spoke about both home and their activism using language imbued with feeling. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that such emotional displays were intimately linked with the need

to assert the legitimacy to act from abroad. They also opened a space for the bodily enactment of the alternative national cosmopolitanisms which were discussed in the previous chapter. However, not all migrants related to their activism in the same way. I show how multiple forms of cosmopolitanism existed within the same ethnographic field and could come into friction with one another. Other cosmopolitanisms could lead to protest tropes which shied away from emotional discourses. Instead, they articulated a universalised political cosmopolitanism which focused on the immediate locality. This shifted the locus of legitimacy for acting at a distance from feeling pain to enacting political obligations. Hence, migrant tropes of experience had particular effects and were rooted in specific ways of experiencing both the nation and political action from abroad. They impacted upon the emergence of privileged migrant activism by influencing the way migrants understood their own legitimacy to act from a distance, as well as impacting upon the forms of protest which they enacted.

6.2 Legitimacy and the right to feel

In this section I describe the way emotion permeated the transnational spaces of some activists and how it appeared within certain protest events. I suggest that particular tropes of feeling became intertwined with assertions of migrants' legitimacy to suffer as a result of what was happening at home and to act from a distance. As such, I show how emotional ways of relating to Mexico from abroad could actually provide some migrants with discursive (and *felt*) tools to bridge the physical gap between Mexico and Barcelona. I argue that the way distance was imagined and articulated by some migrants was intimately related to their need to achieve coherence between their desires to act, and the possibilities of doing so from abroad. This coherence was expressed through living Mexico at a distance in intensely emotional ways. The forms of protest they enacted, then, became linked with the desire to make their own grief and suffering visible to others, and, in doing so, highlight the suffering of victims within Mexico (Wise 2004).

6.2.1 Transnational spaces and fear:

In this section I describe the way emotion became intertwined with the way some migrants experienced their transnational spaces. Glick Schiller and Fouron have argued that migrants live their lives within transnational social fields. This means that their lives are implicated in both home and destination societies, and so become part of a transnational sphere of experience (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999). Here, I show how the connection between Mexico and Barcelona could be lived at an individual level through particular ways of feeling. This had the potential to dissolve the boundaries between places in individual imaginaries, and instead create a transnational sphere of risk. In later sections I argue that such emotional inhabitations of migrants' transnational spaces were intimately linked with the need to assert their own legitimacy to act from abroad, and to achieve coherence between their desires to act and real possibilities of doing so. For now, however, I want to focus on describing the feelings through which migrants lived Mexico from abroad in order to show the way they permeated certain moments in the field.

I was often struck by the emotional nature of the way some of my participants thought about their activism. People involved in anti-war groups would suffer from nightmares, depression and anxiety. Some came to feel that they were in danger and were being 'watched'. They felt that, if they were to return to Mexico, something could happen to them or to their families. This meant that, regardless of the geographical distance of Barcelona from Mexico, it was inhabited as a place of danger and potential risk. The two spaces were connected through fear. As such, the transnational spaces inhabited by some migrants became imbued with particular feelings. In some cases anthropologists have shown how the transnational space became lived through concerns about family and relations left behind (Dreby 2007; McKay 2007; Ryan 2008; Skrbis 2008). Here, I show how it came to be lived through the danger represented by home.

For Maria, for example, to be politically involved with Mexico from Barcelona was to inhabit a space of fear. When she reflected on her participation with NAR during our interview, she described herself as feeling “very scared”:

“The more time passes by, the more fear I feel. The situation in the country is terrible, and they no longer distinguish between their victims. Being an activist doesn’t give you more protection”.

Here, then, even though she is not in Mexico, she is including herself in the category of ‘potential victim’. As an activist, she feels vulnerable. And, with time, her fear only increases. This suggests that instead of differentiating physically between the two places, Maria inhabited both spaces at once through a sense of danger: they became united through the inhabitation of a transnational space of risk. Indeed, Maria felt herself to be in danger as a result of her involvement with NAR regardless of her physical location at the time:

“You laugh at yourself and say ‘but my fear is ridiculous, nothing’s going to happen.’ But I still feel it. Sometimes I think that I’ve reached my limit then, no, this is my limit. I feel scared. Since I opened the blog, I wake up every day at around 5 in the morning with nightmares. The other night I dreamt that I was being raped in the desert. Then I turn the light on. I see that there is no one there. There isn’t a zeta pointing a gun at me. There isn’t a politician sneaking in the corner. There is no one around and nothing is wrong. I’m in my bedroom in Barcelona, I’m totally anonymous, and I’m not important.”

Maria’s narrative gives the impression that the boundaries between Mexico and Barcelona as places could be dissolved by her own fear. She described how she was frightened of what could happen to her even though she was in Barcelona. These worries translated themselves into emotional discussions of her fears during our interview and paranoia and nightmares when she was alone. At the same time, however, she actively reasserted the safety boundary between the two

countries: "I'm in my bedroom, in Barcelona". What becomes apparent in her narrative is the penetration of fear into the way she thought about her actions (and their possible repercussions), as well as how she inhabited her transnational space. This was not a static inhabitation of space; it constantly shifted in relation to how she was feeling at the time. It shows how the distinctions between Mexico and Barcelona as separate places could be dissolved at particular moments by certain inhabitations of feeling.

Others who participated in NAR also became extremely depressed due to the fear they felt. This could reach the extent to which individuals experienced symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS) whilst living in Barcelona. One participant in NAR, who did not wish me to name them in relation to the depression which they suffered, confided to me in an interview that they felt "scared" and "frightened". They explained how:

"I'm scared most of all for my friends...I'm really scared. I'm frightened for the people in NAR. I don't want them to kill me. I don't want them to torture me. I don't want them to torture good people who are doing good things".

This narrative demonstrates the extent of fear which this individual felt. They worried about being tortured, and they worried about being killed. They do not give the impression of someone who views themselves as acting at a distance from Mexico: there is no differentiation in their narrative of the safety which being in Barcelona could offer. They do not distinguish between places in their inhabitation of fear. Instead, they are *felt* through a particular emotion which dissolves the boundary between the two places. They went on to describe their involvement in NAR as:

"...like living with a chord of constant pain. It's as though all the dead said something to you before sleeping".

This implies a deep and intimate connection to their activism – one which is *lived* through disturbing emotions. Despite the fact that the interviewee is not in Mexico, the language which this person used to describe their feelings does not give a sense of separation; it gives a sense of personally felt connection with what is happening in the country which is lived through pain. Beginning to cry, they explained that:

“Even when you’re in Europe, it’s just so hard. I would go to Mexico much more if I knew less. But I would hate to find out everything that happened one day and know that I had done nothing.”

This person related being outside of Mexico with the possibility of being able to combat what was happening there. They associated being at a distance from Mexico with being able ‘to do something’. This did not, however, prevent them from emotionally reacting to their activities: they described feeling as if the dead spoke to them before sleeping, and they worried about the possibility of being tortured. Once again this shows the way in which migrants’ inhabitation of transnational space was not static: they shifted between recognising a separation between the two places at the same time that such a boundary was overcome through particular intimacies of feeling. I discuss the relationship between emotional ways of experiencing activism and asserting legitimacy to act from abroad in the next section. For now, I want to highlight the way emotional language and discourses permeated the way some migrants talked about their activism and Mexico. It also acted to connect the two places within migrant subjectivities through fear of danger.

One afternoon Lolita had invited the members of NAR to her house for a meal. As we were eating, the atmosphere was very festive and jovial. Suddenly, without being quite sure how it turned, the conversation got a lot more serious and heated. We began discussing the security of NAR. Each member had a different view on the security precautions which should be taken in order to protect other members both within and outside of Mexico. They were unsure as to whether they needed protection from the government or organised crime. The theme running through the

conversation was that there were risks to being involved in NAR, and so each person had to decide whether or not they were willing to continue being a member.

During the discussion Lolita kept muttering *“this is so sad, this is so sad.”* She kept saying that she couldn’t believe that it had gotten to the point where they had to even seriously discuss the topic. Alex looked very affected, and very sad. He turned to Cristina and I, who were sitting next to him, and said that he just couldn’t believe that it had gotten to that level. He told us that it made him so sad to have to consider such possibilities about his own country. He said that he couldn’t believe things had reached the point where he had to check online which motorways were safe for his sister to travel on, or that he had to debate whether it was safe for him to participate in activism in his own country *“as if it were Bosnia or Afghanistan, but it’s my own country”*. He looked emotionally shocked and disbelieving. Cristina said that if it were happening in her country she *“would be destroyed”*. We were interrupted by the ongoing wider discussion, and later, as we were all getting ready to go home at around midnight, I asked him if he was ok. By that time however he just laughed it off and said well yeah, are you? The scene around the dinner table was infused with shows of feeling. Fear, sadness and disbelief permeated the conversation and the reactions of NAR’s members. Emotion, thinking about home and thinking about their activism become intertwined to create a particular kind of transnational space.

One of the reasons for such embodied reactions to their activism is located in the risks to political action within Mexico. To denounce the corruption of politicians, police and the military, or to speak about the violence of organised crime, can be and has been a death sentence for many in Mexico. This is especially the case for those who risk their lives to provide information from the front lines, like journalists (see Blog del Narco 2012; Gibler 2012:131, 132; Grillo 2012: 124; Hernandez 2012: 15; Sistiaga 2011: 7). Many of the people around the table that night had plans to return to Mexico permanently soon or to visit family there. Hence, there could be real repercussions to their actions abroad. The looming presence of risk, which was highlighted in the kinds of narratives and conversations I have discussed here, resonates with the way borders can follow

migrants in ways which overcome geographical boundaries. Stephen argues that Mexican migrant agricultural workers living in the U.S. come to inhabit the space in which they live as one of “simultaneous surveillance and invisibility” (2007: 144). In order to understand these embodied experiences, Stephen argues that we need to acknowledge the “flexible and moving nature of the border away from its physical location” and instead look at the way in which the ‘border’ becomes a border of illegality and racialisation which follows migrants wherever they are. As such, Stephen argues, “the border permeates their memories and self-identities regardless of their location or actual immigration status” (2007: 144). This means that borders can follow migrants beyond the moment of their physical crossing – instead they are ‘worn’ by migrants “inside and outside” (2007: 145). The fact that some activists continued to feel fear from Barcelona shows the way the perceived risks of political protest within Mexico could follow them across international borders. It also speaks to the embodied nature of migrant identities, and the way in which political interactions within a state or nation can become constitutive of persons in particular ways (Napolitano-Quayson 2005; Sigfrid Grønseth 2010; Ticktin 2006; Wise 2004). In this case, they disrupted certain individual’s sense of safety and instead created persons who experienced their transnational environments through feelings of vulnerability and fear.

The fear felt by activists also highlights the intensity of feeling with which they thought about Mexico from Barcelona. It implies an intimate connection to the country which is experienced at an individual level through particular emotions. It highlights the importance of emotion in influencing how some migrants understood and embodied the spaces which they inhabited. It also shows how, “if emotions are intimately involved in the processes by which people come to join social movements, they are even more obvious in the on-going activities of the movements” (Goodwin, et al. 2001: 18). Feelings became important for the ways in which the migrational spaces of some activists were lived and understood (Napolitano-Quayson 2005). This resulted in specific ways of talking and thinking about Mexico from Barcelona, and allowed migrants to assert a connection with, rather than separation from, Mexico. Their transnational spheres became imbued

with particular inhabitations of feeling (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999). Later in this chapter we will see how such emotions and tropes of feeling were intimately related to particular assertions of the legitimacy to act from abroad. Before doing so, however, I discuss the ways in which emotional ways of relating to home could be translated into particular forms of protest. In the next section I argue that such protest forms evoked a sense of being connected to Mexico through particular feelings of grief and suffering. As a result, they formed another important aspect of asserting legitimacy to engage with Mexico at a distance.

6.2.2 *Public grief*

In this section I show how emotion permeated certain events intended to raise awareness about the violence happening in Mexico. Participants in such events would engage in embodied performances and enactments of public grief in ways which were intended to make the victims of the violence visible. At the same time, they created a heightened connection amongst the event's participants to those victims (Svašek 2005b; Wise 2004). This was a translation of the cosmopolitan openings to new kinds of others within Mexico which were discussed in the previous chapter into protest. They created a public means through which individuals could assert a *felt* connection to others who were suffering in Mexico, and a space within which they could express their own sense of shared pain. Hence, the ways in which some migrants thought about Mexico from abroad, and the kinds of connections to victims within the nation which they felt, could be practically (and emotively) translated into particular forms of protest (Svašek 2005b: 209). In this section I describe an instance of emotional protest, and explain its immediate effects. In section which follows I argue that such displays were intimately related to the need to express and assert the legitimacy to act upon Mexico from a distance.

A potent example of this kind of emotionally infused protest action could be seen at the inauguration of the exhibition '*No nos cabe tanta muerte*' (We can't hold so much death). This was

the artistic exhibition centred on the femicides in Ciudad Juarez which had been organised by Paula (a member of Mexicanos en Resistencia and the MCMB):

The inauguration begins with a funeral march. The attendees are gathered at one end of the street. The crowd is then led along the path by Sara and Lupe (San Jarocho singers) who are dressed in black and holding candles. They sing a mournful song in a traditional Son Jarocho style, whilst Lupe also plays the jarana. They walk with their eyes closed and sad expressions across their faces. It seemed that the music hits a deep personal chord with them whilst they sing (Sara tells me later that emotionally it had cost her a lot to agree to perform). As we walk in the funeral procession towards the gallery, the crowd looks pensive and subdued. The song is sung to “la llorona” (the weeping woman), who is a Mexican folk figure. She is the ghost of a woman who, after drowning her children, is condemned to walk the earth searching for them; otherwise she cannot enter heaven. According to legend, she screams for her children at night and looks for small children to drown and take the place of her children. The song features lyrics such as:

“They say that I have no grief

They don’t see me cry

Some dead make no noise

And their pain is more

They say that I have no grief

Why don’t they see me cry?

That’s why I cry so

That’s why I must cry

Oh to cry llorona

Llorona take me to the river

*Cover me with your shawl
Because I'm dying from the cold
I don't know what it is about the flowers
The cemetery flowers
Oh, my llorona, let me cry
The cause of my weeping
Is that I can go on no longer"*

As we reach the entrance to the gallery, their song begins to die out. Outside the doors to the exhibition there is an actress dressed in a white, Caribbean style dress and standing on a white towel. She has thick, long, black hair hanging straight in front of her face, and I am told that she is meant to stand as a symbol of the murdered women of Juárez. Sara later tells me that she thinks that was particularly effective because it was almost as if she were a ghost, an apparition, of one of the victims. As we got closer to the actress, their song finishes, and they start handing out candles. Everyone places the candles in a circle one by one around the woman, while she wraps string very tightly around her whole body from the feet up. This is meant to evoke the death of the hundreds of women who had been murdered. After she has finished, she takes three very deep breaths and then kneels to the floor, head down, and stays that way. People continue to place the candles in a circle around her in silence. The attendees gather around the ring of candles and watch her. The doors to the gallery open and most people go inside. The woman motions to Sara to help untie her and then leaves, leaving the white square towel behind in the centre of the circle. I think that this is quite appropriate as a symbol of the absent women the event is trying to make visible.

