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“You have to do everything in your power so that this does not happen to anyone else”. Contention dynamics against the Mexican war on drugs and crime: a case study of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity

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## **Abstract**

In 2006, then Mexican President Felipe Calderón declared a ‘war’ against criminal organisations that were beginning to control some of the country’s territories. Consequently, the number of murders and disappearances of people began to increase steadily by tens of thousands. Far from acknowledging the errors of the strategy, the authorities constantly criminalised the victims and denied the tragic consequences of the use of the military against drug cartels. After the murder of his son on 28 March 2011, the poet Javier Sicilia started leading mobilisations in the state of Morelos to protest the violence. In just a few days, the actions expanded to virtually all regions of the country embracing relatives of victims, activists and organisations of very different backgrounds, forming the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD).

This thesis comprises an in-depth case study of the MPJD. After providing an overview of the context in which the mobilisations started and my research methods, I develop thematic chapters. In the first one, I analyse the recruitment dynamics of the MPJD. These pages contribute to the literature by advancing the understanding of how people without prior political experience or links to a mobilised group join and participate in protest. This, moreover, helps in refining rather than reifying the function of social networks. The second chapter explains the upward scale-shift process of mobilisation and the response given by the government through the analysis of coalition building, framing and counter-framing. The results of the analysis help to specify the conditions that facilitate not only the development of alliances, but also those that lead to their accelerated breakdown. Regarding framing, the work contributes to understanding which attributes facilitate resonance and alignment amongst audiences with contrasting characteristics. Furthermore, the discussion around counter-framing highlights how official responses influence the discursive processes of contentious actors, whose opportunities are not the same in ‘the streets’ and in official spaces. Next, the third chapter examines the type of social ties formed through the involvement in the contentious performances led by the relatives of victims of extreme violence. Bringing together the literature on social movements and a body of Latin American research on “emotional communities”, I argue that the MPJD fostered a political-emotional community in which the public narration of suffering made victims and non-victims coalesce to demand justice collectively. Overall, this chapter advances our understanding of the dynamics through which allies that are not directly aggrieved by extreme violence develop a sense of community with the victims. Likewise, it develops four empirical dimensions for the analysis of political-emotional communities: the role

of *testimonios* (testimonial narratives), the ethics developed during contention, the fluctuations in participation, and the costs and risks involved in the mobilisations.

The last two chapters focus on the outcomes of the MPJD. The fourth one encompasses the political and cultural outcomes contributing to the literature in two ways: First, by discussing how achievements in the policy process can demobilise some groups but mobilise others; and second, by explaining how the spillover of a contentious actor can consolidate a social movement community in an emergent contentious field. Finally, the fifth chapter analyses the biographical consequences of participation in victim-led mobilisations. These pages provide an account of how the lives of the participants have been influenced due to their involvement in contention. This chapter advances the understanding of the interplay between social relations and cognitions that lead participants to modify their worldviews.

In an academic sense, this thesis introduces a series of thematic chapters that provide empirical evidence to refine several areas of the theory to better understand various processes related to social mobilisation. Regarding the importance that this thesis can have for the activists and the families of the victims, my work is, first, a systematisation of their campaigns and experiences; second, an acknowledgement of the transcendence of the actions that they have been carrying out sustainedly during a decade; and third, this research is a space for memory, so that their names and those of their relatives are not forgotten, so that the demand for justice does not end.

## **Lay summary**

In 2006, the former Mexican president Felipe Calderón decided to start a “war” against the criminal cartels by using the armed forces in policing tasks. This conflict led to a dramatic rise in the number of murdered and disappeared people, but the government maintained that the thousands of crimes were only committed amongst criminals. In 2011, when a crime group murdered the son of a renowned poet and political analyst, friends of the poet organised a protest to demand justice and prevent the criminalization of the youngster. In a few days, the protests spread to virtually the entire country and the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD) was formed, bringing together relatives of victims, activists and organisations to demand a halt to the war.

This thesis is an in-depth study of the MPJD that explains many aspects, from its emergence to the outcomes it has had. First, I analyse the irruption of the MPJD considering the characteristics of the activists and relatives of victims who were involved at the beginning. Besides, I explain how their emotional experiences made them prone to protest against the so-called war. This chapter allows us to better understand why people decide to join social movements in contexts of violence.

Second, I focus on explaining how the MPJD mobilisations went from being small protests in only one city to massive marches in almost the entire country, as well as how the government reacted to this. My argument is that the discourse of the MPJD and the relationships of its most seasoned activists allowed it to make alliances with organisations in several regions to carry out large caravans. The government, for its part, sought to limit the scope of the MPJD through a series of dialogues in which the president tried to block criticism, arguing that the MPJD was actually seeking the same thing as the government. The findings of this chapter highlight how alliances are at risk of breaking down under certain circumstances and the strategies with which governments try to stop the expansion of social movements.

Third, I analyse the type of social relations that the MPJD created amongst its participants. These relationships have as core elements the victims and the public narration of their grief. From the constant involvement in the MPJD events, victims and non-victims developed a sense of community that I explain from four elements: the importance of the testimonial narratives, the ethical considerations of the participants, the changes in the frequency of participation, and the costs and risks of becoming involved in these types of mobilisations. This chapter advances our understanding of how highly emotional campaigns bring together individuals to demand justice for the victims.

The last two chapters study the outcomes of the MPJD. The fourth chapter is divided into two broad parts. First, I explain how the MPJD achieved the enactment of a law to protect the rights of the victims and why this achievement stopped the mobilisations. Second, I explain how, after this, the MPJD participants formed new groups to perform new forms of mobilisation that the MPJD refused to carry out. In general, the analysis of this chapter allows us to understand how the actions of a social movement impact the broad socio-political context of a country. Finally, the fifth chapter focuses on understanding how activism has influenced the lives of those who are involved in social mobilisations led by relatives of victims of violence. My argument focuses on three main areas: the changes in the interpersonal networks of the participants, the acquisition of relevant skills, and the worldviews they have developed after their involvement in mobilisation.

In general, this thesis offers not only an academic project that refines concepts and theories in social movement studies, but also an acknowledgement dedicated to those who have worked for years to demand justice for the tens of thousands of murdered and disappeared people.

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## Introduction

On the morning of 28 March 2021, a group of people gathered in the main square of Cuernavaca, the capital of the state of Morelos, Mexico. For 10 years, just outside the Government Palace—where the local governor works—there has been an *ofrenda* in memory of the victims of violence of the so-called ‘war’ on drugs and crime in Mexico, started by the former president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012).<sup>1</sup> On such a day, the group of people mounted a commemorative mosaic next to the *ofrenda* and, afterwards, the poet Javier Sicilia gave a speech. “All [the] governments and parties have been on the side of the perpetrators and never of the victims. They, in complicity with criminal groups [...] have turned the country into an immense clandestine pit full of butchered people, raped women”, and “massacred girls, boys and youngsters”, he condemned (MPJD 2021). It could be said—in awareness of the simplification that this would entail—that, at least symbolically, the set-up of this *ofrenda* a decade earlier marked the start of the actions of what would later become one of the main challenges to the Mexican ‘war’ on drugs, a challenge to the normalisation of the violence of the cartels and its correlate of political violence, a challenge to the governments criminalisation of the victims, a challenge that would adopt the name of Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD).

This research is an in-depth study of the MPJD. Although there is no consensus on the definition of what exactly is a social movement, it is possible to identify some elements that highlight the relevance of the study of the MPJD using social movements theories. Tilly and Tarrow (Tarrow 2011; Tarrow and Tilly 2009; Tilly and Tarrow 2015) define social movements as sustained collective challenges in which claims are directed towards elites, opponents and authorities, resorting to repeated public performances and relying on several organisations, networks and solidarities to hold collective action. Based on the revision of other definitions, Diani (1992) proposes to understand social movements as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of actors that are engaged in political or cultural conflicts, based on shared collective identities. Likewise, Crossley (2004) argues that movements are a relatively durable network of agents and groups that communicate, sustain and transmit a culture of resistance. As will be read in this thesis, before the formation of the MPJD there was already a certain articulation amongst

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<sup>1</sup> *Ofrendas* are commonly used during the Day of the Dead as a manner of respect and remembrance. They consist of a ritual display of candles, flowers, photos and, sometimes, objects that belonged to the dead person.

activists, organisations and relatives of victims of various types of violence in the context of the war in Mexico. Nonetheless, its scope was rather limited. This changed after 28 March 2011, when the MPJD—whose transcendence is widely recognised in the Mexican scholarship (Cadena-Roa 2019; Illades 2017; López Leyva 2019; Tirado 2019)—started bringing together participants from virtually the entire country.

The MPJD is not an organisation; it lacks a formal structure, resources, or a workspace. Nonetheless, for 10 years it has achieved the informal articulation of multiple actors—including organisations, activist networks, groups of diverse profiles and multiple individuals, whose objectives and ideologies are far from homogeneous—to carry out public demonstrations that have fractured the official narrative of violence, demanded a halt to war and promoted solidarity with the victims. The performances, frames and, in a general sense, campaigns of the MPJD have been key, as is argued in this thesis, for the consolidation of the field of contentious politics against the war-like violence in Mexico. Thus, social movement theories are fit to analyse the MPJD and, in turn, the analysis of the MPJD is fit to refine social movement theories.

It must be noted that my research does not seek to understand the dynamics of the MPJD from exclusively one perspective or to fill a gap in a specific area of the literature. Rather, my work incorporates a series of thematic analyses that range from the dynamics of initial participation to the outcomes of mobilisation. Before the introduction of analytical chapters, I provide the readers with a background on the Mexican socio-political context to understand the crisis of criminal violence that started in 2006 and the official framing of such violence. Likewise, the background chapter offers the reader an account of the main socio-political responses to the insecurity crisis and a descriptive outlook of the main MPJD actions from 2011 to 2021. Then, I present the research design of my case study explaining my methods and the ethical considerations of this project.

The thesis does not include a conventional theoretical discussion developed prior to the analysis because, as stated, my main chapters are thematically guided, so I decided to engage with the literature on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Chapter one focuses on the recruitment dynamics of the MPJD; in other words, it explains why activists and relatives of victims joined the mobilisations back in 2011. Next, chapter two encompasses two interrelated topics, the expansion or upward scale shift (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) of contention and the counter-framing. That is, those pages analyse, first, how the MPJD actions went from the setting-up of an *ofrenda* as a protest against violence to the organisation of caravans across the country to make the pain of war visible

and, second, the response given by the government of Calderón. For the third chapter, I focus on understanding the type of social ties created through the mobilisations led by victims of the war in Mexico. This topic provides a discussion on how contentious performances around grief and pain foster a strong sense of community amongst participants.

The last two chapters explore the different types of outcomes of the MPJD. The fourth chapter covers the political and cultural arenas, explaining, first, how the mobilisations led to the enactment of a law to protect the rights of the victims and, second, how the MPJD had a spillover effect (Meyer and Whittier 1994) that influenced the formation of new groups led by victims' relatives whose main actions involve brigades to look for disappeared people in clandestine pits in the countryside. Finally, the fifth chapter studies the biographical consequences for the participants in this field of contention. Furthermore, it provides an account of how the political, cultural and biographical outcomes are empirically intertwined. All these chapters, besides, discuss the respective contributions and theoretical relevance of my arguments.

The increase in both political violence and the opening of human rights organisations over the first decade of the 2000s in Colombia introduced an unfortunate opportunity to study that type of political participation (Tate 2007). Mexico presents a disastrous parallel scenario given the increase in criminal and political violence in recent years as well as in social mobilisation and political contention led by relatives of victims. Thus, the country provides an opportunity to understand this form of activism and its effects, while also engaging in a project of committed social research (Milan 2014) to advance the victims' demands from the academic arena.

## Background

Any analysis of social movements needs an account of the environment in which contention happens to understand how power and the structures of the State influence the political and social arenas for activists (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016). This background offers an overview in four sections. First, I present in a general way the Mexican socio-political context of the most recent decades to understand the crisis of criminal violence that persists to this day. Then, I offer a broad overview of the official discourse around violence that took place during the government of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012); this will show the symbolic dimensions of the Mexican State's positions regarding the topic and the meanings it sought to impose on violent crimes. After that, I discuss how the government responded to some of the social and political criticism towards the insecurity crisis prior to the formation of the MPJD. Finally, I briefly describe how the MPJD started and the actions it has carried out since 2011 — this will make the reader familiar with the case under study to better understand the subsequent chapters.

### 1. Mexican political context

#### *Drug trafficking, militarisation and criminal violence*

One of the most important events in Mexico at the end of the 20th century was the so-called democratic transition. Here, I outline some of the main characteristics of the regime before and after such a milestone in the country's history by focusing on the policies against drug trafficking.

After living several years of violent confrontations in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, the political system in Mexico was characterised by the consolidation of an authoritarian regime of a hegemonic party led by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*). Since its founding in 1929, first with the names of National Revolutionary Party and Party of the Mexican Revolution, the PRI ruled the municipal, state and federal levels of government without serious electoral competition for decades (J. L. Reyna and Weinert 1977). The first major defeat occurred in 1989, in the elections for the governorship of the state of Baja California Norte. Then, in 1997 the PRI lost its absolute majority in Congress, and, finally, lost the presidency of the country for the first time in 2000. Over seven decades, the PRI developed corporatist structures in practically all of Mexico, which allowed a generalised, though

not total, control over political and social activities in the three levels of government (Hernández Rodríguez 2016; Gaxiola Lazcano 2021).

Aligned with the prohibitionism led by the United States of America, Mexico implemented several policies against drugs since the early twentieth century, which served as an incentive for the USA government to remain silent in the face of the undemocratic roots of the Mexican regime (Enciso 2010). However, the economic potential of the production and transfer of drugs through Mexico encouraged the establishment of mechanisms to negotiate spaces of impunity between the groups of traffickers and the power elite (Enciso 2010). Thus, linked to Richard Nixon's ultraconservative positions as president of the USA, the Mexican government involved the military in a "permanent campaign" in drug seizure operations during the first half of the 1970s — even with "brutal human rights violations", these campaigns received the USA support (Enciso 2010, 80). Later, due to some issues regarding the murder of an undercover agent of the USA Drug Enforcement Administration in February 1985, the Mexican government adopted a national security discourse around drug trafficking, which would be radicalised during the 90s (Enciso 2010).

Throughout his term as president of Mexico, Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) intensified the use of the military in the so-called combat against drugs. Although it was presented as a temporary measure in the face of the inability of the civilian police to confront this type of crime, the military occupied key positions in the police departments in virtually the entire country (Chabat 2010). This directly involved the military in tasks of public security which, in the short term, increased the number of human rights violations and evidenced the corruption networks in which the military authorities were immersed (Enciso 2010). Ultimately, even with their grey area of more or less public tolerance, prohibitionist policies had produced a network of political relations between criminal leaders and ruling elites (Escalante 2013).<sup>2</sup>

The presidential elections of 2000 marked the end of seven decades of PRI rule in the presidency. When Vicente Fox, of the National Action Party (PAN, *Partido Acción Nacional*)—an ultraconservative party linked to religious groups and business elites—was elected president,

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<sup>2</sup> It is essential to mention that, although femicide is a multi-causal phenomenon (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Weissman 2005) only partially related to drug-trafficking, during the 90s, the hundreds of brutal murders of women in Juárez—a border town in the state of Chihuahua—attracted international attention to Mexico. Faced with the crisis, both the state government and the federal government began to implement various measures and programs. For their part, the families of the victims began to organise to demand justice and lead their own investigations. The topic is beyond the scope of this work, but a recent review can be read in García-Del Moral (2016).

public opinion was initially favourable and multiple analysts and scholars celebrated this result as the consolidation of a democracy. However, Fox's presidency did not represent a change in the drug trafficking policy: there were some legal reforms, sensational announcements of seizures and arrests of criminal leaders, and the continuation of the militarisation of the police and the prosecution offices (Enciso 2010; Chabat 2010). Following the clashes between cartels in the northern region of the country and the emergence of new criminal organisations, the perception of the problem did take a turn because the idea that the Mexican State had lost territorial control began to be generalised (Enciso 2010). Likewise, scholars developed the hypothesis that alternation in the three levels of government complicated agreements with criminal groups by breaking several corruption dynamics, so cartels fragmented and thus many factions started to compete to control territories and trafficking routes (Chabat 2010; Serrano 2018). In short, even though prohibitionist and militaristic policies continued to guide the government action against drug trafficking, the change of authorities arguably broke the control of agreements with criminal gangs, a situation that increased the intensity and frequency of their clashes and provoked a more violent response from the State.

#### *Calderón's election and the war declaration*

The conditions in which Felipe Calderón, Fox's successor, became president influenced practically his entire term. For this reason, it is pertinent to comment briefly on this matter. During his term as Mexico City's governor from 2000 to 2006, Andrés Manuel López Obrador—a politician of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD, *Partido de la Revolución Democrática*) back then identified with left-wing perspectives—became very popular across the country. To prevent his participation in the 2006 elections, Fox demanded a political trial against him. López Obrador was impeached but, due to legal gaps, his candidacy could not be judicially disallowed. Thus, the 2006 election was the most competitive in the country's history. According to the results, Calderón obtained 35.89% of the votes, while López Obrador reached 35.31%. The partisan left led by López Obrador demanded a new count of all the ballot boxes. Nonetheless, the electoral authorities only approved the reopening of a small number of ballots. López Obrador denounced an electoral fraud and, followed by thousands of supporters, led a blockade on the main avenue of the capital, which lasted for 47 days and only ended after the electoral authorities officially declared Calderón the winner of the presidency.



On 1 December 2006, Calderón's inauguration was marked by protests. Legislators from the PRD placed chains and locks on the accesses to the main hall of the Chamber of Deputies, so Calderón had to enter through a backdoor that would ensure his access. In addition, he was accompanied by members of the military presidential guards, who, contrary to the legal provisions, accessed the building being armed (Garduño, Méndez, and Pérez 2006). Due to all of this, Calderón became the first president who could not deliver his inaugural speech before Congress. Oppositional politicians and left-wing media labelled him as the spurious president from that moment until the end of his administration.

Considering these circumstances, Calderón had two main problems when he became president. First, the appearance of new criminal organisations and their continuous clashes with authorities in certain regions, which had been for some time strengthening the idea that the State was losing territorial presence in front of crime groups. Second, serious and constant accusations of electoral fraud throughout the country, to which Calderón responded that he won no matter how it was (*haiga sido como haiga sido*) (Meyer Cossío 2015). Thus, facing violence in several regions and needing to strengthen his mandate, as part of his first statement as president, Calderón declared that he would be at the forefront of “a battle we have to fight” against criminal groups, even if it would “cost a lot of money [...] and [...] human lives”, because the State had to guarantee “our lives and our heritage” (Calderón Hinojosa 2006, 22–23). Days later, the government started dispatching members of the military—including the army and the navy—along with the Federal Police to take control of local police corporations and directly confront the cartels.

Government communication was embedded in a military scenery and Calderón soon started talking about a “war” demanding support “beyond any partisan flag and any particular interest” (Calderón Hinojosa 2007a, 41–43). At the beginning of this “war”, none of the states' governors expressed disagreements with the federal government's strategy (Astorga 2015; Cervantes Porrúa 2012). On the contrary, there were even collective pronouncements to communicate their “recognition and adherence” (Astorga 2015, 24). While some legislators from oppositional political parties raised criticism towards the strategy calling the operations “cosmetic and mediatic measures” (Becerril, Méndez, and Garduño 2007), Calderón kept reiterating that tackling insecurity required time, money and lives, “which a war of this dimension takes”, so that “the more violence, the more energetic” the official response would be (Astorga 2015, 28–29).

The results of the war were disastrous (Tables 1 and 2) and several studies conclude that the participation of the military in operations against drug trafficking influenced the rise in the indicators of violence (Atuesta 2019; Atuesta, Siordia, and Madrazo Lajous 2016; Madrazo Lajous, Romero Vadillo, and Calzada Olvera 2017). According to official sources, which are arguably conservative, Calderón’s term registered more than 121,000 murders and around 16,100 disappearances. The violent trend has not stopped since then — from 2007 to 2020, at least 351,100 murders have occurred and almost 70,000 people have been reported as disappeared. As part of this violent context, between January 2007 and August 2018, at least 1,018 clandestine graves were identified in the country, containing 2,078 bodies and 201,431 skeletal remains (CNDH 2017; 2018a). No matter how shocking the figures are, no indicator will manage to communicate tens of thousands of stories of horror and pain. However, they allow a general approach to understanding the situation of violence that the country is still facing.

**Table 1. Deaths due to murder in Mexico 2001-2019<sup>3</sup>**

Vicente Fox’s administration						
Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Total</b>	10,285	10,088	10,087	9,329	9,921	10,452
Felipe Calderón’s administration						
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Total</b>	8,867	14,006	19,803	25,757	27,213	25,967
Enrique Peña’s administration						
Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Total</b>	23,063	20,010	20,762	24,559	31,174	36,685
Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s administration						
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Total</b>	36,661	36,579	-	-	-	-

Source: INEGI (2022).

**Table 1. Number of disappeared persons in Mexico 2007-2020**

Felipe Calderón’s administration						
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Total</b>	610	1,060	1,701	3,876	4,905	4,012
Enrique Peña’s administration						
Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Total</b>	4,603	4,714	4,032	5,904	7,857	7,205
Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s administration						
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Total</b>	8,675	8,178	NA	-	-	-

Source: CNB (2022).

<sup>3</sup> Vicente Fox was proclaimed constitutional president on December 1, 2000; Calderón, on the same date of 2006; Peña and López Obrador, likewise in 2012 and 2018 respectively. For this reason, the table does not consider as part of their terms the indicator of those years, since they only governed for a month.

## 2. Official discourse around violence

In a recent literature review, Zepeda Gil (2018) argues that scholars have explained the causality of violence in Mexico from seven explanatory approaches. Rather than contradicting each other, these theses highlight different independent variables to explain violence but, in general, agree that Calderón's policy marked an increase in violence. Since this work does not seek to analyse the causes of violence or acts of violence in themselves, I only provide a very general overview of these perspectives based on Zepeda Gil's (2018) work. First, some argue that the government military operations directly caused the violence either because the criminals reacted by murdering authorities and dispersing to other territories or because the murder or arrest of criminal leaders led to the violent rearrangement of their organisations. Second, others claim that a change in the internal drug market was in development, although only in certain regions, before Calderón's administration so the government action only added to a violent criminal conflict. Third, the intergovernmental incoordination thesis maintains that attempts by criminal organisations to co-opt local governments triggered violent episodes, especially in states governed by opposition parties. Fourth, several authors argue, with different nuances, the weakness of the Mexican State due to the relationships that it established for decades with organised crime. Fifth, although they agree on the weight that Calderón's policy had, there are scholars who highlight the importance of external factors, such as changes in the Colombian drug market—because murders increased in regions of Mexico where South American cocaine was received—and the end of the ban on the sale of assault weapons in the USA. Sixth, some researchers suggest that socioeconomic inequality created the conditions for increased violence because people with the lowest economic resources were recruited for crime. Finally, other works focus on explaining that the crisis of violence in the country is like those of a new type of civil war with an economic background; that is, they identify Mexico as a case of criminal war against the State.

In any case, after the so-called war began, the daily life of multiple states in Mexico included the constant finding of tortured, decapitated, skinned, dismembered, and charred bodies. In parallel, road blockades with burning trailers and the placement of banners with threats to other criminal groups, authorities or the general population, became common elements of the Mexican landscape.<sup>4</sup> Despite, or precisely because of, the extreme violence of these criminal acts, the media recorded daily the bloody displays of various criminal groups. Thus, Calderón demanded the media to

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<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of these actions as discursive and performative exercises, see Campbell (2014).

disseminate actions against crime instead of “sharing with the criminals the strategy of sowing terror” (Herrera Beltrán 2008). However, since the battle or war against crime was the most mentioned subject in the presidential speeches (Jiménez and Meyenberg 2019; Norzagaray 2010), both the development of extreme violence and the constant statements around governmental operations led the press to give most of its attention to the security policy (Lendo 2019, 62).

Scholars have discussed the importance of observing the role of public discourse around the topics on which it is intended to limit attention, since silence and denials are usually products of the asymmetric distribution of power (Zerubavel 2006). Moreover, the discursive construction of the State involves the reinforcement of its symbolic representation both for its agents and the citizens (A. Gupta 1995). Thus, I provide a general outlook on the official discourse around violence during Calderón’s term to get a better idea of the meanings that the government sought to impose on violence. Using data from a documentary review based on two collection of discourses pronounced by Calderón (C. Castillo 2013; Presidencia de la República 2012), as well as press reports, videos and published academic work by other authors, I offer evidence on three dimensions of the official discourse: the alleged necessity of fighting drugs, the division between enemies of the nation and patriots, and the State denials that excluded the victims from the political arena.

### *Linking drugs and violence to justify a war*

A militant of an ultraconservative party, Calderón openly criticised drug use and, of course, opposed its regularisation in the country. Hence, the official discourse fostered a negative perception of drug use, arguing that this was a direct access to criminality (Ortiz Espinoza 2019). With such a reasoning, Calderón maintained that, in the absence of safe public spaces, many children had “no choice but to sit all afternoon in front of television and video games” so they did not “develop fully” and ended up “consuming drugs” (Calderón Hinojosa 2008b, 61). Likewise, the president defined drugs as “the slavery of the twenty-first century” and said that those who consumed them had such a need that they began “to open their mother’s purse [...], to steal homes or vehicles [...] in order to pay for their addiction” so they became recruited into organised crime (Calderón Hinojosa 2008e, 126). Thus, since drugs were “the symbol of death”, he had to “assume the costs and risks of taking a long road [...] to move drugs away” from the youngsters (Calderón Hinojosa 2009a, 264) and “free” them from their “slavery” (Calderón Hinojosa 2008a).

From the official point of view, drugs generated violence in the country from a change in the traffickers' business model. According to the government's diagnosis, before the 1990s, organised crime focused its action on the transfer of drugs to the USA adopting a low-profile business. However, given the alleged strengthening of the economy after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, criminals began to look for a local market controlling complete territories through violence (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2010b). Hence, a fundamental factor in achieving public security was to wage "a frontal war against organised crime" (Calderón 2007, cited in Norzagaray 2010, 176). This framing of the problem led Calderón to assure on multiple occasions that the government's operations did not provoke violence, but that "the violence of the mafias motivated" the government "to mobilise the entire force of the State" (Calderón Hinojosa 2008c, 73) and that his "responsibility" was to "persevere in the fight against organised crime" (Calderón Hinojosa 2008a, 55).

### *Patriots against enemies*

The governmental discourse also simplified in Manichaeic terms the actors involved in the conflict: the "enemies" and the "patriots" (Madrazo Lajous 2016). Regarding the first group, Madrazo Lajous (2016) argues that the official discourse altered the distinctions between criminals—citizens who enjoy the protection of laws—and enemies—polity outsiders representing a threat to its sovereignty—which promoted the dehumanisation of alleged drug traffickers to facilitate some tolerance to government abuse. From this perspective, the war was "not [about] some Mexicans against others" (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2010a); on the contrary, the "people of Mexico" faced "a new enemy of the nation [...]: organised crime" (Calderón 2007, cited in Jiménez and Meyenberg 2019, 40). Thus, Calderón expected "all Mexicans" to "close ranks in our army's struggle against the common enemy" (Calderón Hinojosa 2009c, 146–47). This framing of the conflict took the form of a defence of the civil order against outsiders who did not belong in it (Velázquez Ramírez 2012) and lacked human characteristics since they were "vile and heartless criminals" (Calderón 2012, cited in Madrazo Lajous 2016, 37) and a "social cancer" (Calderón Hinojosa 2007b).

Thus, the presidential discourse praised constantly the "heroism" and "patriotism" of those who participated in the "war". For Calderón, the soldiers knew "that in defence of the homeland it is worth risking life itself" and it was necessary to celebrate that they were not cowed by "the risk

of being injured in confrontations with enemies of Mexico” (Calderón Hinojosa 2009b, 140). Besides, those “patriots” deserved all “homages” for dying in service “to the nation” and “everyone” needed to accept the government strategy “with all the risks and costs involved” (Calderón Hinojosa 2007c, 86–98). Moreover, the whole country was supposed to be grateful for “the sacrifice” of the “hundreds of members of the security forces”, because the government would spare no “human life costs [...], costs that are needed to pay” (Calderón Hinojosa 2008e). Therefore, in the war, it was “essential” for “all of us” to join “the common front” (Calderón 2008 cited in Jiménez and Meyenberg 2019, 40) because not supporting the government’s strategies was “a way to consent that our communities fall prey to insecurity”, so “every good woman and every good man” had to support the “forces of order” or “help criminals otherwise” (Calderón Hinojosa 2008c).

### *State denials and invisibility of victims*

For Calderón, the increase in murders was “spectacular” but not a “thermometer” to measure the success of his strategy (Ramos and Jiménez 2010), because violence was solely the responsibility of “the violent ones”, not of the government (Melgar 2011). Hence, except on certain occasions, Calderón referred to the death of innocents only when they were members of the armed forces who died in combat.<sup>5</sup> For the president, these “heroes” who fell “fulfilling their duty” deserved everyone’s “respect and admiration” (Calderón Hinojosa 2008f, 137). However, human rights violations and the rest of the murders were even a matter of mockery or celebration for the armed forces. For example, an army general suggested that recommendations about human rights needed to be directed to criminals, and declared that after any shooting there would be “fewer criminals” in the streets (La Jornada 2008).

Hence, the government criminalised victims of violence without conducting any investigation around the motives for a murder or disappearance. Besides, the innocence of the victims was questioned even when there were sufficient elements to recognise it. For example,

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<sup>5</sup> For example, when a criminal group killed 19 people in a rehabilitation centre, Calderón sent his “condolences to the relatives and friends” of the victims and condemned the “acts of barbarism [...] perpetrated by unscrupulous criminals”, but warned that these tragedies should “fill us with determination to act united [...] against crime” (Calderón Hinojosa 2010d). Similarly, after stating that the increase in violence was a “product [...] of an increasingly bloody war between organised crime groups in their dispute over territories”, he expressed his “solidarity and condolences” to the relatives of the “civilians outside the conflict” but clarified that he would continue with his strategy and that the country had to bear the costs (Calderón Hinojosa 2010c, 409–10).

when a criminal group killed 18 young students while they were at a party at the Villas de Salvárcar community in Juárez in January 2010, Calderón quickly minimised the importance of the issue by assuring that they were gang members. The social reaction and the statement of one of the material authors of the massacre who claimed that it was a mistake forced Calderón to recant and ensure that military and police actions were no longer enough (Alanís and Durán 2014). Nonetheless, the Secretary of the Interior seemed to imply criminality by declaring that the families of those killed should “submit themselves to the law” to find “respect to their lives and their relatives” (Martinez 2010).

Using the sociology of denial developed by Cohen (1993; 1996; 2001), Treviño-Rangel (2018) analyses how Calderón’s government responded to accusations of human rights violations. First, using literal denials—the rejection of facts or the knowledge of such facts—to refuse a report by Human Rights Watch about multiple cases of abuses by the army and the systematic impunity within the military justice system, Calderón argued that there was “no single case” of impunity for human rights violations in the federal government jurisdiction (Human Rights Watch 2009). Likewise, when the French newspaper *Le Monde* published an article claiming that Calderón’s “crusade against drug trafficking” had become a “war without quarter” and that Mexico was “undermined” by drug trafficking (AFP 2010), the president responded that 9 out of 10 murders corresponded to members of gangs and that the violence was only related to the struggle of some criminal groups against others who were experiencing a process of instability (La Jornada 2010). The president supported such an assertion in the counts of a database created by his government. This database was severely questioned by Mexican scholars due to its important methodological differences compared to other official sources that had been used for years in the country. In addition, multiple authors pointed out that it openly criminalised the victims, since only 4% of the total murders counted were being investigated for organised crime. That is, the authorities did not know the reasons behind 96% of the killings that the federal government related to “alleged criminal rivalry” (Atuesta, Siordia, and Madrazo Lajous 2016). At the end of Calderón’s administration, the database stopped being updated.

Second, forms of interpretive denial—aimed to give a different meaning to something that seems apparent to others (Cohen 2001)—were also used constantly. For example, the Secretary of the Interior declared that the killings of soldiers and police officers, as well as the clashes between criminal groups, were an “unequivocal symptom of the achievements” of the government (Breach

and Heras 2008). Furthermore, according to the head of the army, “despite the deaths of civilians, children, young students and adults in the clashes between the armed forces and organised crime”, the strategy would continue because they were merely “collateral damage” (Ballinas 2010).

Third, there is also evidence on the use of implicative denials, conducted to deny the moral or political implications of a fact, intending to justify, rationalise or evade it (Cohen 2001). As mentioned before, Calderón insisted multiple times about the necessity of his strategy to protect “the nation” notwithstanding its costs in terms of human lives. Likewise, the president argued that despite the increasing amount of murders, his government had “reversed the rising trend of crime and drug trafficking” and “weakened the conditions that make possible its reproduction and its extension” (Calderón Hinojosa 2009e, 284). Thus, although hundreds of members of the armed forces had lost their lives, from the government’s point of view, it meant that the strategy was “advancing” (Calderón Hinojosa 2009f, 313), so it was better to “ignore the voices that naively claim that the State simply should withdraw from this fight” (Ramos 2009).

Official denials are not just superficial fictions or rhetorical flourishes but have roots and impacts on the socio-political sphere (Cohen 2001). This is especially relevant considering that a key factor in marshalling the State’s strength lies in its ability to channel people into certain frameworks that suggest realms of social meaning (Migdal 2001). In a context in which the legitimacy of the highest authority was questioned by a large part of its population, it was particularly necessary to strengthen the official narrative, so State denials could have been part of a broader strategy with which Calderón sought to impose a story that would make his legitimacy unquestionable.

Norzagaray (2010) identifies that Calderón’s speeches included constant explanations and justifications for the war. In the same vein, Lendo (2019) points out that the security strategy was accompanied by a communication strategy that became a key defence instrument when the press began to be more critical regarding the absence of results. As those who did not fit Calderón’s definition of a citizen became invisible, the absence of the victims in the official discourse could encourage the stigmatisation of any murdered person. Thus, without losing sight of the cruel and ruthless violence of organised crime, the official discourse was “the other side of the same violence” faced throughout the country (Velázquez Ramírez 2012, 79).



### 3. Socio-political responses to the insecurity crisis

Despite the official discourse that tried to signify violence as a result of exclusively criminal activities or as evidence of the success of government actions, the insecurity crisis provoked criticism from various actors from the political elite and other societal settings. In this section, I focus on two kinds of responses to the emergency before the formation of the MPJD.

#### *Faced by the elite*

In August 2008, the press reported the kidnapping and murder of Fernando Martí, 14-year-old son of the millionaire businessman Alejandro Martí. Given this, the organisation Mexico United Against the Delinquency (MUCD, *México Unido Contra la Delincuencia*) used its media influence to call for a march to demand more strict security policies.<sup>6</sup> This led the media discussion to focus primarily on the problem of kidnappings in the country. Calderón backed the demand and signed an agreement before the march with the organisers, claiming that the “cancer” of crime threatened the future of Mexican families and so the “frontal war” needed to be a matter of national security (Herrera Beltrán, Martínez, and Castillo 2008).

One week later, the march took place in Mexico City under the name of “Let’s illuminate Mexico” (*Iluminemos México*). Official calculations indicated that 80,000 people attended, including representatives of various business associations, organisations such as MUCD, and characters like Isabel Miranda (López Leyva 2015).<sup>7</sup> Calderón announced that his government would “redouble” efforts to “clean” Mexico of crime because “society” demanded “drastic measures” (Calderón Hinojosa 2008d). The demands were not fulfilled, but a law to punish kidnapping more severely was enacted, in part due to the lobbying of Alejandro Martí and Isabel Miranda (López Leyva 2015).

After this episode, Mexico had elections in 2009 to renew the Chamber of Deputies as well as to elect some local governments. In such a context, Calderón argued that there was no room for “hesitation, divisions or disloyalty” around the official strategy because “the future of our

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<sup>6</sup> MUCD is an organisation founded by Josefina Ricaño and other businesspersons after the kidnaping and murderer of her son Raúl in 1998. MUCD has been constantly questioned for its proximity to the PAN-led federal governments and for its opacity in the management of its funds (Villagran 2014). Recently, the organisation has focused on promoting the legalisation of some drugs through legal mobilisation (Martínez Carmona 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Isabel Miranda gained public relevance in Mexico after the media reported that she conducted the investigations to arrest her son’s alleged kidnappers in 2005, although subsequent investigations have provided evidence against the case’s veracity. Close to the PAN elite, she was a candidate for governor of Mexico City in 2012.

democracy” was at stake (Calderón Hinojosa 2009d). Nonetheless, the PRI removed the PAN’s majority in the Chamber of Deputies, meaning that Calderón had to negotiate his initiatives and that he was facing decreasing popularity (Somuano 2018). In such a context, members of a criminal gang murdered a PRI candidate for the governorship of the state of Tamaulipas in 2010.<sup>8</sup> Calderón then called “all the political forces of the country” to join and become the “generation that faced and defeated [...] the enemies of Mexico” (Calderón Hinojosa 2010a), as well as to “establish a dialogue [...] to act [...] in defence of democracy [...] and find the best alternatives to face [...] the greatest challenge of the country” (Calderón Hinojosa 2010b).

Thus, at the beginning of August, Calderón opened a forum called “Dialogues for Security”, whose sessions were held at a venue administered by the army. During several days, the president met with leaders of organisations such as MUCD, leaders of political parties, media representatives and businesspeople. From the beginning, Calderón said that he wanted to hear the criticism towards the security strategy but that there was “an elementary truth” that everyone needed to acknowledge: “the enemies, the threat to society, are the criminals, not the government [...]; we must not lose the reference of who are not only the bad but the bloodthirsty of the film” (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2010a).

### *Faced by mobilised society*

Between 2007 and 2009, the northern state of Coahuila recorded a steady increase in disappearances. The Catholic bishop Raúl Vera—a priest who participated in the mediation between the Zapatista army and the federal government in 1994—grouped several families to share their experiences safely in the facilities of a human rights defence centre coordinated by his diocese (Sánchez, Pérez Aguirre, and Verástegui 2018). At the end of 2009, the group called a press conference to report on the cases they had documented and concluded that disappearances were not only committed by criminals or drug traffickers — the Mexican State, by action or omission, was responsible for the disappearances that were occurring in the region (Aureliani 2019). After a few months, with the arrival of more relatives of disappeared persons and with the support of other organisations, the group adopted the name of United Forces for Our Disappeared in Coahuila (FUUNDEC, *Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila*). After that, FUUNDEC’s

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<sup>8</sup> The electoral calendar in Mexico is not uniform. For various reasons, there are local elections almost every year in different states.

public actions were extended to the dissemination of press bulletins, meetings with authorities, peaceful protests and activities to search for the disappeared (Sánchez, Pérez Aguirre, and Verástegui 2018). Once the collective made alliances with groups from neighbouring states, it changed its name to United Forces for Our Disappeared in Mexico (FUNDEM, in Spanish). Later, FUUNDEC-FUNDEM would participate in some actions of the MPJD in 2011 (Aureliani 2019).

Since the beginning of the army operations in the northern state of Chihuahua, groups of activists self-identified as anarchists and socialists began to protest against militarisation because they interpreted it as a measure of repression, so they held monthly marches with tens of participants (Silva 2017). When, as mentioned earlier, 18 young students were murdered at Villas de Salvárcar, these groups allied with other organisations and called for more mobilisations that faced government repression to the extent that the police shot a student (Silva 2017). The Salvárcar massacre showed that the violence of “war” was going far beyond disputes between criminal groups and that it deeply affected civil society (Alanís and Durán 2014). Thus, when the president visited the city to present a program called “We are all Juárez”, Luz Dávila—mother of two murdered youngsters—turned her back on Calderón while he was forced to apologise for criminalising the victims. The episode, however, did not cause any discursive change on the government’s behalf. For example, the secretary of the Interior blamed the media for making banal and light criticism, and demanded to link “better the public opinion [...] with the State security forces” (G. Castillo 2010). Furthermore, after two students from a private university were murdered by members of the army in the surroundings of their school, the head of the army claimed that they were both “armed to the teeth” (Arnaut 2018), an accusation that was proved false later (CNDH 2010).

In Mexico City, the killing during the protest mentioned in the previous paragraph caused a group of university students self-identified with traditional left-wing currents to organise solidarity mobilisations. This led to the formation of the Metropolitan Coordinator against Militarisation (COMECOM, *Coordinadora Metropolitana Contra la Militarización*), that gathered individuals from 25 groups who argued that the war was a strategy of the State and capital to generate terror and impose neoliberal reforms (Romero 2016). The COMECOM held marches and forums with hundreds participants in Mexico City (Flores 2014). Then, the group joined the first mobilisations of the MPJD in 2011.

Finally, another social response to criminal violence before the MPJD was a media campaign started by the renowned graphic artist Eduardo del Río in January 2011. A group of political cartoonists close to Andrés Manuel López Obrador (see section 1 of this chapter) published for several days in newspapers and magazines a series of images to demand a change in the security strategy and a halt to the war (Mateos-Vega 2011). Calling the campaign “Enough of blood” but commonly known as “No more blood” (*No más sangre*), the artists invited society to print and place the designs in public spaces to protest against violence. The campaign did not involve any form of organising, but its graphic resources would be more widely used later that year, once the MPJD started to mobilise.

#### 4. MPJD overview

This section introduces a very general overview of the MPJD to provide the reader with a frame of reference to better understand the later chapters. Thus, I do not present any kind of analysis or discuss the implications of any action or issue.

On the morning of 28 March 2011, the police of the state of Morelos found seven bodies in an abandoned car. After a few hours, the authorities identified that one of the murdered people was Juan Francisco Sicilia Ortega (Juanelo, from now on, because it is how his father named him in a poem after the murder), 24-year-old son of the poet and political analyst Javier Sicilia. Besides, the police identified that the other bodies belonged to friends of the youngster.<sup>9</sup> Javier was in the Philippines for work reasons, but a group of people close to him set up an *ofrenda* with photographs, flowers and banners outside the Government Palace of Morelos to protest because of the multiple murder.<sup>10</sup>

The next day, poetry readings were made in the same place, and a march in the city centre was held with around 500 participants (Morelos Cruz 2011a). Javier arrived in Mexico and attended his son’s wake. Later, at the insistence of the press, he offered a conference in which he demanded the resignation of Calderón and the governor of Morelos since they did not have the capacity to guarantee peace, security and justice. Besides, the poet invited society to organise to end violence,

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<sup>9</sup> Their names: Jaime Gabriel Alejos Cadena, Julio César Romero Jaimes, Luis Antonio Romero Jaimes, Jesús Chávez Vázquez, Álvaro Jaimes Aguilar and María del Socorro Estrada Hernández.

<sup>10</sup> Convinced that social research must be close to the people who are the protagonists of the phenomena we study, in this thesis I will refer to all the MPJD participants by their first name because that is how they treat each other.

announced that he and his colleagues would remain in the public square until the crime was investigated, and called for a march on 6 April (Morelos Cruz 2011b). Just five days after Juanelo's murder, Javier published an article in *Proceso*, a renowned magazine dedicated to political analysis from a leftist ideology in which he had written a bi-monthly column for several years. In the text, he declared that society was “fucking fed up” (*hasta la madre*) of the political class, the criminals, and the tragedies that the war had caused.<sup>11</sup> In addition, he reiterated his call for a march to express a cry of outrage due to the violence in the country (Sicilia 2011a).

On 6 April, the announced protest had 40,000 participants in Cuernavaca, the capital of Morelos (Morelos Cruz 2011c), as well as solidarity events in at least 21 other states (Calloni and Tejeda 2011; La Jornada 2011a; F. Martínez 2011a). In three different speeches, Javier, a central figure in the march, criticised the armed forces and the institutions of the justice system and announced another march to Mexico City. Called “March for peace with justice and dignity” (March for Peace, from now on), this mobilisation took place from 5 to 8 May. While on the first day there were only around 500 participants, on the last day the press registered between 80,000 and 200,000 attendees (Pérez 2011), as well as solidarity protests in at least 20 other states and six countries (Brooks and Tejeda 2011; La Jornada 2011b). In the final rally of this march, 70 people read poetry and shared their *testimonios*—testimonial narratives—of violence. In addition, two relatives of murder victims presented the proposal of the “National Pact for Peace”, a document with proposals on six areas that would be signed in Juárez to demand a halt to the violence in the country.

In these initial moments, the groups that sympathised with the MPJD were located in various positions on the political spectrum: the Zapatistas, community police and self-defence groups from various states, representatives of the Atenco's Front of Peoples in Defence of the Land (FPDT, *Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra*),<sup>12</sup> members of socialist parties, the Mexican Union of

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<sup>11</sup> The polysemic phrase “*estar hasta la madre*” does not have a direct translation into English. In this case, it encompasses a state of being extremely sick and tired of something or someone.

<sup>12</sup> To build a new airport, the government of Vicente Fox announced in October 2001 the expropriation of thousands of hectares of agricultural and community land in the state called Estado de México. The inhabitants of the area, especially those of the Atenco municipality, protested by blocking a highway and occupying the municipal palace. Despite the repression, they managed to cancel the project and organised themselves under the name FPDT. In May 2006, members of the police evicted a group of FPDT flower vendors seeking to sell in a market. In response, members of the FPDT blocked a highway again. The police repression resulted in the death of two people, the arrest of more than 300 and the rape of dozens of women. The case reached the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which determined the responsibility of the Mexican State for multiple human rights violations. For more on the case, see Stone (2019) and Zamora Lomeli (2010).

Electricians,<sup>13</sup> assemblies of university students from all regions of the country, supporters of the opposition led by López Obrador, non-governmental organisations, religious congregations and even business chambers (Sicilia 2016b; Suaste 2017). Yet, this changed after the signing of the Pact. For such event, the MPJD made a caravan from 4 to 10 June, visiting some of the states with the highest rates of violence in the northern region of the country. Called Caravan of Consolation, the mobilisation started with 14 buses and 30 private cars transporting around 500 people. The caravan included marches, cultural events and public meetings in which dozens of victims' relatives presented their *testimonios*, many of them for the first time, before hundreds or thousands of attendees. At the end of the caravan, a group of organisations sought to position the immediate demilitarisation of the country as the central demand and rejected any possible dialogue with the government. Javier disavowed these positions and the organisations broke relations with the MPJD (Vázquez 2011).

A few weeks later, the MPJD held a public dialogue with Calderón. There, five relatives of victims of femicide, murder and disappearance, as well as a representative of indigenous peoples—called structural victims—presented their testimonies to the president and other officials of the government elite (Monsiváis, Pérez, and Tavera 2014). As a result of this meeting, the MPJD and the federal government began private meetings around four issues: justice for emblematic cases of violence, attention and protection to victims, review of the security strategy, and mechanisms of participatory democracy (Gordillo-García 2015). Nonetheless, these meetings failed due to the official refusal to make changes to the security strategy. Besides, the dialogue with Calderón deepened the distance of the MPJD with several organisations since it was interpreted as a legitimisation of presidential authority.

In July of the same year, members of the MPJD, including relatives of victims, activists and professionals from social organisations, met with representatives of both houses of Congress: The Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. There, the legislators were questioned for their co-responsibility in the war. Furthermore, during the meeting, at the request of the MPJD, all political parties agreed to work on a bill to protect the rights of victims of violence (García 2018). Later, after holding several weekly meetings, cultural events, marches and placing of plaques with victims' names in public buildings in Mexico City and Morelos, the MPJD began the Caravan to

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<sup>13</sup> In 2009, the Mexican Union of Electricians started leading massive protests in the capital of the country when Felipe Calderón decreed, without prior notice, the closure of a state-owned company dedicated to supplying electricity in the country, leaving around 44,000 people jobless.

the South. In this mobilisation, that lasted from 9 to 19 September, 15 buses and 10 private cars took the MPJD participants to meetings with inhabitants of indigenous communities and migrants, another type of victims. Besides, they held private events in Zapatista territory in Chiapas (Gil Olmos 2016). After the caravan, there was a second dialogue with Calderón on 14 October. For this event, the president imposed the participation of representatives of three social organisations that were close to the government, including Isabel Miranda and Alejandro Martí (see section 3 of this chapter). Given the obstacles, the MPJD decided to stop all dialogue process with the officials from Calderón's administration. Later, the movement also stopped all mobilisations because some participants were murdered: Nepomuceno Moreno, who was looking for his disappeared son, was murdered in Sonora; Trinidad de la Cruz, a member of the indigenous community of Ostula, was kidnapped and murdered in Michoacán; and Eva Alarcón and Miguel Marcial, a couple of environmentalists, were also kidnapped and murdered in Guerrero (Gordillo-García 2015). None of these cases have been solved.

