

DEATH AND RESISTANCE:
QUEERNESS IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY
IN GUERRERO, MEXICO

WILLIAM JOHN PAYNE

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ABSTRACT

Mexico stands out as a place impacted by anti-queer/trans violence, and the state of Guerrero is the site of a disturbing iteration of such aggression. Recent political struggle for LGBTQ rights there has paralleled a dramatic increase in violence linked to organized crime, with significant impacts for sexual and gender minorities. While a small literature on anti-queer/trans violence in places experiencing political violence and armed conflict exists, it has ignored places where such violence links to organized crime, impunity, and state complicity. Furthermore, this literature has largely failed to engage with two other bodies of work: the study of gender-based violence and of sexuality in such contexts. This dissertation addresses these gaps.

The methodological choices guiding this project are rooted in a rejection of a myopic anthropological lens based on tropes that Orientalize Mexico as a distant, other place engraved with patterns of desire tied to tourism and ‘endemic’ violence. Drawing on a poststructuralist feminist epistemology and guided by feminist, queer, and Latinx scholarship regarding geopolitics and transnationalism, this project takes a geographical and critical human rights approach that recognizes how femicide and homonationalist narratives about Mexico link to this anti-queer/trans violence. A commitment to constructivist Grounded Theory ensures that theorization emerges from the research findings. Research tools include participant-observation, in-depth interviews with key informants with knowledge of anti-queer/trans violence, hemerographic (media) analysis, and an in-depth study of a visual archive of Pride events in Guerrero.

This dissertation makes three arguments that contribute to a queer theory of violence: First, anti-queer/trans violence is an iteration of femicide, formed through impunity. Second, anti-queer/trans violence is linked to the political violence of organized crime and related state impunity, which has produced a version of queer/trans activism that has a contradictory, even perverse relationship with the state. And third, the transnational dimensions of this violence established through continental geographies of power with linkages to organized crime, drug trafficking, tourism, extractive activities and geopolitical relationships, further sharpen the danger faced by queer and trans persons through the creation of what I call a *sallyport*, a sort of metaphorical enclosure that magnifies their vulnerability.

DEDICATION

For John and Audrey, my parents.

And for Ray, my world.

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Barbara Deming reminds us that to acknowledge is to recognize that “we are all part of one another”, that we make each other and this happens in specific ways. As I mark the completion of this dissertation, it is a joy to have the opportunity to engage in this act of recognition, of acknowledgement, of naming some of the many people who have accompanied me through these years.

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Chapter 1 - Formed in the Crucible of Violence: Queer Space, Queer State

Introduction

On July 15, 2023, gunmen violently interrupted Mexico's *First National Congress of Strategic Litigation for the Defence of the Rainbow Quota*, an event that was taking place in the central Mexican city of Aguascalientes that day. In a targeted assassination, two killers arrived by motorcycle at the main entrance of the Museum of Discovery where the landmark event was underway and killed Ulises Salvador Nava Juárez, a participant from the southern Mexican state of Guerrero (Anodis 2023). Notably, the goal of the event was to analyze and discuss legal strategies to protect advances in the political representation of the LGBTTTIQ¹ community of Mexico. Activists and legal experts had gathered for a time of collective learning and collaboration to strengthen the sector's efforts "to struggle for a more inclusive and equitable Mexico" (Defensa activa de la cuota arcoiris 2023)². The deceased was an academic and the Head of the Department of Sexual Diversity at the Autonomous University of Guerrero [*Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero*](Ortiz 2023). After shooting Nava Juárez nine times, these gun men were later seen boarding a public bus on route to a neighbouring state (Sujetos armados asesinan en Aguascalientes 2023).

The Aguascalientes Prosecutor's Office concluded that the perpetrators had followed Nava Juárez from Guerrero in southern Mexico to kill him. By the next day, LGBTQ activist organizations from across the country as well as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico denounced the assassination of the activist-scholar and called for a thorough investigation (Greene 2023). Nava Juárez's body was returned to Guerrero and a large funeral took place at the university's principal administrative building in Acapulco, attended by activists, family members, and a broad cross-section of the university community. Three weeks after the homicide, Aguascalientes's Secretary of Public Security announced that officials had identified someone involved in the case but also insisted that given the ongoing investigation additional information was not available (Binoticias 2023a).

Four months after the assassination of Nava Juárez, the principal organizer of the *Congress* was also murdered (Rosete 2023). While the lead prosecutor in this subsequent case insists that the killing of non-binary Aguascalientes judge Ociel Baena Saucedo was a crime of passion committed by their intimate partner whose lifeless body was also found at the scene, LGBTQ activists and Baena Saucedo's own family dismiss the state official's conclusions as untrustworthy and predetermined by prejudice (*The Advocate* 2023). In their last public appearance prior to their own death, Judge Baena Saucedo had recalled Nava Juárez's assassination and denounced societal forces that sought to silent sexual and gender minorities (Binoticias 2023b). In January 2024, Aguascalientes's Attorney General said that the investigation of Ulises Nava is "stuck" (Binoticias 2024).

This brief story reflects something of the layered politics of sexual and gender rights in Mexico.³ There is interplay among the local, national, and transnational discourses concerning sexual and gender minority rights, the role of the political sphere and its interaction with civil society, as well as the political choices of LGBTQ activists and how they construct their struggle. Mexico has held the unenviable position of being near the top of the list of countries ordered in terms of crime against sexual and gender minorities in Latin America and in the world (segundo lugar mundial 2015; Palomino 2021). The State of Guerrero is the site of an especially disturbing iteration of this violence, interwoven into the fabric of organized crime there (ICG 2020). Given this track record, it seems unlikely that these crimes will be solved. Even if the killers are caught, it is even less likely that the intellectual authors of these acts of violence—seemingly designed to send shock waves through the queer and trans communities of Guerrero, of Aguascalientes, and throughout Mexico—will ever be held to account.

This dissertation considers this category of violence, anti-queer/trans violence, what motivates and sustains it, and how the affected communities have responded to it in the state of Guerrero in Southern Mexico. This research project draws on the lived experience of hundreds of sexual and gender minorities who have lived and, in many cases, died in Guerrero, to offer an account of the layered relationship between gender, sexuality, violence, the state and hemispheric relations. I consider how the state deploys feminized, sexualized, and queered bodies such that specific geographies of impunity can be understood as both rooted in gender, sexuality and socioeconomic class but also as

tied to the state's project. But it is not an isolated state. I contend that violence against queer and trans people in Guerrero can only be understood as part of a larger context of violence shaped by femicide – gender-based violence (GBV) facilitated by organized crime and in which the state has culpability, by an absent state whose abdication gives rise to impunity, but also by Guerrero's position and role vis-à-vis the political economy of North America. As such, I reject a stereotyping of Mexico as a perpetually violent place and instead recognize that the violence experienced in the present day is part of a global liberal project.

This dissertation project began with a chance encounter with key activists that took place about three weeks after the murder of LGBTQ leader Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera, in 2011. Although I had worked and travelled in Mexico on and off for more than two decades, this meeting took place during my first visit to this particular state, when I was sent there for a short field visit as part of my responsibilities as volunteer advisor to an international human rights organization with work in that part of Mexico. The primary focus of this dissertation is on violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities between 2002 and 2014. The rationale for this time period is that it corresponds with the emergence of the LGBTQ movement in Guerrero, something that has coincided with the advent of multi-party democracy in Mexico. This period has also been marked by the sharpening of a system of violence related to organized crime that is faced by people across Mexico and especially in Guerrero. As such, I query how leaving violence directed against (some) sexual and gender minorities unpunished supports the transformation of the political order into a form of flawed democracy marked by widespread impunity in a process that has been underway since the emergence of electoral democracy in Mexico at the end of the 20th century.

Starting in 2007, many parts of Mexico experienced a significant increase in homicidal violence related to organized crime (Chindea 2014). Throughout this period, Guerrero has been near the top of the list of states ranked based on homicide rates, reaching the dubious status of the Mexican state with the highest level of homicides for several years running (Agencia Reforma 2017). Impunity reigns. According to the International Crisis Group (2020), there is a 96% impunity rate for murder in Guerrero overall. And while Guerrero has not always stood out in the ordering of states based on

the killing of sexual and gender minorities, Alberto Serna Mogollón, then president of the LGBTTTI Collective of Guerrero, told CNN Mexico that the real figures are more than double the reported levels (Reyes Maciel 2011). Mexico's National Observatory of Hate Crimes Against LGBTQ Persons study covering the 2014-2020 period shows Guerrero in fourth place in terms of the number of cases documented, only surpassed by Veracruz, Chihuahua and Michoacan (Miguel Ramírez and Careaga Pérez 2020). My own research bears out that sexual and gender minorities experience high levels of violence in Guerrero.

This project is a study of impunity, and of why violence is sometimes unrestrained. Sexual/gender dissidents are murdered on a daily basis around the world, a phenomenon too easily hidden in places where organized violence and impunity are common. With the exception of studies of the Peruvian and Colombian internal conflicts (Montalvo Cifuentes 2005; Payne 2016; Serrano-Amaya 2018; Thylin 2020; Liken and Hagen 2022) and of Syria/Iraq (Tschantret 2018), the academic literature has paid scant attention to the link between organized violence and LGBTQ rights. Nationalism, gender, and sexuality are mutually constituted (Mayer 2000; Richardson 2007), and so an understanding of the ways in which violence and impunity function in specific places requires a contemplation of the violence perpetrated against sexual/gender minorities. This analysis pays attention to violence directed at sexual and gender minorities in this corner of southern Mexico and attends to the relationship between governments, social movements, sexuality, gender, and power in a context where rule of law is not functioning. Nonetheless, there is a noteworthy fervent activist and social space based on gender and sexual diversity that is pushing for recognition, one that merits scholarly attention.

A detailed case study in a particular corner of the world—of one state in one country and focused on a specific community— can help illuminate the processes, politics, and patterns of violence going on elsewhere and can potentially provide insight into broader social processes. This goal frames this extended consideration and analysis of the situation for LGBTQ folx in Guerrero, Mexico in the early years of the 21st century.

I have sought to understand social processes that leave some lives cut short, to consider the way that scale forms the state that refuses to protect some lives, to listen to those involved in LGBTQ activism in a context of nearly complete impunity, what I have come to call the *abdicated state*. This research has shown that Guerrero, in Mexico and in North America, functions as a *sallyport*, or the controlled entryway/exit of a fort, castle, or prison, an in-between space of subjection born of both scrutiny and deliberate unknowing, because of the confluence of trajectories that exist at the present time in this place. Of course, given the widespread impunity for violence across the board in Guerrero, it is an additional challenge to try to understand the extent to which the high level of violence against sexual and gender minorities is simply a function of the absence of rule of law. This dissertation considers the extent to which there is specific targeting of these populations, including whether perpetrators are taking advantage of the context of impunity as an opportunity to get away with these forms of violence.

While I hope that this consideration is illustrative of social phenomena far beyond Guerrero's borders, I hold my gaze squarely on the people who have shared their stories and their lives with me, with the aim that this project will be of some use to them as well. In recent years, much has been written about geographically specific LGBTQ communities, about their social and political development in relation to challenges and advances they face and experience, both in the global north and in the global south. Little, however, has been written about the impact of state formations, marked by high levels of socio-political violence and by widespread impunity, on the LGBTQ sector, about the struggles of sexual and gender minorities to insist on their civil and political rights in contexts where rights more generally are only given lip-service or worse. In this project focused on the socio-political space of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, I add to the argument that the political context matters.

The state of Guerrero is a particularly telling case study because the arc of the political struggle for LGBTQ rights has paralleled a dramatic increase in homicides linked to organized crime and militarization as the state's reaction to seemingly uncontrolled violence. In a context in which the state appears to be disintegrating and in which violence against sexual and gender minorities is common, there is nevertheless a burgeoning LGBTQ movement distinguished by a notable adhesion to state institutions

and political parties. I chronicle the extent of the violence directed at sexual/gender minorities as well as the strategies queer and trans people use in order to survive vulnerability, querying whether recent institutional attention to LGBTQ rights matters in the unfolding of this violence. The theoretical framework for this project is rooted in a poststructuralist feminist epistemology guided by the thinking of feminist scholars' consideration of geopolitics and transnationalism. Feminist and queer theory have also guided the approach and methodological choices that have shaped this project. These theoretical and methodological choices are considered in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The dimensions of this study

The guiding question for this project signals the usefulness of a geographical lens to grasp at what is significant in these social processes. I ask, *what insights can be generated through a spatial analysis of violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico?* The project started with three areas of inquiry: First, I offer documentation of the geographic distribution of violence against sexual/gender minorities within specific urban areas and across the state of Guerrero, to understand the circumstances that lend themselves to trans/lesbi/homophobic violence. Why is trans/lesbi/homophobic violence common in some parts of Guerrero and not in others? Why are specific groups based on socioeconomic status and gender identity especially targeted and who targets them? What do sexual and gender minorities think motivates the perpetrators? What is the role of organized groups, legal and illegal? Secondly, I query of the role of the state. How do state authorities explain the extreme violence against sexual and gender minorities that is occurring? How, if at all, does the state contribute to a situation of impunity? What legal protections exist in law and what is the impact of these measures on the lives of sexual/gender minorities? What benefits and costs come with new protections afforded by new human rights legislation at the state and federal level? What benefits flow to different subgroups of sexual/gender minorities due to advances in human rights? Do state protections work? Thirdly, an examination of the strategies that sexual/gender minorities employ to protect themselves is provided. What does LGBTQ activism look like in Guerrero? How does activism and resistance by sexual/gender minorities relate to levels of violence against these same folk, if at all?

Building on the work of queer and feminist scholars of violence and based on the results of this research, in this dissertation I put forth three key arguments that together contribute to a queer theory of violence: First, in contexts marked by endemic violence and impunity facilitated by organized crime, state complicity with GBV is intertwined with its disregard for violence against sexual and gender minorities. A topology of violence approach is useful to unpack the dynamics involved with what I argue is political violence. In the case of Guerrero, violence against queer and trans persons can be understood as an iteration of feminicide. As such, I argue that the conditions that have led to high levels of violence against women in this state overlap with those that lead to the targeting of queer and trans persons, including the ways in which the context is marked by a high level of impunity for perpetrators due to state action and inaction. Secondly, while a human rights approach to violence against sexual and gender minorities is constrained by the political violence of organized crime and related widespread impunity and state complicity, the promises of the state's liberal discourse can lead to a perverse engagement by queer and trans activists with the state. In the case of Guerrero, high levels of impunity mean that there are significant limitations in deploying a liberal human rights approach as the basis of resisting violence against queer and trans person in this place. Yet strangely, there is also evidence of a rapprochement between queer and trans activists and state actors, something that a queer approach to human rights can help illuminate. Thirdly, it is imperative to pay attention to the transnational dimensions of the violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities in specific places. In the case of Guerrero, continental geographies of power, particularly in relation to the intertwined political economy of mining, organized crime, and tourism, shape what happens to queer and trans persons living in this southern Mexican state and constrain choices available to those in danger of violence there. Further, following Puar's (2002a; 2002b; 2002c) disruption of dominant narratives that portray queer interventions from the global north as singularly emancipatory, I propose that homonationalist framings of Mexico emanating from the global north have contradictory impacts on levels of violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero and their capacity to escape violence. As part of this consideration of transnational forces, I put forth an argument based on the metaphor of the *sallyport* to consider the role of enclosure

in sharpening danger faced by queer and trans persons in and from this place.

The horrific killing of LGBTQ activist Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera, in the central square of Guerrero's capital city in May 2011, became a moment in the time-space construction where various trajectories—including my own—collided. When I first met the surviving leaders of the Centre for Studies and Projects on Integrated Human Development (in Spanish, Centro de Estudios y Proyectos para el Desarrollo Humano Integral, known as CEPRODEHI), the organization that Leija Herrera had led, they were in mourning and were trying to figure out what to do and where to go. At that time, I was in the process of developing a proposal for dissertation research meant to consider the relationship between queerness and armed conflict. Starting in this initial meeting, these activists proposed that I focus my planned research on the experiences of queer and trans people in the state of Guerrero. As with this first step, my methodology has been closely tied to paying attention to the data and to the theorization it suggested as I formed next steps in the research process. Really, this dissertation is a product of what Gore Vidal (2006) calls point-to-point navigation, in reference to the act of steering a ship without the benefit of a compass, a practice which invariable produces a somewhat dangerous zigzag course but that nevertheless leads to places that would have been missed on a straight-line journey. The field work for this research project was conducted between December 2011 and May 2014. I made several trips to Guerrero during this time, including extended stays in the state capital of Chilpancingo and the regional city of Taxco, where I rented apartments for several months at a time. I also had lengthy stays in the city of Acapulco, the largest city in the state, and visited many other towns and cities across Guerrero to try to understand the contours of violence against queer and trans people in this state. During this time, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nearly five dozen people, most of whom identified as gay, lesbian or trans, and many of whom were queer activists. I also interviewed family members and professionals with knowledge about violence against queer and trans people. Participant-observation activities formed a key part of the research process for this dissertation, including participation in LGBTQ public events, including Pride marches and parades, drag competitions, and other events related to sexual and gender minorities. Other research methods included a careful review of several local and regional news sources as well as

an analysis of a visual archive that documents the history of Pride marches in the state. A focus group with key activists led to establishing a local advisory committee for this project.

In the tradition of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2001,2006; Wasserman et. al 2009) rooted in a postpositivist approach (Ritholtz 2024), I have paid attention to the data that presented itself and to the theorization that those involved suggested. Grounded Theory (GT) is an approach to qualitative research that requires staying close to collected data in order to ensure that theorization emerges directly from research findings. Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed GT as a methodology to confront the dominance of a strong trend towards positivist quantitative research in the 1960s that ignored the importance of intuition in the research process. I follow Charmaz (2006), a student of Glaser’s methodology, who has reframed Grounded Theory as complementary to other approaches to qualitative data analysis, especially those based in feminist and poststructuralist epistemological orientations. While for Glaser, the key question is, “what’s happening here?” Charmaz has reframed this as: “what are the basic social processes” that the researcher finds in the field? (2006: 20). She further underlines the importance of interventions by feminist standpoint theorists who have called us to pay attention to hidden assumptions (see also Herbert 2010) and so shows the way to navigate the tensions between grounding my theorization in what I learn from my fieldwork and drawing on critical scholars’ work to allow for greater insight. Charmaz (2006) points out that GT is especially useful for research projects that make use of ethnographic observation and intensive interviewing in such a way that considers the researcher as constitutive to the production of the data and not merely a passive observer, which is appropriate for this project. Chapter 2 provides a more extensive reflection on the methods and methodologies employed for this project.

As a geographer, I consider not only the ways in which social processes are shaped by geography but also how spatial configurations are also influenced by the social (and political) processes (Soja 2010). Social processes are always spatial, and the spatial is both the product and vehicle of power, experienced through borders, boundaries, bridges, linkages, and all their various and related topographical and topological elements. Violence is a tool, or perhaps a weapon, of power, involved in the social. I

draw on scholarship concerning the concept of topology, which considers the way that power matters in the making and in the being made of social topographies (Massey 2005; Belcher *et al.* 2008; Giaccaria and Minca 2011; Martin and Secor 2014). Topology has to do with the spatiality of inequality. Martin and Secor (2014: 435) explain that “[t]opology is about how and through what process... relations are repetitively reproduced, and yet continually changed.” Subjectivity is at the root of this topological arrangement, understood as becoming, while held in the crucible of space and power (Foucault 1977/1991; Butler 2010; Dominguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas 2010; Segato 2010; Noxolo 2017). Violence is about force, about harm, and always occurs in space, and in that occurrence remakes space. The state, in its promiscuous relationships with the nation and with violence and produced through cascading contestations and within the crucible of the transnational, must ultimately be held responsible for the circumstances of its subjects (Foucault 1997/2003; Agamben 2005; Dominguez-Ruvalcaba 2010; Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Mountz 2011; Knight 2012; Pansters 2012; Brown 2015b). This study seeks to show how particular topologies of impunity have emerged for sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico in connection to the interconnections among the state, social movement activism and organized crime.

Grounded in specific accounts from the recent lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities in Mexico, this first chapter outlines a theoretical approach that engages with the time-space that is Guerrero in the experience of queer and trans people in recent years, understanding the experience that this dissertation describes of queer/trans life in Guerrero as “a relational event” in which violence and subjectivities form each other. This theoretical approach provides a conceptual framework for my contribution towards a queer theory of violence, including the three key arguments outlined above, that violence against sexual and gender minorities is intertwined with GBV in contexts marked by impunity, that entrenched impunity can be accompanied by a perverse interconnection between rights-seeking sectors of society and the state, and that transnational dynamics shape the lived experiences of queer and trans people seeking recognition of rights.

First, the reader is introduced to present day Guerrero. Then, I consider Massey’s ideas on space and Agamben’s thoughts on spaces of exception. I outline the concept of

topology to understand the navigation of power in relation to the violence that affects sexual and gender minorities in this southern Mexican state (Belcher *et al.* 2008; Gregory 2009; Wagner 2012). I also consider the trajectories of Indigeneity, colonialism and liberalism that have formed this place and have led to the present day boiling over of violence, including violence against queer and trans folk. Then, drawing on key contributions to queer theory, including important Latinx work, I lay out the broad strokes of my intervention towards a queer theory of violence. Drawing on critical scholarship about human rights and homonationalism, I reflect on how these matter to Mexico as part of a continental geography. This introductory chapter also reflects on key scholarly thinking about resistance and social movements as relevant to the context of queer/trans organizing in Guerrero. I conclude with an overview of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Guerrero: A place of contradiction

Melendez's Well, also known as the Mouth of the Devil, is a naturally occurring hole in the ground just off the main road halfway between the adjacent cities of Iguala and Taxco, two of Guerrero's principal cities. The circular crevice measures about five metres in diameter and is of an unknown depth. Residents say that if you drop something into this hole you won't hear it hit the bottom, and that when beasts or humans have ended up in the pit they are never heard from again—nor reportedly does any odour later mark their certain death. Tradition says that the cave's namesake was a revolutionary leader who threw his enemies into this pit (Marroquín 2015). As well, it is associated with the Dirty War, the decade of the 1970s in Mexico when state forces forcibly disappeared over 500 people including more than 300 from the state of Guerrero alone (Mueren 9 por balacera 2014). Most have never been found and many think they are in this hole. Melendez's Well has become a symbol to me of the ways in which some of us are swallowed whole. The government has recently covered this crevice with a locked grate so that nothing larger than a fist-sized stone can fall into it. Yet rumours persist that it still is periodically opened and used as a place to disappear people to the present day.⁴ I feel as if I spent three years peering into this well, trying to make out shapes, straining to hear voices, as I conducted the fieldwork for this dissertation. I have not been alone—

many have accompanied me on this journey including many Guerrerenses, standing on the edge of a seemingly bottomless pit, helping me listen.

Located in southern Mexico, separated from the country's industrial heartland yet only a five-hour journey from the nation's capital by way of the tolled expressway called the "Highway of the Sun" that connects Mexico City to the beaches of Acapulco, Guerrero is a contradictory place. It is central to the history and identity of Mexico yet removed from its present day economic and political corridors of power. Though less than 500 kilometres across, travelling anywhere in Guerrero that is not on the path of the superhighway mentioned above will certainly involve many hours on windy two-lane roads, at best, and so many speed bumps as you pass through any of the state's nearly seven thousand towns and villages, most of which have less than 1000 inhabitants. In between, the rugged semi-arid landscape is mostly covered with scrub forests, punctuated by limited areas where dry crop agriculture is practiced. The coastal areas are hot and tropical. Tourism, mining, and agriculture (including illicit crops) are key sectors of the economy of this state. News of violence in Mexico regularly makes the headlines the world over, and from no state more often than this small entity where less than four percent of the nation's population lives. In fact, half of the people who were born here have left, including an estimated three million Guerrero-born people living in the United States, nearly as many as still live in the state (3.5 million).⁵ Guerrero has the ominous distinction of being the most violent state in Mexico with nearly 11 percent of the nation's homicides (*Prensa Latina* 2016).⁶ With nearly 70 percent of its population living in poverty, it is also the second-poorest state in the country (CONEVAL 2022).

The significant presence of prehispanic archeological sites throughout the state indicates that Indigenous peoples have occupied it for millennia. Before the arrival of the Spanish the Aztec empire included much of its territory, though the central part of the state was home to the Yopes, an Indigenous nation that never submitted to Mexica⁷ rule and was only finally defeated by the Spanish in the mid-16th century after its population had been decimated by European diseases (Berdan and Anawalt 1997). In the colonial period, Guerrero continued to be an important place in Spanish America, as indicated by its prominence in the records of the Royal and Supreme Council of the Indies (Real y Supremo Consejo de Indias), the administrative organ of the Spanish Empire. In the late

16th century, this body conducted a systematic poll of the territories controlled by Spain called the “Relaciones Geográficas.” Notably, of the 123 population centres in Mexico surveyed, 22 were located in what is now the state of Guerrero, nearly one-fifth of all locations in New Spain considered significant enough to merit mention in this colonial scrutiny.⁸ Throughout the colonial period, Guerrero remained prominent, both in relation to its extensive mining operations as well as because of its important port, Acapulco. Within relatively easy reach of the seat of the Viceroy, throughout the colonial period the natural harbour of Acapulco was the key transfer point for the Spanish Galleon trade from Manila, bringing goods from throughout Asia to its docks and then distributing them throughout the empire and to Europe (Illiades 2011).⁹

In 1849, the national government established Guerrero as a state by piecing together territory from three neighbouring states, despite doubts concerning its viability given widespread poverty and lack of infrastructure.¹⁰ A backwater corner of Mexico for the first century after independence from Spain, the largely rural population responded to the call to arms of the Mexican Revolution that began in 1910 in large numbers. By the 1940s, with the advent of the private automobile and commercial air travel, national and international tourism once again brought Guerrero’s coast to the attention of the world, especially Acapulco’s beaches. The transnational drug trade and renewed interest in Guerrero’s mineral wealth further tied Guerrero to transnational economic linkages, though rarely with much benefit for its inhabitants who found themselves on the migrant routes heading north to Mexico City or Chicago.

Reports from the International Crisis Group (2015, 2020) paint a grim picture of the state of affairs in Guerrero, calling it Mexico’s most violent state. In 2014, the homicide rate of 43 per 100,000 was already nearly triple the national rate, and sadly the election of leftist president López Obrador did not lead to lower levels of homicide rates in Guerrero (ICG 2015, 2020). Furthermore, civil society organizations and even the state’s own Human Rights Commission have documented the disappearance of hundreds of people, many involving state actors (ICG 2015). A situation of near-complete impunity is matched by a “widespread perception that criminals have infiltrated the state at nearly all levels, blurring the difference between organized crime and legitimate authority” (ICG 2015: 3). A high degree of infiltration of state institutions by organized crime has led

Acapulco and other cities to literally disband their police forces (ICG 2020). Also, political parties have long made use of bribes and a network of powerful local *caciques*¹¹ to ensure election results. The 2024 Mexican elections demonstrate that those candidates who resist this practice are risking their lives: criminal elements assassinated at least 37 candidates across the country in the lead up to this election, including 12 candidates in Guerrero alone (ONG reporta 37 candidatos 2024). If Guerrero were a country, it would be considered among the most violent in the world.

The drug trade has been a key part of Guerrero's economy since at least the early twentieth century, both as a site for the growing of marijuana and poppies as well as a transit area for cocaine from South America. The war on organized crime waged by the Mexican government with support from the United States during the Calderón presidency (2006–2012) produced the “cockroach effect” in which larger drug cartels are divided into smaller and even more violent groups (Knight 2012: 116). Sadly, this pattern persisted throughout the Peña Nieto presidency (2012–2018) and remained stubbornly in place throughout the term of office of Lopez Obrador (2018-2024). In Guerrero, this led to turf wars between the many small groups called “micro-cartels” with names like Warriors United (Guerreros Unidos), the Reds (Los Rojos), and the Squirrels (Los Ardillos), who expand their activities into other lucrative businesses such as extortion and kidnapping. Although the trafficking routes for cocaine seem to have shifted to other states, for a time the production of poppies flourished, accounting for 50–70 percent of Mexico's production and as much as a third of the heroin sold in the United States market (ICG 2015: 7). While the rise of fentanyl as the drug of choice in the U.S. has led to a decimation of poppy cultivation in Guerrero, this has not led to a decreased role of organized crime in this state (Santos Cid 2023). Recent reports indicate that cocaine production, including the development of coca plantations in Guerrero, is taking up some of the slack left by the fall in demand for heroin (Coca crops take root in Mexico 2023). This net of organized violence has also been linked to Canadian-owned mines, including violence against political candidates who reportedly refused to collaborate with the armed group in question, as well as threats against and killings of striking workers (ICG 2015; CNCA 2023). In face of corruption of state armed forces and high levels of violence and

impunity, various iterations of community police and self-defence forces have emerged to combat the micro-cartels, sometimes incorporating children into their ranks.

It is against this backdrop that LGBTQ organizing takes place, and not without impact. For example, a few months after the state governor Ángel Aguirre Rivero resigned in disgrace amidst allegations that he was tied to the 2014 disappearance of the Ayotzinapa university students (see further discussion in Chapter 2), the left-leaning interim governor Rogelio Ortega Martínez took decisive action. In July 2015, shortly before handing over the reins to his centrist replacement, he unilaterally declared same-sex marriage legal in the state and then held a mass same-sex wedding on an Acapulco beach despite the objections of the city's mayor. While there have been significant advances across Mexico and in Guerrero in relation to formal rights of sexual and gender minorities in some areas over the past decade, nevertheless the high levels of violence generated by a context of near complete impunity and facilitated by the ongoing strength of organized crime continues to have significant impacts on the lives of sexual and gender minorities in this state.

Like all political configurations, Guerrero is an event

In January 2014, I arrived in Guerrero for the sixth and final research trip of this project. Part of the goal of this visit was to better understand dynamics related to LGBTQ activism in the Costa Grande region of the state, the furthest west of Guerrero's seven regions, so I traveled directly to the region's principal city, Zihuatanejo. Through snowball sampling, I connected with several local LGBTQ activists. By coincidence, they were organizing a drag show in the Zihuatanejo prison during the time I was there. Thus, with the consent of prison officials, I was able to attend this out-of-place event in a regional carceral facility located in this small city whose primary orientation is to international tourists. That drag show - and indeed my own happenstance participation in that event - provides a glimpse into the dynamics of power and subjectivity in a particular place. It offers a queer lens through which to view the texture of Guerrero in the present time, where violence, power, regulation, subjectivity, subjection, the state, the transnational, the economic, the cultural and the neo-colonial are all deeply implicated in its make-up. While 96 per cent of murders in Guerrero remain unsolved (ICG 2020), the

prison populations are bursting at the seams. According to a report published by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI 2021), 36 per cent of prisoners in Guerrero who admitted guilt to authorities claim that they did so under pressure or threat, while almost 38 per cent of those behind bars in this state still await their day in court, nearly half of whom have been waiting for more than two years (in comparison, only about a quarter of prisoners across Mexico still await trial and the majority of those have been waiting for less than a year). In this unexpected moment in time, queer and trans activists in one of the lesser known of Mexico's beach destinations engage with state officials to produce an event meant to be both entertaining and educational for the prisoners, 96 per cent of whom identify as heterosexual (INEGI 2021). This event provides a touchstone for understanding event as political configuration (I explore this event in greater detail in Chapter 4).

Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche (2009) remembers that her first view of Mexico was framed by the single story she had been told about the Mexico of the “abject immigrant” who sneaks across borders to take what belongs to another, to escape a violent place. She says that she then reminded herself of “the danger of a single story,” and decided to look at that place—a place she had not been to before—with different eyes. She said that this experience brought back a lesson she had learned many times before in her own life, not in small measure because of the single story that others had attached to the place she is from. She recalled the lesson that places and people are formed by many, ever-unfolding trajectories, and that it matters where you start a story: “Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story.” Adiche teaches us that we can start with an account of the violence or of the brokenness of a person or a people, or instead start with when they were not broken, or with when someone stood up against the one who sought to break them.

Many “single stories” cling to Mexico, a place of escape for tourists from the north who seek beaches and diversion, a region thought of as filled with poverty and need, the site of the first of the twentieth century's key socialist revolutions¹², a place rooted in another time, and most recently a part of the world marked by uncontrolled violence. The problem with these single stories is not that they are untrue in and of

themselves. Tragically, between 2006 and 2016, 150,000 people were killed and 28,000 forcibly disappeared in Mexico (Olivares Alonso 2016). And thousands from the global north do flock to this country's beaches even as half of its citizens live in poverty (CONEVAL 2015). However, my argument is not that Mexico is a violent place stuck in another time, but rather that the violence that Mexico faces is thoroughly modern, is part and parcel of a global liberal project that structures every corner of the world to some degree, and that the place of queers in this configuration is part of the story.