(Reflections from the field based on field-diary entries)



Fig. 5 Sara and Lupe perform a song to 'la llorona' at the head of the funeral procession. Inauguration of the exhibition "No Nos Cabe Tanta Muerte"



Fig. 6 A performance evoking the deaths of the women murdered in Ciudad Juárez is carried out at the inauguration of No Nos Cabe Tanta Muerte. The attendees place candles in a circle around an actress who has tightly tied herself with string.

Svašek argues that, in the case of expellees from the Sudetenland, an act which seeks to express the trauma felt by multiple individuals actually "bridges the domain between the individual and the social" by creating an arena in which personal experiences of suffering are felt to be shared,

and hence lead to a sense of collectivity (2005b: 209). The act I have discussed here incorporated its audience into a funeral procession, forcing them to maintain a slow pace behind the singers and to dwell on the melancholy notes and lyrics of the song. It obliged them to witness a physical performance of a woman being symbolically murdered while they placed candles around her. The act had the effect of bringing the stories and victimhoods of the women who have been killed to the forefront. It was intended as a means of evoking the presence of those women, and highlighting their absence. The candles stood as a symbol of grief, and as a way of honouring the memory of the victims. In this way, it stands as an emotionally infused recognition of the victims in Mexico. Furthermore, it is an assertion of the fact that such victims are *mourned* by migrants. A sense of connection and solidarity with others in Mexico who are victims (as well as intense grief and mourning for their loss) permeates the different stages of the act. As such, it is an embodied enactment of the alternative national cosmopolitanisms which migrants began to experience as a result of their ambiguous and painful relationship to home from a distance (cf. Noble 2013). It is a form of protest which is articulated through particular intensities of feeling, and through particular cultural tropes of suffering (cf. Carro-Ripalda 2009). It opens an avenue for the expression of grief and loss amongst migrants, and in this way it asserts their *felt* connection to Mexico and their own sense belonging to the nation. In doing so, it also seeks to meet certain political aims (those of visibilising the victims of violence in Mexico, and making their suffering known to others). Social suffering, in this sense, “becomes a process of social mediation *and* transformation. It is experienced within nested contexts of embodiment: collective, intersubjective, individual” (Kleinman, et al. 1997: xix). In seeking to express their own suffering (as a result of what is happening at home) through such emotionally heightened protest acts, migrants also highlight the pain of victims in Mexico (and bring attention to them as people deserving the acknowledgement of others). Such protest acts, then, serve the purpose of double visibilisation: that of the victimhoods which exist within Mexico, and, the pain of those living outside of it.

Though I may be adding my own interpretive license to an unintended effect of the ceremony, I believe that evoking a female presence in the performance also conjured up images of the young and innocent *indigenous* girl. This acted as a way to emphasise the harm which had been done to *Mexican* women. Indigeneity has stood as symbol of Mexicaness since the Mexican Revolution (Alonso 2004; Gall 2004). By including a performance in which a woman who so visibly represents “Mexico” is ‘murdered’, the event stands as a symbol for the ravaging of the nation itself. At the same time, it reinforces the subordinated position of indigenous women within Mexico by uncritically reproducing symbols of mainstream nationalism (once again, a woman with indigenous features stands at the centre of the nation (Moreno Figueroa 2010; Stephen 2002). This means that, although an opening to unequal others within Mexico was felt through the alternative cosmopolitanisms which migrants experienced, those divisions of inequality were still being upheld by protest acts which did not challenge mainstream nationalist imagery (Pedwell 2014: 67). Emotional ways of relating to home from abroad could engender desires for closeness with others in Mexico who were suffering. At an individually discursive and subjective level, they could play a major part in overcoming national divisions by creating new ways of relating to unequal others within Mexico. However, this did not mean that such divisions were easily transgressed in practical terms: images which could reinforce them were still employed during certain acts. However, despite the practical limitations of such emotionally-infused assertions of mutual belonging to the nation, it is extremely significant that they were desired and enacted in the first place. It represents a shift in the way migrants thought about others at home; it illustrates the intensity with which they *felt* Mexico from abroad, and it shows how emotional ways of relating to home and emotional discourses could impact upon the forms which certain protest actions could take.

Wise discusses the way East Timorese exiles living in Australia embody their trauma through “performances, ritualised protest, and commemoration of traumatic events” (2004: 24). She claims that through such practices they are able to “reproduce the moral economy of East Timoresehood, and to appease feelings of guilt arising from the sense that they had fled their war-

ravaged homeland” (2004: 27). Through public acts of remembering, participants are able to feel “a personal bodily and emotional connection with events of which they were not directly part” (2004: 30). By creating a connection with the struggle of the homeland, there is a feeling of “repaying the moral debt owed by those who fled” (2004: 30). Similar forces were at play in the acts and narratives which I have described in this section. Migrants felt deeply connected to Mexico through feelings of fear and shared suffering. Emotionally infused protest acts served to make different victimhoods visible. They allowed certain activists to acknowledge the existence of, and to enact their desires for closeness with, unequal others in Mexico who were suffering. Through embodied protest they were able to publicly express their grief for the loss of people who were unknown to them. In this way, emotional protest acts could further (and visually enact) assertions of an alternative kind of national cosmopolitanism. They asserted migrants’ felt connections to Mexico from a distance. In doing so, they also sought to heighten the visibility of those who were suffering in Mexico (and, hence, those who had triggered the pain of those living outside of Mexico). However, as we have also seen, they could maintain societal divisions in other ways. In the previous chapters we saw how migrants questioned Mexican society (and their place within it) in newly critical ways. This section has illustrated the ways in which such questionings resulted in embodied protest acts which sought and asserted those new connections with others in Mexico.

These sections have shown how emotion permeated the way some of my participants talked about their activism, the way they inhabited their transnational spaces, and the way they enacted certain kinds of protests. But, why was emotion so present here? Why did it affect the way some of my participants inhabited their transnational spaces to the extent that the physical boundaries between place could be dissolved? Why was it important for some migrants to evoke a *felt* connection to victims in Mexico during protest events? In the next section, I argue that such emotions were intimately related to the need to assert the legitimacy to feel and to act from abroad. They were intimately related to migrants’ assertions of a right to belong to the nation, and to share in the pain of others as equal members of the nation. They formed part of a

“reconfiguration of the social compact” in Mexico which began with the politicised use of emotional displays during the Mexican Revolution (Noble 2013:250). As such they represented an extension (and continuation) of particular tropes of social change and solidarity within the country, in which different (and unequal) sectors of society could come to be united through the sharing of strong national sentiments (Noble 2013).

6.2.3 The legitimacy to feel at a distance:

Mexican activists living in Barcelona tended to construe their position as ‘outsiders’ as one which gave them a privileged insight into what was happening in the country. They claimed that this allowed them to see things differently to their friends and family on the ‘inside’. Being at a distance from Mexico was seen as endowing them with the very potentiality for political action. Rather than reducing their abilities to perceive the realities of Mexico, then, their narratives asserted that distance actually increased it. The very concept of ‘distance’, here, becomes enabling, and one which actually allows for action rather than preventing it (Yarrow 2013: 8). In this section, I argue that such assertions served as a means to legitimise protest at a distance. When people in Mexico criticised my informants for acting when they were not personally suffering, they did two things: the first was to claim that distance did not impede emotional closeness; the second was to highlight the benefits of distance in bringing certain aspects of Mexico into view. I argue that the emotional language and actions described in the previous sections must be situated within such discourses of legitimacy.

Why was it important, then, for my participants to challenge the accusation that they were less affected by events unfolding in Mexico than people living there? The most common response to questionings of my participants’ right to engage in activism from abroad would involve assertions that what was happening at home hurt them. Distance would be dismissed as something which did

not prevent ‘closeness’ with Mexico. This can be seen in the Facebook comments on a photo posted by MORENA Barcelona during the build up to the 2012 elections. The photo showed members of the group carrying out a protest in Plaça Sant Jaume, in the centre of the city. A woman based within Mexico commented on the picture: *“You guys are so ridiculous. Since you’re not in your own country then keep your mouth shut since you’ve got it so good where you are!”* A member of the group then responded to her comments saying: *“Being an immigrant doesn’t mean that our patria stops hurting us – it remains in our hearts constantly, and its struggles will be ours wherever we are.”* Sensitivity to the kind of critique given by the woman in Mexico and the kind of response given by the member of MORENA was a common theme in my interviews with migrants. They were keen to make it clear that distance did not impede one’s ability, or right, to feel.



Fig: 7 MORENA Barcelona protest in the build-up to the 2012 Presidential Elections, Plaça Sant Jaume, Barcelona

One of the most explicit discussions about this feeling occurred during my interview with Froylan. Froylan was a member of NAR, and a historian who was studying for his Ph.D. in New York. I met him in Barcelona when he visited Lolita on route to a conference in Venice. He had grown up in a drug producing region of Mexico, and later worked as a journalist He was introduced to Lolita (and NAR) through mutual friends in Mexico City. He then opened a blog within NAR which chronicled the

development of the drugs industry in Mexico. On the third day of his visit to Barcelona, I took the train out of the city to Lolita's house in order to interview him about his experiences of being involved with NAR. During the interview, I asked him how he had felt when seeing the changing situation in Mexico. In his response, he explained to me that:

"There will be Mexicans who will say to you 'How can that fucker who has a fucking grant from CONACYT and who lives in New York where the rich people are - blah, blah, blah - well how can he come here and tell us that he understands our pain?' There will be a lot of people who think that right now. Or there will be people who see it ideological nationalist terms, who say 'he's an ally of the fucking gringos, who are part of the problem, who are the biggest consumers who create the problem in Mexico, and he's studying with them'. That's another argument that someone might give you. But that's not what it's about."

He explained that he had faced those kinds of comments before, and his answer in the interview anticipated those kinds of critiques. In responding to them, he asserted that:

"I don't feel the pain less, the pain of the people of my grandparent's village, or my uncles, or my family, or of all the people who are dying [Froylan's family had been forcibly displaced as a result of cartel insertions into their village]. Living abroad does not make it impossible for me to empathise and to feel the pain of the others, and to understand the pain that there is in my land. I don't think that being able to travel and to get to know other parts of the world limits my understanding. On the contrary, it amplifies my vision of Mexico, and it helps me to see a bigger Mexico, a Mexico which has connections with human beings and with regions of land all over the place".

In Froylan's narrative, closeness with Mexico and personal suffering as a result of the violence were actively asserted. He made such assertions in the face of critiques from certain

people within Mexico who might argue that geographical distance impedes such engagement. What these kinds of assertions make clear is that physical presence in a country was not seen as necessary in order to suffer as a result of what was happening there (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Hage 2002). Indeed Froylan claimed that being outside of Mexico helped him “to see a bigger Mexico”. Not only was he asserting his ‘right to feel’, but he was also implying that it was his very distance from Mexico which allowed him to do so. This notion of distance as containing potentiality for action was, I argue, key to the way in which legitimacy was understood by migrant activists (Candea 2010b: 255; Trundle 2012).

Assertions that distance did not affect my participants’ ability to *feel* were widespread throughout the field. However, people like Paula did express frustration at not being in Mexico. They described their own desires for more closeness with Mexico as a means of coping with the emotions caused by being at a distance. Paula told me that she “*needed familiarity in order to face what was happening in the Mexico.*” She explained that:

“I think Mexican culture has a very deep core, a profound, ancestral root. I feel fortunate to be Mexican, and I have always felt that way, it’s something which forms me as an individual, my culture, music, even religion seen from a certain point of view. It profoundly forms my own personal identity. So to find myself before this situation of violence, well it provoked a very profound pain, and it makes me feel like I need to be near my people. Contrary to the need to go into exile, it creates the need to be there because I need that culture and that identity to be able to face this conflict from there.”

Whilst Paula expressed a desire to be closer to Mexico, her narrative indicates that her desire for such closeness arose precisely because she felt so strongly about what was happening there. Seeing what was happening from abroad “provoked a very profound pain” and, in her words, “makes me feel like I need to be near my people”. As such, then, she is actually making it clear that,

despite being at a distance from Mexico, she profoundly *feels* what is happening there. Distance, here, does not impede feelings of closeness with Mexico – even at the same time that it engenders a felt need to be there.

In these narratives, it was precisely because individuals saw themselves as suffering as a result of what was happening in Mexico that they wanted to be closer to it. Again, it becomes apparent that they did not see themselves as feeling ‘less’ simply because they were not *in* Mexico. In this way, the fear and grief with which migrants thought about Mexico acted to bridge the gap between Mexico and Barcelona at a personal level. This bridging was lived through intense displays of emotion which did not always recognise physical boundaries. Precisely because migrants felt such intense connections with Mexico, it became important for them to be able to convey the intensity of their feelings to others. It was imperative that they challenge the idea that distance impeded their ability to feel or to act. In this way, emotional displays, emotional language, and assertions of legitimacy became intimately related. I by no means wish to imply that the emotional intensity with which my participants experienced their activism was not genuinely felt. Rather, I want to suggest that their emotional outpourings during interviews and certain protest events were in some way related to the need to reconcile their position of being outside of Mexico with the fact that they felt so close to it. Emotion created a space within which individuals could deal with the dissonance between their desires to be close to, and their physical distance from, Mexico (Hage 2002). Even though these outpourings resulted in uncomfortable feelings (like grief, depression, and anxiety), they were evidence of the ‘realness’ of their reactions. It meant that my participants could respond to accusations of separateness by asserting their legitimacy to act; if they were deeply and emotionally affected by what was happening in Mexico then they too were entitled to speak out. They too were legitimate members of the nation who suffered. This is a kind of legitimacy which is granted by embodied and rhetorical assertions of the ‘truthfulness’ of their feelings (Carro-Ripalda 2009).

Legitimacy to act from abroad was discursively constructed by my participants by upholding distance as a source of privileged insight. At the same time that their emotional connections with Mexico dissolved the felt distance between the two, migrants would then actively showcase it as their key source of legitimacy for engaging in political action from abroad. It provided a means through which “coherence” could be achieved between an individuals’ possibilities for action at a distance and the perceived effectiveness of such actions (Andrews 1991; Williams 2008). Such assertions of the benefits of distances served to legitimise the intensely felt connections of migrants to home.

One way in which distance was celebrated was through arguments about access to “alternative information” from abroad. Paula argued that being outside of Mexico allowed her “to see things differently”. She asserted that, by being removed from Mexico, she was able to “selectively” choose which media she viewed and decide upon her own filter. If she just wanted to read the news, she could, without being distracted by what she described as more “banal” and “everyday interruptions” which “saturate” the media. She claimed that:

“The media in Mexico bombards you with mixed information so that telethon mixes with the elections, the dead, drugs trafficking, the wedding of Peña Nieto and the latest soap opera and any number of other things which don’t interest me; that so-and-so got a boob-job. It’s all presented at the same level, so it just saturates you totally. But as a Mexican abroad I can search for my own sources of information and filter them”.

She actively held distance up as providing a window onto more clear information on what was happening in the country. She saw herself as being removed from the totality of the media in Mexico, and as such felt that was able to sift through and access to the “real” stories which needed her attention. Here then, distance is being upheld as source of privileged insight into what was

happening at home: it provides an opportunity to 'know' which is not available to others within Mexico.