In April 2012, both houses of Congress approved the General Law of Victims, which established obligations for absolutely all the authorities of the country for the attention of the victims regarding health, psychology, legal assistance, and reparations, amongst others. However, Calderón used his presidential powers to reject its official enactment. This action caused a legal conflict with the Congress, which led the Supreme Court to invalidate the law. In May, in the context of campaigns for the presidential election to be held that same year, members of the MPJD had a public dialogue with the four candidates, who promised to enact the law in case of winning (Gilly 2016).

Later, expanding its scope to the international arena, the MPJD made a month-long caravan across 27 cities in the USA to demand better policies around gun control and drug trafficking (Osorno 2014). Shortly after, Enrique Peña, a PRI politician who was elected president—albeit with multiple complaints about purchase and coercion of the vote—made the official enactment of the General Law of Victims in January 2013. However, the indicators of violence kept increasing (Tables 1 and 2), so the MPJD kept criticising the security strategy, calling it a continuation of the war, and pointing out that Peña only made rhetorical changes. Violence rose again and, on 14 September 2014, armed individuals attacked a group of students from the rural college of Ayotzinapa in the state of Guerrero. As a result, 9 people were killed, and 43 students were

disappeared. In response to the tragedy, thousands of people began holding massive protests in every state in the country (Gravante 2020).

Even though justice has not been guaranteed and the truth about what happened is still unknown, the independent search led by the students' families prompted more relatives of disappeared persons to look for clandestine pits in Guerrero and other states. The images of hundreds of people searching for their relatives in the countryside, excavating and finding human remains attracted the international press. Over time, the national agenda focused on the search for the disappeared in practically every state in the country (De Vecchi 2018) and dozens of *colectivos* (collectives) of families of disappeared people were formed.<sup>14</sup>

In August 2016, one of these *colectivos* found out about the illegal burial of tens of individuals by the government of Morelos in the community of Tetelcingo. Members of the *colectivo* reached to MPJD participants that had open an office for victims' assistance at the University of Morelos. After litigation, the *colectivo*, the MPJD and the university obtained a court order that forced the government to open the pit to verify that the bodies had been buried after all the necessary protocols. When the Tetelcingo pit was opened, 119 unidentified corpses were found without any forensic care. This action revealed that not only criminal groups were abandoning corpses in clandestine pits, but that governments were also disappearing bodies (Romo and Villanueva 2016).

In mid-2018, given the forthcoming presidential election, Javier called the candidates for a new public dialogue to discuss their proposals regarding peace and security with the families of victims and professionals from social organisations (MPJD 2018). Andrés Manuel López Obrador—who had run twice in elections with the PRD and reached his third nomination after creating his own political party, Morena—won the polls. Two months before becoming president officially, López Obrador had a new public meeting with hundreds of relatives of victims. There, he summarised his security policy with the phrase “hugs, not bullets” [*abrazos, no balazos*], asked to forgive and forget the crimes, and promised to adopt transitional justice policies in Mexico (CNDH 2018b). In addition, he asked Javier to become a member of his administration, but the poet rejected the position.

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<sup>14</sup> Although the term *colectivo* might prove confusing, I stick to it since this is how these groups are commonly called in Mexico.



During his first year in office, López Obrador disintegrated the Federal Police and replaced it with a new institution, the National Guard. Although its official character is civil, its members are mostly former soldiers who have been reassigned and its commander is also from the military. Likewise, the current president of Mexico expanded the powers of the armed forces for policing tasks and gave the army administrative control of several government activities, arguing that the soldiers had never been corrupted (El Universal 2020; Político MX 2019).

The trend of murders continued to rise (Table 1). In November 2019, a criminal group murdered and charred 9 women and children in the state of Sonora. This massacre against members of the family of Julián LeBarón, who was a participant of the MPJD between 2011 and 2012, led Javier to make a new call to protest the violence and to demand the president to fulfil the promises he made to the relatives of victims. López Obrador assured that the call was an exercise of his “adversaries” and refused to receive the participants because it was a “show” and he had to “take care” of the presidential figure (Aristegui Noticias 2020).

With the name of Walk for Truth, Justice and Peace, approximately 500 people departed from Cuernavaca on 23 January 2020. After two days of walking, they held a cultural event lasting around 10 hours in Mexico City. Finally, on 26 January, 5,000 people walked to reach the city centre. A few meters from the stage where the mobilisation was planned to conclude, dozens of supporters of the president verbally attacked the participants and tried to block their way. After several minutes of jostles and insults, Javier read a final message on the stage, and a group of people delivered two documents to the presidential office including proposals on transitional justice programs (Ballinas and Urrutia 2020). In 2021, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, a group of relatives of victims and activists gathered to commemorate the MPJD’s tenth anniversary reading a statement next to the *ofrenda* that has remained outside the Government Palace of Morelos since 28 March 2011 (MPJD 2021).

## **Summary**

This background has offered an outlook of the context in which the MPJD started to mobilise. I introduced, although in a cursory manner, Mexico’s socio-political conditions since the twentieth century to understand the current crisis of criminal and political violence. I also offered an overview of the official discourse on violence portrayed by Calderón’s government based on the constructions around the alleged necessity of fighting drugs, the division between enemies of the

nation and patriots, and the official denials that excluded the victims from the political arena. Then, I discussed the socio-political responses and criticism towards the insecurity crisis. Finally, I briefly described the main actions of the MPJD since its formation in 2011.

In the next chapter, I explain my research design, presenting my main research questions and methods to study the MPJD in-depth. After that, each chapter of this thesis is essentially analytical and focuses on different but interrelated and overlapping topics.

## Research design

Having set the context, I now explain how this thesis develops the analysis based on my main research questions:

- How and why, in a context of widespread violence, did one particular murder motivate people to join social mobilisation?
- How did the MPJD's actions grow to encompass people in several regions? How did the government react to this?
- How do mobilisations led by relatives of victims of violence create social ties?
- What have been the outcomes of the MPJD campaigns?

### 1. Methods

Research on social movements has resorted to a wide variety of methods from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Della Porta 2014b; Della Porta and Keating 2008; Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002). Given my interest in having a deep understanding of the meanings that people give to their own backgrounds, their participation, their social bonds and the consequences of their actions, I followed a qualitative approach around a case study.

A case is a phenomenon or event that researchers choose, conceptualise and analyse empirically as a manifestation of a wider class of phenomena or events; its delimitation, definition and description are products of an ongoing theoretical work of the researcher (Vennesson 2008). Thus, in this thesis, I understand the MPJD as a contentious collective actor belonging to the universe of social movement actors led by relatives of victims of war or war-like violence (Bayard de Volo 2006; Berry 2015). A case study is a research strategy that seeks to generate elaborations as well as detailed, thick and holistic understandings of instances or variants of a delimited social phenomenon through the triangulation of various methods (Snow and Trom 2002). Moreover, according to their purposes, there are four main types of case studies in social sciences: descriptive, interpretive, hypothesis generating, and theory evaluating (Vennesson 2008). Following these types, my project encompasses an interpretive one since I supported my research on certain theoretical guidelines to find explanations, but also aimed to perform a subsequent refinement of theories. Likewise, building on Snow and Trom (2002), I argue that the MPJD represents a critical case, meaning that it provides an opportunity to assess a series of relevant

empirical and theorised principles. So, in short, I conducted a study with interpretive purposes (Vennesson 2008) based on a critical case that makes an empirical elaboration of social processes to use the findings to extend and refine theoretical and conceptual developments within social movement studies (Snow and Trom 2002).

While acknowledging the spatial and temporal boundaries of case studies (Snow and Trom 2002), the in-depth analysis of the MPJD makes it possible to identify processes and mechanisms that could help to understand the mobilisations of more collective actors and contentious fields. Hence, I follow other researchers' (Della Porta and Keating 2008; Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002) call to aim for medium-range theories that allow the involvement in theory-driven empirical studies that elaborate on explanations within particular contexts, while also looking to shed some light on broader processes of mobilisation through analytical rigour, replicability and robust research methods (Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002).

Thus, comprising a case study, this thesis builds on data from interviews and a broad documentary review. I first explain the details of the former. Given that the only way into another person's world is through communication, the qualitative interview is a relevant way to access human subjectivity (Vela 2013) because it facilitates the interactive reconstruction of meanings and understandings, not only the collection and reporting of facts (Mason 2002). Facing a typical absence of systematised compilations of documents or databases, semi-structured and in-depth interviews occupy a privileged place in the study of social movements (Della Porta 2014a) — their usefulness in eliciting information about several processes of contentious action and people's motivations and interpretations opens a meso-level understanding of the dynamics through which actors mobilise (Blee and Taylor 2002; Della Porta 2014a). Therefore, doing semi-structured and in-depth interviews allowed a deeper and clearer understanding of the reasons the participants have had to mobilise and sustain their participation, the ties they have created and the consequences that they themselves interpret as products of their contention.

Before specifying how the interviews were done, I must explain how I chose the participants. Sampling in quantitative studies is usually carried out under criteria of randomness to represent the universe in question (Della Porta 2014b). In contrast, the use of qualitative methods seeks to include cases that are theoretically relevant due to their inherent potential to inform about complex social processes (Della Porta and Keating 2008). Thus, what would be considered bias and weakness in a sample constructed under statistical criteria is actually an intended focus in my

methodological standpoint (Patton 2015). Furthermore, it is important to note that sampling for semi-structured interviews with movement participants normally involves a deliberate but not random selection in which people are sought for their particular experiences of participation, and not so much because their experiences are representative of a wider population (Blee and Taylor 2002). Therefore, I developed a purposeful sampling strategy (Emmel 2013; Mason 2002; Patton 2015) to include interviewees that could provide accounts on the central research topics. Given that the use of interviews favours a deep analysis of social movements but also represents a disadvantage because scholars can devote more time to doing transcripts than in the field, research based on qualitative interviews generally resorts to a fairly small number of participants (Blee and Taylor 2002).<sup>15</sup> Thus, this project draws on 17 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with seven activists and ten relatives of victims of the Mexican war on drugs and crime who have participated in the MPJD or have been linked to its actions (Table 3).

Given my years involved in the MPJD networks as an activist—a topic discussed in-depth in the next section—I knew the research participants before starting this project. This benefited the research in two ways. First, there was rapport and trust prior to the interviews; second, I was clear about the topics on which their profiles could provide more information. In other words, I was aware that these persons were “key knowledgeable” whose experiences and insights were able to shed some light on the research topics (Patton 2015, 284). Hence, I created a list of potential participants whom I contacted to explain the project and ask if they would be willing to be interviewed. Of this group, two people rejected the possibility because of the activities they were carrying out—they were at that time in the search of clandestine pits. In both cases, I thanked the response and offered the possibility of doing the interview weeks later, but upon receiving a similar reply, I respected their agenda and did not insist.

The rest of the people in the list agreed to be interviewed. Although all the participants will be properly introduced in the thematic chapters—fifteen in the first one and two on the fourth—it must be noted that they involve MPJD organisers, leaders, both long- and short-term participants,

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<sup>15</sup> Some examples: Bosi (2019) conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with activists of armed groups in Ireland; Olivier and Tamayo (2019) focused on comparing the life stories of two Mexican women activists; Isaac and colleagues (2016) interviewed 36 activists and used 27 previous interview transcripts to analyse the early Nashville civil rights movement that emerged and grew from 1958 through 1961; Van Dyke and Dixon (2013) interviewed a total of 38 people, including participants, organisers, administrators and coordinators of the 1996 Union Summer; Valocchi (2012) conducted 34 oral history interviews with progressive activists in the USA; Passy and Giugni (2000) interviewed 12 committed activists of the Swiss solidarity movement; Downton and Wehr (1998) interviewed 30 persistent peace activists; and Robnett (2004) interviewed 16 people from a civil rights organisation.

representatives of *colectivos*, and drop-outs. Furthermore, due to the empirically difficult demarcation of boundaries in social movements, the notion of membership/non-membership is a conception of little value (McAdam 1986) since activists often claim more than one collective affiliation and their participation varies over time (Blee and Vining 2010; Carroll and Ratner 1996). Thus, some of the interviewees identify themselves as participants of other groups or *colectivos*, but they also acknowledge their involvement in or closeness to the MPJD. Moreover, social movements involve large coalitions and networks of different groups, so no single cluster will totally represent the entire mobilised universe (Jasper and Poulsen 1995). However, as said, this sample is not intended to characterise a larger population but to provide experiences that help in understanding the central research topics.

<b>Table 3. Details of the interviews</b>			
<b>Participant's name</b>	<b>Place of interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Length</b>
Araceli Rodríguez	Ixtapaluca, Estado de México	2 January 2020	02:35:51
Mario Vergara	Benito Juárez, Mexico City	3 January 2020	03:07:47
Denisse Buendía	Cuernavaca, Morelos	6 January 2020	01:43:09
Teresa Carmona	Emiliano Zapata, Morelos	16 January 2020	02:20:19
Juan García	Cuernavaca, Morelos	5 February 2020	01:44:09
Patricia Manzanares	Cuauhtémoc, Mexico City	7 February 2020	02:02:10
María Coronado	Cuauhtémoc, Mexico City	11 February 2020	01:13:47
Pietro Ameglio	Coyoacán, Mexico City	25 February 2020	01:22:06
Angélica Rodríguez	Cuernavaca, Morelos	4 March 2020	01:48:03
Teresa Vera	Gustavo A. Madero, Mexico City	6 March 2020	01:10:02
Guadalupe Aguilar	Via Zoom (2 sessions)	29 March 2020	46:41
		30 March 2020	01:26:02
Leticia Hidalgo	Via Skype	31 March 2020	01:26:33
Magdiel Sánchez	Via Zoom	3 April 2020	01:37:25
Gerardo Gómez and Norma Garduño	Via Zoom (2 sessions)	24 April 2020	02:37:11
		27 April 2020	01:45:46
Roberto Villanueva	Via Zoom (2 sessions)	16 June 2020	01:07:20
		25 June 2020	52:10
Javier Sicilia	Via Skype	27 June 2020	01:53:47

A common methodological flaw in studies of activism is the exclusion of non-activists, which limits the theoretical advances regarding participation due to the difficulty to identify the factors that differentiate supporters from those who reject contentious action (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; McAdam 1989; Perez 2018). Henceforth, a weakness of my study is the lack of interviews to people who have decided not to participate in the MPJD actions at all. Nonetheless, I cover to an extent this deficiency in two ways: First, I use written accounts—found in the documentary review that I explain in the following pages—about why both activists and relatives of victims decided not to

participate in these mobilisations; second, the interviewees provided comments on some reasons they know from people who are not engaged in participation. Moreover, the lack of interviews with victims' relatives who do not participate also responds to an ethical issue — by asking them about their motives for not mobilising along with other people who have experienced similar crimes, a feeling of guilt could be encouraged by making them imagine a counterfactual possibility of having achieved something through protest. However, the mobilisations led by victims' relatives are global news (Padgett 2011; Tuckman 2014; Zatarin 2020), so even non-participants have a view and addressing them is an opportunity for future research.

I carried out the interviews between January and June 2020. All of them were conducted in Spanish—both mine and the interviewees' first language—and recorded with the verbal consent of the participants. Previously developed trust played a role in getting this consent. However, I also explained the participants that the recording was only intended for transcription purposes and pointed out that I could stop it at any time if they wanted to discuss any sensitive topic off-the-record. In addition, several interviewees declared their interest in participating with the aim that the cases of their relatives were exposed to a wider public outside the country. Later, in the section on ethics, I discuss this issue further.

In the beginning, the interviews were conducted in-person in Mexico, but due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the last six were made through video conferences on secure platforms. Although I have no reason to consider that this change had impacted the dynamics of our conversations, it is possible that some of the interviewees had experienced what has been termed as 'zoom fatigue' or 'zoom burnout' — that is, an exhaustion of the constant and extended video conferences that many activities and professions experienced during the lockdowns of the pandemic. However, three of these six online interviews were conducted during the first days of the first lockdown in Mexico—which started on 23 March 2020—making the development of such fatigue unlikely. It should be mentioned that one of these three interviews was conducted in two sessions on two consecutive days due to the participant's agenda. As for the last three online interviews, two more were done in two sessions also due to the agenda of the participants. Details are in Table 3.

Following Blee (2002; 2016), the interviews began in a semi-structured way to allow people to frame their own lives. This is useful because it allows participants “a great latitude” in the narration of their biographies putting together events in sequences that suggest how they

understand the patterning of their personal and political life spheres (Blee 2002, 201). Once they reached the moment of their initial participation, I started posing open-ended but structured questions to collect information on several topics of participation, focusing broadly on their motives to mobilise, their experiences during contention, the bonds they have formed and the outcomes that their participation has caused. To allow flexibility in the exploration of several interrelated topics brought into the conversation by the participants, I did not stick to any rigid questionnaires; rather, I allowed the participants to speak freely, even if they strayed from a topic, and once they finished, I would ask a question to return to the original topic.

For some people it may seem that the questions about activists' lives are invasive, but the experience of several researchers indicates that people are often eager to be engaged in this way of working (Flacks 2005). Yet, an important risk when interviewing victims of violence is related to causing them pain. Thus, I explicitly communicated to my interviewees that it was not necessary to talk about the murder or disappearance of their relatives and that we could focus on their political participation, but the topic was always discussed in one way or another. In most cases, these moments were accompanied by more intense emotions that were reflected in tears. Following specialists in working with victims (Martín Beristain 2011), I always showed an attitude of active listening to facilitate the narration in the interview and allow the expression of any type of emotions. Most of the interviewees cried at one or more moments of our conversations. In each case, I offered the possibility of taking a break, but the participants always indicated their willingness to continue and explained that this always happens to them when they talk about the experiences they have had.

Transcripts of the interviews were done in Spanish and then translated into English. In cases where the idioms or words did not have an exact translation, I chose the closest terms to communicate the idea and included the original expression in brackets. After that, I manually coded all interviews following the main topics of the research questions. While this might seem unusual given the increasing use of qualitative data analysis software and its technical advantages (Deterding and Waters 2021), it was fit for the relatively small number of participants. As typical in interviewing social movement participants, not all the interviewees discussed information about all topics, so the reader might find a lack of quotes from some individuals in certain sections.

In-depth interviews are, as almost any other research method in social science, useful albeit flawed lenses (Pugh 2013). Two of their main disadvantages are that researchers were not



necessarily present to witness the actions in which the interviewees participated and that respondents' memories may not always be reliable (Driscoll 2018; Weiss 1994; R. White 2007). Nonetheless, scholars argue that people remember intense events and powerful experiences with significant accuracy notwithstanding the time that has passed (Driscoll 2018; Isaac et al. 2016; R. White 2007). However, the pretended accuracy of 'what happened' becomes a secondary issue given the relevance of understanding how interviewees present and interpret their own experiences (Crossley 2002; Downton and Wehr 1998; Driscoll 2018; Roy 1994). Of course, even when they might have the best of intentions, subjects' memories are fallible and could—purposefully or not—develop accounts consistent with the movement's ethos to make it look in the best possible way (R. White 2007) because activists tend to portray their actions as aligned with their political and ideological beliefs (Della Porta 1992).

Thus, it was important for this research to address the weak points of the interviews by triangulating methods to investigate certain issues (Ayoub, Wallace, and Zepeda-Millán 2014; Blee and Taylor 2002). The combination of different qualitative methods is a fundamental feature of case studies on social movements, so it is usual to find the use of various types of interviews and documentary reviews within the same research project (Snow and Trom 2002). Departing from this, several sections of the thesis build on both interview data and an ample documentary review based on a free-access newspapers, a subscription-based political magazine, journalistic websites, books, academic sources and video recordings.

I used the national newspaper *La Jornada*—free access via its website—and the weekly political magazine *Proceso*—subscription-based access via its website—as the basic sources for this documentary review. To trace the MPJD most active period, I reviewed every issue of these publications from 28 March 2011 to 9 January 2013. This, of course, does not mean that I read their full content. Rather, for the former I focused on the Politics section, where news coverage of the MPJD was always included, and for the latter I would first review the table of contents. While both sources are widely acknowledged for their reliability, I must note that they are left-wing publications.<sup>16</sup> Arguably, this has an influence on the content they provide, but my aim was not to

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<sup>16</sup> As of 2018, some segments of these media audiences began to split. *La Jornada* has been questioned for the open closeness of its directors and editorialists with the current president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. This, moreover, has been accompanied by an increase in the budget that *La Jornada* receives from the federal government to distribute official advertising (Artículo 19 and FUNDAR 2021). However, given the focus of this work, I do not present an analysis of the current circumstances, but of processes that occurred before 2018, when it was widely recognized that both media shared a critical profile.

check what ‘exactly’ happened but the chronological development of events. Moreover, one of the main issues with the use of media in the study of social movements is linked to frame analysis because journalists usually reframe movements’ frames. However, as will be read in the second and fourth chapters, my frame analysis is based on primary sources.

Whenever *La Jornada* and *Proceso* mentioned an event but did not provide any information about it, I checked two other widely respected Mexican journalistic online sources, *Aristegui Noticias* and *Animal Político*. If, for any reason, the information was limited, I used Google to look for other possible sources that would complement the search. I also used seven books published by participants and allies of the MPJD (Centro de Estudios EcuMénicos, MPJD, and Iglesias por la Paz 2013; Osorno 2014; Rocato 2011; 2012a; Sicilia 2016b; Sicilia and Vázquez 2016; Suaste 2017) which contain dozens of speeches, chronicles, accounts and personal experiences. To a lesser extent, I used academic sources—including theses and articles—and online-available video recordings of the events I analyse.

In sum, rather than evaluating the role of a set of variables, the use and combination of these data collection methods allowed me to pose empirically sustained and theoretically informed responses to my main research questions, which, following Tilly and Tarrow (2015), include a description of processes, identification of their possible causes, and general accounts of how such processes work.

It is worth mentioning that this research does not include data from participant observation. Originally, my fieldwork contemplated the possibility of participating in a brigade (*brigada*) for the search of disappeared people to better understand the new contentious repertoires of the *colectivos*. However, after learning about the threats that a group of people had received prior to the brigade, I made the decision together with my supervisors of gathering data on the subject from the interviews and the documentary review. I am aware that the lack of participant observation in this type of action limits my understanding of the symbolic and material dynamics that take place during the search for people. However, I do not consider that the lack of this information has negatively impacted the project because, as the research progressed, the focus on the brigades was concentrated in their analysis as outcomes of the MPJD, a subject on which my two research methods collected useful data.

In addition, during my stay in Mexico I participated in the organisation and mobilisation of the Walk for Truth called by the MPJD (see background chapter), as well as in some actions of the

*colectivos*, such as the placement of memory plaques outside government offices. However, the present is not the same as the past and, as this research is mainly focused on dynamics of mobilisation that took place almost 10 years ago, it did not make sense to include material from these events. In any case, even if I did not formally use data from these actions in the chapters of this thesis, they are part of my contextual knowledge.

## **2. Ethics**

Ethical concerns are deeply contextualised in the researcher's positionality and relationship with the participants of the study (Gillan and Pickerill 2012). A researcher is not neutral, objective or detached from a study, so we need to think critically about what our own enterprise is and the reasons for doing it, confronting our assumptions and recognising how thoughts, decisions and actions influence our projects (Mason 2002). Thus, a fundamental element for carrying out qualitative research is reflexivity (Mason 2002; Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Milan 2014), which implies explicitly pointing out the social, personal and political characteristics of the researcher, as well as recognising the constructed nature of the research, to be aware of the place occupied in the field and have a better understanding of the group with which one works (Balsiger and Lambelet 2014).

As a Mexican social scientist, I have dedicated my academic work to the activism led by the relatives of the victims of the war on drugs and crime in Mexico. Concretely, I have focused my efforts on the MPJD, which I have also supported as an activist for several years. From this closeness to the MPJD and other actors, I have seen the pain that the war has provoked. One of the main but unseen outcomes of social mobilisation is the consolidation of people willing to dedicate their efforts and often their lives to transform society (Neveu 2019; Olivier and Tamayo 2019). From my perspective, this is the case of countless relatives of victims of violence and activists, who have all my admiration and respect due to their commitment to stop the so-called war.

As said before, due to my years involved in the MPJD networks, I knew the research participants before engaging in this project. In the field of contentious politics and political participation, we have met in multiple spaces for different campaigns. Likewise, during this research fieldwork, I got involved in several events and meetings as an MPJD participant. Thus, my interviewees are familiar with my personal commitment in searching for justice for the disappeared and murdered people, which has also developed bonds of trust with them through the

years. Moreover, beyond the field of activism I am much closer to some of the interviewees — for example, I have been several times to their homes as a friend to chat and have lunch or breakfast, I have been to their birthday celebrations and weddings, and I have even done consultancy projects along with some of them (Gordillo-García and Sicilia 2020).

I agree with Piven (2010) that many of us who work as researchers also engage in activism because of the joy it gives us to work in trying to make our societies more just and because our participation in social struggles illuminates our understandings of the world in forms that scholarship alone never could. Moreover, paraphrasing Cohen (1996), I am certain that writing about people who have suffered both criminal and state violence, and who have mobilised against such abuses, is an end in itself because there is an absolute duty to convey their truth, to bear witness. Thus, I must be clear that the objectives of this project do not only aim at the expansion and refinement of sociological theory on the study of social movements — as an activist and a scholar who has had the privilege to pursue a PhD in a foreign university, with this research I also have the goal of supporting and showing solidarity with the families of the victims in their pursuit of justice, truth and memory. However, although some could consider as bias that my research is inspired by these values, I had no interest in providing fixed responses. I recognise the complexity of the social processes that I analyse. This does not imply abandoning a position of support for those who have suffered tragic crimes, but it does mean that I accompanied such a perspective with a critical view regarding many aspects of the mobilisations. Without such a critical engagement, there would be no real support for the movement's demands.

In other words, the emotional, personal and professional closeness with my interviewees had a positive influence on the confidence they had in me to participate in this research, but this research also has that closeness as one of its core reasons. Moreover, precisely because of my respect for the ties I have with these individuals as well as my ethical stance as a researcher, my work at no time has the intention of evaluating their ideas, their problems or their decisions, but rather to sociologically understand their actions, their motives and their criticisms to the field of action that we share.

During the time when I conducted the interviews, I also engaged in conversations with several of my interviewees on a more personal level due to our bonds of friendship and trust. This did not happen simultaneously with my fieldwork. For example, since some of my interviews took place early in the morning, three of the participants invited me to have breakfast before starting to

work. While we ate, we discussed personal topics such as my experiences in Edinburgh or recent relevant events in their lives. None of this had to do with the research. Once we decided to start working, I reiterated the objectives of my thesis, the topics that I broadly wanted to cover, and the way in which their interviews would be used. I consider that this allowed us to change our role as friends to that of interviewer and interviewees. Outside of the spaces and times in which I conducted the interviews, my role was never that of a researcher in my interactions with the participants. In some informal conversations, however, some of them mentioned relevant issues around certain dynamics of mobilisation. Rather than questioning them in depth on these issues, I included—anonymised—those reflections in this thesis with the aim of analysing their implications for the research questions.

Milan (2014) argues that scholars of social movements must attend four relevant ethical considerations: First, to examine the relevance of the research for the activist community; second, to assess the risks involved in the study of dissident practices and the need to protect the people involved; third, to question the possible power dynamics in the relationships with the participants; and fourth, to address the issue of accountability with people in consideration of their own practices. In that regard, I agree, first, that the research concerns should not only be about the development of theory, but to promote social change in favour of the mobilised groups as well (Milan 2014). Thus, I follow Flacks' (2005) argument that there is an ethical obligation to allow the research participants to use this project in the ways that best suit them. As several interviewees told me during fieldwork, they see in this project a channel for more people outside of Mexico to know what is happening and that—although little or nothing can help to achieve justice for the victims—their relatives continue to be named, not allowing them to be forgotten.

Concerning the second question, I follow other scholars (Cordner et al. 2012; Milan 2014) in that besides complying with formalised ethical protocols, researchers should constantly reflect on how their projects may have beneficent or harmful social consequences. Thus, throughout the thesis I have respected the requests for anonymity in certain topics and the exclusion of some pieces of information that they confidentially shared with me, such as important information about their judicial cases. Besides, to avoid causing any issues within the participants' social networks, I avoided including any specific details regarding personal issues with other participants. Likewise, rather than quoting their criticism towards other individuals or groups' practices, I discuss what I consider the broader underlying dynamics of such criticisms.

Regarding the third point, my interviewees are clear that my work in no way judges what is right or wrong with respect to what the participants do or demand, and that I am not interested in giving instructions on how they should organise or mobilise to achieve their goals. On the contrary, for this research, I learned with and from them to present a sociological analysis of the contentious field in which we act. Finally, to meet the fourth consideration, I stick to other scholars' advice (Birch and Miller 2011; Rosenblatt 1995) on making sure that both the interviewees and I shared a common interest and understanding of the project's goals to co-construct ethical guides together — while they knew that this thesis would, if approved, help me in pursuing a doctoral degree, they are also aware of my goal in promoting justice and memory from my professional area.

In short, qualitative research involves a dialectical process that, at least to some extent, has impacts on both the participants and the researchers (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). Thus, since we unavoidably take sides (Becker 1967), I follow Milan's call (2014) to carry out engaged and committed social research — from now on, this thesis presents a systematic and evidence-based inquiry that also aims to make a difference for aggrieved collectivities beyond the academic community.

## Chapter 1. Recruitment dynamics: activists and relatives of victims

Social reaction to violent deaths, like Juanelo's murder, has been a source of collective action on multiple occasions, gathering people with little in common but their grief and their solidarity (Tarrow 1994). Yet, people are not automatically available for activism, not even when they feel sympathy for a cause (McAdam 1988), or a tragedy in this case. Thus, understanding why people decide to participate in social movements requires a sequential process point of view (Klandermans 1997; Klandermans and Oegema 1987) comprising at least two stages which involve both structural and motivational factors (Van Laer 2017): the formation of mobilisation potential and the conversion of the willingness to protest into protest participation (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006).

In this chapter, I analyse how and why, in a context of widespread violence, one particular murder motivated people to join social mobilisation. Previous studies about recruitment in social movements have shown contrasting results on the importance of biographical availability (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Gundelach and Toubøl 2019; McAdam 1986), the role of networks (Della Porta 1995; Fisher 2010; Kitts 2000; Krinsky and Crossley 2014; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980), and the influence of beliefs related to the life-changing circumstances of potential activists (Corrigall-Brown 2012; Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Passy and Monsch 2014), amongst other factors. The case of the MPJD allows a deep interrogation of recruitment categories to understand how victims and non-victims of the Mexican war on drugs and crime coalesced together to face the official discourse on violence.

Distinguishing amongst the activists who organised the first protests and the relatives of victims who subsequently joined, I focus on the recruitment process into the MPJD, explaining the formation of its mobilisation potential—the people in a given society that could be mobilised by a contentious group (Klandermans and Oegema 1987)—and the reasons that participants had to turn their willingness to protest into actual participation. My argument is that, on the one hand, the case of the group of activists is explained by a radical habitus (Crossley 2003) they had acquired throughout their lives and by the networks in which they were immersed. On the other hand, the case of the relatives of victims is explained by their shared array of meanings around impunity in the Mexican justice system and by the diffusion of information in the mass media. Moreover, moral shocks and strong emotions mediated these biographical backgrounds to cement their recruitment processes. The text is divided into three broad sections. The first and second discuss respectively

the cases of the activists and relatives of victims providing a theoretical outline, their life trajectories, and an analytical discussion. Then, the third section presents a reflection on the role of emotions in recruitment dynamics.

Following Fillieule and Neveu (2019), I introduce the life trajectories of my interviewees focusing on describing—although as briefly as possible due to extension limits—the events they have lived aiming to understand the process that led them to join contention. From my point of view, familiarisation with the participant’s narrations is essential to gain a deep understanding of the case study, because the analysis of contentious actors requires understanding the unique experiences of the activists whom we study, and with whom we study (Jaster and Young 2019). Without knowing what they care about, how they see themselves in the social world and the language they use, it is difficult to understand how and why people organise to protest (Jasper 1997). Thus, it is necessary to know how the participants interpret where, when, and how their movement began (Owens 2008) because separating people from their situational contexts might lead to the neglect of how the narrations of their own actions reflect their past and present selves (Jaster and Young 2019). So, paraphrasing Ganz (2009), I ask readers’ indulgence on the descriptive passages of this chapter since one of my main points is that life trajectories of particular people and their experiences in the social world matter for understanding their activism.

## **1. Organisers**

### *Theoretical outline*

As mentioned before, during the night of 28 March 2011, a group of people close to Javier Sicilia gathered outside the Government Palace of Morelos to protest because of the murder of Juanelo and his friends. There, they mounted an *ofrenda* with flowers and messages about the victims. The next day, with the attention of the press, they organised public poetry readings and a march in the surrounding streets. Later, when the poet arrived in the country, the actions continued, and the group began to expand the scope of the protests.

Two prevailing findings regarding the previous biography of activists suggest that individuals who participate in mobilisations usually have a background of activism and are part of supportive activism networks (Crossley and Diani 2019). This is critical to understanding the recruitment process amongst the MPJD activists. Building on Bourdieu’s work, Crossley (2002) coined the term “radical habitus” to demarcate a particular style of reasoning and acting when



activists make choices about collective action. Those who have developed this internalised set of dispositions due to previous experiences and longstanding involvement in radical politics, Crossley (2002) argues, might bring competence and fluency in radical politics into new socio-political struggles. Thus, participation in protest events or social movement campaigns frequently builds a disposition towards broader political activism — a radical habitus (Crossley 2003).

This individual construction also has an impact on the personal relationships of those who are involved in contentious politics since it entails their immersion in certain social networks that can help in reinforcing individual identities that create the potential for participation (Passy 2003). In this sense, several studies have indicated that people with friends or contacts who are involved in social movements are more likely to mobilise (Diani 2004; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; McAdam 1986; Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980). These personal networks constitute “micro-contexts” for mobilisation especially if their members have a close relationship (Opp and Gern 1993) because strong identification with a particular group may account for protest participation (McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Passy and Monsch 2014; Van Laer 2017) and because they facilitate coordination and communication (Oliver and Marwell 1988). Hence, as summarised by Krinsky and Crossley (2014), empirical evidence supports the theoretical assumption that dense networks lead to increased solidarity, reciprocal support and, generally, the formation of incentives for political participation.

I maintain that the people who decided to organise the first protests for Juanelo’s murder had developed a radical habitus and were immersed in social networks prone to activism. From the interviews made for this research, in the following section, I offer brief portraits of the life trajectories of Javier Sicilia, Pietro Ameglio, Magdiel Sánchez, Denisse Buendía, Juan García, Gerardo Gómez, Norma Garduño and Roberto Villanueva, eight of the people who started the mobilisations. The presentation of these individuals serves not only as evidence for my claim but as a reference for later chapters in which their names are constantly mentioned.

### *Life trajectories*

#### *Javier Sicilia*

Javier Sicilia was born in 1956 and was trained from a young age in Christianity by his father, and the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence by his mother. After studying in a religious high school and a year living in a Jesuit community on the outskirts of Mexico City, he did a major in French

Literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico due to his interest in political thought and poetry. After that, his professional development took place in the editorial industry. Due to the influence of a very close friend named Tomás Calvillo, Javier became “fascinated” with the Community of the Ark founded by Giuseppe Lanza del Vasto, a Catholic disciple of Gandhi who worked in France.<sup>17</sup> After a few years, he managed to travel there with his family. “I got into the life of the Ark, and it marked me — I came to Mexico with the idea of founding one”, he recalls (interview).

While running a university magazine in the 1980s, he published an issue on nonviolence—a topic that had not been previously discussed in Mexico—and that led him to meet a group of promoters of Gandhism, including Pietro Ameglio (introduced below). “I began to link with political-action groups, activism groups. It was there when I entered activism”, he comments (interview). Along with them and a group of artists, he started a magazine dedicated to philosophical and spiritual discussions from non-violence. Later, inspired by his experience in the Ark, Javier decided to start one in Mexico. Although the project ended soon for various reasons, his acknowledged work—which, as he defines it, “has a deeply spiritual component” that also cuts across his political and social concerns (interview)—placed him as a columnist in two publications of national relevance because of their critical profile: the political magazine *Proceso* and the newspaper *La Jornada*.

In 2001, Javier got involved in the campaign to protect the Casino de la Selva in Morelos,<sup>18</sup> meeting other activists such as Ignacio Suárez—Nacho,<sup>19</sup> as he was called—and Magdiel Sánchez (introduced below). As time went by, he also used his literature to support various social movements. In March 2011, at 55, Javier was invited to the Philippines by his friend Tomás Calvillo, then ambassador of Mexico, to give a series of presentations and poetry readings. There, he received the news of the murder of his son and went back to Mexico for the vigil. Shortly thereafter, he announced a series of actions to protest against violence.

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<sup>17</sup> Founded in 1948, The Community of the Ark is composed of a series of inter-religious and family-centred rural spaces “devoted to the search for nonviolent approaches to all aspects of personal and social life” striving “to model an alternative social order” (Sniegocki 2005, 295).

<sup>18</sup> Casino de la Selva was a hotel designed by architects of Spanish exile in Mexico that had murals made by various renowned painters. After several years of being abandoned, the multinational Costco bought its facilities in 2001 to build a shopping centre. This caused the organisation of a group of neighbours, artists and activists in general who founded the Frente Ciudadano Pro-Casino de la Selva to save the place for its historical and environmental value.

<sup>19</sup> Also related to other people who started the MPJD mobilisations, Nacho Suárez was an activist and politician who got involved in several campaigns during his life. He died in a car accident in 2015.

In brief, by the time Juanelo was murdered, Javier was trained and had practical experience in the school of non-violence. Besides, he had participated in protest campaigns—although he was inactive on the issue—and was publishing in critical mass media. Likewise, the poet was immersed in networks in the fields of journalism, art, and political activism.

### *Pietro Ameglio*

Pietro was born in 1957 in Uruguay and moved to Italy when he turned 20. “In Europe, I was involved in solidarity campaigns with El Salvador for the Jesuit massacre, for the murder of Monsignor Óscar Arnulfo Romero. We had an activist group for Central America”, he recalls.<sup>20</sup> He then moved to Mexico and studied History. Pietro considers that Mexico “re-educated” him since, amongst many other things, he experienced an “an ecumenical process of religious conversion” that brought him to Gandhism (interview). It was in this context that he met Javier during the 1980s, with whom he has since formed a “fraternal relationship” and with whom he has worked on various projects (interview). Simultaneously, Pietro founded several organisations, including the Mexican chapter of Peace and Justice Service (SERPAJ, *Servicio Paz y Justicia*), an ecumenically inspired group promoting non-violence with presence in several Latin American countries. As part of other initiatives, he started living and working with homeless people in Morelos and became involved, during the 90s in international peace campaigns. When the Zapatista uprising happened in 1994, Pietro and his SERPAJ peers allied with other organisations to start autonomous education projects in Chiapas. “At the time of the Zapatista uprising, we were fully involved in working with homeless children — the uprising changed our lives a lot”, Pietro explains (interview). Later, together with people from the University of Buenos Aires, he started a program inspired in Jean Piaget’s epistemology that served as “a bridge between cultures” (interview). Thus, the combination of “the Zapatista culture, the Piagetian culture, the Gandhian culture, and the culture of the poorest marked” him and “radicalised” him “positively” (interview).

A few years later, Pietro also participated in the Casino de la Selva campaign, which got him arrested due to his activism. Then, in the context of the war started by Calderón, Pietro collaborated

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<sup>20</sup> Óscar Arnulfo Romero was a Catholic priest who promoted liberation theology and was a critic of the military regime of El Salvador. On 24 March 1980, he was assassinated while celebrating mass. Similarly, dozens of people were killed at his funeral. The Truth Commission for El Salvador identified that those responsible were linked to the “death squads” of the country’s right-wing oligarchy (Eisenbrandt and Cuéllar 2017). The crime fostered international social mobilisation in various countries (see Nepstad & Smith, 2001).

with various organisations in the country to carry out several actions of non-violence to face the growing violence. When he learned of Juanelo's murder in 2011, he suggested mounting an *ofrenda* in protest and to prevent the criminalisation of the youngsters.

In sum, Pietro had been trained in the school of non-violent direct action and had done multiple projects from there, including actions in solidarity with the Zapatistas and the homeless, and against the war in Mexico. Likewise, he was a participant in national and international networks of activism and academic work focused on social struggles. Furthermore, he was Javier's close friend.

### *Magdiel Sánchez*

Magdiel was born in 1984 and considers that from a young age he joined political participation in a context of training “from what was left of [...] another era: with a context of the theology of liberation, of some important social struggles in Morelos, of the impact that the Zapatistas had on the state and of the struggles of the communities” (interview). Later, he began to study Philosophy and simultaneously became fully involved in the Casino de la Selva campaign, meeting Javier. Because of some personal relationships, including Nacho Suárez, Magdiel participated in the land defence struggles in the community of Atenco (see background chapter). Similarly, he coordinated a political newspaper called *El Pregón*, which allowed him to bring together a group of people interested in defending the communities. During this period, he became closer with Javier due to the editorial advice he received for the publication.

In 2008, Magdiel and a group of people close to him gathered “to launch an initiative that would make visible the violence that was taking place in the country” (interview), so he became involved in organising the Mexican chapter of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal. Besides, he continued participating in land defence campaigns and, in 2010, was one of the main organisers of a caravan within the context of an international conference on climate change in Cancun. Upon receiving the news of Juanelo's murder, Magdiel says that he was “shaken” but believed that nothing would happen beyond the tragedy (interview). However, he immediately joined the protest actions. So, to sum up, in 2011 Magdiel had several years of experience in activism in many fields, including community and land-defence struggles, as well as campaigns against violence. Besides, he was involved in national and international mobilised networks and was close to Javier.

*Denisse Buendía*

Denisse was born in 1979 and was trained in feminism since she was a child because her grandmother worked with Betsie Hollants, a retired nun who used to collaborate with Ivan Illich and founded one of the first feminist organisations in the region back in the sixties. “I would be there with her since a very young age, so I caught the feminism that these activists had. My activist training started then from a very young age”, she points out (interview). After doing a degree in Communication Science and taking diplomas in Sexual and Youth Rights, Denisse participated in several projects to support AIDS patients. Later, she joined the Committee Against Femicides in Morelos, a citizen-led initiative that sought to accompany the relatives of the murdered women. Along with several activists, lawyers and psychologists, she documented the crimes, approached the victims’ families and organised meetings with the authorities. Besides, she started publishing her poems and organised a group of local female artists.

Denisse knew Javier through his literature, but also forged a friendship with him because he used to drink coffee daily in the café that she owned. In 2011, Denisse received the news of the murder of Juanelo. “No one believed it to be true. Besides, they [the authorities and the local media] were accusing him of being involved in drug trafficking. We could not allow that”, she recalls (interview). Thus, she joined the group that placed the *ofrenda*. In brief, Denisse had participated in campaigns against gender violence and was embedded in feminist, artistic, and activist networks. Moreover, she was friends with Javier.

*Juan Francisco García*

Juan—known as Juanfra—was born in 1974 and grew up in a humble family of nine siblings. After finishing high school, he tried to study various university degrees, amongst which were Law, because he “wanted to change unionism” (interview), and Literature, because he wanted to be a writer. Although he knew of his literary work, Juanfra met Javier personally because he attended a writing course taught by the poet. After dedicating his work to cultural magazines, bookstores and cultural offices from the local government, he joined the PRD (see background chapter) and ended up as an assistant to a deputy in the state Congress. There, he met Nacho Suárez. “He already had a long experience in social movements and politics. He ended up being a teacher to me”, he comments (interview).

Along with Nacho, Juanfra participated in some protests against the violence that was suffered in Morelos. “Our group was very small, but very representative within the party because it was involved with social movements [and] a series of fighters who were not involved in political parties, but with whom Nacho had a bridge” (interview). In 2011, Juanfra was told that Javier’s son had been killed, so he decided to join the group that was protesting. Thus, Juanfra had done political and cultural activism and was interested in left-wing politics. Besides, he was immersed in networks related to activism, political parties, and arts. Likewise, he was close to Javier.

*Gerardo Gómez and Norma Garduño*

Gerardo and Norma are a couple of activists and defenders of the land who dedicate to traditional medicine. Gerardo was born 1958 and Norma in 1975. Since they participate together in the MPJD, I introduce them together.

Gerardo grew up in a family with several female rural teachers that taught him about the “tradition of working in the communities” (interview). In his youth, he was part of the Mexican Communist Party. While studying Psychology, he became involved in student activism and felt “like a fish in the water” (interview). Upon completion, he began working as a teacher in Morelos and developed a friendship with a group of people trained in liberation theology, including Nacho Suárez and Rocato.<sup>21</sup> Later, after the Zapatista uprising, he collaborated in various ways in the collection and delivery of humanitarian aid in Chiapas. Then, he opened a cultural centre where people would make donations to the Zapatistas. Years later, for personal health reasons, Gerardo was trained in traditional medicine and became a healer, in addition to being a teacher.

On her side, Norma’s mother was also a rural teacher, while her father worked for the government-owned electricity company. As part of a Catholic family, she considers that her politicisation was influenced by liberation theology from a young age. In her teens, and under the influence of her sister, Norma became involved in food collection campaigns to send to the Zapatistas and learned about the processes of community assemblies. “I loved being in those processes in which people gave their opinions and shared their problems. I was the happiest there. Those experiences marked my life for good. Community processes were not indifferent or unknown to me”, she comments (interview). While teaching Spanish, Norma got close to

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<sup>21</sup> Formed in various left-wing organisations during the 60s, Rocato—whose real name is Roberto del Callejo y Torrentera—is a psychologist, cultural promoter, and independent publisher from Morelos. Close to Javier, he was a spokesperson for the MPJD on several occasions.

traditional medicine due to a rare disease suffered by her first daughter. Given that she and Gerardo worked in the same middle-school—where they were Juanelo’s teachers—he supported her in healing the girl. Later both began a romantic relationship. As a couple and having formed a family, they dedicated to traditional medicine and participated constantly in multiple campaigns, like the Casino de la Selva one and the Atenco struggle.

On the afternoon of 28 March 2011, Norma was home marking tests when she heard on the news that several people had been found in a trunk. “Many of the parents of Juan’s class called us to ask if we had news about him”, she explains (interview). After it was confirmed that Juanelo had been murdered, Gerardo and Norma received phone calls from Rocato, Pietro and José Luis Barajas.<sup>22</sup> “We all proposed that we had to go to the centre to set up candles and protest because it was beginning to be said [in the local media] that they were linked to drug trafficking”, Gerardo recalls (interview). In brief, Norma and Gerardo had been involved in left-wing radical politics, student activism, and several struggles of indigenous communities to defend their traditions and their lands. Besides, they were linked to Javier, his son, and other activists from the group that started the protests.

#### *Roberto Villanueva*

Roberto was born in 1983 and grew up in a Catholic family. Because of his closeness to the church, he became involved in social aid groups and was trained to enter the priesthood. During that period, he worked “a lot with church groups in missions to promote the Gospel and in social actions in the communities”, so he “learned a lot about what the community is” (interview). After abandoning his intention to become a priest, he began a career in Philosophy, but dropped it for personal reasons. However, he considers that his time in the National University influenced his politicisation because he participated in student activism.

After a few years of dedicating to his family commercial business and continuing to collaborate with the church, he went back to university to study Human Rights and Peace Management in 2010. There, he was Pietro’s student. Although he did not know Javier personally, Roberto had read his political analyses and his literary work. Besides, a friend of his from the university was friends with Juanelo, so he accompanied her to Cuernavaca to protest the day after

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<sup>22</sup> José Luis Barajas was a worker at the University of Morelos. Close to Javier Sicilia, he joined the mobilisations from the beginning.

the *ofrenda* was set. “There was a context that allowed me to know with much familiarity the pain caused by the murder [...]. I remember perfectly when [my friend] told me that one of her friends had been murdered” (interview). In short, Roberto had been involved in social action through the Catholic church, in student activism and was being professionally trained in human rights defence. Even though he was not directly related to Javier, he knew people close to the poet and his son.