Places are always encountered in *this* time, and are always becoming, in relationship with other places (Massey 2005). Some peoples are not more inherently disposed to disorder and harm towards each other than others. No culture is inherently prone to homophobia or transphobia. To suggest as much would be an act of racism, a point made by Deborah A. Thomas (2011: 4) in her consideration of violence in the context of present-day Jamaica: "Violence generally is *not* a cultural phenomenon but an effect of class formation, a process that is immanently racialized and gendered." Bill Lee (2015: 39) recognizes that a perspective rooted in the cultural, really another version of social Darwinism, has been used countless times to justify a host of deplorable actions by those with power, nothing more than an ideological justification for harm. Lee argues instead for an anti-oppressive perspective that casts its gaze on the way power is wielded in the world. This is the approach I take in this dissertation.

For three decades, scholars have explored how geography matters for LGBTQ communities at many scales and locations (Bell and Valentine 1995; Browne, Lim and Brown 2009; Corrales and Pecheny 2010; Peake 1993, 2013). This scholarship has shown that both place and space are key to the lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities (Murray 2009; Brown 2000; Johnston and Longhurst 2010; Haritaworn 2015). The subjectivities of LGBTQ persons are formed in time-space through multiple trajectories of regulation (Bell & Binnie 2000; Halberstam 2005; Valentine 2007; Puar 2007; McCaskell 2016). Exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and violence are produced spatially, and manifest in particular places (Wekker 2006; Murray 2009; Lau *et al.* 2013). Latinx scholars from the global north and the global south have made important contributions to this conversation (Monsiváis 2001, 2002; Cantú 2002; Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2007, 2015; Careaga 2010, Corrales and Pecheny 2010; List

Reyes 2010; Segato 2010; Díez 2011; Monroy Cuellar 2021). However, there are no recognized standards to measure the degree of homophobia in a particular place or how “gay-friendly” a specific society is for queers who visit or live there (Browne *et al.* 2015). While the criteria often used—such as decriminalization of same-sex activity, access to marriage for same-sex couples, employment-related supports or protections—have helped generate various lists and isographic maps, Browne *et al.* (2015: 4) point out that, “such rankings erase contextual understandings of how LGBTQ populations create positive (friendly?) spaces in nations without affirmative legislation and how [discrimination and violence] may continue to exist in nations where legal protections are in place.” This project provides such a contextual understanding of the collective subjectivity of the LGBTQ sectors in Guerrero and casts light on the relevant social processes well beyond a particular bounded space.

Ideas about specific places, that they are somehow indelibly marked with specific characteristics in relation to violence, sexuality and gender, are common. While scholars have shown that specific experiences and expressions of violence, sexuality and gender are not static dimensions of places but rather the dynamic and impermanent outcomes of myriad processes of multiscale interconnection. I start this project with a commitment to avoid common tropes that orientalize Mexico as a distant place engraved with patterns of desire and violence only understood through a myopic anthropological lens.

I begin with the supposition that gender and sexuality are invariably implicated in the violence that underlies the nation and specifically modern nation-states (Dominguez-Ruvalcaba 2007; Giles and Hyndman 2004; Puar 2007; Thomas 2011; Yingling 1997; Yuval-Davis 1997; Žarkov 1997). I follow a constructivist view of the nation-state, one that acknowledges Agnew’s “territorial trap” that erroneously sees geopolitical units as static and ahistorical and recognizes the importance of narratives of inclusion to the formation of nations, though this of course does not negate the role of a sense of self-determination for modern nation-states (Agnew 1994; Stokke 2017).¹³ As I explore the matter of—to borrow Browne *et al.* (2015)’s question— “what makes life liveable?” at a particular moment in time for specific groups of people, I hope to share some of the glimpses I have gained of a place that is not mine but that I have come to care about deeply.

At the beginning of her treatise on space, Doreen Massey (2005) ruminates on the first encounter between the Indigenous rulers of Mexico and the European colonizers, an occurrence that took place some five centuries ago. Massey points out that when Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés arrived in Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City) he encountered the largest city in the world.¹⁴ What especially interests Massey is the divergence between the ways in which the Mexica¹⁵ and the Spanish experienced, even conceived of, space. For Cortés, space was something you crossed, a surface on which you encountered objects, places, peoples, cultures, and so on. This remains a dominant view of space, at least in the west. In contrast, for the Mexica emperor Moctezuma the structure of time-space was formed by the coincidence of events, and so the timing and directionality of the Spaniard approach to the city in relation to cosmology are relevant in viewing this meeting from the outset through the lens of trajectory and as a moment of crisis.¹⁶

In this dissertation, I pay attention to trajectory, to what the Mexica see as “things in the process of becoming another” (Townsend 1992: 122, as quoted in Massey 2005: 7), to what Massey (2005: 4) calls “a meeting-up of histories.” Massey underlines that the way we see space has political implications. I seek to keep in mind Massey’s (2005: 9) principal propositions about space: that it is “the product of interrelations”; that in space “distinct trajectories coexist;” and that space is always becoming, that it is “always under construction.” Massey’s proposals resonate with Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s (2009) call to reject the single story imposed through centuries of colonial history and to replace it with the “simultaneity of stories”, thinking time and space together, to encounter “a world being made, through relations,” what Massey defines as “politics” (2005: 14–15, 18).

Over a period of nearly three years (between December 2011 and March 2014), I spent a significant amount of time travelling to and traversing the State of Guerrero. Sometimes, I stayed in cheap hotels near the historic city centres of Chilpancingo, Acapulco and Taxco, making it possible to easily attend LGBTQ events and to arrange for interviews. Initially, I stayed in a notably spartan room in Chilpancingo’s rather ostentatiously named Hotel Plaza, located a few blocks south of the cathedral. I do not think I could have imagined that a sheet could be quite that threadbare, though that hotel did provide formidable views of the semi-arid valley that hosts Guerrero’s capital. For

several months in 2013, I rented a quaint apartment on the second floor of an eclectic five story edifice built over several decades and perched on a steep hill adjacent to the historic church of Barrio San Francisco, one of the “traditional neighbourhoods” in the centre of Chilpancingo. There, I was walking distance to most places I needed to visit and had easy access to public buses that took me to towns in the central and north regions of the state to conduct interviews with key informants. From there, I also had easy access to the interurban bus station from which to make longer bus trips to more distant regions of the state, including Costa Chica, Costa Grande, Zona Norte, Tierra Caliente and Acapulco. In those places, local activists often helped me arrange for short-term accommodations in local inns or sometimes hosted me in their own homes. In Acapulco, I usually stayed at the Hotel Misión, the oldest (and among the most affordable) tourist hotel in that city’s historic downtown. The five-story tall avocado tree in the middle of the courtyard has certainly been a silent witness of the vicissitudes of Acapulco’s history. The Misión also provided a comfortable base from which I could walk to many key locations in Acapulco or access city buses and taxis to take me to more distant neighbourhoods. For several months in 2014, a lovely apartment up a cobblestone laneway from Santa Prisca Church in the UNESCO-designated City of Taxco, owned by two U.S. anthropologists, provided a home-base from which to conduct interviews in that city, in Iguala, and further afield.

As I have grappled to understand my own research trajectory, I have tried to reject a conceptualization of it as an encounter with aimless realities in space and time that I had stumbled upon (such an understanding of encounter is dominant in colonial thinking, designed to facilitate processes of colonization). Rather I recognize that I criss-crossed the trajectories of so many other people, sometimes in a planned way but more often not. As such, I seek to put aside the model of discovery, of exploration, that animates so much of western thinking about research and instead view my research as the crossing of paths. I rely on Doreen Massey’s (2005: 8) conceptualization of space—and particular places—as formed through “coeval multiplicities,” and marked by “radical contemporaneity”, and value her refusal to essentialize the places of others by relegating them to a past marked by backwardness, and most especially her rejection of space seen as a container. Massey’s (2005) three propositions concerning space—as interrelations, as co-constitutive multiplicities, and as always in process—point me towards the recognition

that space, including the spaces I encountered in the various towns and cities of the state and even that of the Zihuatanejo prison, is always an event, the confluence of multiple trajectories.¹⁷

A zone of indistinction

Giorgio Agamben's consideration of the shadowed underbelly of the modern liberal state and related implications for its subjects also provides insight that is useful to this project of disentangling an understanding of the situation of queers in 21st century Guerrero. The Agambenian concepts of zone of indistinction and space of exception help conceptualize territory under the political control of the state where the juridical order of that state does not apply, leaving at least some of the state's subjects without recourse to the rule of law because of the reign of impunity. Agamben builds his concept of the state of exception on the Nazi apologist Carl Schmidt's thinking regarding the idea of the exception as a sort of exclusion that makes the rule of law possible in the first place: "The state of exception is not a dictatorship... but a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations... are deactivated" (Agamben 2005: 50; see also Agamben 1998: 15-20). I propose that the indistinction that marks Mexico in our time plays an essential role in the political formation of North America, in some way "allowing" the performance of the rule of law in "El Norte"¹⁸.

Scholars have reflected on the limits of Agamben's thinking as they try to make sense of the plight of vulnerable groups who face violent expressions of sovereign power in the present day.¹⁹ Dunn and Cons (2014: 92-93) note that Agamben, "offers a compelling explanatory theory of violence and power" in spaces where people face abjection, suffering, and the violation of their human rights, but also posit that, "the Agambenian framework does a poor job of explaining how these places actually work." In their own research in contested border zones and refugee camps, they have encountered subjects whose lives are most certainly delineated by multiple competing expressions of sovereignty yet who despite unpredictable restrictions and the resultant uneasiness nevertheless continue to demonstrate agency. Dunn and Cons (2014: 95) dub these zones "sensitive spaces" because of "the multiple forms of power that abound, compete and overlap... and the forms of anxiety that they provoke for both those who are

governed and those who seek to govern.” They argue that the violence that marks such spaces is not an automatic outcome of the expression of a unitary sovereign power emanating from the centre but rather also an effect of sovereignty’s instability, of the contest underway for control. Furthermore, Dunn and Cons (2014: 99) reject the characterization of residents of such spaces as the pathetic victims of the humanitarian imagination but rather see them as people with “burdened agency” such that both their capacity and propensity to act is severely constrained but not eliminated. They agree with Arendt that under such circumstances breaking laws and ignoring regulations is often the only way to assert rights and evade expressions of arbitrary rule. The result is a vicious cycle that includes competing expressions of sovereign power met with constant transgression that Dunn and Cons (2014: 102) term “aleatory sovereignty” or rule by chance. According to these authors, such spaces lend themselves to the emergence of a form of leadership in which some people can exploit the “confused terrain... to their often-significant advantage” (Dunn and Cons 2014: 103). Guerrero is guided by the dictates of aleatory sovereignty.

In Guerrero, various state institutions, both federal and local, seek to exert influence on the everyday and do so in competition with the forces of “the second state”, what Segato (2010) calls those assemblages of powers operating outside the rule of law. Furthermore, the line between the state and the second state (organized crime) in Guerrero is at least very much thinning, and this is coupled with the deep integration of the second state into the socioeconomic fabric of Guerrero society (International Crisis Group 2015, 2020; Kyle 2015). It is a space where contestations for power lead to violence and suffering and to forms of leadership marked by bossism, a sort of petty tyranny known in Mexico as *caciquismo*, and the related forms of clientelism that develop in relation to these forms of leadership.

But Guerrero serves an additional purpose beyond its characteristic as a place marked by aleatory sovereignty far from the centres of power. While this state is found in a marginal corner of North America where competing powers vie for sovereignty, it is also an integral part of the whole, a necessary component that serves specific functions essential to the metropole (i.e. the United States and Canada, and to some extent Mexico City.)²⁰ Tourism, mining, and drug trafficking, and to a lesser extent industrial

agriculture, are principal drivers of the socioeconomic configuration of Guerrero and serve to tie it to the rest of Mexico and to the global north. Through these contradictions, Guerrero is both beyond the pale but also an external space still embedded within the territory claimed by the metropole. However, while dominant expressions of sovereign power by the metropole claim these sensitive spaces, the people living in these sensitive spaces are not so claimed. Like the sallyport of a prison, Guerrero appears almost outside of the main institution (North America) yet is key to its design and function. While this analogy also applies to some extent to other parts of Mexico—I am thinking of the states that border the United States—I argue that Guerrero’s apparent remoteness from the metropole accentuates the topological dimension it holds as a sallyport space.

Mexico as camp: Sovereign power’s production of topologies

[T]opologies... do not map discrete locations... [Rather, they] create the conditions for particular materialized sites.

Belcher et al. 2008: 499

Topology... directs us to consider relationality itself and to question how relations are formed and then endure despite conditions of continual change.

Martin and Secor 2014: 431

Early on in my fieldwork, as I was starting to crisscross this hilly state to attend events and meet with people, someone I interviewed commented that Guerrero is the country’s largest state, viewed in a certain way. While a quick consultation of a map of Mexico would suggest otherwise, she pointed out that because of the many mountain chains folded through its territory, were it flattened out you would see that it would be significantly larger than any other of the country’s political entities. I do not know if she is precisely correct, yet the idea that the density of contour lines might have political implications stayed with me.

Later, as I sat in front of my computer at the kitchen table in the small apartment I rented in the town of Taxco near the state’s northern border, an urban area that dates at least back to the colonial period and is perched on the side of one of those mentioned mountains, I found myself peering across a small valley into the living spaces of

neighbours on the next ridge, a good jaunt away on foot though a short distance as the crow flies, so to speak, and I would remember this comment about the state's topography. Issues of distance and proximity are relative such that gulfs and closeness seem sometimes to coexist. The contrast between the many hours required to travel to points on the map that appeared deceptively close to one another felt strangely reminiscent of the ways in which the lived experiences of those interviewed were sometimes familiar and unrecognizable in the same breath. Guerrero is a topological space in which the distances between things are not always as they seem.

Invoking Giorgio Agamben, Derek Gregory speaks of topology as “a twisted cartography of power [that] is capable of folding... the invocation of the law... into the suspension of the law...,” a phrase reminiscent of my experience of the role of the juridical in Guerrero as encountered in my fieldwork (Gregory 2009: 226). Given that only 4 per cent of homicides are solved in this state, one can say that impunity reigns (International Crisis Group 2020).²¹ Agamben sets “the camp” as a touchstone of modernity, marked by the simultaneity of the law and its suspension, by the excluded rolled into the centre yet not included, and tells us that these spaces of exception are fundamental to sovereign power in the modern period and that the bare life constituted through these spaces is a sign of what is to come for all humans. Feminist scholars point out though that the temporality of this scenario is of consequence, that even in the Agambenian universe there is an ordering and that some lives are stripped bare of the protection of political subjectivity before others, that the differential doling out of precarity is itself part of the project of the modern (Pratt 2005; Ong 2006; Mitchell 2006; Secor 2007; Hyndman and Mountz 2007; Mountz 2011). And so, as impunity reigns in Guerrero, some suffer the consequences of its disdain more quickly than others.

This metaphysical logic dictates that the sexual and gender outsider is more likely to end up in the camp, so to speak, in Agamben's zone of indistinction, both ensnared in and excluded from the political order (Agamben 2005; see also Gregory 2009: 375). For Agamben, the invocation of the state of exception, “the new paradigm of late modern government... [in which] national framings are also affected by transnational geopolitics and geoeconomics...,” is invariably justified by the argument of necessity born of emergency (Agamben 2005; see also Gregory 2009: 226). It is impossible to think about

Mexico in the present day without reflecting on its placement within North America, on the role of borders, of the migration of people and of undocumented labour, of free trade, of the transnational movement of products both licit and otherwise, on the production of those products, of cultures and social movements crossing boundaries, of material inequality on many scales, on the transnationality of exploitation and securitization, and so on. In short, Mexico is not isolated (nor, for that matter, has it ever been.)

Critical geographers have turned to *topology* to grapple with the ways in which space is relational and constructed through power (Secor 2007; Belcher *et al.* 2008; Malpas 2012; Mezzadra & Neilson 2012; Hinchliffe *et al.* 2013; Debrix 2015; Mitchell and Kallio 2017). I deploy the concept of topology as a heuristic device to try to explain something about sociopolitical space in Guerrero, a space that can be conceived through what Mitchell and Kallio (2017) call the *geosocial* given the dialectic between the geopolitical and the geoeconomic, and what is very much an Agambenian space of exception in a continent itself marked by flux and instabilities. I focus on how sexual and gender dissidents inhabit that space in the present day. Beyond this epistemological tool however, topology also provides a sideways glance at the ontological nature of the social in the modern period (Agamben 2005). Critical geographers have found topology to be useful to consider the people who find themselves stripped bare in particular places. For example, Mountz (2011) problematizes Agamben's nameless, genderless (Mountz says gender-blind) *homo sacer* through a consideration of the gendered agency of asylum seekers stuck in limbo in remote places of administrative detention under the auspices of so-called "international protection" through a supposedly universalized human rights regime. Mountz (2011; see also Martin and Secor 2014) sees the topography of particular places as the spatial expression of the topology of sovereign power, a stance I adopt as I consider the meaning of queer or trans subjectivity in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero at a time when sociopolitical violence has come to define everyday life for most people there. Following Martin and Secor (2014), I recognize that this dichotomy verges on viewing topology as the structure that determines the topographic outcome. So cautioned, I adhere to their proposal to recognize that particular topologies are bound to specific topographies. They reject the idea that one is real (topography) while the other is merely true (topology). Rather, they make each other, in terms of both the flows and the

boundaries, the dynamic fluidity and the fixity of particular spaces. What is perhaps true is that there is no centre to these “field[s] of transformation” defined by “the multiplicity of potential relationships that comprise that space,” and so topology allows us to consider “*how... those relationships are repetitively reproduced... and yet continually change...*” such that travelling political logics can end up producing “drastically different outcomes... in different contexts” (Martin and Secor 2014: 431-435). My focus is one such context.

Geographers Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (2011) describe in intimate detail the “Mexico”—literally, more on that below—that was contained within the boundaries of Auschwitz. These scholars follow Agamben’s understanding of the relationship between the topographical—as a measure of space—and the topological—that which is beyond even the most rigid spatiality. They propose that a detailed consideration of the spatiality of Auschwitz is useful for “the analysis of the geographies of exception” of the present day because the “spatial threshold between the topographical and the topological remains at the core of all geographies of exception and terror” (Giaccaria and Minca 2011: 11). I have found it instructive to think about Mexico and its southern state of Guerrero in relation to Agamben’s camp as explored by these scholars. Agamben said, “it is the structure of the camp that we must learn to recognize in all its metamorphoses...” and furthermore that we need to see the camp as the “hidden matrix of the political sphere in which we are still living” (1998: 175). In their consideration of the spatialities of Auschwitz, Agamben’s primordial camp, Giaccaria and Minca (2011) build on Agamben’s work to examine the actual relationship between the topographical and the topological in Auschwitz and how the camp itself is a spatial threshold, a place “where [the topographical and the topological] come together in a regime of exception... [where they] penetrate and produce each other” (Giaccaria and Minca 2011: 4) Following Agamben, they define the topographical as “the attempt to “spatialize” a set of calculative rationalities into a... regime of rational spatiality,” while the topological is for them “that ‘which remains beyond/despite the imposition of such a... regime.’” My read of their detailed examination of the workings of that Second World War concentration camp seeks to illuminate a spatial analysis of the state of Guerrero in the early 21st century.

Giaccaria and Minca (2011) recall that the Nazi camp was designed to maximize power and control and that this involved dividing the camp up into zones based on the activity conducted there, work, accommodations, executions, and so on. They note that Nazi ideology mixed a legitimization of the technological advance of modernity with the antimodernism of its affinity for the logic of the feudal and propose that we need to look for the production of violence at the juncture between modernity and barbarism. Auschwitz was made up of three main camps as well as several dozen sub-camps and satellite camps in the region surrounding the Polish town of Oswiecim, including the Birkenau extermination camp. It was not “an absolute topographical and isolated space driven by calculative rationality” but rather was imbedded in the broader spatial imaginary of the Nazi imperial project, part and parcel with the development of the new German city of Oswiecim-Auschwitz in what had been Poland, which in turn was part of the utopic vision of *Lebensraum* or “living space” (Giaccaria and Minca 2001: 7).

Birkenau III, a space of transit where deportees were held until selected for either the gas chambers or the labour camps, is key to understanding Auschwitz’s geographies (Giaccaria and Minca 2011). Construction of this sub-camp on the periphery of the main camp began in late 1943 to hold thousands of Hungarian Jewish women coming from liquidated Jewish ghettos. Giaccaria and Minca (2011: 8) argue that this sub-camp “presented... the collapse of the topographical order [of] the Auschwitz project... [because] the calculative rationality of Nazi planning was... suspended by the lack of order and efficiency [linked to] chronic shortage of water, permanent overcrowding... [and] fights...” A former deportee remembered it as “the poorest of the poor” (Isaacson 1991: 68, as cited by Giaccaria and Minca 2011). Those detained in Birkenau III were not assigned a registration number, notable given the Nazi preoccupation with recordkeeping and because Auschwitz was the only concentration camp where all inmates (except those in Birkenau III) had their identification numbers tattooed to their arms. I propose that this examination of Birkenau III provides insight into the role of Guerrero in North America.

This discussion does tie back to Guerrero in the present day. By sinister coincidence the Polish inmates of Auschwitz actually referred to Birkenau III as “Mexico”. Giaccaria and Minca (2011: 8) note that the most dangerous areas of some Polish towns were inscribed with this moniker (“Meksyk” in Polish) and speculate that its

adhesion to Birkenau III related to its association with danger or perhaps to it being “a borderzone or a liminal space, a ‘no-man’s-land’ within the camp where literally anything could happen.” This lines up with how Mexico in the present day is seen in the imagination of the global north. These scholars point out that Birkenau III, “Mexico”, is also where two inmates of Auschwitz hid for three days amidst the chaos, taking advantage of the Nazi guards’ own trust in their highly distilled topographical system and remained undetected long enough to slip away once the authorities had concluded they had already fled the area. These two were among a small handful of people who successfully escaped Auschwitz. “Meksyk”, “Mexico”, is the space where “the dialectic between the topographical and the topological that traversed the entire project of the camp became visible” (Giaccaria and Minca 2011: 10). Again, present day tropes about Mexico also often cast it as a place of escape. Think tourism. Or think of Hollywood films depicting people on the run.

North America is a present-day *Lebensraum*. Auschwitz’s sub-camp “Mexico” helps us understand the role that the 21st century country Mexico performs within the continent of North America and that Guerrero plays within Mexico. The peripheral space of Birkenau III evokes the geography of Mexico relative to its continental neighbours to the north. The arbitrary assignation of life or death in that sub-camp is reminiscent of the way in which the U.S.-Mexico border sorts some for death and others for exploited labour. And just as the Nazi project, which brought the continent of Europe and beyond to material hardship and extreme suffering, is epitomized in the life and death of those confined to Auschwitz, the geopolitical and geoeconomic transformations that have impoverished so many across North America over the past two decades are seen most starkly in Mexico and especially in Guerrero.

Just as “Meksyk” represents the space of indistinction where law is suspended inside the territory of the sovereign, Guerrero has become the place of *homo sacer*—the one who can be killed by anyone without punishment. But as mentioned, feminist scholars have underlined that some lives are stripped bare more quickly than others. Despite the passage of legislation in favour of LGBTQ rights, violence against these groups in Guerrero (and throughout Mexico) remains intolerably high—especially for those without the protection of wealth. If you kill a poor queer or trans person, the law

will almost certainly not hold you accountable. I find myself at this juncture grasping at the story of the Auschwitz inmates hiding out in that space of exception that was Meksyk, a rare crack through which a bit of light is able to break into the place that the Nazi camp holds as the key Agambenian metaphor for the modern world. In Guerrero, North America's "Meksyk", we find these escaping inmates—the ones who give us hope that all is not lost in the *Lebensraum* of the present day—in those who resist this zone of indistinction of the present moment. While most of them are not literally seeking to escape the actual nation-state of Mexico, some are.

Modern Mexico as Palimpsest

The European considers Mexico to be a country on the margin of universal history, and everything that is distant from the center of his society strikes him as strange and impenetrable.

Octavio Paz (1950: 65)

Modern Mexico has been formed through various colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes, first Spanish and then American, a trend that continues to the present day (Alarcón 1997; Aguilar Rivera 2012). Drawing on the example of palimpsests created by pre-Columbian scribes to reconfigure documents based on political motivations and to satisfy their rulers, Alarcón (1997: 4) offers the palimpsest as the key metaphor for "understanding the construction of Mexicanness and the domination and exploitation such construction has historically supported and continues today." Through blood and destruction, the Mexica's Anahuac—the core area of the Aztec Empire—was transformed into the Viceroyalty of New Spain, the key pole of Castilian power in the Western Hemisphere.²² For three hundred years, Spanish feudal logic and imperial economics structured the lives and the territory of a large part of the Americas. Mexico's efforts to secure independence in the early 19th century used France and the United States as its models.²³ Formed in the crucible of a liberalism that prioritized a strict separation of powers, though without the checks and balances of the United States' system, Aguilar Rivera (2012: xxv) explains that, "the constitution became a fetish, a magical object that would solve all the social and political ills of the country." Ironically, the century following Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821 was

punctuated by violent interventions from those same two countries that had provided its principal models—though at least in the case of France’s intervention in the 1860s it was to some extent at the behest of conservative Mexicans—and then culminated in the reign of Porfirio Diaz, a sycophant who emulated all things French as he dragged Mexico into civil war. Aguilar Rivera (2012: xxviii) argues that the twists and turns of modern Mexico’s first century resulted in the 1917 revolutionary constitution that “embraced both individualism and collectivism” and provided a model of illiberal modernity for the rest of Latin America.

But what exactly is this modernity that provided the occasion for the ushering in of both liberalism and its shadow? Mexican-American scholar Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2007: 23) defines modernity as, “a process of dissemination of forms as commodities, and the divulgence of ideas through the channels and webs that free-trade imperialism has established.” In his examination of late 19th-century Mexico, Domínguez-Ruvalcaba describes a key social process he dubs “somatic modernity,” one that was based on a bodily masculinity generated in art and culture that was “dependent... on the imperative of sensuality” through images of nudity and descriptions of what he calls “explosive bodies,” male figures determined by their sexuality (2007: 20-21). He describes this as a “modern-colonized masculinity” formed through imitation but also in the reduction of Mexican masculinity “to gazing at the magnificence of the imperial other.” Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2007: 24-26) argues that this resulted in a concern about the production of vice through rural-urban migration, particularly focused on the prostitution of women considered to have stepped outside the patriarchal order of society and in a preoccupation with male effeminacy and transvestism that emerged in popular culture in the latter part of the *Porfiriato*²⁴ era, prior to the Mexican Revolution.

In 1901, Mexico was rocked by the scandal of the “Famous Forty-One” in which Mexico City police arrested several dozen men, half of whom were dressed in women’s clothes, in a house party dubbed a “nefarious ball” (Irwin *et al.* 2003). Though charged with no crime and untried in a court of law, the city’s governor nevertheless sentenced them to hard labour and sent some of them to the Yucatan Peninsula to support Mexico’s suppression of an Indigenous revolt. Irwin *et al.* (2003: 2) propose that the gathering that provided the occasion of the arrests of these people was not a novel event, but that a

context of cultural trends marked by sexual curiosity lit the fuse of a “discursive explosion” concerning a new (and imported) concept, that of homosexuality. The durability of this discourse remains with us today within and beyond Mexico. Historico-semiotic evidence is found in the name of a gay bar that I encountered in Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, on that fateful trip described above, an establishment called the 5 x 8 + 1 Wilde Club, bringing together references to the Mexico City raid mentioned above (the equation solves to forty-one) and to Oscar Wilde, a 19th-century figure also associated with the explosion of this transnational discourse. Carlos Monsiváis (as cited in Dominguez-Ruvalcaba 2007: 36) points out that this spurning of the “strange body” of the transvestite required first that their existence had to be recognized.

Scholars agree that contemporary ideas of Mexican national citizenship and of appropriate gender-specific behaviour solidified during the *Porfiriato*, pushed forward by the president’s technocrats (Gutiérrez 2012: 262). Furthermore, though the words “macho” and “machismo” have become nearly universal descriptives for a supposedly timeless hyper-masculine behaviour associated with Mexico, this usage of a word (which really just means “male”) did not appear in the Mexican lexicon until the 1940s (Gutiérrez 2012: 266, citing Américo Paredes). Macías-González and Rubenstein (2012: 2) problematize the timelessness associated with this word and underline that Mexico’s historical transformations have invariably been tied to negotiations and arguments regarding gender.

Since at least the Conquest, lethal violence has punctuated Mexico’s history.²⁵ The demographic disaster provoked by the direct impacts of Spanish colonialism reduced the population by between 25 and 90 percent (McCaa 1997).²⁶ Mexico’s War of Independence (1810–1821) resulted in “enormous loss of life and widespread economic destruction,” and was followed by a century of war, insurrection, political instability, and economic inequality that served to continue the pattern of violence (McCaa 1997: n.p.) The Porfiriato of the late 19th century led directly to the Mexican Revolution in the early part of the 20th century, “the bloodiest conflict ever witnessed in the Western Hemisphere... [and] the most violent revolutionary struggle ever... [in which] as many as one and a half million people lost their lives” (Adler Hellman 1978: 1). High levels of lethal violence (well over 40 homicides per 100,000 per year) continued until the middle

of the 20th century because of ongoing civil unrest, at which time levels dropped precipitously until the beginning of the 21st century, reaching a low of nine homicides per 100,000 in 2007 (Pinker and Mack 2014; Kawas 2016).²⁷ However, the rate has since risen dramatically such that the militarization of the country during Calderón's presidency (2006–2012) was coupled with more than a 100,000 homicides, an astounding figure surpassed in the Peña Nieto presidency (2012-2018) that followed it (Kawas 2016, Woody 2017). Despite a commitment to address the root causes of the criminal violence that had already gripped Mexico for over a decade, the López Obrador presidency (2018-2024) did not produce a notable improvement in the level of violence Mexicans face (Center for Preventive Action 2024). Enforced disappearance also continues to plague Mexico. According to government figures, between 1962 and 2023, over 114,000 people had been reported as missing and forcibly disappeared, including more than 12,000 people in 2023 alone (Amnesty International Canada 2024). It is in this context of widespread violence and impunity that queer and trans people in Guerrero and elsewhere in Mexico struggle and resist.

The production of violence

In her study of violence in present-day Jamaica that provides insights for this dissertation, Thomas (2011: 4) rejects the easy trope of seeing violence as a cultural phenomenon and instead proposes that it is “an effect of class formation, a process that is immanently racialized and gendered.” She underlines that limiting an analysis of violence to the scale of the nation-state ignores the importance of the geopolitical in shaping what happens in places experiencing violence. She sees the proliferation of violence in the present day in disparate places throughout the world as linked to the entrenchment of neoliberal globalization. She points out that “this violence then shapes symbolic, domestic, and intimate worlds for poor folk around the globe while publicly legitimizing social inequalities by obscuring their origination” (Thomas 2011: 8). She also notes that this structural violence created by the neoliberal order has come to shape everyday life to such an extent that in many places the state's capacity to protect people from violence and provide social order and justice has been destroyed. Thomas (2011: 8) further comments that the spectacular violence of the present day in many places is borne of the

products of this neoliberal order, “sociocultural fragmentation, the proliferation of transnational criminal networks, the lumpen-proletarianization of many urban zones... and the struggle for control over resources by privatized elites...” Her attention to the structural, transnational, state and societal dimensions of violence provides a useful frame for this project.

Following Jacqui Alexander (2005), Thomas recognizes that in postcolonial states in the Caribbean, there are palimpsests inscribed on the national forms that link back to the colonial period and have contributed to a certain hybridity that also depends on other ancestors. Thomas (2011: 13) argues that in the case of Jamaica, “predatory, violent, and illegal forms of rule are the legacies of colonial state formation and plantation-based extraction... foundational to... postcolonial state formation....” Thomas continues: “[D]emocracy in the Americas has been founded on a house of cards, as it were.” As discussed above, Alarcón (1997) made a similar argument regarding Mexico, where the colonial palimpsests left by Spain are well matched by those left by France and especially the United States in the post-colonial period. The lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero in the present day cannot be fully understood without consideration of such palimpsests.