For others, the differences between Barcelona and Mexico City created the practical possibility for carrying out protests on a continuous basis. This was the case for Miguel, a member of both L'Adhesiva and the MCMB. He had been living outside of Mexico for seven years, first in Berlin and then in Barcelona. He had moved to Barcelona in order to study for his Ph.D. in Biology, though he was originally from Mexico City. Miguel argued that, due to the different rhythms of the two cities, *"it might be a bit more difficult to do in Mexico City what we do here"*. This was because:

"Mexico City is enormous; you're not just a phone call away. You can't just message someone like we do here and then meet up. In Mexico, it would be two hours travelling to go to a meeting, be there for another two hours and then travel home for another two hours. It would be impossible, so I think that's one thing which is different here".

Not only, then, was physical distance seen to improve access to the appropriate media, but being in Barcelona was also seen to provide a more adequate space within which activist engagements could happen. Distance was discursively upheld by migrants as a means to assert the validity and practical effectiveness of protesting from abroad. It was seen as creating a context which enabled action, rather than preventing it (Anders 2010; Harvey 2010; Yarrow 2013).

Others made similar claims about the potentiality of distance by actively re-asserting the safety of Barcelona as a place in contrast to Mexico. These assertions would occur alongside the inhabitation of the two spaces through fear. This was the case for two members of NAR, Alex and Buddy. Alex, for example, explained to me that by being outside of Mexico, NAR did not suffer from the self-censorship which other media within Mexico felt it necessary to exercise. This was because they did not have to take the same kind of safety considerations into account (media workers often suffer threats, blackmail and intimidation from both organised crime and the state which pressure

them to publish stories in a certain way, or not at all). As such, he argued, the members of NAR could feel more secure in speaking their mind and publishing what they really wanted to say from outside of Mexico.

Buddy also felt that it was important for the centre of NAR to be outside of Mexico due to the safety and psychological protection offered by being physically removed from the violence. Buddy was originally from a city in northern Mexico, and he had come to Barcelona in order to study for his masters and later Ph.D. He had worked in Mexico previously, holding literary workshops in prisons. He was a member of NAR, the MCMB and was the founder of MORENA and co-founder of #YoSoy132 Barcelona. He explained to me why it was important for NAR in particular to have its “centre” outside of Mexico. Reflecting upon the impact which news of the high profile murders of a number of journalists in Mexico had had on certain members of NAR, he explained to me that:

“Obviously that information cuts you up. It brings you closer to that point where you just can’t do it anymore. Even though you’re here in a really pretty country house, you can’t stand it. Now, imagine if you were over there...you just couldn’t do what someone like Lolita does if you were in Mexico. I think that NAR needs to have a nucleus outside of Mexico because at the end of the day we’re only human, and if you’re there in the middle of it all you can’t think straight, you can’t have the mind-set needed to make decisions about the website and other things”.

‘Distance,’ in the form of being in Barcelona, was construed as providing an emotional and psychologically ‘safe’ place from which NAR could be managed. This was seen to provide such a space at the same time that activists were suffering deeply from the emotional effects of activist involvement and encounters with violence knowledge from abroad. As such, Buddy argued that distance did not prevent such emotions, but rather provided some measure of protection which was not available in Mexico. Distance was showcased as enabling action. We see here how distance was upheld as a source of potentiality. Migrants argued that it would not be possible to do what they did

from abroad if they were in Mexico. Distance was celebrated as providing a safer and easier platform upon which to interact politically with Mexico. It was also viewed by individual migrants as creating a context in which aspects of home could be better perceived than if they had been there. As such, it was seen as a privileged forum for action (Anderson 2001). Researchers have been keen to assert the importance of distance and detachment in affecting the way we engage with the world (Anderson 2001; Daston and Galison 2007). Indeed, anthropologists have been able to show how both are integral part of the process of 'getting things done' (Candea 2010b; Candea and Yarrow 2010) – they are heavily interrelated with practices of engagement when it comes to process of knowledge creation and task completion (Harvey 2010; Trundle 2012; Yarrow 2010; 2013). What we are seeing here, then, is an ethnographic articulation of those very arguments: migrants are asserting that distance does not impede closeness, and that it can in fact be enabling. Such ideas have true salience within the world, and in this case allow individuals to reconcile their feelings with the legitimacy to act.

Many felt that the safety and potentiality which being at distance offered them meant that they had a responsibility to act. One example of this is in the arguments put forward by Arturo, one of the founders of Mexicanos en Resistencia, L'Adhesiva, and a member of the MCMB. During our interview, Arturo talked about why he thought it was important to act from within Catalonia:

"I think you need to exploit to the maximum the possibility that being outside gives you, in this secure environment. If you can't do something over there because you think it might put you at risk, well here you almost have an obligation to explore that side of things. Nobody is going to judge you here. Nobody is going to shoot you here, so you just have to do it. You have to get involved."

Arturo argued that the 'privilege' of distance created an obligation for migrants, as Mexicans abroad, to engage in political activism. Hence, whilst the felt connections to others within Mexico created a need to assert a mutual belonging to the nation based on shared suffering, the

potentiality which distance was seen to endow them with both legitimised those feelings *and* created the responsibility to act upon them. This was also the case for Maria, who explained that she felt that being at a distance from Mexico had allowed her access to privileged information. She told me that:

“NAR has taught me that I can say things as they are. I can say that we are at war, that there are a lot of dead, and that this is the reality. If I don’t read the news, don’t read NAR, and don’t seek that information, well then I would be shirking the responsibility I have as a Mexican, an educated Mexican moreover, to do something; to do something for Mexico, to keep myself informed”.

In this way, migrant narratives sought to achieve coherence between their desire to do something, feelings of closeness to Mexico, and their possibilities for acting from a distance (Linde 1993). The way desires to act could overlap with assertions of the legitimacy strongly resonates with studies which argue that action and belief continuously inform one another in activism. They demonstrate the way activism is related to individual projects of the self (Allahyari 2001; Stein 2001). Yarrow, for example, describes the way Ghanaian development activists cultivate activist selves by presenting their work as sacrifice. Here, “commitment to development – conceived in a plurality of ideological forms – is understood to entail commitment to a particular kind of self in which ‘ideology’ guides action, even to the extent that this might conflict with materially defined self-interest” (2011: 10). Yarrow examines the life history narrative strategies of development workers, and argues that events are organised in such a way as to illustrate “consistency between their ‘ideas’ and their ‘actions’” (2011: 51). Hence, “ideas are said to inform the actions that people have taken, just as these actions are ideally motivated by a consistent set of ideas” (2011: 64). Williams similarly argues that alterglobalisation activists in southern France try to achieve “coherence” between their “principles” and the way they live their lives. This implies undermining the influence of power in their everyday lives, and always looking to preserve their autonomy (2008:

76, 77). Such studies highlight the particular importance which is given to achieving coherence between one's beliefs and one's actions in the construction of activist selves. Mexican activists in Barcelona were deeply affected by the news coming out of Mexico. They were disturbed by the critical reflections on Mexican society which migration had engendered. Their interview narratives were saturated in emotional behaviours and discourses. They wanted to do something, and challenge the idea that they were less capable of feeling whilst living away from Mexico. Their emotional outpourings when discussing their political participation, or when carrying out certain protest events, were intimately linked with the need to reconcile their desires to do something with the fact that they were abroad. Discursive assertions of the potentiality of acting at a distance provided a way of achieving coherence between desires for action with the possibility of doing so (Linde 1993). The individual necessity of achieving such coherence meant that migrants asserted a moral, practical *and* emotional legitimacy to act from abroad. Emotionally imbued ties with Mexico bridged the gap between Mexico and Barcelona. At the same time, that distance simultaneously became a means of achieving closeness with Mexico and of acting upon it successfully. This bridging was further helped at a discursive level by migrants upholding distance as a privileged source of insight and possibility for action. Hence, emotional ways of articulating protests and inhabiting transnational spaces became intimately tied to the emergence of privileged migrant activism by providing a platform upon which migrants could reconcile their desires to act with the legitimacy to do so.

However, not all of my participants agreed with the emotional displays of others during protest events. Indeed, the next section shows how they could be challenged by alternative forms of cosmopolitanism experienced by other activists. As such, it is important to explore the different kinds of cosmopolitanism inhabited by individual migrants since this could impact upon the kind of protest actions they wished to carry out, and the way they understood their own legitimacy to act. In this way, cultural tropes of enacting social change through emotional displays were by no means uncontested or homogenous amongst my participants (cf. Carro-Ripalda 2009).

6.3 Cosmopolitanism and locality:

In this section I argue that assertions of a generalised, political cosmopolitan position amongst some of my participants could act to truncate and challenge the kind of emotional displays discussed in the previous sections. I have already shown how emotional ways of relating to news from home, and to the risks of activist engagement, could solidify commitment and create a new kind of national cosmopolitanism for some migrants. I have also argued that emotional connections with Mexico were intimately related to assertions of migrants' legitimacy to act from abroad. Here, however, I show how this could be challenged by other forms of cosmopolitanism. I reveal the multiple forms of politicised openness which existed amongst my participants, and show how they could come into friction with one another. I argue that the kind of protest which migrants sought to carry out was intimately related to the kind of legitimacy to act which specific forms of cosmopolitanism allowed them to articulate.

6.3.1 Other cosmopolitanisms:

For some of my participants, protest events aimed at eliciting emotional responses from attendees left a lot to be desired. They argued that they excluded local Catalans since the Mexican imagery they evoked precluded a wider comprehension of its meaning. As a result, some migrants argued that the overall effectiveness of their activism *as Mexicans abroad* was curtailed, since non-Mexicans were unable to comprehend the significance of what they were saying. Those who articulated such critiques viewed political action as something to be inhabited universally and independently of one's nationality. Politics was seen as something local and community based. As such, they articulated a particular form of universalised, political cosmopolitanism which sought to link struggles across communities and localities. In this section, I describe such a position by looking at the perspectives of two people, Rosa and Arturo. I argue that such different positionalities within

and between groups demonstrate the multiplicity of cosmopolitanisms (or openings to the 'other') which existed within the same field of politicised migrant action. Therefore, I argue, an exploration of the form of activism enacted by migrants must address different possible ways of being cosmopolitan (Robbins 1998a: 260). This is important when it comes to the emergence of forms of privileged migrant activism since the ways migrants interpret their legitimacy to act influences the way they inhabit their transnational spaces, and the kind of protest actions they ultimately wish to carry out.

Rosa was a member of NAR and the MCMB. A journalist and fellow anthropologist, she was studying for her Ph.D. in Barcelona. She had moved to the Catalonia with her Catalan husband after becoming disillusioned with her work in party politics in Mexico. She had a long personal history of being involved in political struggles in Mexico. She told me that her first involvements with activism began when she studied at a school run by nuns. They used to take the students on trips to 'evangelise' indigenous communities, and she went along with someone who she described as a "revolutionary nun". Rosa said that this nun had told her "it was more pious to tell the communities about contraception methods rather than evangelising," which was the point at which she began looking at liberation theology. Rosa studied for her degree in journalism and became involved with the work of squatter communities who were displaced by the building of the school. She went on to study sociology, and was at the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) for the strike of 1999. Before that, she had gone down to Chiapas with a group from her university in order to work with the Zapatistas. When Rosa was about twenty-four, she began to work for the left-wing party 'PRD'. She stayed with them for around six years. She was offered a job as a *diputada* but, she said, that was the point at which she decided to leave. She claimed that there was "just too much corruption for me to be comfortable", and that everyone treated her "like an idiot for not changing cars every year" or taking opportunities for "self-improvement". In the end, she said that she realised "the sharks eat you. That's if you don't end up becoming a shark yourself".

Despite her long history of being involved in politics in Mexico, she told me in our interview that *“I was just fed up, and so tired. I just didn’t want anything more to do with politics.”* That feeling coincided with her desire to study abroad, as well as the fact that she had a Catalan partner and the possibility of moving to Catalonia with him. She explained that when she first came to Barcelona she *“didn’t want to interact with any Mexicans”* and *“didn’t see the point on basing friendships on a shared nationality”*. She particularly *“couldn’t stand the idea of interacting with uncritical people who still think that it’s enough to be there with their sombrero or, for the more modern ones, a lucha libre mask”*. She felt that most of the Mexicans she saw there, apart from those in *“the same tiny activist circles as always”*, belonged to a different social world of which she was very critical; people *“whose identity is consumption, and defending the status quo – both here and there”*.

Her desire to distance herself from Mexico whilst in Catalonia was intimately related to her stressful experience of working in politics in Mexico, and the need to immerse herself in something new. She told me that *“I wasn’t interested in meeting any Mexicans because I knew that I needed to grow roots. After all, we have to locate ourselves in the place where we are. It’s not going to take away your roots.”* In leaving Mexico, she wanted to make the most of being in a new locality and immerse herself in another culture. By claiming that such a stance would not affect her being Mexican (and therefore she saw no reason to pursue friendships with other Mexicans in Barcelona just for the sake of it), she was reiterating ethnographically that which other theorists have been keen to assert - that the inhabitation a cosmopolitan *“openness”* towards the world does not take away one’s nationality (Appiah 1998: 91, 92; Robbins 1998b: 8; Richard Werbner 2008b : 190).

Rosa’s attitude towards her move to Barcelona displayed a particular kind of cosmopolitan sentiment. She wanted to immerse herself in the locality where she found herself, and link herself with those closest to her. This is a different kind of cosmopolitanism to that described in chapters four and five. It does not relate to becoming more open towards unequal others within Mexico. Instead, it depends upon displaying openness to those closest in terms of physical proximity. In Rosa’s view, events like those held during the inauguration for *No Nos Cabe Tanta Muerte*, or the

MCMB's Day of the Dead celebration, spoke *"only to the Mexican context without giving an explication to the locals"*. Speaking about MCMB protests in general, she argued:

"If I open a placard saying 'Sicilia we are with you' to a Catalan, what is that saying to them? That we are with the Mafia? I mean how do you interpret the movement as a Catalan or a Spaniard? I don't think we've achieved the right mechanisms to allow those people to understand. People need to grow more roots here, to really look for the sympathy and complicity of people here, to make them aware, and not just focus on the Mexicans."

Rather than focusing on emotional connections with suffering others in Mexico, and creating a public forum for the collective expression of individual grief (Svašek 2005b), Rosa views protest as an opportunity to link local people with Mexico. She sees it as a way to expand concerns over what is happening in Mexico beyond Mexicans. Politically engaging with Mexico from abroad here becomes related to educating local people about what is happening, rather than asserting a mutual belonging to the nation. "Growing roots" in Catalonia, and acting upon what is happening in Mexico, become intimately linked. Speaking about the event held by the MCMB for the Day of the Dead, she described how when walking at the back of the procession, she could hear the comments of local Catalans *"who thought that the event was just something for Halloween"*. Rosa did not see the relevance of deploying Mexican traditions during protest events in Catalonia – even if they were enacted with a political slant and had affective meaning for migrants. She argued that:

"Most local people will have no idea about what's going on. The people who are going to protest or think that way within Mexico already do, so you need to concentrate on raising awareness from the outside."