### *Radical habitus and social networks*

The group of people who started the protests of the MPJD had been involved in various forms of socio-political participation over the years, such as church workgroups, training spaces in human rights and political theory, student and indigenous activism campaigns, and organisations that supported local and international social struggles. Furthermore, as observed in other social movements (Downton and Wehr 1998; Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012), most of them had adopted a particular lifestyle that reflected their commitment to certain causes — for example, some had lived in radical communes, while others based their families, their scholar careers and also jobs around activities related to several types of activism. These ways of living that are deeply linked to mobilisation matter because they show a common pattern that crosses through personal life and political activity (Crossley 2003). Therefore, the group that started the mobilisations in March 2011 had earned experience in multiple areas that allowed them to develop a sort of expertise in contentious actions.

Bourdieu (1977) defined habitus as systems of structured and structuring dispositions that generate practices and representations. In a general way, the notion of habitus reflects how individual and collective actors’ actions and choices are influenced by their respective histories, and how, in turn, these choices and actions have an effect on the actors’ understandings in the world (Crossley 2002). Building on this theoretical work and using his own research amongst mental health movements in the UK, Crossley (2002) introduced the concept of radical habitus to define the way of reasoning and acting that activists show when they make choices about collective action. According to him, since the habitus involves a form of know-how and adopted assumptions that outline practical reason, it can help in understanding the choices around contentious action that activists make (Crossley 2002).

The life trajectories that I previously introduced show that several members of the organising group of the MPJD had been involved in collective processes around Zapatismo, left-wing politics,



land protection and the defence of human rights from multiple perspectives. The sustained participation of these actors in contentious politics facilitated the development of a radical habitus, which was a key element in their decision to protest in response to the violent crime against Juanelo. This group of people considered mobilisation a legitimate and useful method to publicly express grievances and, moreover, several of its participants already had some experience in organising against violence. This disposition towards radical practices was formed and fostered precisely through their participation in such practices. Thus, their internalised disposition to radical politics impacted on their contentious response after the murder because they drew upon their knowledge derived from an enduring interest and involvement in social mobilisation. Since the MPJD organisers had a practical interest in movement activity and had learned from their participation in previous campaigns, they ‘knew’ the importance of protesting to protect the dignity of the youngster and his friends.

The micro-universe of knowledge, valuations and practices that the members of this group shared about social movements guided their actions because events around violence, as well as other socially relevant topics, are signified differently amongst the “politically innocent” and the “seasoned activists” who perceive the world through diverse schemas (Crossley 2002, 55). Hence, the radical habitus acquired by this group of people through the years made them resort to protest practices, which in turn contributed to the continuation of movement activities (Crossley 2003).

Although without making any reference to Crossley’s theoretical proposal, Neveu (2019) argues that the “militant habitus” reflects a long-lasting input of energy to involvement in collective action and social struggles, which in turn structures a set of abilities, interpretive frameworks, and practices that support such an orientation. Using his work on activists from the sixties, Neveu (2019) claims that primary socialisation in the leftist social wing of Catholic church influenced commitment to the common good and to aid people in suffering. This has also been found in other contexts (Corrigall-Brown 2011). As shown in the life trajectories that I presented, most of the organisers of the MPJD was in one way or another related to segments of liberation theology or to ecumenical perspectives on the practice of non-violence. In other words, their socialisation in progressive religious spaces was part of their radical habitus.

Furthermore, the habitus is shared and developed in the lifeworld of communities (Crossley 2002) so its structural component must be linked to the social networks in which the actors are immersed. Personal networks are relevant micro-contexts for organising protests due to the ease

with which information flows within them and the personal rewards that participation may represent for its members based on the approval of their peers (Opp and Gern 1993). Besides, the set of relationships of activists has three dimensions (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013): First, a structural sense that indicates the presence or absence of certain relationships that delimit the actors that people can reach; second, a relational aspect referring to the type of relationships that people have built through their social interactions; and third, a cognitive component that provides shared representations, interpretations and systems of meaning. Therefore, social ties are micro-structures impregnated with stories that shape values, identities, emotions, preferences and perceptions (Passy 2003; Rosenberger and Winkler 2014).

Social networks have a structural-connection function that is observable before individuals mobilise (Passy 2003). In the case of the MPJD, the group of activists that started the protests was composed not only by actors who had developed a radical habitus but who were also related to each other through the figure of Javier or his son, so the tragedy had a certain degree of closeness. This is relevant because a feeling of identification with a particular group has proven useful in explaining political participation (McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Passy and Monsch 2014) and because mobilisation has more chances of occurrence in communities with densely networked members (Crossley and Diani 2019; Rosenberger and Winkler 2014).

The relational and cognitive components of social ties—or their socialising and decision-shaping functions (Passy 2003)—show how networks enable individuals to construct and reconstruct interpretive schemas that can foster political consciousness regarding a given protest issue through their embeddedness in certain networks. Even though the sympathy for a cause is not sufficient to explain mobilisation (McAdam 1986), the integration into supportive networks serves as a ‘pull’ that encourages individuals to join protests with topics for which they feel sympathy. Those who initiated the mobilisations knew the violent context of the country and, in some cases, had been directly involved in activities to make violence visible. In other words, these individuals had prior interest or sympathy for the thousands of murders and disappearances that were occurring in Mexico and were concerned with the militaristic response that governments gave to the insecurity crisis. As such, it is possible to observe the function of social networks as systems of meaning — since its members were close both with contentious practices and violence-related social struggles, this group shared evaluations about how activism was an appropriate response to the murder of Juanelo. While these ties did not necessarily show any collective identity, they

implied trust and recognition around the victim and his father, which facilitate involvement in social mobilisations (Diani 1997).

In short, I argue that the activists who started the MPJD protests had developed a radical habitus and were part of activism-prone social networks. The radical habitus, formed through their constant involvement in mobilisation campaigns around different issues over the years, determined their perception of protest as a legitimate and valuable way to introduce grievances in the public sphere. Besides, these internalised dispositions around contentious politics contained organisational expertise in the case of various individuals of the group. For its part, the social network that these individuals had formed around their relationship—directly or indirectly—with Javier and his son was relevant as a mobilising microstructure. The ties between these actors allowed the connection between activists who had developed a radical habitus and facilitated the reinforcement of their political consciousness around violence as a protest issue that required attention.

## **2. Relatives of victims**

### *Theoretical outline*

The first local protests of the MPJD did not involve relatives of victims. Denisse recalls that she heard many people arguing that they “should let victims take control” of organising the actions (interview). “The MPJD was born with people who did not have disappeared or murdered relatives [...]. The first press reports said: ‘Poets and activists take over the Government Palace’, not the relatives of the victims”, she adds. Besides, “there was [...] a bit of paranoia [...]. We had known each other for years; we knew what we were working on [...]. We could not integrate a total stranger to the coordination [...]. It was a security decision”, she explains (interview). However, after the 6 April march, families of murdered or disappeared people from different regions of the country began to approach the group who organised the mobilisations. Most of these persons lacked experience in activism and were not linked to politicised networks. Hence, using the same categories of analysis as for the activist group seems implausible. Likewise, it would be easy to fall into the error of considering that suffering a violent crime is enough to lead people to protest. Nonetheless, the decision of engaging in mobilisations does not take place at one single moment since it involves a dynamic process occurring over time (Passy and Monsch 2014).

I argue that the case of the relatives of victims is understandable through, first, the development of a shared array of meanings built upon the experiences of impunity in the Mexican justice institutions, and second, due to the dissemination of information in the media. Before engaging in protests, people become sensitised to a protest topic by developing a system of meanings that enables them to sympathise with the cause of a movement (Klandermans 1997). Even though networks are a usual element in this construction, people also modify their cognitive maps through their own life experiences and observing external events (Passy and Monsch 2014). Building on Blumer (1969), Passy and Monsch (2014, 30) use the term “self-interactions” to conceptualise the actors’ activities, quests for knowledge, and personal readings of situations that influence and shape their cognitive toolkits without necessarily involving social interactions but interactions with themselves. Thus, both self-interactions and external events have effects similar to those of social networks on an actor’s cognitive map (Passy and Monsch 2014). In this understanding, the relatives of victims who decided to participate in the MPJD had a shared array of meanings built on their experiences around a violent crime and the dynamics of impunity in the Mexican justice system — the tragic event that their loved ones suffered led them to acquire an in-depth knowledge regarding the practices of the institutions in charge of investigating their cases, which they personally evaluated through self-interactions.

Furthermore, a number of studies have shown that the media plays a part in recruitment to social mobilisation since it can raise general awareness of certain problems or events (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gitlin 1980; Noakes and Johnston 2005). Newspapers, radio and television have had a fundamental role in the diffusion of information about protests during decades (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Braun 2011; Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Myers 2000). This is important because, after becoming sensitised to themes around violent crimes, the media had influence in the recruitment of the relatives of victims since it provided them with information about the MPJD’s protests.

As with the organisers, I now introduce seven relatives of victims who participated in the MPJD using data from the interviews made for this research. The presentation of their life trajectories prior to their involvement in the mobilisations serve as evidence for my argument as well as a reference for subsequent chapters since their names are repeatedly mentioned.

## *Life trajectories*

*Araceli Rodríguez*

Ara, for short, was born in 1963 and, despite her wishes, was prevented from studying secondary school due to financial issues. She got married and had three children by the age of 26: Jovany, Martín and Luis. She and her partner separated, which led her to have several simultaneous jobs to sustain her sons. After a while, she began working in a hotel, first as a maid and then as a receptionist. During this period, Ara met the father of her daughter, Gabriela. Her son Luis worked as a Federal Police officer. In 2009, he was notified of his transfer from Mexico City to Michoacán, but he was disappeared along with five other officers and one civilian while travelling on 16 November. When Ara requested information on Luis' whereabouts, the authorities replied that he was not taking phone calls surely "because he was drunk" (interview). Furthermore, they warned her that they would open an investigation against him for abandoning his duties. It was not until a week later that the institution agreed to file the complaint for the disappearance.

From that moment, Ara narrates that she lived "very shocking and painful moments due to the wrongdoing of the authorities" (interview). For example, she was told that Luis' body was found charred, but this turned out to be false after making DNA tests on the corpse. Besides, the Federal Police tried to close the case based only on the declaration of a detained person who assured that Luis was killed. An official addressed Ara personally: "We have already arrested several people and [...] they narrate that the first one killed was your son, with bullets to the forehead", he said (interview). Then, "all the families heard how they were killed, how they were going to be burned alive. It was horrific. The mothers began to pass out, I started to get short of breath", she recalls (interview). Ara was forced to leave her job at the hotel and dedicated herself to the search for Luis. Then, she heard on television about the murder of Javier's son. "I saw that he was making a public call and I wanted to join", she remarks (interview). Without having joined any kind of protest before, she participated in the final day of the March for Peace. After a few weeks, she was contacted by Nacho Suárez—he had heard about her case because a relative of another of the disappeared policemen attended a demonstration during the Caravan of Consolation and gave him Ara's phone number—who asked her to participate in the first dialogue with Calderón. Ara then joined the MPJD.

*Tere Carmona*

Tere was born in 1959 and acknowledges that she grew up in a “privileged economic situation” that allowed her to drop out of formal education and dedicate herself to other activities and travel in the country and internationally (interview). In her 20s, she settled in Cancun with her partner and had three sons: Joaquín, Diego and Fabián. Joaquín, the eldest, studied Architecture in Mexico City until he was assassinated on 7 August 2010. Tere then travelled to Mexico City while her father filed the judicial complaint at the public prosecutor. “My mom was with me in Cancun, in a senile state. We did not even share with her what was going on. Two of my friends [...] took me to Mexico City. We had a vigil [...]. It was hard”, she remembers with tears in her eyes (interview). “I saw my son, I kissed him and, the next day, we buried him in Morelos [...]. It was very difficult. At first, I did not even want to leave my room”, she adds (interview).

Eight months later, Javier called for a mobilisation on 6 April 2011, and Tere participated in a solidarity march in Cancun carrying Joaquín’s photograph. A friend of hers asked why she was showing his picture if he had already been murdered. Tere remembers having replied: “That is exactly why I am going out with the photograph, because someone killed him, and nobody has explained anything to me” (interview). Besides, she recalls that she wanted to show solidarity with the Sicilia family. “I was not thinking about the poet but the mother and the siblings, because I knew what they were going through” (interview). A couple of weeks later, Tere travelled to Cuernavaca to join the March for Peace and has been participating in the MPJD since then.

*María Coronado*

Mary, for short, was born in 1969 and grew up in a humble family. At 18, she married Mauricio Aguilar and had three children, Edgar, Jaqueline and Mauricio. Mary used to work in a restaurant and as a cleaner, doubling shifts. Later, she joined a company as a contractor to do quality control of various products. In 2011, her husband travelled to Veracruz, where he was supposed to meet one of their sons. However, he was disappeared on 27 May. Mary’s son told her not to worry and went to police stations and hospitals to investigate, without obtaining any results. After two days, Mary filed a judicial complaint. “Everything was very difficult because you do not know what the system is like or how they will treat you. You go to file your complaint and it takes the whole day, until nightfall”, Mary explains (interview). Besides, she noted that the staff suggested that Mauricio “was involved in something” and that she was related to the disappearance (interview). Mary would

call the prosecution daily but was always told that there was no progress. Furthermore, she never felt that she was treated respectfully.

While she was with a friend who worked as a lawyer, Mary saw on television that Javier was calling relatives of victims to participate in the Caravan of Consolation. “I told my friend that I wanted to go, meet Javier and belong to that movement [...]. I knew that we would be able to understand each other because I was living the same thing”, she recalls. “In my own house, my family did not understand or support me [...]. When I saw the news, I wanted to be there. I saw so many people, and I knew that I was not the only one [looking for a relative]”, she comments (interview). Thus, Mary went to one of the MPJD meetings and was convinced that working collectively, as opposed to doing it alone, could help in achieving something. “That day I arrived, and I no longer moved away” (interview).

#### *Teresa Vera*

Teresa—to distinguish her from Tere Carmona—was born in 1944 and started her politicisation from a young age because her father participated in a national railroad workers’ strike that was repressed by the army in 1959. She got a professional degree and worked in the state of Oaxaca for 15 years. Later, she moved to Mexico City and became involved in the *Asamblea de Barrios*, participating in many political campaigns.<sup>23</sup> She then retired and returned to live in Oaxaca with her husband and son. On Saturday 29 April 2006, Teresa’s sister Minerva went out to get a haircut, but was disappeared on her way. The family started looking for her immediately but found nothing. After filing the judicial complaint, Teresa considers that the prosecution did “absolutely nothing to search” for her sister (interview). Indeed, when she read the file later, she noticed that “the agent did not even include her photograph or birth certificate” (interview). Furthermore, police officers asked for money to search for her arguing that they had no budget or car to go out. Teresa went from one office to another, but the authorities did not present her with any progress, only bureaucratic procedures, so she decided to search for Minerva on her own. Thus, she toured Oaxaca and the surrounding states, but the results were null.

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<sup>23</sup> After the 1985 earthquake, residents of several marginalised neighbourhoods in Mexico City founded the *Asamblea de Barrios*, a popular organisation that opposed government’s housing policies and demanded the provision of land for the construction of low-cost homes. Over the years, the organisation became one of the main supporters of the PRD in the urban area of the capital. See Cadena-Roa (2002).

As the months went by, she began to go to more distant cities, until she travelled virtually every state. “I would sleep in bus stations [...]. I thought I was the only person who was looking for a disappeared relative, but I realised that I was not. There were already many disappeared people”, she remembers crying (interview). Years passed without any lead of Minerva’s whereabouts. Then, in 2011, Teresa heard on television and read in the newspapers about Javier. “By that time, I was already very aware of what was happening in the whole country”, she comments (interview). Thus, she decided to attend the final rally in the March for Peace. “While there, I heard very painful *testimonios*. After that, I started going to the MPJD’s meetings”, she remembers (interview).

#### *Leticia Hidalgo*

Letty, for short, was born in 1962, did a degree in Communication and worked for over 30 years as a teacher in Nuevo León. Besides, she had two children, Roy and Richy. In her family, everyone was dedicated to study or work until 11 January 2011, when a group of armed men wearing police uniforms broke into her home, stole lots of stuff and took Roy away. “From January to June I had been alone with my family, going to the authorities, asking them to look for Roy”, Letty explains (interview). Given the distrust of the police—especially because those who entered her home were wearing police uniforms—she decided to denounce the disappearance to the army, and almost daily went to the barracks to ask about any progress on the investigation. However, “that road was very tortuous, very frustrating. The fact that they did not pay us the attention we thought we deserved [...]. Virtually no one was doing anything”, she comments (interview). In June, Letty and her family learned from television about an invitation to participate in the local demonstration of the Caravan of Consolation. “I knew nothing of the caravan. My mom, Richy and I saw it on television. We decided to go because we wanted to denounce. Even though we were very scared, we wanted to tell someone” (interview).

Although she had no experience in mobilisations, she arrived at the place of the demonstration and shared her *testimonio* in public for the first time. Then, someone from the MPJD advised her to approach a local allied organisation named Citizens in Support of Human Rights (CADHAC, *Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos AC*) and Letty began to meet other relatives of disappeared persons. After a while, she founded a *colectivo* and participated in the Caravan in the USA.



*Guadalupe Aguilar*

Lupita, as she is known, was born in 1955, did a degree in Nursing and had two sons and a daughter. They all lived in the state of Jalisco. Pepe, as she fondly calls one of her sons, owned along with his brother a small company for light shows. On 17 November 2010, the truck they used to transport all the equipment was stolen and, exactly two months later, Pepe was disappeared. Lupita filed the judicial complaint, but “the authorities did not do anything” (interview), so for months she searched by herself and found Pepe’s vehicle in the neighbouring state of Colima. Convinced that she would find him there as well, she virtually moved there for several months. “I toured all the towns in Colima. I would stay in a little hotel downtown. At night, I would make my plan for the next day with my map. I would leave at 6:00 am. I was practically alone”, she says as she cries (interview). Later, she asked the army to help in finding her son, but things did not change. Lupita tried to get help from Jalisco’s governor but given the lack of responsiveness, she had to stay for three days outside his office so the staff would receive her. Yet, the governor skipped the meeting and sent the state attorney, who said that both of her sons were on an “unlawful path” (interview).

In July 2011, Javier and Roberto visited Jalisco and participated in a public demonstration due to the disappearance of a student. “Every time I saw something that looked like what had happened to my son, I would run there”, Lupita comments (interview). Thus, she arrived at the place and was invited to talk about her case in the stage. “That was the first time that I grabbed a microphone to talk about what was happening. I let go [...]. I got down scared to see so many people all over the street [...]. That marked me”, she says (interview). In September, Lupita attended a Calderón’s event in Jalisco. There, she interrupted the president’s speech and asked for help. Calderón said that he would speak with her at the end of the event. The guards escorted her to an adjacent room and, after a while, Calderón arrived. Lupita showed him the folder with all the information on her case. He asked the army generals to contact her and look for her son. “I got out of there crying with happiness because I thought: ‘Now I am going to find him’ [...]. I do not forget that I gave free rein to my cry of sadness, of happiness, of mixed feelings” (interview). When she got home, she received a call from the generals asking for information. “I was in communication with them for about two months. Later, when I dialled, the number no longer existed. My happiness and my illusion of finding Pepe ended there”, she laments (interview). After experiencing all of this, Lupita participated with the MPJD in the Caravan to the South and in the Caravan in the United States. Then, she formed a *colectivo*.

*Patricia Manzanares*

Pati, for short, was born in a humble family in 1968 and had eight other siblings. After studying primary education, she had to drop out of school and began working selling tortillas and, later, in a cafe washing dishes. After a few years, she was able to study secondary school and then took a course to become a nurse-midwife. At 19, Pati's first son, Juan, was born and she started working as a hairstylist, a job she did for 30 years. In 2009, Juan started working as a Federal Police officer. Two years later, on the night of 20 February 2011, the group to which he belonged was staying at a hotel in the state of Nuevo León to carry out an operation. There, amongst dozens of other policemen, Juan was disappeared. When Pati went to the Federal Police offices in Mexico City, she was only told that Juan went out and did not come back to the hotel to sleep. She then travelled to Nuevo León and discovered that the authorities had not filed a judicial complaint about the disappearance, but rather an internal administrative record in which they dismissed Juan for abandoning his work. Although the institution started looking for him, the officers from Juan's group were reassigned to other regions, which made it impossible for Pati to speak with them. Besides she found many "strange things" in her son's case (interview). "They sent him to be trained with weapons, but this did not appear in his personal file. That night, two more officers disappeared inside the hotel, and, in total, 15 Federal Police officers disappeared in different hotels in Nuevo León", she explains (interview). This led her to conclude that there are police officers involved in criminal gangs. Pati argues that, taking advantage of their hierarchical position, authorities train rookies in the use of weapons and then turn them over to crime. "Who delivers them [to criminals]? They. They train them so the criminals can take them away" (interview).

In this context, Pati learned about FUUNDEC-FUNDEM (see background chapter) and decided to make contact. "FUNDEM has lawyers and psychologists [...]. In FUNDEM there are people who have really been human rights defenders, they know many people and give very good workshops", she considers (interview). However, "I had many conflicts at the beginning because I was even afraid to say that my son was an officer. He was so criminalised because the children of many companions were disappeared by the police. I felt attacked" (interview). Months later, a woman who also participated in FUNDEM spoke with Pati about the MPJD. "She told me that there was a group led by a writer who suffered this and that. I arrived with Javier Sicilia at the end of 2011, when the MPJD held meetings in Patricio Sanz [the street where the assemblies took place]", she remembers (interview). Although she stopped attending the meetings after a while—a

topic discussed in the third chapter—she has participated in several mobilisations organised by the MPJD.

### *Shared array of meanings and the role of media*

The fluctuating positions and roles in the broader social setting and some life-course changes have the potential to affect the decision or ability to engage in collective action because they shape what issues individuals interpret as relevant (Corrigall-Brown 2012; Fillieule 2010). Thus, analysing these changes in a person's biography is fundamental to understand why they participate. The relatives of victims who got involved in the MPJD had suffered an extremely violent crime through the murder or the disappearance of a loved one. Furthermore, they all experienced the negligence and dissimulation of the authorities. Coming from various regions of the country, this group knew the practices of governments that sought to criminalise or minimise the importance of the crimes that were committed in the frame of the so-called war started by Calderón. As they pointed out in their respective interviews, crying in most cases, they lived shocking periods that caused them terror, pain, frustration and helplessness in the face of the indifference by the authorities. Hence, the tragedy they suffered from the crime was not the only event that changed their biographical course and their life conditions — given their deep immersion in the dynamics of the inefficient Mexican justice system, these individuals were aware that the institutional channels were not working, and this knowledge and evaluation is crucial to explain their recruitment because being close to some arrays of values and beliefs serves as an incentive to motivate participation (Bosi 2007) and offers a source of attitudinal support to a movement (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Bosi 2007).

The accumulation of individual experiences that this group of people shared provided them with a common array of meanings around injustice and impunity. This matters because strangers are susceptible to recruitment in mobilisation campaigns because of these pre-existing images, beliefs and feelings they individually hold (Jasper and Poulsen 1995) — through the interpretation schemes shaped by shared values and understandings, they perceive opportunities to express grievances in collective action (Polletta 2006). As explained by Passy and Monsch (2014), self-interactions and external events alter people's cognitive maps. The former involve a personal pursuit for knowledge of the world or the context in which one is embedded, while the latter include events that do not necessarily convey social interactions. Thus, these two elements might make

people prone to respond positively to mobilising opportunities, leading them to join contentious politics (Passy and Monsch 2014). As shown in the biographies of the relatives of the victims I interviewed, their knowledge regarding impunity in the justice system and their assessments regarding the lack of attention from the authorities can be understood as the result of a process of both social and self-interactions.

Furthermore, most people in this group of relatives knew about the MPJD mobilisations through the mass media, which played a key role in producing awareness about this external event. Some authors (Noakes and Johnston 2005; Soule and Roggeband 2019) point out that diffusion of information through the traditional news media has proved useful in raising public's awareness about certain protest events and, as such, has been a vehicle for recruitment (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Braun 2011; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gitlin 1980; Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Myers 2000). Even though the media functions according to its own organisational and cyclical dynamics (Amenta et al. 2009; Andrews and Caren 2010; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Oliver and Myers 1999; Rafail, Walker, and McCarthy 2019), and despite how technology has impacted journalism, some studies suggest that press reporting of protest has remained relatively similar through the years (J. Cable 2017). Previous research has found that the use of disruptive tactics, the presence of broad coalitions, and the public prominence of those who participate are some of the elements that make movements gain more media coverage (Amenta et al. 2009; Rucht 2013; Valentim and Baumgarten 2019). Likewise, expected mass demonstrations are usually reported in advance, making the news portray what the protest will look like (J. Cable 2016).

At least initially, the MPJD mobilisations included massive protest events in various regions of the country. Broad sectors of student groups, unions, human rights organisations, indigenous collectives for the defence of the land, and even members of opposition political parties participated in these actions (Suaste 2017; Sicilia 2016b). Besides, the contentious performances of the movement—which are discussed in the third chapter—included novel tactics in the context of violence in the country, such as the caravans and the public presentation of *testimonios*. In addition, it is essential to bear in mind that Javier, as one of the central figures of the MPJD, had a privileged position in the fields of media and arts in Mexico due to his work in critical publications of political analysis and his literary work. In other words, at the time of the murder of his son, he had access to mass media, in which he collaborated, and given his interpersonal networks, he received the

solidarity of artists from various areas with a certain public presence. All of this influenced the extensive media attention that the MPJD received.

It is worth noting, though, that coverage is not automatically a positive phenomenon because media frames can differ substantially from a campaign's objectives (Rosie and Gorringer 2009) since journalists are not simply neutral unselective recorders of events (Oliver and Maney 2000) but players whose comments shape the discussion in their interpretations and analyses (Gamson 2004). In that regard, it should be mentioned that some commentators who were sympathetic to the ruling party initially tried to frame the MPJD negatively — one of them criminalised Javier's son and his friends, arguing that “they were murdered for a reason” (Gil 2013), while another suggested that the poet was used by the opposition to lead a “vulgar political movement of revenge against Felipe Calderón's government” (Alemán 2011). Yet, most of the relatives of victims that I interviewed pointed out that they became aware of the mobilisations through the media, so in the case of the MPJD, press coverage served for recruitment purposes.

In short, I argue that, in the absence of a radical habitus and the embeddedness in activism-prone networks, the case of the relatives of victims is explained through the life-changing circumstances around a tragic violent crime, which led them to share an array of meanings around impunity within the ineffective Mexican justice institutions, and through the dissemination of information about protests in the mass media.

### **3. Emotional mediation**

Individuals often mobilise to communicate their emotions, making known that they are angry and disaffected with authorities (Bosi 2007). Several researchers argue that emotions can accelerate participation and amplify the motivation for joining mobilisations (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007; 2013). While some emotions, such as resignation, fear or dread might discourage one's will to mobilise (Jasper 1998), others, such as moral outrage, anger and love have been fundamental to incite new activists to protest as well as invigorate their commitment (Kim 2002; Nepstad and Smith 2001). Nevertheless, emotions are not inherently linked to an act of injustice (D'Orsi 2018) but narrowly tied to the individuals' pieces of knowledge and moral judgements about the social world (Jasper 1997).

Coined by Jasper (1997; 1998; Jasper and Poulsen 1995), the concept of moral shock entails a “package” of feelings (Jasper 2014, 38) in reaction to events or pieces of information—whether

based on personal experiences or external circumstances—that raise such a sense of indignation that it makes a person prone to mobilise. Moral shock episodes can make people question their pre-notions or understanding of the world and open their willingness to join a social movement to seek a form of redress (Jasper and Owens 2014) because their emotional constructs emphasise perceptions about “what is”, moral aspirations on “what should be” and the possibilities of “what could be” (Aminzade and McAdam 2001, 19). Moreover, there are events that can echo the shocks of personal experiences and impact the knowledge and sensitivities that individuals already possess, which determine the interpretation of the urgency of responding to certain circumstances (Nepstad and Smith 2001).

My argument is that the victims’ relatives had suffered a moral shock as a result not only of a violent crime against their loved ones but also of criminalisation, vilification and disdain by the authorities. For their part, the organisers experienced a shock after the murder of Juanelo, mainly because of the closeness they had with his father. Although for different reasons, people from these two groups had biographical backgrounds that mediated their emotional disposition to being recruited. Furthermore, once mobilised, they lived new emotional dynamics that influenced their involvement because, just as emotional experiences can lead people to protest, movements can create and redirect emotions (Bayard de Volo 2006; Kleres and Wettergren 2017).

The interviewees recall an atmosphere of sadness and outrage during the first protests. Respectively, Denisse and Norma talk about “chaotic” and “very painful” days (interviews). In addition, Roberto comments having experienced “the indignation that moves you [...]. Something so severe that it does not allow you to be still [...]; it could hurt you empathically, but you were not going through Javier’s pain. It was a matter of indignation” (interview). Likewise, Juanfra remembers that, surrounded by “so much pain and so much sadness” because of knowing about so many killings, he “believed that everything else in life was unnecessary” if they did not look for alternatives to change the situation (interview). “I did not feel comfortable with my surroundings, and I thought we had to fight to transform that. I could not do anything other than be there”, he says (interview). Talking to the press, Nacho Suárez considered that “Javier found in the people all the solidarity that he wove for years”, so “when Javier decided that his pain was the pain of many and that of Mexico, we said: We are going with you” (Vergara 2011, 45). Widely, compassion and empathy make people conceive the circumstances that others face and foster a willingness to help them (Jasper 1998). Thus, for the organisers, the discontent and concern over the countless murders

were joined by empathy with the case of someone close to them who, besides, could be subject to slander. The radical habitus developed throughout their lives favoured the conditions for emotions to move towards protest. As has been theorised (Aminzade and McAdam 2001; Jasper 2014), these heightened emotions mediated the favourable circumstances—the prior development of networks and the disposition to activism—helping to galvanise protest around Juanelo’s murder.

Protest-related emotional dynamics are fluid (Benski 2011), so they can involve the parallel experience of seemingly contradictory feelings. The organisers of the first actions claim that participating in the mobilisations involved pain and a sensation of being overtaken because many of the people who attended were suffering, crying, talking about their cases and trying to give them their files looking for help. As Norma remembers, it “started to be emotionally complicated” because she “saw many comrades going into crisis” (interview). In particular, “I very much remember one of them saying: ‘All the bad news I have seen on television are in front of me today’. It was extremely painful”, Norma says (interview). However, participation in protest activities can also be satisfying for individuals, in part, because it provides a chance for articulating, enlarging and adapting moral sensibilities, convictions and principles (Jasper 1997). Thus, the activists claim that what they experienced during the first actions made them also engage to continue with the MPJD. For example, Roberto comments that “having found Javier and the mothers of disappeared and murdered people was a brutal change of life. The march from 5 to 8 May 2011 has been the most important active, social experience in my life” (interview). While marching, “many things go through your mind, through your body, through your spirit. You feel different too”, he claims (interview). “Knowing you have to be there [...] to do everything in your power so that what happened to Juanelo, to his friends and to everyone else we met there would never happen to anyone else. It was impressive”, he adds (interview). These words reiterate previous findings about how other emotional benefits of getting involved in contention revolve around experiencing a profound role for agency linked to the meaning of one’s actions (Wood 2001) and to an augmented perception of the effectiveness of collective action, which are key elements in understanding recruitment (Einwohner 2002; Gamson 1992a).

From his spiritual perspective, Javier explains his call to protest substantially from love. He remembers being “empty, fucking fed up [...] as any other victim [...], uninhabited and torn apart” (interview). Being a “mess and having no ability to reflect”, he considers that love—which he links directly to what he understands as God—triggered something internally that led him to protest.

Since love shapes one's understanding of the world, the grief and sorrow due to the loss of a loved one can profoundly impact people's perception of certain social issues (Jasper 1997). As discussed above, the relatives of victims had experienced the loss of a loved one, vilification and contempt by the authorities. Javier's call—which messages are analysed in-depth in the next chapter—presented a range of grievances that they could understand from their own experience; his experience was that of others because it transcended the personal case and reflected the pain and helplessness that thousands had lived after losing a loved one. Participating in the mobilisations was then an opportunity to express collectively their personal grievances. Thus, for the victims' relatives, mobilising with the MPJD was not only mobilising for the murdered son of a writer, but it was also mobilising to protest because of their own cases. This coincides with previous findings that indicate that individuals become attached to movements when they consider sharing emotions with other participants (Jasper 2014; Bayard de Volo 2006).

In that regard and talking about the March for Peace, Tere comments: “What made me go? I could not avoid doing it. I had no choice — it was the only thing I could do. I did not think about doing anything else” (interview). Likewise, when Mary heard on the news about the invitation to the Caravan of Consolation, she decided to approach the MPJD because she felt that people there could understand her since they were living and experiencing the same. She then attended a meeting and she “realised that alone” she “was not going to achieve anything” and that by working collectively they “were going to be able to achieve things” (interview). When Lupita spoke in public about her case for the first time during a protest led by other members of the MPJD, she was “marked” and got convinced about joining articulating with other relatives to face the authorities (interview).

Furthermore, when Letty attended the MPJD demonstration in her city during the Caravan of Consolation, she was “speechless, shocked” at seeing so many people (interview). She spoke publicly about her case for the first time “with great fear, with great terror” that some criminal might listen to her and, in retaliation, harm her family again (interview). However, she kept participating once she joined an organisation with other relatives of disappeared people. Melchor Flores, the father of a disappeared youngster, also spoke for the first time in public about his case during an MPJD protest.<sup>24</sup> “I asked myself: ‘What is going to happen? Are they going to listen to

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<sup>24</sup> Melchor Flores is looking for his son Juan Flores—a street artist popularly known as The Galactic Cowboy (*El Vaquero Galáctico*)—who disappeared on 25 February 2009 in Nuevo León.



me or am I going to go unnoticed?’ [...] People welcomed me with open arms [...]. From the first day [...], I saw people’s affection for my problem”, he said in a press interview (Vergara 2011, 16). These cases reiterate that emotional experiences can move people to protest and, once active, movements can create and redirect collective emotions (Bayard de Volo 2006) — someone might engage in protest experiencing fear initially and then, through participation, manage it and gain courage (Eyerman 2005; Goodwin and Pfaff 2001; Johnston 2014). Thus, the MPJD mobilisations offered the relatives of victims a space to present their cases and socialise their suffering. Since being listened to was important for them and, possibly, cathartic, the involvement in movement events channelled their emotions towards participation.

Although for different reasons since they had not developed a radical habitus, victims’ relatives showed a positive feeling about what collective action could achieve. It has been observed in other movements that new participants find in protest a way of reclaiming their dignity because they consider that their actions define who they are (Jaster and Young 2019; Wood 2001). Even if the MPJD participants were not clear about what they would achieve, being part of these mobilisations was a form of affirming their relatives’ dignity in the face of violence and official criminalisation of the victims. As Tere comments, she joined the March for Peace in part because of a “very human idea that what we are going to do will be useful for something, without having any expectations of what it will cause” (interview). Facing “the fact that Joaquín died in that horrible way and that nobody cared, that there was no justice, that there was a frightful indifference, it had to work somehow”, she adds (interview). Likewise, Javier comments that he did not have “much hope” but did what he considered to be his obligation. “I did what I had to do; what came to me from the bottom of that emptiness and from that long construction of my life that emanated from the emptiness”, he claims (interview). Researchers have argued that experiencing hope facilitates mobilisation because it portrays prospects of future change (Aminzade and McAdam 2001) — it implies the possibility of achievements, of making a difference (Einwohner 2002; McAdam 1988; Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, and Walgrave 2019). So, although there was no clear expectation of what could be attained, hope facilitated and motivated participation.

Nonetheless, some participants acknowledge experiencing hesitation and being dubious about some aspects of the mobilisations when the MPJD started. As previous research shows, a state of pessimism has sometimes promoted collective action because those that are more experienced usually know that most people do not get involved, so there is a perception that if one

does not perform an activity, no one will do it (Oliver 1984). A similar dynamic took place in the recruitment into the MPJD. Magdiel remembers that he had a different idea of how movements needed to act. “It became difficult for me to see how my political ideas could combine with a movement that, from the outset, could not be as I thought it should be”, he comments (interview). Yet, for “political, moral and personal reasons”, he became fully involved in the MPJD (interview).

Likewise, in an interview conducted in another context, another MPJD activist named Raúl Romero argued that a group of people with political experience saw “contradictions” within the movement—a topic discussed in the next chapter—but decided to continue participating because “we became humanised about what we already called war; we had known the victims of the war, the pains of war; we had heard people tell their stories for the first time” (Gordillo-García 2015, 51). For her part, Teresa comments with a certain sarcasm that at the MPJD gatherings she “met with peers and other people who say they are very sympathetic to our problem” so she started distrusting several individuals who “unfortunately spoke out for their own interests” (interview). However, she kept participating since it was a way of demanding justice for her sister. Thus, the complexity of the emotional dynamics in the recruitment of the MPJD reflects that it would be wrong to look for the causality of mobilisation in only a limited set of emotions. Far from it, participants can feel contrasting emotions in their involvement process and, despite a lack of trust, prioritise their commitment to the cause.

However, not all victims’ relatives convert their mobilisation potential into actual participation. Some of the interviewees explained that they know people who refuse to join mobilisations mainly for two reasons: feeling lethargic because of the crime they suffered and being fearful of reprisals from criminals or authorities. Although they may seem individual, these emotional experiences must be understood from a social perspective — in addition to personal depression due to the murder or disappearance of a relative, in regions where criminal groups dominate the territory in complicity with the authorities, protesting and getting involved in contentious politics may put one’s life at risk, thus limiting activism. This topic, however, requires further research.

## **Conclusion**

The placement of the *ofrenda* on 28 March 2011 implied a transformative, catalytic, breaching and critical event (Benksi 2005; Bosi 2007; McAdam and Sewell 2001; Staggenborg 2001) — a defiant

act that set in motion complex processes of social understanding that offered many people the possibility of imagining themselves as part of a larger collectivity, the MPJD. In this chapter, I analysed the recruitment into this contentious collective actor. Focusing separately on the group of activists who started the protests and the group of relatives of victims who subsequently joined, I argued that the case of the organisers is explained by the radical habitus they had developed throughout their lives, as well as their membership in mobilisation-prone networks; regarding the victims' relatives, I maintain that their recruitment is understood through the development of a shared array of meanings as a result of life-changing circumstances after suffering a violent crime, and because of the role of the mass media in the dissemination of information related to the protests. Furthermore, moral shocks and strong emotions mediated the biographical conditions of these groups to complete their initial involvement.

Collective action is a dynamic and interactive process (McAdam 1986; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), so the same elements could promote mobilisation amongst some individuals and inhibit it for others (Viterna 2006). Thus, although there is not a single form or a usual pattern by which people are recruited into social movements, this analysis sheds light upon other cases of contentious politics led by victims' relatives that have taken place in Mexico recently. I delve into this in the fifth chapter.

It is worth noting that scholarship has tended to pay little attention to the recruitment of people who join contention without prior experience in activism or social ties to a mobilised group (Fisher and McInerney 2012). Hence, the analysis developed in these pages provides empirical evidence to refine the theory on recruitment processes. As Passy and Monsch (2014) suggest, rather than reifying the role of networks, researchers need to evaluate and specify their functions. The study of the MPJD helps in that regard since networks were fundamental to recruit only one segment of the participants. Now, in the next chapter, I analyse how these first actions grew to encompass more people in the whole country.

## Chapter 2. Scale shift and official response

This chapter focuses on two questions: How did the MPJD's actions grow to encompass people in several regions? And how did the government react to this? To answer, firstly, I analyse the movement's upward scale shift process—that is, the increase in the number and level of coordinated mobilisations from a local point to other areas with a broadened range of actors, objects, and claims (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2005)—through its framing and coalition building; secondly, I study the dynamics of counter-framing deployed by the government. My argument is that the protests went beyond the local sphere because the MPJD's frames resonated amongst people and organisations of diverse profiles, with which some brokers—broadly, the actors that establish connections between groups (Diani 2003; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001)—were able to build alliances, although some of them ended in separation. Besides, I maintain that Calderón's government based the counter-framing on debunking (McCaffrey and Keys 2000) and discursive obstructions (Shriver, Adams, and Cable 2013) to discredit the MPJD frames. The text has three sections. First, I offer a theoretical and methodological outline for the study of framing and coalition-building. Then I describe and analyse the process by which the MPJD expanded its scope. Finally, I discuss the counter-framing dynamics of the government using the two public meetings of the MPJD with Calderón.

### 1. Theoretical and methodological outline

Contention's upward scale shift needs the generalisation of a core idea from one particular reality and the construction of bridges with other collective actors (Tarrow 2005). The former can be analysed through framing and the latter through coalition-building efforts. I will focus on frames first. Frames are schemata of interpretation (Snow et al. 1986) that allow individuals to understand what is going on in a given situation (Johnston 2002). In the study of collective action, the verb *framing* conceptualises the signifying work done by social movements through three core tasks: diagnosis, prognosis and motivation (Snow and Benford 1988). Diagnostic framing demarcates what is the problem and who or what is to blame; prognostic framing explains a proposed solution and the plans to achieve it, which usually are contingent on the diagnosis; and motivational framing provides a rationale—including cognitive and emotional dimensions (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000)—for joining contentious action.

Within these tasks, frame alignment is the linkage between individuals' and movements' interpretive orientations, which usually is achieved through strategic efforts of bridging, amplification, extension and transformation (Snow et al. 1986; Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2019). Bridging involves the connection between frames that are congruent, but structurally disconnected — empirically it can occur between a movement and a cluster of people who share knowledge, opinions or emotions around some grievance. Amplification entails the invigoration and further rhetorical elaboration of a previously constructed frame so that its foundations become more salient for a given individual or group. Extension occurs when the primary scope of a frame is stretched to encompass topics that are relevant to groups of potential allies. Finally, transformation occurs when there is a change in the understanding or meaning of certain ideas or values previously embraced by an individual or collective actor. In short, movements' frames are constructed through the development of a diagnosis, a prognosis and a motivational argumentation, and they are linked to possible supporters through strategies of alignment.

Furthermore, frames' mobilising capacity depends on their resonance (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow and Benford 1988; 1992), which comprises the relationship between a frame, the aggrieved social group and the cultural context (Oliver and Johnston 2000). As such, scholars consider a frame resonant if the potential supporters of a collective actor are compelled by its expression and interpretation (Noakes and Johnston 2005). However, there has been some criticism towards the conceptualisation of frame alignment and resonance due to their empirical and theoretical overlapping (Noakes and Johnston 2005; Opp 2009), which tends to produce circular reasoning on the premise that the happening of any protest is evidence of the resonance of the organisers' framing (Bloemraad, Silva, and Voss 2016; Ferree 2003). Taking this into account, Ketelaars (2016, 344) argues that there is little differentiation because “the more people align” with a frame, “the more the frame resonates” — yet, the key difference is that resonance is a frame attribute while alignment is something individuals experience (Ketelaars 2016). In other words, resonance is an indicator of alignment or a consequence of frame alignment strategies (Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2019). Hence, one needs to explain the type of alignment process to understand why a frame was—or not—resonant.

Broadly, resonance has been theorised as consisting of two sets of interacting factors: credibility and salience (Benford and Snow 2000). Amongst them, scholarship has focused mainly on the dimension of narrative fidelity or cultural resonance, while other characteristics have been

left aside (Ketelaars 2016). Here, I analyse the MPJD frames' resonance considering three dimensions of credibility and salience: the claims-makers' credibility, the centrality of the proffered frames for targets, and the experiential commensurability of the frames. The first reflects the perceived reliability of the people who articulate the movement's discourse; the second is related to how indispensable the movement's ideas are in the life of potential participants; and the third remarks the congruence between collective action frames and people's daily lives (Benford and Snow 2000).

To transcend the mere description of a movement's rhetorical work and obtain a more complete picture of contention, researchers must work on "content snapshots" of the frame structure using longitudinal sampling that allows linking the variations of the frames with the political context, the strategies and relationships with other actors (Johnston and Alimi 2013, 454). Thus, my analysis of the MPJD's framing builds upon Ketelaars (2016) and Johnston and Alimi (2013), answering four questions: First, who is the subject? This demarcates the aggrieved collectivity. Second, what is the problem? This points to the afflicting issue. Third, who or what is to blame? This establishes responsibilities regarding the problem. Fourth, how can the problem be solved? This comprises both the prognostic and the motivational call. Moreover, given that written and spoken words are the most useful evidence for frames (Johnston 2005), the analysis is based on public statements of the MPJD that were made to announce mobilisations and pronounced in mobilisation events before the Caravan of Consolation. Since Javier has been the main spokesperson of the MPJD, most of the messages that I present were delivered by him; although this overshadows the polyphonous voice of a movement (Johnston 2002), the methodological decision is based on the fact that organisations and spokespeople usually introduce their claims aiming to reflect their supporters' beliefs and values (Espinoza-Kulick 2019).

Given that a deep understanding of contention requires analysing the dynamics of organisational collaboration (Van Dyke and Amos 2017), the other key element in upward scale shift that I analyse in this chapter is coalition building. Although previously mobilised groups can join collective action for several reasons (Crossley and Diani 2019; Diani 2015; Diani and Mische 2015), two recent reviews of the literature point out that the social ties of the brokers, the organisational characteristics of the collective actors involved, and the ideology of the different parties are amongst the main factors that determine the formation of alliances or coalitions (McCammon and Moon 2015; Van Dyke and Amos 2017). As such, in this analysis I focus my

attention on three elements: First, the ties between activists, because the role of brokers has been fundamental in multiple social movements due to their trust bonds (Arnold 2011; Borland 2008; Heaney and Rojas 2008; Shaffer 2000; Von Bülow 2011). Second, the multiplicity of objectives of the MPJD, since broad goals enhance cooperation because thematic variety increases the chances of having shared interests so more groups can be addressed (Borland 2008; Hewitt and McCammon 2004; Van Dyke 2003). Third, the cultural and ideological congruence with other actors with whom the MPJD forged alliances in its upward scaling because cultural similarities and consistent ideologies are critical to longstanding alliances since they provide a ground for mutual understanding. Conversely, incompatibilities might prevent organisations from working together despite their common goals, especially when there are no conflict resolution channels (Haydu 2012; Whittier 2014).

Governments can respond to social mobilisation in various ways: ignoring protests, repressing them, co-opting them, or offering solutions to the issue, amongst others. One way to analyse these responses is through the study of counter-framing, which encompasses the efforts of the claims' targets to refute, undermine or deactivate the challengers' collective action frames (Zuo and Benford 1995). Since meaning-making is a contested process (Esacove 2004), it is necessary to observe how the responses of the movements' targets influence the framing of the challengers. Although counter-framing goes far beyond words, for analytical purposes one section in this chapter is intended to understand the government's discursive exercises in responding to the MPJD, as well as the MPJD's responses to those counter-frames.

## **2. Going beyond the local**

### *Gathering social support*

Left-wing organisations, scholars, analysts and political parties in Mexico widely agreed that Calderón declared a “war” to legitimise himself as president (Cervantes Porrúa 2012; Méndez 2015; Meyer Cossío 2015; Wolf and Celorio 2011). The broad reach of that idea makes it possible to consider it a master frame (Snow and Benford 1992) — a frame whose interpretive scope was sufficiently inclusive that it was influential amongst various types of contentious campaigns. This interpretation of the war was also portrayed in the first MPJD mobilisations when some of the organisers denounced that the crime against Juanelo was linked to “an absurd, stupid war, which [Calderón] declared [...] because he could never prove that he won the elections” (Morelos Cruz

2011a). Thus, as often happens in contention, the MPJD made use of a broadly known idea to frame collective action when it started.

Javier's first article after the tragedy was an open letter to the political class and criminals in which he condemned both groups alike, equating murders and disappearances with the criminalisation and stigmatisation of the victims. In this text, he presented as a subject both the families who were suffering indescribable pain due to the violent loss of a loved one and the citizens who showed their solidarity. He also identified a general problem: the countless unpunished murders that were caused by the war started by Calderón and by the lack of ethics of the political elite and criminal groups. As a possible solution, the poet argued that social mobilisations would force on the one hand, the ruling class to establish an agenda to unify the country and, on the other, the criminals to adopt codes of honour. In addition, collective action would serve to express a cry of outrage that would break the fear of insecurity and violence.

The brutal murder of my son [...] adds to those of so many other guys and girls who have also been assassinated throughout the country not only because of the war waged by Calderón's government against organised crime but also because of the rotting of the heart that has seized the so-called political class and the criminal class [...]. What I want to tell you today from those mutilated lives, from that pain that has no name [...], from that suffering, from the indignation that these deaths have caused, is simply that *estamos hasta la madre* [we are fucking fed up].