Social scientists focused on Mexico have also grappled with the source and role of violence in the present-day. Pansters (2012) and Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2015) argue that violence has been key to the formation of the Mexican state throughout its history. Robledo Silvestre (2016) underlines how political and criminal violence have become intertwined and confused. Watt and Zepeda (2012) insist that the present-day configuration of violence is better understood as tied to the United States promotion of a neoliberal agenda through its “war on drugs.” Gibler (2011: 29–30) argues that the “climate of overwhelming violence and impunity” produced by organized crime provides a convenient cover for the killing of anyone who opposes the Mexican state’s disregard for human rights and that the collusion between the state and organized crime benefits from financial support from the United States, whose officials “neglect to mention that the Mexican army and federal police very often *are* drug traffickers.” Pansters (2012: 8–14) coined the term “violent democracy” to describe the militarization of large parts of Mexico that has blurred the line between crime-fighting and social movement

suppression and has resulted in unfathomable levels of impunity and a failing justice system. He calls for a “concerted, systematic study of violence and coercion... to come to terms with how Mexico’s... democracy blends with violence and the multiplication of (privatized) armed actors” (Pansters 2012: 10). In this project, I consider how the violent democracy that has been produced in Mexico through transnational criminal violence interconnects with queer and trans people.

Watt and Zepeda (2014: 20) unpack how “the line between [U.S.-supported] anti-narcotics operations and the shaping and manipulating of the political economy of Mexico by its powerful northern neighbour is often quite blurred.” Robert Joe Stout (2014) agrees, and articulates five interrelated “land mines,” any of which could explode with little warning and lead to destruction on a scale far beyond the widespread violence of the present time: a) migration from Mexico northwards in a context marked by growing inequality and aggressive border control; b) the expansion of Mexican drug organizations into other economic activities and into political violence, along with escalating drug use in Mexico; c) the violent repression of social movements by Mexican political forces; d) widespread corruption of government and business entities, particularly in relation to oil profits, leading to even greater concentration of wealth; and e) pervasive environmental destruction tied to a loss of agricultural capacity and to rural-to-urban migrations. These themes outlined by Watt and Zepeda especially apply to Guerrero, and thus have relevance for sexual and gender minorities there. Sadly, the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024) was mostly marked by a continuity of these levels and forms of violence, though not without significant resistance from Mexican feminist anti-violence activists (Paley 2023).

Based on detailed historical analysis, Pansters (2012: 15) provides a useful typology of the kinds of violence that have marked Mexico since its revolution in the early 20th century based on “the basic motivations that drive acts of violence in order to gain or maintain power and/or control over people or resources.” Pansters’ three broad categories are a) violence with political-institutional motivations, b) violence with economic motivations, and c) violence with social motivations. Pansters’ first category (political-institutional violence) is further delineated based on perpetrator identity: violence committed by a state agent including repression and human rights violations;

violence committed by a non-state actor but encouraged by a state agent, including political assassinations, extrajudicial killings, paramilitary activities and bossism (*caciquismo*); conflicts between non-state parties over access to state power or to resources; and, violent resistance/opposition by subordinate groups to powerful non-state actors (i.e. elites/bosses/*caciques*) perceived as empowered by the state. Pansters's second broad type (violence that seeks economic rewards), includes theft, burglary, robbery, mugging, violence over scarce resources, kidnapping, drug-related violence, organized gang violence, non-drug organized crime, territorial gang disputes, intra-narco executions, armed clashes between narcos and state security forces, and human trafficking. His last broad type (violence designed to produce/reproduce traditional social power relations) includes violence against Indigenous communities, riots and violent protests, gender and sexual violence, feminicide, rape, domestic violence, child abuse, vandalism/hooliganism, and vigilantism. Sadly, most of the types of violence outlined by Pansters are strongly evident in Guerrero with direct relevance to queer and trans folk. While Pansters' typology overlooks the violence of poverty and inequality, also called structural violence (Galtung 1969; Price 2012) and treats Mexico as a self-contained entity detached from the rest of the world, thus ignoring transnational dimensions of violence, it does nevertheless provide a useful framework to analyze the violence uncovered by this investigation.²⁸

The choice to use violence is usually argued in relation to what it will accomplish, something that is key to Pansters' typology. Arendt (1969) however, points out that the goals of violent action, as in the case for all human action, are invariably overshadowed by the means. As such, she insists that we direct our gaze to the means, as they are "more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals" (Arendt 1969: 4). In a discussion that compares violent and non-violent means for the achievement of social change (even its progressive variant), Arendt laments that violence (in the form of war) has emerged as the social system that orders our world. Arendt advises us to reflect on the implications of these means, the technologies of violence in the world around us. And while she does distinguish between criminal violence and other forms of violence, she also points out that they often become part and parcel of one another in particular events, something this research project demonstrates.

However, the transnational dimension cannot be ignored. This project is framed as doing feminist geopolitics (Hyndman 2001), the methodological implications of which I explore further in Chapter 2. Mitchell and Kallio (2017) assert that the scholarship of feminist geopolitics is useful for understanding transnational topologies. They identify four key interventions made by these scholars: a) a “critique of separate categories of containment, particularly of the local and the global”..., b) Hyndman’s idea of “embodied statecraft...” [that] elucidates how we can trace geopolitics ‘trickling up’ through an investigation of the movements of bodies and the spaces of population management”, c) the “extensive feminist literature on emotion and identity... [as] imbricated in transnational politics,” and d) a “critique of normative disembodied and universalising narratives... [including a] healthy scepticism about research conducted *on* subjects in the developing world” (Mitchell and Kallio 2017: 2-4). As discussed, they also propose the adoption of the framework of “the geosocial” to encapsulate the geoeconomic and the geopolitical: “geosocial subjects and spaces are constituted in and through the everyday geopolitical and geoeconomic and *vice versa*...” Mitchell and Kallio (2017: 7-8) call on scholars to examine “sites of resistance...” through paying attention to “the intertwining of geopolitical agendas and everyday social relations...” This study of the situation of queer and trans folk in the southern Mexico builds on the geosocial approach and draws on feminist geopolitical thinking as outlined by these scholars.

Towards a queer theory of violence

To this point, I have tried to ground the reader in an understanding of Guerrero as a social space shaped through transnational forces over time and where queer and trans people face and challenge violence in the present day. I now outline the basis of my effort to contribute to what I am calling a queer theory of violence. To do this, I begin with a reflection on what queer is and briefly review queer theory scholarship as relevant to this project. I also lay the groundwork for the three main arguments of this dissertation as outlined above and briefly restated here: a) that violence against sexual and gender minorities is related to but distinct from gender-based violence (femicide); b) that an understanding of the modern state is key to understanding violence against (and

resistance by) queer and trans people, and c) that violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities is shaped by the transnational.

I have a strong memory of when the meaning of the word “queer” shifted for me. It happened around 1990. Until then, queer was a word from the lexicon of elderly relatives, usually used in hushed tones to refer to a man (or very occasionally a woman) who had failed to live up to societal expectations in relation to gender and sexuality. “He’s a little queer.” In about 1990 (or 1991), I found myself at an activist meeting in downtown Toronto (I think at the 519 Community Centre) with hundreds of other people who had come together because of violent attacks against LGBTQ people on the streets of the city, what we called gay bashing. An activist group in New York City facing similar violence there was calling itself “Queer Nation”, and groups in other U.S. cities had followed suit (Brown 2015a). I experienced a consensus process involving a large room full of people making decisions together. Possible names for our group were considered. I remember that some people talked about doing something distinctively Canadian and so suggested we call ourselves “Queer Family” rather than “Queer Nation”. Both options were clearly about reclaiming words, Queer, Nation, Family, ones that had been weaponized against us. While I did attend at least one subsequent event (a kiss-in at Toronto’s Eaton Centre) I did not become part of the ongoing organizing, though this experience helped reconfigure my own frames for understanding sexuality and gender. The key organizers ended up going with the name Queer Nation Toronto. After that though, I found myself shifting from calling myself “gay” to referring to myself as “queer”.

At the time, I taught at an alternative public secondary school in downtown Toronto that provided a safe space for students who had not found welcome in other schools. We strove to be a democratic school—in fact I was hired by a committee that included high school students. Most students were from families on social assistance or lived on their own, also receiving welfare. The universal breakfast and lunch program provided two meals a day for a large part of the student body—food also prepared by students—and was instrumental in bringing many students to school. In 1992 or 1993, when some straight-identified students complained about which washroom trans students were using, the teachers set a policy that people could use the washroom that

corresponded to their own gender identity (we were still rather binary then) and we refused to make concessions to accommodate transphobic views. One day, a student asked me for assistance with a situation he was finding challenging. He was probably 15- or 16-years old, male- and straight-identified. At a regular school he would have been called a “jock”. He told me that he had been receiving “love letters” from another male-identified student. He said that he did not want to beat up the other student, but that he did not know what else to do. I asked what he would do if the letter writer was a female-identified person who did not interest him in a romantic way. He said he would just tell her that he is not interested. I asked him what the difference was. His eyes lit up: “I guess there is no difference,” he said. Teachable moments. During the conversation I had referred to the other student as “queer”, and he asked me about that, saying that he thought it was a slur. I said something about reclaiming words and how “queer” is about questioning the identities and practices that society imposes based on gender and sexuality. I added that a wide range of people identify themselves as queer, not just gays and lesbians. When he decided that he was going to start identifying as a “straight queer” I wondered what I might have gotten myself into!

In our curriculum and our practice, we centred anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-classism, and anti-homophobia, though without a conceptual framework for understanding the intersections of these oppressions. A dynamic, in-your-face dyke taught a senior English course called “Gay and Lesbian Fiction and Film,” likely the only course of its kind in Ontario at the time. When she went on sabbatical in around 1996 or 1997, she asked me to teach the course, giving me support (I wasn’t an English teacher) and free range to make the course my own. I decided to change the name of the course to “Queer Fiction and Film”, though not without some resistance from a straight-identified teacher: “some of my gay students do not like the word ‘queer.’” I ignored the comment. Academic freedom. Teaching at that school laid the groundwork for my own subsequent critical engagement with the state, including its multiple and contradictory elements. At that time, I had not yet heard of “queer theory” per se, but I was figuring it out in relation to activism and everyday use. That is not especially surprising, I have come to know. Queer Theory formed in relationship to resistance and to shifting lexicons. In 1990, Teresa de Lauretis organized the first Queer Theory conference, and around that time

scholars such as Eve Kosofsky, Judith Butler and Gloria Anzaldúa were writing what is now considered early queer theory scholarship. Queer has also come to address interlocking themes, including the performativity of gender and sexuality, and related power dynamics. Queer is also an umbrella term for people who reject heteronormative scripts, and queer theory considers the interconnection between sexuality and the state and the importance of an intersectional lens to understand the interlocking oppressions (Butler 1997; Halperin 2003; Puar 2007).

Some scholars of queer theory have directly addressed the theorization of violence (Mikdashi and Puar 2016; Monk and Cohen 2017; Martinez Gil 2019; Stanley 2021; Huneke 2022/2023). In their consideration of the interface between queer theory and area studies, Mikdashi and Puar (2016: 219) call for queer theorization that decentres the United States, especially focused on places facing violence produced through transnational dynamics. These authors ask, “what kinds of queer organizing, archives, theory, practices, visibilities, institutions [and] knowledge production projects emerge” in places that are “beset with strife?” (Mikdashi and Puar 2016: 219). They are talking about the Middle East but this equally applies to Mexico. These scholars underline that “homophobia is a homogenizing and flattening discourse... [that] aggregates aggressions that might also be understood as gendered or racial or economic” (Mikdashi and Puar 2016: 219). Given the level of lethal violence in other parts of the world tied to the war on terror, they challenge us to let go of queer theory’s sometimes singular lens of queer sexualities: “Different contexts have the potential to push conversations in queer theory in surprising directions precisely because they disturb the ‘taken for granted’ background picture of queer theory as American Studies” (Mikdashi and Puar 2016: 221). This project seeks to apply queer theory to an understanding of the lived experience of queer and trans persons in Guerrero, examined using a transnational framework.

In an essay entitled, “A brief theory of queer violence”, Sophie Monk and Joni (Pitt) Cohen (2017: np) argue that violence is “the normative state of queer life.” In saying this, they underline their rejection of the idea that violence is somehow the normative state of being more broadly and instead propose that the market economy, what they call “an economy of violence”, produces violence—both structural and immediate—for those who are most defenceless, including queers (Monk and Cohen

2017: n.p.). They argue that the structural violence that queers face is cumulative, related to the combined exclusions in the workplace, in healthcare, and in other aspects of daily life. They say that “it is a distraction to trace the root of violence... to prejudicial impulses deep inside the human soul and [that it is] more accurate to see occasions of individualised violence as embodiments... of a much vaster project of social violence” (Monk and Cohen 2017: n.p.). Following Bourdieu, they argue that violence is an energy that flows from person to person and accumulates in those on the margins, including queers. This violence is then converted into self-harm and harm towards other queers (I would add, other marginalized persons). They call on queers to respond collectively with political violence, as both therapeutic and reproductive (and I think also, productive, though they do not say so), to do so in the tradition of Marsha P. Johnson of Stonewall fame, who threw the first stone so to speak, of Leslie Feinberg’s Theresa, a dyke who fought back at police violence using a high-heeled shoe, and of Black Lives Matter activists coming together to challenge racist structures, each an example of facing anti-queer state violence as part of a collective.

An emerging Latinx Queer Theory scholarship

Over the years, I have heard several iterations of the same joke from people in Mexico: A young man comes out to his father: “Dad, I’m gay.” “Do you have a sports car?” asks the father. “No,” responds the son. “Do you have a penthouse in Mexico City?” asks the father. “No,” responds the son. “Do you have a U.S. visa?” asks the father. “No,” responds the son. Then the punchline: “Son, you’re not gay. You’re just one more neighbourhood faggot.” It is quotidian knowledge that identities are constructed in relation to positionality and that terms we use to describe ourselves change over time, sometimes crossing language divides. Gay is an English word that has come to be used widely in Spanish, though as the joke demonstrates, gay also has a class dimension, something Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2016) discusses. Monsiváis (2001: 9, as cited in Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2016: 104) outlines that language itself, even in translation, is productive: “gay is not a synonym of homosexual, maricón [sissy], puto [slut or faggot], tortillería [dyke], invertido [invert], sodomita [sodomite], but rather a word that names attitudes, organizations, and behaviours that were unknown until recently.”

When CUNY scholar Rafael de la Dehesa (2010) published his book, *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil*, in English, a friend commented to him that it would be impossible to do so in Spanish or Portuguese because the word queer does not translate. Five years later, the Spanish-language version was published, using the word queer in the title (de la Dehesa 2015), evidence that the concept has epistemological legs, though in my own research I also recall activists from Guerrero repeatedly asking me to explain what exactly queer is. Time will tell whether the concept of queer will gain widespread use in Latin America. Of note, Latinx scholars writing from Mexico, from elsewhere in the Americas, and from the global north, have already produced important Queer Theory scholarship that has taken the conversation in new directions (List Reyes 2010; Nzu Zänä 2010; Viteri, Serano and Vidal-Ortiz 2011; Vega Suriaga 2011; Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2016; Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid 2016; List Reyes 2018; Monroy Cuellar 2021.) A notable consensus among these scholars is that “the intersections that constitute the diverse sexual subject in Latin America do not only have to do with sex and gender but also with social class, race..., ethnicity and... colonial construction” (Monroy Cuellar 2021: 22). Here, a review of some key interventions from this scholarship helps to frame the situation faced by queer and trans people in Guerrero, important groundwork for my key arguments towards a queer theory of violence.

For more than two decades, Mauricio List Reyes has produced a notable body of work on queer sexuality in Mexico, with significant attention to the role of the body and the diversity of masculinities, scholarly work that I draw upon in Chapter 3. In an article entitled “Academic Work and Queer Theory in Mexico” [El trabajo académico y la teoría queer en México], List Reyes (2018) takes up a polemical critique of queer theory by an Indigenous woman named Nxu Zänä (2010) that she titled “Against Queer theory (From an Indigenous perspective)” [Contra la teoría Queer] that has circulated via social media for many years. Given the focus of this project, I think it is important to report on the ideas of these two authors. Nxu Zänä (2010) argues that Queer Theory is an instrument of neoliberalism that acts against social movements of the most disadvantaged communities. She says that colonialism is the key determinant of identity, but that Queer Theory seeks to erase this through a reduction of identity to individual sexuality. List Reyes (2018: 79) underlines that “a queer perspective questions the naturalization of the subject... [and]

proposes the destabilization of such identities,” but also acknowledges that academia has been complicit in the violence experienced by Indigenous peoples across the Americas and that in the initial development of queer theory by poststructuralist feminists there was at times a subordination of the voices of Chicana feminists, feminists of colour and others, but that a subsequent incorporation of a wider range of voices has allowed for the recognition of great complexity in these debates. List Reyes (2018) also responds to Nzu Zänä’s (2010) assertion that in its questioning of the fixed categories of maleness and femaleness and in its extolling of non-normative sexualities that somehow Queer Theory seeks to erase GBV and to limit political action to the sphere of promoting individual and private sexual practices. List Reyes (2018) points out that denaturalizing bodies opens spaces for struggle against GBV and acknowledges that Queer Theory is concerned with obligatory heterosexuality as a contributor of this violence. Finally, List Reyes (2018) responds to Nzu Zänä’s (2010: 5) concern that Queer Theory has become “the perfect neoliberal ideological weapon based in individualism and pleasure.” List Reyes (2018: 84) proposes that “Queer Theory is... a complex field of knowledge constituted in transdisciplinary terms..., an exercise in which scholars from many countries have participated, reflecting, debating, arguing...” and is far from being what Nzu Zänä has asserted. List Reyes (2018) concludes by pointing out that fear of transgressing normative frameworks is one of the key obstacles blocking the transformation of violence and that Queer Theory has something to offer in this regard.

Viteri, Serano and Vidal-Ortiz (2011) interrogate what queer is from the point of view of a Latin-American epistemology, though they stress that their encounter is not with a geographical region but rather with a positionality in relation to knowledge production. Overall, they conclude that interventions from Latinx scholars “present *queer* as a function of rebellious movements against the state, [against] religious institutions, or concerning notions of citizenship of abject subjects...” and that the body of work they considered contributes to the production of knowledge about queerness itself, which they see as encapsulated in the concept of “difference” (Viteri, Serrano and Vidal-Ortiz 2011: 49-50, translated by the author). These scholars identify this body of work as focused on “systems of oppression and the mechanisms that define processes of subjectification,” seeing queerness as being all that is outside of “the norm” (Viteri, Serano and Vidal-Ortiz

2011: 52). In a response to Viteri, Serano and Vida-Ortiz, Vega Suriaga (2011) comments that Latinx queer theorists have drawn on the rich heritage of Latin American thinking, in particular Popular Education and Liberation Theology, in their consideration of the critique of systems of power, anchored in attention to the subaltern. Vega Suriaga (2011: 12) points out that the key interventions discussed by Viteri, Serano and Vidal-Ortiz's (2011) in fact "come together in a resounding criticism of hegemonic masculinity as a cornerstone of the heteronormativity of the sex-gender system..." However, Vega Suriaga (2011) also emphasizes that norms related to sexuality and gender are not alone in shaping subjectivity, that poverty, racism, sexism and ageism are other key influences that cannot be ignored.

In his book *Translating the Queer: Body Politics and Transnational Conversations*, Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2016) traces the contributions of queer theory and critical thinking about queerness to scholarship about Latin America. They underline that "queer is a form of understanding the politics of the body... [which] implies a criticism of the hegemonic culture, the legal system, and the gender structure (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2016: 2). In his discussion of key elements of "the Latin American queer conversation", Domínguez Ruvalcaba recognizes that scholars are engaged in a transnational dialogue that centres a liberatory approach that avoids reinscribing colonial relations. He underlines that this involves a necessary vigilance to ward off the possibility that queer theory could function as a "new theoretical colonialism". He recognizes that US Latinx scholars focused on "the realm of the abject for both colonizing and colonized cultures" nevertheless hold a key role in this conversation, and that this means that Queer Latin American theory constitutes "the dissident side of the metropolis". As such, Domínguez Ruvalcaba sees these interventions as a contribution to the existing Latin American anticolonial project of modernism through "the inclusion of gender and sexual dissidence within citizenship" and argues that queer interventions have established a "process of inclusion" that transforms the patriarchal gender-sexuality framework through a prioritization of community over nation and a valorization of "multicultural practices of sexuality" over a universalist approach. Finally, Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2016: 3-18) argues that queer Latin American theory recognizes that neoliberalism's "machineries of consumption and disposability," have produced "non-championable..."

peripheral spaces” that have fostered “forms of body exploitation and violations of human rights...”. In this regard, this scholar lists sex slavery, child pornography, pedophilia, sex tourism and violent sexuality as examples of such criminal neoliberalism that he argues still fall within the queer and merit attention. In my project, I seek to engage in this transnational approach as described by Domínguez Ruvalcaba in a way that centres knowledge production by Latinx scholars and activists, considers their critical understanding of modernity, and pays attention to their priorities in terms of what forms of violence to examine. Grounded theory has provided a way to do this, as outlined in Chapter 2.

Several points made by Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2016) bear further consideration. First, this scholar calls for a decolonizing of queerness itself, not by reestablishing the ancestral sex-gender system but by disrupting the nefarious elements of the system established through colonialism, pointing out that the queerness we talk about today started with the “the estrangement and condemnation of native sexual cultures, making criminal and sinful practices that used to be sinless” (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2016: 22). By outlining the systematic dismantling of the third-sex framework through the establishment of the colonial project, this scholar underlines that colonization itself was centered in the sexual and gendered fields and that colonial expansion was rooted in a deployment of sexuality and the body through sexual suppression. Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2016: 58) argues that two hundred years ago, the supplanting of the colonial administration with liberal institutions simply exchanged the power apparatus of the Inquisition with modern ones linked to medicine and criminality: “In terms of queerness in Latin America, modernity implies a consolidation of society’s abject, a reduction of diversity to the universal pretensions of Western civilization through juridical discipline, objectification and disenfranchisement.” The palimpsests of this history were abundantly evident during the field portion of this project in ways that make clear that lived experiences of queer and trans folk in Guerrero including the violence they face is refracted through its colonial and postcolonial history.

Productively drawing on queer theory, Mexican scholars Guillermo Núñez Noriega and Claudia Esthela Espinoza Cid (2016) outline an argument that drug-trafficking in Mexico operates as a sex-gender power apparatus (in the Foucauldian and

Agambenian sense). By this they mean that this apparatus is a “heterogenous network of discursive and material elements that have a concrete strategic function and are part of a relation of power” (Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid 2016: 93) Their focus is on the northern Mexican state of Sonora, though their observations have relevance for this present study given that the narcoculture they consider is one that extends to southern Mexico as well, including Guerrero. They note that there is a body of research about crime and sexuality that has focused on the category of “sexual crimes” but has not considered the linkages between sexuality and the criminals themselves beyond that framework. These authors lament that to date, while there is a small body of research on crime and gender including some work on “the violence of gender”, understood as violence suffered by men at the hands of other men, and while there is an even smaller set of studies that consider emotional dynamics of men involved in organized crime in relation to gender and the connections between drug-trafficking and masculinities (including the work of Domínguez Ruvalcaba previously mentioned), there has not been any research in Mexico that considers the actual criminal violence of people involved in organized crime in relation to gender or to masculinities (Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid 2016: 99). Given this paucity of relevant research, these scholars turn to cultural archives including a genre of music called narcocorrido (drug ballads) that provide some insight to their scholarly questions about the actual violence committed by people involved in organized crime, specifically in drug-trafficking, in relation to the sex-gender system. They point out that the dominant ideologies of this system, “homophobia and misogyny... organize subjectivities, identities, relationships, institutions and practices” (Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid 2016: 106). Drawing on queer theory’s assertion that sex-gender identity is eminently precarious, they propose that the relationship between drug-trafficking organized crime and the sex-gender system is one that is “total, structuring [and] fundamental” (Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid 2016: 107). They underline that this apparatus operates in relation with other sex-gender apparatus such as the family, the media, and state institutions. They also point out that organized crime, particularly in its drug-trafficking version, produces masculinities, and that it also produces specific femininities rooted in the hyperfeminine that are fundamental to it. Their point is that socioeconomic conditions are useful but not sufficient to explain why

people adhere themselves to drug-trafficking in Mexico and that narcoculture is tied up in these processes rooted in misogyny and homophobia. This thoughtful analysis of organized crime as a power apparatus is useful in gaining insight into the violence queer and trans people in Guerrero experience, as considered in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters.

A critical reading of human rights theory: from femicide to killing queers

Don't come here and count the dead... Anyone can do that. Tell the stories of life. Profile the fear, which is another death that no one covers.

Javier Valdez Cárdenas
(As cited in Gibler 2011)

For nearly three decades, writing in a style that has been called “magical journalism” because of its profound honesty without explicitly mentioning names, Javier Valdez Cárdenas, a prominent Mexican journalist based in Culiacán, a city that is the heart of the Sinaloa cartel territory, chronicled how an economy based on organized crime, corruption, and violence structures the intimate lives of regular Mexicans. Several years ago, John Gibler (2011: 89), an American journalist who has made his home in Mexico for many years, asked Valdez how outsiders should document the story of Mexico's violence: the citation that opens this section was Valdez's answer, that we should tell the stories of life, even as they are punctuated by fear. In May 2017, weeks after his fiftieth birthday, Javier was shot dead in broad daylight a few blocks from his office. Since 2000, at least 141 journalists and other media workers have been killed in Mexico, and at least 61 were killed in direct relationship to their work (Amnesty International 2024). In Amnesty International's 2023 report on Mexico, they reviewed many categories of ongoing human rights violations in Mexico: Freedom of peaceful assembly; excessive use of force; freedom of expression; refugees' and migrants' rights; women's rights; enforced disappearances; arbitrary arrests and detentions; right to a healthy environment; LGBTQ people's rights; and, right to health. The terrain of human rights in Mexico is treacherous.

A key argument of liberal human rights theory is that the speech-act of naming violence and shaming the perpetrator and those who are complicit will contribute to its eventual end (Hafner-Burton 2008; Krain 2012; Murdle and Peksen 2014; Ausderan 2014). The logic is that someone is listening, that perhaps that someone didn't know about the violence until it was named or is embarrassed that their own action or inaction has now become public, that this someone has some capacity to impact outcomes, that this new knowledge will lead to action and that the action will help end the harm-doing. This is perhaps the heart of modernity, of liberalism, of putting stock in the flawed idea of progress and the power of the individual to act. A liberal theorization of human rights focuses on the scale of the state: it is the state that is responsible for the respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights. The argument is that the community of nation-states has committed—through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent treaties—to ensure that the state abides by these responsibilities. Of course, for so many people across the globe, the human rights protected by this implied international regime are a fantasy. Across the board, states are to varying degrees complicit in the violation of human rights, and Mexico is no exception. The situation of impunity in Mexico, linked to the stark reality of ongoing feminicides and to the deaths of queer and trans people, puts a spotlight on the state's complicity. This section reflects on the liberal concept of human rights and the entanglements of the state through the lens of queer theory.

The entrenched overlapping of political and criminal violence that Mexico is experiencing compels the rethinking of the very idea of human rights given the topology of impunity for violence against sexual and gender minorities perpetrated by state and non-state actors. Robledo Silvestre (2016) considers this matter in relation to the nearly 30,000 enforced disappearances in Mexico between 2009 and 2016, a pattern that has sadly not changed even with the election of leftist president Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Robledo Silvestre argues for a recognition of the crime of enforced disappearance as a discrete violation of human rights independent of other violations, not only in cases where the state is directly or indirectly involved but also in cases in which the perpetrator is a private party, but the state fails to search for the missing person or investigate and sanction those responsible. "It can be said that the disappearance of

persons [in Mexico] is a crime of the system (or a systemic crime) . . . ,” says Robledo Silvestre (2016: 104), who further underlines that the core issue is that the state must be held responsible for the situation of widespread impunity that is eating away at even the most feeble sense of rights in Mexico.

This dissertation expands a theoretical understanding of violence and its intersectional dimensions through an engagement with the linkages between GBV and violence experienced by queer and trans persons in Guerrero. Scholars have also taken up the issue of impunity in Mexico in relation to gender and sexuality in a body of literature related to *femicide*. I seek to put this body of work in dialogue with the work of queer theorists in relationship to violence, as discussed above, to theorize the relationship between gendered violence and violence against sexual and gender minorities, including the dissonances. Scholars of femicide have underlined that the state is central to the violence they study. Lagarde y de los Rios (2010) defined femicide as distinct from *femicide*, which is the killing of someone because she is a woman. In contrast, femicide is a “crime against humanity... genocide against women... [that] occurs when the historical conditions generate social practices that allow for violent attempts against the integrity, health, liberties, and lives of girls and women” (Lagarde y de los Rios 2010: xv-xvi). These social practices emerge in relation to the state. Fregoso and Bejarano (2010: 5) also implicate the state for its role in creating the impunity that accompanies femicide, a situation of “systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence” against women “rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities.”

Scholars have also identified that there is a geography to GBV. In her consideration of the epidemic of violence against women in Ciudad Juarez on Mexico’s northern border, Segato (2010) proposes that we pay attention to the site of violence, marked not only by the dead women but also by an international boundary line transformed by transnational economic activity and by a local oligarchy of powerful families on both sides of the border whose wealth depends on unregulated accumulation. Segato notes that there are two aspects of this violence that are usually considered indisputable but that merit additional attention. The first is that drug traffickers are responsible for the crimes. Segato points out that this first aspect then reproduces the subject of the “thug” but ignores evidence that the sons of the “good” families are

involved in the murders. The second premise is that these crimes are sexually motivated. This, she says, assumes that there is a pre-existing impunity that allows the crimes to take place. Segato (2010) calls on us to question our assumptions about the perpetrators and their motives. She proposes a different scenario, that the killings take place *in order to create the situation of impunity*, not because of it. She is focused on those in charge, transnational subjects, people who easily cross the U.S.-Mexico border. The implication of Segato's argument is that when those involved in organized crime create or reinforce a situation of impunity by committing acts of violence, they improve their own business environment.

Drawing on previous research with convicted rapists in Brazil, Segato (2010: 76) points out that there is ample evidence that sexualized violence is not usually committed by solitary antisocial predators, but rather that perpetrators depend on their interlocutors—either ones who are physically present or ones who are in their mental landscapes. In the case of Juarez, she argues that there is a “mafia fraternity” marked by a “vow of silence” involved in these killings that in turn shores up a system of domination she dubs the *second state*, a social configuration that operates in conjunction with the state:

These murders are aimed at exhibiting for us an intense capacity to produce death, an expertise in cruelty, and a sovereign domain over territory to tell us that this is a matter of an occupied jurisdiction in which we cannot interfere.

Segato 2010: 89

It bears repeating that this dissertation is not especially focused on the violence of thugs, in the stereotyped sense, as that takes attention off of the structures of violence involved. This idea of the second state reverberates with another concept mentioned above, *caciquismo*, a particularly Mexican iteration of patrimonialism, governance in which power emanates from the leader and in which there is little distinction between the public and private sectors. It is a phenomenon that scholars have begun to examine in the context of the management of political power in Mexico. Knight (2005) says that Mexico's political configuration is the result of tensions among three rival processes: democratization, bureaucratization, and caciquismo.²⁹ In subsequent chapters I consider the implications of caciquismo for the LGBTQ sector's internal functioning and

interactions with the rest of society as well as the impact of Guerrero's "second state" on the human rights of sexual and gender minorities.

Latinx queer theorists have spelled out the overlaps between GBV and violence against sexual and gender minorities. In a review of a book entitled *Los géneros de la violencia. Una reflexión queer sobre la "violencia de género"* (The Genders of Violence: A Queer Reflection on Gender Violence) written by Olga Arisó Sinués and Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez (2010), Martínez Gil (2019: 107) subtitles his reflection "A queer theory of violence." Martínez Gil (2019) summarizes the argument put forth in the book about how "the violence we call 'gender violence' responds to the very structure of society and how it culturally conceives the world and social relations" (Martínez Gil 2019: 107). This scholar also underlines another important argument of this book, that it is necessary to keep in mind "technologies of gender" as described by queer theorists and to make visible those new masculinities that go beyond the logic of patriarchal control and that are outside the binary of nature/culture. The point is that gender violence is both an illegitimate and structural violence that impacts everyone, something that calls for a queering of gender violence through opening up terms and categories that are oppressive.