This suggests a delinking of political action from tropes of personally felt suffering. Rosa's ideas about the form of protest which Mexicans in Barcelona should be enacting move beyond assertions of legitimacy which are based on pain and grief (Carro-Ripalda 2009). It assumes the right to act from abroad, and instead highlights migrants' responsibility to educate others about what is happening. She described how she had suggested to the MCMB that the group give a talk in certain neighbourhoods of Barcelona and adjacent towns – those which she perceived as having a more local character. However, she felt that the reaction of other members of the group was negative:

“Because it wasn't Las Ramblas, they look down on those spaces. But, the thing is, the people in those places are going to come and really listen to you because they are also doing community work. Instead, the group just preferred to separate itself from the social fabric which already exists in Catalonia, and become totally endogamous.”

Rosa's position rejected the emotional displays of other members of the group during protest events precisely because she felt it limited the participation of the people closest in geographical terms. Events which spoke mainly to other Mexicans were viewed as preventing the message being made comprehensible to Catalans. As such, the perceived effectiveness of the protests was reduced for her. The kind of protest acts she wanted to carry out were intimately related to the form of cosmopolitanism which she inhabited. This was a cosmopolitanism which sought to build and cement relationships with local Catalans, as opposed to dwelling on newly felt connections to others in Mexico. It was a cosmopolitanism which focused on more universalised understandings of political action which could connect different groups who shared a locality, as opposed to bridging geographical boundaries between places. Articulations of this kind of cosmopolitanism would often surface during events held by certain groups such as L'Adhesiva, as can be seen in this description of an activity they carried-out from my fieldnotes:

We are sitting in a huge, empty industrial room located in the renovated remains of an old factory in the neighbourhood of Sants. Using a space occupied and reclaimed by local residents, members of L'Adhesiva are holding a workshop aimed at recruiting human rights observers to go to Chiapas, Mexico. Removing his habitual "comrade" cap, Arturo, one of the long-term participants and founders of the group, clicks onto the next slide on his presentation. He begins to speak with the special passion he always reserves for when he discusses the Zapatistas. He describes to the majority Catalan audience the reasons for the Zapatista uprising in southern Mexico in 1994. He focuses particularly on the ideology behind a Zapatista way of life, and why they need the continued support of human-rights observers. He is followed by other members of the group, Marina and Manuel, who describe what life is like as an observer, and what could be expected from the experience. When the talks finish we are all a little doubtful over whether or anyone in the audience will actually be willing to go to Chiapas, but at least the seeds have been planted. We take a break for lunch, and head onto a previously abandoned street within the reclaimed factory complex. Here, local neighbourhood groups are hosting a street-party style lunch in order to raise funds for the continued reclamations of the old factory for community use. After tucking into roasted leeks, sausage and beans, we go back into the old workroom to show a documentary about the Zapatista uprising. Meanwhile, members of a local anti-austerity group practice anti-repression manoeuvres using home-made reflective shields just outside the entrance to the room.

(Reflections from the field based on field-diary entries)

In this example, the importance of making Mexican protests comprehensible to the local population and vice versa as an important concern for members of L'Adhesiva becomes visible. Indeed a major concern of the group lay in finding ways to combine Mexican and local Catalan concerns, as well as those of other migrant groups in the city. Many events held by L'Adhesiva, like the one described above, occurred in occupied social centres. This meant that the issues they discussed would often intermingle with other local concerns (as can be seen by the overlapping of

activities occurring within the same space of the old factory complex). A number of its members participated in the running of the centres and took an active interest in their continuation. This had an important influence on the way some people viewed the potentiality of different forms of political action. Its members were often equally concerned to participate in local struggles as they were to engage politically with Mexico from abroad. Whenever L'Adhesiva held a talk in an occupied social centre, they would make sure to include a discussion of the same or a similar issue in Catalonia and another part of the world. This provided a means of "linking the struggles". The audience for such events would often be formed by at least as many Catalans as migrants, if not more. Similarly, the desire to combine political action oriented towards Mexico with other more local struggles was always present in group meetings. The form which their preferred mode of protest took was intimately related to the universalised political cosmopolitanism which its group members inhabited.



Fig. 8 Members of L'Adhesiva recruit human rights observers to go to Chiapas in a community-renovated factory complex (Can Batlló) in Barcelona.



Fig. 9 Members of L'Adhesiva help out in a local occupied allotment in the neighbourhood of San Andreu, Barcelona.

Arturo was a member of L'Adhesiva, and had also participated in the Zapatista collective, Mexicanos en Resistencia and the MCMB. He had moved to Barcelona with his previous partner and stayed on to work in a human rights observatory. He carried out human rights missions in Paraguay, Argentina, Guatemala, Mexico and Spain. He had a long history of political participation in Mexico, beginning with the inspiration he received from the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua during the 1980s. He had participated extensively with the Zapatistas since their uprising in 1994, and also participated in the 1999 strike in the UNAM. He often said to me that his personal philosophy was one of needing to combine the struggles of different localities and to participate politically in the things which mattered locally -wherever he happened to be. We talked about such an outlook during our interview, and how it became visible in the work of L'Adhesiva. He explained to me that he felt that the desire to mix struggles came from a mix between the idea of "*el Zapatismo*" and Catalan anarchism:

“Such perspectives link people beyond borders, seeing them as the same struggles. They recognise themselves in the fights of another. They understand their autonomy reflected in the autonomy of the other, and that in order for one to happen, the other does too. I recognise myself in a certain territoriality, but that doesn’t take away the possibility of seeing myself reflected in others”.

This kind of perspective dissolves a different kind of border to that which was crossed by emotional ways of living Mexico from abroad. In the first half of this chapter we witnessed how the physical boundaries between Mexico and Barcelona could be overcome by emotional assertions of shared belonging to the nation and shared suffering over what was happening there. In contrast, the perspective of people like Arturo sought to overcome boundaries between people who shared a locality, and connect seemingly disparate struggles into a shared one. As such, a particular kind of politicised legitimacy for action independent of one’s locality becomes apparent here. The right to act is tied to a perceived obligation to do so no matter the context in which one finds oneself. He went on to claim that:

“I don’t think about Catalan political prisoners, or Mexican political prisoners, I just think about ‘the political prisoners.’ I just think it’s natural to arrive at any place in the world, and the first thing you do is grab the newspaper and see what the news is there. You automatically get involved with what is happening in that place”.

This implies that, in Arturo’s view, engagement in a political struggle has the potential to unite people across a spectrum of struggles. Shared participation in political action, albeit in different local contexts, overcomes ‘otherness’. This is a universalised and politicised kind of cosmopolitanism (Beck 2004) which, rather than recognising unequal others as equal members of the nation, recognises shared political subjectivity as the basis of connectedness. This is a different

kind of cosmopolitanism to the alternative national cosmopolitanisms discussed earlier in the previous chapter. Arturo then chuckled, and added that:

“It’s not as if I get ulcers to consider myself as part of the territory of Mexico, but the important thing is to recognise solidarity as something human which spreads to a global level.”

This shows that, whilst his own sense of being connected to others who are engaged in political struggles is one which is independent of locality, neither does it prevent him from feeling a sense of belonging to Mexico. In this sense his narrative is quite similar to Rosa’s, and her argument that opening up to others does not prevent feelings of belonging to home (Appiah 1998). However, he said that he understood why groups such as MCMB and NAR seemed to focus “too much” on Mexico, because:

“It’s a battle front. In the face of all the barbarous cosmopolitanism which surrounds us, deciding what our battlefronts are is important.”

Here we can see how the notion of cosmopolitanism can be articulated ethnographically – it forms part of the world and is implicated in the way people inhabit it (Robbins 1998a; Werbner 2008a). Arturo expressed a universalistic cosmopolitan ideal in the way in which he saw political fights across the globe as being connected. Such a perspective developed during a life-time of participating in political activism, and was especially influenced by the notion of difference through equality and the idea of a “world where many worlds fit” put forward by the Zapatistas (Brysk 2000; Earle and Simonelli 2005; Hernandez Castillo and Furio 2006; Nash 2001; Speed and Collier 2000). This universalised cosmopolitanism sought to link different political struggles by emphasising their points of connection. Constantly looking to create possibilities for cross-struggle collaboration meant that a personal preference for a particular form of protest should be enacted: they should

not preclude the possibility of local comprehension, and should not dwell on eliciting meaning for migrants *as Mexicans alone*. This also locates the legitimacy to act in an individual's understanding of politics: because struggles are linked, and it is necessary to immerse oneself in any struggle you are connected with, being near or far from Mexico does not add or detract from one's right to act. Legitimacy is located in one's *obligation* to act whenever there is the necessity to do so. As such, there is less of a felt need to express a sense of emotional connection to what is happening to Mexico as the basis for having the right to act.

The perspectives of people like Rosa and Arturo illustrate the way multiple cosmopolitanisms could operate within the same transnational activist field, and affect the form of political actions which were enacted. Carrying out protest events in emotionally intense ways was, for some migrants, a way of being able to feel a connection with people who were suffering in Mexico. It was a way of bridging distance so that it became unimportant for the legitimacy of acting from abroad. It was this which then allowed them to visibilise the plight of others suffering the violence within Mexico. However, the perspectives of people like Rosa and Arturo challenged both the validity and the effectiveness of such behaviours. Emotional ways of relating to home during protests were seen by them to curtail the possibility of involving local people in migrants' political projects. Emotion, here, was understood as preventing a specific kind of openness. This was an openness based on a sense of connectedness to others which was rooted in mutual participation in political struggles, rather than on the recognition of suffering. As such, the new kinds of national cosmopolitanism described in previous chapters could come into friction with other, more universalised forms of political cosmopolitanism when it came to carrying out certain forms of protest and asserting the legitimacy to act from abroad.

6.4 Conclusion:

This chapter has focused on the implications of asserting particular tropes of feeling and certain understandings of political action amongst migrants. Looking at the effects of emotional outpourings during interviews and protest events is important, since it reveals the means through which some migrants understood and asserted their own legitimacy to act from abroad. This formed an integral part of the process of through which activists account for their political activation, since it reconciled migrants' desires to do something and their feelings about what was happening in Mexico with their real possibilities for action. However, it is also important to attend to differences in the kinds of other with which migrants wished to connect through their activism. This chapter has highlighted the existence of different kinds of cosmopolitanism being practiced by individuals, and the impact this had upon the way they viewed protest. A generalised political stance towards the world, which sought to create connections between individuals engaged in struggles no matter their locality, created a different kind of protest and a different understanding of the legitimacy to act in comparison to those described in the first half of this chapter. This kind of cosmopolitan stance rooted an individual's legitimacy for action in their obligations to express solidarity with political struggles occurring wherever they were. It also meant that emotional displays directed towards other Mexicans during protests were frowned upon, since they were seen to preclude the possibility of local connections taking place. At the root of these differences lay different inhabitations of cosmopolitanism. For some migrants past histories of political engagement brought with them a politicised orientation to the world in general, which linked people within a given locality across struggles. For others, the emotional impact of migration and relating to home from abroad could engender a new sense of connection with others in Mexico. Such connections undermined (at least at an individually felt and discursive level) structural inequalities within Mexican society, and opened up a space for the recognition of mutual belonging to the nation. They resulted in a particular kind of protest, one which sought recognition of, and legitimacy for, migrants' right to 'feel' what was

happening in Mexico. At the same time, they attempted to make visible the suffering of others in Mexico through emotionally-infused acts.

Overall, this chapter has shown how different inhabitations of alternative cosmopolitanisms engendered different behaviours and feelings within individual activists, as well as different narrative means of achieving coherence for their actions (cf. Linde 1993). They influenced the kind of protest events they carried out, the way they articulated their own legitimacy to politically engage with Mexico from abroad, and the way activists created coherency within their narratives. The next chapter extends this theme further, by asking how an individual's continued participation in long-distance activism was shaped by cosmopolitanism. It shows how different ways of being open to the subjectivities of other activists could impact upon the survival of a group, and an individual migrants desire to cooperate with others.

Chapter Seven:

Collaborative Friction

7.1 Introduction:

In chapter six, we saw how different inhabitations of cosmopolitanism could affect the kind of protest actions which migrants carried out, and the way they asserted legitimacy to politically engage with Mexico from abroad. In this chapter, I look at how cosmopolitanism could impact upon an individual's continued participation in long-distance activism. I do so by looking at the way migrants engaged with one another, and assessing the extent to which they were able to practice an in-group openness towards the subjectivities of other activists. The ability to do so, I argue, was a fundamental factor in prolonging or curtailing their sustained participation in certain groups.

In the first part of the chapter I dwell on the frictions which could arise between activists. I argue that discourses of class and ideology affected how they viewed one other, and themselves. This could preclude the possibility of individuals comprehending the viewpoints of other migrants. I describe the extent of misrecognition which could occur between group members when trying to reach consensus in meetings. I argue that one form of cosmopolitanism - that of being open to the subjectivities of unequal others in Mexico - did not necessarily translate into cosmopolitanism being practiced towards the subjectivities of other activists (and indeed, members of the same class within Mexico). This, I argue, could reduce the likelihood of prolonged activist participation for some migrants. However, I also consider situations in which the two forms of cosmopolitanism could be

practiced together. I highlight the importance of discourses of tolerance and pragmatism when it came to creating a space for collaboration between individuals of different political subjectivities. I show that, whilst different forms of cosmopolitanism could truncate one another, the practice of pragmatic openness could create the possibility for reconciliation between activists.

7.2 Ideology and Class:

In this section, I focus on the difficulties of consensus reaching between migrants. I show how the context of group meetings could cloud individual subjectivities by reaching final decisions through consensus. This could lead to misrecognition occurring between activists, and meant that individuals with certain ideas about class and politics would judge others according to specific criteria for legitimacy. I show how the sharing of group membership did not inevitably lead to mutual understanding amongst migrants. As such, openness towards others in Mexico did not necessarily translate into an openness towards the subjectivities of other migrants (Latour 2004). I also argue that such misrecognitions demonstrate the multiple ways in which members of the Mexican middle classes actually understand and articulate the meaning of class and politics. The ability to accept different ways of understanding the meaning of class and political action formed an important aspect of privileged migrant activism, since an individual's ability to extend a cosmopolitan awareness towards the classed perspectives of other activists could impact upon their continued participation in political groups. Cosmopolitanism, here, becomes linked with both the emergence and continuance of privileged migrant activism.