*Estamos hasta la madre* of you, politicians [...], because amid this badly planned, badly waged, badly directed war, of this war that has put the country in a state of emergency, you have been unable [...] to create the consensus that the nation needs [...]; because the corruption of judicial institutions generates complicity with crime and impunity to commit it; [...] because [...] our boys, our children, are not only murdered but criminalised, falsely convicted; [...]. *Estamos hasta la madre* of you, criminals, of your violence, of your loss of honour, of your cruelty, of your nonsense [...] because your violence has become infrahuman [...], subhuman, demonic, imbecile [...].

The death of my son Juan Francisco has raised solidarity and a cry of outrage [...] from the citizens and the media. That indignation [...] must be accompanied by great citizen mobilisations that force [...] to create an agenda that unifies the nation and makes a state of real governance. The citizen networks of Morelos are calling for a national march on 6 April [...] demanding justice and peace. If citizens do not join [...], the spiral of violence [...] will lead us to a path of horror with no return [...]. Since we do not want that [...], we will go out into the streets [...]. [We] are calling for a national citizen unity that we must keep alive to break the fear and isolation that the inability of you, politicians, and the cruelty of you, criminals, want to put us in body and soul [...]. Today, after having



endured so many crimes [...], we must speak with our bodies, with our walk, with our cry of indignation (Sicilia 2011a).

Given that they were structurally disconnected and given the life experiences included in the first chapter, I maintain that the victims' relatives started going through an alignment process of bridging in which resonance was based on the experiential commensurability of the frames. In other words, the relatives of victims of murder and disappearance were aware of the dynamics of criminalisation and impunity that were taking place in various regions of the country, at all levels of government, so the words of Javier in this first message were congruent with the daily experiences of tens of thousands of people. Besides, by building on the frame of the war started by Calderón, the poet provided a cultural referent widely shared by left-wing social sectors, making the message appealing to those groups.

Movements' leaders use discourse to get sympathizers hooked with their motivational framing (Schrock, Holden, and Reid 2004). Yet, their attributes influence how their reliability is perceived by different groups (Benford and Snow 2000). Javier's use of an emotional, common and popular language, I maintain, appealed to large collectivities and allowed to identify the poet as a close character for most of the potential sympathisers. It was not the business elite asking for more drastic measures against crimes or a politician criticising the government to support their own party, it was a deeply hurt man speaking truth to power, placing authorities and criminals on the same level. As such, it is possible to argue that this first message portrayed Javier as someone who shared the feelings of many opposition groups and relatives of victims who had been treated in an unworthy manner.

During the 6 April 2011 march in Cuernavaca, the poet gave three speeches. I only focus on the third one, delivered at the end of the protest, because it included elements of the previous two. Javier insisted on the general problem regarding the criminalisation of victims, highlighting the implications of this practice not only in the personal sphere but also in the social. Besides, he pointed out how the emotional response across the country led to protests that were helping in giving identities to the victims, whom he portrayed as a community by mentioning that he felt all the murdered youths were part of his family:

The appalling murders of my son [and his friends] have filled the citizens [...] with outrage and pain. Their names, their stories and their shattered dreams brought to the public light by the love of citizenship, have made it possible to also show the names, stories and dreams of thousands of other guys murdered and criminalised by the violence [...]. Before them, with some exceptions, the dead

ones were [...] abstractions, collateral casualties or criminals [...]. When human beings have to get up daily to make their children live on miserable wages and know that perhaps they will not go back home [...]; when the criminals, by the force of impunity, have lost their codes of honour [...]; when [...] we must live from what Catholics call hope in God [...], we have already begun to live in hell [...]. That is what we have built when we made selfishness and enrichment virtues and threw the culture, education and solidarity into the field of useless things [...].

Since my son [and his friends] were murdered, I felt each one of the guys and girls [...] of this nation, as members of one family: my family [...]. To you, young people [...] who know how to use social media [...], we ask you to convene, to unite, to take to the streets [...] — own the country and decide the destiny and the nation that you want [...]. When this tragedy happened [...], you [...] embraced my cause, which is everyone's cause [...]. I have decided to stay here in a sit-in in this square, in front of the *ofrenda* [...], along with all those who want to accompany me [...] until 13 April. It is the last date that we give the governments [...] to bring to justice the murderers of our children [...]. We will create a space for citizen dialogue where we will debate the way to stop this absurd war [...] and to devise actions that build peace with justice in our nation [...]. If they do not present the criminals to justice, we will call a national march to Mexico City demanding the resignation of the governor and the urgent halt to this absurd war [...] (Sicilia 2016b, 433–36).

In this speech, Javier introduced himself—the father of a murdered young man—along with the people who showed solidarity with his cause as subjects but also expanded the reach arguing that his cause was the cause of the country. Regarding the problems, the poet pointed out that, given the lack of opportunities they faced, young people were forced to join criminal gangs and become hired killers. This, at least in part, was caused by an economic model that benefited the accumulation of wealth and destroyed social bonds. Another problem, much more personal but a reflection of the general situation in the country, was that the crime against Juanelo had not been solved and the local government was to blame. Given this, Javier insisted on social mobilisation as a possible solution because it would make the names, faces and stories of the victims visible so that the authorities would understand that they were not collateral damage or statistics. In this understanding, the announced sit-in would pressure the authorities to resolve the case and, simultaneously, would allow the group to organise with other people interested in finding strategies to achieve peace.

I argue that it is possible to identify both amplification and bridging efforts in this message: it can be noted that Javier builds on the master frame of Calderón's war highlighting one of its interpretations regarding the cause of the violence crisis, while also focusing on feeding another

dimension of the frame to connect with the victims' families, a sector that, as already said, was structurally separated from previously politicised groups. The call for social dialogue is relevant because it opened the opportunity to start building cooperative ties with other previously mobilised actors. In addition, due to its empirical content and emotional charge, the narrative about the criminalisation and the unwillingness of the authorities to comply with their obligations provided elements that reinforced the reliability of the MPJD. I maintain that Javier's experience as the father of a murdered young man was that of thousands of people who could find in his words the same story that they had lived in the face of impunity. Thus, in going out to protest as the father of another murdered youngster he provided an opportunity to express others' own grievances. The efforts of frame amplification and bridging opened the opportunity to connect organised and politicised groups with relatives of victims scattered throughout the country, while the content of the messages—which included elements that were central and empirically reliable to the audience—favoured the resonance of the frames introduced by a man whose condition strengthened his experiential credibility.

It is important to note that the organisers of MPJD recall the importance that Javier's speeches had in directing the actions. Norma remembers that the poet told the organisers that the protests “were not only for the murder of Juan but for the many who had been killed — what we needed was not only to ask for justice but also pacification” (interview). For his part, Roberto mentions that Javier's “words and messages made your blood boil, moved you, made you empathise” (interview). Thus, Magdiel sums up that “despite what a group of people very close to Javier did, the determination to open the prospect of a new movement was Javier's” (interview). As such, “we did the minimum required of people who did want to break into the public scene”, he considers, but “it would not have been something beyond those first actions had it not been for the prompt and explosive way in which Javier posed the issues. That was when everything trembled”, he adds (interview).

The words of these three activists reinforce, from a point of view close to the mobilisations, the role that framing played in motivating participation. However, as explained in previous pages, broadening the scope of the actions also requires brokerage. Juanfra recalls that aiming to organise the March for Peace, some participants of the MPJD—which at that time called itself the Network for peace and justice (*Red por la paz y la justicia*)—contacted other organisations and groups seeking to receive support and solidarity. “Nacho Huape, who had contact with many organisations,

began to contact people from Pasta de Conchos,<sup>25</sup> the ABC nursery<sup>26</sup> and others”, he says (interview). Likewise, Magdiel states that, due to his personal relationships, he was in charge of seeking the participation of the electricians’ union, the FPDT (see background chapter for their relevance), and the Comité 68,<sup>27</sup> amongst others. On his side, Pietro explains that he also called individuals and organisations that he knew due to his previous work. “I was the one who introduced Javier to Emilio Álvarez and Miguel Álvarez” (interview), who, respectively, were directors of CENCOS (National Centre for Social Communication, *Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social*)<sup>28</sup> and SERAPAZ (Services and Counselling for Peace, *Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz*),<sup>29</sup> the two main organisations that supported the MPJD. These people and groups “entered, somehow, because of my relationship with them and with Javier”, Pietro argues (interview). Furthermore, due to his lengthy involvement in projects with the autonomous communities in Chiapas, he also linked the MPJD with the “urban-civilian arm” of the Zapatistas — “I introduced them and was the bridge, the trust bond”, Pietro recalls (interview).

All of this is relevant because close personal ties between brokers and their contacts are one of the most important factors in forming alliances since they offer a degree of trust and sharing of knowledge (Arnold 2011; Dixon, Danaher, and Kail 2013; Levi and Murphy 2006; Staggenborg 2015). People like Nacho Suárez, Magdiel and Pietro had been collaborating for years with contentious actors from multiple regions of the country. Their work had built bonds of trust that served to involve many organisations and groups which, to different degrees, were linked to some of the forms that violence had taken in the country. Some of these organised actors did not focus on mobilising against the war, but they did oppose and criticised many of the government policies and positions. This reiterates that although social movements are usually focused only on a theme

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<sup>25</sup> In February 2006, an explosion at a mine in the state of Coahuila buried 65 workers. The case became an emblem of labour exploitation, corruption between companies and the State, as well as the impunity enjoyed by the economic elite in Mexico. At the time of writing, the miners’ families continue demanding to search for the bodies.

<sup>26</sup> On 5 June 2009, a fire occurred in the ABC nursery school in the state of Sonora, where 49 children died and 106 were injured. The nursery operated irregularly under the supervision of the Mexican Institute of Social Security. Marcia Gómez del Campo, one of the owners of the nursery, is a cousin of Margarita Zavala, wife of the then-president Calderón. The case showed the impunity enjoyed by the families of the political elite in Mexico.

<sup>27</sup> The Comité 68 brings together survivors of the brutal repression that the students suffered on 2 October 1968 in Mexico City. The 68 movement is a referent of social mobilisation, State violence and the struggle for democracy in Mexico. See Allier-Montañón (2016).

<sup>28</sup> With an openly Christian inspiration, CENCOS was founded in 1964 aiming to claim social justice by making visible those sectors of the population ignored by the mainstream media.

<sup>29</sup> SERAPAZ was founded in 1996 by bishop Samuel Ruiz as a mechanism to support the intermediation between the Zapatista army and the government.

or set of themes, activists tend to participate in multiple fields of contention (Meyer and Boutcher 2007) and often attempt to construct alliances amongst diverse movement actors (Mische 2009).

The case of the Zapatistas—one of the most reputable and respected social movements in Mexico and internationally—is illustrative of how the brokerage met with frame alignment processes. As mentioned in the background chapter, several solidarity demonstrations took place during the March for Peace; amongst them, the one carried out by the Zapatistas in Chiapas was especially relevant due to the participation of 15,000 members of the autonomous communities who walked silently carrying messages against the war. This was their most crowded action in 17 years since the public irruption of the movement (Henríquez 2011). The message from the commanders stated:

Today we are here because people with noble hearts and firm dignity have called us to demonstrate to stop the war that has filled the soils of Mexico with sadness, pain and indignation. Because we have felt called by the cry for justice of mothers and fathers of boys and girls who have been killed by bullets and by the arrogance and clumsiness of bad governments. Because we feel called by the dignified rage of the mothers and fathers of young people killed by criminal gangs and by government cynicism. Because we feel called upon by the relatives of the dead, wounded, mutilated, disappeared, kidnapped and imprisoned without any guilt or crime [...].

The words and silences of those good people do not represent the bad governments. They do not represent the criminals who steal, rob, kidnap and kill. Neither do they represent those of the political class who want to get profit from this national disaster. The silences and the words of these people are those of simple, working, honest people, [...]. These people do not want personal gain — they only want justice and that the pain they have felt does not reach the hearts of others [...]. These people do not seek to be a government, but rather they seek the government to take care of the life, liberty, justice and peace of the governed [...].

Today we are not here to talk about our own pain, our struggles, our dreams, our lives and our deaths. Today we are not here to signal paths, nor to tell anyone what to do, nor to respond to the question of what happens next. Today we are here [...] to say: We, the Zapatistas, understand and support you [...]. You are not alone (EZLN 2011).

This message shows the resonance that the MPJD frames had for one of the most relevant social actors in the country, which, in turn, called its own sympathisers to mobilise and support the demands of peace and justice (Bellinghausen 2011a; KeHuelga 2011a). I maintain that the Zapatistas' speech shows frame alignment through extension. As they had argued in several communiqués across the years, their struggle is for life and against death — in the message in

support of the March for Peace, the Zapatistas extended their core frames to embrace the demand for a halt to the war waged by Calderón. Furthermore, they highlighted the credibility and reliability of the conveners, organisers and participants of the march based on a set of qualities they perceived from their words and actions. Thus, trust bonds with brokers, frame alignment and frame resonance are key to understand how some organised actors like the Zapatistas helped in the upward scale shift process of the MPJD.

Some other organisations were not contacted by brokers but decided to get in touch because of overlapping goals. The group known as COMECOM—which gathered activists from 25 other groups, including students, unions and socialists, amongst others (see background chapter)—is illustrative of how the lack of trust bonds with brokers can complicate cooperation. Although I delve into this in the next pages, it is important to note now that, a few days after the April 6 march, some COMECOM participants visited Javier at the sit-in in Morelos to deliver a letter and express their intention to join efforts. Their message shows a process of alignment through bridging, and resonance based on the centrality of the claims made by the MPJD for the objectives of their own organisation:

We are youngsters [...] with a will to live [...], like the many thousands that the government and organised crime have assassinated and disappeared in this ‘war’ [...]. The main responsible for this barbarity is the political class that governs us [...], which with its savage capitalism destroys everything [...]. We believe that only by organising, unifying struggles and protesting will we achieve the great transformation that Mexico needs. Just like you, Javier, we are fed up with violence, death and injustice [...]. Let’s take the streets, let’s occupy the public squares, let’s flood with life this country that the powerful have wanted to bury with death. Only together can we face so much pain, so much injustice (Flores 2014, 324–25).

Although some participants of the COMECOM considered that the MPJD was a “bourgeoise” group that could not be trusted, they decided to collaborate in the logistics of the March for Peace (Flores 2014, 326). I will return to this later.

In the final speech of the four-day long March for Peace, Javier portrayed as a subject the participants who walked silently to express their grief and pain, but at the same time hoped to rebuild the nation. Amongst the problems the poet identified, he pointed out, first, the generalised violence for which the authorities and criminals were responsible. Then, there was the issue of re-victimisation caused by elites who denied reality and criminals who acted with impunity. Third, Javier introduced the country’s weak democracy as a problem caused by all the political parties

that were only interested in obtaining power. The last problem was the “war” on drug trafficking, for which the president was responsible. To solve this series of issues, the MPJD proposed to continue mobilising to name all the murdered people and make visible the suffering, oppose the elections—the following year, 2012, there would be federal and local elections—and address drug trafficking as a public health issue, not as a matter of national security:

We have come on foot, as the ancient Mexicans did [...] to make the roots of our nation visible again [...]. If we have walked and arrived like this, in silence, it is because our pain is so great and so deep, and the horror from which it comes so immense, that they no longer have words to be said [...]. These open wounds [...] have forced us to walk here to tell them [those who are responsible for the security] directly to their faces that they have to learn to look and listen, that they must name all our dead who have been killed in three ways: with the deprivation of life, with criminalisation, and with burial in mass graves [...]; to tell them that with our presence we are naming this infamous reality that you [...] have denied and want to continue denying. A reality that criminals [...] seek to impose on us [...]. We will no longer accept an election if the political parties do not clean their ranks of those that [...] are in collusion with crime and have the State handcuffed and co-opted [...].

In the face of the advance of the mafia linked to drug trafficking, the executive branch considers [...] that there are only two ways to confront the threat: By administering it illegally as it used to be done and is done in many places, or by having a war with the army in the streets as it happens today [...]. Drugs [...] must be treated as a [...] public health issue, not as a criminal matter that must be confronted with violence [...]. This has been fertile ground for crime [...]. How to restructure this reality that has put us in a state of national emergency? It is a complex challenge [...]. This is why we tell you that [...] we all must make a pact: a fundamental commitment to peace with justice and dignity, that allows the nation to remake its soil [...]. The pact we are convening [...] contains six fundamental points that will allow civil society to promptly monitor compliance and, in the event of betrayal, penalise those responsible. This pact will be signed in the centre of Juárez, the most visible expression of the national destruction [...] and it will be full of a deep sense of what a dignified peace means [...] (Sicilia 2016a).

The framing of this message reinforced elements of previous speeches about whom the MPJD sought to represent, allowing victims’ families to recognise this struggle as an issue that matched their daily experiences, and not as an abstract and distant phenomenon. Moreover, the significance of Juárez, I maintain, was known not only by the most politicised actors but to a large part of the country’s population because the city was recognised nationally and internationally as one of the most dangerous in the world due to the crisis of femicides and murders (Vulliamy 2009; BBC News

2009). Furthermore, in this event the MPJD prognosis was more clearly stated — after Javier, two relatives of victims read the content of the “National Pact for Peace” (the Pact, from now on). This document presented the MPJD and all the people who agreed with its content as the aggrieved collectivity.<sup>30</sup> The central problem was violence in the context of war together with impunity. Although it was recognised that the cause of the problem was related to complex social structures, it was also identified that the responsibility fell on the criminals who sought to impose their rules, the governments that militarised policing, and the corruption that united both groups. The proposed solution was social organisation from below to promote six demands: truth and justice, ending the war, fighting corruption, combating criminals’ economic assets, policies for the youth, and participatory democracy.

Broadly, around the first demand, the MPJD argued that truth and justice would be achieved through the investigation of crimes in a transparent manner, not only identifying the guilty but also naming absolutely all the victims. Second, to end the war it was necessary to adopt a citizen security approach based on the experiences of the communities. Third, corruption had to be tackled by giving independence to the judiciary and the prosecutors’ offices so they would not depend on the ruling elites, as well as subjecting the institutions to citizen-led inspection. Fourth, the prosecutors should have as a priority to investigate money laundering to cut off the criminals’ income and report the cases immediately to society. Fifth, all governments should promote educational, cultural and employment opportunities for young people through policies with a large budget. Sixth, Congress should approve mechanisms of participatory democracy such as independent candidacies, referendum and recall elections to promote the involvement of citizens in politics.

Collective action frames underline how serious, unjust or immoral is a social condition that might be previously seen as unfortunate or tolerable, attributing responsibilities to those who are culpable of the situation while also encouraging individuals to articulate to work in a somewhat unified manner (Snow and Benford 1992). Thus, frames portray action-oriented arrays of meanings that inspire mobilisation (Benford and Snow 2000) legitimising discontent by pointing out the incompetence of power holders (Bröer and Duyvendak 2009). So, even in the absence of any structural linkages or resources, the arguments that movement actors use to motivate others to participate in collective efforts to generate social change are decisive in getting new sympathisers

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<sup>30</sup> The original version, published on the day of the march, is available in SERAPAZ (2011). A shorter one, which presents the same demands, is in MPJD (2016).



(Hewitt and McCammon 2004; McCammon 2001) because mobilisation depends very much on the shared understandings of activists and supporters (Gamson and Meyer 1996). I argue that the content of the Pact entailed a frame extension effort because it portrayed the demands and goals of the MPJD beyond the original focus on violence and the need for justice for the victims. Furthermore, the Pact's frame delved into the allocation of blame for the crisis, which is crucial to protest because it demarcates who can solve a problem, even if they are not the cause (Jasper 1997). The MPJD pointed out that the inequality caused by the capitalism model fostered various forms of violence. Besides, Calderón was framed as responsible for deepening the dynamics of violence through his security strategy and, as such, he was held accountable for the problem. As previous studies have found (Gamson 1992a; Ketelaars 2016), the identification of specific agents to blame for a problem makes a frame more appealing because it suggests that the issue can indeed be solved.

Thus, the discursive work of activists is necessary to set a clear target to blame for injustices and direct the outrage and opposition (Jasper 1997; 1998; Jasper and Owens 2014). The content of the Pact covered broader issues than violence, re-victimisation and impunity on which the MPJD built its first messages. Previous studies have found that thematic multiplicity facilitates resonance between groups that might not identify elements in common with the main frame of a movement (Borland 2008; Hewitt and McCammon 2004; Van Dyke 2003). Thus, I maintain that the frame extension of the Pact made mobilisations appealing to several organisations whose agendas built upon forms of social justice and, in general, supported the goal of stopping the violence in the country, but did not necessarily share the diagnosis or prognosis of the MPJD.

Since political persuasion is not merely an exercise in logical deduction (Jasper 1997), Cadena-Roa (2002) argues that the messages of a collective actor are not necessarily based on irrefutable arguments but on their appeal to moral principles and values that awaken emotions in their audience. Following that line of thought, some scholars have argued that there is a dialectical relationship between collective action frames and the emotional lives of potential recruits (Robnett 2004; Schrock, Holden, and Reid 2004). Although the demand to end the war could be far from the relatives' evaluative universes given the little politicisation that many of them had, the messages that Javier delivered included constant demands so the authorities would treat people with dignity to guarantee justice in their respective cases. That is, the MPJD frames highlighted elements that, as pointed out in the first chapter, were crucial in the lives of the people who decided

to participate, meaning that resonance was developed also based on the centrality of the claims that connected with pieces of knowledge, values, and emotions that some people already shared.

Likewise, although gradually the frames began to incorporate elements of greater professionalism and politicisation—there are several examples in the Pact, such as demands for democratisation of the media or mechanisms for citizen participation—the content of the messages kept the experience of the victims and demands for justice as pivotal themes. This, I argue, was fundamental to the resonance of the frames amongst relatives of victims across the country because previous studies show that when protest topics are presented from people’s everyday-life standpoint, frames have more resonance because potential sympathisers can personally relate to them (Ketelaars 2016).

After the March for Peace, Calderón’s government invited the MPJD to dialogue in order to inform the participants about the official actions against insecurity (J. Reyna 2011). Pietro responded to the press that the MPJD was open to dialogue, but on equal conditions and not from subordination. I will return to this for the analysis of counter-framing (Ballinas and Morelos Cruz 2011).

### *Losing allies but setting priorities*

With the dual goal of making the victims visible and signing the Pact in Juárez, the MPJD made the one-week-long Caravan of Consolation—whose performances are discussed in the next chapter—in June 2011 supported by Christian Base Communities,<sup>31</sup> unions, human rights centres, non-governmental associations, student organisations, and activist groups in several states. Although, according to Javier (2016b), it was clearly stated that the MPJD’s agenda included only the six points presented in Mexico City, other leaders convinced him about the importance of discussing the Pact to enrich its content. This opened an opportunity for some organisations to promote their own demands.

As mentioned earlier, after the March for Peace, groups like the COMECOM conditioned their will to cooperate with the MPJD. Given that the itinerary of such a march had sudden changes

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<sup>31</sup> During the 60s and 70s, influenced by the Cuban Revolution and with origins in 19th century Christian socialism, theology of liberation spread in Latin America. This trend put its priority focus on working with people in situations of extreme poverty and marginalisation, aiming to promote community-building. Since then, Christian Base Communities have been established in different countries, including Mexico. Many of the MPJD participants—like Pietro, Nacho Suárez, and Miguel Álvarez—had links with these communities.

and they were not given time to use the microphone in the stages, many COMECOM participants were dissatisfied with the event and considered it a display of disrespect towards their participation. Thus, they decided that they needed to promote more horizontal dynamics of decision making within the MPJD and to push further their agenda. Therefore, they worked with some local organisations from Juárez to demand the immediate return of the army to the barracks and denied any possibility of dialogue with the government (Flores 2014, 340–49). In different letters addressed to the MPJD organisers, groups of activists from tens of left-wing organisations pointed out that the demilitarisation of the country had no room for negotiation, that the six points of the Pact should be only a basis to guide further debates, and that they would not consider any kind of interaction with any authority — besides, they argued that the MPJD needed to include demands around labour issues, class struggles and against USA imperialism (Asamblea Juarense por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad 2011; Frente plural ciudadano y Centro de pastoral obrera de Cd. Juárez 2011a; POS 2011; Red por la Paz y Justicia Coordinación Chihuahua 2011). For its part, the COMECOM requested to include as demands a general wage increase in the country, freeze the prices of the basic food basket and fuels, guarantee food sovereignty and expand public hospitals (COMECOM 2011a). In other words, several groups pushed to expand the Pact's content to encompass many other issues that they considered important.

On the night of 10 June 2011, participants of the MPJD dedicated four hours to discuss the six points of the Pact with around 600 individuals and representatives of various organisations (Quintana 2016). In the absence of consensus, especially regarding the demand for the immediate return of the military to the barracks, the report of the discussions gathered 72 demands and measures to be adopted, including a political trial against all government officials, the creation of a community radio station, a national campaign to unionise workers, and an investigation on biopiracy in the country, amongst many others (Comité Cerezo 2011). Although hundreds of individuals signed the document, Javier and Emilio Álvarez disavowed its content the next day due to the contrast with the six points of the original proposal (Sicilia 2016b, 316–17).

Some organisations did not take this well. Javier's action provoked a series of criticisms for the lack of democracy in decision-making within the MPJD, for the media attention to a reduced group of people and for not adopting a much more contentious position towards the government (COMECOM 2011b; Frente plural ciudadano y Centro de pastoral obrera de Cd. Juárez 2011b; Martínez Cruz 2011; Radio Chinelo 2011). For his part, Javier sent an email to the participants in

the Caravan asking for their understanding because the document was a mere report of the discussions — including dozens of demands would cause the government to comply with nothing while the immediate demilitarisation would ignore other regions' demands; furthermore, he pointed out that they needed to remember that the justice for the victims was the core of the mobilisations (Flores 2014, 355–57). In response, some members of these organisations decided to continue participating individually in the MPJD, but the organisations as collective actors stopped supporting the MPJD. Moreover, many of these groups, like the COMECOM, dismembered fully a couple of months later (Flores 2014, 360).

While several activists from the MPJD consider that this episode was sabotage caused by groups trained in discursive radicalism that had not had time to make political statements during the caravan and sought to “mount” their own agendas in the MPJD, others reflect that it was caused by “everyone’s intransigence” (Gordillo-García 2015, 33–34; Vázquez 2016a, 103). Javier considers that it was a “great failure” given that the organisations did not understand the “spirit” of the Pact, although it had previously been clarified to them that it was the MPJD’s agenda, so he had to ignore the document in “an act of authority, not authoritarianism” (interview). Likewise, in another context, he has considered that this episode caused organisational weaknesses for the MPJD because the support of groups with the capacity to mobilise was lost, but moral authority was gained because it was made clear that the MPJD would not bow to any ideological discourse (Gordillo-García 2015). Participants from other groups considered this as exclusionary arguing that having opened the opportunity to their participation implied accepting other discourses, such as labour issues (SME 2012). However, Javier’s position echoes previous findings of how, apart from any rational calculation that might arise during coalition building, the leaders of a movement also evaluate their cooperative ties based on ethical commitments (Levi and Murphy 2006).

Framing usually involves disputes between moderate and radical factions within a movement (Benford 1993). The organisations that stopped supporting the MPJD only partially shared the diagnosis, prognosis and motivation to mobilise. “I think we understood each other, but we did have different positions. We both knew how Calderón had started a war and how he was doing policy”, but their idea of denying the government’s authority did not match the MPJD’s goals, Roberto considers (interview). Besides, other groups—regardless of not being against dialogue as a tactic—also backed away from the MPJD because of the terms used in the collective action frames. For example, Denisse recalls that feminist activists raised with Javier the need to highlight

femicide and human trafficking in the discourse. “He would say that the victims were victims [...]. That bothered us as feminists. I remember very much the disappointment that some felt, so there was a separation from the feminist group” (interview). Thus, this reiterates that participants in a mobilisation campaign are not completely aligned with the main claims-makers’ frames, so the resonance develops only to a certain degree (Ketelaars, Walgrave, and Wouters 2014) and, likewise, that movements need adequate frames not only to mobilise bystanders but to motivate people who are already willing to take action (De Vydt and Ketelaars 2020).

Moreover, alliances require dynamics that strengthen interorganisational trust by the brokers’ personal relationships, the involvement of members of all parties in decision-making and the division of tasks, and arrangements that make commitments credible and sanctionable (Borland 2008; Dixon, Danaher, and Kail 2013; Levi and Murphy 2006; Van Dyke and Amos 2017). The alliance with some organisations lacked previously developed ties of trust and the perception amongst these groups was that the MPJD did not take them into account. In that regard, some participants in the caravan consider that Javier was a leader close to the victims, but distant from collective political discussions (Suaste 2017). The poet himself acknowledges that he despairs “very quickly” in long assemblies and tells people to “fuck off” (“*los mando a chingar a su madre*”) (interview). This position strengthened amongst several organisations the perception of his leadership as a vertical figure which they opposed in the interests of total horizontality in the movement, although other leaders and brokers without media attention did participate in all those meetings.

A shared discourse that reflects a common understanding of the problems between groups and the similarity in values can differentiate instrumental alliances from substantive ones (Di Gregorio 2012). This compatibility of moral, ethical and political positions can be reflected in the ideologies of the actors involved. A narrow affinity between organisations may suffice to make casual alliances, but long-term coalition work requires greater ideological overlap (Enriquez 2014; McCammon and Moon 2015; Park 2008; Van Dyke and Amos 2017). Members of groups self-identified as Marxists declared that “for many of us, the poet’s Gandhism and Christianity are neither the best nor the only ways to combat a murderous government” and questioned the “reformism” that people from the MPJD represented (KeHuelga 2011b). Several participants of the MPJD consider that these groups came from a hard, puerile left, whose ideology was not one of criticism but of slogans (Sicilia 2016c; Vázquez 2016b). Thus, the discussions around the Pact

confronted the ideological positions of, on the one hand, left-wing political organisations pushing different demands and, on the other, human rights defence centres and barely organised relatives of victims who proposed a speech of reconciliation and search for justice (Romero 2016).

Furthermore, although it might seem obvious, the early decisions of the representatives of a collective actor impact their possible coalitions (Staggenborg 2015). For example, before reading the final speech of the March for Peace, Javier demanded Calderón to dismiss the Secretary of Public Security as a goodwill display. However, hours later he retracted and clarified that this was not the MPJD position. Several participants and allies agreed on such a demand, although it was not discussed collectively. Withdrawing the demand, I maintain, affected how trustworthy Javier appeared to some organisations with more radical discourses, causing frame dissonance and affecting their will to collaborate with the poet.

Other collective actors did not break with the MPJD but also had issues with some leaders. Javier (2016b, 291–94) narrates that, during the Caravan of Consolation, a representative of the Zapatistas told him that the commanders made an invitation to hold a national encounter of victims in the autonomous communities in August. The poet thanked them and responded that he needed to discuss it with other supporters of the MPJD, while Emilio Álvarez added that during such a season the Zapatista communities suffered from floods. Hours later, the Zapatista representative informed them that the invitation was withdrawn because they perceived rejection on behalf of the MPJD. Despite the bonds of trust between brokers, the decision of not accepting the invitation caused a distancing with a group of international relevance willing to be allied of the MPJD. “Looking at it after 10 years, I think it was a serious mistake [...]. I do not know what would have changed, but the MPJD’s course would have been different [...]. The possibility was lost”, Javier argues (interview).

Hence, the MPJD diagnostic frame argued that violence was the result of both criminal and governmental action because the war started by Calderón led criminals to be bloodier, fostered impunity and promoted revictimisation. The prognostic frame explained that actions were required around six major areas to begin solving the crisis. For its part, the motivational frame contended that social mobilisation would make visible the pain caused by the war, dignify the victims, and promote the official implementation of the Pact. The alignment processes around the rhetorical construction of the MPJD involved bridging amongst relatives of victims and some organisations that were not linked structurally to the MPJD, as well as extension amongst collective actors whose

core frames embraced the ones proffered by the MPJD. Since what resonates is socially located (Robnett 2004), I maintain, on the one hand, that resonance amongst victims' relatives was based on the centrality that the ideas defended by the MPJD had in their daily lives and on the experiential commensurability of Javier's speeches. On the other, at least at the beginning, some organisations were attracted by the Pact's frame extension and amplification strategy because it introduced a variety of goals in which they saw the possibility of fitting their own demands, which, moreover, were directed towards the same target: Calderón's government. Frames that address a variety of topics considered as important in a given field tend to resonate amongst more potential sympathisers since they open the opportunity of having intersecting ideas (Hewitt and McCammon 2004; Gerhards and Rucht 1992). As such, the broad content of the Pact suggested the possibility of improving the country's issues in many ways, not only in terms of crime and violence, and caught the attention of several political organisations that identified an opportunity to expand its scope by adding their agendas directed at the government. Thus, the upward scale shift of the MPJD happened through the gathering of actors that experienced a certain degree of alignment with the frames and considered them resonant, although for different reasons.

Besides, the brokerage of some participants was key in getting the support of previously mobilised actors with a certain reputation in Mexican contentious politics. The MPJD was pulled in different directions, but the leaders decided to focus on the victims rather than wider inequalities and to take advantage of institutional channels along with non-violent direct action, which led several left-wing organisations based on ideological commitments to break their alliance. Other groups that were brought to the mobilisations by brokers did not break with the MPJD in the same manner, but still limited their collaboration after discrepancies and disagreements with the leaders. As Denisse sums up: "The first meetings were more chaotic and fierier because everyone wanted to do very radical things: 'Let's occupy Congress, let's go to the military to paint their walls!' People [*la banda*] wanted to hand over the governor to the authorities" (interview). However "it was later understood that the actions were going to be more structured, with meetings and agreements. People [*la banda*] that wanted to be in protest all the time, taking the streets, broke up", she adds (interview). It was under these circumstances that the MPJD attended the first dialogue with Calderón.

### 3. Counter-framing

Although social movement scholarship has paid much more attention to challengers, analyses on elite framing have been developed in recent years aiming to understand how state officials and their non-State allies portray social issues (Danaher and Dixon 2017; Shriver, Adams, and Cable 2013). Studying these “official frames” (Noakes 2000, 658) facilitates a better understanding of the struggle dynamics between competing interests and how they change during contention (Cunningham and Browning 2004). In this section, I focus on analysing the MPJD discursive contests with Calderón’s government based on the two episodes of dialogue that took place on 23 June and 14 October 2011.

After the March for Peace, Calderón announced that he would seek a dialogue with the organisers of the mobilisation to explain the government’s strategy (J. Reyna 2011). Javier and other leaders agreed to meet, but only if it was a public event, with the participation of relatives of victims and after the caravan to Juárez (Ballinas and Morelos Cruz 2011; Excélsior 2011). MPJD participants recall having extensive discussions around attending the dialogues. In interviews done for another project (Gordillo-García 2015, 44–48), several people acknowledged having been against these events because they involved sitting at the table with a “murderer”. However, those in favour argued that the exercise was necessary because the State was the main actor responsible for both violence and justice, so the MPJD had to demand the investigation of the murders and disappearances, while also making the officials see the victims face-to-face. In the interviews conducted for this research, more MPJD participants reiterated these positions. “I remember, with laughter, how much I suffered the first dialogue with Calderón because of a certain fetishism that one has for the characters”, Magdiel comments (interview). “I felt that we were sitting [...] with the most disgusting actors of the country. I wanted to do something there. I asked why we were sitting down to talk if what had to be done was something else”, he claims (interview). “However, you would also find yourself in a brutal crudity in which you would say: I do not have anything else to offer people — I do not have the capacity or the strength to offer an alternative”, he adds (interview). Thus, there were many critical voices in the internal debate around dialoguing with Calderón, but the participation in the event was finally accepted considering that the victims’ relatives needed to be heard by the main person who was responsible for the war.

Before going through the dialogue episodes, it is essential to remember that—as explained in the background chapter—Calderón’s discourse around violence stated that drugs enabled crime,



criminals were enemies of Mexico, and they were murdering and disappearing each other. Thus, the official diagnosis indicated that violence was the result of crime gangs' actions that sought to control several territories, while the prognosis dictated that only the imposition of State force—through the armed forces—would subdue the criminals, although it was also necessary to reform the police groups and work on social bonds. The MPJD, as analysed in the previous section, agreed that violence was caused by organised crime, but also pointed out that the crisis worsened profoundly after Calderón declared a war. That is, the attribution of guilt highlighted the shared responsibility of criminals and authorities. Furthermore, the government was replicating violence by treating victims as mere statistics and collateral damage. Regarding the prognosis, the MPJD argued that following the demands of the Pact would set a base to start solving the issue.

### *First dialogue*

The first event took place two weeks after the meeting in Juárez. Accompanying the president at the venue were his wife and five cabinet members, while the MPJD's representation consisted of relatives of victims, activists, and inhabitants of indigenous communities. The empirical content of this section is based on a video recording of the event (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011a). Aiming to make the reading easier, I only include the references for direct quotes.

The first speaker was Javier. He explained that the participants were representing the thousands of victims who had to mobilise and walk throughout the country for the authorities to listen to them. “You will say that many of these victims are criminals [...]. Even if they were [...], they are victims [...]. Look at our faces [...], listen to our words [...]. Do we seem like collateral casualties, statistics [...]?”, he asked (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011a). The poet outlined four general problems: the rotting of the political institutions; facing drug-related problems as national security issues rather than public health ones; the tens of thousands of killings, disappearances, as well as the pain and suffering of thousands of families; and the criminalisation of the victims, who were treated as mere statistics. Although not solely, Calderón's government was framed as responsible for all these issues. Regarding the solutions, Javier clarified that the dialogue would probably not have positive outcomes, but it was necessary to recognise the debt that the State owed to the victims and the entire nation. For this, he made three demands. First, guarantee the truth, justice and non-repetition measures by making the victims visible and granting them reparations through a truth, justice and reconciliation commission, as well as with a law to

protect them. Second, rather than continuing with the militarisation, the MPJD demanded adopting human security approaches using local experiences, discussing the legalisation of certain drugs, establishing citizen observation to police groups, and strengthening the budget for education. Third, it was necessary to implement participatory democracy mechanisms. As can be noted, the MPJD held the main points of the Pact, although presenting them in a different order.

In his response, which was undoubtedly directed not only to the MPJD but to his own supporters, Calderón pointed out that he also wanted peace and justice, and declared that he felt saddened by the youngsters, cops, soldiers, and other innocents killed by crime gangs. Regarding the problem, he repeatedly asserted that the MPJD had a wrong diagnosis and prognosis because it departed from the wrong premises — the State did not cause violence; rather the force of the State was used because criminal gangs were producing violence. According to the government diagnosis, the cartels went from trafficking drugs to the USA to focus on selling them in Mexico, corrupting and intimidating authorities to control full territories using violence. Therefore, the solution could not be to withdraw the armed forces—which should have been used “earlier”—but to use all the forces of the State to “face and subdue criminals”, rebuild the police and prosecution offices and give young people work and education opportunities (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011a).

Thus, Calderón’s first response insisted on the distinction between the brave authorities and the inhuman criminals, as he had constructed for almost five years. This type of counter-frame based on boundary work is usually common in official responses on various topics (Gallo-Cruz 2012). However, it is important to note that Calderón did not raise his argument that 90% of the victims were criminals. This, I maintain, implied a strategic work of frame contraction (Lavine, Cobb, and Roussin 2017) that deliberately removed elements of the discourse constructed during four years of government. Although the power of governments influences the argumentative conditions of a social movement (Danaher and Dixon 2017; Ferree 2003), movements also impact the discursive possibilities of the authorities they struggle with — in front of relatives of murdered and disappeared people who had gained legitimacy in wide sectors of the country, Calderón’s opportunities to sustain the criminalising elements of his rhetoric were much less than those he had in closed forums for the participation of other elite members. Likewise, assuring that his government and that he personally also sought to end the violence and have peace shows the intention of putting the MPJD on the same side of the conflict. I return to this later.

After the president, five participants of the MPJD spoke. First, Julián LeBarón, a leader of the Mormon community in the north of the country who had suffered the murder of his brother and several other relatives; Ara Rodríguez, mother of a disappeared federal police officer; María Herrera, mother of four disappeared men; Salvador Campanúr, an inhabitant of the indigenous community of Cherán; and Norma Ledezma, whose daughter was a victim of femicide. Julián explained that he preferred not to discuss who was to blame for the violence, but rather focus on possible solutions to the crisis, which began by naming all the anonymous victims and adopting civilian strategies, not military ones. In addition, he asked the president, the police and the army to participate in a caravan to the south not as authorities but as citizens to listen to both victims and perpetrators. Ara pointed out that the official strategy was wrong because, despite the huge amounts of money allocated to the police and the military, drug trafficking was still there and the war continued to cause victims; instead of insisting on a strategy with absolutely negative results, the government should combat corruption in the institutions and use the budget for education, health and decent work opportunities. Crying, María Herrera said that she was there on behalf of all the mothers, brothers, children and families who suffered the pain of violence. For her, the main problem was that the authorities did nothing but abuse and humiliate the victims, so citizens had to carry out their own investigations. On his side, Salvador Campanúr presented himself as a voice that represented the indigenous peoples who suffered dispossession, looting and extermination by the authorities and paramilitary groups — to solve these issues, the government had to respect the San Andrés Accords.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Norma Ledezma spoke on behalf of the victims of femicide and their families to point out how the authorities protected criminals and demanded official DNA databases and attorneys specialised in gender-related crimes.

Calderón insisted that, despite the “prejudices” against his government, he wanted “exactly” the same thing as the MPJD: to protect people (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011a). Although he claimed he was open to listening to local experiences and discussing the legalisation of some drugs, he said that any measure had to be focused on strengthening institutions. On budget, he pointed out that his government allocated more to education than to security and that he had done the largest investment in the country’s history. Moreover, the president assured them that

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<sup>32</sup> After the ceasefire and two years of dialogue, the Mexican government signed these accords together with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. They included the demands of the indigenous peoples to guarantee their rights to autonomy and social justice. Although the authorities promised to include them in the Constitution, this did not happen.

most of the criminals involved in the participants' cases had already been arrested and promised to personally supervise the cases that remained without resolution. Finally, he insisted that withdrawing the armed forces would not solve the violence and blamed local governments for being co-opted by criminals.

Rather than framing the MPJD as a contender, Calderón's speech kept emphasising that the participants actually wanted the same as the government, that their goals were equal. Scholars have called this type of counter-framing centripetal (Peña and Davies 2017) — instead of highlighting the differences and pushing the contenders away from the government, the government brings the protesters closer to it. In other words, Calderón insisted on the distinction between criminals and authorities, but pursued a “boundary deactivation” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, 215) with the MPJD. This would be deepened, as explained later, in the second dialogue. Besides, the government's counter-framing denied that the MPJD's proposed solution was the correct one. According to Calderón, doing what the participants asked would only give worse results. This strategy of qualifying the challenger's prognosis and diagnosis as detrimental has been used by other actors who seek to minimize the significance of the proposals of a social movement (McCright and Dunlap 2000).

As the president spoke, supporters of the MPJD, including those at the table but not on the list of participants, interrupted him to point out that his statements were misleading — Norma Ledezma replied that the authorities could talk about thousands of administrative improvements, but the reality was that women continued to be murdered and disappeared while those responsible were still free; Julián LeBarón demanded respect for the memory of his relatives because, contrary to what Calderón claimed, there was not a single detainee in his case. Thus, despite the government's efforts to enlist the alleged achievements of his administration, the MPJD participants prevented the promotion of rhetoric that they knew to be empty and contrary to the realities of hundreds of thousands of people. Finally, Javier pointed out that the MPJD did not criticise the fight against crime *per se* and did not ignore the responsibilities of criminals regarding violence. However, the MPJD did hold the government responsible for having started a war with corrupted institutions, so he insisted that the president should acknowledge the poor results of his strategy. In addition, Javier handed Calderón a scapular, a symbol of pain that a victim gave him during the Caravan. To close the meeting, Calderón argued that he could not wait to reform the

institutions, so he acted with the resources that he had in the armed forces. Moreover, he agreed to work on a law to protect the rights of the victims, which is analysed further in the fourth chapter.

Although they were deemed as such for a while in the literature (Noakes 2000), official frames are not static (Cunningham and Browning 2004). In that regard, a key feature of this first dialogue is that the president did not speak of guilty victims or suggest that the murders occurred exclusively amongst criminals, but instead focused on the alleged achievements of his administration. This is relevant because counter-framing can limit the possibilities of argumentation of the contender (Riese 2014). In other words, the targets of the claims can respond only to a part of the messages that are addressed to them, and this, to an extent, limits the challengers' subsequent responses. Thus, not using the criminalising discourse and focusing on other aspects, such as the official diagnosis of violence, limited one of the MPJD's most powerful arguments regarding the constant criminalisation of victims. This would also have a later impact in the second dialogue.

As other scholars have analysed (Trumpy 2016), activists make evaluations of the counter-framing of their opponents. "The State was very weak, and I think Calderón was very clever in opening the space and capitalising it as a democratic space. I think the MPJD helped him", says the poet before laughing and puffing on his cigarette (interview). "Politically, it paid off for him. There had not been a president who carried out an act of this nature [...]. It was unprecedented both what we did and Calderón's response", he adds (interview). Furthermore, the MPJD and a group of government officials formed four working groups after the dialogue to discuss the main demands on four topics: law enforcement, creation of a victim assistance program, review of the security strategy, and participatory democracy mechanisms (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011b). The meetings were held between July and September 2011. In interviews conducted in another context, several participants of the MPJD criticised how unproductive these private events were, in which government representatives disputed the concepts that they used. "They did not like us talking about war. Why would we ask for peace if Mexico did not have a war? [...] They did not want to cooperate, it seemed that they were only putting obstacles", Ara has commented (Gordillo-García 2015, 64). Coincidentally, Raúl Romero assured that "we all insisted that there were victims of violence and human rights violations. That topic dragged us through all the meetings [...]. The MPJD argued that the State had to recognise that it also had responsibilities in

war” (Gordillo-García 2015, 65). These critical evaluations of the counter-framing strategies that the government implemented privately would be relevant in the second dialogue with Calderón.

### *Second dialogue*

A week before meeting for the second time with the MPJD, the president unilaterally ordered the opening of a victim assistance office called ProVíctima, but it was not assigned any budget or staff—I will discuss this in depth in the fourth chapter on political outcomes. Besides, the officials imposed the participation in the meeting of three representatives of organisations that supported the security strategy—Isabel Miranda, Alejandro Martí, and Graciela Bringas (see background chapter)—and limited the presence of MPJD supporters. Given the disagreement, it was arranged that the first part of the meeting would be only for representatives of the MPJD to speak.

Interviewed in 2015, Javier commented that Calderón’s officials wanted to make the MPJD look like the other organisations. The poet said directly to the secretary of the interior: “They represent your class, and we represent all the victims that you have denied; that is an absolute difference” (Gordillo-García 2015, 89). Moreover, “the security measures were like never [...]: A metal detector, they banned photos of victims, checked bags... It was awful” (Gordillo-García 2015, 89). The imposition of the participation of other organisations that supported the government’s militaristic and punitive measures confirms that the elites replicate their official frames through private parties to hinder movements’ framing (Shriver, Adams, and Cable 2013). Furthermore, I maintain that this was a government attempt to deepen the centripetal counter-framing (Peña and Davies 2017) to continue deactivating the boundaries (Tilly and Tarrow 2007) between the MPJD and Calderón’s administration. Overall, the settings to which the dialogue was conditioned shows, as other scholars have found (Danaher and Dixon 2017), that the elites allocate resources to control the symbolic and discursive field in which the contenders frame their demands.

Before analysing the episode, it must be noted that the empirical content of this section is based on different sources: video recordings of the event for Calderón’s positions (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011d; 2011e; 2011f) and transcripts for other actors’ interventions (CENCOS 2011; Gordillo-García 2015, 80–88).<sup>33</sup> Aiming to make the reading easier, I only include the references for direct quotes.

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<sup>33</sup> The full video of the meeting was public until 2018. Once the current Mexican president took office, all archives and multimedia files from previous administrations on the government website were deleted.