Loken and Hagen (2022) pick up this conversation on the links between violence against queer and trans people and GBV. They observe that while there is a small literature on violence against sexual and gender minorities in the context of armed conflict, it has largely failed to engage with two other bodies of work, scholarship that considers GBV in conflict situations as well as scholarship that considers sexuality. To address these gaps, they propose that scholars see violence targeting sexual and gender minorities as GBV and on that basis analyze the role of regulation of sexuality in contexts marked by violent conflict. They recognize that many scholars who research GBV conclude that such violence links to "unequal, gendered social conditions" but that sexual assault is also "a dimension of militarization" (Loken and Hagen 2022: 4-5). Citing several studies including my own previous work (Payne 2016), they are concerned that researchers of violence against sexual and gender minorities in the context of conflict have not sufficiently considered how this type of violence is "part of a larger, gendered pattern" and furthermore that this research "misunderstands sexual orientation as a discrete characteristic rather than an intersectional component of gender" (Loken and

Hagen 2022: 7). While their critique is not without merit, I do think that my previous work regarding the deployment of homophobic and transphobic violence in the context of the conflict in Colombia did accurately report a categorical difference in violence by armed groups against cis women compared to the violence these same groups used against gay men, lesbians and trans persons. However, in this present study concerning violence against sexual and gender minorities in southern Mexico, the evidence does indicate a tight correlation between GBV and violence against sexual and gender minorities.

Furthermore, Loken and Hagen (2022) stress that violence targeting sexual and gender minorities is GBV because people are targeted in relation to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Loken and Hagen (2022: 9) say that a consideration of gender dynamics helps clarify “when, how, and why targeting sexual and gender minority individuals composes part of an organization’s ‘repertoire of violence,’” and they point out that political homophobia has been used as a “tool of statecraft” by state militaries and by rebel organizations. These scholars also make the point that those queer and trans persons who also have other marginalized identities (i.e. poverty) are more vulnerable to violence and call for an intersectional approach to future research, an approach that has guided this project. They propose an “integrated research approach” to better understand the targeting of sexual and gender minorities in conflict zones as GBV that has a regulatory component. Elements of the approach these scholars propose include: a) the expansion of “opportunities for data collection on violence targeting [sexual and gender minorities]...,” b) “address[ing] the variation on conflict actors’ behaviour...,” c) “assess[ment] of who within minority communities... is targeted, when and why...,” d) “the consequences of this violence, both individual and collective...,” [and] e) “the applicability of [their] framework to cases outside... active armed conflicts... including... gang or cartel violence” (Loken and Hagen 2022:16-17). The research approach of this dissertation has sought to pay attention to this framework, to consider the impacts of a context shaped by cartel violence for queer and trans people through documentation of the violence they face. However, I think that methodological challenges remain regarding how to conduct this sort of research when the violence is

ongoing and is produced through the presence of amorphous organized criminal entities, something that I address further in subsequent chapters.

Queer theorists have also unpacked the contradictory relationship between the LGBTQ rights movement and the state in ways that inform this project (Stanley 2021; Huneke 2022; Huneke 2023). In their interrogation of trans/queer violence in the United States, Stanley (2021) follows Fanon's concept of atmospheres to grasp at how violence envelops us and ties us to the world such that we are without escape from a thick fog, except through collective action that Stanley says makes us ungovernable. Stanley (2021) says that the fantasy of a stable LGBTQ identity has harmed those queers whose subjectivity does not allow them the opportunity to participate in the deception, and that the idea of *inclusion* itself is the violent expansion of the state. Stanley (2021: 2) starts his contribution to a queer theory of violence by reminding the reader of the lives and deaths of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, two trans racialized activists whose leadership in the Stonewall Riots was long ignored because their "chaotic splendor militantly unsettled the coercive gender normativity of both the dominant culture and the growing lesbian and gay activism of early 1970s New York City." Stanley (2021: 3-4) says that "it is the phenomenology of racialized violence" as a dimension of violence against trans people that brings gender and sexuality into contact. Stanley (2021: 5) also points out that while anti-trans violence is "retaliation against an assumed gender transgression..., more often than not [it] is accompanied by... homophobic utterances... Trans women are often called "fags" during a moment of harm." The point is that gendered violence and what Stanley calls trans/queer violence emerge together.

At this time of apparent inclusion of sexual and gender minorities, Stanley (2021: 6) argues that "mainstream LGBT politics clamors for dominant power through a reproduction of the teleological narrative of progress [and] reproduces the idea that anti-trans/queer violence is an aberration of democracy..." However, this is also a time of death for some queer and trans people. The issue is that anti-queer/trans violence becomes privatized, captured as random and unexpected, something that then makes state violence ordinary: "We are under the administration of the state because we are its subjects; we are subjects because we reside under the state's rule..." Stanley (2021: 8) continues: "Through this tautology, the state is not something external to the social but is

civil society's collective projection." They further argue that by paying attention to murders of racialized queer/trans subjects we can push back at the narrative that this violence is random and instead see that it is "a necessary expression of the liberal state" (Stanley 2021: 10). As a result, we will recognize the common fallacy that the legal system's purpose is to end violence and will see more clearly that the violence is itself part of the democratic system rather than evidence of its attrition. While Stanley engages with queer/trans violence in the U.S., their engagement with the state resonates with what is happening to queer and trans folk in Guerrero as well, something that I unpack in subsequent chapters. In contrast to Stanley, Huneke (2022/2023) argues that queer theory can integrate its critical impulses with a recognition of the necessity of the state, an optimistic stance that I return to in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Extending Homonationalism

Guerrero is not a container. Key to an analysis of the topology of impunity that structures the lives of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero is a consideration of transnationalism, "both a process-based and spatially oriented way of thinking, and [also] an ongoing phenomenon related to the circulation of people, goods, ideas, and exchanges across national borders" (Mitchell 2017: 6). This relates to my third key argument for this dissertation, that the transnational dimensions of violence against sexual and gender minorities are fundamental. Transnational discourses about power, human rights, sexuality, and the state as well as the material manifestations of transnationalism, matter for this study (Sousa Santos 2002; Carrillo and Fontdevila 2014; Gordon and Webber 2016). This research project engages with the ways in which transnational assemblages related to globalized organized crime, international migration, international tourism (especially sex tourism), and even transnational mining and geopolitics, contribute to the structuring of the social reality of people in Guerrero, particularly sexual and gender minorities.

The concept of *homonationalism* refers to complicities between LGBTQ populations and national ideologies (Puar 2007; Puar 2022), originally focused on the alliance between the LGBTQ sector in the U.S. and the U.S. state, though scholars have used it to understand other complicities. In this section I outline how I see this concept as

useful in revealing the ways in which particular transnational assemblages leave queer and trans people in Guerrero more vulnerable to violence. Puar (2007) developed the concept of homonationalism in her magnum opus, *Terrorist Assemblages – Homonationalism in Queer Times*. It is useful to review key ideas in that text that led to the formulation of the term homonationalism, starting with Puar’s three frames for encountering the assemblages that demarcate some bodies as terrorists: sexual exceptionalism, regulatory queerness, and the ascendancy of whiteness. The first frame is related to the long history of U.S. exceptionalism but incorporates a twist, an Agambenian möbius strip, such that some people can be hidden in the machine’s very structure, stripped of their humanity. This new iteration involves the inclusion of some LGBTQ subjects in the U.S. body politic, but only those willing and able to acceptably perform homonormativity. The first frame thus leads to the second: queerness itself becomes a regulatory mechanism such that the progressive sexually liberated subject who was supposedly freed from norms—this is the subject who took to the streets when police raided the Stonewall Inn—has now got hitched as it were, and only just-in-time to give his new hubby a peck on the cheek before he heads off to the military recruitment office. Queer is the new complicit. Puar borrows Rey Chow’s term “the ascendancy of whiteness” as her third frame, which refers to the global process that turns Europeans into the primary subjects of history and leaves the rest of the world to be managed and domesticated populations.

This process continues to expand its reach in the present day through the ongoing appropriation of new kinds of bodies willing and able to submit to multiculturalization and heterosexualization (Puar 2007: 24-25). Puar says that homonationalism is a process associated with the first frame (exceptionalism) and has to do with those who have the potential to be incorporated into the (exceptional) nation as well as those who face certain disenfranchisement. The second frame, the inclusion of some queers in the U.S. body politic allows these included subjects to play a role in the entrenchment of this exceptionality. The mechanism of homonationalism also relates to the third frame, the determination of whose lives are recognized and valued in the global calculus.

Puar (2007: 51) also identifies three deployments of homonationalism, the reiteration of “heterosexuality as the norm”, the fostering of “nationalist homosexual

positionalities indebted to liberalism,” and the enabling of “a transnational discourse of US sexual exceptionalism vis-à-vis perversely racialized bodies of pathologized nationalities...” These outlines of these deployments help us examine the ways in which queers participate in the normalization of heterosexuality, to consider how queers rely on liberalism and nationalism for their sexual rights, and to examine the ways in which queer struggles broadly defined reproduce racism and other forms of exclusion. While other scholars have engaged with Puar’s concept of homonationalism in ways that are useful to this project (Hyndman et al 2010; Trott 2014; Murray 2014; Llewellyn 2017; Kehl 2020), surprisingly, Latin America is largely missing from the literature on homonationalism, though with a couple of exceptions that are worth noting (Gaytán and Basso 2022; Buscemi 2022; Insausti and Ben 2023). My goal is to use the concept of homonationalism to explain how the continental geography of North America contributes to the structures that sharpen the violence experienced by queer and trans people in Guerrero, Mexico.

In Hyndman *et al* (2010), Hyndman calls for consideration of the possible “submerged geographies” of homonationalism and a theorization of space within the assemblage of homonationalism that Puar (2007) describes. Trott (2014: 228) explains that the issue with forms of international solidarity that evoke homonationalism is that they are rooted in pity and in a forgetting of the “operations of power that inhibit your own ability to shape and realize your desires.” Following Spinoza, Trott (2014: 228) proposes that the remedy is activism rooted in “a joyful affirmation of our own desire to live well, which is inextricably bound up... with a desire for others to live well too.” Some scholars have demonstrated how homonationalism is evident in relation to asylum processes in the global north, specifically in processes that end up excluding queer subjects who do not successfully perform the unified narratives of sexual or gender dissidence recognized by the immigration authorities (Murray 2014; Llewellyn 2017). However, Kehl (2020) draws attention to homonationalism scholarship that too easily dismisses discourses of “gay-rights-as-human-rights”. She calls for greater attention to “the complexities and ambiguities [of] the new (global) tales of LGBT inclusion...” and to recognize that while these discourses may sometimes be “expressions of

(neo)colonialism and (neo)liberalism, at other times they are more than that or other than that (Kehl 2020: 33).

In their study of the politics related to the “eh puto” [faggot] controversy involving the use of this homophobic slur by Mexican fans at international sport events, Gaytán and Basso (2022: 28) point out that the stock image of Mexico as a homophobic place persists: “Media coverage and scholarly discussion... reinforc[es] the stereotype that Mexican culture is more anti-gay than the United States and other Western nations.” These authors argue that this two-dimensional view of Mexico is insufficient and see this chant “as a window into exploring the influence of political economy on gender relations and social hierarchies, including sexualities as sites of situated meaning in Mexico” (Gaytán and Basso 2022: 29). They point out that initially, this was a chant of working-class soccer fans in Guadalajara, people who saw themselves as rebelling against a neoliberal order that had abandoned them. These fans were not only targeting the opposing team members (initially, a specific player who had switched teams to earn a great deal more money). They were also targeting the other team’s neoliberal corporate sponsors. These authors outline how the epithet used by those working-class fans had emerged from a working-class usage of the term for regulating masculinity among heterosexually identified men. Subsequently, this chant has been taken up by what these authors refer to as the technocrat-manager fans. These fans are men (and a few women) who can afford to attend the international soccer events because they have benefited from the neoliberal realignments in the continental economy through the expansion of free trade since 1994, changes that doubled the level of poverty in Mexico and left the working-class fans behind. Thus, people who were among those targeted in the initial stadium usage are now using it as a cartoonish display of Mexican masculinist nationalism on the world stage. Gaytán and Basso (2022: 54) point out that “the chant’s symbolic power is enhanced when it coheres with preexisting impressions and is used as proof of Mexican culture’s excessive anti-gayness.” My point in summarizing the findings of these authors is not to discount the longstanding deployments of masculinist regulation as a form of homophobia in Mexico. Rather, I argue that the hypocritical global outcry about the use of this term serves to recast Mexico as a backward place in what is a classical deployment of homonationalism from the global north.

This depiction of Mexico as a backward place through the device of homonationalism and other discourses that cling to Mexico (a place that is violent, macho, lawless, a paradise) shapes its place in the imaginary geography about the continent, a geography that impacts the lives of Mexicans, especially queer and trans people. The lives of sexual and gender dissidents in Guerrero are structured by restrictions at various scales from the body and the community to the nation and the transnational. This dissertation takes a critical human rights approach to this study of violence against sexual and gender dissidents in Guerrero that also recognizes that this violence resonates with feminicide and is shaped by homonationalism and other stories that are told about this place. Using the concept of enclosure and the metaphor of the *sallyport*—the space of surveilled transition between the inside and the outside—this engagement with the role of the transnational considers how it plays a role in sharpening the danger faced by queer and trans persons in and from this place.

The face of resistance

As part of this first chapter, I include a brief reflection on activism as a form of queer resistance to violence, a theme that I address in greater detail in Chapter 3. A key finding of this research concerns the role played by LGBTQ community activists in reshaping Guerrero—even amidst so much strife—by entering the messiness of the political with the goal of changing Guerrero’s trajectory, at least in relation to the place of sexual and gender minorities there. Sexual and gender minorities in Mexico and in particular in Guerrero have long resisted the violence, discrimination, marginalization, and harm directed towards them.

In turning to the lived experiences of those who challenge the unjust deployment of power it is possible to grasp something about what resistance really is. Pile (1997) recognizes that resistance is about marches, strikes, blockades, and other forms of action to carve out territory for those who have been marginalized, but then underlines that resistance also manifests as action against the colonization of our inner worlds through the imposition of norms and values.³⁰ Patricia Wood (2017:16) “argue[s that there is] a continuum of acts of resistance to suffering and exclusion, both private and public, that includes the less visible, less spectacular, in addition to mass mobilizations... [and]

includes behaviour labelled ‘deviant’, non-compliant, uncooperative, queer, creative, and outrageous...” This scholar also underlines that identity and belonging exist in relationship to spatialities of resistance and that “individuals and communities work at claiming, reclaiming, and repurposing space to create an environment in which to survive and thrive” (Wood 2017: 17). Wood also considers what a politics that starts from suffering and pain might look like. She notices that “[m]any theories of resistance, citizenship and justice start from positions of power, rather than positions of suffering [and]... are articulated... through a politics of respectability frame... the idea that democracy is a fundamentally civil conversation...” (Wood 2017: 63). Wood underlines that a politics rooted in suffering also seeks justice and citizenship, but from a starting point of exclusion from the national body even though the suffering of these individuals and communities is nevertheless involved in producing the nation.

In a book-length study of the movement for sexual minority rights in the United States, Mark Stein (2012: 9) distinguishes between resistance, which includes “individual or one-time acts... aimed at advancing personal or collective interests”, from the activism of political movements that “involve a significant number of people and... last for a significant amount of time...” Stein argues that the gay and lesbian movement has fundamentally changed the United States through its influence on public discourse, and on law and politics, but also points out that many things have not changed including various forms of discrimination that especially impact queers who also face exclusions related to other markers of identity. Though he focuses on social change wrought by the gay and lesbian movement, Stein underlines that this change has not necessarily always been positive, nor has it managed to represent the full range of interests of queer people. Stein (2012: 10) also notes that the orientation of the movement has ranged from leftist and radical to liberal and reformist, but “has often been dominated by gender-normative middle-class white men...” In an intimate tracing of the queer rights movement in Canada over the past four decades, McCaskell (2016) found similar patterns, and notes that the apparent progress of the movement for sexual and gender minority liberation has not necessarily brought its constituent members the change they expected, nor has social inclusion mapped equally on all bodies. Brown (2015a) distinguishes between lesbian and gay activism compared to queer activism and identifies the beginning of the latter as

AIDS direct action in the 1980s. This scholar also calls on queer activists to “engag[e] with the worries of those diverse sexual and gender minorities now struggling with the effects of austerity [...], the persistent prejudices of supposedly ‘tolerant’ societies [...], and] the limited options offered by the homonormative mainstream” (Brown 2015a: 84).

It is important to mention that with few exceptions the scholarly literature about LGBTQ social movements available in English has largely ignored Latin America, and particularly Mexico (key exceptions include Corrales and Pecheny 2010; Díez 2011; de la Dehesa 2010). This scholarship of queer social movements in Latin America has informed this project. In an edited volume focused on movements for LGBTQ rights in Latin America, Corrales and Pecheny (2010) argue that the study of LGBTQ politics provides new insights into the wider democratization processes of the societies of that part of the world. They define democracy as fundamentally tied to “the right to difference” and propose that the movement for sexual and gender rights in Latin America in recent decades has been at the forefront of this struggle. Corrales and Pecheny point out that these efforts to challenge heteronormativity in all spheres of life manifest in particular ways in Latin America because of how the family, religion and socioeconomic class map onto the lives of queers in this hemisphere. In his reflection on LGBTQ activism De la Dehesa (2010) speaks of “the violence of modernity” as expressed through globalized LGBTQ identity politics that has reproduced narratives about progress and civilization that marginalize other expressions of sexuality and gender. That said, he locates queer activism in Latin America among other social movements in the region:

The proliferation of social movements throughout the region mobilizing in opposition to authoritarian governments and the growing importance of human rights in shaping public discourse marked something fundamentally new in organized civil society’s relationship with politics, holding out the promise that activists could expand and deepen the parameters of citizenship and begin holding states accountable in ways that might intercede in and challenge asymmetric relations of power... (de la Dehesa 2010: 209)

Conclusion and chapter outline

This project has been informed by my previous research on anti-queer/trans violence in Colombia (Payne 2016) and has also led to three scholarly publications, entitled, “The researcher-witness of violence against queers: One scholar-activist’s pathway through lament” (Payne 2019), “Queer urban activism under state impunity: Encountering an LGBTTTI pride archive in Chilpancingo, Mexico” (Payne 2020), and “Territorial inequality driven by tourism: A queer mapping of urban space in Acapulco, Mexico” (Payne 2023).

The first chapter has outlined the dimensions of this study, a spatial analysis of violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico and introduced key arguments for a queer theory of violence. Drawing on the thinking of Deborah A. Thomas, Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, Doreen Massey, Giorgio Agamben, Laura Segato and others, I introduced Guerrero as an event, a political configuration, a trajectory, a space of exception, and as a place shaped by “the second state” and formed through the transnational. I summarized scholarly thinking of William Pansters and Joe Stout regarding the history of violence in Mexico. I also engaged with the development of queer theory in relation to violence, drawing on the thinking of Maya Mikdashi, Jasbir Puar, Mauricio List Reyes, Eric A. Stanley and others, to develop the framework for a queer theory of violence. I also introduced the concept of the *sallyport* to better understand political violence in spaces impacted by conflict impacts sexual and gender minorities. In subsequent chapters I discuss how these themes emerge in relation to the LGBTQ rights movement in the state of Guerrero. To close this first chapter, I provide a summary of the principal themes covered in the rest of the chapters of this dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I lay out the methodological choices and outcomes relevant to this project. I consider my intersectional positionality in relation to this research project and outline how the emergent field of queer conflict research, including its insights in relation to queering the study of violence, informs it. Drawing on the thinking of Kathy Charmaz and others, I review the tenets of Grounded Theory and how I have applied them to ensure that my theorization has emerged directly from the research findings, while at the same time drawing on feminist and queer considerations for doing research. I also outline the primary research tools that have been employed, including participant-observation of

a fragmented social movement and deep encounters with key players through in-depth interviews, triangulated with hemerographic (press analysis), an in-depth analysis of a visual archive of Pride events in the state that covers more than a decade, as well as other documentary data. I also reflect on the importance of engaging with this project as “sensitive research” formed in a context of heightened violence and uncertainty.

Chapter 3 provides a succinct story of the LGBTTTI sector and its antecedents in the state of Guerrero and includes an examination of organizing in this state from 2002 to 2013. This analysis of the role of LGBTQ activism in a peripheral state capital city in southern Mexico addresses a gap in the scholarly literature that has ignored Pride events in smaller cities in the global south. A private archive made available to me by an activist-photographer helps frame my telling of the story of the movement of sexual and gender identity rights as a specific geography of this place that celebrates classic Mexican pageantry and fiesta-making tinged with transnational dimensions. I ground this story in historic understandings of gender and sexuality in this region with particular attention to the role of the Mexican Revolution and of international tourism in the rearticulation of gender and sexuality. Building on social movement literature, I outline the contours of organized LGBTTTI activism across this state, from cosmopolitan Acapulco to a host of provincial cities still marked by colonial social structures and to small towns where Indigenous identities are significant. I review the place of LGBTTTI organizing in the state of Guerrero in the wider story of queer identities and activism in Mexico. Finally, I give an account of the relationship between territoriality, sexual/gender identity, and violence through a close read of the story of Amelio Robles and the town of Xochipala.

In Chapter 4, I use the emerging body of carceral geographies literature (Allspach 2010; Moran *et al.* 2012; McWatters 2013; Turner and Peters 2017; Wilson Gilmore 2022) to further consider the event of the prison drag show as an anamnesis to examine the differentially permeable boundaries faced by sexual and gender dissidents in an ostensibly liberal society nevertheless marked by a frail legal regime and by the imbrication of governance structures with proscribed economic activity that puts this liberality in doubt. This chapter also includes an overview of the violence that sexual and gender minorities have experienced across the state, with a particular focus on how sociopolitical realities in different regions impact upon the lived experience of these

communities. Relying on data obtained through in-depth interviews triangulated with a hemerographic review, I provide a snapshot of violence perpetrated against LGBTTTI persons across the state of Guerrero in the first long decade of the 21st century. I include chronicles from my journeys to various regions of the state, stories recounted by activists and others with knowledge about the violence queer and trans people face in some of the small towns and cities across Guerrero. This part of my inquiry proposes the metaphor of the *sallyport* as a useful tool for the interrogation of transnationalism in our time.

Chapter 5 provides a close reading of three recent horrific homicides of queers in the state capital, Chilpancingo, including well-known queer activist Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera in May 2011, of trans youth “Almendra” Antonio Calderón Peralta in June 2012, and of high-level civil servant Salvador Becerril Gómez in March 2013. Building on Dominguez-Ruvalcaba’s theorization of the role of masculinity in the construction of Mexico as a modern nation as well as on academic literature on feminicide, I propose that the crucial issue may not actually be whether the violence I am examining is particularly motivated by homophobia or transphobia but rather the production of *homo sacer* in particular places and its usefulness for a particular configuration of the state. Chapter 6 considers lethal violence against queer and trans persons in the large urban centre of Acapulco in recent years and in so doing seeks to respond to Brown’s (2008) call to theorize urban homosexualities outside the global north on their own terms.

Finally, Chapter 7 provides an analysis of the relationship between social movement, subjectivity, violence, the state and the international at the present time in Guerrero, Mexico, including additional thoughts on a queer theory of violence. A consideration of two masks I acquired early in my fieldwork serve as a touchstone to engage with the violence against LGBTQ persons considered in this project. Entitled “The Closet” and “The Girl”, these artifacts ground my articulation of the modern nation-state as an assemblage of power in palimpsestic connection with that which precedes, supercedes, and borders it and the multilateral relationship among sexuality, gender, and the state in a particular place in the early 21st century that results. As part of my intervention in a queer theory of violence, I develop the concept of the *abdicated state* to understand the emergence of a specific iteration of the modern state in face of relevant transcontinental neoliberal forces.

Giles and Hyndman (2004: 11) remind us of the feminist edict to look beyond simple binaries in our efforts to understand sites of violence, noting that in such places—like in all places, “[n]ationalism, gender, and sexuality are socially and culturally constructed and often mutually constituted.” They also insist that cultures are “infinitely malleable maps of meaning within a material economy of nationality, sexuality, class, caste, religion and gender” (Giles and Hyndman 2004: 17). This dissertation seeks to trace these maps of meaning in relation to violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico. Building on my concept of the *sallyport* as an illustrative metaphorical tool, I articulate how the context of Guerrero, Mexico, provides insights into the relationship between violence against queer and trans people and GBV, how a context of impunity coupled with complicity leads to perverse engagements of LGBTQ activists with the state, and the ways that homonationalism contributes to a nefarious transnational context that worsens violence experienced by queer and trans people. I conclude with a brief reflection on grief and research.

¹ Terminology is fraught. When referring to the sexual and gender rights movement in Mexico, for consistency I have adopted the acronym LGBTTTTIQ used by Mexico’s National Centre for Human Rights (Donoso Jiménez et al, 2018, p.23), which refers to “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, *travesti*, intersex, queer.” *Travesti* (transvestite) is a term used by some people who were assigned male at birth but develop a feminine or transfeminine gender identity. When referring to the sexual and gender rights movement in Guerrero, I have used the acronym used there during the time of the field research, which is LGBTTTTI. When referring more generally to a transnational movement for sexual and gender rights, I use LGBTQ.

² This text has been translated from the original Spanish by the author. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Spanish to English are by the author.

³ It is both difficult and important to delineate what exactly is meant when using terms such as sex, gender, sexuality, and gender identity. I follow the anglophone feminist tradition of contrasting biological sex with gender, understood as a social construction (Pratt 2009: 268). While I am mostly uninterested in sex per se in this dissertation, I recognize that the idea of the fixity of biological sex is itself contested (Valentine 2009: 679). Sexuality is also an elusive term, though in this dissertation the primary focus is on what the local LGBTQ community in Guerrero refers to as “sexual diversity”, the movement to destigmatize and legitimize a broad range of expressions of sexuality delinked from heteronormative dictates. Finally, I use the term gender identity in reference to subjectivities seen as non-conforming in relation to dominant expectations of gender expression linked to a fixed concept of sex. For a useful discussion of sex-gender dissidence (*disidencia sexo-genérica*) in the context of Mexico, see Monroy Cuellar (2021).

⁴ It is important to note that Melendez’s Well is not the only clandestine grave that has been discovered in the area. For example, on May 29, 2010, the remains of about 55 people were discovered in an unused mineshaft in nearby Taxco (Covarrubias 2010).

⁵ Personal communication with Luis Hernández Navarro, a renowned Mexican journalist and author who writes for Mexico’s national leftist paper *La Jornada*. Hernández says there are more Guerrero-born people living in Chicago than in Guerrero’s own capital city Chilpancingo.

⁶ The violence that Guerrero faces became known to the world in September 2014, when 43 university students were disappeared from the downtown streets of its third largest city by an amalgam of state forces (police and military) together with criminal gangs associated with drug trafficking.

⁷ *Mexica* and *Aztec* can be considered to refer to the same people, culture, and empire prior to the arrival of the Spanish to Mexico. The term “Aztec” was popularized by 19th century German scholar Alexander Humboldt and evokes their origins prior to arriving in the Valley of Mexico in the 14th century, while “Mexica” is the term used at the time of contact in the 16th century. Their descendants in the post-contact period are referred to as *Nahua* (as speakers of Nahuatl, the Aztec/Mexica language.) Mirandé (2017: 51) says that “Aztec” references a national unity that did not actually exist while “Mexica” is “reserved for the people who lived in Tenochtitlan.

⁸ These figures are based on my reading of data available in López Guzmán (2007).

⁹ Guerrero also figures prominently in Mexico’s War of Independence against Spain. The nascent republic’s first constituent congress, known as the Congress of Anáhuac, took place in 1813 in Guerrero’s state capital, Chilpancingo. That gathering began with the declaration of the “Feelings of the Nation” [Sentimientos de la Nación] that installed representative government and formally abolished slavery, torture and class distinctions in the nascent republic. As well, the Solemn Act of the Declaration of Independence of Northern America [el Acta Solemne de la Declaración de la Independencia de la América Septentrional], the first official document to establish the separation of Mexico from Spanish rule, was declared in the Chilpancingo Congress later the same year (Illiades 2011: 49).

¹⁰ Illiades (2011) says that this decision was in large part due to the insistence of two prominent leaders of the Mexican War of Independence who had each later been elected president of the country, Nicolás Bravo and Juan N. Álvarez, who both came from Guerrero.

¹¹ *Cacique* is an Arawak word that means “the one who... keeps a house...” (Knight 2005: 10). The title *cacique* was used in colonial Mexico to refer to Indigenous leaders, then in the nineteenth century republican period to denote any sort of “political boss... who... stood at the interface between “traditional” communities and the new ostensibly “modern” institutions of the (usually republican) nation state” and remains a “ubiquitous” figure in Mexican politics to the present day in which the cacique operates as the political boss operating within a clientelist¹¹ system (Knight 2005: 11-12).

¹² Octavio Paz (1950/1985) says that the Mexican Revolution was not “socialist,” at least not in the European sense of the word and that its motivations were primarily endogenous. He argues that “our social movement grew up of our own soil, out of the lacerated hearts of our people,” and that “[o]ur movement was distinguished by a lack of any previous ideological system and by a hunger for land” (Paz 1950/1985: 137, 141).

¹³ Following the thinking of the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, Octavio Paz (1950/1985:127) asserts that a nation requires a past that influences it inactively and a valid historical project that is capable of animating dissimilar spirits and of giving unity and transcendence,” something he proposes commenced in Mexico starting with the Reform Period in the 1850s.

¹⁴ While agreeing that the Spaniards arrived at what was without a doubt a very large city, Stephen O. Murray (2010) says that Paris was larger.

¹⁵ See Endnote 7.

¹⁶ Octavio Paz (1950/1985: 55) made a similar observation a half-century before Massey, noting that for the Aztecs, “space and time were bound together and formed an inseparable whole... to be born on a certain day was to pertain to a place, a time... and a destiny... [and that] there were as many “time-spaces” ... as there were combinations in the priestly calendar...”

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt (1969: 7) also pays attention to the idea of the event, noting that “events” by definition “interrupt routine processes and routine procedures.” Arendt cautions that in our examination of the unfolding of such events, the danger is that we often only see only what we expect to see.

¹⁸ Literally, “the north,” the expression “El Norte” has become a moniker of the U.S. in the Mexican imagination to describe the destination implicated by the trajectory of millions of its citizens. In recent years, Canada has started to register in this vocabulary as more Mexicans see it in similar light.

¹⁹ For example, Mountz (2011: 386) notes that Agamben’s “spaces of exception tell us something about where and how sovereign power orders territory and people, often by using geography to exclude them as exceptions to the law,” but then underlines that Agamben fails to consider how the real people performing the roles of sovereign and *bare life* actually negotiate the spaces to which they are assigned.

²⁰ Combessie’s (1998: 127) *sensitive perimeter*, the neighbourhood that surrounds a prison, the “no man’s land that demarcates the institution both materially and symbolically from its broader environment,”

provides another analogy for Guerrero's place as both adjacent to and formed in relation to the global north.

²¹ According to ICG (2015), the national average for the conviction rate across Mexico is slightly higher at sixteen percent of registered homicides, though this figure may not take into account disappearances.

²² This key role is demonstrated by how for more than two centuries, the Spanish colony of the Philippines was administered from Mexico, and the governors were almost exclusively Mexican-born rather than Spanish-born during that period.

²³ This is reflected in the official name of the country to the present day—The United Mexican States

²⁴ A period defined by the dictatorial presidency of Porfirio Diaz and dominated by scientific liberals,

²⁵ In his early 19th century survey of the political geography of New Spain, Alexander von Humboldt (1811: 92) discussed the deleterious impact of disease on the Indigenous population throughout the colonial period but also noted that, “[t]he working of the mines has long been regarded as one of the principal causes of the depopulation of America.” Based on his extensive consultation of available colonial documents and archival material in Mexico City, he calculated the population of the Viceroyalty at about 5.2 million people in 1793. This was likely significantly smaller than the population had been three centuries earlier when Cortez arrived, something Humboldt commented was visible in the cultural landscape: “The extensive ruins of towns and villages in Mexico under the 18° and 20° of latitude undoubtedly prove that the former population of that part of the kingdom was much greater than the present” (Humboldt 1811: 68.)

²⁶ Guerrero, Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Chiapas are the four Mexican states almost entirely south of the 18th parallel. Of these, Humboldt only visited Guerrero (he began his year by landing in Acapulco in March 1803. McCaa (1997) critically reviews available estimates and concludes that the population before the Conquest was at least five million and possibly as many as 25 million. He says that while disease was certainly the primary cause of the 16th century demographic disaster, that overwork, the disruption of the Indigenous economy, ecological distress, and forced displacement also played a role.

²⁷ The Mexican revolution began in 1910 with an attempt to overthrow the liberal dictator Porfirio Diaz, putting into motion a series of contestations that would cost more than ten percent of the population their lives. The end date has always been harder to pin down: While the Mexican Constitution was adopted in 1917, heavy fighting continued well into 1920 and intermittent armed conflict between belligerent groups took place past 1930. Until 1950, the annual homicide rate remained high, always above 45 per 100,000 per year, and then dropped steadily until the 1970s. Through the following two decades the homicide rate stayed fairly constant at around 20 homicides per 100,000 per year, followed by a slow but steady drop in levels starting in the late 1980s that continued until 2007 when the rate was below 10 homicides per 100,000 per year, the threshold for epidemic violence set by the World Health Organization (For more detailed analysis, see: Valle-Jones 2011; Pinker and Mack 2014; Kawas 2016; Collman 2017).