7.2.1 Complexities of reaching consensus:

Each of the groups I worked with in the field contained a multiplicity of opinions about the kind of political actions which should be carried out and why. In the process of reaching consensus,

individual perspectives could be brushed over. Bringing disparate voices together when deciding upon an action suitable for everyone was a difficult task, and individual concerns sometimes went unaddressed. This meant that individual migrants often left group meetings feeling dissatisfied with that which had been decided upon, and nursing resentments against other individuals whose opinions they had particularly disagreed with (Graeber 2009a; 2009b). Take, for example, this excerpt from my field notes about a #YoSoy132 assembly meeting on the 4th July 2012. It was held just three days after the PRI candidate - Enrique Peña Nieto – was proclaimed the winner of the presidential elections in Mexico. #YoSoy132 Barcelona had declared an emergency meeting in order to decide upon an appropriate course of action for denouncing the election results:

The meeting begins, and everyone presents their opinions on what form of action they think should go ahead. One person says they don't want to carry out any actions directed at the Mexican embassy. They argue that some people could put the completion of their degrees at risk if they were deported. Therefore, they feel that the group's actions should be directed at locals and tourists. They are interrupted by someone else, who feels that what is needed is action directed at the EU parliament, and political groups like the Green Party. A girl then interrupts him, arguing that since they are in Spain, they need to act upon their responsibility as Mexicans abroad, and make local people aware of what is going on. People start throwing around suggestions for online petitions and campaigns for international observers. Then another girl speaks up and tells the group that this is her first assembly. She says that she normally doesn't get involved with these kinds of groups because she finds that they eventually lose their dynamic and things stop being done. She came today, she says, because she wants to see something done soon – tomorrow – and she wants to do some kind of immediate action so that she won't leave today feeling disappointed.

Already by this point a multiplicity of opinions could be seen. Rather than each individual contribution being evaluated and discussed on its own, the group was inundated by different

suggestions. Everyone was keen to put their ideas forward, whilst objecting to those suggested by others. Before these could be addressed, the discussion would move on:

Suddenly the discussion swerves to an extensive argument about mailing lists, about not getting emails or seeing things on Facebook. A lengthy discussion (with lots of points being repeated) ensues, and eventually Adriana speaks up, saying that she will take charge of the mailing list. She passes her tablet around for people to write their names onto a word document she has opened.

This seemed to provide a break in the discussion, in which the previous suggestions were forgotten, and people began making new ones:

The discussion swerves back again, and different people start mentioning different possibilities for immediate action – a demonstration, a flash-mob, a protest march. Someone suggests doing it two days from then, but then others bring up the issue of legal permission from the police, which needs a week's notice. Monica suggests doing it without permission, but others don't want to because they don't want to get into trouble with immigration. Someone else suggests a protest outside the offices of the newspaper El País, in which they can burn the copy of the paper which pronounced the PRI candidate to be the legitimate winner. That doesn't get a very good reaction, and others say they don't want to participate in any symbolic violence or anything morbid. Someone raises a concern about recruiting enough people for a demonstration. Monica mentions that other collectives already in existence have extensive mailing lists which could be taken advantage of – as such they need to forge links and alliances with those groups. She is interrupted by a man who says that they don't need to dialogue with other groups, since they have convoked events online. Monica contradicts him, saying that they need to respect other collectives and inform them about things, send emails, start dialogues and create networks. Maria interrupts her, saying that #132 is not a collective, just citizens

coming together. In the end they decide to wait until the 15th July to do a protest march, and see if they can find ways of getting more people to join.

No-one, then, was entirely satisfied by the ideas of other members of group. Each idea was challenged by someone else, and the result was an action which no-one was entirely happy with. This extract shows how consensus-reaching in a group situation could mean that individual concerns were not addressed. This is important since it meant that individual members might take the suggestions of others at face value, and interpret them according to their own criteria for legitimacy. This could lead to misunderstandings of the motivations behind what other people said, and lead to disenchantment with the group. It impacted upon an individual's desire to continue collaborating with other activists. In the following section, I bring the narratives of individual activists into conversation with one another in order to illustrate the way such misrecognition could occur, and demonstrate the impact this had upon on the continued existence of a group. I also argue that such misrecognitions demonstrate the multiplicity of positionalities which actually exist amongst members of the Mexican middle-classes.

7.2.2 The politics of class and the class of politics:

During my interviews, it became clear that individuals often nursed private critiques of the actions carried out by a group. People continued to judge actions reached through consensus, and the arguments put forward by other activists, according to their own criteria for legitimacy. This meant that when they disagreed with the viewpoints of other members, or the ultimate form of an action which was decided upon, the group itself became judged as a reflection of undesirable political sensibilities. As a result, they would question their continued participation in the group. The possibility of continued political action became jeopardised by activists talking past one another. In

this section, I focus on how such judgements could be based on different understandings of class and political ideology. This had particular ramifications for the possibility of migrants accepting the alternative subjectivities of others, and hence limited the practice of in-group cosmopolitanism. Elitism or middle-classness is often associated, both ethnographically and within the literature on elites, with conservatism or right-wing sentiments (Marcus 1983; Viqueira 2012). Whilst it is true that class does have an important bearing on a persons' sense of self, value, and helps create relational persons (Lem 1994; Pratt 2003; Urciuoli 1993), this section demonstrates that understandings of a 'class' are not homogenous amongst its members (Pratt 2003; Walker 2013). As such, it reveals the way in which conflicts between individual activists in Barcelona actually reveal the enactment of intra-class struggle in a context outside of Mexico.

When I interviewed Antonio, who was a member of #YoSoy132 Barcelona, he articulated extensive critiques of the other members of the group. Antonio had come to Barcelona with special hopes of finding the Republican spirit of the city still alive. At heart, he described himself as anti-capitalist and anti-systemic. He attributed this to his academic training in the social sciences but had not belonged to a social movement before. He described himself as having "lacked a political vision" before he began to work in for the local (left-wing) government in Mexico City. He described himself as being very "utopic". However, after working in local government, he explained that he realised "there are mechanisms which can be employed in order to achieve certain things". He said he learned "how to capitalise on certain actions and ideologies in order to get real results." Immediately after leaving his job in Mexico City, he came to Barcelona in order to study for his Ph.D. in geography. #YoSoy132 Barcelona was the first social movement he had participated in. From the beginning, however, he had doubts about joining the group:

"A friend sent me a link on Facebook to 132Barcelona, saying I might be interested. At first I just told her 'yeah, yeah – thanks', and ignored it. The movement in Mexico just seemed snobby and fresca,

without any political content, so I just laughed at it. I still didn't want to meet any other Mexicans at that point, and I just wasn't convinced by the movement. I mean, I sympathised with some things about it, but not in others. For example, look at where it began: it began in Ibero. I mean maybe it's my prejudice against fresas; I don't know. It all just seemed too superficial. I criticised it for starting in a private university, not a public one. Then again, it had to start there because Peña Nieto would never have visited UNAM in the first place – they never got the chance to kick him out. But, it's interesting because Ibero is a Jesuit school, where the children of the Mexican elite go to study. I mean it was interesting that the movement started there.

He argued that he had avoided joining the group because he associated it with something “*fresa*”. This is a specific word in Mexican Spanish which is often translated as “posh”, “stuck-up” or “preppy”. It does not necessarily go hand in hand with wealth but, rather, with the behaviours associated with a wealthy, conservative *persona*. A *fresa* can be someone who invests in superficial markers of wealth such as expensive commodities and designer labels. They speak in a specific tone of voice, sometimes inserting English words as a sign of status. Their behaviours are aimed at asserting a high social status, which means rejecting anything associated with the lower classes (this means they may display racist or classist attitudes). They may also display political conservatism. Whilst these characteristics often go hand in hand, they are not exclusive: someone can be *fresa* by displaying only one of the behaviours described. It is interesting that whilst Antonio recognised himself as being a ‘privileged Mexican’ (by being able to study abroad) he still distinguished between himself and someone who was *fresa*. In his interview narrative, he associated being *fresa* with being elite. As such, he referred to the movement in Mexico as “elite”, whilst *not* including himself in that category. He attributed this to social differences within the Mexican upper- and middle- classes. Someone who goes to UNAM (a public university) in his view is not the same as someone who goes to Ibero (a private university). Therefore, he was reluctant to join the movement because of the class-notations he perceived in it. But, we could also read his argument as relating more to

politics than to class. His discourse implied that ideology and class can create a situation in which a left-thinking member of the privileged classes in Mexico can absent themselves from a classed position, whilst upholding the classed position of those who are not. Those who are *fresa* and conservative are “elite”, whilst he - a left-thinking non-*fresa* - is not.

He described how he joined the group:

“When I started seeing how the situation in Mexico was getting worse and worse, and how it seemed more and more likely that the PRI was going to get back into power, I said well, I don’t agree with the ‘light’ part of the movement [light referring to the movement not being radical enough], and I’m not doing it to be snobby, but I can at least see what they do and then see if I participate. I read the news and I listened to the radio. I was getting really disturbed by everything that that was happening, and the fact that I was far away without being able to do anything. It’s hard to be here and not do anything. It seemed so brutal that the PRI was going to come back, so I said well, I’m at least going to do something”.

However, his initial trepidation about the movement increased after his first meeting:

“I was really disappointed by the first meeting. They were like ‘the spokespeople say we need to decide on an artistic action’. And I was like, what do you mean, ‘the spokespeople say’? I thought this was a horizontal movement where decisions wouldn’t be imposed? I didn’t like it. Eventually, we decided upon a flash-mob, but I had hoped for more of an assembly with debates and reflection, where we could question things. But no, it was more a technical question of this needs to be done, and this how we’ll do it, these are the materials we need, and that’s it. I came from a background of working in the government, with executive meetings where we said this needs to be done, and we all

worked on it. Finding myself amongst such a lack of consensus, with people who didn't fit with my ideas, people who I felt left something to be desired, it was complicated."

He said that this made him continually question his further participation in the group. He explained that he thought the group just seemed to want to take photos of protest acts to put on Facebook and Twitter, *"just so that they could be a trending topic"*. He saw such aims as *"superficial"*, especially, he argued, when *"taking into account the low internet coverage within Mexico"*. He confessed that:

"I thought, this isn't activism, this is cyber-activism, and it doesn't move from there. It just ended up circulating around ourselves – educated middle class people who were aware, with some kind of political awareness and class consciousness. It was like producing things for self-consumption".

Despite the fact that he absented himself from sharing the same position as an 'elite' when discussing his unwillingness to join the movement, Antonio incorporated an element of self-critique into his discussion. He didn't want to be a movement built around socially-conscious 'middle-class' people (a categorisation in which he included himself). Here it would seem that an inability to escape from a certain class-based position is seen as an inability to articulate political protest correctly. He elaborated further on this:

"I realised that, in the meetings, I would say 'hey, shouldn't we reflect a bit over what's happening?' and everyone else would be like 'no, no, no, there isn't time, what we need to do now is act – there isn't time to think'. I wasn't convinced, but I went along with it because at the end of the day the aim of the movement was to prevent the imposition of Peña Nieto and to challenge the rule of mass media. When the elections were over, and everyone reacted really badly, we had the emergency assembly in front of the filmoteca. I said 'I want us to really talk about the situation.' But no.

Everyone was like 'no no; we need to do something'. Once again, that space of reflection wasn't created. We just haven't been capable of managing to debate issues which really mean something – as much as for Mexico as for us. I think the assemblies are just technical meetings. We don't have a proper system of consensus. We vote, and that means we just replicate the bad habits of mainstream democracy. If someone loses the vote, well they can go fuck themselves, and that's that. Even now that they've managed to organise the meetings a bit better, we still don't discuss anything."

He saw the decline in participation of older people from other collectives as a sign that they viewed the movement as depoliticised and “*decaffeinated*”. He felt that the group had been criticised as a result of “*not looking to fight the system or question the system*”. He claimed that “*an anarchist or someone who follows a similar position would see us as reproducing the system, and that's it.*” He confided to me that unless he saw changes in the way the group worked, he would seriously reconsider his participation in the movement. He also questioned his further participation in the group after students from the private ITAM and IBERO universities in Mexico had said that they would respect the decision of the Supreme Court of Justice in its verdict about the elections. Neither was he happy when they expressed misgivings about linking with the Zapatistas or social movements involving oppressed communities:

“I see that they don't want to link themselves with any movement which is more radical, and that's where we enter into a class conflict. It's not just about ideology then, but also about social class, and how you see the world according to the point of view of your social class”.

For Antonio, a lack of ideological discourse and unwillingness to link with “more radical” groups signified a class-based position (rather than a political one) from which the movement was unwilling to break. The less ‘in tune’ the movement became with his own political ideas, the more

'classed' it became for him – he saw it as an 'elite' movement (a categorisation from which he himself was at first absented). The key factor for Antonio in escaping a class-based position was the ability to reflect upon Mexican society and upon their position within it. By seemingly being unable to do this, and by only focusing on practical activities, this indicated to Antonio that the members of the movement were unable to escape the confines of their class. This is an intriguing pattern which was repeated in a number of interviews (which I discuss below), where the 'right' kind of politics was viewed by certain people as cancelling out class. In Antonio's eyes, access to education should have led to increased radicalism and a more articulated political ideology. Not only that, it should have led to articulated critiques against mainstream Mexican nationalism:

"They don't question the system. They don't question the futility of voting in elections. We don't question the 15th September [Mexican Independence Day]; we don't question those dates. We don't question how the revolution started. The Mexican Revolution was just a load of northern bourgeoisie idealists who used the peasants and the workers as soldiers, like most revolutions who send the poorest to the front lines. We just don't question it. We don't question the 15th of September, that Hidalgo didn't shout, unlike what they teach you at school, that he didn't shout 'viva Mexico' or 'viva Nueva España', but that he actually shouted 'viva Fernando, the last king of Spain' – which wasn't exactly independence. Neither does the movement question machismo and gender. They say they are an anti-neoliberal movement, but neoliberalism is just one aspect of capitalism. We don't look at alternative ways of doing things, or of economic solidarity, other ways of building. It's difficult to leave the system, but they just don't question those things. The thing that worries me the most is that in spite of them being educated to such a high level, they only question some things and not others. They don't question everyday life. It just seems that despite the fact that we are so privileged in comparison to the rest of the Mexican population, in being able to have education and access to education, we just don't question any of it".

He perceived an absence of “questioning” in the group. For him, this represented an inability to realise the full potential of education in building articulated ideological viewpoints. For Antonio, such an absence demonstrated an inability or unwillingness to escape from a class-based positionality. This was frustrating because it held him back from doing so too. We can see this in his interview by the ways his own position shifted within his narrative. He criticised the movement for being elite, and he criticised the members of the group for not engaging in debates which would allow them to escape the confines of their class. He also associated participating in mainstream nationalist discourse with an inability to escape class. Because Antonio considered himself to be personally capable of that critique, he absented himself from the discussion: “they” are elite and middle-class, not “we”. However, because he had continued to participate in the group, the classed-failures he perceived meant that he turned his discussion into self-critique. Since he was participating in the group, its failures became a property of “we”: “we are a group of educated middle-class people”, “despite the fact that we are so privileged”, “we just don’t question any of it”. His discourse implies that the politics of the movement acted to ‘class’ Adrian once again, and the resulting feelings were uncomfortable for him. This affected his own willingness to continue participating in the group.