The dialogue took place on 14 October 2011. Calderón began with an account of some recent violent events to reiterate that the armed forces needed to be deployed throughout the country to confront criminals and defend the population. He thanked the representatives of organisations for being in favour of security and against crime, and said that he had the conviction to give a “unified and forceful response to their demands” (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011d). Next, Javier denounced that the government actions were “closer to demagogy and media spectacles” than to effective policies (CENCOS 2011) — if the government wanted to set the basis for a solution to the crisis, it needed to attend all the MPJD’s demands in collaboration with society. Faced with the imposition of the participation of other organisations, the poet said that the MPJD did not seek to represent all social sectors, but rather the pain of the most vulnerable victims, those who were denied and criminalised, as well as the citizens who knew the consequences of violence. In addition, Javier regretted that the government did not show the will to achieve any kind of peace in the private meetings and demanded justice for the murder of Pedro Leyva—an MPJD supporter and representative of the indigenous community of Ostula. Finally, he invited society to continue using public spaces during the next Day of the Dead to remember all the victims of violence. Subsequently, providing details on the work of the last three months, five more participants of the MPJD criticised the null progress of the working groups with the government and the obstacles imposed for this dialogue.

As mentioned, official counter-framing strategies can prevent the contenders’ possibilities of debate (Riese 2014). Since movement actors cannot only ignore opponents’ frames but have to find ways to respond to their arguments (Benford and Hunt 2003), by privately questioning the semantics and narrative of the MPJD before the dialogue, the government made the participants’ argumentation to pay more attention to this issue rather than others. Framing and counter-framing strategies, thus, modify in relationship to each other (Esacove 2004). In that regard, the president used Leyva’s murder to reiterate that only the force of the State could confront the criminals. In addition, he questioned the veracity and significance of various proposals of the MPJD: He denied any militarisation of the country, he denied that the judicial cases were in oblivion, he denied that he obstructed the participation of the MPJD and denied the creation of a truth commission.

Regarding what you call militarisation of the country: the presence of the army is not the core of the strategy [...]. The core strategy is to regain people’s safety [...]. I understand that violence cannot be resolved with more violence [...], but here we are facing a different issue: the violence of criminals

affecting citizens. This will not be resolved if the force of the State is not imposed [...]. It is unthinkable that the problem will be solved without the presence of the force of the State [...].

You point out that of the 31 cases analysed there is not a single positive result except for the case of Juan Francisco. The prosecutor says that there are 106 detainees and several arrest warrants. Categorically stating that there is no solution seems untrue to me [...].

As for ProVÍctima not guaranteeing social participation: Of course it does, and it is one of the few times that representatives of civil society are incorporated into an institution [...]. The project was consulted with representatives of the victims — with several, perhaps not all [...].

Truth commissions have emerged in contexts of authoritarian and repressive regimes, where the State is the main actor that kills and disappears, and where the truth is hidden. Honestly, this is not an authoritarian State. If this were an authoritarian State, we would not be speaking here [...].

Change the current strategy for one of human and citizen security? Well, but exactly what is proposed? That security is focused on the people and not on the State [...]. We must understand that the security of the people is implicitly linked to the security of the State, because the people are the fundamental component of the State [...].

You say that there is no policy for the participation of civil society in public life. If there is not, how can we understand these dialogues [...]? This is the policy of participation: that we speak and listen to each other. We make an effort, and we do not always succeed, to listen to civil society, but I also ask the other way around: listen to us [...] (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011e).

I maintain that Calderón attempted to discredit the ideas of his contenders with these messages, subjecting them to deep scrutiny to advance his own frames. In other words, his counter-framing built upon a strategy of frame debunking (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). Moreover, the president rejected some MPJD proposals because, from his perspective, there were already institutions working on the issues. Then, he repeated that he would continue with his strategy and that the diagnosis and prognosis of the MPJD were wrong. “One must confront criminals with the public force. I wish it could be done [...] with the power of personal *testimonio*, but [...] an armed criminal [...] must be subdued with public force”, he commented (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011f).

After a pause, representatives of the other organisations gave brief messages. Miranda, who months later would be a candidate for governor by the president’s party, thanked Calderón for his openness with society and thanked the army for being in the streets. Martí criticised Congress for not approving laws that would give certainty to the army’s involvement in policing. Finally, Bringas explained how her organisation collaborated with the government to promote the culture



of legality. Closing the meeting, Calderón acknowledged that there were some abuses by the armed forces that needed to be punished. “If there was a misunderstanding [...], I apologise; our idea was to be much more inclusive [...]. I really want to wish all of you luck because your goal of making victims visible now is also our goal”, he concluded (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011f).

Besides the intent of co-optation portrayed in that last phrase—a topic that is discussed in chapter 4—this second dialogue offers empirical evidence of a discursive obstruction strategy (Shriver, Adams, and Cable 2013) in which a network of state officials and private actors acted together to overlap the frames of a social movement and clog them. Thus, it can be observed how power asymmetries limit the discursive possibilities of a movement (Danaher and Dixon 2017; Ferree 2003) not only in the broader context but also in situational circumstances. Although a government’s lack of legitimacy opens opportunities for social movements given that official frames face difficulties to resonate amongst broader social groups (Messer, Adams, and Shriver 2012; Zuo and Benford 1995), officials can also take advantage of their interactions with movement actors. The case of the MPJD shows that opportunities are not the same ‘in the streets’ and directly facing the elites. As discussed in these pages, State officials can impose boundaries to movements in their interactions if they happen where they control the discursive arena. Facing these obstacles, the MPJD leaders refused to continue any dialogue with Calderón’s government.

As researchers have found (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Rohlinger 2002; Rosie and Gorringer 2009; Muncie 2020), the arguments of social movements are filtered by the media to reach wider audiences, which creates media frames (Gitlin 1980). Analysing the role of the media in these two episodes would require a broader systematic review, but in an illustrative manner it can be pointed out that a group of commentators who worked in the national newspaper identified with the left—who, in addition, were militants of the political party led by López Obrador (see background chapter)—began to attack the MPJD and, personally, Javier, arguing that he had become a supporter of the president.<sup>34</sup> This reiterates previous findings on how institutional interactions with the government—even when they do not imply co-optation—tend to provoke a confrontation between contentious actors and opposition parties (Peña and Davies 2017). Thus, although leaders of social movements often draw upon the legitimacy of elites to use their symbols against them (Hewitt and McCammon 2004; Noakes and Johnston 2005), framing messages to

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<sup>34</sup> Two examples are in the articles “*La ciudadanía quiere más*” (Citizens want more) and “*Candidaturas independientes*” (Independent candidacies), published by the newspaper *La Jornada* respectively on 27 June and 28 July 2011.

resonate with one audience might undermine the resonance with other audiences (Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2019) and, as such, harm the possibility of some alliances.

## **Conclusion**

The MPJD framing and brokerage brought activists, organisations, and victims' relatives from almost every region of the country. Although for different reasons that were discussed in this chapter, these groups aligned to different degrees with the MPJD's frames and found the claims to be resonant. Yet, many of these groups tried to impose their own agendas and ideological commitments to the mobilisations. Since the MPJD leaders rejected these positions, several alliances broke following the signing of the Pact. Then, the dialogues with Calderón accentuated the ruptures. Once confronting the government in the institutional arena, the president's counter-framing strategy limited the possibilities of the MPJD's frames and imposed conditions that prevented the leaders to advance their demands.

Rather than falling into the error of simply assuming that the MPJD mobilised people because the frames resonated amongst the participants, the analysis in this chapter took the lead of recent research (De Vydt and Ketelaars 2020; Ketelaars, Walgrave, and Wouters 2014) to avoid unrealistic homogenisations and explained how frame alignment processes were different for different audiences. This also made it possible to understand what characteristics of the frames were resonant for those who decided to participate. Likewise, these pages presented an account on the conditions in which alliances are fractured, despite brokerage and frame alignment. Finally, although scholarship has usually paid more attention to movements' frames, I followed recent research on elite framing (Danaher and Dixon 2017) to understand how Mexican officials and their allies responded to the MPJD challenge.

Collective action frames and performances are deeply interrelated (Nelson and King 2020; Zuo and Benford 1995), but researchers usually distinguish them for analytical purposes. In the same vein, I analyse in the next chapter the MPJD's contentious performances and the type of social bonds they fostered.

## **Chapter 3. Contentious performances and political-emotional communities**

Considering that social movements are essentially relational phenomena (Diani 1992), this chapter focuses on answering how mobilisations led by relatives of victims of violence create social ties. The text is divided into three sections. First, I provide a theoretical outline of what contentious performances are and how they produce a sense of collectivity. Then, I provide a general overview of four of the main MPJD mobilisations: The March for Peace, the Caravan of Consolation, the Caravan to the South and the Caravan for Peace in the USA. After that, I analyse these contentious episodes focusing on their community-building dimensions. Finally, I summarise the findings of the chapter.

### **1. Theoretical outline**

Repertoires of contention are the distinctive arrays of performances that are known and accessible to a collective actor to make claims to its targets (McAdam and Tarrow 2019; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1978). Although this ‘toolkit’ is learned through historically embedded practices from previous groups (Tilly 2008), social movements also create new oppositional performances for their repertoires borrowing and adapting tactics, strategies, organisational forms and meanings to carry out their activities (Van Dyke and Taylor 2019). Moreover, movements’ performances are rational projects for meaning-making and political action (Nelson and King 2020) as well as dramatic representations loaded with emotions (Eyerman 2005). As such, repertoires are fields of contestation in which symbols, bodies, actions and discourses are used to pursue or prevent social change, and develop solidarity and an oppositional consciousness amongst participants (V. Taylor and Van Dyke 2004) — that is, they carry an interactional movement-building dimension. Besides, while contentious repertoires are observable in specific episodes (V. Taylor and Van Dyke 2004), a given event is not simply one random part in a chain of contentious gatherings because they all portray specific meanings and characteristics drawn from their context, conditions and staging (Doherty and Hayes 2019).

Getting involved in a given group implies taking part in regular interactions within a particular world of meaning (Fillieule 2010). Thus, the relationships between actor and action, as well as their performative and symbolic elements, are key to understanding the complex meanings of contentious events and the movement-building processes (Barker 2001; Doherty and Hayes

2019). Some studies have found that continuous participation in protest performances enhances solidarity because it brings people together towards a shared purpose (Barker 2001; Berezin 2001; Casquete 2006). This is directly related to the development of collective identity, the perceived multidimensional links of individuals with a broader community based on their interpersonal relationships and the idea of some common status (Polletta and Jasper 2001), which is a critical element for sustained action (Flesher Fominaya 2019). Although McDonald (2002) suggests, based on empirical observations amongst young anti-capitalist activists, that collective identity is not relevant for some movements, Flesher Fominaya (2010a; 2010b) argues that even when some activists reject belonging to a given group reifying heterogeneity, they do identify as participants of a broader movement or mobilised community. For such a reason, scholars must observe collective identity as a constantly renegotiated phenomenon rather than as a given product (Flesher Fominaya 2010a). Hence, I maintain that the analysis of how people participate in contention provides an opportunity to observe the formation process of a sense of collectivity within a movement and, in turn, to understand the type of social ties it creates.

Moral outrage has inspired in some contexts a sense of community by fostering the formation of links amongst those who are indignant (D’Orsi 2018). A cluster of Latin American social anthropologists working with groups of victims of different types of extreme violence proposed the concept of emotional community to understand the links created between victims and the public through the narration of an individual or collective lived suffering (Jimeno 2010; Macleod and De Marinis 2018). The fundamental characteristic of this type of community is that the pain of the victims does not remain enclosed in them but spreads to other audiences who are moved by the narrative — this is followed not only by a compassionate moment but by the progressive construction of a political bond that leads people to organise and mobilise to demand justice (De Marinis and Macleod 2018; Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo 2015). *Testimonio*—testimonial narrative—plays a fundamental role in this process because it promotes, through its emotional elements, a shared version of violent events and establishes links that lead to the collective claim for justice and reparation (Jimeno 2010) taking personal struggles into the socio-political arena (Macleod and Bastián 2019). Although Jimeno and colleagues (2019) have chosen to use the term emotional community, they first proposed the concept as political-affective communities (Jimeno 2007), which is still used by De Marinis (2018) and Pearce (2018). Yet, following Stephen’s (2018) lead, I consider it best to use the term political-emotional community since it highlights the political

dimension of the social ties that are created through the emotional content of performances led by victims of violence.

It must be noted, though, that the literature on social movements had already developed an understanding of how emotions foster community-building. Contentious actors do not only rely upon pre-existing networks; during mobilisation processes, participants tend to develop new ties and solidarities between themselves, supporters, the general public and even elites (Diani 1997) because protest performances are forums for contestation as well as spaces where notions of community and belonging are built (Casquete 2006; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Nepstad 2004; V. Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). This means that socialisation and resocialisation in movements can lead people to adopt new perspectives and practices because they develop shared meanings about the means and goals of their campaigns, constructing community-specific cultures (Passy and Monsch 2019; 2020). Thus, participation fosters an active network with emotionally involved activists that share ties of trust and solidarity (Bayard de Volo 2006; Diani 2004; Hunt and Benford 2004; Jung 2003; Kim 2002; Santos 2020; V. Taylor and Rupp 2002) and, in turn, these emotional dimensions of social relations nurture continued involvement (Gundelach and Toubøl 2019; Jasper and Owens 2014).

The now-classic volume edited by Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001b) contains evidence from multiple contexts to show the link between emotional bonds and political participation. As argued by some contributors, political rituals communicate and articulate ideas, feelings and symbols that unify actors by focusing their attention on a shared experience, thus binding people and enhancing solidarity because of the new social relationships they create (Barker 2001). Likewise, the public expression of emotions can animate political activism (Gould 2001) because mass gatherings provide people with a chance to experience not only a sum of personal grievances but collective solidarity, hope and courage (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001). Thus, although focused on political identities linked to ethnicity and nationalism, authors like Berezin (2001, 93) have introduced the concept of “communities of feeling” to portray temporary arenas created through the experience of emotions in political rituals that fuse “self and other”. Beyond the sense oriented to political identities, what matters are the underlying dynamics between performances, emotional experiences and social ties, which have shaped contentious fields with distinctive characteristics like the activism on transnational migration and asylum search (Rosenberger and Winkler 2014; Russo 2014; Steinhilper 2018).

Walgrave and Verhulst (2006, 276) proposed the concept of “new emotional movements” to encompass cases of mobilisation resulting from random violence which shared certain characteristics: the central role of emotions and victimisation, the lack of clear-cut demands, organisational weakness, and broad elite support. Except for the fundamental role of the victims, the MPJD does not respond to the characteristics developed by these authors — the MPJD was not triggered by patternless or random violence, it did embrace specific demands, it did not have a lack of organisational ties, and elite support was not generalised. Moreover, although it has been found that grievances involving a loss cause a stronger emotional willingness to engage in activism (Bergstrand 2014), more research is needed to explore how allies, in contrast to those directly aggrieved by a given protest issue, engage in forging community with the groups they work for (Russo 2014).

Thus, the concept of political-emotional communities is analytically and theoretically valuable because it focuses on social and contentious interactions that have victims of extreme violence at their core, hence providing a deeper understanding of this area of social life. This paper links Jimeno’s (2007; Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo 2018) conceptual proposal with social movement studies by arguing that the performances of the contentious repertoire of the MPJD provided the settings where the participants built a political-emotional community. To support my argument, I now provide a general overview of the main contentious episodes carried out between 2011 and 2012. Then, aiming to refine the concept to develop its empirical study, I will present my analysis through four dimensions that I find fundamental in the research of these communities: the role of *testimonios*, the ethics developed during contention, the fluctuations in participation, and the costs and risks involved in the mobilisations.

## **2. Caravans overview**

Whilst the caravans have been described at length elsewhere (Rocato 2011; Sicilia 2016b; Suaste 2017; Osorno 2014; Muehlmann 2017; Estrello 2011; García de Alba 2013; Gräbner 2015), this short account provides a general idea of the context in which they took place, the type of actions that were carried out and the organisational aspects that made the tours possible.

### *Before the caravans: March for Peace*

After the 6 April 2011 march in Cuernavaca, several relatives of victims sought out the MPJD organisers to talk about their cases during the sit-in. “The response was very surprising [...], a lot of people began to arrive to give us the files of their relatives”, Denisse recalls (interview). Likewise, as days went by, Norma remembers that people who the organisers trusted began to approach offering their help. Thus, the MPJD gathered a base of participants for the following mobilisation, the March for Peace, which Pietro describes as “the pre-condition of the caravans” (Ameglio 2013, 31). The objective of this march was to mobilise the “moral reserve of the country” (Ameglio 2011, 23) and to “break the siege” of the local context, taking the protests to the capital, where “the centre of impunity was”, Pietro has claimed in previous interviews (Gordillo-García 2015, 25–26). Thus, on 5 May, about 300 people departed from Morelos to Mexico City behind a black banner that stated “*¡Estamos hasta la madre! Stop the war! Peace with justice and dignity*”. There were attendants and media from various regions and countries, but the presence of dozens of people carrying photographs stood out: “murdered sons, kidnapped relatives, burned infants, dead brothers, disappeared people [...]. Everyone carries pain and indignation”, a participant described (Vázquez 2016a, 57).

After three days of walking in silence to communicate the pain of violently losing a loved one, the MPJD arrived at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in the capital, where thousands of people received them in the night while an orchestra played Mozart’s *Requiem* (Garduño 2011a). On 8 May, the fourth and final day of the march, the local government estimated that 80,000 people participated, but the organisers argued that there were at least 200,000 (Pérez 2011). In any case, the main square of Mexico City was crowded with people that listened to dozens of relatives of victims and poets who participated in the closing rally, where Javier introduced the Pact and announced the visit to Juárez.

### *Caravan of Consolation*

Social movements usually carry out actions that are familiar to their participants (Doherty and Hayes 2019; Tarrow 1994). As Pietro explained, one of the main inspirations for the Caravan of Consolation was the experience of the Zapatistas, who had done similar actions — “in this warlike context, a caravan is not only a mass nonviolent action but a [...] peaceful column that breaks the siege [...] of violence [...] materially and morally supporting the people, bringing solidarity,

making visible [...] their suffering” (Ameglio 2013, 23–24). The MPJD held this first caravan from 4 to 10 June 2011 with around 500 people transported in 14 buses and 30 cars (Morales 2011), including entire families, students, citizens with and without political experience, relatives of victims, artists and journalists (Arriagada and Lajous 2011; Suaste 2017).<sup>35</sup>

The inaugural message of the caravan was given in Mexico City, where Javier explained that the concept of consolation was used because it was “a beautiful word that means being in the solitude of the other. Let the cry be: We are not alone!” (Riley 2013). After a brief stop in Estado de Mexico—where the poet denounced the high budget allocated to the upcoming local elections and the ties of the political parties to crime—the MPJD arrived in Michoacán, the state where the military operations began and where some of the most violent cartels had a strong presence. In the state capital, activists and relatives of local victims did a march and denounced the constant shootings, individual and group disappearances, murders of journalists, and attacks on indigenous communities (Urrutia 2011a).

As Suaste (2017) describes, one of the characteristics of the MPJD caravans was their openness to the participation of any victim regardless of their political sympathies—or lack of—or their socioeconomic position. Prior to the caravans, some local organisations worked with human rights defence groups to contact victims and invite them to participate. Then, the lists of participants were completed just a few minutes before the demonstrations began — the organisers would use the microphone to invite the relatives of victims interested in speaking to approach the stage to sign up. However, those who asked to participate after the list was closed did not have the opportunity to speak in public. The process by which a contentious actor ‘selects’ the cases or profiles that it publicly defends can have relevant effects on other socio-political dynamics (Kreiss and Tufekci 2013; Kramer 2017), so a possible area of future research is the analysis of the cases that the MPJD chose as emblematic.

After Michoacán, the MPJD travelled to San Luis Potosí, where people marched and shared more *testimonios*. Besides, showing solidarity to indigenous peoples’ struggles, some of the participants symbolically closed a mine operated by a company that invaded community lands (Suaste 2017, 75). Following a public meeting in the state of Zacatecas—where the MPJD denounced a raid by the Federal Police on the facilities of a human rights centre that helped with

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<sup>35</sup> For two documentaries with video footage of this caravan, see *Emergencia Mx* (2011b) and Riley (2013).



the logistics of the caravan<sup>36</sup>—hundreds of people received the caravan late at night in Durango to share more *testimonios* at a public meeting (Pineda 2012; Rea 2011; Soto 2012). Then, in Nuevo León, a group of people exposed stories of torture, murders, disappearances, and impunity. Besides, representatives of the MPJD attended the local attorney office to demand the resolution of the cases of some of the participants who were travelling with the caravan (Urrutia and Ramos 2011). The next day in Coahuila—where eleven people had been murdered the night before in a rehabilitation centre—more people gave *testimonios* about the discovery of clandestine pits, constant group disappearances, murders and rapes (Urrutia and Ramos 2011). Although some participants of the caravan highlight that the victims who spoke in the demonstrations had very different profiles, the *testimonios* were marked with a recurrent pattern: the government offices were negligent to the judicial complaints and the families were responsible for conducting the investigations on their own account (Suaste 2017, 74).<sup>37</sup> Likewise, many people gave the participants of the MPJD their files hoping to receive some support—the documentation team collected and systematised information from 291 cases (Suaste 2017, 91).

Upon arriving in Chihuahua, the MPJD held an event in the capital with *testimonios* about massacres and the control by organised crime in various areas of the state. Besides, the participants placed a plaque in memory of Marisela Escobedo, an emblematic victim (EmergenciaMx 2011a).<sup>38</sup> Then, in Juárez—known as one of the most violent cities in the world—thousands of people received the MPJD to visit the cotton fields in the outskirts of the city, where the bodies of several victims of femicide had been found (Bellinghausen 2011b). Later, the participants dedicated four hours to discuss the content of the Pact, whose results were discussed in the previous chapter.

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<sup>36</sup> On the night of 5 June 2011, 30 members of the Federal Police broke into the facilities of the human rights centre without a warrant. After destroying the doors and windows, they went through all the archives of the place and destroyed several folders and furniture, supposedly looking for weapons in the building. As confirmed by subsequent investigations, the official version was false. After a while, the authorities argued that it was only a mistake. The raid occurred a week after the hearing of a case in which lawyers from the centre defended five people who were tortured to accept charges of organised crime.

<sup>37</sup> It is not possible to include here the names of all the people who shared their *testimonios* — for some brief accounts, see Suaste (2017, 86–91) and Torres (2011b).

<sup>38</sup> Marisela Escobedo was assassinated on 16 December 2008 when she was just a few steps from the Government Palace of Chihuahua protesting for the femicide of her daughter Ruby, whose confessed author was released by a judge. For more, see Pérez Osorio (2020).

### *Caravan to the South*

The Caravan to the South “repeated the essential elements” of the Caravan of Consolation: the open space for the victims, the public meetings featuring images of lost beings and the *testimonios* of cases without justice (Suaste 2017, 126).<sup>39</sup> Contentious performances were carried out in 25 different locations in eight states and had the participation of political organisations, unions, groups for the defence of the indigenous territories, peasant communities, religious congregations that host migrants on their way through Mexico, and community police corporations (Gil, Mandujano, and Matías 2011). Besides, the documentation team recorded 221 cases of violence, amongst which the disappearance of persons predominated (Torres 2011c).

The MPJD left Mexico City on 9 September 2011 with 15 buses and 10 cars carrying over 600 people (Gil 2016). After departing from Morelos, massive marches and public meetings were held in three cities of Guerrero (EmergenciaMx 2011d; Rea and González 2011; Urrutia 2011b). The caravan then moved to Oaxaca, the state with the largest indigenous population in the country, where the MPJD visited multiple areas over several days. In various indigenous communities of the mountainous region, the MPJD marched and participated in ritual ceremonies to later hear stories of inequality, structural violence and the siege of native populations (EmergenciaMx 2011e; 2011f). Similarly, in other areas of the state, migrants from Central and South America shared *testimonios* of violence they had suffered while passing through Mexican territory (Urrutia 2011c). Besides, there were protests outside local prisons to show solidarity with political prisoners jailed for defending their lands (EmergenciaMx 2011g).

The caravan then went to Chiapas and listened to *testimonios* of more migrants in a shelter. Later, they travelled to the border with Guatemala, where Javier apologised to representatives of Central American organisations for all the violence that migrants suffer in their transit to the USA (Gil and Matías 2011; Riley 2013). Then, the group was divided into two to hold meetings with inhabitants of indigenous communities. The first group gathered with survivors, relatives and companions of the Tzotzil people killed by paramilitaries on 22 December 1997 in Acteal,<sup>40</sup> while the second went to Oventic to meet privately with Zapatista representatives. Following the route of migrants heading to the USA, the MPJD advanced to Tabasco and then to Veracruz, a state with high rates of violence where *Los Zetas* cartel had a strong presence. After holding marches and

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<sup>39</sup> For video footage of this caravan, see EmergenciaMx (2011c; 2011d; 2011e; 2011f; 2011g) and Riley (2013).

<sup>40</sup> For more, see Kovic (2003).

public meetings in these states, the caravan went to Puebla to carry out one more event before concluding in Mexico City.

### *Caravan for Peace*

Using two buses and six smaller vehicles, between August and September 2012, 100 participants of the MPJD—mostly relatives of victims but also representatives of indigenous communities and activists—toured 26 cities in the USA, from California to Washington DC.<sup>41</sup> The initiative arose months before, during a visit Javier made to Los Angeles for a conference on drug policy. There, representatives of two US organisations suggested the poet replicate the mobilisations in the neighbouring country (Osorno 2014). Javier accepted based upon the understanding that the “war on drugs” started there, the weapons that both the army and the cartels use are produced there, and the money of the criminal groups is laundered there (Sicilia 2016c, 48). Thus, this caravan was based on the argument that to end the violence in Mexico it was necessary to press for a change in the bilateral dynamics with the United States. Hence, Javier argues that “the idea of going to the US was more political” and sought to make the country acknowledge its “responsibility in the disaster” (interview). “We met other victims, of the same circumstances, but with another narrative — Chicano communities, black communities, the most marginalised communities in the US where drugs and gun violence were rampant”, adds the poet (interview).

About 200 organisations collaborated in logistics, including groups for the defence of migrants, promoters of civil rights and racial justice, churches of various religions, academic research centres, promoters of the legalisation of drugs, students, artists, veterans and retired police officers (Lewis 2016). A detailed chronicle of the route can be found in Osorno (2014) but it is worth noting that the tour’s dozens of mobilisations consisted of private meetings with local and national authorities—from a sheriff famous for his overtly anti-immigrant stances and his extremely coercive measures against inmates to a House representative who collaborated with Martin Luther King Jr.—exchange of organisational experiences, press conferences, ecumenical events, and non-violent direct actions—including marches, destruction of weapons, protests next to military facilities and in the offices of banks that laundered money from the cartels.

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<sup>41</sup> For video footage of this caravan, see EmergenciaMx (2012) and Calderón Torres (2014).

### 3. The dimensions of a political-emotional community

#### *Role of testimonios*

The development of a political-emotional community has at its core the process of a person or a group narrating their experiences of suffering to others, who in turn respond with compassion and engage with them for organisation purposes (Stephen 2018). The mobilisations described above provided the context to establish affective links between the relatives of victims and other participants through performances that characterised the MPJD's repertoire: the public presentation of *testimonios* and long journeys through various geographies.

*Testimonios* are narrations of events that marked the biography of someone who lived them or witnessed them and are intended to be shared in the public sphere (Beverley 2008). In contrast to other discursive exercises, *testimonios* are usually focused on the suffering of injustices (Valencia 2017) and present a claim appealing for recognition, empathy or justice (Jolly 2014). Although this is not narrative analysis, it must be noted that *testimonio* is a form of verbal and performative narrative that demands a degree of engagement from the listeners with whom the speakers establish a relationship (Cubilié 2005; De Marinis 2018; Lira 2020). Narrativity is a part of social epistemology and social ontology because it helps people to understand and make sense of the social world through knowledge and moral meanings (Polletta 2006; Polletta and Gardner 2015; Sommers 1994) that in some contexts foster solidarity for collective action (Nepstad 2001). Thus, several researchers have found that narratives similar to *testimonios* can be effective in getting people's attention because individuals do not usually consider them as intended to be persuasive, so there is less resistance to their content (Van Dyke et al. 2021). As such, *testimonios* have had a relevant political role in several countries due to their use to denounce acts of extreme violence and repression (De Marinis and Macleod 2018; Huang 2016). Particularly in Latin America, they have been at the core of acknowledging the past State-led terror, the victims' reparations and the construction of collective memory (Iturriaga 2019; Lira 2020).

Movements seek to strategically move certain emotions amongst their audiences (Cadena-Roa 2002) and even when they do not necessarily have such deliberate intention, their actions usually have this effect (Gould 2002). The constant public meetings in which the victims' relatives shared their *testimonios* worked that way. During the Caravan of Consolation, one of the cases that stood out for the press and the participants was the one of María Herrera (see chapter 2), who suffered the disappearance of two sons in 2008 and two more in 2010. She told her *testimonio*

publicly for the first time at an MPJD event in Michoacán (Herrero 2011; Suaste 2017, 86). When she finished telling the story, many people surrounded María Herrera, embraced her, and offered help to publicise the case. The woman then decided to travel to Juárez. “I have felt a certain peace and hope of having my children in my arms again [...]. I feel that through the networks of this caravan I will find something [...], some kind of help”, she told the press (Herrero 2011, 31). *Testimonios* do not only portray the documentation of events but bring past violence and injustices to the present as well as their attached emotions (Stephen 2013). The case of María Herrera shows their role in community-building — the emotional dimensions of *testimonios* facilitate the construction of a shared version of violent events to link subjective experiences to a broader social context and articulate actions around solidarity (Jimeno 2010).

It is fundamental for researchers to understand what kind of socio-political arrangements and bonds that *testimonios* foster (Tagore 2009; D. Taylor 2003). As argued by De Marinis and Macleod (2018), political-emotional communities are formed in moments and spaces where the emotional and the political coalesce victims and people in solidarity in the struggle for justice and reparation. Throughout the caravans, dozens of victims’ relatives shared their *testimonios* at the MPJD events, spurring a collective solidarity response in different parts of the country. For example, Letty Hidalgo spoke about her case for the first time in public at the MPJD event in Nuevo León during the Caravan of Consolation. “I was speechless, shocked [...]. I had heard and seen [about demonstrations] and such, but being there, in that environment [...]. I still did not know there were victims [in the place] [...]. There were people playing music, people reading poetry, protesting...”, she recalls (interview). The caravan arrived late at night, so many sympathisers left but she waited. Rosario Ibarra, the founder of the Eureka Committee, was on the stage of the event.<sup>42</sup> Letty recognised her because, during her childhood, her mother told her about the work she did to search for disappeared people. “She was a very strong and beloved admirable reference. I do not know... Never in my life did I imagine that I was going to stand next to her and that we were going to be in the same situation”, she says (interview). Letty took the microphone “with great fear, with great terror”. Then, she started talking, but without naming Roy and not saying who she was. “I was afraid that someone could be watching us and would want to hurt us again

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<sup>42</sup> The Eureka committee is an organisation made up of relatives of victims of enforced disappearance for political reasons during the dirty war period in Mexico.

[...]. I stopped talking after two or three minutes and I got down the stage being dizzy, nauseated [...] as sick”, she recalls (interview).

Then, several journalists approached to ask her name and one asked if she was with a group or if someone was accompanying her. “I told him that I was alone, and he said it was important for me to be in company”, Letty adds (interview). That person gave her the phone number of a local organisation allied with the MPJD and asked her to call the next day. From there, Letty met other relatives of disappeared people and activists. Similar responses during the caravans reiterate that the public expression of the pain caused by an experience of extreme violence is the starting point for the formation of political-emotional communities (De Marinis and Macleod 2018) since *testimonio* links personal harm to the social sphere through its emotional content (Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo 2015).

The interactive dynamics around *testimonios* facilitated emotional ties between participants, leading members of the audience not only to feel sympathy but to establish links that took personal grief to political goals for directing collective action towards justice demands. Rocato (see chapter 1) considered that, through *testimonios*, “we [the MPJD participants] met the victims that [...] should not have died or disappeared” and, after listening to their words, “we are left with the obligation to remember them and work for them, so that they have justice, so that they appear, so that it is known that [...] innocent people die in this country” (2012b, 3). Likewise, Roberto, comments that listening and documenting the cases was “a very powerful approach to pain [...], a pain that I did not know [...]. Although you might have been hurt by something, it is not even remotely close to what those people are experiencing”, so “you cannot stand still — you have to do everything in your power so that this does not happen to anyone else” (interview).

As in many other contexts (Cadena-Roa and Puga 2021; Jerne 2020), denunciations of injustice were also presented in other dramaturgical forms that raised emotional responses from the public, not only through spoken word. For example, Norma and Gerardo travelled with their four kids — Génesis, their daughter, considered the night in Durango during the Caravan of Consolation was the “saddest one” because “the first person I saw was carrying a banner that read: ‘Sicilia, my dad would be here supporting you, but he was killed on Saturday’. That made me cry and I could not stop crying throughout the demonstration” (Gómez 2011, 35). Likewise, one of the visual elements that stood out the most during the MPJD mobilisations was the extensive exhibition of photographs of murdered and disappeared people; a “forest of photographs”, as Javier calls it

(Sicilia 2016b, 211). “We carry them hanging from sticks, printed on T-shirts, on banners [...]. We do not abandon them for an instant [...]. They are a sign of our pain and our love, of our disapproval and our cry for justice”, the poet wrote (Sicilia 2011b, 48). These kinds of symbols have been used by other relatives of victims in different contexts. For example, in Argentina, the grandmothers and mothers of Plaza de Mayo, as well as other organisations formed by the offspring of disappeared people, usually carry huge banners with photo IDs of their relatives who were victims of the dictatorship, using them to face and remember the State-led terror and defend the uniqueness of each individual (D. Taylor 2003).

In the interactive and participatory act mediated by a *testimonio*, the listener becomes a participant and, in a way, co-owner of the memory of the traumatic event (D. Taylor 2003) building a sense of ‘we’ (De Marinis 2018). During the Caravan of Consolation, Javier argued that the participants brought “the consolation that the victims need [...]. They say they no longer feel alone [...]. The body shudders, the throat closes, and the eyes fill with tears when listening to them”, so “one feels an infinite desire to hug the person and cry [...]. People are in great need of someone to listen to them [...]; when there is someone who understands them, they join, they give you [...] mementoes of their” relatives (Torres 2011a, 63). Similar dynamics have been observed in other movements. For example, sharing personal experiences amongst feminist groups has allowed women to identify patterns of shared oppression that, in turn, foster their activism (Van Dyke and Taylor 2019) because participants experience cognitive-relational processes that allow them to collaborate in collective meaning-making with overlapping and common understandings (Passy and Monsch 2020). Thus, during contention, individuals redefine their social world, their locations in it, their structure of meanings and their self-perceptions, all of which assist the process of identity-building and strengthen political consciousness towards a protest topic (Passy 2003). This cognitive and emotional framework that constructs collective identity is shaped by social interactions through an ongoing process that outlines—although not uniformly—the field, ends and means of collective action (Melucci 1995). The formation of this notion of ‘we’ also sheds light on the social ties that action creates.

Many accounts of the participants in the caravans portray the community-building process based on *testimonios*. Julián LeBarón (see background and chapter two) considered that “in addition to witnessing the tragedy of many people”, the MPJD “built humanity” through consolation — “we learned from the pain of the other and allowed the pain of each city that we

went through to transform us” (Riley 2013). Likewise, two participants stated that “the sadness of the stories, the screams and the sobs did not leave intact those who travelled with the caravan: journalists, police officers, family members or activists alike” (Arriagada and Lajous 2011).<sup>43</sup> Magdiel also points out that he remembers that “when you stopped to listen, you would break completely. That was over and over again. There were mixed feelings between that pain and the satisfaction of seeing the size of the mobilisation” (interview). This emotional duality in his experience reflects the overlap of moral positions and the expectations of how collective action should be (Jasper 1997) and, although it seems like a contradictory position, it is usual during contention because emotions are not unidimensional but involve many while in interaction (Benksi 2005; Gould 2001; Kemper 2001; Ransan-Cooper, Ercan, and Duus 2018).

Although the ties established through the narration of *testimonios* may involve several dimensions, their centre is in the formation of a network from a shared emotion (Stephen 2018) that departs from the subjective experience to become a social and political phenomenon of moral repudiation against those responsible for the violence (Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo 2015). In that regard, Tere comments that during the Caravan of Consolation she formed a “new family” with “great intimacy, closeness and trust” (interview). She illustrates her argument with an anecdote: “Rubbing the feet of a woman from another social class—or having her rub my feet—whom I had never seen in my life, but whose son was killed the same day as Joaquín. How can I explain that to you?”, she asks (interview). “Everything was erased there”, Tere claims. “We were a family. We came from the same painful birth of loss, of not understanding anything, nobody explaining anything to us, knowing that justice does not exist [...]. You know what I feel because you feel it too”, she adds (interview).

Gerardo considers that the organisers did not calculate the response that people would have during the caravans. “Many times, 15 or 20 kilometres before entering the city [...], there were already people on the highway”, he recalls (interview). Furthermore, Nacho Suárez claimed that “the experience was important not only for the victims of the places we visited but for the entire country [...]. The *testimonios* touch your heart, it is difficult to escape so much pain, anguish, fear and impotence of impunity” (Vergara 2011, 45). Besides, Roberto especially remembers people receiving the caravan and giving the participants “their solidarity, food and shelter with that pain

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<sup>43</sup> In some parts of the route, the buses were accompanied by patrols. Likewise, police officers were present at some demonstrations.



[...] but also with hope [...]. There was a feeling of unity [...]. You felt that [others] were feeling the same as you [...]. I think it was something incredible” (interview).

Emotions and the social ties formed through them are crucial for the sustained activity of a movement (Jasper 1997). After her participation in the Caravan of Consolation, Letty was invited to the journey in the USA. Due to the studies of her son Richy, she could not participate in the entire tour, but they both joined the events in Texas. “We got on the bus and that was when I met everyone else from the MPJD [...]. They are very dear people to me because they gave us so much affection”, Letty claims (interview). “Ricardo and I went with that hole in our hearts, but they began to fill it up”, she comments as tears run from her eyes (interview). After she spoke at one event, her son gave his *testimonio* at the next. “He received all the love of the mothers and the guys [...]. He felt very loved, protected [...]. He knew that through him they knew Roy and that they loved Roy too [...]. That was something extraordinary”, she recalls (interview).

Likewise, Lupita Aguilar highlights the community-building process during the month of that caravan. “Imagine what a bus with 40 women who have their children disappeared is [...]. It was very important. We were only true warriors [...]. When we arrived in Mexico, we promised that we would each organise a *colectivo* in our states” (interview). Thus, the sustained involvement in performative contentious action with the MPJD brought relational dynamics that impacted the actors’ sense of belonging developing ties through the emotional and political dimensions of *testimonios*. I will discuss this further in the next two chapters.

### *Ethics developed in contention*

Going through strongly emotional experiences together with others increases solidarity and willingness to participate (Flesher Fominaya 2019) because collective performances tend to amplify and transform individual emotions into collective ones through the awareness of a shared focus of attention (Collins 2001). Moreover, contentious action usually carries notions of morality that influence how people live or feel politics (Allahyari 2001). As claimed by Jimeno and colleagues, the affective bonds formed in the social spaces that have the *testimonios* about extreme violence in the centre underpin ethics of recognition of the victims, the damage they have suffered and the commitment to doing them justice (Jimeno 2010; Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo 2015). From that understanding, it is possible to understand more broadly the rejection of attempts by organisations that sought to place their demands on the agenda of the caravans (see chapter 2).

As mentioned earlier, during the Caravan of Consolation, some representatives from political organisations tried to raise their claims in the first events, but their slogans and chants gradually faded as days went by because the organisers did not provide them with time on stages (Arriagada and Lajous 2011; Suaste 2017). In other words, given that the victimhood brought people together, the MPJD participants insisted that the victims needed to be the core of the mobilisations above all other topics and, thus, the caravan was focused on the sharing of *testimonios* across the journey. However, this changed in the last stop of the mobilisation, when the MPJD set workshops to discuss the content of the Pact with other organisations. Juanfra took part in the discussion on demilitarisation and recalls that “the great debate was whether the military was required to return to the barracks or not” (interview). People from Juárez asked for this as an irreducible demand. Nonetheless, some other people from communities that had recently started to face the presence of cartels did want the army. After the discussions, it was agreed to conclude that there was no consensus on the matter, but the public minutes stated as an MPJD demand that the military had to be withdrawn. Gerardo considered the episode as a “sabotage” led by militants from the “radical left” who dedicated themselves to “blowing up the meeting” (interview). However, Norma points out that there were two faces in Juárez: one with a “very violent political stance [...] in the sense of intolerance, of not listening” and another made up of “the people who had organised to receive us, the victims” (interview).

On the same topic, Tere remembers that she was there unaware of what was happening. “I was not there as an activist. I was there with the pain that [...] my son had been murdered”, so “I did not see the Trotskyists or the pamphleteers nor did I care. I was there with the mothers of murdered and disappeared women in Juárez, with Soledad, Nepomuceno and Melchor [other relatives of murdered and disappeared youngsters]” (interview). However, she now argues that “some leftist groups wanted to take advantage [of the caravan] and that is fine. But if you want to take advantage of someone who has just pulled his dead son out of a trunk [...], that is not okay” (interview). It is important to note, though, that this thesis does not include interviews with participants in these groups—whose public opinions, nonetheless, were collected in chapter 2—so a possible area of future research revolves around the meanings that these people give to their involvement in this episode.

The signing of the Pact shows that, in political-emotional communities, the core of ethics is based on the figure of the victims and the need to work collectively to recognise them and do justice

to them, thus rejecting discourses and agendas that, although somehow related to the issue, do not prioritise the victims. Some authors argue that the strategies and meaning-making of a social movement are inherently linked (Nelson and King 2020), so, even ‘failed’ efforts might consolidate collective identities and the sense of community through the construction of a common story about how a group overcame difficulties (Flesher Fominaya 2010b). As Javier claims, despite the “political failure” in Juárez, the Caravan of Consolation “had a humanitarian triumph [because] the victims shocked people — they were no longer figures, they were no longer statistics: we were beings of flesh and blood who had a story and a pain to tell. It was very important” (interview). In other words, the ethics of victim recognition runs through the evaluation that participants make of their contentious campaigns.

The formation of a sense of collectivity does not require actors to have fully coincidental stances, ideologies or even social positions to collaborate in collective action (Flesher Fominaya 2019). Even though the social ties built from *testimonios* in political-emotional communities can entail dimensions such as gender, race, ethnicity or class, their core ethical dimension revolves around a shared emotion due to the suffered violent event (Stephen 2018). Tere—a white woman with light eyes who openly acknowledges the privilege in which she grew up—points out that in the Caravan to the South she was very nervous at the microphone, so she thanked her son for the possibility of being “received” by her “indigenous brothers and sisters”, who cried along with her. “Otherwise, I do not see how that would have been possible [...]. I think it [the moment] has some value [...]. It is an anecdote for this country of so many contrasts”, she claims (interview). Thus, Tere’s anecdote shows that the ethics of recognition of the victims in political-emotional communities focus the participants’ attention on the tragedy as a central element of social relations, regardless of other social characteristics of the victims.

However, this ethical construction around the recognition of the victims of extreme violence might also exclude some understandings of who is a victim in a broader sense. For example, Gerardo recalls that, from the beginning, several native communities supported the MPJD, so he and Norma proposed to organise an internal group to work along with them, but it was rejected. “We told them: You are all very racist [...]. For you, the victims that matter are only those who have a murdered or a disappeared person; our colleagues [from indigenous communities] have been victims long before this crisis”, he comments (interview). After discussing the issue in a broad meeting with dozens of participants, it was agreed to create the working group. “Javier was angry

at us for a long time”, Gerardo says while laughing, “he got very angry and said that our work could not be that of the National Indigenous Congress<sup>44</sup> [...]. He did not want conflicts or making it look like we were upstarts”, Gerardo explains (interview). This makes it possible to note that the victim-centred ethics in political-emotional communities opens the possibility of denying the relevance of certain types of violence that might not be the same that was suffered by most of the participants.

Moreover, although some of the participants in the first caravan considered not attending the one to the South, their recently developed ethics led them to join. For example, Juanfra initially refused the invitation to oversee a bus during the second caravan because he was still “very emotionally touched”; however, one night before departing, “I decided that I was going because it was part of my conviction, I had to go. I was a supportive companion moved by great compassion, not pity, doing what I had to do: work with them [the relatives of the victims]”, he says (interview). As previously found, doing contentious practices involves performances of duty (Jasper 1997) since personal ethics and commitment are linked to emotional attachments, moral convictions, feelings of social responsibility and moral assurance (Downton and Wehr 1998; Driscoll 2018; Kim 2002) and, in the case of political-emotional communities, participation conveys cooperation in the search for justice (De Marinis 2018).

It would be wrong, though, to portray the ethics of a political-emotional community as a tension-free phenomenon. Ara mentions that especially during the Caravan for Peace there were “conflicts” between participants due to the desire that some people had to be on stage during the actions — “I had to face rudeness from people who were angry that they [the organisers] took me to certain meetings. We all had activities and tasks [...] but some colleagues offended me because of their desire to be the protagonist” (interview). There are relatives of victims who seek a leading role in protest events and other actions to give broader media exposure to their cases. This position has caused clashes on multiple occasions and, according to some interviewees, has become more evident in the mobilisations of the *colectivos* of relatives of disappeared people—I will discuss this in the next chapters. Another source of tension in the MPJD’s caravans came from what Tere considers “the human part of our personalities” (interview). As she comments, some people engaged in constant discussions and abusive practices towards her during the USA caravan. “Later

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<sup>44</sup> Following a call by the Zapatistas, native peoples of Mexico formed the National Indigenous Congress in 1996. The organisation brings together representatives of communities and ethnic groups from practically all regions to defend their rights and autonomy.

I learned of the circumstances that these people faced right before going and I understood the disturbed state of mind they were in. Who am I to judge them?”, she asks (interview). “Today we greet each other with affection, but it was very complicated because nobody prepares you for those situations. Those people cried with me, I know they also love my son and say he should not have died”, Tere adds (interview).

Although they might seem anecdotal, these interpersonal conflicts reiterate that the MPJD’s mobilisations had the experiences of victims of extreme violence as pivotal elements of their ethics — even those who did not have a good relationship demanded, and continue to demand, justice for each other’s cases. However, social relations are essentially dynamic (Emirbayer 1997), and the ties created in political-emotional communities are not free of contradictions (Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo 2011), which makes it necessary to practice forms of intervention to maintain closeness and complicity between participants (De Marinis 2018). In that regard, Roberto recalls that “spending so much time together caused friction, misunderstandings” and he “was in charge of dealing with these problems a lot” (interview). “I would bring the relatives together and we would sit down at night” to talk and reconcile the antipathies during the USA caravan, he comments (interview). This can be understood as a form of participatory care (Santos 2020), an effort aimed at minimising the constraints that complicate participation in collective action and, thus, sustaining relationships to preserve the commitment to the community.

### *Fluctuations in participation*

It would be misleading to expect all participants to react identically to the same messages in a given mobilisation because while some people can experience, for example, sorrow, others can feel anger and, thus, follow different forms of action (Van Dyke et al. 2021). Hence, as many scholars have criticised, the binary distinction between activists and non-activists is inaccurate because protesters are not a homogeneous group and involvement varies as a matter of degree (Corrigall-Brown 2012; Isaac et al. 2016; Klandermans 2004; Smith 1999; Saunders et al. 2012; Collins 2001). Although the concept of ‘community’ might be inaccurately perceived as an unchanging phenomenon when it is rather permanently in process, “a becoming rather than a being” (Gould 2001, 155), researchers need to analyse when people take part in the community and when they take distance. This is similar within political-emotional communities (Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo 2018; Stephen 2018).

Many relatives of victims that attended the demonstrations during the caravans decided not to talk in public. For example, in San Luis Potosí, one of the local organisers explained that, days before the caravan's arrival, he gathered privately with several families that shared their *testimonios* with him. "People troubled by anguish and anxiety [...]. In vain they turned to one authority after another [...]. However, they preferred not to speak publicly [...]. The fear prevailed. One family authorised me to narrate their case" without giving specific details, while "others did not even want their cases to be known", he expressed (Faz 2011, 75). Likewise, when invited to participate in Coahuila, the parents of two murdered youngsters that were criminalised by the authorities replied: "What are the marches for? What can be achieved with meetings? We will not get them back" (Valdez 2011, 129). This reiterates that feelings of dread can paralyse when they are not transformed into moral outrage (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001a) or when there is no hope to propel collective action (Kleres and Wettergren 2017).