²⁸ Pansters' (2012) typology has several other limitations: His focus on motivation brings to mind Arendt's caution that what matters most are the means. He ignores the ways in which specific acts of violence may have multiple motivations and that various types of violence support each other. He seems to take the focus off the widespread human suffering that is the result of violence in its various forms. And while Pansters (2012: 25) does acknowledge that “state, partisan, and corporatist institutions are governed by informal... political groups, patrimonial practices, and personal loyalties,” and that “patrimonialism, clientelism, and *caciquismo* [bossism] have profound bearings on the nature of Mexican state-making,” overall he provides a quintessentially Weberian, state-centred liberal analysis of the challenges Mexico faces, which while descriptive, is insufficiently analytical and fails to provide a clear way forward. Nevertheless, the typology provides us with a starting point for disarticulating various manifestations of violence.

²⁹ While Knight notes that violence is key to the power of the *cacique*, Knight (2012: 118) rejects any “grand psycho-cultural theories that attribute Mexico's supposed propensity to violence” to a pre-colonial or colonial past and instead stresses that “violence—like many other forms of human behaviour—is chiefly the product of circumstances... and... should be analyzed in context...” In the present day, these social patterns are reflected in the realities of drug trafficking, a trade that depends on the U.S. market.

³⁰ Pile (1997:17) points out that both Castells and Fanon also make this point, that “[r]esistance... cannot simply address itself to changing external physical space... but must also engage the colonized spaces of people's inner worlds.”

Chapter 2 - A Research Journey: Winding Roads and Sometimes Losing the Map

The most worthless literature of the world has been that which has been written by the [people] of one nation concerning the [people] of another.

Stephen Crane (1895)
The Mexican Lower Classes³¹



Figure 2.1 – Childhood home of transwoman murdered days after her 18th birthday

(Source: W. Payne)

Introduction

This project has unfolded as an intuitive process of exploration of what it means for queers to live in places marked by high levels of violence (see Figure 2.1). To ground this consideration in the material world, I have focused on the State of Guerrero in southern Mexico, a place where longstanding patterns of social and political violence have reached new levels of entrenchment over the past long decade, a jurisdiction where

no one claims that the rule of law reigns and where references to widespread impunity in relation to violence are commonplace. I have used a range of methods and strategies to try to get at what it means to *think spatially* about this conflagration in which bodies are etched with violence in multiple ways. This chapter starts with an articulation of the methodological framework of this project, followed by a description of the methods used.

The methodological framework of this project is guided by the *doing* of feminist geopolitics, “a field of inquiry that sheds light on the lives of people across the globe, . . . aims to produce knowledge that helps people improve the condition of their lives, and . . . draws attention to how these conditions are shaped by all manner of political, economic, cultural and environmental factors” (Dixon 2015: 1). Hyndman (2001: 219) stresses that a feminist geopolitics, “embodies an approach that advocates a finer scale of ‘security’ accountable to people . . . and analyzes the spaces of violence that traverse public/private distinctions,” while Dowler and Sharp (2001: 174) insist that a feminist geopolitics is neither “a traditional mapping of boundaries [n]or an embracing of the fluidity of international politics” Hyndman (2004: 319) reminds us that a *feminist* lens focuses us on unequal power relations and calls for an analytics and action grounded in “the care of bodies” such that a focus on security includes not only the state but also, “the security and well-being of people who live in and across its borders.” Hyndman (2007: 42) insists that feminist geopolitics in the context of violent conflict narratives sees everyday people as “embodied political subjects” and “forges a space for the telling of their stories.” Dixon (2015: 13) follows Hyndman’s assertion that a feminist geopolitics implies a feminist material approach, one that considers “the ways in which bodies are configured as having a particular place not only in relation to other bodies but in the world at large.” As such, the methodological choices of this project sought to establish as political subjects the sexual and gender minorities who are faced with the impunity that grips the state of Guerrero, people whose relationship with the state and the transnational merits attention.

Fieldwork for this dissertation took me to six of Guerrero’s seven regions (See map in Appendix 1).³² The cartel violence that dominates news stories about Mexico has affected most corners of Guerrero, though the large cities in the central part of the state have been especially impacted (Kyle 2015; Beittel 2022). Acapulco—once the

playground of Hollywood stars—is now better known for having the second highest homicide rate in the world outside of formal war zones, while Chilpancingo—long considered a sleepy backwater town that became a state capital because of the vagaries of history—now features prominently in the national news as a city where political strife competes for ink with brutal acts of violence by organized criminal elements. Likewise, the social and political fabric of the towns along the western boundary of the state has been frayed to such an extent that international travel advisories make special mention of this otherwise peripheral region aptly called Tierra Caliente (“hotlands”), where organized crime spilling over from the neighbouring state of Michoacán has brought with it a regime of lawlessness. On my first visit to that area, I was advised by trusted sources that to seek details of cases of homophobic and transphobic violence from local law enforcement could lead to a quick call to a hired assassin before I had time to get out of town. Of course, I didn’t go to the police station that day, and throughout this project my practice was to pay close attention to the counsel of trusted informants in order to stay safe.

While none of the 81 municipalities of the state have been unmarked by organized violence, some towns and cities appeared to be holding on to a sense of normalcy during the time I conducted fieldwork. For example, the eastern part of the state—home to hidden beaches and Indigenous communities nestled in the verdant mountains—did resist the incursion of armed actors through the creation of self-defence forces made up of members of the local community. But then, in September 2014, 43 student teachers were forcibly disappeared in the city of Iguala. The students, from Raul Burgos Rural Teachers’ College located in the village of Ayotzinapa a short drive from the state capital, were never seen again. While DNA analysis has linked bone fragments found in the nearby town of Cocula to three of the 43 missing students, the details of how the bone fragments ended up where they were found remain murky (Mexico missing students 2021). What is known is that police, military, politicians, and organized crime were all involved. This forced disappearance of unarmed students from marginalized backgrounds and the impunity that continues to the present moment regarding their disappearance put Guerrero on the map of the international media. Waves of violence continue to wash over Guerrero, and as of 2024 show no signs of abating.

I first travelled to Guerrero in June 2011 to attend a planning meeting of a human rights organization called Peace Brigades International (PBI), which has had a field presence in this state since 1999. This trip took place a few weeks after a prominent gay activist named Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera (mentioned in Chapter 1) was brutally murdered in the capital city of the state, news of which had reached me in Canada through an Amnesty International report. Since 1990, work in peacebuilding, human rights, and international protective accompaniment has brought me to various places across Latin America, including extended stints in Chiapas (Mexico) and Santander (Colombia). After many years as a fieldworker and program coordinator with Community Peacemaker Teams, I served in an advisory role with PBI between 2010 and 2018. With assistance from colleagues, in that initial trip to Guerrero in 2011, I contacted the surviving leadership of CEPRODEHI, the organization that Leija Herrera, the murdered activist, had led. Encouraged by them, I decided to focus on Guerrero as the primary field site for this project. Over the following three years, I travelled to this southern Mexican state five more times as part of this project, including several short research trips of one to three weeks as well as two multi-month trips. In total, I spent more than eight months crisscrossing the state, meeting with community leaders, activists, government officials and others who had knowledge about violence against queers and efforts to resist it and attending related events and visiting relevant spaces.

The primary method used for this dissertation was semi-structured interviews (individual and group), triangulated with an activist focus group, as well as extensive participant-observation, daily review of local news sources during the fieldwork period, a private archive, and informed by scholarly literature on Guerrero and related themes. A local advisory committee assisted in the development of the project. This somewhat informal committee emerged from initial conversations with leading activists in the state capital immediately following the murder of Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera and came to include key activists in other cities. While initially, I asked specific people to participate in this role based on their evident knowledge, over time these activists regularly reached out to me to check in about the progress of the research and to offer advice regarding challenges I faced, recommendations regarding who to contact in other regions of the state, and guidance regarding the navigation of personal safety as I moved from town to

town. This research used a constructivist lens, which in the case of the interviews means seeking out that which is meaningful—the gestalt of the narrative—through a subject-subject relationship with the interviewee, something which requires a context of trust, collaboration, and shared goals (Manning 1997; Aitken 2010).



Figure 2.2 – Zumpango Pride Parade, 2012

(Source: W. Payne)³³

Participant-observation involved documentation of many community events including Pride marches in six different communities and over a dozen drag shows and LGBTTTI beauty pageants, events that provided both information and contacts for potential interviews (see Figure 2.2). In Chilpancingo, I attended the second ever LGBTTTI Pride Week, an event organized on a shoestring budget to honour the memory of that recently murdered community leader, Leija Herrera, mentioned earlier. In Ometepec, the regional centre of the eastern coastal region, I marched in their first Pride march ever—the organizers had never even attended one before and told me that they

decided what elements to include by watching videos of other Pride marches they found on the web.

In the course of travelling around the state to meet with activists and attend events, my trajectory crossed with those of others that ended up shaping this dissertation in concrete ways. In Zihuatanejo, I stumbled across a run-down bar named after Oscar Wilde where I met an activist who invited me to attend a drag show he was organizing in the local prison the next day. Seeing an advertisement for the Pride event in the town of Ometepec in the eastern reaches of the state, I connected with the organizers via Facebook messenger, who offered to arrange accommodations for me. I found myself crossing the state, changing buses a couple of times along the way and encountered a group of fierce queer activists organizing a Pride event without ever having attended one themselves. In Chapter 3 I return to the fascinating way in which virtual transnationalism is still relevant to groups with little access to “globalization.” Through an interview with a lesbian activist in the capital city, I learned about a historical queer figure from a small town in the central highlands whose life has shaped local knowledge about queerness and gender. Armed with nothing more than the name of the village, I found myself meeting with villagers in Xochipala about the town’s most famous son, Amelio Robles—a man who had been identified as a girl and a woman until his early twenties when he joined the armed resistance to the Porfiriato (the reign of president-dictator Porfirio Diaz discussed in Chapter 1). Soon elevated to the title of colonel in the Mexican revolutionary army because of his accomplishments in the war, he later returned to his birthplace and lived out his life as the town’s patriarch until the 1980s. Everyone in town knows that Colonel Amelio Robles had lived as a girl and a woman until his transition in his early twenties, and one of the town’s two elementary schools is named after him (see Figure 2.3).³⁴ Over the course of the field research the Mexica concept of space discussed in Chapter 1 as the coincidence of events and as trajectory came to be key in terms of how I understood this research project, something I take up in greater length in Appendix 2.



Figure 2.3 - Colonel Robles Elementary School, Xochipala, Guerrero

(Source: W. Payne)

A central piece of the research process involved the documentation of violent deaths, learning about sexual and gender minorities from across the state whose lives had been snuffed out, and considering how a constellation of factors matters differently depending on who and where you are. The role of the state and the ways that it maps onto the lives and bodies of queer subjects because of how it creates and perpetuates patterns of impunity where rule of law is at best aspirational and likely less than that, emerged as a key learning. Queer activism, how lesbian, gay, and trans people are engaged in a conversation about the inclusion of marginalized sectors of society, even in a context marked by uncertainty and fear, also became a key theme that the data suggested. The somewhat disparate themes covered by the rest of this dissertation are the product of this point-to-point navigation rooted in a commitment to Grounded Theory, something I explain in greater detail below. First though, I reflect on the methodological

implications of my own subjectivity as a privileged outsider and of the commitment to pay attention to the simultaneity of stories and the trajectories it fosters.

Malinchismo and researcher positionality

As a researcher focused on a place that is not my own, it is crucial to pay careful attention to my own positionality. How does my whiteness create safety or danger for me in the places where this research takes me? More important, how does my whiteness create safety or danger for those who agree to participate with me in this research as interviewees or advisors? To answer these questions, as a researcher from north of the border working in Mexico, I needed to pay critical attention to the ways in which the outsider is understood in this context. When I asked a key contact why he felt so strongly that I should do this research he told me that precisely because of *malinchismo* it is possible for me to do this particular work that would be more difficult at best and perhaps impossible for him or for other Mexicans.

What is malinchismo? The term derives from the 16th century figure of La Malinche, Cortés' translator and mistress, and has come to mean, "those who want Mexico to open itself to the outside world" (Paz 1950/1985: 86). Referred to as "Marina" in Cortés' letters and also known by her Indigenous name "Malintzin," La Malinche is remembered as an Indigenous woman of noble origins, a skilled linguist who interpreted for the conquistador in his initial conversations with Aztec emperor, and also as Cortés' concubine and mother of his son. She also reportedly warned the Spanish of a planned attack by an Indigenous army.

Hamnett (1999) underlines that this figure signifies the betrayal of Mexican integrity and values in favour of the foreign. Pérez-Lagunes (2001: 2) says "*La Malinche* has been perceived as a heroine, the tongue, the Conquest's verb, and also as a traitor, symbolic mother of the mestizo and whore." Monsiváis (2001) tells us that "malinchismo" became a derogatory term in Mexico starting in the mid 19th century during the liberal reform in order to identify those Mexicans who have a preference for foreigners and consider them superior, and was deployed as part of a process of *desespañolización* (de-Spanishification) that sought to shed the heritage of both the colonial and the pre-colonial in favour of the formation of a liberal Mexican identity

without a past. In the post-revolutionary period, as Mexico forged a national identity rooted in Indigenous values that rejected the Porfiriato's preoccupation with all things French, the figure of La Malinche gained increasingly negative connotations and became a national myth (Pérez-Lagunes 2001: 35, 87). In contrast, Glantz (2001) notes the vindication of this figure in recent years as representative of multiculturalism and the *Mestizo* nation. She underlines efforts by scholars and others to challenge the misogynist deployment of this figure and points out the deployment of the figure of La Malinche to support Chicana struggles yet worries that these shifts tend to downplay the real and epistemic violence of the conquest.

Everhart (2014: 411) contends that *malinchista* refers to someone who wants to “open the veins of Mexico to the political powers of other countries.”³⁵ In an essay that examines the poetry of two prominent post-revolutionary Mexican gay literary figures Salvador Novo and Xavier Villaurrutia in terms of their queer perspectives, Evarhart (2014: 419) describes how malinchismo from the Porfiriato to the post-revolutionary period came to be associated with homosexuality as an affront to Mexican manhood and to the emergent idea of machismo as key to the revolutionary figure, a taint that clung to these authors: He notes that, *despite* their fervent patriotism: “[a]s homosexuals in a *machista* society they were turned into *malinchistas*.”³⁶ Yet, Evarhart (2014) underlines, they persisted as literary figures that nevertheless sought to challenge patriarchy in Mexican society and now provide that society with an example of “the flagrant homosexual as a powerful figure.”³⁷

I return to the comment from the key contact person mentioned above, that this research project is easier for a foreigner to conduct, precisely because of malinchismo. Really, it was a lament that he, despite his longstanding commitment to queer activism and his own work as an academic who examines queer issues, could not take on this project precisely because of his own positionality, the ways in which his gay Mexican identity would work against him, and perhaps more importantly, put him in physical danger. This reminded me of the importance to walk carefully, to remember that I am a foreigner and that everything I do will be through that identity and in relation to the long cultural and political history of intervention that Mexico has experienced.

This point about positionality brings me to the theoretical thinking behind it, that of intersectionality. This concept was first advanced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991) and developed by others since, especially women of colour, to address how subject positions based on various identities such as race, class, sex, gender, nationality, sexuality, ability, and so on must be understood in relationship, and that the grid matters. Positionality has to do with where we fit on a grid of intersecting identities, on various forms of unearned privilege. Puar (2013) recalls that Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) traffic intersection analogy sought to serve the political goal of centering women of colour (WOC) in the discussion but laments that to some extent the result has been the opposite, such that whiteness has been reinscribed as the starting point from which "difference" is measured. To address this, Puar (2013: 50) proposes that intersectionality be understood in productive tension with the concept of assemblage, "that which is prior to, beyond, or past the grid." Puar (2013: 54) points out that, "many of the cherished categories of the intersectional mantra . . . are the products of modernist colonial agendas and regimes of epistemic violence . . . operative through a Western/Euro-American epistemological formation through which the notion of discrete identity has emerged." These very categories—she gives the example of sexuality—were formed in a particular historical context but were subsequently reframed as ontological truths. Assemblage focuses on arrangement, and thus on relations, the way things are connected. Puar (2013: 57) proposes that "assemblages are interesting because they de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing," though one might note that the same logic applies to other kinds of bodies as well—including nations—a point to which I will return. As such, Puar (2013: 58) proposes that categories such as race, gender, and sexuality are better understood as "encounters between bodies . . . rather than simply . . . attributes of subjects." It is the arrangement that matters most, and Puar points out these various categories are really actually events and are meaningless outside of the particulars of encounters between bodies.

Let us stick with this point that subjectivity can be understood as event. Puar (2013) argues that while the intersectional critique of the past couple of decades has certainly intervened in the social structures that require a fixed rights-bearing subject, this critique has also reproduced the fixed subject of modernity and thus reinforces the related

tendency to discipline and control bodies. Puar proposes that assemblage thinking not only, “destabilize[s] identities and grids, but also the forces that continue to mandate and enforce them . . . [and then] asks what is prior and beyond what gets established (Puar 2013: 63).” In this project, I seek to pay attention to my own positionality, and to do so through Puar’s assemblage lens, to understanding myself as a body that affects other bodies through various trajectories of privilege and oppression, but also to understand Mexico as a body that does not start and end at its “skin,” so to speak, its borders, and to recognize that the rights-bearing subjectivity of modern Mexico exists in palimpsestic relationship with that which precedes and supersedes it, and assembled it through colonial and postcolonial processes.

Puar (2013) builds on Brian Massumi’s (2002: 15) concept of the event-space in which an event is not action or activity but instead the “folding of dimensions of time into each other.” Puar recounts Massumi’s (2002: 81) example of a gendered encounter on Super Bowl Sunday during which, “the male’s already-constituted propensity to strike” is made manifest. This recognition that maleness—masculinity—might be understood not so much as a characteristic but rather as a predilection towards striking out, towards the assemblage of event-spaces that will be marked by this specific kind of action, led me to think about how other positionalities on the Crenshaw grid might also be reconceived as action, as always potentially formative of event-spaces. So, as maleness is associated with a propensity to strike, whiteness is tied to a propensity to dominate. Wealthiness is linked to a propensity to exploit, straightness to a propensity to normalize, middle-agedness to a propensity to marginalize, able-bodiedness to a propensity to control, cisgenderness³⁸ to a propensity to essentialize, and so on. This way of thinking is useful in that it disrupts the idea of essential characteristics—for example, that males are inherently violent—but it does not erase the social reality of a world in which gender matters. And in which race, class, sexual orientation, ability, and gender identity also matter. As a researcher who is usually read as someone with gender, race, and class privilege, it behooves me to pay attention to these predilections.

Tracing the genealogies of blunt objects

In our history appears an element unknown in Spain's: the world of the Indian. It is the dimension at the same time intimate and unfathomable, innermost and unknown, of my country. Without this dimension we would not be what we are . . . The world of the Indian was from the beginning, the other world, in the strongest sense of the term. Otherness that, for us Mexicans, becomes identity, distance that is closeness.

Octavio Paz (1981, 2012: 544)

It is important to keep in mind, “the simultaneity of stories,” to keep in mind the need to, “replace the single history with many” (Massey 2005:14), something that Octavio Paz underlines has special relevance in the case of Mexico given the topological dimensions of Mexican identity in relation to Indigeneity and colonial processes. Following Massey, I seek to imagine specific spaces not as bounded but rather as constantly produced through relationships and at multiple scales, from the local to the global, with different configurations of resistances and borders/boundaries over time and space (space/time) that matter in the identification of perpetrator beyond a simplistic binary of villain/victim. In this consideration of violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico, I seek to critically engage and challenge the imaginative geographies that cling to this research through grappling with the range of complicities involved in the production of particular violences and through attending to the multiple trajectories that such horrible time-space events unleash.

So, when Almendra, whose story is taken up in greater detail in Chapter 5, lost her life because a perpetrator—likely someone she knew intimately—swung a blunt object at her head in a remote ravine, we can certainly conclude that he³⁹ is the material author of her demise. But if we are going to critically examine how Almendra's perpetrator arrived at the moment where he was able and willing to kill her, it is also important to consider the range of intellectual authors that created the conditions that contributed to her vulnerability and thus to her death. We can also consider production of the subjectivity of the person who killed her. When we consider how it came to be that Leija Herrera's work as a human rights advocate was cut short by a fatal blow using a large rock in a downtown street, also taken up in detail in Chapter 5, it is key to consider

the construction of impunity that has ensured that even this well-documented crime remains unpunished several years later. In the next four chapters, I unpack the historical, social, and political dimensions of the sexual and gender minority sectors of Guerrero and the socio-political context in which they have lived to understand both the violence and the resistance that mark their collective experience.

To truly understand the political in terms of the processes of power that have spatial outcomes in particular places, it is key to recognize the need to keep in focus several scales at the same time. As I interrogate the research findings of this project in the coming chapters, I seek to pay special attention to the spaces of exception marked by the admonition I heard time and again, “Do not go there.” From the Ciudad Altamirano police station that I never visited because of warnings I received, to the “boulevard” that runs alongside a river in the middle of Guerrero’s capital, where I was told to exert extreme caution, to the haphazard suburbs of Acapulco where taxi drivers were decidedly unhappy to take me, to whole stretches of the state such as Tierra Caliente where I was told to take extreme care, to the cautions I receive every time I travel to Mexico, I have learned how places are created through the discourse that surrounds them. In the next chapter, I turn to how sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero have sought to create space for themselves despite very real challenges.

In a careful engagement with anti-queer/trans violence, Stanley (2021: 15) reflects on “[t]he specter of representation, its world-building and world-destroying power [that] is everywhere in [the] pages...” of his writing in a way that resonates with my own experience: “In translating these untranslatable episodes into the written word, of retelling the horrors that consumed and continue to stalk the everyday of many more, any claim to purity must be lost.” Stanley (2021: 15) says that it is necessary to approach these stories “as a praxis of care, as an exercise of solidarity” and to “resist a pornography of violence where death becomes yet another metaphor for the still living...” He reminds us that staying with the harm of these stories is only useful as part of a project that seeks to help dismantle social realities that perpetuates this violence.

A recently published edited volume entitled *Queer Conflict Research: New Approaches to the Study of Political Violence* (Hagen *et al* 2024) provides a useful lens through which to examine the methodological framework of this dissertation’s encounter

with sensitive research. Their project reviews a range of ways for scholars to conduct what they call “queer conflict research”, which includes “research that disrupts and redefines existing methodological and epistemological frameworks of conflict research...” as well as engagement “with queer subjects during and after conflict” (Hagen *et al* 2024: 1). These scholars underline the importance of this emergent body of research that draws on queer theory and related methodologies and methods. They also reflect on ethical considerations related to research with and about queer subjects and communities in conflict-affected contexts and provide resources for approaching this sort of conflict research. While this publication came along too late to inform my own research project, it does provide a useful foil for reflecting on the methodological choices and research practices that I have employed. They also point out that queering conflict research complicates dominant narratives about the progression of LGBTQ rights rooted in the trope of modernity and that security is not a condition that is achieved but rather something that is lived, reflections that resonates with my own findings.

One of this volume’s editors also authors the first chapter of the book based on their own experience as a human rights worker and scholar and their recognition of the need for the documentation of the lives of queer and trans people living in violent contexts to help provoke related political action (Ritholtz 2024). This scholar frames their chapter as a “starter guide” for queer conflict research. They identify a fundamental ontological tension in this category of research, “whether queering a subject matter simply requires a renewed focus on those with non-hegemonic sexual orientations and gender identities or whether there is a certain epistemological approach required to redress the epistemic silence present” given that queer and trans people are so often absent from the study of places affected by conflict (Ritholtz 2024: 23). While recognizing the contributions of queering epistemologies, Ritholtz concludes that the examination of how violent contentious politics impact sexual and gender dissidents constitutes queer conflict research.

Ritholtz (2024) reviews four epistemological approaches that queer conflict researchers use: a) positivism, which views political phenomena as objective; b) postpositivism, also known as critical realism, which recognizes that social processes shape the production of knowledge and so often uses a case-study approach with priority

given to qualitative research (sometimes correlated with quantitative data); c) interpretivism, which grounds its attempts at explaining reality in context and subjectivity; and d) humanistic or postmodern approaches, which focuses on how knowledge itself is shaped by processes that are fundamentally subjective and thus not objectively knowable. Ritholtz (2024: 27) argues that “a queer epistemology of conflict studies”, which builds on feminist standpoint theory and the recognition that knowledge is situated and produced, can “highlight a normative question within... any of the four previously identified epistemic positions.” They further outline this position:

By considering the relationship between sexuality, gender, and hegemonic order, scholars conducting conflict research can utilize a queer epistemological approach not only to extend our understanding of queer and trans experiences of conflict but also to explore how norms pertaining to sexuality and gender might further impact cis and straight populations during conflict, thus complicating existing conceptualizations of the concept.

Ritholz 2024: 29-30

As outlined in Chapter 1, there is an emerging literature that pays attention to the situation of LGBTQ persons in contexts marked by sociopolitical violence and the need to queer the study of this type of violence. Ritholz (2024: 30-32) further identifies three possible frames for queer conflict research: a) *queer as a subject*, focused on the lived experience of queer and trans persons; b) *queer as a structure*, focused on sexuality and gender as key to the structuring of conflict spaces; and c) *queer as a method*, which seeks to destabilize a “cisheterosexist gaze” through queering or deconstructing existing concepts. My own research is rooted in a queer epistemology which fits within Ritholz’s frame of “queer as subject” and takes a postpositivist approach, drawing on qualitative methods to consider a case-study with the goal of theorizing the experiences of sexual and gender dissidents in the context of armed conflict and its counterpart, impunity. I started this project with a commitment to using Grounded Theory, a well-developed approach to postpositivist research, to try to ensure that the theorization emerges from the knowledge gained through the research process. To an extent though, my research also responds to the other frames Ritholtz outlines, by reflecting on how gender and sexuality structure Guerrero as a place experiencing violence and by dismantling standard

cisheteronormative assumptions about how violence works. I have also tried to hold a postmodernist sensibility that considers to what extent it is even possible to draw conclusions beyond the contingent.

A queer ethics of care

Research is always a political project, perhaps in the worst sense when its power relations are denied. Feminists have problematized the proposal that it is possible to conduct research from the vantage of detached observer. As Smith (2010: 167) argues, a commitment to social change through research is more than, “just to ‘give voice’ to those involved (thereby preserving the existing unequal social relations), but to work with people, to listen to their priorities, to engage with the politics and practices of social change, and to take seriously the challenges of not just noting difference but to work with it and across it.” Queer researchers should not be afraid to make our political projects explicit (Detamore 2010). Following Mohanty, the political is personal and calls us to what Detamore (2010: 178) names a “queer ethics for research,” replacing the “liberal fantasies” of liberating the Other with something that “looks much more like kinship.” This research project has also been constructed as an enactment of my queer familial responsibilities, though I need to also recognize the ways such a framing can obscure relations of power between the researcher and the researched (Detamore 2010).

A certain vigilance is required to avoid epistemic violence. Browne and Nash (2010: 7) caution that queer research has its own geography, one that “often leaves unrecognized the situatedness of academics from the global north who become ‘international,’ transcendent . . . whilst those from ‘elsewhere’ are bound to their location.”⁴⁰ In an attempt to escape such an eventuality, I hold to a commitment to a methodology that values knowledge made or stored at the peripheries (Haraway 1988; Johnston and Longhurst 2009; Mitchell 2011). I need to interrogate my positionality as someone with race, gender, class, and passport privilege at every step of the research process and have sought to do so. Feminist research implies paying attention to the process of research itself in which method is data collection, but methodology has to do with how those methods relate to our epistemologies (Harding 1987; Moss 2002). Such attention to the ways in which methodology links our research methods to our ontological

and epistemological stances is also central to queer social science methodologies, though perhaps with even greater attention to how “ontological, epistemological, methodological and methods-related considerations . . . are engaged in mutual and contingent constitution” (Browne and Nash 2010:10). This dialectical relationship between the concrete deployment of methods and these other dimensions of a research paradigm is something that I have tried to keep in mind throughout the research process.

Queer researchers have reflected on a multitude of political and ethical dimensions of research. For example, Thrift says that research is fundamentally a performative act, an affective engagement in which we need to give “a chance to encounters and interactions that . . . are excluded from the definition of what counts as knowledge” (Thrift 2004: 84; see also Dewsbury 2010). However, this “giving a chance” has additional dimensions in a context marked by endemic violence where caution and safety must always be taken into consideration. Some scholars take up the issue of insider/outsider status through a consideration of subjectivity within the research process, emphasizing that the researcher herself is one of the research subjects in any project (Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Waitt 2010). Also, access and security issues related to this project were very much impacted in complicated ways by aspects of my own positionality, someone from the global north with under-earned race and gender privilege related to whiteness and as someone who is often read as cis-male, something I come back to in later chapters. Calling for the queering of the politics of knowledge in conflict research, Serrano-Amaya (2024: 42) calls for “focusing analysis on the interactions between academia and activism... and understanding these interactions as fluid, heterogenous, and overlapping.” This scholar insists that the bidirectionality of the relationship between academia and activism must never be ignored and underlines the importance of considering the theoretical, political, and ethical dimensions of these interactions. Serrano-Amaya (2024: 55), a scholar from the global south whose work is framed as “activist scholarship”, laments the proliferation of “colonial research practices”, including among queer conflict researchers:

...a researcher lands or ‘parachutes’ into a situation with little preparation or understanding, with the aim to collect ‘data’ and to subsequently leave, having extracted the required material without much concern for the subject of study...

[a] practice sometime justified by the novelty of the topic or by the ‘need to do something for those suffering.’

Keeping these cautions and considerations in mind, this project has sought to foreground the matter of whose representation and theorization is centered. Although not strictly conceived as “action research,” this research is guided by the genealogy of feminist geography of recent decades in that it is motivated by political commitments; allied to social movements; and committed to undoing oppressions, social justice, and “acting with” (Lundy and McGovern 2006). With all this in mind, I have sought to take my lead in this project from the questions and concerns guiding queer activists in the state, especially those who agreed to help guide my project and the unfolding of its fieldwork. In the next section, I offer additional comments about my application of Grounded Theory, as reconceived by Charmaz (2006) and others.

Queering Grounded Theory

The initial idea of my own project came from a chance encounter. As a member of the international board of PBI, I was asked to participate in a planning meeting in Mexico that took place in Chilpancingo, the capital city of Guerrero and a place I had never before visited. At that time, the theme of my dissertation research had already been established: I was planning to look at the situation of sexual and gender minorities in contexts marked by armed conflict, organized violence, and impunity. In my consideration of possible ways to conduct this research project I decided that Grounded Theory (GT) would provide a useful methodological approach to this topic given its proven track-record for engaging with topics that have not been considered extensively by scholars. I adopted the primary commitments outlined in this tradition (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006; Wasserman *et al* 2009), adjusting the approach to the specifics and limitations of the project. A key commitment of GT is to saturate the data collection to the extent that the researcher senses that concepts and theorization emerge from the research process itself and then to allow the key themes to emerge from data analysis through a methodical coding process. I endeavoured to follow these tenets, though the sheer volume of the data collected did make it challenging to incorporate in this dissertation all the themes that the data indicated. As introduced in Chapter 1, GT

involves a close read of collective data in an iterative process that leads to a process of theorization that emerges from the findings. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that a methodical, intuition-based approach to data is useful for uncovering the theory embedded in the data, though subsequently scholars have reconsidered this idea of excavation and have reframed GT as a methodology that can lead to the construction of theory (Charmaz 2006).