Other individuals demonstrated a similar pattern of judgement where politics, rather than class, took centre stage. Here, people made judgements about the actions of other group members as being indicative of a hidden ideological stance. This was the case for Buddy, who had participated in NAR, the MCMB, MORENA Barcelona and #YoSoy132 Barcelona. He described himself as being from a middle-class family in a city close to the U.S.-Mexican border. He was extremely critical about many aspects of Mexican society, including classism and racism. At a discursive and practical level he was keen to engage in educational activities from the bottom-up which would challenge taken for granted inequalities in Mexico. He often judged the behaviour of certain groups as an indication of their inner ideological position. This meant he would match specific kinds of behaviour with a typology of Party-influenced behaviours relating to the PRI (the centre-party which ruled

Mexico for seventy one years, and returned to power in 2012) and the PAN (the right-wing party which gained power in the 2000 and 2006 elections). In discussing the development and eventual decline of the MCMB, Buddy claimed that:

“Many of the members are from very, very, very blue-blooded families, and even though they say they are leftist, their discursive forms are totally from the right. Such people think leftist things, and protest with the left, but their most profound attitudes and beliefs which make them who they are, even if it is done with leftist knowledge, are done with actions and ways of interpreting reality of the right.”

Buddy confided to me that his strongest impression of such inner political-selves occurred during the “hanging incident”. This event happened before I entered the field and so my knowledge of what happened is limited to piecing together the account of different individuals. It was generally agreed upon by those who recounted the story to me that NAR decided to do a protest event where they would ‘hang’ stuffed models from a bridge in the city, accompanied by a giant placard reading something along the lines of “this sight happens every day in Mexico. In 6 years, [number] people have been killed”. The aim of the act was to raise local awareness of the conflict happening in Mexico through a visually arresting display. They invited other collectives to join the act if they wished. When the proposal was sent to the MCMB, there were strong reactions on both sides. Some people disagreed with the form of protest, arguing it reproduced the violence they were seeking to end, and so did not want to participate. Some wanted to write a letter declining the invitation. Others felt the situation was more urgent, and that the protest should be stopped altogether. Such reactions to the proposal became indicative to Buddy of “hidden” political positionalities. He viewed such reactions as conservative impositions and described them as examples of “*machistic authoritarianism*”. He believed that such individuals were unable to escape their families’ positions as followers of el PRI or el PAN because:

“In Mexico the parties are religions, they infiltrate people’s belief systems, and they determine so much of their way of being. It was obvious to me since the first session, that no matter what they said, some were PRI, deep inside they were PRIista; that so-and-so had a PRIista inside, another had a PANista inside.”

He associated attempts to control the group, to impose opinions, to buy favour or to limit the use of explicit and accusing political messages as a sign of being unable to escape the habitus of a conservative way of being. He argued that the existence of such hidden political persuasions also became apparent when members of the MCMB had declined to participate in a photo taken in front of the Sagrada Familia in support of the MORENA campaign in the build-up to the July 2012 elections. He argued that:

“The people from the MCMB – those who didn’t show up - would never have appeared in the photo even if they planned to vote for Obrador behind closed doors. In the MCMB people never put their cards on the table, and that’s a very PANista thing to do – that’s where you can see it in them. Those people who did show up to the photo might have been fresca, they might have gone to the tec de Monterrey [a private university in Monterrey], but the fact they came shows that their bubbles are breaking, they are breaking the PANista or PRIista which they have inside, and you can do something with them.”

For Buddy, actions were seen to speak louder than words, and such actions formed the basis from which he judged the ‘true’ selves of other activists. He judged actions against a typology of behaviours which he saw as being rooted in deeply internalised and Party-inflicted ways of being. He became more disenchanted with the attitudes of people in Barcelona as he came closer to leaving. Around a month before I left the field, Buddy was obliged to return to Mexico when his

scholarship payments from the Spanish government were cut. Before finally deciding to go back, he had looked for different ways to remain in Barcelona. He didn't want to return to Mexico due to the risks posed by activist engagement there, as well as an unwillingness to face the classist and racist behaviours he had felt free from in Barcelona. However, as his departure date approached, his attitude changed. He attended a number of events held by L'Adhesiva, and told me that he was impressed by their way of working and that they understood what was needed – which was working from the ground up. Despite the fact that he had originally been enthusiastic about the development of groups like #YoSoy132 Barcelona, and keen to assert the need for the nucleus of groups like NAR to exist outside of Barcelona, his thinking about the legitimacy of acting from a distance changed. He explained that:

“Sometimes I have felt scared about going back, but then you just get to the point where you want to go back and where you need to throw the punches yourself and just be there. It's different being there in the middle of everything; the situation is different. You need to do this from different people, and with people at the grassroots. People here don't speak with people at the grassroots. I want to go back to Mexico to work with them, so that I can really see what they are doing. You need do it at ground level, with the people, because here they can only give a diluted version of what is happening”.

He argued that while he felt that NAR was of extremely high importance in providing alternative interpretations of the war and in being a locus for the creation of historic memory, its impact (and potential audience) was still limited as a result of poor internet coverage in most of Mexico. As a result, he wanted to go back and work on the diffusion of the information present in the NAR via local radio stations. He claimed that:

“I don’t want to be amongst people who say they want to defend the poor when they have never spoken to a poor person, and who dress up as indigenous people when they have blonde hair and have never even spoken with one. Certain people are so affected by everything that is happening in Mexico because they were separated from reality, living in their bubbles, and when they look outside of their bubbles, the world looks terrible. That’s why I want to go back and work from Mexico now.”

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the legitimacy to act from abroad was asserted by different individuals. They achieved this by emphasising the privileged possibilities for action which being outside of Mexico allowed them. Buddy himself articulated such a position, arguing that the kind of information that NAR worked with was so emotionally upsetting and so dangerous that it wasn’t possible to work in that way from within Mexico. He made that argument in the same interview during which he criticised the hidden ideological positions which he felt other members of the MCMB had shown. Despite the criticisms he levelled against other members, he still believed in the potentiality of acting from abroad. Why, then, did his position change? Why did he end up rejecting all forms of action from Barcelona as an elite and distanced activity during our second interview? The simplest answer is that people change. Living in Barcelona and feeling the need to act, and to justify that need to others meant that highlighting the legitimacy of action from abroad could give meanings to one’s actions. But, when it came to returning, those same arguments of privileged insight no longer applied. Buddy wanted to continue to do something from within Mexico and, within that process, he readdressed what his possibilities for action would be there. This meant he reflected even more critically on the actions of others in Barcelona. Asserting the legitimacy of being *in* Mexico could represent a means of dealing with the fear of returning, and of validating his new possibilities for action. The more removed he became from the position of activists in Barcelona the more he absented himself from sharing in their subjectivities. *They* were the privileged ones; they were uncritical, and he wanted to go somewhere ‘real’. His willingness to try to understand the viewpoints of others he disagreed with became even more reduced. Hence, the

way he judged the effectiveness of the groups acting from within Barcelona over time was intimately related to his own personal criteria for legitimately engaging in political action.

In his exploration of the life-histories of Ghanaian development workers, Yarrow shows how their personal life histories became important at events like conferences. Here, discussions of personal biographies were thought to reveal the political, ideological, personal and moral outlook of a person (2008: 336). He claims that “partly such conversations were valued for their perceived capacity to reveal aspects of people’s true ‘self’.” Similarly, such biographies “were often seen to be telling of the ‘real’ nature of people’s beliefs and were thus regarded as a gauge of ‘underlying’ or ‘genuine’ motivations” (2008: 337). Yarrow describes how, whilst the ideal of a certain moral-self amongst Ghanaian NGO workers “is not always realised”, it continues to “provide a moral and ethical framework through which people assess their own and others’ actions” (2008: 353). Such behaviours were also apparent amongst my participants. In the discourses of both Antonio and Buddy, it is clear that they were making judgements about class and ideological affiliations based on the behaviours of other group members. It is interesting that, though they belonged to the same social sector as those they criticised, they absented themselves from the kind of positionality they critiqued. Because they disagreed with the methods of protest and opinions of their fellow group members, they were excluded from sharing in their class-based positions and political habitus. However, their discourse could also turn to self-critique when they felt themselves to be too implicated, or too limited, by the behaviours they had criticised. Their participation in certain collectives put them in danger of crossing the line back into a classed or ideological position which they did not consider themselves to occupy. This could lead to further critiques of the group, and a desire to distance themselves from it. In Buddy’ case, looking for legitimacy in acting from within Mexico (whereas he had before highlighted the benefits of acting from abroad) meant that he absented himself even further from other members, and could once again exclude himself from the critiques he levelled against them.

7.2.3 Misrecognition:

I now want to put forward the accounts of two individuals who would fall on the side of those being “critiqued” by both Antonio and Buddy. Their narratives illustrate the extent of cross-talk within different groups. By bringing their perspectives into conversation with discourse of Buddy and Antonio, I show how activists (and members of the same class within Mexico) could talk past one another when it came to evaluating the ‘hidden’ motives or ‘deficient’ political sensibilities of other members. This meant that, whilst individual migrants could inhabit an alternative national cosmopolitanism towards others within Mexico, they did not necessarily express an openness to the subjectivities of other migrants and members of the same social sector to which they belonged. One form of openness did not translate into being open to *all* (Latour 2004). Hence, a lack of in-group (and intra-class) cosmopolitanism could prevent the continued articulation of long-distance activism for some individuals.

Laura came from a wealthy and conservative family in Mexico City. She told me that, before moving to Barcelona ten years earlier, she had never attended a protest or demonstration since such activities were badly looked upon within her social circle. She attended her first ever demonstration (against the declaration of war against Iraq) in Barcelona. Such an experience was a revelation, she said, because it made her see how such acts could be positive. She enjoyed the feeling which being at a protest could generate. When she later joined the MCMB, however, she kept in mind the way members of her social circle in Mexico would be viewing those activities. Indeed, she told me that she felt frustrated by the fact that other members seemed unable to put themselves in the shoes of an upper-class, conservative personality in Mexico. She argued that if the group as a whole was to win conservative members of the upper classes over to their cause and to change their views, then they would need to adapt the way in which they carried out protests. She described how, when the MCMB first began:

“There was a proposal to include a text which went plainly against Calderón [the PAN President at the time], and that was a shock because it was like, we can’t start like that. Most Mexicans in Barcelona are really fresca, and if they use that kind of language then no-one is going to come. I come from that society, I know them. If they convened such a radical march for me, I wouldn’t turn up. Knowing the people where I come from, we couldn’t begin like that, not with ‘Calderón, out!’”

Buddy judged such a position as being indicative of Laura’s inability to free herself from a deeply ingrained conservative persona. However, Laura did not see herself in this way. Her own ideas about protest seemed oriented towards ensuring the widest number of participants possible – she wanted to attract more people into the movement. It created an entry point through which Mexicans who were *fresa* could eventually become politicised in the ‘right’ way. In her view, too much radicalisation to begin with would prevent that. She claimed people would not show up. As such, then, Laura showed an awareness of the kind of political habitus criticised by Buddy. She responded to that in the way she thought certain actions should be held. Class and politicisation were as much a preoccupation for her as they were for Buddy, though in a different way. Laura was taking on a double perspective – she talked about her social circle as being different to her (she uses *they* and not *we*), but she also informed her actions *as if she still thought like one of them*, with the intention of getting ‘them’ involved. It is not my intention here to argue that either Buddy or Laura was ultimately in the right. Rather, by bringing their discourses into conversation with one another, I want to show how in many ways they were talking past one another. When it came to reaching consensus around issues like the text referring to Calderon, or the hanging incident, the opinions which certain people gave in the group could be taken as a sign of hidden class-based or ideological stances, whereas the individual in question may not have seen it that way. This indicates that some individuals were not necessarily open to accepting or even attempting to understand the viewpoints of other activists. It also reveals the fact that there were multiple ways of understanding class and political action amongst individuals who belonged to the same privileged social sector within

Mexico. The inability of individuals who understood class in one way to accept alternative understandings which were articulated by other migrants thus affected the likelihood of such individuals continuing to work together in an activist capacity.

This was also the case for other members of #YoSoy132 Barcelona. Earlier in this section, we saw how Antonio took the absence of group-level reflection and debate as a sign that the group's membership was unable to leave their class-based position (which for him was linked to the level of their political consciousness). However, people like Adriana were ready to recognise that their personal histories of activist involvement were small or non-existent. They argued that it was this lack of experience which made them want to take things slowly when making their mind up about important issues. This did not mean that they lacked critique. Adriana, for example, explained that whilst she had never before participated in a social movement:

"I think it's good to get to know people with different ways of thinking because you can learn from them. You realise that things, unfortunately, are much more fucked-up than you thought. Of course I'm in favour of indigenous rights, anti-capitalism and pro-abortion movements – I always have been. But, the thing is, I lack a lot of experience because I don't understand the conflicts well. I think I need to read up on a lot of historic things about Mexico and to try to understand it better because the conflicts are very complicated. But that's why I think it's important we just focus on one issue for now, like the monopoly of biased media corporations. While some of us are trying to work out all the other stuff, we can still be alerting people about what's happening, and try to get some global resonance from that – challenge what is reported in the papers".

Her desire for immediate actions (like protest marches, demonstrations, flash-mobs and photo opportunities) aimed at denouncing the mass-media in Mexico did not stem from an unawareness of other issues, nor from an unwillingness to act upon them. Rather, they came from a desire to further her awareness before making ideological assertions about the wider political aims

of the group. In this way, actions were being carried whilst she was still deciding her opinions about other things – the urgency she perceived in the electoral problem meant that she felt it necessary to do both at the same time. During our interview she confided that her reluctance to engage in wider debates during assemblies came from a shyness of being judged by others who she felt were better informed by her, though in her spare time she was reading up about other issues.

We have already seen how a lack of debate during meetings was taken as a sign by Antonio as an inability on the part of the group's members to remove themselves from the confines of 'class'. But, Adriana did not see herself in this way. Once again, it is not my intention to judge the validity of the positions being defended here. Instead, I want to highlight how multiple discourses around the legitimacy of different group members existed at any one time. People were judging one another's external behaviours according to different class-based and ideological criteria. The act of trying to reach consensus during group meetings could prevent deeper understandings of why someone thought the way they did, since the fast-pace movement of meetings, and the challenges posed by other group members to certain suggestions as soon as they were made, obscured individual justifications for their positionalities. By allowing individual members to leave group meetings feeling dissatisfied with the perspectives of others, this could then obscure an acknowledgement of the multiplicity of opinions which did exist. It could also prevent a willingness to enact openness to alternative opinions and ways of viewing political action. The result was a constant interplay between consensus reaching and misrecognition when it came to working with others who did not share one's own sensibilities. This resonates with Gatt's description of Friends of the Earth activists, and the way in which "organizational relations can be transformed into supra-personal actors" as a result of changes in personal, power structures and personal relationships in the movement (Gatt 2013: 25).

Activism is a "complicated and contested terrain of political identities and subjectivities...where multiple identities are performed and mobilised in different ways at different moments" (Tate 2007: 303). Yarrow argues that the term 'activism' relates to a "particular kind of

orientation towards the world". However, since disagreement often exists with regards to "nature of this orientation", the nature of an 'activist identity' can be "at times contested" (2008: 340). Every activist with whom I spoke in Barcelona was aware that, as Mexicans studying postgraduate degrees in Europe, or highly educated individuals working in professional positions, they were in a privileged position in comparison to rest of the population. However, the positionalities which I have brought into conversation with one another show that, even when a generalised shared reality was agreed upon (that there was a violent conflict in Mexico, that indigenous groups suffered from discrimination, and that electoral fraud occurred in 2012), the finer details about the nature of that reality, and the way in which it should be acted upon, varied greatly. Amongst Mexican activists in Barcelona, conflicts over ideological allegiance and the correct form of political protest merged with discourses on class and reconciliation, demonstrating the way in which, according to Rapport, the reality of community is actually one of "of heterogeneity, process and change" (Rapport in Amit and Rapport 2002: 8). The same ideas can mean different things to different activists, even at the moment of working together (Ram 2008; Stivens 2008). The process of defining what is shared (and if that which is shared is understood in the same way) is inherently complex. One may participate in a community through both cooperation *and* conflict, agreement *and* contestation. It is not always as easy as asserting the presence of "shared experience" (Dyck 2002: 102).