Furthermore, some of the participants who devoted more time and effort to the MPJD during the first two caravans did not endorse the one in the USA, while some of those who had only participated in local actions and meetings in Mexico City joined the caravan and dedicated a whole month to its activities. Magdiel points out that although some of the organisations that supported the caravan in the USA "are very valuable" and indeed he works with them at the time of writing, he did not want to have any relationship with others — "I took a pause, without breaking with the movement [...]. When I went against its dynamics and did not have the ability to stop them, I tried to collaborate at the minimum but without hindering", he comments (interview). Likewise, Norma and Gerardo were against going to the USA for "political conviction" because of what the country represents in their interpretation, but they helped to organise the participation of some inhabitants of native peoples with whom they had worked for many years (interview). Thus, as pointed out by other scholars, political ideology is a key element to understand what campaigns activists decide to join (Corrigall-Brown 2019). The Caravan for Peace shows that commitment does not imply the automatic acceptance of all movement actions. The ideological positions of people who have developed a radical habitus (Crossley 2002; see chapter 1) influence the evaluation of the social spaces in which they decide to participate.

However, on the other end, Mary Coronado explains that she had attended all the marches and meetings in the capital, but not the caravans due to the health of her son, who has cancer. Thus, she spoke to her sister and asked her for help. "That was the last month that my son was going to

be hospitalised for chemotherapy [...]. I asked her to be with him in the hospital so I could go to the caravan”, Mary recalls (interview). Likewise, Teresa had participated in all the actions in Mexico City, but not in the caravans for personal reasons. It was “sad to leave the country and see that other people wanted to help us while our authorities were not able to stop the violence. We had to do it so the world could realise everything that was and is happening”, she says (interview). Contrastingly, Lupita says that she was “disappointed” because at times she considered that the activities of this caravan did not imply looking for her disappeared son. “I thought: If we go to the USA and shout at the Congress or if the president receives us, then everyone will know what is happening” in Mexico, she recalls (interview). However, “it was a real disappointment realising that if my own governors do not do it [look for her son], those of another country would less so [...]. I came back very sad”, she points out (interview). It must be noted that despite having contrasting impressions of the caravan in the USA, all these people have continued to join many MPJD’s mobilisations also bringing new participants in. This confirms previous findings of how individuals with strong socialisation and identification around a given protest issue often become more committed to a social movement (Passy 2003).

Nonetheless, there are people who, despite having an initial approach preferred not to deepen their relationship with the MPJD. For example, Pati Manzanares explains that after attending the meetings for a few weeks, she decided not to get more involved. “I realised in the meetings that all the people who were victims were welcomed. There were cases of femicide, homicide, disappearances... I did not want that. I wanted to be in a group dedicated exclusively to disappeared persons” to articulate actions around their search, she points out (interview). Others who were deeply involved, like Pietro, decided to set a distance with the MPJD because they no longer agree with Javier’s criticism of the current Mexican government. Disengagement is related, amongst other elements, to critical moments that lead to re-evaluations of participation in the personal life of activists (Fillieule 2010). Likewise, some studies argue that the schisms in a movement are usually linked to different expectations about goals, commitments and achievements (Aminzade and McAdam 2001) since activists constantly evaluate their decision to participate based on both a rational and affective complex basis (Flesher Fominaya 2010b). Yet, as already mentioned, participation is a matter of degree in terms of intensity and persistence (Isaac et al. 2016). Pati and Pietro illustrate this too: despite not feeling embedded in the MPJD for very different reasons, they

have been involved in several other campaigns organised by its participants. I will delve into this in the following chapter.

### *Costs and risks*

As pointed out, participation in political-emotional communities involves constantly hearing *testimonios* about events of extreme violence by people who suffered them and who live with their consequences. These performances bring a costly emotional load for both the speakers and listeners. Norma and Gerardo, who headed the group in charge of the participants' health during the MPJD's mobilisations coincide in how crushing the journeys were. "The Caravan of Consolation was overwhelming [...]. Hearing the horror, the terror, the sadness, the depression, was very, very tough [...]. The victims would get on stage. You would start to hear the stories and it was, geez [*uf*], very tough", he recalls (interview).

Performances and mobilisations based on the logic of bearing witness usually have an accentuated capacity to directly transmit an emotional message and, in turn, heighten the emotional intensity of participation (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Juanfra remembers that every time "we came to a city, it was a sea of tears. We would cry while hearing the tragedy, always with a description of the horror [...]. There was a moment when I perceived that the whole square, everyone, was crying" (interview). Those "were terrible sensations [...]. That traumatised me. If something triggers it, I burst into tears again. It is overwhelming. The stories, sharing and making visible what was happening was overwhelming", he adds (interview). This experience was more difficult for some of the participants to handle. Denisse, for example, points out that although she did not go to the caravan because her mother was facing health issues, her then-partner did make the journey. "When he came back from the [first] caravan, he went into crisis and had to be medicated. He would tell me that it was very fucking intense [*estaba muy cabrón*]" she recalls (interview). Thus, without practices to channel the emotional charge of political-emotional communities, activists might experience burnout and, as in other contexts, participation might be discouraged (Gorski 2019; Gorski, Lopresti-Goodman, and Rising 2019).

Participation in political-emotional communities can also bring risks for those involved. During 2012, for example, the press reported that Calderón's government was spying on various MPJD leaders and participants (Gil 2012). Besides, in the Caravan of Consolation, several participants of the MPJD identified the presence of civilians who were taking photographs of the



vehicles and communicating by radio (Patrón 2011). Norma especially remembers the presence of children. “Kids with radios and with weapons longer than their own bodies. Those were shocking scenes”, she comments (interview). As “the vehicles were passing by, the kids would pull out their radios” to report the arrival of the caravan — “it was terrible. Any story that I had heard was completely overcome with those scenes”, she adds (interview). Separately, Magdiel agrees with the idea and points out that he “did not manage to realise the size of the tragedy [...] that was lived in Mexico” until the MPJD’s mobilisations (interview). There, he began to “understand the horror” that people were living, “to understand how there were forms of forced labour, how people’s minds degenerated to become hitmen” (interview). Thus, “one can know that there are manuals for such a purpose, but listening to it out loud and [...], understanding what it is to live in a war of a new type” was a “fundamental” learning for him (interview). These experiences show that the costs and risks of political-emotional communities can involve a form of schooling or preparation path that provides intense learning and a degree of cognitive transformation to the participants (Coley et al. 2020; Isaac et al. 2016; 2020). More on this is discussed in the fifth chapter.

As previous findings show, many people involved in this type of community acknowledge the dangers of their mobilisations but still are willing to act to denounce violent events and prevent their repetition (Stephen 2018). Javier narrates that at the event in Torreón, Coahuila, he was informed that there were armed people in the crowd (Sicilia 2016b, 287) and Tere remembers the same in Juárez, where a group of armed men questioned the people as they approached the public square (interview). Although in both cases the subjects withdrew after a few minutes, she remembers the tension experienced and comments that “it was madness” (interview). Nacho Suárez commented on the complexity of the situation by assuring that “we know that all of us around Javier are at risk; it is a challenge that we have decided to accept with the pleasure of walking with him, who today is a light for justice in this country” (Vergara 2011, 46). This can be understood because of the socialisation processes within movements that lead to the formation of emotional and interpersonal bonds—as well as a sense of responsibility towards the cause—that encourage activists to participate in more risky and costly actions (Della Porta 1995; Goodwin and Pfaff 2001; Gundelach and Toubøl 2019; McAdam 1986; Smith 1999; Wiltfang and McAdam 1991).

Likewise, leaders play an important role in developing motivation, common understandings of collective capacities and coping with risks (Ganz and McKenna 2019). Ara argues that she “realised that Javier was like a shepherd who had united a crowd so that we would not be afraid

and embrace and shelter each other. This was feeding me strength, energy, encouragement” (interview). Thus, the poet “kept us moving forward without fear, without letting ourselves be overcome by fatigue. He was giving us an example of strength because his son had been killed too and he was also a victim of a failed State”, she adds (interview).

Despite overcoming fear, some participants of the MPJD experienced direct intimidation in encounters with agents of crime groups and corrupted governments. On the move from one city to another in the state of Veracruz during the Caravan to the South, Javier’s vehicle got delayed for a few hours due to a meeting with local organisers. Although it was an agreement not to travel at night, he decided to catch up with the rest of the caravan. On the highway, a truck with hooded armed men followed Javier’s car for a couple of kilometres. A group of police patrols that accompanied the poet that evening surrounded his car and took out their weapons pointing at the truck. After some minutes, the suspect vehicle retreated (Gil 2016; P. Martínez 2011). “A lot of people were travelling [in the car] and that did really anguish me: [I was worried] that they would shoot us there, that they would rip us to pieces and take people away [...] It was terrifying”, Javier recalls (interview). “I did not want to leave like that, with all those people who were showing solidarity with the victims [...]. I later learned that the command was sent by [Javier] Duarte to intimidate us”, he adds (interview).<sup>45</sup>

That same night, at approximately 80 kilometres, the participants of the caravan were already at the next public event. Norma observed that behind some trees there were people with long weapons. When she reported this to Magdiel, who oversaw the general coordination, he replied that a truck had stopped Javier, but asked her not to make it public. “Those were very tense moments. I cannot even tell you how much time passed. Magdiel’s idea was not to generate panic [...]. He ended the event [...]. It was quite tense”, Norma recalls (interview). Then, they all moved to the building where they would spend the night. There, they could see trucks surrounded by armed people. “We agreed that every hour a couple of people had to guard the door. It was very naive because what would we have done?”, Norma asks laughing (interview).

“Almost dawn, I had to stand guard with José Luis (see chapter 1) and we were both shaking. But we were in Veracruz”, she says while laughing because the weather in that state is very warm, so “it was because of the damn fear we had” (interview). While next to the door, “I took out a

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<sup>45</sup> Javier Duarte was governor of Veracruz from 2010 to 2016. He is currently in prison due to receiving payments with money of illicit origin and criminal association.

cigarette and I was shaking, so I could not light it [...]. When I turned around, I already had a flame by my side. It was one of the armed guys. The guy lit my cigarette”, Norma continues (interview). “I took a puff [...]. I was scared to turn to see. I said thank you. I offered him a cigar, he grabbed it and put his weapon in his back. The three of us smoked in silence”, she explains (interview). Seconds later, the man told them: “Do not worry, go to sleep” — she replied: “I cannot. We have to stay here. I cannot disobey” (interview). The man pointed to a truck and Norma recalls that he said: “He is my boss. We are *Zetas* [...].<sup>46</sup> If we wanted to do something to you, we would have already done it. We are here only to make sure you leave soon” (interview). After finishing the cigarette, the subject walked away and continued to prowl the building. The trucks, Norma explains, followed the buses until they left the city.

Thus, these episodes show that besides the limitations that the authoritarian profile of the Mexican political system and governments’ history of repression impose (see background chapter), political-emotional communities like the one formed by the MPJD face latent material risks due to the violent settings where they mobilise and the type of demands they raise. The MPJD actions did not only confront criminal violence but also denounced the corruption and association of the ruling class with the cartels, precisely like the case of ex-governor Duarte who is imprisoned today. It is in this context that the crimes against five MPJD participants must be understood: Pedro Leyva, an inhabitant of the indigenous community of Ostula, was murdered in Michoacán; Eva Alarcón and Miguel Marcial, a couple of environmentalists, were kidnapped and murdered in Guerrero; Trinidad de la Cruz, another member of the indigenous community of Ostula, was kidnapped and murdered in Michoacán; and Nepomuceno Moreno, who was looking for his disappeared son, was murdered in Sonora. It is not possible—nor responsible—to point out these crimes as unequivocal consequences of the activism of their victims, but it would also be naïve not to frame them in their participation with the MPJD. In any case, the murders remain unsolved and were dismissed by the authorities—for example, after Nepomuceno’s killing became publicly known, the then-prosecutor of Sonora suggested that it happened because he was involved with organised crime, a statement condemned and refused by the MPJD (Prados 2011).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the violence against these

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<sup>46</sup> A widely known cartel because of its extreme violence. Most of the *Los Zetas* founders were former members of the military.

<sup>47</sup> Just as a sample of the complex context of corruption and violence that Mexico faces to date, it should be noted that this former prosecutor, Abel Murrieta, was assassinated in 2021, while he was running for mayor in the state of Sonora.

activists had an impact on the type of actions that the MPJD was able to carry out and, eventually, on the diffusion of its repertoire. This topic will be analysed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

Javier sums up that “the spirit of the caravans was to go to meet these people [the victims] and give them space, give them a voice, give them a face. It had a deeper purpose than the pure political goal of transforming a State policy” (interview). As such, the contentious performances of the MPJD focused on putting victims at the centre of the public sphere. Jimeno and colleagues (2018) analyse how after a massacre in a Colombian province, the protests of inhabitants of the region imbued the figure of the victims with an affective content that re-signified the imposed bureaucratic categories and led broader social groups to organise to demand justice in the political arena. The MPJD caravans promoted a similar process in which, from the sustained pronouncement and listening of *testimonios* of extreme violence, a group of people kept mobilising to bring private and personal pain to the collective reach, turning the demand for justice into a socio-political issue.

Social movement campaigns and protests are eventful — they usually have significant cognitive, affective, and relational impacts that foster and strengthen the formation of communities (Della Porta 2008; Wood et al. 2017). The political action led by victims of the Mexican war on drugs and crime has developed a specific type of social ties with distinguishable and observable characteristics. The emotional and political dimensions of the MPJD performances were deeply intertwined and constituted one another; its campaigns were not only political mobilisations but spaces to construct new meanings, ethics and bonds by bringing together victims and allied activists.

In short, I argue that the MPJD built a political-emotional community through its repertoire of action. To refine the concept and advance its empirical study, I proposed and analysed four dimensions that are fundamental in the research of this type of community: the role of *testimonios*, the ethics developed during contention, the fluctuations in participation, and the costs and risks involved in the mobilisations. Furthermore, I have also brought the literature on political-emotional communities into conversation with the scholarship on social movements to allow a deeper understanding of the complexity of the social ties created in campaigns led by the relatives of victims of extreme violence. Following recent calls (Russo 2014), this contributes to our

knowledge regarding how allies, in contrast to those directly aggrieved by a given protest issue, engage in forging community with the groups they work for.

## Chapter 4. Political and cultural outcomes

Since the first systematic studies around the results of social movements (Gamson 1975; Piven and Cloward 1977), the literature has developed multiple possibilities for analysis and, although what counts as outcomes of movement activity is a matter open to debate (Amenta, Halfmann, and Young 1999; Tilly 1999), scholars have studied them from three main areas: political, cultural and biographical (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016). Empirically, all three are interdependent and can mutually influence each other (Tindall, Cormier, and Diani 2012), so their division responds to analytical purposes (Bosi and Uba 2009). Acknowledging such a complexity of social realities, but also aiming for clarity, in the next two chapters I focus on answering what the outcomes of the MPJD have been. In the current one, I analyse what might be called the ‘collective’ outcomes — that is, the political and cultural, in that order. Then, in the fifth chapter, I discuss the individual, or biographical, ones.

Thus, in these pages I argue, first, that the MPJD achieved the enactment of the General Law of Victims (GLV)—a law that sets the obligations of all the authorities and levels of government in Mexico for the attention of the victims regarding health, psychology, legal assistance, and reparations, amongst others—based on three explanatory factors: framing, political opportunity structure and the leaders’ strategic capacity. Second, I maintain that the MPJD’s spillover effect through relational diffusion influenced the formation of new groups, called *colectivos*, which are led by victims’ relatives and have adapted some of the MPJD’s organisational forms and performances.

### 1. Political outcomes

#### *Theoretical outline*

Broadly, the political consequences of contention are the effects that modify in some fashion the political environment for social movements (Giugni 2008). Given that this area is the most studied of movement outcomes (Bosi and Uba 2009; Giugni 1999), I will start with the analysis of the policy consequences of the MPJD. Based on findings from Western European countries and the USA, scholars agree that movements are more likely to influence policy if the field of their demands, or the specific issues they dispute, are low-profile (Giugni 2004b; Giugni and Yamasaki 2009; Kolb 2007; Kriesi et al. 1995). Furthermore, the influence that contentious actors might have

varies according to the moment of the public policy process because each stage has different dynamics (Soule and King 2006). In that regard, Burstein and collaborators (1995) argue that there are six possible areas of influence in this regard: access of the demands to the political system, incorporation of the issue of protest in the public agenda, adoption of legislation or policy in the terms that the movement demands, application of the legislation under the same conditions, improvement in the problem that motivated collective action, and structural transformations in the socio-political context. Previous research from the same Western countries has found that the influence of movements has been greater in the early stages (King, Cornwall, and Dahlin 2005; Soule and King 2006) because frequent protests around topics considered as legitimate might be enough to get an issue into the official agenda (Baumgartner and Mahoney 2005; King, Bentele, and Soule 2007; Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2012). Moreover, Amenta and colleagues (1992; 1999; 2005) argue that the political context mediates the consequences of the actions of contentious actors when their demands are state-oriented, a perspective supported by several authors (Kane 2003; Kolb 2007; McCammon et al. 2007).

It is unclear, however, how all this works in contexts like Mexico. The USA political system allows an easy introduction of bills at the state level that rarely advance legislatively because of the many possible veto points. Besides, Congress works based on a usually divided legislature with two catch-all parties. In contrast, the Mexican political system was controlled by one hegemonic party during decades (Gaxiola Lazcano 2021). In recent years, however, the legislative branch has involved at least three main parties with several satellites to form majorities, while the executive branch has been granted legislative capacities and special veto options. Thus, the case of the MPJD and the GLV opens the opportunity to test these findings in countries that only recently turned into a somewhat democratic system (Selee and Peschard 2010).

One way to observe the context in which collective action occurs is through the political opportunity structure, a concept used to distinguish the stable—but not necessarily formal or permanent—characteristics of a political system (McAdam and Tarrow 2019; Tarrow 1994; 2011). Authors have focused on different dimensions of the political opportunity structure (McAdam 1996) and, given the breadth of the concept, its explanatory capacity depends on the specific variables that are chosen to be studied (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Building on Tarrow's (1994) influential work, I will focus on the instability of alignments in elite groups and the presence of allies with influence in decision-making.

The timing of mobilisations matters because opportunities vary (Andrews 1997). Tarrow (1994) explains that during electoral periods, parties compete for the support of social groups that are not part of their usual alliances. Thus, politicians tend to adopt, at least temporarily, the demands of some social movements when they consider that this will give them votes (Kolb 2007; Soule and Olzak 2004). In this way, electoral processes expand political opportunities and also represent an open window for the policy process (Kingdon 2014). Moreover, if elected officials perceive that they can legitimise themselves by continuing to promote the movement's demands, they are likely to co-opt the issues for the legislative or government agenda (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Burstein and Linton 2002; Cornwall et al. 2007).

Regarding the organisational characteristics that can influence policy outcomes, classical works from political science found that policy issues can gain access to the government agenda through mobilisations because they broaden a problems' scope, intensity and visibility (Schattschneider 1960). Furthermore, in contrast to demands that only state that something has to be done, developed arguments get more attention from decision-makers in the policy process (Cobb and Elder 1972). The literature on social movements has similar findings. Diagnostic and prognostic frames that are articulate and coherent have been key in understanding policy outcomes (Cress and Snow 2000): Politicians tend to be more responsive when diagnosis specifies the seriousness of a problem as well as the responsible agents and institutions, and when prognosis outlines the actions needed to remedy the issue (Cress and Snow 2000; Fassiotto and Soule 2017; McCammon 2009).

However, open opportunities are lost if no one recognises or interprets them, and frames are not randomly proffered by collective actors (Meyer 2004; Gamson and Meyer 1996). Although it was a relatively neglected topic in social movement scholarship for several years due, amongst others, to the strong focus on structural conditions, leadership has been increasingly included in the analysis of contention and its outcomes (Barker, Johnson, and Lavalette 2001a; Ganz 2010; Ganz and McKenna 2019; Morris and Staggenborg 2004; Nepstad and Bob 2006). Along with many other tasks, leaders set goals and develop strategies to pursue them. Ganz (2009, 9) defines strategy as an ongoing creative process to learn "how we turn what we have into what we need to get what we want" and points out that two of its critical elements are targeting and tactics — the former involves choices to focus resources to specific goals while the latter are the ways to make the most of one's own resources. It is important to note that leadership is rarely seen as the preserve



of one person in contentious collective actors — rather, it is exercised at different levels (Barker, Johnson, and Lavalette 2001b) by people with significant salience and authority both within the group and for outsiders (Bob and Nepstad 2007; Ganz 2000). Thus, when talking about the leaders of the MPJD I am not only referring to the main spokespeople but also to those who are at the “intermediate layer” working to bridge participants (Robnett 1966, 1688).

My argument is that the MPJD achieved the third area of influence in the policy process with the enactment of the GLV, which brought together the rights of the victims and their families, issuing responsibilities for almost all authorities in their care. I explain this political outcome considering three elements: (1) the construction of relevant frames that were introduced in (2) a favourable political opportunity structure—shaped by the electoral period at the end of Calderón’s government—where (3) the MPJD leaders showed strategic capacity to focus the collective resources on the specific goal of obtaining the law. Since the study of policy outcomes requires an inclusive view that examines how changing circumstances matter (Jeness, Meyer, and Ingram 2005; McCammon et al. 2007) and how different targets respond to movements’ actions (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016), I will focus both on Calderón and Congress’ reactions towards the demand of the law. A relevant methodological note on this section is that my analysis is based on the documentary review and supported with interviews made specifically for this thesis, but I also include several quotes from interviews done in previous years because I decided not to ask my interviewees again about topics that we had discussed several times before.

### *Framing*

As explained earlier (see chapter 2), the first point of the Pact presented on 8 May 2011 demanded truth and justice through the transparent and accountable resolution of all crimes and the identification of all victims, as well as actions to foster memory (MPJD 2016). The second point demanded a halt to the war strategy and the adoption of an approach not based on the use of the armed forces but human security with respect for human rights and the reconstruction of the “social fabric” (MPJD 2016, 81). After the meeting in Juárez, the first point of the report of the discussions around truth and justice indicated as the first demand “a law that protects the rights of direct victims (those killed) and indirect victims (their relatives)”; around the end of the war strategy, the same report included the demand for the immediate return of the army to the barracks (Comité Cerezo 2011).

Although Javier and other MPJD leaders rejected the validity of the report of the discussions in Juárez as an official position, they adopted the demand on the law and reframed the one on the immediate demilitarisation for the first meeting with Calderón. During the dialogue with the president, the poet made three broad demands. The first was to guarantee “our right to the truth, to justice and non-repetition” through the enactment of a law for the care and protection of victims “to repair what the war and impunity” had caused (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011a). The second demand was to redefine the security strategy with a focus on human and citizen security to gradually withdraw the army from the streets. The third, which is not related to my analysis, was around democracy. Calderón assured that there were already areas of attention to victims of crime in various government institutions, but he agreed with the proposal of the law because he “had thought about proposing a system of attention to victims” (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011a). Regarding the second demand, the president refused to make changes to the strategy and warned that he would continue in exactly the same direction.

Later I will discuss the implications that this dialogue had for the political opportunity structure. For now, focusing on framing, it must be understood that the MPJD articulated the demands of the pact around two broad areas related to the growing violence in the country, reframing at least partly the results from the discussions in Juárez. As argued by framing scholars (Benford 1997; Snow et al. 2014), this adaptation in the discourse of the MPJD shows that frames are not static; leaders, as will be later discussed, strategically adopt and adapt elements from discussions within the movement. While one of the reframed demands was discarded by the head of the State, the other marked the achievement of a new area of influence in the policy process (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995) — the mobilisations had brought the demands to the institutional political system, and then they were incorporated in the priority of the government agenda when the president agreed on working towards the law.

There was a meeting with members of both houses of Congress on 28 July 2011. In the dialogue, which lasted more than six hours, Javier described the legislators as “jointly responsible for our dead ones and our sorrows [...] by assigning the budget to the armed forces to carry out their war” and equated them with the criminals for “hijacking the democratic aspirations” of the country for the benefit of their respective political parties (Canal del Congreso 2011a). Next, the poet expressed the demand to legislate on security through a law that would contemplate the reconstruction of social bonds, the return of the army to the barracks, the decriminalisation of drugs,

the professionalisation and supervision of the civil police, the punishment of the abuse of power, and the protection of human rights defenders. Likewise, he demanded, as a matter of urgency, a law for victims that would provide them with access to justice, reparation of damage and comprehensive care (Canal del Congreso 2011a).

Research in other contexts (P. Brown et al. 2004; Elliot and Freeman 2003; Ottinger and Cohen 2011) has found that the presentation of experiences of people who directly suffer a grievance provides a form of moral credibility that has been useful in the articulation of frames to convince decision-makers. In addition, the support of qualified professionals and the use of scientific evidence has provided another type of reliability to the claims makers' arguments (Lubitow 2013; Sciubba 2014; A. White 1999). Morrell (2015) distinguishes between these two sources of expertise and calls the former 'experiential expertise' and the latter 'professional expertise'. According to her analysis of farmer movements in the USA, combining both types of expertise, rather than leveraging only one, proves more useful in promoting or mobilising against legal amendments. During the meeting with Congress, the MPJD leaders decided not only to allow the victims to present their *testimonios* but also to get specialists and representatives of professional organisations to elaborate on technical details about the demands that were being raised (García 2018). Thus, 15 more participants talked about proposals to legislate on the points of the Pact. That is, the MPJD introduced frames to the legislative branch backed by both professional and experiential expertise. The legislators of the seven political parties in Congress claimed that they supported all the proposals — none of them rejected any (Canal del Congreso 2011a; 2011b). The relevance of this episode for the political opportunity is discussed in the next pages.

Following the meeting, the MPJD convened a team with professionals from allied organisations to arrange a series of talks (*conversatorios*) with relatives of victims to define, from personal experiences, what needs the law should cover. Ara and Teresa remember participating in these forums, where they explained that the law had to guarantee the services of lawyers and psychologists, as well as measures for a dignified economic reparation that would allow the victims' relatives—especially those who were left unemployed to dedicate themselves to the search for their loved ones—to cover living costs (interviews).

Specifically, the MPJD established that the law needed to 1) acknowledge the dignity of the victims through enforcing a dignified treatment and non-revictimisation; 2) include a broad definition of who was a victim; 3) guarantee the participation of the victims in the implementation

of any legal measure; 4) strengthen the creation of networks and collective spaces; 5) provide sufficient budget; 6) establish training protocols and supervision for officials; 7) assure transparency and accountability; 8) include safety measures; 9) ensure the quality of both legal and psychological assistance; 10) adopt a model to facilitate the speedy attention of victims rather than reifying an overly-bureaucratic approach; 11) set up citizen auditors to observe how officials work and; 12) create autonomous institutions to attend the victims (Antillón and Vega 2014). The report of these talks was fed into the official proposals (Antillón and Vega 2014). An in-depth analysis of how these points were respected or not in the formal legal wording would require a different framework, in addition to the consideration of the reforms that the law has undergone. However, as I will discuss later, MPJD participants are critical of the law's implementation based on their original expectations.

In any case, as well as in the meetings with the authorities, in which the MPJD framing included specific demands and plans regarding the points of the Pact explained by professionals, the exercise of the *conversatorios* with victims' families and the technical advice with specialised organisations allowed the elaboration of proposals based on both experiential and professional expertise. More than simply pointing out that the victims faced problems in a general way, through its multiple mobilisations and speeches, the MPJD discourse had already framed the violence of the so-called war and the criminalisation of the victims as serious issues (see chapter 2). In addition to the general prognosis included in the Pact, the framing of the law included specific solutions to address the problem and offer immediate attention at least to a part of the problem. This is relevant because, as found by previous research, frames that provide clear rationales to support the movement's demands and introduce concrete evidence usually have better chances of convincing lawmakers (McCammon 2009).

### *Political opportunity structure*

The first meeting with Calderón implied widening political opportunities because, by partly accepting the demand of the law for victims' rights, the government positioned the MPJD as a worthy claim-maker within the polity, which usually legitimises the political benefits given to collective actors and the people they represent (Meyer 2005). Furthermore, the electoral calendar also shaped the favourable opportunities for the MPJD. The dialogue with Calderón was held in June 2011 and the one with Congress in July of the same year. The next federal election would

take place one year later, in July 2012, and involved the complete renewal of both houses of Congress and the presidency, so—although not officially—political campaigns were already taking place.

In that context, during the MPJD dialogue with Congress, the opposition parties took the opportunity to criticise the government's policies, while the ruling party and its allies assured that the government was sensitive to social demands and open to reforms to guarantee security. Regardless of whether there was any personal sensitisation amongst legislators, I maintain that the episode made it possible for political parties to observe the potential benefits of supporting, at least in the face of the upcoming elections, the demands of the MPJD. Thus, the parties in Congress announced that they had begun to prepare their own initiatives on the law to protect victims only two weeks after the meeting (Becerril 2011b). This reiterates that movements alter the dynamics of power of institutions with which they interact during certain periods (McAdam and Tarrow 2019; Tilly 2006).

Given their interest in remaining in office and expanding their constituencies, political parties tend to calculate their alliances from an instrumental point of view considering costs and benefits (Rucht 2004). In August, the press reported that the Senate planned to approve an initiative of the president that proposed, amongst other things, to perpetuate the participation of the armed forces in policing duties (Garduño 2011b). The reaction of the MPJD was to cast the legislators as traitors to the commitments they had given to the victims, so all dialogues stopped (Muñoz 2011). However, the senators announced that they would not approve the presidential project without discussing it first with the MPJD and human rights organisations (Becerril 2011a). Arguably, after attempting to vote through Calderón's project—which was against the main demands of the MPJD—the legislators could have evaluated the possible electoral cost of turning their backs on the MPJD's agenda and decided to follow a form of conflictual cooperation based the sharing of knowledge, capabilities and resources to negotiate and work towards a shared objective (Giugni and Passy 1998). Thus, as has happened in other contexts (Holdo 2019), the legislative elites presumably realised that supporting the MPJD provided them with an external source of legitimacy, which is especially relevant considering that public opinion was not supportive of Calderón's security strategy (Somuano 2018). Although some authors have found the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes to be empirically uncertain (Uba 2009), others argue that decision-makers take public opinion into account when it responds to their electoral concerns

(Burstein and Linton 2002). Although the MPJD framed violence and justice as issues that transcended any partisan interest, I maintain that the legislators weighed their parties' electoral costs and benefits since, after retracting from approving the presidential initiative, they started to officially present initiatives for the law on victims' rights (García 2018; Turati 2011).

From a different approach, the government also tried to take advantage of the MPJD demands. As has been observed in multiple contexts, elites often try to co-opt social movements through apparently cooperative practices that seek to defuse mobilisations without offering substantive changes or by adopting fragments of content from the contentious frames but subverting their purpose (Coy and Hedeén 2005; Holdo 2019; Trumpy 2008; Burke and Bernstein 2014). At the beginning of September 2011, and without any prior notice, Calderón announced the creation of a Social Attorney for the Attention of Victims of Delinquency (ProVítima, in Spanish) that would have the objective of “identifying each one [of the murdered victims] [...], targeting the search for those who have disappeared at the hands of criminals, providing assistance to their families and accompanying them in the painful process of demanding justice” (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011c). However, the president insisted that “the only way to truly end this cancer”, in reference to criminal violence, was “to persevere in the strategy” (Presidencia Felipe Calderón Hinojosa 2011c), to continue the so-called war. Representatives of the MPJD considered the announcement a dissimulation without any social legitimacy whose usefulness was destined to fail because official actions would continue to multiply victims throughout the country (Otero 2011). Furthermore, ProVítima lacked financial resources and personnel because it was not agreed with the legislative branch, which is in charge of approving the government's budget. Faced with criticism from the MPJD, a presidential official declared that “Sicilia's opinion” was “very valuable”, but was “not the only one” (F. Martínez 2011b). This attempt to co-opt the MPJD's demands and frames shows that the victims' issues had gained prominence within the official agenda in the face of the upcoming election — first, the legislators from all political parties backed the proposals of the MPJD and then the government tried to gain sympathy by apparently adopting them.

In addition to the opening due to the proximity of the electoral period, another important dimension of the political opportunity structure was the presence of allies in the elites. At the beginning of 2012, Eliana García—an MPJD supporter who between 2003 and 2006 was a PRD deputy and during 2012 worked as an advisor in the Senate—met with Javier and Emilio Álvarez

to explain that any bill should be approved before April (Gordillo-García 2015).<sup>48</sup> Then, together with her team, Eliana made a comparison of the different initiatives and presented an opinion to be evaluated by the senators. However, the legislators did not attend the session planned to discuss the document and some argued that they did not have constitutional capabilities to legislate on victims' issues. Interviewed in another context, Javier recalled that a group of activists and relatives of victims then went to the Senate and announced a sit-in to demand party leaders to assume their responsibility (Gordillo-García 2015, 102). Within hours, legislators agreed to vote on the bill that same week (Monroy 2012). Eliana's support as an insider in the Senate was added to that of Nacho Suárez, who—because of his work in the PRD (see chapter 1)—had access to decision-making spaces within the Chamber of Deputies. Their role in the process of lobbying for the law can be understood as that of institutional activists, people that at least partly work in political institutions but pursue outsiders' goals (Pettinicchio 2012; Santoro and McGuire 1997). This makes it possible to note that although the differences between the ruling elite and grassroots movements are usually very clear, the frontiers between some state institutions and challenging groups can be more porous than they appear (Banaszak 2005; Duyvendak and Jasper 2015).

Furthermore, the MPJD forged relevant *ad hoc* alliances with prominent legislators that were able to influence other members of their parties. In an interview for previous research, an MPJD participant named Jorge González recalled that there was no support from the political parties as institutions for the law's approval, "but there were people in particular who supported it [...]. It was not institutional support, but there were legislators from all parties who were aware of the necessity of the law", including those who were relevant for making decisions within the parties (Gordillo-García 2015, 105). Likewise, Javier has interpreted that "the elections were coming, and everyone wanted the photo. We won the consensus mainly with the PRI, they lobbied very hard [...]. Other legislators [from other parties] were important too because they understood the importance of the law" (Gordillo-García 2015, 105–6). Thus, the MPJD had access to relevant decision-making spaces through institutional activists and then secured the support of relevant allies within the Congress elite that could take electoral advantage of backing the movement's demands.

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<sup>48</sup> Unless extraordinary schedules are approved, Congress only legislates from February to April and from September to December.

The law was approved by both houses at the end of April 2012, but the process did not end there. Congress sent the law to the executive branch and Calderón had one month to propose changes or make the official enactment. However, without notifying Congress, a deputy belonging to the PAN—the president’s party—asked the presidential office to return the bill arguing that an incorrect document was sent (Gordillo-García 2015, 106–8). By the end of the month, the president had not published the law and legislators from all political parties officially asked him to inform the reason (Becerril 2012). The MPJD described the bureaucratic disarray as an “illegal procedure to stop the implementation of the law” (Gordillo-García 2015, 108). Although the leader of the Senate—also a member of the same party as Calderón—officially demanded the executive branch to fulfil its constitutional obligation and immediately enact the law, on the night of July 1<sup>st</sup>, the date on which presidential and legislative elections were held in Mexico, Congress received the modifications proposed by Calderón. According to the Constitution, legislators needed to discuss the proposal but there was no possible time to do so because Congress sessions would only resume in September, once both houses had a new composition because of the election. Thus, the MPJD considered Calderón’s act “a mockery of the victims’ pain and demands” (Gordillo-García 2020, 307). Researchers have found a series of legislative buffering threats through which Congress can halt the advance of a project without formally blocking it — for example, focusing decisions on another branch, sending the project to committees in which there is no sympathy towards the contentious actor or including issues in discussions without prior notice (Basseches 2019). Calderón’s manoeuvre shows that the executive branch can also resort to seemingly innocuous procedures to prevent the enactment of bills that go against its interests despite previous attempts to co-opt the MPJD demands.

As explained, the electoral period represented an opening of opportunities and a source of instability amongst elite parties that were looking for votes. Such instability deepened once the result of the election was announced. Since the PRI won the presidency as well as the majority in both houses of Congress, members of Calderón’s party presumably had little incentive to keep supporting the president’s attempt to stop the law. Thus, Congress rejected Calderón’s proposed amendments to the General Law of Victims arguing that they were not sent at the lawful time and the Senate leader, a member of the PAN, officially demanded the executive branch to respect the Constitution and enact the law (Becerril and Ballinas 2012a). The president filed a demand to the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation—the most important institution in the judiciary—to



determine whether the temporality of the amendments was legal, but Congress filed an appeal against the president in the same Court, considering that there was no legal basis to oppose the enactment (Becerril and Ballinas 2012b). Thus, the Court declared the law invalid until further analysis of the situation.

The president-elect's team contacted Javier through Eliana—who would later be appointed deputy attorney for human rights—to announce their will to enact the GLV and organised an event to do it. Thus, on 9 January 2013, accompanied by dozens of victims' relatives—an issue that is discussed below—the new president, Enrique Peña, made the official enactment. With this, the MPJD went from getting its demands around justice and peace into the polity to their incorporation in the government agenda, and finally to the adoption of legislation in the terms that the movement demanded. In other words, the MPJD reached the third area of policy influence (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995).

### *Strategic capacity*

Leaders' capacity is observable in the responses they give to turn uncertainty into constructive purpose when facing threats, critical dilemmas or sudden opportunities (Ganz and McKenna 2019; Nepstad and Bob 2006). Although the signing of the Pact in Juárez caused a series of ruptures with several activists and political organisations (see chapters 2 and 3), I maintain that the reframing of two of the main demands that were raised in the encounter portrays the strategic capacity of the MPJD leaders. Likewise, the *conversatorios* with relatives of victims and the involvement of skilled professionals to articulate concrete proposals for the law involved a strategic decision to focus on one specific goal and dedicate the organisational resources to it.

Tere, who “participated very actively” in the activities around the law, recalls that during this period “we entered another dynamic” (interview). Rather than mobilising and carrying out non-violent direct action, the MPJD participants “spent whole days knocking on legislators' doors to explain why we needed this law; we sought that the voice of the victims would sensitise legislators”, Ara has mentioned in a previous interview (Gordillo-García 2015, 102). However, several participants have criticised that after the Caravan to the South and the second dialogue with Calderón, the mobilisations stopped, and all subsequent efforts focused on promoting the law. Rocato, for example, has called this time the “grey period [when] we left the mobilisations and bet

everything to the political negotiation. That too was very important in the long run, but we did stop the mobilisations” (Gordillo-García 2015, 70–71).

Likewise, Pietro claims that “dialogue with power without non-violent pressure on the street [...] ends up being a way in which power manages to neutralise demands, create simulation, sign agreements that it will not comply with” (Gordillo-García 2015, 127). Raúl Romero (see chapter 2) agrees that “a current that abandoned social mobilisation triumphed [...]. We always said that the movement advanced with two legs: the social and the institutional [...]. By abandoning the social part [...] to bet everything on the law led to a conflict” (Gordillo-García 2020, 309) between those who saw mobilisation as the most important method to achieve the MPJD’s objectives and those who opted for traditional ways.

Although deciding between disruption and institutionalism is a common dilemma for social movements that can cause major divisions (S. Cable and Shriver 2010; Haines 2006; Jasper 2004; Shriver and Adams 2013; Sawyers and Meyer 1999; Offe 1990), I argue that the choice in this case points to the strategic capacity development amongst the leaders (Ganz 2009; 2010). As previous research has found, events with claims around several apparently disjointed issues including participants from many different organisations are harder for lawmakers to follow, leading to negative impacts on the policy process (Fassiotto and Soule 2017), so trying to advance all the demands of the Pact could have complicated the influence of the MPJD in policymaking. Besides, in consideration of the context of violence that the MPJD participants were facing (see chapter 3), some leaders—particularly Javier, who acknowledges the influence of Emilio Álvarez—decided to target the efforts to a specific goal: the law to protect the victims’ rights. In addition, four of the MPJD’s largest and most ambitious mobilisations had already taken place—the 6 April march, the March for Peace, the Caravan of Consolation, and the Caravan to the South—so the movement had established its general agenda and shown its convening capacity throughout the country. Thus, there was room to use less disruptive tactics, such as talks and lobbying, to push the law project. The dilemma between social mobilisation and political negotiation, though, was not easily resolved and had other impacts on the MPJD’s dynamics as will be read in the next pages.

Although movement scholars usually struggle to establish causal links between mobilisation and policy outcomes (Giugni 1999; Tilly 1999), the evidence discussed here—specifically, the acceptance of both the executive and legislative branches to promote the law during the dialogues with the MPJD, and the subsequent acceptance of Peña’s team to enact it—makes it possible to

maintain that the GLV was a policy outcome of the MPJD. In that same vein, when assessing the approval of the law by Congress, Javier considered that for the MPJD “this achievement was the result of dialoguing with the institutions and making concrete proposals [...], as well as of peacefully demonstrating, holding meetings with academic institutions and organisations, and up to two weeks of intense meetings with legislators” (Sicilia 2012). Although the poet recognised that the law did not resolve “the origin of violence or impunity”, he considered that it was an acknowledgement of “the reality and the need for justice of the victims”, as well as of “the weakness of the State and the lack of will of those who lead this country to face the national emergency” (Sicilia 2012). By framing the process this way, Javier fostered the interpretation of the law as a partial success for the MPJD. This was also a strategic decision, since storytelling and claiming credits play a key role in defending the outcomes of contention (Meyer 2006).

### *Beyond the enactment*

Although taking advantage of possible opportunities depends largely on the perceptions of leaders (Gamson and Meyer 1996; McAdam and Tarrow 2019), the case of the GLV shows how the responsiveness of the authorities can vary according to the branch of the government, the person in office or even the moment of the policy process. As targets of the claims, the evaluation that incumbents make of the possible costs and advantages of supporting a movement is critical to understanding the different positions they adopt (Luders 2016). In this case, due to the benefits of supporting the MPJD, there was greater openness in the legislative branch and with a recently appointed government than with an unpopular president. However, participants have a critical reading in this regard. For example, interviewed in 2015, Javier considered that Peña committed to the enactment of the law because “he wanted to deactivate the most uncomfortable movement”, while Jorge González surmised that the president’s goal was getting “the photo with Javier to say ‘we are with the victims’ and shit — it was totally pragmatic for [the benefit of] his image” (Gordillo-García 2015, 122). Likewise, Ara judged that the enactment proved to be only a montage to “pretend that things were going to change” (Gordillo-García 2015, 121). This shows that social movement participants make critical assessments of their outcomes and the uses that elites make of them.

As mentioned before, amongst other elements, the GLV enacted in 2013 brought together the rights of the direct victims and their families, distributing duties for all levels of government.

Besides, it established the State's obligation to pay economic reparations to the relatives of victims and created a national system for the care of victims that is headed by the Executive Commission for Attention of Victims (CEAV, *Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas*). However, several participants of the MPJD, scholars and organisations have criticised the poor implementation of the law (García 2018; Gordillo-García and Sicilia 2020). Broadly, this criticism is directed towards the insensitive treatment victims still receive from the CEAV personnel, the amount of paperwork needed to process simple requests, and the constant obstacles that are raised around health attention and economic aid—as stated in the law, the relatives of victims have the right to receive a monthly stipend while their legal process before the prosecution and the judiciary is still open.

However, activists also acknowledge the importance that the law has had for the families of the victims. For example, Magdiel was very critical of the process and got distanced from the MPJD when efforts began to be directed exclusively to the negotiation of the law since he interpreted the whole issue as government dissimulation; nonetheless, he considers that it has become “a minimal resource, a way for people to catch a breath. There are people who would have a worse time if the law did not exist” (interview). The interpretations about small victories—including policy outcomes—or losses can impact substantially in internal dynamics even when they are not either absolute wins or humiliating defeats (D. Gupta 2009). Furthermore, the different meanings that activists give to legal norms and their related processes are linked to the instrumental, political and cultural schemes that each person has (Kostiner 2003; McCann 1994). Back in 2015, Ara considered that participating in the process of the GLV “was very exciting because, as victims, we learned to build through pain; building the law was building hope. When it was approved, everyone was crying” (Gordillo-García 2015, 102). In the interview carried out for this research, she added that, for her, “the law is a recognition to those who are not here, those who were murdered, and us, the relatives who want no one else to suffer this” (interview). Tere also remembers that she did not go to the cemetery on her son's birthday because that day a series of meetings with legislators was scheduled and she wanted to give her son an “important and dignified gift” (interview). This shows that political outcomes are closely intertwined with biographical outcomes, which are analysed in the next chapter.

Moreover, policy outcomes influence several areas of socio-political life because they introduce or transform meaning-making symbols that frame and legitimise grievances, identities, goals and even feelings (Bröer and Duyvendak 2009; Marshall and Barclay 2003; Meyer 2005;

Pedriana 2006; Schneider 1986). Thus, even with its implementation issues, the MPJD put the dignity and rights of the victims of the war in the national socio-political agenda — the GLV represented an acknowledgement of the emergency of the country, where crime and the government produced, and continue to reproduce, tens of thousands of victims each year. Regardless of the political benefit that Peña could obtain as president, the enactment of the law opened the opportunity to promote the agenda of the victims not only with social mobilisation but also in the institutional arena. Several groups of victims' relatives have adopted a discourse in defence of their rights and have mobilised to demand the proper implementation of the law confronting the heads of the CEAV and other authorities (Camacho 2020; Dávila 2017; Proceso 2016). Hence, the GLV did not resolve the broader causes of violence, but it did provide the victims' relatives with aid for immediate issues and with material and symbolic resources to keep mobilising. In other words, the MPJD did not manage to go further than the third area of influence in the policy process (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995) — the law has not been applied as demanded, there has been no improvement in the reasons that originally motivated collective action, and there have been no structural transformations in the socio-political context. Explaining why this has not happened would require further analysis, so it is a possible future research project.

To summarise, with the enactment of the GLV, the MPJD achieved the third arena of influence in the policy process (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995). I argue that this political outcome is explained by (1) the development of relevant prognostic and diagnostic frames that included experiential and professional expertise (Morrell 2015) in (2) a favourable political opportunity structure due to the instability of elite alignments and the presence of influential allies within the elite, where (3) the MPJD leaders made strategic choices to target one specific goal amongst the multiple demands of its original agenda and focus the movement resources on its attainment. Security was the priority issue of Calderón's government, so the demands of the MPJD were in a high-profile arena. Accepting the law in the terms stipulated by the movement would have implied an acknowledgement that the security strategy had failed, a costly concession for a government that had defended its military security project for five years. In contrast, although the issue remained high-profile for the next government, the enactment of the law was useful, first, to stand apart, even if only rhetorically, from an unpopular government and, second, to co-opt at least in the short-term the demands of a relevant contentious actor at the national level.

The relationship between policy change and social protest is complex because it can demobilise some groups but also provoke others to join contention (Evans 2020; Kane 2010; Sawyers and Meyer 1999). As outlined in the background, the MPJD stopped social mobilisation after the enactment of the law, but many participants formed new groups that have mobilised for several reasons, including some issues around the law. I will now analyse this phenomenon.

## **2. Cultural outcomes**

### *Theoretical outline*

The study of the cultural outcomes of a social movement can vary depending on the adoption of a more agentic or structural approach because the evidence of these outcomes can be found both inside and outside the movement in performances, ideations and artefacts (Van Dyke and Taylor 2019; Earl 2004). Regardless of what kind of perspective is adopted, scholars agree that the actions of one movement provide several possibilities to subsequent movements (Staggenborg 1998; Tilly 2008), including changes in political opportunity (Meyer 2004) and a series of meanings and understanding of how things happened, what was done and why it worked or not (Morris 1992; Tarrow 1992). Besides, some participants become movement's "cultural workers" who raise consciousness amongst new activists, supporters and observers to promote their organisation and strategy for new mobilisations (Morris 1992, 371). When this happens, movements' porous boundaries become more blurred and they start to overlap with other actors causing an impact in the broader field of contentious politics, a process known as spillover (Meyer and Whittier 1994; Krinsky and Crossley 2014; Terriquez 2015).

One of the possible ways to study a collective actor spillover effect is through its diffusion dynamics. Broadly, diffusion happens when one group adopts contentious performances, ideas and organisational forms from another (Strang and Soule 1998) and its study has been part of almost every theoretical tradition in social movement scholarship (G. Edwards 2014). Diffusion is by no means a mechanical transfer or a 'copy-paste' exercise (Soule and Roggeband 2019); rather, the process involves contestation, creativity and strategy to adapt what was done, claimed or organised in the first place (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010b; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Valocchi 1999; Wood 2012). As such, the analysis of diffusion provides an opportunity to observe more clearly the consequences that go beyond the participants of a social movement and are reflected broadly in certain cultural settings.