Judith Wuest (1995) provides an early reflection on the resonances of feminist theory with GT. This scholar observes that GT demonstrates a foundational respect for the production of knowledge through subjective interpretation of social experience by research participants, a position that feminist scholarship also values. Furthermore, Wuest (1995: 128) says that key feminist tenets, that knowledge is “contextual and relational” and that dichotomies are artificial constructions that obscure real understanding of social structure and process, are also central to GT. Charmaz (2006) revises GT to make this consideration of underlying social processes as its key element, and furthermore values a process of drawing on the work of other critical scholars as part of a method that seeks to bring to the surface the researcher’s own hidden assumptions. Wasserman *et al.* (2009) recognize that the analytic process is a cyclical one that eventually leads to conceptual and theoretical insight and allows concepts to emerge from qualitative data through the use of coding without a priori themes in mind. However, they are concerned that this methodological tradition does not provide a clear and systematic manner to explore the relationships between these concepts, a key step in the process of theorization that seeks groundedness in the original data sources. Following Charmaz (2006: 126–127), I have adhered to a definition of theory that is constructivist and “emphasizes *understanding* rather than explanation,” sometimes called “interpretive theory,” which seeks to “[c]onceptualize the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms [and] . . . [to o]ffer an imaginative interpretation.” Charmaz (2006: 131, 148) emphasizes the importance of recognizing one’s own presuppositions, paying attention to how all “analysis is contextually situated in time, place, culture, and situation,” and “on being eclectic, drawing on what works, defining what fits.” Following Charmaz, Asakura (2017: 532) underlines that GT is not about excavating objective reality but rather seeks an “interpretive outcome of how the researcher and the participants together construct...

stories.” This project has endeavoured to work with queer and trans people in Guerrero to construct a productive and useful story about the violence they face.

GT, as originally laid out by Glaser and further refined by Charmaz, Wasserman, and others, has provided a useful guide for each step of this research project. Below, I describe the methods I used as part of this project, including data collection and data analysis as informed by GT. There is also a section on visual archives, that reflects upon this added set of methods and related methodological considerations, the inclusion of which was prompted by the unexpected offer of access to a large private archive related to the project’s core themes. I close the chapter by considering the process of adjusting to the themes that emerged over the course of the data collection process, a key aspect of GT that nevertheless can cause consternation for the researcher.

Queer methods for queer subjects⁴¹

The multiple methods approach that I set out to employ—including participant-observation with LGBTQ organizations and activists, a focus group to suggest initial themes to consider, and in-depth interviews regarding the situation of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, sometimes combined with mental mapping—faced some hiccups along the way. A key organization that I had expected to rely upon disbanded during the early part of the fieldwork phase, though the working relationships I had set up with activists who had long been involved in that organization did nevertheless serve to guide me throughout the project. Despite a strong welcome from an activist organization in Cali, Colombia and some useful early research with them, an initial plan to use a secondary case study considering the violence they face as a foil for gaining a better understanding of the underlying social processes did not come to fruition—in the end the practicalities of travelling across two countries in two different continents as an individual researcher in graduate school proved unworkable. A method not initially planned for but that was embraced because the research process led to it is that of engagement with a visual archive related to queer activism in the state.

The interview is a key method used by social scientists, and one thing that is certain is that formal and informal interviews have provided crucial insight for the project at hand (Longhurst 2010; McDowell 2010; Secor 2010). My interview process has been

guided by scholarly reflection on how to understand interviewing. Scholars have identified that interviews and other talking methods give us information about “events and stories that haven’t been recorded in newspapers or other documents,” but they also “give us access to the ways in which people represent themselves and the world” (Secor 2010: 195). McDowell (2010: 161) reminds us that the interview is not “a straightforward exchange of information,” and calls us to be attentive to how it is “a complex and contested social encounter riven with power relations.” In reflecting on interviews conducted with people from immigrant communities near the U.S.-Mexico border to understand something about their social reality, Aitken (2010: 47) comes to a similar conclusion, and underlines that it is not sufficient for scholars to “simply rework other people’s experiences through [their own] experiences and [through their] writing...,” that scholars must engage with the emotional connectedness produced through the “politics of difference” that characterizes interviews with people whose lived experience is distinct from that of the researcher’s. Aitken (2010: 59) stresses that “the problem is not just to map patterns but to chart the varied processes through which difference is constituted and to elaborate how these processes are embedded in power relations” (Aitken 2010: 59). This scholar challenges other researchers to leave behind notions of research rooted in the othering processes of colonialism and instead embrace the difference and diversity that the research reveals, even when it is unrepresentable. All the interviews drew on the modified biographical method first developed by Rosenthal (1993/2006: 14) to interview armed conflict survivors and perpetrators of the Holocaust meant to arrive at the gestalt of the informants’ narratives, the marrow of their story that may not be reached through overly directive questioning as it relies on a fluid emergence of themes that will possibly not be anticipated by either the researcher or by the research participant.

Another issue addressed by scholarly consideration is the management of self-disclosure for queer interviewers engaged in research. Rogers (2021), who identifies in various ways including as genderqueer, reflects on experiences interviewing a range of people as part of two research projects and the related emotional labour involved in managing discomfort. This scholar underlines that the degree to which researchers disclose aspects of their own identity is a personal choice but that there are always implications of that choice for the self and for the research. Rogers (2021: 35) proposes

that researchers use “the discomfort we experience as researchers as a tool for self-evaluation... [to] see our data in new ways.” The large range of people who agreed to interviews with me were central to the construction of knowledge about this topic and this place in complicated ways that the scholarly literature anticipates.

I conducted 53 formal semi-structured interviews with 58 people as well as other informal conversations that I documented in my field notes. Most interviews lasted between 1-2 hours though some went longer. Those interviewed formally included over two dozen gay men, 13 trans women, three lesbians and a straight woman, almost half of whom were activists and many of whom were leaders of civil society organizations. Nine people were interviewed based on their professional knowledge (four of whom were “on the record”, speaking in their official capacity and chose to be named), two interviews were with groups of family members of people who had been murdered who wanted to be interviewed together, two other interviews were with people who knew each other and wanted to be interviewed together (I refer to these interviews as “group interviews”), one interview was with someone in prison charged with the murder of a gay man, and several interviews were with people with privileged knowledge of a well-known historical figure relevant to this study who changed his public identity from female to male while fighting in the Mexican Revolution (I come back to his story below and in Chapter 3.) The selection of participants depended on a snowball technique in which informants suggested other possible informants and also involved approaching potential informants encountered during ethnographic aspects of the project, something Secor (2010: 201) calls “on-site recruiting.” Secor (2010: 201) says that “the success of interview and focus group research often depends on being ready to diverge from the question guide.” Appendix 3, is the informed consent form used with most informants and includes a schedule of questions that I used as a general guide for interviews and focus groups (Spanish and English versions). Appendix 4 includes a list of the interviews and informal conversations conducted as part of this research project.

The twists and turns of the research process did provide some insightful encounters with government officials, although a striking level of resistance to sharing knowledge held by state entities was also encountered, something that might have been anticipated. Several key interviews with activists from Mexico City allowed for a

national context to inform my thinking. The most difficult interviews were those in which the informant was directly connected to a murdered gay person—including family members and friends as well as one perpetrator, though these encounters also offered some of the most insight into the layers behind the tragic loss of life through violence of someone who had already lived in a certain marginality because of gender or sexual identity. The group interviews mentioned above with family members of people who had been murdered had originally been arranged with individuals and constituted unplanned yet nevertheless useful group interviews that involved “people who share something in common or know each other” (Longhurst 2010: 109). Another unplanned though finally successful group interview took place with four research subjects who decided they would prefer to meet with me as a group. In that case, an HIV specialist had agreed to assist in the recruitment of interview participants in a remote setting but found himself unexpectedly away from work the week prior to the prearranged date and so recruited volunteers at the last minute during the monthly clinic I attended, having travelled by bus for over seven hours the day before.

Two informal focus groups took place early in the first long phase of research and brought together a group of nearly a dozen activists in the state capital who had worked together for many years and were close friends. While they were provided with the informed consent document including the interview schedule’s sample questions, as researcher I sought to focus on listening and recording as those assembled discussed the related themes. Several of them also agreed to act as an informal local advisory committee for this research project and provided insightful support throughout the field work portion of the research. In another case, a focus group that a research participant proposed and offered to arrange in a small regional centre on the Costa Grande region did not end up happening because—according to my contact person—the participants all decided at the last minute not to participate. I suspect that I failed to create the conditions for the trust needed for that event to take place.

Building on the methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that involves going back and forth between data collection and analysis, the reconceptualization of GT offered by Kathy Charmaz (2006) provides a practical guide for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Charmaz maintains that GT methods can

complement other approaches, rejects the earlier idea that focused on the discovery of theory and instead argues that scholars are embedded in the world they study and that theory about social process is constructed, rather than discovered. Using NVivo, I coded the transcripts of all formal interviews as well as field research notes that documented observations during participant-observation aspects of this project, including notes on informal conversations.

Using an emergent and iterative coding process as outlined by Charmaz (2006: 42), I named “segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.” Charmaz (2006) emphasizes that careful attention to the coding process helps ensure that the researcher’s own motives and emotions do not displace what the collected data actually indicates. Data was coded based on 84 substantive codes (aka nodes), based on an “incident to incident” approach, including some codes that can be classified as “in vivo codes” because they reference terminology used by participants (Charmaz 2006: 53-55). While I attempted to stay grounded in the collected data, I found it challenging to completely ignore “extant codes” that occurred to me based on prior examination of related scholarly literature, something that Charmaz (2006: 67) calls “forcing their data” and acknowledges that many researchers experience. Through the coding process, I started to see relations between specific nodes. To help visualize these connections, I started a process of writing the names of the codes on slips of paper and then cleared a wall in my home to start grouping codes based on the emergent themes. Over time, and through the iterative process of data collection and analysis, seven groupings emerged on my wall (in no particular order). In an effort to allow for the ongoing emergence of linkages, I initially resisted naming these groupings, though eventually came to see them under these headings: the state; organized violence; activism; geography; anti-queer trans violence; social identity; and the transnational. These relational groupings came to help shape specific parts of the dissertation.

According to Charmaz (2006: 72), “memo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers,” and are useful for crystallizing emergent concepts and themes. The scholarly publications produced as part of this project emerged out of memo-writing to try to formulate what social processes I think I have learned about. Following GT practice, I conducted several phases of research,

analyzing the collected data in-between so that subsequent phases of research could function as “theoretical sampling... seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in [the] emerging theory” (Charmaz 2006: 96). GT identifies saturation as the point at which the researcher senses there is sufficient data to feel confident that it covers the properties of the identified categories that have emerged through the coding and memoing process. For my project, the process of theoretical sampling involved conducting interviews and participant-observation with activists and other informants in places in Guerrero and related to issues and themes that were indicated in the earlier phases of research. While the initial scope of the project did anticipate some degree of coverage of the various geographical regions of the state, the iterative process of theoretical sampling also allowed for the pinpointing of what additional interviews would be useful to better understand the various emerging dimensions of the social process of violence against queer and trans persons in the state of Guerrero indicated in earlier fieldwork phases. One thing is certain: the key arguments made in this thesis emerged from the data and could not otherwise have been anticipated to any great extent.

Mental mapping, asking research participants to draw maps to identify places that are relevant to the themes they address during an interview, has been used as a research tool to access how people understand places and to learn what information is important to them (Bain, Payne and Isen 2015). While the use of mental mapping as part of a series of initial interviews in this project provided some useful insights, given the extremely sensitive themes raised in the interviews, the process of inviting informants to engage with this method ended up feeling disruptive and contrived, so I dropped it from the semi-structured interview process. The focus group format that was part of the initial proposal also proved difficult to implement, particularly because navigating the process of creating a space that felt safe for a group of participants given the topic and context often felt too fraught, though as noted a couple of very successful focus groups did take place. Longhurst (2010) says that the idea of a focus group is to create a setting in which people feel relaxed talking with each other, something akin to a group of friends, an apt description of an important session held in my apartment part way through the research process, a gathering that brought together nearly a dozen gay men, mostly activists. In

some ways, it felt like what Wekker (2006) called “folk seminar” in which the facilitator laid out the general topic and then picked up on ideas as they emerged.

The winding roads of the research process

As I worked through the research process, there have been hurdles along the way. My commitment to constructivist GT and to non-directive interview practice was tested in the interview process. Sometimes, people agreed to participate in an interview but then said very little in response to open-ended inquiry about the topic at hand, and so I found myself shifting into a question-answer format. The snowball method of identifying research participants was very effective but sometimes became challenging when it came up against the real fissures within the LGBTTTI sector in the state of Guerrero, a situation that I had not anticipated. Sometimes, interviews were arranged but then canceled for no apparent reason. Other times, people agreed to participate in an interview but seemed especially cautious. Perhaps this is not surprising in a place affected by high levels of violence and impunity, where the foreigner has long played a dubious role and where rumour is a common source of information about safety issues.

The process of this research project unfolded organically, starting with the initial visit to this southern Mexican state, but at times needed to be more methodical, more systematic, to ensure that the rich information in the hundreds of pages of interview transcripts and field notes would guide the insights of this project. Secor (2010: 202) notes that content analysis seeks to understand the themes that are relevant to the participants, both individually and collectively (in this project, in their understanding of Guerrero as a place where sexual/gender minorities live and die), while the narrative analysis explores the stories participants tell, including the “social work” that the stories do. I pay particular attention to the ways in which sexual/gender dissidents, family/friends of sexual/gender minorities who have been killed, but also government officials, frame acts of violence against queer and trans people, including violence motivated by trans/lesbi/homophobia. I contextualize and develop an understanding of the primary source material through the use of secondary sources including NGO reports, media accounts, relevant legal literature, relevant legislative and policy documents, and archival materials provided by long-time activists and activist organizations.

This project is framed as accountable research and so includes mechanisms to stay attentive to power relations, positionality, and issues of representation (Smith 2010). Upon arrival in Mexico in January 2013, I formed a small reference group of LGBTQ activists I already knew in the state capital who had already provided valuable support for this project during preliminary research (including some leaders of the now-defunct CEPRODEHI, the recently established Colectivo Gay Orgullo Guerrero, and others) with whom to consult as the research progressed. LGBTQ activists in Guerrero requested that I present preliminary research findings in local public forum, something I agreed to do, but a commitment I have been unable to fulfill because of the deteriorating security situation in the state. As well, in response to the expressed desire by local LGBTQ activists for documentation of the extent of trans/lesbi/homophobic violence in the state, Chapter 4 includes a critical mapping of lethal violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero during the first long decade of the 21st century. In recognition that maps invariably efface as much as they show, and fix the dynamic power relations that produce them, this mapping process needs to be conducted in a self-critical manner (Sparke 2005; Hyndman and Giles 2011).

Even as the unfolding of the research project brought unanticipated encounters and directions, I have sought to pay close attention to ethical research design and practice so that contexts of danger and risk already experienced by many of the research subjects are not in any way aggravated. For example, when one informant disclosed that she was experiencing suicidal feelings in relation to the barriers she was facing as a trans woman, I was able to successfully connect her with a local trans activist who arranged and agreed to accompany her for a first meeting with a trans-friendly psychologist for counselling. In accordance with strict ethical standards, all interviews were arranged and conducted such that the consideration of the participant's safety is first and foremost, though the process of navigating such a priority given so many unknowns on one occasion required a decision not to proceed with an interview with someone who was incarcerated until I felt certain that the potential dangers were removed (even though the informant had no objections to proceed). This hurdle was eventually overcome, and the interview took place in a private corner of the prison yard several weeks later. To provide further protection of the research participants, an experienced transcriber from outside the

research site transcribed the interviews. Dialogue with local queer leaders continues through electronic communications regarding the best use of data including ways to publish data and preferred ways to conceptualize the results for different audiences.

In the process of contextualizing and developing an understanding of the primary source material, secondary sources including NGO reports, media accounts, relevant legal literature, relevant legislative and policy documents, and archival materials provided by long-time activists and activist organizations have been invaluable. Relevant published reports from international organizations have also provided an overview of the conjuncture regarding violence in Guerrero (and Mexico more broadly), in particular as it relates to LGBTQ persons. I learned early on that Facebook is the communication tool of choice among the LGBTQ community in Guerrero (email is nearly useless), and my engagement with this communication tool ended up providing access to additional relevant material.

Throughout the project I also reviewed relevant news articles concerning violence against sexual/gender dissidents in the study site and the situation of violence and impunity more broadly speaking in Guerrero and Mexico. When I first began field work I was struck by the proliferation of daily newspapers in the state of Guerrero (31, according to Prensa Escrita, an organization that maintains a public record of all Spanish-language daily newspapers in the world), though my enthusiasm was tempered by comments of local informants who said that many of the available publications are controlled by government through funding and by organized crime through threats and violence (Peralta 2017; Mexico Institute and WOLA 2017⁴²). While conducting field work, I regularly reviewed respected regional newspapers *La Jornada Guerrero* and *El Sur* for relevant material. I purchased hard copies of these at least twice a week during the time I was in Guerrero to ensure that I had a sense of the social and political events in the state and to identify cases of violence against queer and trans persons covered in the press. I also obtained copies of newspapers available only in specific towns and regions when conducting fieldwork there, such as *Vértice* and *El Sol de Chilpancingo* (Centro region), *Novedades Acapulco* and *El Sol de Acapulco* (Acapulco region), *Diario de Taxco* and *El Diario de Iguala* (North region), *El Diario de Zihuatanejo* and *Despertar de la Costa* (Costa Grande region), and *Despertar del Sur* (Tierra Caliente region). A stack of

folders filled with carefully clipped newspaper articles, previously piled on my desk in hopes of further consultation and now unceremoniously shoved to the back of a filing cabinet drawer, provides testament to this part of my data collection process. Since completing the field work portion of this project I have continued to sporadically follow relevant news stories from some of these publications online as available as well as from international online sources and online Mexican news agencies including *Agencia IRZA*, *Noticias de Guerrero*, and *Notiese*.

Endowed with a visual archive

While conducting fieldwork about violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico, a local photojournalist named (Sasha) Emiliano García Arzeta offered me an electronic copy of his vast collection of mostly unpublished images and videos of the public life of the LGBTTTI community in that state for the first long decade of the 21st century. This photographer has given permission to publish their name. García's collection records a nascent LGBTTTI movement as it blusters its way onto the streets of the state of Guerrero in the early 21st century and invites our encounter with the lived experience of homophobia and transphobia of both those both facing and aiming the camera there. Through an intimate relationship between the photographer and the subject matter, this visual data provides a unique and deeply relational look at the development of a social movement through its first long decade. The collection contains more than 7,000 photos and nearly 900 short videos.

But what actually makes something an archive? Azoulay (2014) notes that the archive is traditionally defined by its distance from the present moment, separated temporally from the possibility of provoking scandal in the political configuration to which it is contemporaneous. Azoulay argues that such temporal distancing constitutes the robbery of knowledge to which citizens have a right and as such is itself a form of violence, and says that the proper question is not "what is an archive?" a question which by its very framing keeps the archive outside of the world, but rather, "what do we look for in an archive?" Azoulay (2014: 3) answers her own question almost glibly, "that which we have deposited there," but goes on to note that this alternate question leads to the "founding of new sorts of archives" not defined by sovereign power. Personal and

community archives such as the one that is the focus of Chapter 3 are a form to which Azoulay draws our attention.

In that it provides a useful glimpse into social processes taking place in a specific period in a particular place, this collection can be considered an archive. While archives are usually understood as passive resources, depositories of facts, and as marked by impartiality, neutrality, and objectivity, the growth of personal and other “non-official” archives, including those facilitated by electronic storage of documents such as that of García Arzeta, has unharnessed the traditional form and allowed for the proliferation of archives that goes beyond the limits of the usually state-centred version (Schwartz and Cook, 2002; Withers 2002). According to feminist scholar Barbara Godard, an archive is only important when it is a node for political activity. Reflecting on this scholar’s relationship with archive, Kate Eichhorn (2015: 46) said that Godard “is not seduced by the fantasy or fiction of the archive.” Eichhorn (2015) cites Godard (2013: 321) on this point: “If women are left out of the archive, their absence from public history is lived as trauma. [But i]f women are kept in the archive, and not brought up from the dead, out into the public space as living memory... the trauma is projected through the future.” Azoulay (2014: 3) makes a similar point when she argues that the traditional distancing of archives from the present moment to avoid scandal is really a robbery of knowledge to which citizens have a right and calls for the “founding of new sorts of archives,” ones not defined by sovereign power, and including personal and community archives such as the one that is the focus of Chapter 3 in this dissertation. My goal in considering García Arzeta’s archive is to deploy it as just this sort of node of political activity in relation to the lives of queer people from Guerrero that it documents.

García Arzeta’s archive begins with the state’s first Pride march held in the state capital Chilpancingo in June 2002 and includes five telling images of this inaugural event. The archive also contains about three dozen images of each of the following two annual marches, and at least 100 images of each annual march from 2005 to 2012, and in some cases many more. Starting in 2005, short video clips recorded during the annual Pride events document the events, preserve artistic performances and speeches that took place on stage in the main public square at the completion of each march, and log short interviews with participants and observers. The archive also includes other LGBTTTI

events, including gay/trans beauty pageants, political protests, meetings with politicians, cultural and political events such as the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) and World AIDS Day, as well as marches and parades held in other towns and cities across the state. García Arzeta is a public figure who has been associated with the LGBTTTI movement in Guerrero throughout its short history. He participated in the state's first pride march and was part of the inner circle of CEPRODEHI, the organization that took the lead in the advancement of LGBTTTI rights in Guerrero and in the coordination of Pride events for several critical years, until it folded in the aftermath of the murder of its founder, Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera. García funds his documentary work through self-employment as a photojournalist and professional photographer and videographer. This archive is both a body of his artistic work and a manifestation of his activism as a queer-identified man.

Modern photojournalism grew out of “the novelty of being able to hold time still and really look at moments of life in parts of the world most people would never see,” and has depended on technological advances to facilitate this (Newton 2009: 234). The relatively recent development and widespread availability of digital technology including digital photography/videography and storage have made the significant scale of García's project possible. This visual archive is the product of a documentary gaze rooted in multiform motivations that follow the conventions of journalistic photography (Feigel 2010; Hay 2017). The supposed objectivity of the documentary gaze, usually understood as one that maintains a certain separation between the documentarist and their object of investigation, ignores the fact that the documentation process itself simultaneously creates reality (Feigel 2010). To supersede this contradiction, Hay (2017: 568) underlines the importance of documentary material produced through autoethnography because it offers a version of the documentary gaze that “shift[s] gaze and voice from the documentarian outside' to the documentarian 'inside' . . . [and thus] balance[s] specific and general, individual and group . . . theory and emotion.” García's archive provides this type of material for our consideration, a deeply personal documentation of the public events of a sexual and gender minority community, events that can also be understood as pageantry implicitly designed to be photographed and videotaped, created for the spectator (McFarland Bruce, 2016; Peterson et al., 2018).

The visual provides insight into various geographical knowledges such that our seeing of the world in the most literal sense of sight, of viewing, has a particular relationship with our knowing it (Rose 1996; Rose 2016). In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the use of visual research methods in the social sciences, including geography, made possible by improved visual technologies coupled with the expanded acceptance of qualitative methods (Knoblauch *et al.*, 2008; Rose 2016). Photographs have long been part of “what geographers do,” first as a tool in aid of the colonial goals of the discipline and more recently as the basis for critical analysis in relation to gaze and elements of power, and they can still be useful for social inquiry: “[A photo can] become . . . a powerful aid in seeing the impact people and places have on one another and how they mutually reinforce one another; in other words it is a powerful tool in examining the sociospatial dialectic” (Sanders 2007: 185). This distinction between “understanding about pictures” compared to “understanding through pictures” has been taken up by the sociologist Bohnsack (2008: 3-5) who reminds us that “our world, our social reality, is not only represented by, but also constituted or produced by pictures and images,” and encourages us to use pictures as tools to help understand *how* social phenomena are produced.

Mondada (2006) notes that video is becoming increasingly embedded in everyday life and so its use in social science research needs further exploration. Furthermore, Mondada (2006: 62, 64) points out that video practices are “organized and promoted by social actors for other than academic purposes produce video records that can be used by researchers themselves,” and that such videos can provide additional insight into how their producers analyze social life. As video has become increasingly embedded in everyday life, Knoblauch *et al.* (2008: 3, 9) propose the term “visual data” to encompass the use of both photography and videography by social scientists, and note that video is “likely to become as straightforward for social scientists to use in their research as photographs,” so we need “to develop an encompassing methodology for the analysis of visual data” including new ways for presenting these types of data.

According to Bohnsack (2008: 7), both those who take photographs and the subjects of those images constitute “picture producers”. This is explicitly evident in many of García Arzeta’s videos and photographs in that the subjects are clearly aware of—and

responding to—the presence of the camera. As such, this archive is also very much a coproduction between a photographer and a social movement. Sanders (2007: 190) cautions that since, “social and spatial process are symbiotically and parasitically embedded in one another . . . it is not easy to identify and disentangle what is cause and what is effect” in photos and further reminds us to recognize that this medium lends itself to voyeuristic and colonialist engagement. With these prerequisite cautions in mind, a consideration of García’s archive provides windows into the recent lived experience of Guerrero’s sexual and gender minorities.

García’s archive documents the development of a localized social movement during its first decade. Through thick description, the contours of this social space, built of discordant gender and sexual identities and their expression in the public sphere, start to emerge (Geertz 1973; Hanhardt 2013). This thick description draws on this visual archive in conjunction with other data sources (formal interviews as well as informal conversations in the context of participant-observation) to narrate lives and places, bringing them to life through words and images and through the practice of storytelling. I understand García’s images as a series of images that provide an “accurate record . . . of what was in front of the camera when its shutter snapped,” through cultural coding, and adopt Rose’s questions to guide the analysis: “What is being shown? What are the components of the image? How are they arranged? What do the different components of an image signify?” (Rose, 2016: 312; Rose, 1996: 287). In the following section I draw on this framework to interrogate García’s archive regarding what can be learned about practices of LGBTTTI urban activism in Chilpancingo, how activists use space and place to advance the rights of sexual and gender minorities in this city, and how urban spaces are leveraged and transformed in this undertaking.

While García Arzeta is the author of the body of work that is the focus of Chapter 3, this collection is also very much a coproduction between a photographer and a social movement (Bohnsack 2008). In a similar vein, in an analysis of place-based everyday life for marginalized communities in urban Mexico, Lombard (2013: 28) used the technique of “auto-photography” in which community members were asked to take photos that represent aspects of their community life that they valued. That investigator notes that “photos taken by residents tend to illustrate the complexity of place more successfully

than photos taken by the researcher.” Although my use of García’s archive is not strictly speaking an example of “auto-photography” since the images and videos of this collection were not produced for my research project nor has García actively worked with me to produce the analysis included in this paper, nevertheless some of the advantages of auto-photography hold true in this case, particularly in relation to how the selection and framing of the social phenomena, places, events, and everyday geographies included in the collection have not been determined by me as the researcher. Through the intimate relationship between the photographer and the subject matter, this collection of images does provide a unique and deeply relational look at the development of a social movement through its first long decade.

The study of visual texts

Scholars have underlined that how visual data is used matters. Sanders (2007: 190) offers several cautions regarding how it is used: (a) pay attention to the cognitive dissonance inherent in photography [and similarly videography] given that what we see may not be what the photographer/videographer looked at; (b) remember that “social and spatial process are symbiotically and parasitically embedded in one another [such that]... it is not easy to identify and disentangle what is cause and what is effect”; (c) the medium lends itself to voyeuristic and colonialist engagement; and (d) our initial read tends to be “naïve, visceral and frequently lacks sophistication and critical appraisal.” With these prerequisite cautions in mind, a consideration of García Arzeta’s archive may very well provide windows—even if at times dusty ones—into the recent lived experience of Guerrero’s sexual and gender minorities.

Based on her own extensive pedagogical practice involving the use of image as a source of geographical insight, Rose provides guidance for how to proceed that is useful for the project at hand. Based on her own and her students’ experience, she has settled upon a type of semiotic analysis as especially helpful to such an end through which place can be understood as “refracted through power” and matters of representation and identity can be critically interpreted (Rose 1996: 282). She follows other geographers in paying less attention to the matter of “how well” an image represents reality and instead focuses on “the ways in which particular social power relations structure the meanings of

an image” (Rose 1996: 283). On this point, Bohnsack (2008) follows Foucault’s proposal that picture interpretation is aided by suspending our knowledge of the concrete biography and history of the *represented* picture producers (i.e. those who have been photographed) in order to access the image as a self-referential system (like other texts) that communicates regarding the relevant social processes connected to both the represented picture producers as well as the *representing* picture producer (the photographer).

Rose has settled upon three key nodes for encountering the visual, which she calls *producers* (for Rose, the people and equipment involved in the image making), *texts* (the images themselves), and *audiences* (those who view the images, immediately, and also much later). She proposes we pay attention to three interconnected registers involved in the production of meaning: *the social*, “the organization of social institutions, social differences, and social subjectivities”; *the aesthetic*, “visual codes and conventions”; and *the technological*, “the equipment involved” (Rose 1996: 284). Images and videos are texts to be read, and I borrow the following questions from Rose (1996: 287) to guide my reading of the texts at hand: “What is being shown? What are the components of the image? How are they arranged?” She suggests we pay attention to how specific images are part of a series and how cultural encoding adds meaning to them by providing the signs that we notice when considering these texts in a semiotic fashion. “What do the different components of an image signify?”

Through an examination of García Arzeta’s archive we can gain some insight into the referent system that represents the geography of queer/trans Guerrero in the early 21st century, a time when the region was beset by high levels of socio-political violence coupled with an ongoing story of widespread impunity for perpetrators of various forms of harm-doing. Rose (1996: 289) reminds us that “both looking and being seen [are] . . . essential to the construction of social identity,” something that seems especially relevant given the subject matter—public events meant to perform difference and to affect the wider society. Rose (1996) recalls that scholars of cultural studies have long argued that social texts are inherently productive because viewers are drawn into their referent systems and in the process are positioned by them, and so it follows that organizers of Pride events certainly seek to reconstitute the relationship between gender/sexual

conformers and gender/sexual dissidents. García Arzeta's archive continues this work, and while it is primarily documentary and journalistic, given the nature of the events he covers, this archive also gravitates toward advertising, a form of imagery that Bohnsack (2008:17) says makes particular use of "the pose" and of "hyper-ritualization" to express individuality within presentations of belonging, unity, and community.

Chapter 3 includes an analysis of this collection with a particular focus on the coverage of LGBTTTI Pride marches in Chilpancingo and uses this examination as the basis of a reflection on the development of a LGBTQ rights movement outside of the metropole in a context of violence and impunity. In my analysis of García Arzeta's archive, I focus primarily on the photographs and video clips themselves (the texts) in relation to the social and the aesthetic registers, though I have also sought to pay attention to the matters of producer/production and audience, as it has seemed relevant to my purposes. I began with a systematic review of the entire set of images and videos, briefly looking at each of the 7000 photos and watching at least part of most of the nearly 900 short videos. I created an outline of the contents of the archive arranged in chronological order, including the specific events documented and relevant ethnographic information I knew about the events. Guided by Rose's questions as outlined above to identify items that would be useful as texts that document the social and the aesthetic, I then selected five images and five video clips (if available) for each event, ones that struck me as capturing key aspects of the event in question in relation to my prior knowledge of the event and how the images chosen seemed to depict something important or key. Based on this selection process, I created a subset of 193 photos and 97 video clips.

The purpose of this step was to create a manageable subset of the visual data that spoke to the purpose of this research. Then, I carefully analyzed this subset of visual data to identify and clarify key themes as outlined above. I applied Rose's key questions to the photos (and to a more limited extent to the video clips) in this subset of García Arzeta's collection. Recognizing that more conventional textual analysis is also useful in cases in which there is spoken word in the videos, the content of specific videos provided additional documentation of events considered in this dissertation. In my analysis of this archive, I also kept in mind Bohnsack's (2008: 20) recollection of the insight from ethnomethodology regarding the importance of paying attention to context to understand

aspects of a text. This scholar encourages the analysis of photographs that goes beyond a focus on isolated elements in images. To do this, I considered the visual data in relation to what I knew about the depicted events, based on accounts from interview material or in some cases from my own participation. This subset of photos (and videos) served to inform the analysis included in Chapter 3. Several of these photos are also included in the dissertation, as well as photos I took during the research process.

A complicated story: Impunity might mean there are no “good guys”

I close this chapter focused on methodology and methods by unpacking a complicated story that I came to know during this research on violence and the LGBTTTI sector in Guerrero, Mexico, one that demonstrates some of the methodological and ethical challenges this project presented. As such, it underlines hurdles involved in research based on key informant semi-structured interviews and participant-observation with a fragmented social movement. It also signals the importance of careful navigation in relation to sensitive research and to field work conducted in contexts marked by violence and impunity (Lee 1993; Manning 1997; Mallon *et al* 2021; González Cabrera 2024). I propose that this story disrupts the possibility of a simplistic narrative in which sexual and gender minorities band together to face a context marked by violence and discrimination and by state complicity. This story also demonstrates a fractured sector in which allegiances, infighting, struggles for leadership and mudslinging appear more prominent than efforts by leaders of the LGBTTTI sector to investigate and denounce the many violations of human rights that punctuate their collective story. Furthermore, the episode that I describe below points to the roles of the state and of political parties as players in the unfolding drama of sexual and gender minority activism. One prominent queer rights organization makes reference to “the machista state,” a state marked not only by complacency in regards to violence against women but also by the wilful abdication of the responsibility to protect the rights of queer and trans folk, particularly activists who demand effective investigation of crimes involving the killing of sexual and gender minorities.⁴³ This is the state that LGBTTTI rights activists seek to engage, and so a consideration of this state, a state that is shaped by transnational forces, is key to my inquiry into the dynamics that mark this sector in Guerrero in the present day.