Rather than 'misunderstandings', the evaluations of the actions of others by Buddy and Antonio and their challenges by other group members like Laura and Adriana, actually represented 'judgements' located in different understandings of the meaning of class and political action. Each subject position represented a coherent view for the individual who inhabited them. The discourses of other activists were evaluated in ways which made sense for the individual making the judgement. As a result, participants in the same group, and members of the same class, could end up talking past one another when evaluating the effectiveness of the group's actions as a whole, or the true intentions of its members. This could act to limit possibilities for sustained collaboration between activists by provoking individual dissatisfaction with the group's overall outcomes. It could

result in a premature closure of openness towards the political sensibilities of other activists within the group, at the same time that their energies were directed towards others in Mexico. As such, reduced practices of in-group cosmopolitanism could impact upon the continued participation of individual migrants in activist groups.

This section has shown that there are variations in the way members of the Mexican middle classes understand class membership, belonging and meaning (Pratt 2003). It has also illustrated the way certain individuals may absent themselves from class categorisations in the process of articulating such understandings. Here, intra-class conflicts over the viability and potentiality of different forms of action overlap with judgements over class and politics. Hence, this isn't just 'class' affecting the way personhoods are created, but rather individuals negotiating their identities within classed positions which nevertheless discursively exceed the possibilities created by those 'classes' (Lem 1994; Pratt 2003). 'Class' is not a static, homogenous category or social entity, it is constructed in multiple and contested ways (Ortner 1998; Pratt 2003; Urciuoli 1993). The fact that some individuals critique the system does not in itself represent the transformation of an entire social class – those perspectives were already varied and heterogeneous (Walker 2013). Here we see judgements coming from particular positionalities within the same class, and so we see how members of the same class may or may not agree with one another about political action. In Barcelona, individual members of privileged social sectors who would previously not have interacted because of those different sentiments are obliged to try to work together, or to discontinue their activities. Those who are unable to extend patience towards other the viewpoint of other members of the same class (other activists) eventually see their participation limited.

That there are conflicts, arguments and frictions in activism has been well documented (Graeber 2009a). Appadurai, in discussing an urban activist movement in Mumbai, describes how “not all members of the Alliance view the state, the market, or the donor world in the same way. Thus, every new occasion for funding, every new demand for a report, every new celebration of a

possible partnership, every meeting with a railway official or an urban bureaucrat can create new sources of debate and anxiety within the Alliance. In the words of one key Alliance leader, negotiating these differences, rooted in deep diversities in class, experience and personal style, is like ‘riding a tiger’” (2002: 30). In this section I have attempted to show that “the moment of common cause was full of misunderstanding” (Tsing 2005: 222). Indeed, Tsing argues that such instances are “more important than we ordinarily think” when it comes to carrying out political actions (2005: 246). Activist engagements can actually be full of “blurred zones” which “include *ambiguity* with regard to political forms...and *contradictions* concerning people’s claims about their own and others’ experiences” (Rubin 1998: 143). In this way, activism can be “regarded as a source of friendship and solidarity but also of tension, disagreement and personal enmity” (Yarrow 2008: 339).

In previous chapters I argued that by participating in activism oriented towards Mexico, migrants were engaging in an alternative form of national cosmopolitanism which undermined, at least at a personally felt and discursive level, the hierarchical divisions of Mexican society. I have shown here that individual ideas about class and ideology meant that, even when this form of national cosmopolitanism was being enacted, some individuals were prevented from extending a similar openness to other members of the group (and other members the privileged classes in Mexico). In this way, one kind of cosmopolitanism did not necessarily result in an extension of openness to other avenues of interaction (Kahn 2008: 266). In creating a context in which migrants and members of the Mexican-upper classes came together outside of Mexico, activism could itself become divisive. Judgements based on alternative understandings of class and politics made against other activists could prevent the possibility of sustained collaboration between migrants. This, however, was not always the case. In the next section I argue that a particular kind patient politics practiced by some migrants could prolong an individual’s political participation with others.

7.3 Alternative cosmopolitanisms

In this section, I describe the measures taken by some activists to ensure that members of a group could continue to work together and to get things done. I discuss the various ways a politics of patience was enacted in order to achieve this. I argue that this represented an alternative form of cosmopolitan opening towards the subjectivities of other activists, and towards other members of the upper classes – one which could create a space for collaboration between migrants of different political sensibilities and who articulated varying understandings of class-belonging. As such, it shows how coming together outside of Mexico could actually result in a new way of ‘doing politics’ amongst members of the same class.

7.3.1 *A politics of patience:*

Some people took a pragmatic view towards the existence of different positionalities within a group. Here, a suspension of questioning the political significance and ideology of the group was seen as necessary “in order to get things done” and to encourage what Appadurai terms “a politics of patience” (2002: 30). Rosa, for example, did not agree with certain discourses present in the MCMB - especially those who argued protests over violence should be kept separate to commentaries on ‘official’ party politics. Rosa had a long history of political activism in Mexico, and in the previous chapter we saw how she disagreed with events aimed at expressing grief amongst other Mexicans rather than being oriented to local people within Catalonia. As a result of her long term involvement in different political causes, she said that she was used to seeing how movements came together and dissipated. She believed that:

“Those movements cannot be on principal apolitical, so when they tell you ‘against violence but without politics’ it’s like “No!”. The reason we are so fucked is clearly due to bad politics, so for me that apoliticality is just a farce”.

Whilst she had her own viewpoints, however, her approach to the group was ultimately pragmatic one. She felt that only by suspending those judgements about the political nature of the task in hand would they be able to carry out any events or protests at all. She reflected on this, claiming:

“We need to realise that we came together in conjunction with what was happening with Sicilia’s movement in Mexico, and therefore we shouldn’t be trying to define ourselves in long rhetorical sessions, especially if we want the movement to survive. In Mexico, we’re used to living at the point of conjunctures, and we continually reproduce them here.”

Rosa became distanced from the group after ‘the hanging incident’, and after seeing that *“those who I had supposed to be much more radical showed themselves to be ridiculous”*. However, she was still sure that *“If the point comes when we need to meet and do something again, we will.”* Such a coming together, however, would only be possible as a result of a suspension of ideological questionings about the nature of the group:

“In order for the movement to survive, we need to be an echo of what goes on in Mexico rather than doing little and big meetings each week which have no use.”

Here, Rosa would seem to be challenging the viewpoint of someone like Antonio. She does disagree with the political line taken by some members of the group. However, she believes that debating their differences at a more profound level would lead to fissures in the group which would

prevent any actions being carried out. Rather than a lack of debate indicating an inability to distance oneself from one's class, her argument implies a movement with a wide membership which wants to last over time cannot engage in such discussions. In the interest of common action, common differences should not be asserted. This implies a particular kind of cosmopolitanism – it is a pragmatic openness to the subjectivities of others, employed in the interest of prolonging group cooperation.

However, different people had different views about how cooperation could come about. Paula, for example, found productivity located in the tensions that were expressed by different members of the group. One evening I attended a talk which she gave as part of the No Nos Cabe Tanta Muerte exhibition. In the talk, she discussed the role of art in political protest. She showed images of art pieces used to denounce different conflicts, and explained how she didn't believe it was productive to reproduce the very violence one is denouncing in one's artwork. In the break, she and another member of the MCMB carried on the discussion and were making unfavourable comments about the violence replicated by 'the hanging incident'. Paula, then, had her own opinions about what form of political action was most desirable, and which should be avoided. However, when I interviewed her, she was keen to point out that she tried to be fair to the opinions of others when trying to work together in the MCMB. She saw the membership of the group as being different to that of other social movements:

“Precisely due to the personality who convoked it - Javier Sicilia - it touched another sector of society which hadn't yet been touched and which hadn't participated in activism.”

She described how they had intentionally convoked the group separately to Mexicanos en Resistencia, since that group had been clearly associated with López Obrador. Instead, she explained, “we wanted to attract people.” This meant not taking a specific political line, since:

“in Mexico there is such little dialogue between social sectors, and people move in totally separate groups: public universities on one side, private universities on the other; the working class on one side, the upper classes on the other and the middle classes on yet another; everyone just acts within their own worlds which are almost parallel, they don’t touch”.

As a result, she felt that trying to reach a consensus from different ideologies and political positionalities *“became quite a mini democratic exercise”*. Reflecting upon that experience, she said:

“It was interesting for those of us who had already been involved in activism and social struggles to reach a consensus with those who hadn’t. It was important to learn to include people who weren’t used to those dynamics, and for those who were accustomed not to take charge of the dialogue. That was a really positive experience, because having the patience to create dialogues doesn’t often happen in Mexico.”

For Paula, then, it was important to be able to try to understand what other people were saying, and to engage in conversations across difference. For her, this would have ramifications beyond the prolongation of the life a group: it could help to reconcile members of different classes and political dispositions. In other words, it could further the alternative national cosmopolitanisms being expressed towards others within Mexico by affecting the way they thought about other migrants living in Barcelona.

Arturo also had a long personal history of being involved in different political struggles in Mexico. Though he described himself as being from a wealthy and conservative family in Mexico City, he had spent years working with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, and carrying out human rights work in other Latin American countries. During our interview, he told me that his political beliefs had led to significant rifts within his own family. However, when the MCMB was founded, he saw an opportunity to reach people who had never before been involved in political action. This demanded

a certain kind of patience. He began by explaining that he felt the discourse of groups like MCMB and NAR were “quite elite.” He elaborated further, claiming:

It’s about that sector of society which speaks out against the violence but from the perspective of victimisation, rather than due to a profound analysis about what is happening in our society.”

Although he disagreed with the political basis of the group, he also saw the importance of his participation in the MCMB after he realised it had the potential to aid in the transformation of the political subjectivities of others:

“At first, in the first few meetings, it was a big shock for me, and I asked myself if I should be there. But I realised that yes, because as well as being a mirror for what was happening in Mexico, it was interesting that there were people and collectives who, in their natural environment, would not be doing this. There were certain people who come from above, from the elite, but who have been able to change their discourse to those below, like Laura. She comes from a wealthy family, and never had a way of being involved in struggles and resistances, but here, due to different circumstances, she has. That made it obvious for me that I needed to be there in order to create alliances with those people”.

Like Buddy and Antonio, he associated “elite” with conservatism. Despite the fact he also came from a privileged sector of society, his narrative indicated that his politics meant he was absented from being an “elite” too. Rather than making a distinction in terms of political belief, he made it on the basis of class. “Those below” (i.e. the Mexican working classes and indigenous groups) were those who have the ‘correct’ political discourse, whereas the ‘elites’ did not. The discourse of individuals was again associated with their class, rather than their position on the political spectrum. However, by maintaining this distinction between elites = conservatism, left-wing

= non-elite, he was able to build an image of the membership of the group, and articulate why he needed to adapt his behaviour in order to get them on board. This meant that his attitude towards the actions carried out by the MCMB actually became similar to that of Laura:

“In L’Adhesiva and with the kind of people there, it would be difficult to see how Laura could participate there, they would reject her. You need to look for links and where they may become possible, and the possibilities through which politics can enter into the discourse of MCMB or NAR. L’Adhesiva never asks for permission, because we are fighting against that system. It always makes me laugh when people in the MCMB are running here and there for permission and then they just do something small. In Mexico, protest is interpreted with illegality rather than social rights. The media demonises you and people complain about disruptions to economic activity, so it’s understandable they would be reluctant to protest here, but it also just shows the poor political culture which there is. They have the chance to break that.”

However, he realised that patience was also required:

“It’s hard for people to change their chip. In L’Adhesiva – we go, we take, we occupy the public space and that’s that. But you also have to be careful in things like MCMB, if they ask for opinions you give it, but you also have to respect what they are willing to do.”

Though he and Laura came from different histories of activist participation, Arturo was articulating a similar argument to that put forward by her. Although he preferred L’Adhesiva’s more radical way of working, he argued that it was necessary to realise that that kind of radical action wouldn’t always be possible in the MCMB. Instead, a space needed to be created in which people with other political views and other ways of understanding political protest (and class membership) could feel comfortable enough to articulate them. He didn’t consider himself ‘as elite’ as Laura since

his politics absented himself from such a position. And yet, there is a surprising similarity between the arguments used by Arturo and Laura in the need to use methods that would attract socially conservative groups to protest. They both indicate a pragmatic positionality towards the subjectivities of others in the interest of meeting wider political aims.

The different perspectives I have presented in this section show that the MCMB could be a place of negotiation, patience and transformation of political subjectivities, as well as a place of suspension of ideological positions in the name of cooperation. Rather than criticising the positions of certain individuals to reveal the continuance of class-based interests, or the presence of hidden ideologies, such differences could also be taken for granted. Instead of challenging the perspectives of others, and looking for ways to overcome them, some people sought ways of interacting with one another which would not prevent common actions from being carried out (Razsa and Kurnik 2012: 248). This is a different kind of cosmopolitanism - one which allows for patience to be exercised towards the views of other activists. It allowed for a new way of doing politics abroad by creating a context in which individuals who would perhaps have avoided others who articulated radically different understandings of the meaning of class and political action when in Mexico were obliged to work together.

Such cosmopolitanism represents an ethnographic articulation of what anthropologists have observed about the workings of political mobilising, where misunderstandings and “incommensurable” differences can be articulated so as “not to homogenise perspectives but rather to appreciate how we can use diversity as well as possible” (Tsing 2005: x). As such, “there is no reason to assume that collaborators share common goals”. What may be happening is that “overlapping but discrepant forms of cosmopolitanism may inform contributors, allowing them to converse – but across difference” (Tsing 2005: 13). Indeed, other anthropologists have shown how individuals occupying radically different social, economic and class/caste positions can come together in spite their socially inscribed differences during moments in which they are obliged to cooperate (Parry 2008; Sigfrid Grønseth 2010; Werbner 1999). As Graeber argues, “once the focus is

on common action, rather than agreement about the nature of some higher Truth or set of definitions or correct analysis, it becomes easier to see how a diversity of perspectives can come to seem strength rather than a weakness. The fact that human beings live in incommensurable worlds has rarely prevented them from effectively pursuing common projects” (2009b: 89). Becoming open to different kinds of ‘other’ in the interest of mutual aid or in the pursuit of certain needs (such as certain activist goals) can create the possibility for mutual understandings which can overcome difference without eradicating it. As we have seen in this chapter, this is not easy. Conflict can still happen, and misrecognition occur. It does not prevent individuals from making judgements in private (Kahn 2008: 266). However, it can create a space for collaboration, no matter how fraught, in which actions can be carried out. This shows how multiple forms of cosmopolitanism can be asserted at once in order to make a space for prolonged common action: a national cosmopolitanism towards unequal others in Mexico, a generalised political cosmopolitanism focusing on one’s locality, and a patient, intra-class cosmopolitanism directed towards the political and class-based subjectivities of other activists. Cosmopolitanism, here, becomes multiple *and* particular (Clifford 1998; Malcomson 1998; Robbins 1998a).