Spillover and diffusion can happen between very different national contexts (Meyer and Boutcher 2007; Romanos 2016; Tarrow 2010) or within one same geography or locality (Wood 2015). Departing from Buechler's (1990) and Taylor and Whittier's (1992) work, Staggenborg (1998; 2013) coined the concept of social movement community to portray how movements are composed not only by political and formal organisations but by several different individuals and collective actors who share cultural elements and advance certain goals. The notion emphasises informal and cultural elements of movements, such as fluid social networks of individuals and their practices to support movement ideas (Hassan and Staggenborg 2015). Thus, the concept reflects how contention fields include both linked and disjointed actors that share, although never uniformly, cultural dimensions. In this understanding, it is theoretically relevant to analyse how the spillover and the diffusion processes of a collective actor impact on the formation or transformation of the material and symbolic environment of a social movement community.

In this section, I study how the MPJD has influenced other groups in terms of two key elements of movement culture: organisational forms and contentious performances (Van Dyke and Taylor 2019). Although there are many forms of diffusion—such as non-relational and mediated (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010b; Soule and Roggeband 2019; Tarrow 2005)—I will focus on the relational form that occurs through interpersonal ties or organisational connections that facilitate the sharing of cultural elements from one group to another (Crossley and Diani 2019; Tarrow 2010), by showing how people and groups come into contact to learn and adapt mobilisation dynamics (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010b).

Broadly, my main argument is that the formation and mobilisation of *colectivos* of relatives of disappeared people that have taken place in Mexico recently (De Vecchi 2018; Iliná 2020; Martos and Jaloma 2017; Ohlson 2020; Robledo 2019; Sánchez, Pérez Aguirre, and Verástegui 2018; Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016) are, at least in part, a cultural outcome of the MPJD spillover. The MPJD campaigns brought together people who would later articulate the *colectivos* adapting some of its organisational forms and performances. Overall, the process happened through relational diffusion and shaped how groups organise and perform contentious action in the social movement community against the Mexican war on drugs and crime. The remainder of the chapter is divided into two sections. First, I focus on the diffusion of organisational forms that have fostered the formation of the *colectivos* of relatives of disappeared people. Then, I analyse the diffusion of contentious performances from the MPJD to these new groups. It is

important to note, however, that I do not intend to study how these *colectivos* work or to provide a deep analysis of their contentious performances. Rather, my aim is to explain how they came to be, arguing that they are a cultural outcome of the MPJD.

### *Formation of colectivos*

Lupita recalls that at the end of Caravan for Peace, the relatives of disappeared people who participated agreed to continue working together. “We were only true warriors there. There was Margarita López, Lucía Baca, Letty Roy [Letty Hidalgo], María Herrera, Araceli Rodríguez, Ignacia [González Vela] [...].<sup>49</sup> When we arrived in Mexico, we promised that we would each organise a *colectivo* in our states”, she points out (interview). Thus, along with another small group of women who were looking for their relatives, Lupita founded United Forces for Our Disappeared in Jalisco (FUNDEJ, *Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestro Desaparecidos en Jalisco*) in 2013. From the contacts she knew due to her involvement in the MPJD, she took FUNDEJ to the project Citizen Forensic Science (CfC, *Ciencia Forense Ciudadana*) in 2014. Funded by an English university and started by two Mexican students from there, this project sought to provide the families of disappeared people with relevant tools to handle forensic technology and thus, given the limited capacity and willingness of the Mexican government, to build a database of DNA with reliable records that would allow the identification of bodies (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016). At the beginning, CfC also had the participation of other relatives of disappeared people who were part of the MPJD, amongst which were Letty Hidalgo, Ara Rodríguez, Norma Ledesma (see chapter 2), María Herrera (see chapter 3) and her son Juan Trujillo, Lucía Baca and her husband Alfonso Moreno (CfC 2014).<sup>50</sup>

Thus, because of the experiences in constant episodes of mobilisation during 2011 and 2012, many of the relatives of victims of disappeared people who had met in the MPJD began to reproduce and adapt its organisational dynamics of collective work to bring together other individuals who faced the consequences of a violent crime in their respective states. One of the first projects in which some of these *colectivos* came together was CfC. “It was a terrific project

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<sup>49</sup> Margarita López is the mother of Yahaira Bahena, a 19-year-old woman who was disappeared, tortured and murdered in Michoacán in 2011. Lucía Baca is the mother of Alfonso Moreno, a young man who was disappeared in 2011 in Nuevo León. Ignacia González is the mother of Andrés and Braulio, two men who were disappeared in Tamaulipas also in 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Lucía Baca and Alfonso Moreno are the parents of Alejandro Moreno, a man who was disappeared on the Monterrey-Nuevo Laredo highway on 27 January 2011.



[...]. We warned the government of what could happen” in terms of the forensic crisis that the country faces, Lupita claims (interview).<sup>51</sup> After being taught, “we were going to directly take genetic samples from our colleagues in the group and from all the people who wanted”, she explains (interview). “The project was fully paid, but the reagents and samples were not allowed to get into the country — they were held in customs [...]. We began to despair, and the group began to split”, she laments (interview). Besides, Lupita recalls that another person involved in the project disagreed on the way the resources were used, and it was eventually impossible to continue. “Money is quite a bastard (*bien cabrón*). The project was ruined [...]. In my house I still have 47 DNA results from people who were in the group at that time. They arrived about a year later”, she points out (interview).

CfC was one of the first exercises within the Mexican crisis of violence in which it was sought to give the families of victims the tools to correct the deficiencies of the State—a topic that is discussed later—and represented the formation of a new space to gather some relatives of victims, although with a very different approach from the one in the MPJD. What is important, however, is that those who were involved in contention with the MPJD began a process of relational diffusion of the organisational forms of collective work with other relatives of disappeared people.

Letty also organised a *colectivo* in Nuevo León. Although she does not establish, as Lupita does, a direct link between the MPJD and this *colectivo*, it is important to remember that her first experience of mobilisation for the disappearance of her son Roy was during the Caravan of Consolation and that, due to the contact that she maintained with other participants, she also joined a part of the caravan in the USA. As mentioned in chapter 1, Letty started attending the meetings of an allied organisation of the MPJD, where she met dozens of relatives of murdered and disappeared people who were also ignored by the authorities and learned to do documentation of cases. After constant disagreements for various reasons with the director, Letty separated from the organisation.

However, through contacts with the MPJD, she learned about the campaign Embroidery for Peace (*Bordados por la Paz*) which called people to gather in public spaces to embroider the story of a murdered or disappeared person in a fabric piece to then expose it publicly to face official

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<sup>51</sup> As stated by the current Under Secretary for Human Rights of the Ministry of the Interior, there are at least 26,000 not recognised bodies in the forensic facilities of the country (Secretaría de Gobernación 2019).

denials around violence.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Letty decided to start embroidering and invited other mothers of disappeared people to participate with her weekly in a park. During their gatherings, they used to talk about their cases because they wanted to share who in the government offices was working effectively and who was not. Likewise, she started to invite her colleagues to attend the appointments that she had with authorities. “I would tell them that I was going with another person who wanted to ask about their children too [...]. We realised that they did not like having a lot of people there, so we took that in our favour”, she recalls (interview). “They regularly wanted to take us out [...]. We wrote everything down and made it public because we already had a Facebook page [...]. We began to understand that organising was our strength and a weakness for the authorities”, she adds (interview). Shortly, in April 2012—after having met members of FUUNDEC (see background)—Letty decided to name the group United Forces for Our Disappeared in Nuevo León (FUNDENL, *Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Nuevo León*).

Letty’s words show how people who lacked any politicisation began to experience a political radicalisation in which personal grief became a socio-political issue of seeking justice and truth, a topic that I will discuss in the next chapter. However, its relevance in terms of the analysis of cultural outcomes lies in the fact that relatives who had their first experience of political participation with the MPJD organised *colectivos* in several areas of the country.

On the same topic, María Herrera and her son Juan Trujillo formed the *colectivo* Familiares en Búsqueda (Relatives in Search). She has told the press that the MPJD “was disintegrating” after the caravans and she decided to separate because it was “clear” to her that “nothing was being done regarding the search” for disappeared people (Este País 2021). For this reason, she and her son began to contact the relatives of disappeared persons whom they had met during the caravans, but whose cases had not been followed up. Along with them, they started organising the Red de Enlaces Nacionales (National Links’ Network), which articulates the work of dozens of *colectivos* throughout the country. “This was, of course, done with people who had already been in the MPJD,” María Herrera has stated (Este País 2021). Organisational structures from previous

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<sup>52</sup> When the March for Peace was held in 2011, a group of artists decided to participate through a series of visual performances in which they stained red, like blood, water from all fountains along the way. The activists, who called themselves *Fuentes Rojas* (Red Fountains), continued to collaborate in the actions of the MPJD and, after some time, called for the permanent campaign Embroidery for Peace. They continue to do so until the time of writing. For more on this, see Olalde (2019) and Colectivos Bordados por la Paz (2014).

campaigns usually provide a base for the growth of social movement communities (Aunio and Staggenborg 2011; Staggenborg 2013) and, moreover, the trust that these structures carry facilitates coordination. As such, the *colectivos* started collaborating to face the dramatic increase in the number of disappearances during the government of Enrique Peña (see background chapter).

Ara remembers that in 2015, the directors of the organisation SERAPAZ—which was an ally for the MPJD (see chapter 2)—called for a meeting with representatives of *colectivos* from all over the country. Most of the people who attended the gathering “knew each other through the MPJD: Letty, Graciela Pérez, Edith Pérez, Silvia Ortiz, Araceli Salcedo... The MPJD trained all of these defenders”, Ara points out (interview).<sup>53</sup> At the meeting, it was agreed to establish cooperation ties and have periodic gatherings. Soon after, the group of 60 *colectivos*—whose representatives are also part of the Red de Enlaces Nacionales—decided to adopt the name Movement for Our Disappeared in Mexico (MNDM, *Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México*). In a document prepared by members of the MNDM, an unidentified relative of a disappeared person also points out that the MPJD was a “reference” for organising — “we sought to join along with families and organisations who knew each other already from that space [the MPJD], and then we suggested that it was important to include other regions [...]. Little by little we started connecting” (CCC 2018, 19).

I do not intend to make an in-depth analysis of the MNDM’s mobilisation dynamics—a topic that could encompass a whole thesis—but it should be mentioned that one of its main demands was the enactment of a law against the disappearance of persons because Mexican legislation was not even remotely close to international standards on the matter (CCC 2018). With the advice of national and international professional organisations, the MNDM launched several campaigns to demand the legislative and executive branches to work together with the families of disappeared people to build this law. After several months of mobilisations, work and lobbying, the law was enacted in 2016, creating the National Search Commission and the National Registry of Disappeared Persons.

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<sup>53</sup> Graciela and Edith Pérez are looking for four members of their family—Aldo, Arturo, Alexis, and Milynali—who were disappeared in 2012 in San Luis Potosí. They formed the *colectivo* Voz y Dignidad por los Nuestros (Voice and Dignity for Ours). Silvia Ortiz is the mother of Fanny Sánchez, a young woman who disappeared in Coahuila in 2004. Together with her husband, Silvia founded the *colectivo* Grupo Vida (Group Life). Araceli Salcedo is looking for her daughter Fernanda, who was disappeared in Veracruz in 2012. She articulated the *colectivo* Familias de Desaparecidos Orizaba-Córdoba (Families of the Disappeared in Orizaba-Córdoba).

Several of the participants from *colectivos* and organisations that promoted the law against the disappearance of persons had also been part of the process around the General Law of Victims. The MPJD had shown the possibility of the victims' relatives to influence policymaking and its story of victory in this field was known to most of the *colectivos* precisely because many of their participants had helped to achieve the law. As has been observed in other contexts (Freeman 1983; Meyer 2006; Oliver and Myers 2003), the overlapping networks between the MPJD and the MNDM served as a means for the story to be shared and it became a resource for organising and mobilising. Furthermore, in addition to the empirical reference of the MPJD, the relatives of disappeared people had the know-how to get into the field of policy again and they took advantage of these conditions to advance the law.

Moreover, not only the relatives of victims fostered the diffusion of organisational forms — the activists who organised the first protests of the MPJD also fostered this process. For example, Roberto helped linking relatives that did not participate in the MPJD with other *colectivos*. To illustrate, I will use the case of Angélica Rodríguez—Angy for short—who is looking for her daughter Viridiana Morales. In 2012, Viridiana, who was 21 at the time and studied psychology at the University of Morelos, and her husband went camping in Estado de México, but they were disappeared and never returned to Morelos. Angy started looking for her immediately and, after a few days of not hearing about her whereabouts, Viridiana's classmates held a demonstration at the university and called the press to cover it. This gave “local visibility” to the case, Angy considers (interview). Then, she was contacted by a local lawyer who offered his services. “He is not the best lawyer to litigate, but he does everything in the media”, which is why they began “to hold press conferences and, as he is related to many journalists, the case was on the front pages of the newspapers for many days”, she comments (interview). Then, other relatives of disappeared and murdered people in Morelos began looking for Angy. Since the lawyer began to request more money to carry out his work, they dismissed him. In 2013, Angy and the other relatives started doing on their own what the lawyer used to do. “We realised that alone we had no voice and that together we were a force”, she explains (interview). After some time, she attended a forum on the General Law of Victims and personally met Javier and Roberto, who invited her to a series of courses and meetings. “From there a friendship arose and I began to interact with people based in Mexico City and with groups from other states”, she adds (interview). Shortly, Angy and her colleagues founded the *colectivo* Regresando a Casa (Coming Home) in Morelos.

Roberto recalls that some organisations, educational institutions and groups of victims began to request MPJD participants to give them training courses on human rights, which is why he began offering workshops in various states. The significance of these spaces in the acquisition of skills is discussed in the next chapter, but in terms of cultural outcomes it should be noted that these types of courses have been key to diffusion in several contexts because they help to bridge groups and disseminate information (Isaac et al. 2012). “It was extremely important to share what we knew and bring the victims closer to other people [...] so that they could take control of their cases [...] with confidence [...], identifying exactly where they wanted to go”, Roberto says (interview). Through the contacts made in these courses, Angy met María Herrera and her son. “Juan started inviting me to their meetings and I started to participate. I began to see that we had a long way to go, but that united and organised families can do a lot”, Angy mentions (interview).

As found in other contexts (Andrews and Biggs 2006), rather than mass membership, a cadre of activists was fundamental in the relational diffusion process of the MPJD — some of the people who participated in the campaigns of the MPJD set a base for the organisation of new *colectivos* that advance the victims’ demands. Building on the organisational forms nurtured by these participants, the MNDM and the Red de Enlaces Nacionales represent a new kind of centre in the social mobilisations against the war in Mexico; these collective actors have been capable of bringing together relatives of victims of disappearance, activists, organisations, forensic experts, universities, and such, to promote new campaigns to stop violence and demand justice. Thus, I argue that MPJD had a spillover effect through relational diffusion in which former participants reproduced organisational forms that led to the articulation of new *colectivos* of relatives of disappeared people in several regions of Mexico. These groups, moreover, had also reshaped their field of contention by introducing innovative actions that I will now analyse.

### *New contentious performances*

On the night of 14 September 2014 in Iguala, Guerrero, a criminal cartel attacked a group of students from the rural college of Ayotzinapa. After chasing them around the city for several hours, hundreds of people were injured, six were killed and 43 students were disappeared. The case soon attracted media attention and, given the impossibility of knowing the location of the students, local organisations began to protest to demand that the authorities search for them. Days later, due to clues of the possible participation of the police and the military in the disappearance, the protests

spread to the capital of the country and other states. Hurried official investigations concluded that the students had been killed and incinerated, and their remains thrown into a river. The lack of elements to scientifically support this conclusion led the families of the students and their legal representatives to demand a review by an independent organisation. In parallel, the protests continued. Thus, the Mexican government accepted the participation of an independent group of experts proposed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The result of the investigation pointed to the participation of authorities in the disappearance and the manipulation of evidence and crime scenes (GIEI 2015; 2016). At the time of writing, the case remains without resolution and the country does not know the truth of what happened. In this research I will not analyse the protests or contentious activities around the forced disappearance of the 43 students, which requires several other discussions.<sup>54</sup> However, it must be mentioned since it was a key event in promoting some of the performances of the current repertoire of the relatives of disappeared people.

When versions about the possible murder of the students began to circulate, a local organisation called Union of Peoples and Organisations of the State of Guerrero (UPOEG, *Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero*) decided to search for bodies in Iguala because some of the students were sons of its members. It is important to note that the UPOEG had located disappeared people in the past because it coordinated community police groups in some localities (Warnholtz 2016). The media soon reported the UPOEG searches because eleven graves with 38 bodies were found, but none were the students (BBC News 2014; Excélsior 2014; Ocampo 2014). Inhabitants of the region who had disappeared relatives soon contacted the UPOEG. That was the case of Mario Vergara, brother of Tomás Vergara, a taxi driver who was disappeared on 5 July 2012 while working in Huitzucó, a small town located 40 minutes from Iguala. For Mario, the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students was “a bomb” (interview). “I was watching the news and my sisters saw that there were going to be demonstrations in the city of Iguala. They brought a canvas with my brother’s photo. Many media paid attention because more people started to come out”, he considers (interview). On 16 November 2014, the UPOEG summoned the relatives of disappeared people to go to the hills to look for clandestine pits. “My sister told me, and we joined. We brought three friends. A lot of media attended the call”, Mario mentions (interview). Miguel

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<sup>54</sup> For deeper analyses on the mobilisations around Ayotzinapa, see Gravante (2020) and Meneses and Castillo-González (2018).

Jiménez, a UPOEG leader who was assassinated in August 2015, offered him his first workshop to search for clandestine graves. “He told us: ‘We are going to go to the countryside. Wherever we see a little mound of earth, we are going to dig; wherever we see the soil of a different colour, we are going to dig’”, he remembers (interview).

Photographs and videos of different media (Grillonautas 2014; Monroy 2014) show how the families travelled in several cars and motorcycles to wild areas. As Mario recalls, on the way “we found a man walking with his little donkey carrying firewood. We stopped and Miguel Jiménez, who was a very good speaker, told him that we were going to look for buried people and asked if he knew anything” (interview). Then, “the man said that for a few weeks it had been smelling like something rotten, that we should look in a certain area. We went, dug and found the first skeleton” (interview). Mario pauses and then continues: “It was horrible. We were going to look for the dead, but we did not know what we would find [...]. We never imagined that strong smell, seeing a bone and thinking that it belongs to your relative” (interview). Press reports increased and more families joined (Aristegui Noticias 2014; BBC News 2014; Turati 2014), even some members of the then active CfC project went to offer people to take DNA samples (Turati 2015).

As in several other contexts (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Braun 2011; Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Myers 2000), news media played a key role in the diffusion of these actions to other cities of Guerrero and other states. Besides—echoing recent research (Haydu 2020; Poell 2014)—social media also encouraged the speed of diffusion. Mario recalls that one of his sisters found the Trujillo Herrera family through Facebook and invited them to visit Iguala. Juan Trujillo has also reiterated this talking to the press (Ayala 2020). “They were thrilled with what we were doing. They told us that they had been looking in papers in offices for years and that they had not found anything”, Mario recalls (interview). Thus, he showed them “what we were doing, to use the steel bar in the soil, to detect the rotten smell. I think that motivated the first national brigade to search for disappeared people”, which took place in April 2016, he says (interview).

As other authors have found (G. Edwards 2014), the adoption of contentious performances and practices depends largely on the social networks where activists are embedded. Pietro, who is very close to the Trujillo Herrera family and who provides training workshops on non-violent strategy to several *colectivos* of relatives of disappeared people, links the search brigades to the internal discussions of the MPJD, where he proposed the action but other leaders, particularly Javier, refused. From the beginning “we proposed [...] the brigades [...]. A lot of infrastructure

was needed [...], so the problem was tackled with the difficulty of infrastructure [...] and we did not proceed. It was not possible to proceed due to that institutional logic”, he considers (interview). Pietro recalls that the argument in favour of the brigade was that it should be carried out as an act of defiance to the authority, to do what the authority did not comply with, regardless of whether it had the support of forensic experts. Non-violent direct action is “very violent for authority; they would rather you slap them [...] than do a fast in front of their house [...]. Doing a search brigade in the MPJD was gigantic and very strong; that is why they did not push it”, he adds (interview). From Pietro’s point of view, the refusal to carry out the brigades was based on two factors: First, “in the MPJD there was always a tension between mobilisation and institutional action; the balance tipped to one side”, he mentions in relation to the decision to focus on obtaining the law and not on direct action (interview). Thus, Pietro believes that a brigade represented a relevant challenge to the State that, from the institutional position of the MPJD, could break the dialogue with the authorities. To this was added, secondly, the murder of several participants — carrying out a search brigade not only implied a confrontation with the State, but with criminal groups, so the risks were bigger. Pietro’s words reiterate how some leaders evaluate the relationship between their goals and the socio-political context to make decisions regarding collective action. However, although these decisions may seem appropriate in the face of external circumstances, they risk discouraging participation when they do not take into account the expectations of other people involved (Corrigall-Brown 2011).

Thus, although some citizen-led groups had started searching for clandestine graves before 2014 (Robledo 2017) and although the MPJD did not perform direct actions such as search brigades, I maintain that the presence of its participants in new social networks and spaces prompted the diffusion of ideations around this contentious performance. Social networks are structures filled with meanings that arise from interaction (G. Edwards 2014; Mische 2003) — given the context imposed by the tragedy of Ayotzinapa and the conditions of the social networks fostered by the MPJD, a topic that I will discuss more broadly in the next chapter, the ideas of activists like Pietro or relatives of victims like the María Herrera and Juan Trujillo are essential to understand how the brigades became one of the main performances in the contentious field against the war in Mexico. Besides, the inefficacy and lack of will of the Mexican authorities played a role in the adoption of this performance. In that regard, Angy remembers that some of the *colectivos* that formed the MNDM and that were part of the Red de Enlaces Nacionales began to compare



regional experiences — several groups were already finding bodies and notifying the prosecutors, but “we saw that the authorities did not search like the families would [...]. For them, little hints are not important [...]; for us, they are super important”, so that prompted more people to organise the brigades (interview).

The choices participants make about tactics affect movements’ unity and prospects for subsequent actions (Sawyers and Meyer 1999). For this research, Javier conceded it was “a strong mistake” to object to the brigades as a “second phase” of action in the MPJD like Pietro proposed (interview). The refusal left several participants dissatisfied and, along with others whose proposals of hunger strikes were also rejected, these people started working on organising the brigades from other spaces. Thus, at least partly since the Ayotzinapa case had a very relevant influence, the failure of the MPJD to promote brigades caused the ideations around these actions to be relationally diffused. The relatives of disappeared people began to organise “taking some experience from the MPJD” to do on their own “what other groups, other movements or the State had not done”, Pietro claims (interview). Although it might be thought that there is no way in which an action not carried out can be diffused, it is essential to take into account that diffusion involves not only borrowing ideations from multiple sources but an adaptation and modification that usually delivers new models of action (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Snow and Benford 1999; Van Eerdewijk and Roggeband 2014).

In separate interviews, Mario and Angy agree that the role of the Catholic Church was also crucial for the first brigade, especially the work of a local priest named Julián Verónica. “He is a great guy [...]. The Trujillo Herrera family had already worked with people from churches [when they were active in the MPJD]. Someone contacted priest Julián, and thanks to him the brigade was made”, Mario points out (interview). Angy agrees and claims that some priests in Veracruz began “to announce that a brigade would go and that, instead of giving tithe, people could leave a note with whatever information they had about where there were buried bodies or graves. And yes, it worked. This is how it started” (interview). The families were in Veracruz for two weeks, accompanied by dozens of activists and press reporters. “We felt pressured because we did not find anything for several days”, Mario says (interview). After the first discovery of human remains, the local government tried to deny the relevance of the brigade. “The state prosecutor’s office published a statement to say that we had only found pieces of wood. In the end, they issued another statement to say that the first statement was to avoid panic in the community”, Mario recalls

(interview)—this was also reported by the media (SinEmbargo 2016). At the end of the brigade, the *colectivos* found 15 graves with hundreds of charred human bones (Gilet 2016). Since then, there have been brigades in Veracruz on two other occasions, Sinaloa, Guerrero and Morelos. Along with the annual “national brigades” organised by the Red de Enlaces Nacionales, there are constant local brigades and search actions across the country organised by other *colectivos*.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, many of the groups organise annually caravans for the search in life (*Caravanas de búsqueda en vida*) in which they visit jails, asylums, hospitals, and such to look for disappeared people (EFE 2021; Partida 2021).

As has happened with other practices in a wide array of contexts (V. Taylor and Van Dyke 2004), it is possible to maintain that the brigades have attracted hundreds of participants and the attention of national and international media because of their novelty and disruption. Besides, authors have found that the uncertainty of not knowing what happened to their loved ones plays a key role in motivating the participation of relatives of disappeared people because they live in a permanent and indefinite state of mourning in the face of the sudden and inexplicable absence (Robledo 2014; 2018; 2017). Mary, for example, comments that she has participated in search actions with various *colectivos* in several states. “I have to search for my husband between the living and the dead” because “I have seen how my colleagues find bodies and I ask myself: ‘What if he is my husband and I did not look for him?’ That is why I have gone”, she says (interview). Two bodies were found in the last search she attended before the interview. “It is very difficult because my mind starts asking ‘What if it is my husband? What could have happened to leave him in these burned fragments?’ It is very difficult”, Mary adds (interview).

Thus, the brigades have been an exercise with which the families of disappeared people have shattered the official discourse around violence and have directly challenged the authorities, revealing the multiple dimensions of criminal violence and its correlate of political violence. Nonetheless, an unexpected consequence of these actions has been to reveal a new problem in the search for justice and truth. “I am against searching in graves” because those who do it “are not experts”, Pati points out (interview). Furthermore, “if I go, scratch the soil, take out the human remains and hand them over to the authorities, they will disappear them again. We have seen it happening. The bags that the relatives hand over to the authorities disappear again”, she emphasises (interview). Separately, Pietro highlights another problem in the same regard. There is a now a

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<sup>55</sup> See Wattenbarger (2020), Zatarin (2020), Kahn (2020) and Pardo and González (2019).

relevant “imbalance between the search brigades and the monitoring and identification processes” because “there are tens of thousands of bones and fragments of clothing, and there are practically no identified corpses. The authority argues that there are no forensics or equipment and that it is very expensive” (interview). Thus, for him, the brigades run the risk of becoming non-strategic actions that amplify the forensic crisis that the country faces. The brigades “have grown a lot, they have good support from groups, institutions, and academics. There is a lot of know-how that has been accumulating. It grows a lot, but if the identification of people does not grow, the wound will grow”, Pietro comments (interview).

In addition, several relatives of disappeared persons criticise that the government pays part of the expenses of the brigades.<sup>56</sup> “I do not see that the authorities actually do much [...] because we are getting them used to us doing the work [...]. They [through the CEAV] are giving money so that the brigades [...] look for the people... How cool for them!”, Lupita comments (interview). “I have very bad experiences [...]. There is a lot of crap behind this. If they [some participants of *colectivos*] are not paid, they will not go to search”, considers an interviewee that asked not to be named for this purpose. This opens a possibility for the government to co-opt and demobilise some *colectivos* through their representatives, a topic that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In sum, I argue that—along with the broader socio-political context of the Ayotzinapa crisis and the growing number of disappeared people—the relational diffusion of the MPJD produced a spillover effect that brought ideations around search brigades to the newly formed *colectivos*. By adopting the practice, the *colectivos* have reshaped the contentious repertoire of the social movement community against the war in Mexico. Moreover, it must be noted that the relevance of the citizen-led search for the disappeared in the country has also influenced the MPJD. As I pointed out in the background, in 2016 several MPJD participants who had created a victim assistance area at the University of Morelos—how this came to be is discussed in the next pages—were contacted by the *colectivo* led by Angy because she and other relatives identified two irregular massive pits created by the state government in the town of Tetelcingo. After litigating in court, the MPJD participants, the *colectivo* and the university obtained a court order that demanded the opening to

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<sup>56</sup> As part of the General Law of Victims, relatives of victims of certain crimes are entitled to receive a monthly financial amount to cover expenses related to their case (for example, travel costs to visit attorney offices). In addition, the law establishes obligations for the federal government to allocate economic resources to actions aimed at knowing the truth about these crimes. Using these rights, the CEAV has covered on multiple occasions the expenses of various searches led by relatives of disappeared people.

ensure that the 119 bodies were buried in compliance with all forensic protocols, especially with the collection of DNA samples. “We found these pits and turned the university into a model [...]. Although I had refused to search for the disappeared, to go digging, we also ended up doing it from the university”, Javier comments (interview). Thus, the way the contentious field against the war has been modified by the organisational forms and performances adapted by the *colectivos* has also influenced the collective actor that fostered these organisational forms and performances, causing a sort of boomerang effect. However, unlike the boomerang effect identified by Terriquez (2015)—in which A’s strategies are adapted by B to achieve different goals but, by doing this, B ends up furthering the aims of A—in this case, the strategies not adopted by A were implemented by B and, given the transcendence of B’s actions, they later had to be adopted, although only to some degree, by A.

## **Conclusion**

During the most active years of the MPJD, the caravans and the public presentation of *testimonios* fractured the official discourse around violence and took the pain of the victims’ relatives to the public sphere, making authorities face them to stop criminalising their murdered or disappeared loved ones. As I analysed in this chapter, the mobilisations and lobbying of the MPJD made the political elite support—albeit for their own benefit—the demand for a law to recognise the rights of victims. Although the outcome in the policy process demobilised the MPJD, many of the participants began to organise *colectivos* in virtually all the states of the country to continue confronting the authorities and demanding the search for the disappeared. Given the ineffectiveness of the government to fulfil its responsibilities, the *colectivos* decided to do things on their own, organising citizen-led search brigades for disappeared people with the support of multiple actors. Thus, the mobilisation of the *colectivos* through search brigades reshaped the social movement community against the war in Mexico shattering official denials and silences around extreme violence. Besides, all of this influenced the actions of the MPJD. Despite originally refusing to do direct actions to search for the disappeared, leaders and participants of the MPJD have been involved along with the *colectivos* in the opening of clandestine pits full of human remains to show that not only criminals but also governments disappear people.

Some studies have found that, while formal social movement organisations still play an important role in contention, other more fluid and less formal groups have multiplied in recent

years (Biggs and Andrews 2010; Roggeband and Duyvendak 2013; Van Stekelenburg and Boekkooi 2013). The formation of the *colectivos* reinforces this finding since they are loose groups without fixed memberships and with a wide rotation amongst their participants.<sup>57</sup> Besides, the mobilisation of these *colectivos* confirms that challenges by “early risers” (Tarrow 1994, 86) or “initiator movements” (McAdam 1995, 219; Valocchi 1999, 61) can be sustained, although transformed, by other groups that adopt the organisational models and ideas for related contentious campaigns (Meyer and Whittier 1994).

Nonetheless, diffusion is multidimensional and any study on the matter will only provide a narrow excerpt of complex and broader social phenomena (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010b). Although being aware of this, I maintain that the evidence discussed here makes it possible to argue that the MPJD had a spillover effect that set in motion, at least partly, the organisation of the *colectivos* of relatives of disappeared people across the country. Likewise, through dynamics of relational diffusion, some participants of the MPJD influenced the adoption of new performances such as the brigades by the *colectivos*. Moreover, the theoretical relevance of the findings around cultural outcomes lies on the discussion about how the spillover of an initiator movement can consolidate a social movement community (Staggenborg 1998) in a given contentious field, whose characteristics in turn influence the initiator’s subsequent actions.

In the next chapter, I study the biographical outcomes of the participation in contention led by relatives of victims of war in Mexico and, although briefly, reflect on how the ‘collective’ outcomes analysed so far are linked with the most personal consequences of mobilisation.

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<sup>57</sup> However, it is important to note that many of these *colectivos* choose to formally register as civic associations since this facilitates various procedures, such as funding from other non-governmental organisations and universities.

## **Chapter 5. Biographical outcomes**

As stated in Mills' (1959) classic work, sociological inquiries must link biography to broader social processes. Thus, now that the political and cultural reach of the MPJD can be understood, it is time to analyse the impacts contention has had on the lives of its participants. In this chapter, I will focus on the biographical consequences of mobilisation—that is, the effects on the life course of individuals that are, at least in part, due to involvement in social movement processes (Giugni 2004a). Although most of the scholarship tended to overlook the individual effects of activism for a long time (Fillieule and Neveu 2019; Passy and Monsch 2019), social movement studies have recently turned their attention to their systematic analysis, but the majority of this literature has been focused on the USA (Giugni and Grasso 2016). Building on Fillieule's (2010) work on activists' careers and defection, my main argument is that mobilization has caused three main changes in the lives of the activists and relatives of the victims: a reconfiguration of their sociability networks, the development of know-how and wisdom, and a renegotiation of their worldviews. These changes are linked to each other as elements of a cognitive-relational process (Passy and Monsch 2019), meaning that the interplay between the changes in the relational environment and the acquisition of certain pieces of knowledge fosters a new self-perceived position in the social arena. The text is divided into four sections, one for the theoretical outline and the rest for the three changes product of mobilisation. In the conclusion, I discuss the interplay between these three elements and include a discussion on the relationships between political, cultural and biographical movement outcomes.

### **1. Theoretical outline**

As Giugni and Grasso (2016) point out, several scholars have focused on analysing the post-protest lives of the participants in the New Left in the USA, especially the most committed ones (Braungart and Braungart 1991; Sherkat and Blocker 1997; McAdam 1988; Fendrich and Tarleau 1973). Through the years, other researchers have also studied the individual impacts of social movements in other geographical contexts and fields of contention. Whether or not it is an explicit goal of the mobilisations, intense and continued activism has the potential to transform people's biography (McAdam 1999; Van Dyke, McAdam, and Wilhelm 2000; Polletta and Jasper 2001). Thus, scholars working on biographical outcomes show that the resocialisation processes of involvement

in contention impact the political ideas and behaviours of the participants (Giugni and Grasso 2016), producing cognitive liberation (McAdam 1982), political solidarity (Hirsch 1990), moral conviction (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2004), new relationships (Corrigall-Brown 2012; Nepstad 2004; Whittier 1995), identity formation (Downton and Wehr 1998; Gamson 1991; Hunt and Benford 2004; Polletta and Jasper 2001), and modifying their imagined horizons of possibility for social change (K. Brown 2016). Besides, scholars have also identified changes in the work trajectory of participants (McAdam 1989), their private life-spheres—especially regarding their family dynamics (Maslet 2016; Wilhelm 1998)—and other less visible outcomes related to how activists interpret their life course (Blee 2016). In other words, after engaging in contentious politics, participants are more likely to make different decisions in all sorts of situations in the future and are unlikely to passively accept the state of the world (Meyer 1999). As Perez (2018) summarises, researchers given more attention to the role of ideas or beliefs than to the influence of practices or routines. However, some scholars do acknowledge the importance not only of the perceived effectiveness of action (Barkan, Cohn, and Whitaker 1995; Corrigall-Brown 2012) but of skills acquisition (Van Dyke and Dixon 2013) and the integration of activism-related routines in everyday life (S. Cable 1992; Downton and Wehr 1998; Passy and Giugni 2000).

Thus, the biographical impacts of contentious participation are the “micropolitics of social change” (Neveu 2019, 84). Following Fillieule’s (2010, 7) work on activists’ careers and defection, I maintain that it is possible to study the biographical outcomes of contention by observing the reconfiguration of sociability networks, the development of know-how and wisdom, and the renegotiation of visions of the world. Analysing the interrelation between these three forms of change is key to understanding how biographical results occur. In that regard, Passy and Monsch (2019) argue that social interactions and cognitions shape the activists’ worldviews in what they call a cognitive-relational process. In a recent literature review (Passy and Monsch 2019), they also highlight the importance of providing more empirical evidence to assess this process in different contexts. This chapter advances in that direction.

While this is not necessarily a sequential issue, it can be argued, first, that just like personal networks might draw people into social movements, these also forge new social ties because people meet other activists and supporters (Diani 2004). These bonds produce a series of unique social relationships (Della Porta and Diani 2006) that represent a particular form of social capital (Diani 1997; Tindall, Cormier, and Diani 2012). Second, activists usually become knowledgeable

specialists on their protest issues (Shemtov 1999) because they acquire relevant skills through formal and informal training (Coley et al. 2020; Isaac et al. 2020). This expertise can be understood as a form of activist capital (Van Dyke and Dixon 2013). The interplay between the changes in the participants' relational networks and their cognitive developments fosters a renegotiation of their worldviews. Thus, in the third place, through activism, people often acquire certain forms of political consciousness (Fillieule and Neveu 2019; Morris 1992) and start seeing themselves as active subjects in the social world (Meyer 1999; Wagner and Cohen 1991). Hence, many activists tend to establish a link between their social self-perceived position and their personal life-spheres, altering their symbolic construction of self (Passy and Giugni 2000). Therefore, activism against the war on drugs and crime in Mexico provides an opportunity to analyse empirically how the interplay between social interactions and cognitions shape people's worldviews. In other words, this chapter helps in advancing our understanding of the cognitive-relational processes (Passy and Monsch 2019) that consolidate biographical outcomes.

In the following pages, I analyse these three main changes in the participants' lives building on the interviews carried out for this research. Although this chapter can be understood in itself, the reader might want to do a quick review of the life trajectories presented in the first chapter to recall the conditions and processes that led to recruitment, because, on the one hand, it is easier to understand what activism produces considering what produced it in the first place (Pagis 2019) and, on the other, personal outcomes are linked to interpretive trajectories that start earlier than the first involvement (Blee 2016).

## **2. Reconfiguration of sociability networks**

Following Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (1993), Diani (1997) argues that mobilisation often produces networks that carry a particular form of social capital that reflects ties based on trust, recognition and solidarity, through which resources circulate. These social networks are imbued with stories and meanings that shape values, preferences, perceptions and, in a general manner, individuals' cognitive toolkits (Diani and Mische 2015; Fuhse 2009; Passy 2003). Thus, bonds that arise from contention reflect not only structural ties but also the principles, emotions and cognitions of the group of activists that integrate them (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013).



Although other chapters of this thesis shed some light on the importance of the social ties created in the MPJD from a collective point of view, these bonds also marked a transformation in the relational environment of the participants in the mobilisations from a personal perspective. Amongst the relational changes experienced by the relatives of victims who have participated in the MPJD, it is possible to identify that they were able to reach out to new people, and that they became reachable as well, to face the insensitivity and ineffectiveness of the Mexican authorities, which shows the reconfiguration of the structural component of their social ties (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013).

For example, Ara comments that after she participated in the first dialogue with Calderón, several families began to approach her to request advice regarding their cases. “I started to accompany other families [...]. I became very visible, I started giving interviews and giving my cell phone number [...]. I began to be a trusted person for families. They would call me an advocate”, she recalls (interview). Tere also considers that the mobilisations forged “very special relationships” for her (interview). Amongst many examples, she highlights the role that Nacho Suárez had in her quest for justice. The first time she attended the prosecutor’s office in Mexico City—on previous occasions, Tere’s father had overseen the complaint about the murder of her son Joaquín—she was accompanied by Nacho. Although the visit had no results and only left Tere “devastated” because the agent gave her a pillow stained with blood claiming that it was “no longer useful” evidence (interview), she explains the importance of having been accompanied by the MPJD participant: “It was extraordinary. He was loving, supportive, lucid; a person who could resolve all conflicts. I felt very supported [...]. Not all the people have one Nacho to go to the prosecutor’s” (interview). Thus, echoing other cases (Tindall, Cormier, and Diani 2012), activism broadened the diversity of the participants’ networks by establishing connections with people from diverse backgrounds within the mobilisation context. Moreover, social capital fostered by activism does not necessarily presupposes collective identity (Diani 1997) — even those who do not consider themselves participants of any *colectivo*, like Pati and Teresa, acknowledge that due to activism now they know people from almost every state in the country and thus can refer individuals when necessary.

Although the activists who started the MPJD actions were already part of networks with a broad mobilisation capacity, their involvement in contention put them in touch with new people and groups that were focused on issues such as security, human rights and justice. This has allowed

them not only to put victims' families in contact with representatives of organisations and with some authorities but also to respond to events of violence that they have suffered. For example, due to a 12-hour kidnapping and a raid on their home that they directly relate to their activism against mining in Morelos, Gerardo and Norma had to relocate their home to another state between 2013 and 2017.<sup>58</sup> During this period, although the case remains unpunished, they received the support of other MPJD participants who mediated with the authorities and brought their cases to top-level officials.

Roberto experienced a similar structural reconfiguration of his personal network. As he recalls, during his participation in the opening of the Tetelcingo clandestine pits, he was subject to harassment and multiple intimidations by the local officials, especially the secretary of security. “More than fear, I felt helpless [...] to the extent that I had to go and ask in an almost personal way that the undersecretary of human rights of the federal government could act and do something” (interview). The official “communicated with the local secretary of security [...] to defuse this threat and prevent something from happening”, he says (interview). Although it cannot be known with certainty what would have happened in both cases had it not been possible for the activists to establish contact with authorities capable of decision-making in a high-level setting—a situation that does not guarantee the safety of the people—the mere ease of reaching out to these authorities reflects an outcome of activism in the networks of the MPJD participants.

In addition to their structural component, networks contain and transmit meanings (Fuhse 2009; Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Mische 2003) because of the history of interactions amongst those who are embedded in them (Nepstad 2004). As I indicated in the first chapter, several of my interviewees declared that they had not found support in their families — on the contrary, many got distanced due to the constant criticism they received after suffering a violent crime. In contrast, the reconfiguration in their sociability networks produced by their activism carries trust, support and personal appreciation. “I have shared such tough stories with the people I have walked with. My companions [*compañeras*] know what happened in my case and I know what happened in

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<sup>58</sup> In May 2013, while participating in an intense series of mobilisations against the opening of a mine in Morelos, Norma and her daughters were kidnapped for almost 24 hours. The authorities soon intervened due to other MPJD participants' mediation, and the women were rescued. Although the prosecution dismissed the complaint and determined that it was an extortion attempt, Norma and Gerardo point out that subsequent risk analyses carried out by several national and international organisations determined that it was an operation in which dozens of people had participated with no intention of obtaining any money. A few days after the kidnapping, a group of people broke into their home and caused a disaster at the place, but nothing valuable was robbed; all they took were the documents and photographs of their daughters. After that, they left Morelos.

theirs”, Mary explains (interview). “They lived very tough issues, and they had the trust to tell me about them. I love them and respect them a lot”, she adds (interview). Moreover, “they have advised me, they have invited me [...] not to be afraid, to continue fighting for Mauricio, for the thousands of disappeared, and for our rights. They have encouraged me not to break down” and, “likewise, when I see them weaken, I do not leave them alone”, she emphasises (interview). As Diani (1997) argues, the mobilisation-caused bonds imply mutual recognition and trust between those involved and, the broader these ties are, the greater the movement’s impact can be. Thus, the experiences embedded in the networks of the people that have participated in the campaigns led by victims’ relatives have provided a fundamental change in their lives, altering the relational component (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013) of their post-protest networks.

Furthermore, participants that are not victims’ relatives have experienced a parallel process. Norma and Gerardo highlight, for example, the relationship that their daughters have created with individuals like María Herrera, Melchor Flores and other relatives of disappeared people. “I remember a lot that they would say to Ara: ‘Luis is not here, but I am here, and I am going to give you all the hugs that he has not given you.’ They still call her ‘mommy Ara’”, Norma comments (interview). For his part, Roberto shares that he has developed a close friendship with several participants of the MPJD and other *colectivos*, so he considers that his personal “thermometer” is the “trust” that these people give him — “I have not stopped trying to help them collectively, always from the community [...]. That is my personal thermometer: the moral quality that you have in front of the people for whom you dedicate yourself”, he says (interview). This, as I will analyse in the next pages, is also linked with the development of know-how and with the transformations in the worldviews.

Nonetheless, social ties are polysemous or multivalent, so actors can value the same social ties in contrasting manners (G. Edwards 2014; Kitts 2000). As such, it must be acknowledged that although the social capital formed during contention carries changes considered as positive by the participants, it would be simplistic and erroneous to suggest that the networks produced by activism do not have conflicts between those involved. For example, in the interviews conducted for this research and in informal conversations during fieldwork, several people shared misunderstandings and experiences that have led them to mistrust certain individuals and groups. Pietro considers all this “a pity” since the “rivalries, fights and gossip” have caused a certain distance between many *colectivos* (interview). Likewise, Angy argues that “together we have an immense strength.

Immense. If we really left behind egos [...], if everyone really joined together [...], we would be capable of many more things” (interview). Thus, as discussed in the third chapter, tensions amongst participants in mobilisations led by victims’ relatives are just as usual as in any other social setting. Portraying in an idealistic way the relational component of these networks (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013) that this type of activism produces would mislead any kind of analysis.

Moreover, the meanings built on networks allow individuals to unravel and understand social realities (Passy and Monsch 2020; Mische 2003). The modifications in the relational environment of the people who got involved in the mobilisations of the MPJD and the *colectivos* have altered the interpretations they make not only about their own networks but their social worlds through shared representations and cognitive resources constructed through close contact with politically active individuals. For example, Mario comments that although he was unfamiliar “with this whole world of social struggle”, now he knows “many activists” (interview). “The Trujillo Herrera family introduced me to many people in this struggle. I did not know anything; my life was none of this”, he claims (interview). Likewise, while Letty regrets that only a few people are involved in seeking solutions to the crisis, she values the bonds with those who persist in showing solidarity. “There are only us, the activists and the extraordinary people who are interested in this issue; friends and family who accompany us [...]. It is a very small group that accompanies us, sustains us, and makes us strong”, she says (interview).

Hence, the cognitive component of the sociability networks (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013) has brought interpretive resources to the lives of people who were not active in contention but it has also broadened the group-based systems of meanings of the activists who started the first mobilisations. For example, Gerardo highlights the relevance that the persistence of the relatives of victims he met in the MPJD has for his participation. “It is a motivation [to continue participating]. Seeing an Araceli, a Vaquero [as Melchor Flores is known]. They are still there. That is a motivation”, he mentions (interview). These experiences reiterate that embeddedness in networks around a protest issue provide individuals with salient resources to sustain collective action (Fernandez and McAdam 1988; McAdam 1988; Neveu 2019; Passy 2003; Corrigall-Brown 2011).

In brief, activism in mobilisations led by relatives of victims has modified the relational environment of the participants. This reconfiguration of the sociability networks has altered not

only their structural positions, but their histories of interaction and the meaning-making resources embedded and communicated in their post-protest ties.

### **3. Development of know-how and wisdom**

Just as it does with personal networks, involvement in contention influences personal skills that strengthen capabilities and competence in activism-related issues and other occupations (Beckwith 2016; Passy and Monsch 2019; Wagner and Cohen 1991; Wood et al. 2017; Fillieule and Neveu 2019). Here, on the one side, I will focus on the skills developed by the victims' relatives and, on the other, on the jobs of the MPJD organisers.

Often, movements and organisations arrange workshops and courses specifically designed to train participants (Coley et al. 2020; B. Edwards and McCarthy 1992; Isaac et al. 2016; 2020; McAdam 1988). One of these initiatives was planned within the MPJD. After the Caravan of Consolation, the idea of training participants in civil resistance strategies and non-violent praxis was promoted, but for several reasons—which my interviewees asked not to make explicit—the project failed. “We could say there were two groups [...] that did not enrich each other [...]. One would offer a workshop, and the other as well” but “the benefit of attending was individual” and not collective, an interviewee recalls. “I went to some workshops, and they were indeed useful for me, but it was not that the MPJD promoted non-violent resistance. There was no training program”, the same person claims. Yet, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Pietro provides free constant workshops on non-violent strategy to the *colectivos* that organise the search brigades. Likewise, Roberto has offered relatives of victims several courses and workshops on defence of human rights since he got involved in the MPJD. The initiative started in informal settings, but universities and cultural centres started asking Roberto to coordinate institutional courses since 2013. Although he gets paid for organising this, the victims' relatives attend for free. Pietro and Roberto do not plan these courses jointly, but I maintain that both initiatives can be considered as a form of linked movement schools (Isaac et al. 2012), forums where the participants have the possibility of re-socialising knowledge and acquiring new skills while also linking to each other.