In early 2013, I learned that an employee of the Office of Guerrero's Attorney General⁴⁴ had laid a complaint with Guerrero's Human Rights Commission. The employee, Cristóbal Galarza de la Paz, had apparently accused his supervisor of homophobic treatment. Galarza de la Paz worked as an expert in the area of psychology⁴⁵ with the state's ministerial police. I learned that the state governor's Advisor for Attention to Vulnerable Groups, Manuel Castillo Jaimes (a well-known LGBTQ activist, better known by his nickname, Igor Pettit), had intervened in the case and had organized a meeting involving several people: the complainant, Cristóbal Galarza de la Paz; Guerrero's then State Attorney General, Martha Elba Garzón Bernal; the supervisor against whom the complaint had been laid, Ricardo David Ramirez Zuñiga; other officials from the Attorney General's office; and Igor Pettit himself.⁴⁶

On April 10, 2013, Jaime López Vela, the National Secretary for Sexual Diversity of Morena (leftist political party in Mexico) issued a press release regarding this matter (Morena 2013). This press bulletin outlined the broad strokes of the case: on December 6, 2012, Galarza laid the original complaint with Guerrero's Human Rights Commission against his supervisor, accusing Ricardo David Ramirez Zuñiga of homophobic aggression; on December 21, 2012 (in the meeting mentioned above), Igor Pettit accused Galarza de la Paz of harassing his own supervisor; in the same meeting, the Attorney General demanded that Galarza de la Paz withdraw the human rights complaint and also said that she would be firing him because she "no longer had confidence in him"; Galarza de la Paz expanded the original complaint, also naming the Attorney General; on January 18, 2013, the Attorney General was a guest on Igor Pettit's longstanding radio show "Controversies in the Night" where she denied that she had compelled Galarza to withdraw his complaint; on March 4, 2013, Galarza de la Paz once again expanded the complaint, this time also naming Pettit (remember that he was the governor's advisor regarding vulnerable groups) for threatening to have him roughed up ["que él le pondría una chinga y que tenía gente para hacerlo"]; the following day, March 5, 2013, Pettit publicly said that he would see to it that Galarza would "quiet down" ["que él se ocuparía de que calmaran a Cristobal"]; on the evening of April 9, 2013, unknown assailants attacked Galarza de la Paz outside his home in Acapulco, and according to the Morena press release the attackers said that anyone who laid human rights complaints would be

similarly attacked; the press release concluded by saying that Galarza de la Paz feared for his life and called for justice in this case.

The same day, *El Sur*, Guerrero's key daily newspaper, also published an article written by journalist Anarsis Pacheco Pólito (2013) regarding the reported attack and a subsequent press conference given by Galarza de la Paz, together with Vianney Salgado Gallegos, another former employee of the State Attorney General's Office, who reportedly witnessed the attack against Galarza de la Paz. During the press conference, held in the office of the National Union of Press Editors⁴⁷, Galarza de la Paz accused Garzón Bernal (the Attorney General) and Ramirez Zuñiga (the supervisor) of having likely ordered the attack and announced that he would be laying criminal charges against the State Attorney General for "aggression against an employee." The newspaper account also reported that two months earlier Galarza de la Paz and Salgado Gallegos had called on the state's Governor, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, to fire the attorney general because of her violations of labour rights. In the press conference, Galarza de la Paz also spoke about the complaints he had previously laid against his supervisor and the state attorney general, said that he feared for his life, and called on the state congress to investigate the Attorney General. A few days later, the leading progressive national newspaper, *La Jornada*, published a similar account of these events in its Guerrero edition (see Giles Sánchez 2013).

Some months earlier, shortly after the Galarza de la Paz–Attorney General meeting described above, Pettit had uploaded the brief video clip from the meeting referenced above to a public repository (Pettit 2013). The segment shows five people sitting around a table in what appears to be a conference room, including Pettit himself, Galarza de la Paz, the Attorney General, the Assistant Attorney General, and the supervisor that Galarza de la Paz has accused of discrimination. The segment appears to show the final minutes of the meeting mentioned above. Pettit speaking to Galarza de la Paz: "Friend, I am going to ask you again, before giving the floor to the Assistant Attorney General, what might be your final thoughts . . . what do you think about what the Attorney General has said, that you have been fired and that you will leave without a cent, that you are losing your job at a time when things are so difficult? Would you like to reflect a little, and with humility accept the role . . . the misunderstanding?"⁴⁸

Galarza de la Paz is visibly upset and stares down at the table in front of him as he responds: “That is of no value, since they always treat me this way because of my sexual preferences.” Pettit responds: “But I’m not seeing anyone discriminate against you for your sexual preferences . . . And I beg you to be careful regarding what you say because we are filming, or rather, they are filming . . . I have heard absolutely no one discriminate against you because of your sexual preferences. I’m not hearing them say to you, ‘because you are homosexual’ . . . I haven’t heard this from anyone, and you also cannot prove it. . . . If I were to hear something from the man in front of me, or to read in something that he has written to you, or if you were to have a witness, proof that he has discriminated against you because of your sexuality, I would leave here and call a press conference and say that this man is a danger to the Office of the Attorney General and that this man should not be here . . . But I am not seeing this” (Pettit 2013).

Pettit continues: “What I see is an argument that does not have validity because there is no proof whatsoever provided when you say, ‘it is because of my sexual preference.’ I too am gay and I am an advisor of the governor and I work with him . . . and here I am with my friend [the Attorney General] and these others and no one ever discriminates against me. But if you have been discriminated against, please, I beg you, demonstrate it to me so that I can act. But you haven’t done this. So in a little while when I head downtown here in Chilpancingo and run into the journalists that have been calling me to ask my opinion regarding this matter, I’m going to have to say, ‘Gentlemen, I’m sorry but I don’t see any discrimination because the young man has no way to prove absolutely anything . . . that I have met in private with him . . . and others . . . and there is nothing there.’” Then, turning to the three officials, Pettit says: “I’m very clear that you have the right to proceed in the manner that you think is appropriate, as does this young man. And of course, I will submit a report to the governor and will share my opinion with the press if given the opportunity.”

This LGBTQ activist, Igor Pettit, had been in the news before in relation to accusations of involvement with violence. Two years earlier—in the months following Leija Herrera’s murder—press accounts described an earlier conflict between Pettit and CEPRODEHI activists. Citing threats against Leija Herrera made by Pettit in both the press and social media prior to Leija Herrera’s death, the Office of the State Attorney

General was called upon to investigate whether Pettit had been involved in Leija Herrera's murder (Denuncia CEPRODEHI amenazas 2011). In July 2011, the CEPRODEHI leadership sent an open letter to state governor Ángel Aguirre Rivero, the then state's Attorney General Alberto López Rosas and the head of the state Human Rights Commission Juan Alarcón Hernández regarding the matter. In that letter, the CEPRODEHI leadership accused Pettit of threatening to block all government funding for their organization unless they publicly apologized for having called for an investigation of Pettit in relation to the murder of Leija Herrera and unless they expelled the activist who had made the official complaint (Denuncia CEPRODEHI amenazas 2011). The CEPRODEHI leadership also called on the governor to stop Pettit's attacks against their organization and to remove Pettit from his position as the Governor's Advisor for Attention to Vulnerable Groups. By 2012, citing "pressure from family and the risks that activists face in a machista state," the leadership of CEPRODEHI announced the organization's dissolution (Chavez 2012).

I initially became aware of the Morena press release described above from a Facebook post. That post provoked comments from others, including several known LGBTQ activists in Guerrero. While some comments denounced the government officials involved in the Galarza case, others questioned the veracity of Galarza's claims and accused the original poster of defaming the reputation of Pettit for having posted the national political party's press release. The last response on that thread read as a public ostracization. In that post, a group of LGBTQ activists from across the state were reportedly distancing themselves from named former CEPRODEHI activists. The post ended with a list of 39 activists' names, along with their associated organizations or hometowns. While Pettit's name is not included in the list, a photograph accompanying the post—taken at a recent statewide LGBTQ sector meeting hosted by him in his official role—includes about half of the people listed in the post. Pettit is in the centre of the photo.

For a time following this incident, Galarza de la Paz became a recognized leader in the local LGBTQ community in Acapulco. For example, publicity for the "First Gathering of Leaders—Lesbian, Gay Transsexual, Bisexual, Travesti, Transgender, Intersex—of the City of Iguala" held on July 4, 2014, proclaimed him as the "special

guest” of the event. Also, as president of the Centre for Cultural Development and for Human Rights, Diversity and Gender (CDHDIGNO, as per the acronym in Spanish)⁴⁹, he led protests related to other cases of homophobic discrimination covered by the local press, including the firing of a lesbian employee of the State Institute of Education for Youth and Adults of Guerrero (Síntesis de Guerrero 2016). Galarza de la Paz’s organization has also called on the municipal government of Acapulco to create an “Office of Sexuality Diversity” to address cases of discrimination based on sexual or gender identity (Government of Acapulco 2016; Labastida 2016). A month after the Morena press release, Martha Elba Garzón Bernal resigned from her role as Attorney General, citing personal reasons (Imagen Noticias 2013). Pettit’s role as the Governor’s Advisor for Attention to Vulnerable Groups ended abruptly when Governor Ángel Aguirre Rivero resigned amidst accusations of being involved in the Ayotzinapa case in which 43 student-teachers were forcibly disappeared in September 2014. The students are presumed to be dead.

This series of events occurred during the fieldwork phase of this project. It reveals a context in which state officials do not follow the law, can intimidate and harm queer/trans folk and perhaps even kill them, but also indicates that their complicity or participation in such events can sometimes come back on them. This series of events also points to the roles of bossism (undemocratic leadership structures) and clientelism (the exchange of political support for social benefits through the coercive subordination of clients by the state) in the development of the LGBTTTI movement in Guerrero. These complicated roles of the state, of political parties, and of LGBTTTI activists in Guerrero merit additional consideration and will be considered further in the next chapter and in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological frames and the related methods for this project. I began with a consideration of Malinchismo as concept that reflects my own intersectional identity in relation to this project. I drew on the methodological contributions of the emerging field of queer conflict research to outline my own engagement with queer theory to conduct this research. Also, I reviewed my deployment

of Grounded Theory as articulated by Kathy Charmaz and others who have reframed this postpositivist approach through a constructivist and feminist frame. I outlined the methods used to conduct fieldwork for this project. This chapter also reflected on some of the hurdles faced and opportunities that emerged during the research process. A key opportunity was the offer of access to a significant collection of photos and videos of local Pride events, and so this chapter provided a consideration of methodological considerations in the use of that archive and the method used to analyze it. This chapter closed with a reflection on fissures in the LGBTQ community in Guerrero and the impacts on this research. In the next chapter I continue to build the key arguments for a queer theory of violence through: (1) the documentation of how violence against queer and trans people is gendered in a similar way as femicide, (2) how an LGBTQ rights movement responds to a weak state through closer engagement to it, and (3) the transnational dimensions of the lived experience of queer and trans persons living in Guerrero.

³¹ As cited in Alarcón (1997). Stephen Crane, recognized novelist from Newark, New Jersey and author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, travelled to Mexico City as a newspaper correspondent in 1895. Alarcón (1997: 59) proposes that Crane is a “forerunner of the kind of ideal journalism” that is self-critical even while effective in describing and representing subjectivities dissimilar from the author’s own, though Alarcón also acknowledges that other scholars have a more critical view of Crane’s contributions to journalism and literature. I have included this citation as a reminder (to myself and to the reader) of the particular importance of self-criticalness when one is foreign to the place and people under consideration.

³² While much of this research project focused on Guerrero’s two largest cities, Chilpancingo (the capital, in the Centre region of the state) and Acapulco (located in the Acapulco region), I also conducted research in other towns in the Centro region (Tixtla, Zumpango, Chilapa, Xochipala), in the North region (Iguala and Taxco), in the Tierra Caliente region (Arcelia, Ciudad Altamirano and Coyuca de Catalán), in the Costa Grande region (Zihuatanejo and Atoyác) and in the Costa Chica region (Ometepec). I did not visit the Montaña region. In 2023, the State of Guerrero created a new region called “La Sierra” by realigning existing boundaries (See Appendix One).

³³ A reader of a draft of this dissertation asked about the ethics of including this photograph given that some people are recognizable. As there were many people documenting this event using photography and given that the event was covered in several local news sources including photos, I decided to include it in this dissertation.

³⁴ While the elementary school uses the masculine version of the Spanish word ‘coronel’, his grave marker in the town’s cemetery uses the feminized version of his name (Amelia Robles.)

³⁵ In the original Spanish: “abrir las venas de México a los poderes políticos de otros países....”

³⁶ In the original Spanish: “Como homosexuales en una sociedad machista, se hicieron malinchistas.”

³⁷ The full sentence in the original Spanish is as follows: “Al final, Salvador Novo y Xavier Villaurrutia dieron al ámbito literario y la sociedad mexicana un ejemplo perdurable de la confluencia del subrepticio y flagrante homosexual como figura potente.”

³⁸ While “cisgenderedness” may seem more correct than “cisgenderness,” it unfortunately also effectively reproduces the moniker “transgendered” that has been rejected by the transgender community. The “ed” is the issue because it suggests that something happened to make someone trans rather than an identity.

³⁹ I use a masculine pronoun to designate the unidentified perpetrator because all the informants I interviewed assumed that the perpetrator is male and because the suspected perpetrator is male identified.

⁴⁰ This point was made clear to me yet again through a recent experience. I was on my way to Spain to present a paper regarding my research concerning homophobia in the Colombian armed conflict. My paper referenced email correspondence I had had with a Colombian colleague and so I wrote him about that. He gave his permissions for the inclusion of this material but then went on to tell me that he too had been planning to attend the same conference until he was denied a visa. Being tied to place means different things for different bodies.

⁴¹ As appropriate to a feminist poststructuralist methodology, I include myself as one of the said queer subjects.

⁴² This eminent panel rejects the normalization of violence against journalism and how it serves the state. The panel includes Ana Cristina Ruelas (Article 19) who discusses the current attacks against journalists; Azam Ahmed (New York Times bureau chief for Mexico) who discusses the gulf between the law and reality, government funding of fake journalism, and the need for a political solution; and Jennifer Clement (PEN International) explains how organized crime controls the press.

⁴³ See Chavez (2012)'s reference to the use of the term "*machista* state" by CEPRODEHI leadership. In 2017, Amnesty International referred to the Mexican state as a "*machista* state that "despises the lives of women and holds them responsible for the violence they experience" (AI dice que México es un "estado machista" 2017). See also Beltrán (2017)'s reference to the same matter in which they cite an Amnesty official stating that Mexico has "an outstanding historical debt" to women because of its complicity in relation to femicidal violence.

⁴⁴ In the original Spanish, "Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de Guerrero."

⁴⁵ In Spanish, his position was "*perito en psicología*."

⁴⁶ The partial recording of this meeting, held December 21, 2012 and uploaded by Igor Pettit on January 21, 2013, can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EzZ6ZM74ts>

⁴⁷ In Spanish, "*Sindicato Nacional de Redactores de la Prensa*."

⁴⁸ Translation from the original Spanish into English by the author

⁴⁹ In Spanish, "Centro de Capacitación Cultural y de Derechos Humanos, Diversidad y Género."

Chapter 3 - An Altered State: The LGBTTTI Movement in Guerrero, Mexico

As the Mexican homosexuals of today—though not necessarily those of yesterday or tomorrow—through suffering persecutions, repression, discrimination by an intolerant system, we are necessarily living a marginality that in addition to its nuisances, also has its benefits: the glorious benefits of the rebel, that are not intrinsic to any particular sexual option but rather to a political one: the struggle that challenges our survival has also given great meaning and emotion to our lives, and it would be a tragedy to lose that in exchange for the tolerance of the consumer that predictably . . . will certainly soon impose itself in Mexico in the terrain of sex.

José Joaquín Blanco, 1979: 256⁵⁰
Ojos que da pánico soñar

Introduction

In this chapter I tell the story of Guerrero’s contemporary LGBTTTI movement⁵¹ and what has framed its development in a context marked by a weak state and a strong transnational configuration. I start with an argument that homonationalism participates in the relegation of Mexicans to the category of a managed population that is not considered the subject of history, to use Puar’s frame of the ascendancy of whiteness. Then, I engage with the history of sexuality and organizing in Mexico, outlining how the story of Guerrero’s LGBTTTI rights movement fits into the larger story of Guerrero and Mexican sexo-politics through time.¹ The term “sexo-politics” [“sexo-político” in Spanish] has been used in Mexico since the beginning of the 1970s to describe the political dimensions of the LGBTQ movement (Martínez Carmona 2020: 93). Next, I examine a series of Pride marches in the state capital Chilpancingo over a 10-year period, starting with this city’s first Pride celebration in 2002. I draw on the private archive of activist-photographer (Sasha) Emiliano García Arzeta to show how activists use these marches to work to change social attitudes and state policy in a context marked by widespread impunity for human rights violations. These research findings disrupt simplistic understandings of the play of sexuality and gender in Guerrero and its relationship with violence. I also include an analysis of other dimensions of the

movement for sexual and gender diversity rights across the state, including Pride events in towns and cities throughout Guerrero, the role of drag shows and queer beauty pageants and their politicization, the range of LGBTTTI rights organizations that have led these events, and finally the establishment of municipal offices for LGBTTTI affairs in towns and cities across the state in recent years, still in the context of widespread impunity. This chapter also includes a look at the town of Xochipala and the story of Amelio Robles, its most famous son. Robles was a hero of the Mexican Revolution who lived a long life as the patriarch of this community, someone whose hyper-masculinity however contrasts with his own childhood and early adulthood lived out in this same town as a girl and as a young woman. I pay attention to the work that this situated story does to disrupt stereotyped views of the fixity of gender and masculinity in Guerrero, Mexico.

A key goal of this research project is to go beyond understandings of place generated through the deployment of an orientalist view of Mexico and instead recognize that this place is born of a long history of unequal relations with other parts of the world, a reality illustrated by the following story. While conducting fieldwork for this project, I stumbled upon a public event in the open-air amphitheatre at the north end of Chilpancingo's centrally located Alameda Park. This story has come to provide a touchstone for understanding several dimensions of this project. I had found myself debilitated from the process of conducting interviews with people with so much intimate knowledge of violence against sexual and gender minorities, and so had gone for a walk to clear my head. A group of activists had chosen Valentine's Day 2014 to offer a public feminist critique of stereotyped views of gender: they performed a mock beauty pageant in which the actors used life-size cardboard dresses held up to their bodies, reminiscent of traditional paper dolls and their corresponding outfits. The production served to disrupt gender norms and expectations for the diverse audience that had gathered to view the show, drawn from the random assortment of people who just happened to be in the park that sunny Friday afternoon.



Figure 3.1 – “Miss Alberta Canada”— drag artist in Chilpancingo, Mexico
(Source: W. Payne)

A drag queen named Miss Alberta Canada served as the host of the ersatz spectacle that sought to challenge understandings of gender roles and of individual agency in relation to their reproduction. When I asked about the drag artist’s moniker and its reference to a western Canadian province, they mentioned they had once visited Canada. It seemed though that they did not want me to read too much into it: “I simply like how it sounds.” I do think it also serves to remind us how the issues these cultural workers sought to interject into the daily life of a sleepy marginal Mexican city also traverse international borders. The following story further illustrates this point.

Guerrero's sexo-politics are part of a larger national and indeed global story, so it is important to recognize that foreign discourses often and simplistically portray Mexico in stereotyped ways as a primitive and lawless place. On March 26, 2016, the website GayNZ.com (which bills itself as "New Zealand's #1 GLBT website") ran an article about the plight of a New Zealand same-sex couple reportedly stuck in Mexico with their three newborn children. The initially un-named couple was said to be "struggling" to bring their three infants back to New Zealand from Mexico but had run out of money and had thus turned to social media to assist with fundraising. While two different surrogates in Mexico had carried the babies to term, they were referred to as "the world's first triplings" because they were all conceived using the sperm of one of the men and a single egg donor. Apparently, the premature birth of one of the children meant that the couple were hit with a large unanticipated hospital bill. One of the men characterized himself as someone who "fight[s] for the underdog," and had reportedly found himself seeking the help of others because they—and their "beautiful kiwi babies"—were "stranded in this third-world country" due to unpaid medical bills as well as because of the "bureaucracy" requiring them to prove parentage (Plea to help Kiwi 2016).

The international news coverage characterized Mexico as a place marked by arbitrary impositions by the state and essentialized Mexico as a space outside the global human rights regime. The article failed to explain why the surrogacies happened in Mexico in the first place instead of back in New Zealand, or why this couple thought that Mexican officials requiring proof of parentage before Mexican-born children would be permitted to leave the country was unreasonable. In fact, surrogacy in New Zealand is only available when provided by the surrogate altruistically, and payment is not permitted. So, one presumes that given the vagaries of global capitalism, Mexico was the optimal choice for this couple in the neoliberal market of surrogacy. It also seems odd to complain that Mexico requires proof of parentage of infants leaving the country, as that does seem like a reasonable standard. Rather, the focus of the news coverage was on the purported plight of the non-Mexican men who had contracted two Mexican surrogates, and whose only goal was to ensure that the children would get "out of this dangerous country and back to the safety of New Zealand." The orientalist frame is stark.

This story shows the incongruous construction of Mexico as both haven for the exercise of rights—a place where a same-sex couple can accomplish surrogate birthing—but also as dangerous—a place beyond the pale of global safe space. A rapid succession of articles followed in various newspapers and news sites from around the world, identifying the couple as David and Nicky Beard of Auckland, New Zealand. On April 5, 2016, *The Guardian* reported that their Mexican lawyer, a specialist in surrogacy law in the state of Tabasco where the children were born, told a different story of what had transpired: he said, “they are not stuck here,” and underlined that they only needed to sign a few more documents for the adoptions to be finalized (Agren 2016). On April 8, 2016, *The Guardian* further reported that pressure was mounting against the crowdfunding site *Givealittle* because of questions concerning the accuracy of the couple’s claims that they had been swindled, that the children had been subjected to substandard medical care, and that they were stuck in a place they called a “dangerous country” and a “hell hole” (Ainge Roy 2016). Nevertheless, with three weeks left to go this campaign had already received more than 95% of its goal of raising \$30,000. Soon after, the Beards secured New Zealand passports for the three babies and returned to New Zealand. Several months later, in an article entitled “We risked our lives to be dads,” David Beard again reproduced these tropes, “Mexico was a scary time for us,” and claimed that an unnamed source had told them that their surrogacy agency had links to organized crime and that the Mexican authorities had been unable to protect them against this shadowy danger (Van der Zwan 2016). It seems that reproducing stereotypical portrayals of Mexico for your own ends is a productive venture for non-Mexicans. The privilege of Kiwi citizenship oozes with orientalist tropes that justify what is fundamentally an extractive transaction: They got what they needed and “fled”.

This chapter’s empirical exploration of the development of a sexual and gender rights movement in the context of violence and impunity builds on the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter concerning the scholarly consideration of a critical approach to human rights, read through a feminist geopolitical lens, and refracted through the concept of homonationalism. As Puar (2007) and others have shown, homonationalism is a process through which some queer bodies are normalized and leveraged for political and geopolitical goals in and by the U.S., while furthering the

queering other bodies. Puar (2022) underlines that homonationalism is not an attribute of specific states but rather the term is a hermeneutical device for understanding the demarcation of some countries as progressive versus backwards and barbaric. Puar (2022: 3) has been concerned with “the unfolding of queer complicity with the War on Terror transited through the propagation of Islamophobic tropes of perverse Muslim homo- and heterosexuality,” though recognizes that homonationalism is intelligible in relation to a range of sites from Israel to South Africa and beyond. I argue that the War on Drugs—with Mexico as one of its primary targets—relies on parallel discursive tools related to homonationalism, with material implications for queers from and in Guerrero. While this has implications for queer and trans people from Guerrero who seek to migrate to the U.S. for a range of reasons, it also has implications for shaping Guerrero itself and thus impacts the lives of queer and trans people living in Guerrero as well.

As discussed in Chapter 1, feminist geopolitics (Hyndman 2001) provides a window for the consideration of geopolitics at a scale other than the nation-state and brings into focus key aspects of this study of the lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico. Many queers have become quintessential transnational subjects whose very subjectivity is worked out in the context of the globalization of discourses concerning sexual and gender diversity. Furthermore, while some queers engage in various kinds of migration such as tourism, relocation in search of professional opportunities, and forced displacement, these impacts on subjectivity occur for queers regardless of whether specific bodies have crossed borders or not. Mexican subjectivities have developed and continue to evolve in relation to the international, and as has been shown, this is especially true for queer and trans folk living in or coming from Mexico’s State of Guerrero. As introduced in the first chapter (Mitchell and Kallio 2017), the insights of feminist geopolitics bring into focus key aspects of this study of the lived experiences of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico, including the dialectical relationship between the local and the global as well as how the movement of bodies is constrained and how populations are managed in space in relation to statecraft (recall Hyndman’s concept of embodied statecraft, discussed in Chapter 1).

In their introduction to Lionel Cantú’s posthumously published book about queerness and migration, Naples and Vidal-Ortiz (Cantú 2009: 4) point out that

“Mexicans have been historically viewed as among the least desirable immigrants to the United States.” These authors recognize that Mexican immigrants crossing the border are met with violence and fear while those who make their home in the U.S. face racism and discrimination. They describe Samuel P. Huntington’s (2004) racist idea of “Mexicans as antagonistic to the American dream and as a danger to the . . . soul of the country.” These authors point out that this context of rising anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. has paralleled two other shifts: recognition of same-sex relationships in both Mexico and the U.S.; and an attack on what Cantú (2009: 6) calls “inside the closet” sexualities in face of HIV public health measures. Cantú’s (2009: 33) study of the situation of queer Mexican migrants is shaped by this context in which so many Mexican immigrants find themselves marked as liminal and excluded from “an imagined legitimate community.” The basic tenets of their argument are as follows: “Sexuality is . . . a dimension of power that permeates all social relations and institutions; ‘gay’ identities . . . are linked to capitalist development and urban migration . . . ; migration studies “have failed to recognize sexuality as an important dimension of analysis”; identity is linked “to the power of the state and its mechanisms of regulation and normalization . . . ; and, the lens of spatiality allows better understanding of “the complex and specific relations that shape the sexuality of migration” (Cantú 2009: 37). While my project is not primarily focused on people who migrate, the theme of migration is never far from the conversation in Guerrero where every person has relatives and friends who have left and where more people have left than still live in this state. Of note, while 12 per cent of queer asylum seekers in the U.S. come from Mexico, the vast majority of the rest of queer asylum seekers in the U.S. have spent some time in Mexico after leaving their home countries in Central America and beyond before arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border (Shaw et al 2021). Furthermore, the implications of Cantú’s study of queer Mexican migrants are also relevant for sexual and gender minorities (still) in Guerrero given that their lives—like those of all Guerrerens to some extent—are shaped in relation to Guerrero’s placement in North America.

Sexual and gender diversity in Guerrero, Mexico

The historical record and the evidence collected in this project do not support a facile narrative of Mexico as simply a violent place rooted in an eternal machismo. Rather, the multifaceted story of sexual and gender diversity in Mexico and specifically in Guerrero can only be comprehended through attention to its various dimensions, such as culture⁵², the state, economics, borders, and the transnational. This state's LGBTQ movement has emerged during a time of growing lawlessness produced through a worsening and precarious political and social context, and so in this analysis I seek to pay attention to relevant contextual circumstances including significant levels of organized crime, violence, and impunity, but also understanding Guerrero as a place made in relationship with other places. Relying on the proposal that a queer sensibility has the potential to illuminate the contradictory ways in which the disciplining power of the state is mobilized, this exploration unpacks specific moments in space and time in order to query what can be known about the abdications of the state to respect and protect the rule of law, the deployment of violence by state and non-state actors, the importance of permeable borders and their borderlands in the ongoing formation of spaces (following Massey's conception of places), and the gendered and sexualized subjectivities adhered to them.

Mexican scholars of sexuality and gender offer insights useful to this examination. For example, List Reyes (2010:40) underlines the limits of using global north understandings to cast light on the workings of sexuality and gender in Mexico, arguing that "in the Mexican/Latin American system there is no subject position equivalent to the American 'gay man.'" However, List Reyes (2010: 94) also comments that "it is difficult to undo historically constructed normative models," that these models have a certain inertia such that they "constrain the possibility of the subject to construct and define themselves as a subject and in relationship with their peers." This scholar further underlines a key limitation of westernized societies—and in this List Reyes includes Mexican society—that of starting with a Cartesian view of the sexes that can only conceive of two possibilities and of also seeing heterosexuality as "natural" and all other expressions of sexuality as iterations of homosexuality. The result is that in Mexico,

“scandal and offense are defined based on the exercise of sexuality contrary to a supposed natural mode, focused on reproduction, that of heterosexuality” (List Reyes *et al.*, 2010: 180).

List Reyes *et al.* (2010) argue that “gay liberation” in Mexico has brought advances for some sexual and gender minorities, affording the possibility of a more open life, but for others it has accentuated the need for concealment because it has only made social stigma more visible rather than eliminating it. They further argue that the increased possibility of a more open life has corresponded to more urbanized spaces at a time of accelerated growth of cities through migration and globalization but that class condition and ethnic origin are also key to understanding who is more likely to experience elevated scrutiny by police and by society more broadly because of the advance of the sexual and gender diversity rights movement: “The form of control of these bodies by the moral and sex police has intensified, and . . . has depended on the homophobic and moralistic policies that have governed public spaces according to prevailing ideology” (List Reyes *et al.* 2010: 194). These authors conclude that the encounter between sexual diversity and space in present-day Mexico, intimately reaffirmed by a culture of gender rooted in heteronormativity, has led to new forms of violence motivated by homophobia and transphobia as well as to other more subtle forms of discrimination and social differentiation in public space.

Mexican scholar-activist Gloria Careaga Pérez (2010: 53, 55) cautions that “present day definitions of sexual categories seem to erase in one fell swoop the long and complex process by which a better understanding of the multiplicity of sexual expressions and practices has been sought,” and warns against an analysis of sexuality based simply on the formation and defence of categories. Careaga (2010: 58, 60) also reminds us that, “sexuality has been used for social control and for the maintenance of supremacies, sustained in the imposition of a certain kind of morality,” and calls for attention to the cultural, political, and theoretical pressures that put identities and categories into question. Adriana Fuentes Ponce (2010) says that in Mexico certain archetypes emphasize the ongoing importance of something called “good manners” (*buenas costumbres*) and observes that the visibility of sexual and gender minorities in recent decades is seen by many as violating these good manners. As such, Fuentes Ponce

says that while people are not legally persecuted for their sexual preferences in Mexico, some acts by people identified as sexual or gender minorities are seen as indicating a failure of morality or as noncompliance with societal prohibitions concerning good manners and social harmony, and that this results in an implicit acceptance of violence against these groups. Fuentes Ponce (2010: 255) also underlines the close relationship between discrimination based on gender and discrimination based on sexuality: “The distance between misogyny and homophobia is not great. It’s difficult to separate them given that the basis of both is built upon constructions of femininity and masculinity that conform to the heterosexual imaginary. Both concepts are linked to aversion, sanction, hatred for the feminine, and fear of changes in the social structure.”

With some caveats⁵³, List Reyes (2018: 81) thinks that queer theory is useful for its power to question the naturalization of the subject and for its consideration of identity in more flexible terms: “[We] need to modify the regulatory systems to end the various sexist, misogynistic and homophobic forms of violence . . . [precisely because the] . . . current Mexican reality has shown that violence against women and against a diversity of ‘others’ has been growing in recent years.” As such, they link feminicide to anti-queer/trans violence. Zaragocin and Caretta (2020: 2, 6) offer an alternative view, positing that, “territory is the preferred scale of Latin American critical geography,” and that “there is no ontological difference between territory and the body.” I return to this view of territory in the last section of this chapter as part of this effort to disrupt orientalist understandings of the very real violence sexual and gender minorities face.

Mexican “Sexo-politics” through time

It is important to situate the anti-queer/trans violence of the present day in its historical context as part of grappling with its various colonial and transnational dimensions. Furthermore, the recent story of LGBTQ activism in Guerrero is part of a longer and wider history of agitation by sexual and gender minorities in Mexico. This section engages with these historical developments relevant to both the violence of the present day as well as efforts to resist this violence.