7.4 Conclusion:

The first part of this chapter showed that the way certain activists related to other group members was related to individual understandings of class and politics, as well as the potential of consensus-reaching during group meetings to cloud an understanding of the subjectivities of others. This could result in extensive cross-talk occurring between group members. My interviews highlighted the extent of misrecognition which could occur between activists by creating a space in which individuals could elaborate on their own political subjectivities. Bringing those subjectivities into conversation with one another highlighted the extent to which they were talking past one another, as well as demonstrating the variety of positions which exist amongst members of the

Mexican privileged classes. The frictions generated by such misrecognitions could preclude the possibility of further collaboration and could result in a breakdown of an individual's willingness to continue participating in a group. I argued that the existence of alternative national cosmopolitanisms directed towards people suffering in Mexico did not necessarily translate to being open to the subjectivities of other activists (and other members of the same class) within Barcelona.

However, I also argued that continued cooperation, and even a willingness to understand the political subjectivities of others, could be enabled by a politics of patience. Some individuals were able to suspend their own convictions at the point of deciding upon group actions precisely because they understood the multiplicity of attitudes which existed, and their possibility to preclude action. This required the practice of a different kind of cosmopolitanism, and a new kind of intra-class collaboration. Hence, the continued practice of activism directed towards Mexico required an openness to the lives of unequal others in Mexico as well as to alternative political subjectivities amongst members of the Mexican privileged classes within Barcelona. Though the latter was often fraught with friction and conflict, it was necessary for the practice of sustained action. It opened up the possibility for novel ways of carrying out political action outside of Mexico. Those who do show patience to the viewpoint of members of their same class (not just unequal others in Mexico) actually begin to partake in the kind of mini-democratic exercise defined by Rosa in the second half of this chapter. This is a particular kind of patient cosmopolitanism, or openness towards the viewpoint of an *equal* other, which is intimately related to the continuance of privileged migrant activism. Hence, its process of development is not just linked to new understandings (or empathies) between members of different classes developing, but also relates to the cultivation of intra-class empathy. The process of the development of privileged migrant activism in Barcelona, then, becomes novel in the sense that it allows for the creation of political configurations not immediately imaginable within Mexico, even amongst members of the same class (due to differences in political stance). However, the very possibility of the continued existence of those novel ways of doing

politics is intimately related to the individual practice of cosmopolitan openness towards the perspective of others.

This means that the way activism was lived and evaluated by migrants differed greatly. Previous chapters have shown how, emotion and certain forms of cosmopolitanism were important in engendering and sustaining desires for political action amongst my participants. However, this chapter has highlighted the importance of focusing on individual subjectivities, and the way they can act in conversation/disagreement with one another. By doing so, the multiplicity of cosmopolitanisms which existed within the space of migrant activism becomes visible. So too do the complexities of unravelling the ways class and political allegiance were understood. The space created by privileged migrants engaging in long-distance activism was one of both friction and cooperation. Their possibility of expressing openness towards one another impacted upon the possibility of sustained collaboration occurring between individuals, and their desires to continue being a member of a given group. As such, the ways in which migrants accounted for their own political activation in this context was intimately related to the variations within individual inhabitations of different kinds of cosmopolitanism, and the possibilities this created for overcoming intra-class conflicts. This impacted upon the likelihood of an individual wishing to continue cooperating collaboratively with other migrants, even at the same time that it did not change the nature of their feelings towards what was happening at home.

Chapter Eight:

Conclusion

How do privileged Mexican migrants in Barcelona account for their own political activation?

In the introduction I argued that neither the literature on migrant activism to date, nor studies of privileged migration, allow us to fully understand the way Mexican migrants in Barcelona accounted for their political participation with the homeland from abroad. Studies within these literatures have shown how the act of migrating can lead to the articulation of new political identities on the basis of experiencing marginality and ambiguity (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Kearney 2000; Stephen 2007). They have also shown how the experience of privileged migration can lead to migrants changing the way they think about home (Ley Cervantes 2012; Wiles 2008), as well as experiencing a newly fragmented sense of belonging (Amit 1998). Neither of these perspectives, however, fully accounted for the emergence of long-distance activism amongst Mexican migrants in Barcelona. In this thesis I argued that individual migrant narratives suggest that emotional and cosmopolitan experiences were the key to understanding why some privileged Mexicans became involved in political action oriented towards Mexico.

This account has attempted to dwell on the personally felt nature of the way Mexican migrants related to home from Barcelona. It has located the emergence of long-distance activism amongst privileged migrants within narratives which describe a processual transformation in the way individuals thought about their homeland. I have shown how such transformations were

situated within the emotionally rooted knowledge of the world which was gained as a result of specific migration experiences and engaging in particular political projects, such as counting for *Menos Días Aquí* (Milton 2005b). They allowed for new ways of thinking about Mexico as a nation, and also created the possibility for individuals to question their own place within Mexican society. Such changes in the way migrants thought about home were personally *felt* (Josephides 2005). At the same time that they were rooted in the social, they were intimately tied to the bodily nature of emotion (Svašek 2005b) They meant that migrants lived Mexico from abroad through intensities of emotion from which it was difficult to extract themselves. It was this which contained the potential for more collective forms of action, and for such responses to extend beyond individuals (Richard and Rudnyckj 2009: 59). Individual emotions could bring migrants together via a felt need to be amongst others who were experiencing similar feelings. Through this we see the emergence of political collectives oriented towards Mexico. At the same time, such emotional narratives took on a particular cultural coherence by continuing and extending historical tropes of social justice within the country, such as those occurring in the strong emotional displays by individuals participating in the Mexican Revolution. Emotion has a history of creating a means to undermine social divisions and inequalities within Mexico (Noble 2013), which gives a particular form of coherence to emotional migrant narratives in Barcelona (Linde 1993).

The experience of migrating to Barcelona brought with it particular implications for individuals. These implications became most visible during my interviews with migrants. The way they talked about their lives in the city, and in Catalonia as a whole, demonstrated a particular pattern of ambiguity (Brennan 2004: 3; Kearney 2000). By indicating a sense of contentment *and* dislocation in Barcelona, as well as a longing *and* estrangement from Mexico, I argued that migrants' narratives showed how they became suspended between the two places. This was a reaction to migration which was rooted in ambivalence: migrants were unable to feel a sense of belonging in Catalonia, but they were also unable to articulate a straightforward longing for Mexico. Individual narratives showed how migrants lived their migration through a fragmented sense of belonging.

More often than not, this was rooted in a sense of dislocation from both Mexican and Catalan societies. It resulted in a state of questioning within individuals in which they began to evaluate society from newly critical angles. This had the potential to reveal alternative avenues for political action, and highlighted aspects of home with which they were not content. Their migration became transformational by changing the way they thought about home.

It is in looking at the way migrants described their reactions to the news coming out of Mexico that we could see the way in which the ambiguous implications of migration intersected with particular emotional experiences. In chapter four I argued that the way migrants talked about home during interviews resulted in emotionally saturated narratives. I also showed how this pervasiveness of emotion in the way they related to home became visible in their behaviour amongst other migrants. But, merely identifying the presence of emotion in their narratives was not in itself revealing. However, asking what such expressions were doing, and why they were expressed in such a manner, revealed an important part of the process through which their activism emerged. I argued that emotional reactions to the news were rooted in new experiences of self and societal critique. These were intimately related to the transformations in how home was viewed which began as a result of having migrated. As a result of such self-critiques, the experience of encountering the news became doubly jarring for individuals: it presented migrants with violent imagery which simultaneously obliged them to locate themselves within the structures of blame behind such images. Home became a painful experience, and the result was an outpouring of emotion from which individuals became unable to extract themselves. One way to cope with this sense of entrapment was to be amongst others who shared in those feelings. This, however, represented a particular form of continuity with historical tropes of social change within Mexico, and so resulted in a certain culturally coherent form of engaging in political action (Noble 2013, Linde 1993).

These transformations in how migrants thought about home did not occur in a particular instance. These were not rooted in singular, isolated incidents. Instead, they were the result of a

cumulative process of ambiguously experiencing migration and responding to the news from home in emotional ways. Transformations in political consciousness here were not the work of a moment, or located in a specific feeling of moral outrage or personal revelation (Erickson Nepstad and Smith 2001; Wood 2003). Instead, they were related to the way changes in consciousness were formed within individual biographies over time and through experiences which were particular (Andrews 1991; Yarrow 2008). They were part of a process of 'becoming' (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 3). It is here that we see how emotional knowledge of the world carries with it the political potential to change it (Clough and Halley 2007: 2).

Migrants' commitment to acting upon home in political ways could become solidified by their participation in certain activist projects. In chapter five, I showed how the experience of counting the dead in *Menos Días Aquí* had particular implications for the way in which activists understood their relation to certain 'unequal' others within the country. This became apparent in the way migrants talked about their connections to victims, and the way in which they rejected any identification with undesirable subjectivities. Such felt relations were lived through emotional outpourings, and individuals were not immediately able to theorise upon their significance. The key impact of such experiences, however, lay in the fact that migrants came to feel a new sense of connection to others within Mexico who were suffering. Later, the political implication of such experiences became visible: they changed the way individuals thought about inequality and power structures in Mexico, and also engendered feelings of having a responsibility to act upon them.

The political ramifications of the personal transformations experienced by migrants resulted in a new kind of openness to others within Mexico which crossed divisions of class and race. They undermined structural inequalities within Mexican society, at least within the imaginaries of individuals, by allowing privileged migrants to feel a sense of belonging and connection with others from whom their lives had previously seemed divorced (Mookherjee 2011b). Emotional ways of experiencing migration to Catalonia and of viewing Mexico from abroad created the possibility for expressing alternative national cosmopolitanisms. Such openings to unequal others within

Mexico were embodied by migrants through particular intensities of feeling, such as grief and pain (Csordas 1993; Csordas 1994b). The new bodily and emotionally felt knowledge of Mexico could make visible at a conscious level the structures they now wished to critique, and against which they desired to protest. An embodied response, here, could engender newly articulated political views as well as a sense of having an obligation to act – it became a politicised experience (French 1994). It also allowed for (and gave coherence to) emotionally infused political acts (Noble 2013, Linde 1993).

Emotions, then, were important in creating the possibility for new ways of thinking about home, and in engendering a felt need to be amongst others who shared in those feelings. At the same time, different ways of inhabiting cosmopolitanism impacted upon the way in which such feelings were translated into forms of political action. They also affected the likelihood of an individual continuing to engage in collective action alongside other migrants. Therefore, I argue that the emergence of privileged migrant activism cannot be separated from the multiple ways in which an individual can exercise cosmopolitan openness towards the subjectivities of different kinds of others, and from individual interpretations of their place in the world (Abu-Rabia 2008; Carro-Ripalda 2009; Werbner 2008a).

Wishing to express and assert connections with others who were suffering in Mexico could lead to forms of protest aimed at publicly expressing feelings of grief, and of visibilising those victims (Wise 2004). They could result in the inhabitation of transnational spaces which became imbued with particular feelings, such as fear. Through the inhabitation of such alternative national cosmopolitanisms, discourses around the legitimacy to act from abroad became intertwined with assertions of 'distance' as enabling (Trundle 2012; Yarrow 2010). At the same time, more universalised and political assertions of cosmopolitanism could have different implications for the way protest actions were carried out. Locating the legitimacy to act within the responsibility to engage with political struggles no matter one's locality meant that protest became more about building solidarity with others, as opposed to expressing grief and empathy. Again, the way in which individuals articulated their own legitimacy to act became linked with individual biographies of

experience (Yarrow 2008; Yarrow 2011). Meanwhile, being able to express openness towards the subjectivities of other activists was a key factor in determining the likelihood of migrants continuing to work together *collectively*, even though this did not necessarily change individual desires to act.

Most visible here are the complex ways in which emotion and cosmopolitanism intertwined within migrant narratives when accounting for their political participation with the homeland. When viewing such narratives, the sense of transformation and the personally *felt* nature of such changes become most potent, as do the particular social histories of their emergence. It also allows for comparisons to be made in the language and perspectives of different migrants. Such comparisons have the potential to both highlight commonalities of experience amongst migrants, *and* bring to light the ways individual views diverged from another. Asking why this was so brings the diverse ways of being cosmopolitan within the same ethnographic field of action into view. Most importantly, they emphasise the importance of specific local histories of place and personally felt experiences in influencing the processes through which privileged migrant activism can emerge, whilst demanding a recognition of the coherency which emotionally infused acts can represent.

Afterword

This ethnography has opened a window onto a specific time and place, and onto a specific moment in the lives of individuals. It captures a certain point in the life histories of my participants – the point at which they became involved in activism oriented towards Mexico. However, it is important to note that people change through time, as do their possibilities for acting. Sophie Day argues that temporality is important for documenting changes in ethnographic knowledge. In her study of sex workers in London, she demonstrates the way time itself can alter the way our participants understand and articulate their experiences, the way the anthropologist interprets them and, also, the relationship between participant and ethnographer (Day 2007). As I mentioned in chapter two, my field was transient due to the constant movements of my participants. Before I left the field, and after, a number of activists moved back to Mexico. I have since watched their increasingly committed political activity from afar – carried out at great risk to their personal safety. I have also, however, witnessed the dissatisfaction of some with the responses of others in Mexico and their disappointment with the normalisation of everyday violence which has taken place there. Despite the potentiality they saw in being able to act from within Mexico, they are now looking for ways to return to Europe. Others experienced difficulties in establishing themselves in new places within Mexico, and experienced depression due to the stress of their activist commitments. This has meant that the demands of a new job and emotional fatigue have caused such individuals to take a temporary break from activism.

Some people who remained in Barcelona have continued to carry out their political activities without disruption, sometimes even expanding the range of topics they work with. Indeed, inter-group collaborations between certain collectives have only increased. Others have since gotten married, had children, or been met with increasing work demands. Some have continued

with their activism in spite of these changes. Others have decided to lay their political commitments to rest whilst they focus on such personal issues. For those still wishing to participate politically with Mexico from abroad, their ability to do so in large numbers has been compromised by the coming and going of migrants in the city, and the concomitant reductions in their numbers.

What *is* apparent from my conversations with the people I worked with is that their *concern* for what is happening in Mexico and the *desire* to do something has not changed. Documenting whether or not the attitudes and political commitment of my participants will change through time is undoubtedly a topic for future research. However, the fact that their lives, and perhaps their personal outlook, may have changed since I carried out my fieldwork does not compromise the validity of this study. Such changes in the life history of an individual are to be expected. Rather, by dwelling on the unfolding of experience and the narration of feeling in the moment, this account has been able to bring into view those factors which contributed to the emergence of long-distance activism amongst my participants at a certain point in time. What the future holds remains to be seen.

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