Moreover, scholarship shows that knowledge and skills are also acquired through informal channels and day-to-day interactions (Van Dyke and Dixon 2013). As has happened in other contexts (Nepstad and Bob 2006), both through formal and informal schooling, several relatives of victims who have participated in the MPJD and the *colectivos* have developed skills to become

specialised in areas such as human rights, disappeared people's search, and even forensic identification. Ara had only studied primary school and was a receptionist at a small hotel in Mexico City when her son was disappeared in 2009. After she became involved in the MPJD, she started attending several courses and workshops. Ara captures her trajectory in a phrase: "I jumped from receptionist to activist to human rights defender" (interview). This happened because "the pain led me to reconcile [...] with myself. It took me to study secondary school, to attend courses, workshops and talks. It took me to study the SERAPAZ Peace School,<sup>59</sup> to study high school", so "I went forward and forward and forward. I am now pursuing a Law degree at university", she points out (interview). While Ara's decision to pursue three levels of education may also be related to factors other than activism, political participation has influenced educational outcomes in other contexts (Breeze et al. 2021), so it would be wrong and misleading to frame it out of such conditions. From her perspective, pain has been the driver for her mobilisation and, as her words show, she considers a fundamental point in her life the adoption of the role of activist since it opened the possibility of preparing herself in certain spaces directly related to it and, later, take on the role of defender. This process also highlights how activism influences the construction of the self, a topic that I discuss in the next section.

Other people have also turned to university training to continue the search for their relatives. After the CfC project failed (see chapter 4), Lupita—a nurse by profession—decided to pursue a specialisation in genetic identification. She highlights the relevance of her course by contrasting it with an episode of the search for Pepe. In May 2011, she found her son's vehicle in Colima, but since a group of criminals contaminated it, the authorities said that no sample could be taken. "I was always dissatisfied [...], but did not know anything", so "it was as simple as saying 'we did not find anything'. I swore to myself that no one would ever play me for a fool again [*nadie me volvería a hacer pendeja*]. That is why I started studying", Lupita explains (interview). "Now I fight based on my knowledge. If someone tells me that it will take two months to check their DNA sample, we go to the authorities and demand them to make it faster", she adds (interview).

Likewise, accounts from other participants deepen how this development of know-how and wisdom process provides the relatives of victims with new skills to face the inefficacy and disdain from the authorities. Teresa narrates that she got interested in learning about law and human rights

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<sup>59</sup> Organised by SERAPAZ, this is an annual pedagogical program lasting several weeks that seeks to strengthen capacities for organisations and social actors in conflict transformation.

when she joined the MPJD actions. She claims she was interested in knowing more about the problem “to help people better”, so she “took several workshops” including “forensic science courses” in which she learned “what an inert body looks like and how DNA tests are done” (interview). “Later I was in a workshop to learn more about our bones and how people should be searched in graves”, she recalls (interview). Likewise, Pati points out that several years ago she enrolled in the human rights defence school by the Cerezo Committee.<sup>60</sup> “I began to [...] know my rights, what to do, with whom and where [...]. It helps you, so the authorities cannot play you for a fool [*que no te vean la cara*]. I have been in many courses in forensic anthropology too”, she comments (interview). Mary coincides saying that the courses she has attended “are tools to defend yourself, to defend your colleagues, and to defend relatives who are not here” (interview). As a result, she argues that “we [the victims’ relatives] can no longer be fooled so easily. They [the authorities] cannot keep lying to us” (interview). Thus, as found by other authors (Barr and Drury 2009; Einwohner 2002; Passy and Monsch 2019; Van Dyke and Dixon 2013), there is evidence to argue that the acquisition of personal skills reinforces the perceived self-efficacy within activists to better organise and face the authorities, thus leading to continued participation.

Letty’s case offers a view of how other participants have gone further still in specialisation. Irregularities in the case of a disappeared woman named Brenda González led Letty and FUNDENL to seek the support of a member of the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team in 2014—an independent organisation that works on defending the rights to truth and justice in cases of forced disappearance and extrajudicial execution in Peru and several other countries. The man, named Franco Mora, brought Letty to meet other forensic archaeologists and anthropologists. Over the years, FUNDENL’s search actions led to the discovery of dozens of bodies and graves in Nuevo León. At the end of 2018, she met again with Joel Hernández, one of the anthropologists she met with Franco. “I told him about the whole problem of how since 2015 we began to search and find remains, we handed them over to the authorities and they did not do anything”, she recalls (interview). Joel then offered to advise the group professionally and called other colleagues, while Letty requested help from more specialists. “A small group was formed that agreed to review the FUNDENL files. We thought: How wonderful! We formed a team that the State cannot provide us” (interview). In such a way, FUNDENL formed its own forensic team to search for disappeared

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<sup>60</sup> The Cerezo Committee is a grassroots organisation that defends human rights since 2001. Amongst other activities, they organise annual courses to train new defenders.

people. In 2019, this team carried out the intervention in a pit where human remains were found and sent to an independent laboratory abroad. “Everything has been done because of the knowledge we have acquired and because of this humanitarian, supportive network that we have found [...]. That was the extraordinary leap we were able to make and of which I am very proud”, Letty adds (interview).

Thus, due to this form of know-how, many MPJD and *colectivos* participants have become directly involved in the process of opening clandestine pits. During the opening of the Tetelcingo pits, Angy and other members of the *colectivo* Regresando a Casa officially oversaw and documented the process. “Lina was an observer, and I was documenting and packing. They would pass me the bone samples” and then “I wrapped, labelled and stored them. When the bodies were taken to the trailers to transport them to the cemetery, we also had to assign a number and so on... We were documenting everything together”, she explains followed by a sigh (interview).

Similar to what has been observed in other contexts (Wagner and Cohen 1991), along with professional training, the participants in this type of contention have acquired knowledge and skills through other relatives. This shows how activist capital flows through social networks. For example, Mario remembers that he learned to identify charred bones thanks to Silvia Ortiz (see chapter 4) and, likewise, due to the contacts of his network he now knows the criminal dynamics of the various regions of the country. “Each state has its own way of operating” — for example, “in Coahuila, charred bones are like our nails” because “they are thrown into a barrel with diesel and then crushed [...]. Technology cannot identify DNA like that. Meanwhile, we, in Guerrero, find the entire bodies in the countryside”, he explains (interview). Tears begin to flow from Mario’s eyes after saying those words and accelerate when he points out: “I go out into the field, and I realise everything that is happening. In Tijuana, many people were acidified; there is only left a kind of jelly and there is no way of knowing who they were”; moreover, “in Sinaloa, a woman discovered that the bodies were thrown at the crocodiles [...]. There are also those who were thrown into the sea”, he bemoans (interview). Thus, participants in contention led by relatives of victims acquire knowledge about criminal violence that otherwise might not be available to them.

Furthermore, Mario’s experience shows how formal and informal training combine to lead relatives to find alternatives in the search for their loved ones. Given the constant disagreements and dissimulations from the authorities in the identification of pits—in which they constantly discard discoveries by assuring that they are animal remains—Mario has attended multiple



workshops on forensic topics. One course especially stands out for him because an anthropologist told him that “the best way” to search for graves is “to get primary information [...]. There are many people who were buried in the countryside. There are also many people who work in the countryside and who noticed. Besides, there are the people who did it”, he points out (interview). In other words, Mario understood the importance of having sources of information to carry out searches. “People have us as superheroes”, he says in reference to the constant mentions people make about his ease of finding bodies — “we are none of that, but we do get information [...]. At first, we walked entire hills. Then we learned” (interview). This perspective has led Mario and many other participants in *colectivos* to search for criminals who know where human remains are buried. As they constantly emphasize, they are looking for corpses, not for who is to blame for the crime. “We are living a crazy life. Now we pray that nothing happens to bad guys who have buried people” because “the day something happens to them, all information will be lost [...]. A lot of people criticize me, but I do not know... they should put themselves in my place”, he comments (interview). Although more research is needed, this could imply a shift in the understanding of what justice is amongst some networks of relatives of victims in Mexico, who might be advocating for a truth and reconciliation approach.

Regardless of the personal considerations that people could have regarding this new approach that some relatives have adopted, proximity to criminal groups puts them at direct risk and reveals a deeper degree of government ineffectiveness. Bosi (2019) suggests paying attention to how the State influences the socio-political contexts that frame the biographical outcomes of movement participants. Hence, it is essential to understand that the decomposition of the Mexican State has not only led the relatives of war victims to organise to demand justice and to acquire professional skills but has also influenced their lives to the extent of promoting the conditions that lead them to interact directly with criminal cartels not in hopes of receiving justice, but solely as a method of finding disappeared people. “I do not want to be an anthropologist, nor do I want to be an athlete, but looking for my brother has made me learn the human bones, learn to rappel down into ravines”, Mario points out (interview). “I have learned to do many things that I did not used to do [...]. I do not want to learn everything I am learning, but I have no choice”, he concludes (interview). Thus, in contrast to the positive impression that the participants have regarding the changes in their sociability networks, the development of know-how and wisdom is sometimes perceived as a negative outcome.

As stated in the first chapter, the life trajectories of the MPJD organisers were very different from the relatives of victims that subsequently joined the actions. Thus, their biographical outcomes have also a different profile because they are a function of the social resources earned before mobilisation (Fillieule 2010). However, it is possible to analyse these consequences considering the development of know-how and wisdom during contention and the institutionalisation of their skills.

As briefly discussed in the third chapter, politicised people like Norma, Gerardo and Magdiel claim that during the caravans they were schooled about complex criminal dynamics such as the practices of criminal gangs for turning kids into hitmen. Likewise, they highlight the organising skills they developed while participating in the MPJD. For example, Norma and Gerardo consider that they acquired relevant skills that they use for their participation in other types of contention campaigns, especially those with indigenous communities. For his part, Magdiel argues that an “important personal” outcome for him was the formation of a group with which he “reconstructed” his “form of political action” called Youth before the National Emergency (*Jóvenes ante la Emergencia Nacional*) — “we are no longer young, but we have not changed the name”, he mentions humorously (interview). Given that in 2011 he knew politicised young people from various regions of the country, he called them to participate in the MPJD. They organised a first camp and “something very similar to what happened in Juárez” (see chapters 2 and 3) occurred: “there was a brief document that outlined the context and everyone, with their energy to raise all kinds of demands, made a very, very, long document. It did not prosper”, he laments (interview). Nonetheless, a part of that group kept working within the MPJD and independently promoting their own actions, forums and discussions. “I think we did interesting things that helped the group sustain itself to this day [...]. We are developing another idea of how to do politics”, Magdiel points out (interview).

Thus, in addition to the expansion of networks that was discussed in previous pages through the post-protest social capital, the cases of these activists show how even for people with an already developed politicisation process, participation in mobilisations led by victims of violence provides know-how and wisdom that, in dialogue with the first chapter of this thesis, deepens the radical *habitus* (Crossley 2002; 2003) to bring competences to new fields of contention. Moreover, based on Magdiel’s experience, it can be argued that an unintended outcome of this form of activism has

been to promote a form of horizontalism (Benski et al. 2013; Sitrin 2006; 2016) amongst participants. However, more research is needed in this direction.

As happened with many relatives of victims, other organisers enrolled in formal training to continue their activist formation. “All this puts you on another level. After all the tours, all the experiences, you get stronger and have elements to keep fighting”, Juanfra claims (interview). “Having this idea that you must learn to fight, I took several diplomas, the SERAPAZ Peace School, workshops on security, non-violence, different types of violence. I think you must do it if you are going to dedicate yourself to this”, he adds (interview). However, one of the biographical outcomes that stands out the most amongst this group of activists is the positioning in formal jobs related to their contention topics in a team formed by Javier at the University of Morelos.

After the closure of the caravan in the USA in 2012, the poet communicated that he planned to take distance from the MPJD. “I had to live my grief, see my daughter and my grandson. I closed in Washington, and we went to the Ark for three months [...]. And I came back to hell [Mexico], but in a different way”, he comments (interview). Although Javier planned to dedicate himself to writing, in 2013 the newly appointed rector of the University of Morelos—whom he knew from the years he had worked there—contacted him and explained that he was planning to give a strong social orientation to the university, and he offered the poet to join. Javier asked for enough resources, his own team, and freedom to focus on the victims’ agenda and on other “very critical” issues, such as the articulation with native communities of Morelos and the formation of “a non-violent school of life” (interview). The rector accepted and Javier put together a team with several people from the MPJD, amongst whom were Magdiel, Denisse, Roberto and Juanfra.

As in many other contexts (Corrigall-Brown 2019; Fendrich and Tarleau 1973; Fisher and McInerney 2012; McAdam 1989; Pagis 2019), activism provided the organisers with skills that could be transferred into a professional area, translating social movement involvement into a fully paid job. Although at the beginning Javier’s area at the university was very limited, the project expanded. “We were able to introduce issues of non-violence and peace with magazines, books, workshops and conferences. A great job was done. We could say that I moved my activism to the university”, Juanfra considers (interview). Likewise, Javier called Roberto—who had documented cases with the MPJD and then worked for four years at CENCOS, one of the MPJD’s allied organisations, also doing documentation and other tasks—to be part of the department of attention to victims. “We wanted to create a space [...] for comprehensive advice [...]. We did a lot of

research, training and [...] legal guidance”, Roberto explains (interview). Later, in 2016, he was director of the Victim Attention Program and formed a multidisciplinary team that led the process of opening the pits in Tetelcingo. Hence, as found by previous research in other contentious contexts (Giugni and Grasso 2016; Pagis 2019), participants in mobilisations led by victims’ relatives tend to take job positions that allow them to bring their radical dispositions and their activism-related expertise into the professional sphere, which, furthermore, are linked to the networks they developed.

Although one could be tempted to think that the institutionalisation of skills that come from this type of activism is less intense than the mobilisation campaigns, the Tetelcingo episode shows otherwise. Denisse sums up that the process in the pits “was a marathon work” for all the participants, with emotional consequences for everyone (interview). She especially remembers the words of a journalist who described that “it smelled of death” since they were “in the bowels of death” — “it was a place full of people, arid, all dusty, with intense sunshine, with the smell of decomposing bodies”, she explains (interview). Likewise, others express the difficulty of communicating the experience in Tetelcingo. “The image of the backhoe removing the bodies is awful because it inevitably reminds me of the holocaust. All those bodies piled on top of each other”, Juanfra comments (interview). “It is awful. For me, it is awful. No, no, no. There is no explanation. There is no way to explain it”, he points out while moving his head and hands from side to side (interview). As Wood and colleagues (2017) argue, researchers need to understand the emotional dimensions of movement outcomes. In this case, it is possible to identify that job positions that are linked to participation in mobilisations as those of the MPJD and the *colectivos* have emotional consequences similar to those of movement events (see chapter 3). In other words, both contention and professional institutionalisation in victim-related topics carry intense emotional consequences for those involved.

After the Tetelcingo episode,<sup>61</sup> Roberto accepted an invitation from the then head of the CEAV, where he worked for three years. “Those were years of great personal cost [...]. While working at the CEAV, I had several fractures with friends” because “when you enter a space where

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<sup>61</sup> Shortly after Tetelcingo, the rector ended his term at the university and the project lost a relevant ally because the next administration considered that the resources dedicated to the projects headed by Javier were unjustifiable expenses that were leading the institution to bankruptcy. The poet resigned in 2018 and retired. Denisse and Juanfra comment in separate interviews that they continued working at the university—but in a very limited way, without any link to the projects that Javier had promoted—and Magdiel resigned shortly afterwards and started pursuing a PhD.

you have a responsibility, there are many expectations because you have been an ally of the victims [...]. I was trying to do everything I could [...], but some trust was lost”, he explains (interview). Therefore, linked to the literature on bureaucratic activism (Abers 2019; Banaszak 2010; Rich 2013; Vilaça 2020), Roberto’s experience points out some of the issues that arise from working in government institutions after being a participant in mobilisations — politically active relatives of victims have faced official disdain for years, so even while acknowledging the limitations that individuals have within institutions, many expect former activists to promote major changes from within the government. Thus, just as activism influences the actions of those who take roles inside official spaces (Goirand 2019; Mische 2009), it also feeds the expectations of activist peers towards people that start working for government — in case these expectations are not filled, social capital can get affected alienating former colleagues (Abers and Tatagiba 2016).

In short, involvement in mobilisations like those of the MPJD and the *colectivos* has encouraged the development of relevant cognitions in the form of know-how and wisdom amongst participants. On the one hand, contention has provided victims’ relatives with skills that strengthen their self-perceived efficacy and facilitate their ongoing participation since they have the tools to organise collective action and better face the authorities. On the other, the activists that originally began the MPJD mobilisations have also developed professional skills and have got the chance to turn commitment into full-time jobs, bringing activism to the institutional sphere.

#### **4. Renegotiation of worldviews**

Participating in a group, Fillieule (2010) argues, implies taking part in its material, relational and symbolic dynamics with a certain regularity, which influences the construction of a place for self in the social. After becoming involved even in one episode of contentious action, individuals’ worldviews can experience relevant changes (Klandermans 1992; Rupp and Taylor 1986; Whittier 1995) because of the resocialisation of their ideas about common good and politics with other participants (Passy and Monsch 2019). As Passy and Giugni (2000) argue, political participation constructs specific meanings in the activists’ life that are related to other life-spheres, which are analytically distinct but intertwined ‘regions’ in the life of an individual—for example, professional life or family life. When participants link, materially and symbolically, their political activity around a particular issue and their personal life-spheres, such an issue is more likely to become a crucial element in the construction of self (Passy and Giugni 2000).

I argue that the involvement in mobilisations of the MPJD and the *colectivos* has led participants to renegotiate their worldviews, making contention a crucial feature in their notions of self. For the relatives of victims, this has promoted a form of politicisation and the elaboration of a new sense of life,<sup>62</sup> while for the activists it has meant a resocialisation of their political commitment. Furthermore, this renegotiation of worldviews fed the formation of a collective identity—a socially constructed understanding of a shared purpose, reciprocal identification and mutual recognition that, although not strictly an individual phenomenon (Hunt and Benford 2004), lies in self-conceptions and is expressed through action and interaction (Flesher Fominaya 2010b; 2019)—that, simultaneously, has influenced sustained participation.

I first focus on the victims' relatives. Political socialisation is defined as the ongoing development of people's personal and distinctive views of the political (Fillieule and Neveu 2019). Within this process, political consciousness is constantly negotiated and shaped by social struggles (Morris 1992) and allows individuals not only to identify and frame those issues attributing their causes to broader socio-political structures (Simon and Klandermans 2001) but also to see themselves as agents with the ability or capacity to transform society (Coley et al. 2020). As discussed in the first chapter, most of the relatives of victims that joined the MPJD did not have any kind of political formation. However, after becoming involved in contention, several of their accounts portray the politicisation they have developed. Letty, for example, argues that she started to get interested in attending meetings from other people that were protesting against the so-called war and other topics. "My son Richey and I began to learn because we did not understand anything [...]. We began to realise this whole issue of the government, how it transgresses all our rights", she comments (interview). So, for her "this whole process has been about learning a lot [...]. From understanding what happened [in terms of the disappearance of her son], to understand how the government is managed, that the government is not going to help you, that the government is not interested in this" (interview).

Likewise, recalling the time she had to spend three days to get an appointment with the Jalisco governor (see chapter one), Lupita jokingly says that "if the governor does not receive me now, I could throw a bomb [in a figurative sense] in Casa Jalisco [the official residence]" (interview). What she implies with this phrase is that due to her activism she now knows how to make

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<sup>62</sup> For a focus on the gender dimensions of the impacts that political contention has on the lives of the women related to victims of violence, see Jelin (2011), Berry (2015) and, specifically for the Mexican case, Iliná (2020).

authorities pay attention to the victims' relatives. For her part, Mary considers that “when you walk alone, you are a shadow for the authorities”, but if you participate with “the MPJD or an organisation with political weight, it is not the same anymore” (interview). Moreover, “what the authorities do not want are precisely the marches, the sit-ins. They want to avoid them, but that is what we do: You are not listening to me; well, here I am”, she adds (interview).

Previous research (Simon and Klandermans 2001; V. Taylor and Whittier 1992) shows that politicised people consider themselves participants of a group in a power struggle where external actors are responsible for a series of grievances. This stance, furthermore, provides a distinct cognitive dimension to individuals' worldviews. The above quotes by Letty, Lupita and Mary offer the possibility to note how their actions have adopted the techniques they have learned from activists. Hence, this politicisation shows features of the development of a radical habitus (Crossley 2002; 2003) amongst the relatives of victims. Other interviewees provide further evidence on this. For example, Tere Vera says with humour that she cannot recall all the actions that she has been part of: “Hunger strikes, closing streets, closing government offices, marches, many things” (interview). In a similar fashion, Patty recounts all the types of mobilisations she has been to and comments: “Not that I like it, but I support all of these actions” because “if they do not want to attend you, although it is your right, they will do it if you demand it [...] by protesting, closing offices, yelling, exposing them publicly” (interview). In general, “the Mexican authorities are like little donkeys [*burritos*] — if you do not pull them with the lasso [...], they stand still. We have no other choice”, she considers (interview).

For other relatives of victims, this politicisation process has also implied an approach to political philosophy and other forms of *praxis*. Tere comments that, after the Caravan to the South, she began to learn about Zapatismo. “I have learned a lot. I have attended various seminars and meetings in Chiapas”, and “what I have read about Zapatismo helped me to reconcile joy in the struggle: In life, as fucked up as it is, poetry is there; it is a matter of wanting to feel it”, she claims (interview). Furthermore, Tere points out that she has tried to guide her life with the teachings of non-violence, which she was drawn to by the Gandhian influence of the MPJD. In that regard, Pietro talked to her about hand embroidery as a non-violent direct action. Since she was living full-time in Cancun after the General Law of Victims was enacted, she decided to embroider to keep participating in contentious politics. In the face of the crisis of violence against women that was taking place there, Tere started embroidering on femicides in September 2015 and did so for two

and a half years. “I took over a bench in the main square [...]. Many foreign people used to be there. It was a very rewarding work and a way of telling the world what was happening not only in Mexico but in Cancun”, she comments (interview). Moreover, not all the pieces that Tere embroidered are for victims, there are also those for the dissemination of information and political issues. “It was very impressive to live my city, that very banal environment that Cancun is, doing something with such a radical essence. Although it may seem that it is not, it is very radical”, she points out (interview).

Thus, Tere’s case shows another form of politicisation that the victims’ relatives have followed after becoming involved in mobilisations like those of the MPJD. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that she is the mother of a murdered youngster. As she acknowledges, although there is no justice, she had the opportunity to say goodbye to him, which is not the case for most of the relatives of disappeared people.<sup>63</sup> Although more research would be needed, there is room to argue that the type of crime one suffers has an impact on the kind of politicisation that follows. At the beginning of the mobilisations, many relatives of murdered people would attend, but “today, we are no longer on the scene” in terms of the focus of the public discussion, so “I always appear in solidarity with the relatives of the disappeared [...]. The important thing today is to search for and find the disappeared because the tragedy is horrifying”, Tere claims (interview). Therefore, given that the context in which this type of contention takes place has changed recently placing disappearances as the priority, the way in which relatives of murdered people participate has also changed, and they have constructed spaces and practices to continue mobilising in support of other victims’ relatives.

Both relatives of murdered and disappeared people argue that mobilisation has changed the way they perceive fear and unwillingness to live. Talking about the constant threats he received during the MPJD’s main campaigns, Javier recalls that every time he was asked if he was not afraid, he would use a verse: ‘If they kill me, fine; if they do not, all the better’. “Life no longer has great meaning when your son is murdered or disappeared” because “you enter a state almost of emptiness, of indifference in the face of the threat or the possibility of being killed”, he explains (interview). Yet, Tere considers that there is “no way to finish paying or even start paying” what “Javier gave us at that time”, in reference to the most active period of the MPJD (interview). “He helped us to believe that we could continue to live with that pain that seemed to kill us” and “to

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<sup>63</sup> See Robledo (2018) for more on how a disappearance involves a form of permanent mourning.



think: Fuck no [*No, chingá*]! How am I going to die? I have to go speak truth to the president and go back to the attorney because they have to give me explanations” (interview). Although “they did not explain anything to me, I believed it, and at that moment it gave me the strength to live”, she adds (interview). Likewise, Ara recalls that she “no longer wanted to live” but “to stay home and cry” because she “did not feel strong enough to know how they dismembered” her son, but when she joined the MPJD, she started seeing herself “as a subject of change, a subject of rights” (interview). Back then, “people started calling me an advocate. If Luis Ángel had to be a martyr for me to raise my voice, then I chose not to die as I wanted before”, she points out (interview). For her part, Angy considers that she “would have gone crazy by now” if it was not for what she does with the *colectivo*. “I must go out and yell at the authorities, face them. I am putting in my grain of sand, I am doing something”, Angy states (interview). Besides, “this gives me a little peace of mind; it gives a little meaning to my life [...]. It puts an ointment on the gigantic wound [...] that does not stop hurting you, but it gives another meaning to your life”, she emphasises (interview).

Several authors have argued that people do not only participate in contention aiming for political change but also to advance dignity in their lives (Bell 1992; Goodwin and Jasper 2006; Klandermans 2004). Hence, movements allow individuals to pursue personal self-realisation (Della Porta and Diani 2006) and adopt meaningful roles for themselves in the socio-political arena (Simon and Klandermans 2001). The above quotes show that, by becoming active in contentious politics, the relatives of victims have modified not only their personal feelings towards life but their notions of self in the social. Thus, activism and contention do not only facilitate personal changes in what could be thought of as a very personal state of mind but also in how individuals see themselves concerning critical issues around violence and justice. “I have to continue fighting not only to find Luis but all the disappeared people in the country. You also have to help people with all the problems there are [...]: murders, torture, gender violence, violence against migrants, child violence”, so “this is my sense now: to walk towards truth and justice along with those who need me”, Ara maintains (interview). The reconstruction in what the relatives of victims call a sense of life portrays how personal grief has been transformed into a socio-political issue that involves solidarity amongst victims of different forms of violence. The new notions of the self of this group of participants are not based on whether they are relatives of victims individually, but on their

connection to a broader social field in which self seeks to influence socially and politically from collective action.

As Melucci (1995) points out, such a sense of unity is not the starting point of mobilisation, but rather a result of it. In the beginning—as I discussed in the first chapter—the victims’ relatives joined the protests, amongst other reasons, due to the importance of presenting their cases to the public. Yet, as they got embedded in networks and became politicised, they renegotiated their notions of self also fostering a new collective identity. Although their participation occurs in many forms—from giving *testimonios*, attending marches, caravans and brigades to confronting the authority in the opening of pits—the key element in this new notion of self is its link to collective agency, an understanding that is key to the consolidation of collective identity (Snow 2001). Mary, for example, considers that after her husband’s disappearance she began to experience a lot of insecurity to speak. Thus, although she attended all the MPJD meetings in Mexico City, she did not use to participate giving her opinions. When she started talking about what happened to Mauricio, she “would cry and cry”, but she considers this “strengthened” her (interview). “Now I speak in public. Before, nobody even knew my voice [...]. We are the voices of the thousands of disappeared, of the murdered. If we do not raise the voice, no one is going to listen to them”, she comments (interview). Hence, as has happened in other contexts (S. Cable 1992; Friedman 2009; Shriver, Miller, and Cable 2003), Mary’s case shows that the invigoration of one’s perceived role in the social arena plays an important feature in the reshaping of self.

Other interviewees’ experiences echo this process of redefinition of individual and collective identities. Letty, for example, explains that she considers herself a companion [*acompañante*] of other victims’ relatives. “I have given [...] massages, I have hugged people who are dying of sadness, I have been next to people who shout: Where is my son?!” (interview). Likewise, “I have asked for their sons and daughters at the attorney’s offices and everywhere. I do not just ask about Roy [...]; I am not just looking for Roy”, she adds (interview). For her part, Teresa also highlights the importance that accompanying other people has for her: “I help colleagues no matter where they are from. If they call me [...], I go with them [to the authorities] [...]. I accompany people to whom something like this happens for the first time and who do not know what to do” (interview). Angy’s experience shows a similar pattern of turning from the personal case to the collective struggle — “I think I have become a human rights defender because, mainly, who I am looking for is my daughter, but many people have come along that path” and thus “I am not only focused on

the issue of my daughter now but also concerned by and occupied with the context of violence that we live in this country”, she points out (interview). Likewise, Tere, who experienced a different form of politicisation, has linked her personal grief to her ability to support others: “I, a mother hurt by the loss of a son, embroider about others’ daughters and sons. That is the commitment, the conviction. I cannot do anything else” because “it is not like you wake up and then go back to sleep — if you already woke up and saw how the issue is, you are already screwed because the struggle is there, and you have to fight” (interview). These quotes suggest a form of “disalienation”, a process through which individuals stop passively accepting their positions in the social structures, reinterpreting their roles and notions of self from a collective perspective (Wagner and Cohen 1991, 555). Thus, as observed in other forms of contention (Snow and Anderson 1987), activism has allowed the relatives of victims to embrace identities that fill their life with significance and meaning.

Jasper (1997) argues that the gratifications that social movement activities provide are a function of the biographies of those involved. Considering that, prior to their participation in contention, most of the relatives of victims had to face alone the dynamics of impunity and injustice, it is possible to understand the satisfaction that helping others in a similar situation brings them. Letty claims that “when I go to sleep, even if I go to bed with the frustration of returning home and not bringing Roy back, I do it with a feeling of duty accomplished, with a feeling that I helped” because “I did everything possible [...]. Whenever I have been able, I have helped, and I will surely continue to do so” (interview). Likewise, despite the emotional costs of participating in Tetelcingo, Angy emphasises the importance that supporting other relatives has for her. “I had to go to horror every day, but [...] Edith’s [another participant of the *colectivo*] brother was found there”, so “with that, the 15 days of being there from 7:00 in the morning to 7:00 at night were worth it”, she says (interview). “That gave me a lot of hope to continue doing what we are doing, to continue denouncing and to continue searching”, she adds (interview). Angy’s experience shows that the development of professional skills amongst victims’ relatives is a biographical outcome that also has broader implications for new dynamics of contention. This reiterates previous findings that highlight that movement outcomes should not be understood as final states but as provisional points in a longer chain of events (Blee 2016).

Besides, Lupita comments crying that she has “found a sense of life in these searches, in helping people” (interview). “I feel very, very good with all the women of the *colectivo*. I feel more

comfortable than with part of my own family” and, thus, “I do not see myself doing anything else [...]. I like to study a lot and keep studying to keep helping. Sincerely, I want to continue helping”, she points out (interview). Her experience highlights the importance of considering everyday practices as fields of movement participation (Pichardo Almanzar, Sullivan-Catlin, and Deane 1998). Daily routines that could seem mundane and regular are key to explain sustained involvement (Glass 2010) because noncontentious actions are also a face of social movements (Downey 2006). Activism provides a chance for individuals to embrace the activities they consider appropriate and respectable to assure their sense of what is worth (Perez 2018) and, along with its therapeutic benefits, the emotional features of such actions reinforce collective identity (Bayard de Volo 2006).

Regarding the activists who organised the first MPJD actions, it must be remembered that they had been involved in several campaigns around different issues and some had already linked their political life-sphere in many ways to their personal life-spheres. Nonetheless, while immersed in the MPJD dynamics, the activists who started the mobilisations resocialised their political commitment. Norma and Gerardo comment that although their contentious activities—“the job” [*la chamba*] as they call it—had permeated many areas of their life, the participation in the MPJD made them commit to a new degree. “We started to get involved and our life turned upside down. Although we were activists [...], we were not 100% involved every day [...]. Suddenly, we got involved in the MPJD and attended all the events”, Gerardo points out (interview). On his behalf, Magdiel argues that he was “marked” by realising that “pain was beyond our own ideologies and how that suffering could not be contained to the political expectations we had”, so he “transformed” his understanding of politics and social change (interview). After mentioning his experience with some left-wing political organisations whose discussions “were more ritual encounters, talking about politically clear things in a very isolated political environment”, Magdiel points out that he learned to “deal with the universe of actors” that were in the MPJD, including those whom he distrusted, but who “contributed a lot to the movement” (interview). Thus, he learned that when looking for “a radical transformation of greater scope, you cannot just depart from the micro-universe of the left, its debates and its environments [...]. The transformations of the social order occur through the confluence of a lot of worlds, not just yours” (interview).

These experiences reiterate that the construction of self is never fully given but constantly renegotiated. From their involvement in the MPJD, the organising activists were immersed in

practices and challenges different from those of their previous experiences of contention, with emotions, themes and actors that reconfigured their political commitment and worldviews. Besides, Magdiel's words restate previous findings that although solidarity and collective identity have a strong connection, participants may not feel any sympathy for some actors and still embrace the commitment to support a group broadly (Gamson 1992b; Hunt and Benford 2004).<sup>64</sup>

As part of her political resocialisation, Denisse claims that she learned from the MPJD to “organise and understand political processes from a different perspective” (interview). Furthermore, her experience confirms that movements' ideations, organisational dynamics and tactics usually become emotionally and morally salient features in the participants' lives (Jasper 1997). In that regard, Denisse was friends with several people who joined the MPJD's first actions but later stopped participating because they felt that the organisers had turned their backs on those who started the protests in Morelos — “They began to criticise the MPJD and its dynamics. I have friends with whom I better not talk about the movement because if we do, we are going to fight”, she comments (interview). This makes it possible to observe how some previously politicised activists embraced the mobilisation dynamics of the MPJD and linked them to their personal life-spheres, making them a sensitive topic even in conversations with their closest social networks.

For other people, like Juanfra, the involvement in this type of contention directly impacted their family sphere. During the Caravan to the South, he met Miriam, who was a member of SERPAJ, an organisation founded by Pietro (see chapter 1). After the mobilisation, they began dating and it soon turned into a romantic relationship. At the time of writing, they have one son named Matías. In this case, the influence that activism had on the personal life-sphere implied a change in the degree of political participation. “Being alone allowed me to participate in all the activities. Today is different because I have a partner and a son [...]” so “now I try not to participate so much [...], but last year [2019] I went to the search *brigada* in Guerrero. From time to time, I stop participating, but then I am searching for disappeared people”, he comments (interview). As discussed in chapter 3, the social ties formed in political-emotional communities prompted a particular form of engagement in the struggle for justice. Juanfra's experience after his most intense period of mobilisation reiterates this finding and shows that many people manage biographical constraints to be able to participate in this type of contention.

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<sup>64</sup> For a contrasting perspective, see Saunders' (2008) work on environmental organisations.

Another way that activism in the MPJD and the *colectivos* has influenced participants' political resocialisation is by developing a perspective that cuts across their emotions. "I believe that within a country with a situation like the one we live in and the one we have faced and seen [...], you would have to be very shameless to be fully happy", Roberto claims (interview). Thus, "I do not think I am a happy man because there is always an issue of not being able to remove myself or separate myself from what happens beyond [...] where I live", he adds (interview). "Really, the situation in Mexico exceeds you or should exceed you; if you do not feel like there is something to do, it is either because you fell into burnout or outright because you are a cynic or a scoundrel", he emphasises (interview). These words show that the resocialisation of the MPJD organisers' commitment reconfigured the emotional dynamics of their personal life-spheres and their considerations about what and how they feel in the socio-political arena.

Furthermore, these emotions have been key to linking the renegotiated notions of self with collective identity and sustained participation in this contentious field. Several participants' accounts deepen in that regard. Roberto, for example, mentions that there is a phrase by Javier that he has "not been able to avoid" in all his reflections: "It is a lie to think that there is a bottom, that we have already hit bottom and that we only can go up. Hell has no depth [...]; the bottom continues to infinity, and we continue going down" (interview). Thus, he decided to make a "cause" from the pain of the relatives of the victims and "do everything possible" to stop the violent crisis and prevent it from happening again (interview). Magdiel agrees separately and explains that he feels "the need to betake" himself, "to stretch the will as much as possible to be able to do something for others, for humanity, even if it sounds too hollow or romantic" (interview). Likewise, Javier identifies the interrelation of these emotions and his sustained contention. In that regard, the poet links his call for mobilisation in 2020 to the outrage at the massacre against Julián LeBarón's family (see background chapter). "The death of those children, of those women, revived the murder of my son", and "I owed a debt of friendship, of love, to Julián. Julián was very important in the MPJD. He came and embraced my pain [...]. I learned to love him very much" (interview). Thus, "the crime deeply outraged me [...]. It shook me and I said: it is time to do something; one last effort", Javier recalls (interview).

In sum, the involvement in the mobilisations of the MPJD and the *colectivos* has led participants to renegotiate their worldviews, turning contention a crucial feature in how they perceive themselves in the social. In the relatives of victims' case, this renegotiation is observed in

their politicisation and the development of a new sense of life. On their behalf, the MPJD organisers have resocialised their political commitment, linking it to their emotions in this field of activism. These new notions of self, furthermore, have fed the elaboration of a collective identity that, simultaneously, has influenced sustained participation.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the involvement in contention with the MPJD and the *colectivos* has produced three main changes in the participants' lives. Activism reconfigured these individuals' sociability networks, altering not only their relational environment structurally but also imbuing it with stories and values. The type of contention performed by the participants of these new networks and the protest issues they focus on have, likewise, prompted the development of know-how and wisdom in areas such as non-violent direct action, human rights defence and forensics. Thus, the cognitive toolkit of the participants has been modified or expanded with skills and capabilities that are acquired through formal training but also transmitted and reproduced through the social networks that were created in contention. With this know-how and wisdom, the activists and victims' relatives started to face the authorities and criminals in a different and relevant way in the context of the war. The reconfiguration of the sociability networks and the development of know-how and wisdom have led to the renegotiation of the worldviews of the participants, especially around their self-perceived position in the social, where contention has become a crucial feature of self. Thus, this research offers empirical evidence that reiterates the importance of analysing the biographical outcomes from the perspective of a cognitive relational process (Passy and Monsh 2019).

Linked with the previous chapter, it is now possible to briefly explain the how the three types of outcomes relate to each other. First, regarding the relationship between political and cultural outcomes, although the focus on the General Law of Victims and the subsequent enactment demobilised the MPJD, many *colectivos* that were formed after that have mobilised to demand its effective implementation, defend the rights included in it and even push for the resignation of the CEAV directors (Animal Político 2020; Camacho 2020; Dávila 2017; Proceso 2016). In addition, the actions of those *colectivos*, such as some search brigades, are at least partly carried out using the material resources that the victims' relatives receive thanks to the law. As Kane (2010) argues, the relationship between policy outcomes and demobilisation is not simple. This research shows

that although a victory in the policy process can stop the actions of one collective actor, it can also benefit the mobilisation of others—which were formed due to the spillover effect of the initiator—within the same social movement community. Thus, as has happened in other contexts (Banaszak and Ondercin 2016; Bröer and Duyvendak 2009; Ferree 2003), the MPJD case indicates that political outcomes legitimised the discourses and demands of new actors in the polity, a phenomenon that is a cultural outcome. This finding reiterates the importance that social movements can have in the enduring attention that an issue receives even after its demobilisation (Ferree 2012; Gaby and Caren 2016).

Second, Goodwin and colleagues (2000, 78) recommend scholars to analyse how political events influence emotions. This research highlights that amongst the relationships of political and biographical outcomes are the emotional dynamics that participation in the formulation, discussion and enactment of a law involves. As noted in the previous chapter, the policy process of the General Law of Victims implied the development of hope for many people due to knowing that their experiences were actually considered important for the project and due to the possible results that the implementation could bring to their lives. In addition to hope, the case of the law obtained by the MPJD helps to understand how outrage can be directed towards the negative results that a political outcome brings and to the use that the authorities give to it, as the interviewees consider, for dividing a social movement community. Following Bröer and Duyvendak (2009), this research reinforces that policy is a meaning-making process that, amongst other aspects, legitimises feelings and can be closely intertwined with people's everyday subjectivity.

Finally, cultural and biographical outcomes have a rather complex relationship because many of their aspects overlap, so the same issue can be considered collective and cultural or individual and biographical depending on the type of perspective that one adopts (Van Dyke and Taylor 2019). The MPJD case reiterates findings from other contexts (Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010a; Pagis 2019; Whittier 2016) regarding how diffusion processes not only involve forms of instrumental learning, but also the reconfiguration of personal networks, skills, notions of self and identities that entail a new conception of what is possible and desirable in the socio-political arena (K. Brown 2016).



## Conclusion

As noted in the background chapter, following the massacre of the family of an ex MPJD participant, Javier called for mass mobilisation in January 2020. Called the Walk for Truth, Justice and Peace, this mobilisation—inspired partly by the March for Peace in 2011—lasted four days to go from Morelos to Mexico City and was attended by dozens of collectives and organisations from all over the country. However, there were wide contrasts in consideration of what happened almost a decade earlier. The attendance compared to the 2011 march was considerably lower — close to 5,000 people in contrast to more than 80,000 of the March for Peace. Framing was also different — the main demands focused on transitional justice programs in contrast to the argumentation around the importance of making the victims and the pain visible. The political context was different too — demands were targeted at the president with the largest popular mandate in the country’s history in contrast to the demands addressed to a president whose legitimacy was widely questioned. Due to the focus of this research, I did not develop an analysis of the Walk for Truth, but this thesis offers the analytical basis to understand it.

My research developed an in-depth analysis of the mobilisations led by the relatives of the victims of the war on drugs and crime in Mexico. Based on the case of the MPJD, I offered answers to how recruitment occurs in this form of contention, the way in which its actions spread and the subsequent official responses, the type of social ties fostered by its performances, and its consequences in the political, cultural and biographical fields.

Distinguishing between activists and relatives of victims based on their very different biographical profiles, I argued that the initial participation—or recruitment—of the organiser activists can be explained by a radical habitus (Crossley 2002) they had developed throughout their lives and by their embeddedness in mobilisation-prone networks. The victims’ relatives, on their side, started participating because of the development of a shared array of meanings as a result of the life-changing circumstances of suffering an extremely violent crime, and because of the dissemination of protest-related information in the mass media. Moreover, moral shocks and strong emotions mediated the biographical conditions of these two groups to complete their initial involvement. Since there are only a few studies on the recruitment of people without prior political experience or ties to a mobilised group (Fisher and McInerney 2012), my first chapter contributes to the literature through the theoretical refinement around the processes that led the victims’

relatives to mobilise. This follows other scholars' suggestions to evaluate networks functions rather than reifying them (Passy and Monsch 2014).

Then, I argued that the MPJD's upward scale shift process (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2005)—that is, the increase in the number of coordinated mobilisations to go from Morelos to virtually the entire country—is explained by its framing and coalition building. The MPJD's rhetorical work and brokerage brought activists, organisations, and victims' relatives from almost every region of Mexico. These collectivities aligned to different degrees with the MPJD's frames and found the claims to be resonant with their own goals and experiences. Nonetheless, many of these groups sought to include their agendas and ideological pledges in the main frames of the mobilisations. Given the refusal from some leaders of the MPJD to accept this, several alliances broke in the short term. Besides, Calderón's government tried to contain the protests by offering private meetings with the main figures of the MPJD, who refused and demanded a public dialogue. During the dialogue, the official frames avoided criminalising the victims but focused on contesting the MPJD's diagnosis and prognosis. Then, Calderón tried to co-opt the MPJD's agenda creating an office that lacked personnel and budget. Furthermore, facing a second dialogue, officials imposed the participation of allied organisations that took part in discursive obstruction (Shriver, Adams, and Cable 2013) against the MPJD. The findings of this chapter contribute to the theory in three ways. First, the analysis helps to specify the conditions that facilitate not only the development of alliances, but also those that lead to their accelerated breakdown. Second, rather than mistakenly assuming that any protest takes place because the frames resonate amongst participants, I followed recent research (De Vydt and Ketelaars 2020; Ketelaars, Walgrave, and Wouters 2014) to advance the understanding of the attributes that facilitate frame resonance and alignment amongst audiences with contrasting characteristics. Third, taking the lead of recent research (Danaher and Dixon 2017), my discussion around counter-framing highlights how official responses influence the discursive processes of contentious actors, showing that their opportunities are not the same in 'the streets' and in official spaces.

Building on the work of a cluster of Latin American researchers (Jimeno 2010; Macleod and De Marinis 2018), in the third chapter I argued that the contentious performances led by the relatives of victims in the MPJD fostered a specific form of social bonds that constituted a political-emotional community which has the pain of the victims at its core, making other people not directly affected by violence organise and demand justice collectively. The contributions of this chapter

consist, first, in bringing the literature on political-emotional communities into conversation with the scholarship on social movements, which, following recent calls (Russo 2014), advances our knowledge regarding how allies, in contrast to those directly aggrieved by a given protest issue, engage in forging community with the groups they work for. Second, these pages contribute to the scholarship by specifying four empirical dimensions of political-emotional communities: the role of *testimonios*, the ethics developed during contention, the fluctuations in participation, and the costs and risks involved in the mobilisations.

To understand the outcomes of the contention led by victims' relatives, I distinguished between the political, cultural and biographical fields. In the policy process, I argued that the MPJD obtained the enactment of the General Law of Victims through three elements: (1) the construction of relevant frames that were introduced in (2) a favourable political opportunity structure where (3) the MPJD leaders showed strategic capacity to focus the collective resources on the specific goal of obtaining the law. This analysis, furthermore, contributes to the literature by discussing how achievements in the policy process can demobilise some groups but mobilise others to protect those perceived political victories. Regarding the cultural outcomes, I argued, first, that the MPJD promoted the formation of *colectivos* led by relatives of disappeared people through its relational diffusion. After being involved in the MPJD campaigns, many participants decided to adopt and adapt in their own contexts the organisational forms around collective work and started articulating new networks. Second, I maintained that the relational diffusion of the MPJD also had a strong influence on the contentious performances of the new networks of *colectivos*. Brigades to search for disappeared people were widely discussed in the MPJD, but some leaders refused to organise these actions. However, once the *colectivos* were formed—and in the context of the internationally known forced disappearance of 43 students—many former participants of the MPJD diffused the ideations around this contentious performance and promoted its adoption. The findings around this type of outcome contribute to the literature by discussing how the spillover of an initiator movement (McAdam and Sewell 2001) can consolidate a social movement community (Staggenborg 1998) in an emergent contentious field, whose characteristics, in turn, influence the initiator's subsequent actions.

Then, in the fifth chapter, I analysed the biographical consequences of the involvement in mobilisations led by victims' relatives. I argued that engagement in this type of contention has produced three main changes in the participants' lives: the reconfiguration of their sociability

networks, the development of know-how and wisdom, and the renegotiation of their worldviews. First, activism has modified the relational environment of the participants — given their involvement in new networks, they have reconfigured their structural positions, their histories of interaction and the meaning-making resources embedded and communicated in their post-protest ties. Second, contention has provided victims' relatives with relevant skills that foster their self-perceived efficacy and facilitate their ongoing participation since they now have the tools to organise collective action and effectively face the authorities. Likewise, the activists that organised the MPJD mobilisations have also developed professional skills and have brought activism to the professional sphere. Third, participants have renegotiated their worldviews, especially their notions of self, making contention in this field a crucial feature in how they perceive themselves in the social. Following recent calls (Passy and Monsch 2019), this chapter, contributes to the literature with empirical evidence around the cognitive relational processes that consolidate biographical outcomes.

In terms of violence, conditions in Mexico have not improved. As explained in the background chapter, the trend in the number of murders and disappeared persons continues to grow. Furthermore, the strategies for dealing with crime also remain practically the same. The governments led by Peña and López Obrador deepened the use of the armed forces by creating supposedly civilian offices, which are *de facto* constituted and controlled by members of the army and the navy. Even though the number of victims is increasing day by day, the current government has cut the budget and reduced the capacities of the institutions that care for their relatives. In short, the crisis continues. In this context, this thesis offers an analytical framework to fully understand the Walk for Truth. Through the theorised principles developed here, researchers can study the involvement of both first-time participants and returners, the processes of alignment—or lack of—of the protest frames, the official response, the possible fostering of a sense of community, and the potential consequences of this campaign.

Finally, it should be noted that analysing the dynamics of mobilisation of the MPJD has special relevance both for the literature and for those who lead the actions against the Mexican war on drugs and crime. In an academic sense, this thesis developed an in-depth study of a contentious actor that, despite its importance, has received little attention in the literature. Through a series of thematic chapters, I provided empirical evidence to refine several areas of the theory to better understand various processes related to social mobilisation. Regarding the importance that this

thesis can have for the activists and the families of the victims, my work is, first, a systematisation of their campaigns and experiences; second, these pages are an acknowledgement of the transcendence of the actions that they have been carrying out sustainedly during a decade; third, this research is a space for memory, so that their names and those of their relatives are not forgotten, so that the demand for justice does not end.

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