In a study of the 19th-century roots of this social movement, Robert Buffington (2003) argues that homophobia and homosexuality should be seen as making each other.

Buffington outlines how such a dialectical relationship shaped the dying days of the Porfiriato regime, a key period just before the Mexican Revolution when the Mexican elite flirted with contemporary European propositions regarding what it meant to be an advanced society, including the incumbent relaxation of sexual mores.

There is an evocative geography to the modern Mexican LGBTQ movement that emerged in Mexico City in the early 1970s (de la Dehesa 2010; Díez 2011; Encarnación 2016; Peterson *et al.* 2018). By 1978, lesbian and gay activists had publicly participated in political marches that challenged state violence and injustice in Mexico, and in 1979, they organized the country's first actual Pride march, with a focus on sexual freedom as a political right (de la Dehesa, 2010; Díez, 2011; Peterson *et al.*, 2018). The movement's inaugural event began at the famous Monument to the Revolution, a triumphal arch in the middle of this city meant to signify the establishment of a new political order rooted in social justice at the beginning of the 20th century. That first march ended in the Alameda Central Park, the Americas' oldest public urban park (Villasana and Hidalgo, 2018). This use of prominent public spaces links to a long tradition of bringing forward grievances of marginalized social groups in Mexico to wider attention through street protest (Ustundag and Tanyildiz, 2017). In this section, I outline the broad strokes of a history mostly focused on Mexico City, since advances in rights recognition outside of the capital have only come much later (Schuessler and Capistrán, 2010).

Lizarraga Cruchaga (2011) delineates the LGBTQ social movement as “sexo-politics” and argues that it has its roots in late 1960s international feminism and in New York City's Stonewall riots. He locates the beginning of its narrative arc in a public protest against the firing of a young employee by Sears in Mexico City, held under the banner of the Homosexual Liberation Movement (also called the Homosexual Liberation Front of Mexico), a group founded by public intellectual Carlos Monsiváis, theatre director Nancy Cardenas, activist Juan Jacobo Hernandez, and others in the early 1970s. By 1978, three groups had formed in Mexico City to resist homophobia, including Sex Pol, a self-help group focused on consciousness-raising, the aforementioned Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action (FHAR), which took as its inspiration the 1968 Paris student revolution, and the Lambda Group of Homosexual Liberation, influenced by gay activism in the US and Spain. Renowned Mexican author Luis Zapata calls these times

the “mythical years” during which “[t]he word ‘liberty’ would acquire new tones . . . the colours of the rainbow,” and said we should give tribute to “those fags and dykes that gave us a homeland” (Zapata 2010: 25).

In July 1978, the FHAR publicly linked socialism and homosexual rights through a rather paradoxical participation in Mexico City’s commemoration of the Cuban Revolution (given the homophobia of the Cuban state at that time), though the key turning point took place when all three original groups marched together in the October 2, 1978 10th anniversary commemoration of the Tlatelolco massacre of student activists: “[W]hen the lesbian-homosexual contingent entered the Plaza of the Three Cultures they received a warm applause from the population and from the contingents that had already arrived” (Lizarraga Cruchaga 2011: 35). These groups went on to organize Mexico City’s first Gay Pride March the following year. The last two decades of the 20th century were also marked by a proliferation of new drinking establishments serving sexual and gender minorities in Mexico City, the names of which were often in English, including establishments such as el Infinity, el Anyways, el Doors, el Lipstick, el Boy Bar, el Living, and el Spartacus among others (Bautista 2010). The transnational linkages between this developing LGBTQ movement and its counterparts in the global north are evident in both this nomenclature and in the explicit connections between Mexico’s sexual and gender rights social movement development and what was happening elsewhere in the world. In his study of the historical trajectory of Mexico’s lesbico-gay movement starting in the 1970s, Díez (2011: 694) points out that international influence had an important role in the evolution of this social movement, including their adoption of what they call the discourse of “foreign organized homosexual groups” regarding the need for liberation from the social and sexual system.

The 41: The invention of Mexican homosexuality

Of course, there were antecedents to this key sexo-political moment in the development of what Schuessler (2010: 32, 156) calls “modern gay culture in Mexico”. The 19th century post-independence historical record of Mexico provides limited insight into the lives of sexual and gender minorities, a history collected in Jaime Cobian’s (2013) book *Los Jotos* [*The Faggots*]. For example, on July 31, 1833, a newspaper report

lamented the lack of government action in response to “lazy effeminate men hanging out in plazas” in the state of Durango while in 1871, another report in Mexico City warned of assaults by men dressed as women (Cobian 2013: 44, 47). In 1888, in response to complaints concerning effeminate itinerant food sellers in central Guadalajara, the governor had them moved to another neighbourhood. The same governor also enacted a new law that year outlining “offenses against the family order, public morality and good manners,” that included the threat of arrest and fines (Cobian 2013: 47–48). On December 17, 1899, a newspaper called *El Barreto de Guanajuato* lamented that “more than a thousand faggots” had attended the annual festival at the important pilgrimage site of San Juan de Los Lagos, “more painted than a clown, salty, done up, clean yet repugnant... insulting their sex” (Cobian 2013: 54). According to Cobian, newspapers also made mention of “effeminate men,” using various epithets including “sexual inverts” and “polkos” (apparently in relation to their skill at the polka!) and there were specific denunciations in newspapers of people accused of sodomy.

For Schuessler (2010) an important turning point was the mass arrest of 41 people in a private event in Mexico City at the turn of the century (or 42, counting then President Porfirio Diaz’s son-in-law, Ignacio de la Torre y Mier, known as “Nachita” and reportedly the intellectual author of the event who was later allowed to slip away): “The 41 faggots discovered at a ball La Paz Street on November 20, 1901,” is the headline⁵⁴ of a broadsheet from the time that includes a sketch by the popular Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada depicting same-sex male couples dancing, some wearing dresses yet clearly identified as men through facial physiognomy and moustaches (see also Irwin *et al.* 2003: 7; Vardero 2010: 231). Schuessler and Capistrán (2010) call this mass arrest “Mexico’s Stonewall.” Since this incident in which dozens of men present at a gay dance were arrested and harshly punished, the number 41 has been associated with homoeroticism in Mexico. Homosexuality has not been illegal since Mexico adopted the Napoleonic code in the mid 19th century, though the more ambiguous “offenses against morality and good manners” [*las faltas a la moral y las buenas costumbres*] have provided an alternative legal instrument still in place to the present day in some Mexican jurisdictions, including the state of Guerrero (see Monsiváis 2003: 155–158 for a more extensive discussion of the matter of law).

The incident of the 41 sparked an initial flurry of puerile interest from Mexico City's print press (the mainstream newspapers and the so-called "yellow" press, a genre of tabloid newspapers in Mexico focused on salacious and macabre stories) over the days that followed. Five years later, the publication of a fictionalized account of the event called *Los Cuarenta y uno: Novela critic-social* [*The Forty-one: A Novel of Social Criticism*], was met with limited interest and considered of dubious quality. Seven decades would pass before scholars would consider the meaning of this event for sexual and gender minorities in the country. In 1974, Miguel Capistrán published an article in Mexico City's *Contenido* in which he outlined the mass arrest that included sons of some of the "best families" of the capital and well-known "dandies" [*lagartijos*] of Calle Plateros, the most fashionable street of the city at the time (this piece is reprinted in Schuessler and Capistrán, 2010).

Based on his own research, including accounts he heard from Salvador Novo (who was reportedly acquainted with one of the 41), Capistrán tells us that while initially the men were simply required to sweep the streets of the area as punishment, the city's governor subsequently ordered that they be conscripted into military service. In order to assuage public opinion, those without resources or influence with which to mount a legal defence were then shipped to the Yucatan to join the war effort against the Mayans who were in rebellion against incorporation into the Mexican state. The only one of those arrested known by name thanks to Salvador Novo's⁵⁵ later account was Antonio Adalid of Mexico's "pulquera aristocracy" (*pulque* was a then-popular alcoholic beverage), godson of Mexico's former Emperor Maximiliano I (brother of the Emperor of Austria). Adalid went by the nickname "Toña la Mamonera" and was reputedly the life of Mexico City's clandestine gay party scene until he was forced into exile by his family and moved to San Francisco (Monsiváis 2003: 143; Capistrán 2010: 60). This set of stories indicates to us that Mexico's gay scene and politics evolved somewhat earlier than in the US and elsewhere.

Scholars have argued that the visibility that this case brought to sexuality in Mexico led to a new level of public debate that exemplifies Foucault's point that repression invariably incites productive discourse in that it "disrupts mainstream constructions of nation, of history, of collective identity" (Irwin *et al.* 2003: 4, 16).

Monsiváis (2003: 147) goes further, saying that the incident of the 41—which he calls *La Redada* [The Raid]—provides a window into gay life in late 19th century Mexico: “[A] ball in 1901 is almost literally the Gay Pride Parade of 2001.” He adds that proletarian gays—apparently absent from this event—also certainly existed at the time but then cautions that there is no knowledge about them available in the historic record (though given the references to the raffling of adolescents and of prostitution in the gay event earlier described, I think he overstates the case.) Monsiváis conducts a thought experiment in response to the unanswerable query a century after the fact: “What do those detained in the Dance of the 41 think of themselves?” He surmises that as Catholics, they would have seen themselves as on the brink of the fires of eternal damnation, as torn between hypocrisy and their sexual appetites, but that the persecution they experienced would have itself provided intuitive knowledge of their rights precisely because of the persistence of their conduct: “As a social entity, the gay is born out of stigma, out of mockery . . . The Raid “invents” homosexuality in Mexico” (Monsiváis 2003: 163–164; Robert McKee Irwin 2003: 184 and Robert Buffington 2003: 194 make similar arguments).

The decadence of the Porfiriato, marked by limited space for the closeted bourgeois homosexual as part of a hypocritical liberalism built on the backs of the poverty experienced by most Mexicans, was overtaken by the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917), which institutionalized the masculinization of Mexican national culture (Schuessler 2010). Cobian (2013) reports that a veritable “hunt” of effeminate men began in 1930, including their imprisonment, without justification in law. At the same time, Mexico’s cultural, literary, cinematic, and scientific sectors did provide some openings for sexual and gender diversity through regular depictions as they developed in the 20th century, even if they were usually marked by exaggeration and stereotyping.

From liberation to diversity

Brito (2003) argues that the secularization of Mexican society and its related moral tolerance coupled with an urban demographic explosion in which Mexican baby boomers were coming of age in the context of widespread international social change constituted the necessary ingredients for the development of gay and lesbian activism.

However, by the time the sixth gay march in Mexico City was held in 1984 deep conflicts had emerged among the LGBTQ activist community. By that point many activists did not adhere to the explicit socialist orientation of the first gay organizations, something that led to the disruption of the march by former leaders of the defunct FHAR and resulted in a fragmentation of the Mexico City movement that would persist for more than a decade (Brito 2003; Díez 2011). Also, with the onslaught of the AIDS crisis, much of the limited activist energy was redirected towards Mexico's response.

These initial successes were followed by a period of fragmentation that lasted from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s (Brito 2003; Díez 2011). The end of the 20th century was a time marked by a bumpy transition of the country to democratic rule, and Mexico City's LGBTQ communities also experienced its own renaissance at that time. Starting with the 1999 Pride march, rebranded as a parade, the movement refocused itself on gaining political representation within the country's political system and on performative public display focused on overt expressions of dissident sexuality. The end of the 20th century was also marked by the beginnings of state recognition of the civil and human rights of LGBTQ persons through concrete legislative and public policy, gains that also helped shift the movement towards a more national focus (Brito 2003). At that point the sexual and gender rights movement in Mexico also adopted a new collective LGBTQ identity based on the concept of "sexual diversity," one that responded to a more fluid understanding of sexuality (Díez 2011: 703–705). This contributed to legal and social advances for sexual and gender minorities in Mexico, including the inclusion of sexual orientation as a protected category in national anti-discrimination legislation in 2003⁵⁶ and state-sanctioned same-sex marriage in Mexico City in 2009 (Beer and Cruz-Aceves, 2018). This concept of "sexual diversity" is also evident in the discourse of activists in Guerrero in the present day and is used as a collective moniker for the various identities included under the LGBTTTI banner.

However, Mexico's recent drift towards democracy, starting in the 1980s after a long period of one-party rule, has also coincided with increased homicide levels, weak rule of law, corruption, and state terror (Wright 2018; Felbab-Brown 2019). In the context of neoliberal globalization, socio-political trajectories that form places sometimes intersect such that most people cannot reasonably rely on the rule of law for protection

from harm, a reality presently faced by people in many parts of Mexico and particularly in Guerrero (Walsh and Menjivar 2016; Zepeda Lecuona and Jiménez Rodríguez 2018; Dowler and Christian 2019). Wright (2018) provides insight into the impunity faced by people in the State of Guerrero by outlining how it is directly linked to the US-supported drug war, but also underlines that this place-specific violence is part of a larger phenomenon. Wright (2018: 327) insists that this bigger picture, what they call the “repressive neoliberal and global order,” is at the root of the impunity that people in southern Mexico face. As such, it is important to remember that it is in this context that Guerrero’s LGBTQ movement emerged at the cusp of the twenty-first century, something that I further outline in the next section.

Encountering LGBTTTI Pride in a small Mexican state capital



Figure 3.2 - “First Homosexual Pride March”—Guerrero, 2002

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

On June 13, 2002, LGBTTTI activists organized the first ever Pride march in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, Mexico. Surprised onlookers watched a ragtag procession wind its way through the downtown streets of the state capital, Chilpancingo. The closing rally took place in the city's main square, where a white banner draped on the front of the stage proclaimed, "All below the same flag," in reference to the rainbow flag, used throughout the world as a symbol of LGBTQ unity in diversity since 1978 (Formby, 2017). The banner announced the: "First Homosexual Pride March," with the words "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender" below, in brackets. Its authors also included text that predicted the significance the event would later hold: "this march marks the arrival of a time when we are able to exercise our citizenship to definitively liberate ourselves from stigma, prejudice and discrimination [in] Guerrero" (translation of banner's text by the author).

However, widespread violence and impunity have also defined the first long decade of the 21st century in this southern Mexican state. In this section I draw on an analysis of a visual archive of this social movement's annual Pride events over this time period (as described in Chapter 2) to consider how an identity-rights-based movement co-exists with a weak state and yet makes modest advances. In Guerrero, there is evidence of local activism that draws on global human rights discourse concerning social inclusion, safety, and political change to demand recognition of sexual and gender minority rights using focused public events, yet largely ignores other prominent social and political issues that impact upon their everyday life in this place (Hanhardt 2013). In this section of this chapter I offer a study of the first ten Pride marches in Guerrero's capital city through the lens of photographer (Sasha) Emiliano García to introduce Guerrero's sexual and gender minority rights movement and to start to understand it in relation to violence and impunity, the state, and the transnational.

A large body of work considers the development of LGBTQ movements in the global north over the past half-century, including the role of Pride marches, parades, and celebrations (Johnston 2005; Browne 2007; Markwell and Waitt 2009; Podmore 2015; Delgado 2016; McFarland Bruce 2016; Peterson *et al.* 2018). In many cases, Pride events have shifted from politically charged marches to public displays of queer bodies for touristic consumption, increasingly intertwined with the state (Markwell 2002; Johnston

2005; Browne 2007; Markwell and Waitt 2009; Delgado 2016; Formby 2017). Activists also often stage carnivalesque events to temporarily produce politicized space that flaunts stigma and challenges heteronormativity and the masculine-feminine binary using incongruity, theatricality, and humour, in order to change attitudes, language, symbols, and behavioural norms that justify the marginalization of LGBTQ persons (Browne 2007; Podmore 2015; McFarland Bruce 2016; Peterson *et al.* 2018). A growing literature also examines the LGBTQ movement beyond the global north⁵⁷, specifically in Latin America, where scholars have focused on efforts to affect state action, though some see Pride parades as a foreign cultural practice taken up in the periphery (de la Dehesa 2010; Corrales and Pecheny 2010; Encarnación 2016; Peterson *et al.* 2018). Most studies of Pride events in the global south focus on national capitals or world cities (see for example, Milani 2015; Sircar 2017; Lamond 2018; Peterson *et al.* 2018). Missing from the literature is detailed study of Pride celebrations in smaller cities in the global south, places that are far from the national centres of power, especially places impacted by weak state structures (Aldrich 2004). This analysis of the role of LGBTQ activism in a peripheral state capital city in southern Mexico using Pride marches addresses this gap.

Since 2002, activists have gathered from other towns and cities to hold Pride demonstrations in the historic centre of this remote state capital, events that periodically disrupt the social space of the narrow streets of this peripheral city's downtown. García Arzeta's archive allows us to gain insight into the development of these Pride celebrations, to draw attention to queerness in a peripheral city, and to underline the importance of place to LGBTQ activism and of visual archives for its documentation. I also draw on García Arzeta's coverage of LGBTTTI Pride marches to reflect on the experiences of this movement in the context of an historical juncture marked by high levels of socio-political violence coupled with an ongoing story of widespread impunity for perpetrators of various forms of harm.

García Arzeta follows in a long line of notable Mexican photographers who have documented "the generations of the rainbow," since at least the late 1920s when Luis Márquez Romay's collection of homoerotic images had a limited circulation (Torrez 2010: 140). Lola Álvarez Bravo produced an extensive collection of photography documenting "gay Mexico" from the 1930s until her failing vision compelled her to put

down her camera, though not before documenting Mexico's first Pride march in 1979 (Torrez 2010: 143). Other important visual chroniclers of Mexico's LGBT sectors in more recent years include Yolanda Andrade and Jorge Claro León's outstanding images of Pride marches over many years, Agustín Martínez Castro's 1980s series about *travestis* (trans people assigned male at birth), Graciela Iturbide's 1989 study of "the daily life of a homosexual" in Juchitán, Oaxaca, that documents the lives of *Muxe* (the local Indigenous term for someone identified as male who lives as a woman), Óscar Sánchez Gómez's late 1990s collection of images of same-sex couples at home, and Omar Gámez's more recent and unauthorized documentation of sexual activity inside a Mexico City darkroom (Torrez 2010: 145-147). I propose García Arzeta's archive builds on these earlier works such that the analysis included in this dissertation provides insights into the development of a social movement in the context of violence and impunity.

Three principal themes about this social movement emerged from my analysis of García Arzeta's archive: First, it documents the temporary transformation of urban space, how the use of a mixture of symbols communicates the agenda of the social movement, including symbols that are transnationally recognizable as well as others drawn from local history and culture. Second, the archive shows how this social movement reflects local politics and traditions even as the images reveal how it resonates with similar events around the world. Chilpancingo's annual Pride marches create a carnivalesque space, marked by gender performances designed to be provocative. Finally, this social movement has made consistent use of its organized social presence in the state's main urban spaces through Pride marches to draw public attention to the local configurations of violence experienced by its members and to memorialize those who have been killed.

Examination of an archive

In Latin America, plazas play a key role as the site of public events because they are often already "imbued with profound cultural history and social meaning" (Delgado 2016: 21). Since its first Pride march, Chilpancingo's central plaza, the *Plaza Civica Primer Congreso de Anáhuac*, has been both the end point of the public marches and the site of related speeches and entertainment, and thus figures prominently in the images of the archive that is the focus of this section. This plaza is steeped in a history that offers a

sense of place that attaches to public gatherings held there in the present day, such as Pride. While Chilpancingo is now a markedly peripheral city, it played a key role in Latin American history as host of the Congress of Anáhuac in 1813, a momentous gathering of political leaders that publicly declared its support for the independence of Septentrional America⁵⁸ from Spain, the abolition of slavery, and all other class and racial social distinctions in the region, eventually leading to the establishment of liberal government (Brading 1991). This origin story of liberalism is important to key 21st century queer/trans activists, who ground their own efforts in this rights-based tradition. These values are thus reinforced each June as Chilpancingo's historic buildings envelop the crowds that gather from across the city and the state to celebrate sexual and gender diversity and to demand respect for and protection of human rights regardless of sexual or gender identity (Markwell 2002; Peterson *et al.* 2018).

However, the use of violence by powerful forces—including organized crime, corrupt state officials, and transnational business interests—has realigned the social landscape of the towns, cities, and rural areas of Guerrero in recent years. It is a remote place yet also created through connections to the continent's metropolises (Kyle 2015; Zagato 2018). The trajectories that form Guerrero converge such that most people cannot reasonably rely on the rule of law for protection from harm, and unsurprisingly the lives of sexual and gender minorities are especially impacted in particular ways (Zepeda Lecuona and Jiménez Rodríguez 2018; Beer and Cruze-Aceves 2018). Strikingly, throughout this period the LGBTTTTI movement in this place has nevertheless consistently called on the state to fulfill the role of defender and protector of rights despite scant evidence of its inclination to do so. García Arzeta's archive, through memorialization and in its documentation of symbolism, assists in the mapping the geographies of violence and resistance relevant to the lives of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, including the role of the state in both mitigating and in producing these geographies.

Since the first annual commemoration of the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, US, Pride marches and parades have been known for their activist function, articulated through the deployment of widely legible symbolism coupled with performances that draw more specifically on local conditions and diversity (Podmore

2015). Using a series of selected images, I comment on how the themes introduced above - symbolism, carnivalesque, violence, and memorialization - are evident in the archival material, and build on this analysis to show how this unique social movement has intervened into the political through its transformation of urban space.

Starting in 2002, an ad hoc group that later became the Linaloe Group—named for an aromatic tree endemic to Guerrero—organized the first three Chilpancingo Pride marches (Hernández 2017). These early activists, now referred to as the “pioneers” of gay activism in Guerrero, drew on their connections to LGBTQ organizing elsewhere in Mexico to bring sexual and gender minority rights to the attention of the Guerrero public, to promote a secular society there, and to challenge the Catholic Church’s influence.⁵⁹ In 2005, CEPRODEHI, the organization that Leija Herrera founded, took over the coordination of Chilpancingo’s Pride marches and began to coordinate related political and educational activities, with a particular focus on how violence impacts sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero. Leija Herrera remained president of CEPRODEHI until his untimely death.

On May 4, 2011, Leija Herrera was murdered, his lifeless body left in a laneway adjacent to that same central plaza so tied to Guerrero’s LGBTTTI movement. This death strongly impacted the activist community and coloured that year’s Pride events. García Arzeta’s archive also documents several other events focused on violence against sexual and gender minorities that the surviving leadership of CEPRODEHI organized in the months following Leija Herrera’s death. These included a public poster campaign for IDAHO days after Leija Herrera’s killing, a press conference denouncing violence against sexual and gender minorities, and a funeral procession and silent march commemorating “Marimar,” another well-loved local gay personality who was killed immediately following the town of Zumpango’s first Pride parade, two months after Leija’s murder.

The 2012 archive covers the second state-level LGBTTTI “cultural week,” a series of artistic, cultural, and political events dedicated to the murdered president of CEPRODEHI. The last event documented in García Arzeta’s archive that is included in this analysis is a press conference held on June 29, 2012, in which the CEPRODEHI leadership announced that organization’s dissolution, at least in part due to increased

insecurity that they felt they faced. This examination of the content of García Arzeta's archive seeks to provide insight into the development of the LGBTTTI movement in Guerrero, especially in its capital city, over its first decade. The intent of this examination is to provide a sense of the movement itself, the issues and challenges the activists faced, and the battles they fought (and sometimes won). This examination sheds light on the context of violence faced by queer and trans people. It also shows how this violence can be understood as gendered, the ways in which this movement relates to a state implicated in the widespread violence and impunity, and how the transnational dimensions of this violence are key to its configuration.

Movements are made through their public events

All five images from the first Pride march focus on the same figure, evidently chosen as a key symbol for this first Pride march: a rather robust rendition of the Statue of Liberty, appropriately bedecked in Romanesque robes and spray-painted silver from head to toe, clutching a book tight to the breast with the left arm and holding aloft a torch (unlit) in the right hand (see Figure 3.2). The figure is crowned with a five-pointed star reminiscent of the original seven-pointed version that graces New York City's harbour.

In this image, the person who depicts this universal symbol of freedom and rights stands on a stage flanked by two others, each holding a rainbow flag. At the rear of the stage others hold up another large rainbow flag that partially obscures the graffiti on the stage backdrop. A red AIDS ribbon, a smiling condom figure, and more rainbows decorate the banner described above. Other photographs show the Statue of Liberty figure walking down Chilpancingo's main street, rainbow flag in hand. As has happened in places across the globe for more than five decades, the organizers of the first LGBTTTI Chilpancingo Pride March clearly drew on a transnational repertoire of symbolism to communicate their collective entry into the public realm (Peterson *et al.* 2018). This procession would also have been legible to the citizens of Chilpancingo due to their familiarity with a longstanding local use of public space to contest social meanings and values and to insist on recognition (Ustundag and Tanyildiz 2017).



(a)



(b)

Figure 3.3 - Crowds observe Chilpancingo Pride, 2003 and 2008

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

Pablo, a 33-year-old gay man who taught performing arts, discussed his participation in the first march with me: “We were people who had the courage to face society, to silence . . . viperous tongues, and we had the courage to demonstrate peacefully without disrespecting [others]” Subsequent marches garnered increased attention from the public, as demonstrated by the large crowds that thronged the street as the participants approached the city centre (see Figure 3.3a) and that also filled the central square for the speeches and entertainment that followed (see Figure 3.3b). Activists who marched in the early events recalled that the wider community watched them with morbid fascination, more recently replaced with expressions of solidarity.

The 2003 photos depict many banners and signs, including one that evokes Oscar Wilde: “Let the population that is traditionally hidden show its face and speak with its own voice and name.” In a press conference held prior to that march, organizers denounced the Catholic bishops’ opposition to condom use and abortion, offered their support to political parties that promoted corresponding rights, and announced the upcoming Pride event (Cervantes 2003). These assertions suggested a continuity between the emergent LGBTTTI movement in Guerrero and its counterparts in other countries that also declared that “they will no longer allow the state, the heterosexual majority, or their antagonists to cast them in the shadows” (Peterson *et al.* 2018: 7).

In an image from the 2003 march, an older statuesque woman dressed in a modest red dress is pictured crossing a stage with a small sign that reads “transgender,” part of a set of signs that represents a range of sexual and gender identities. In another image a group of people standing on a stage hold two flags, the rainbow flag on the left and the Mexican flag on the right. Another photo shows two women holding up a colourful hand-drawn banner that reads “Right to marry or not to marry” [Derecho a casarse o no casarse]. Behind them a dozen people are carrying a giant rainbow flag that fills much of the narrow street. Once again, there is evidence of the use of this widely recognized symbol, as well as evidence of the tension between a liberationist vision versus a rights-based model for the LGBTQ movement in Guerrero, one that has played out in queer movements throughout the world (Formby 2017).



(a) 2004



(b) 2005

Figure 3.4 - Religious symbols prominent in early Chilpancingo Pride marches

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

Someone dressed in the garb of a bishop leads the 2004 Chilpancingo Pride march with a sign that reads: “The pope insists in condemning our lives/We are all equal under the law of god” (see Figure 3.4a). The lead banner of the march reads: “Gay Guerrerens Association Against AIDS / Third state Pride march / Gay, lesbian, bisexual and

transgender / For respect of sexual diversity/total and absolute recognition of our rights, without discrimination.”⁶⁰ The text-heavy banner also includes several symbols and logos on its edges, including a condom, a small map of Mexico, and the AIDS ribbon. Once again, there is evidence of ritualized public performance drawing on a preponderance of transnationally recognizable symbolism mixed with the local.

An especially striking photograph from Guerrero’s fourth state Pride march in 2005—the first organized by CEPRODEHI—shows two hooded figures, shirtless and barefoot with chains attached to their ankles, rough ropes around their waists holding up simple black skirts, walking side by side with a heavy metal pole across their shoulders (see Figure 3.4b). Three words are written on the horizontal pole: “Closet, Discrimination, Homophobia.” A rainbow flag hangs between the two figures, tied to their waists. The traditional Catholic penitential symbolism is readily accessible to the observers who have likely seen similarly dressed figures walk through the streets of nearby Taxco during the popular religious processions in Holy Week. The message is clear: Societal harm against sexual and gender minorities is suffering that warrants attention. García Arzeta’s archive shows a gradual adaptation of a more festival- or carnival-like tenor, as evident in the combination of discordant symbolism seen in Figure 3b. While a conventional understanding of the carnivalesque aspect of urban events sees it as a frivolous way for people to blow off steam, scholars have argued that the use of carnivalesque in urban parades allows for the surfacing of social conflict through the symbolic upending of established social hierarchies (Jackson 1988; Johnston 2005). This can engender a culture of resistance and to an extent has done so in the LGBTTTI movement in Guerrero.

The homicide rate in Guerrero skyrocketed in the early years of the 21st century, and by the middle of the century’s first decade there are explicit references to violence against sexual and gender minorities in the state capital’s Pride marches. The main banner for the 2005 march denounced crimes motivated by homophobia: “Fourth gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Pride march/calling for less discrimination, the total eradication of aggression and the solving of homophobic crimes.” A video clip also shows march participants vigorously chanting: “The faggot who shuts up will never be listened to; the proud gay will defend their voice,” evidence that the Chilpancingo Pride

marches continue to reproduce a transnationally recognizable emphasis on the importance of visibility (McFarland Bruce 2016).

The images of the 2006 Chilpancingo Pride march again depict an eager, small-town parade, one that likely evoked an association with the many other carnivalesque events that regularly take over public space in this city through its annual cycle of cultural and religious community events. Several hundred marchers decked out in bright, homemade costumes walked down the city's main street. As leader of CEPRODEHI, Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera's presence is prominent in this march and in subsequent events until his death. In one image from this march he is seen walking past shuttered businesses, holding the rainbow train of the outfit of a figure who is wearing white gloves, holding a baton, and dressed in a top hat and black cocktail dress. The archive documents a steady pattern of growth in state Pride marches in terms of the number of participants and the size of assembled crowds. The 2007 and 2008 events, in particular, were notably larger and more colourful than those of previous years and included many more floats as well as a host of social and political contingents.

The officially authorized use of Chilpancingo's central plaza coupled with participation of prominent political leaders suggests a shift from an "oppositional demonstration to [an] increasingly sanctioned and festivalized . . . event" (Podmore 2015: 76).⁶¹ Together with the activist leadership, politicians from the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the political party that then controlled the state government, marched at the front of the 2008 parade. In a video of that event's commencement that fits Browne's (2007) conceptualization of a "a party with politics," the CEPRODEHI president directs the politicians to initiate the event by waving large rainbow flags on each side of the road, calling on them to do this "according to our traditions." The phrase he used in Spanish was, *usos y costumbres*, a direct reference to the rights of Indigenous peoples, words that those present would have understood as legal language that dates to the colonial period, signalling sexual and gender minorities as analogous to other cultural groups that warrant state recognition.

The 2008 Chilpancingo Pride march theme continued the rights-based focus: "A new day is born today: Defend your rights by voting." A video clip from García's archive shows Leija Herrera addressing the crowd: "We are here to promote peaceful

coexistence, to demand that homophobic hate crimes be addressed, and to celebrate the fact that . . . Guerrero now recognizes that we are neither criminals, sick, nor degenerate.” He also thanked Guerrero’s Secretariat of Public Security and its Office of Attorney General for protecting the LGBTTTI community in face of threats from the church to attack the march. In the 2009 march the elaborate outfits of the participants and the increased number of floats were evidence of a heightened level of pageantry. This development of a carnivalesque marking of Pride is an example of an event in the periphery that draws on the tradition of protest and resistance from elsewhere and reconfigures it according to local circumstances (Markwell and Waitt, 2009).

Formed in the crucible of impunity



(a)

(b)

Figure 3.5 - Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera, CEPRODEHI president, leads 2010 march (a).

In the 2011 march, activists demand the solving of his murder (b).

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

The 2010 march was the last led by Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera (see Figure 3.5a). That day, he stood on a stage lined with activists and beauty pageant winners from across the state and announced the coming into effect of a state law against discrimination based on sexual diversity, the result of a longstanding CEPRODEHI campaign. The archive also documents the responses of activists to Leija Herrera’s murder. In a press conference that was videotaped by García Arzeta, held several weeks after Leija Herrera’s death, José Lavoisier Luquín Jiménez, a close friend of the murdered leader elected to take on

the role of president of CEPRODEHI after his death, said that Leija Herrera had received an anonymous death threat several months prior to his killing.

Held two months after the prominent activist’s murder, the principal demand of Chilpancingo’s tenth Pride march concerned that crime. Leading activists carried a banner that read: “Mr. State Governor Angel Aguirre Rivero, the LGBTTTI collective, and the society in general of the State of Guerrero demand that the murder of our friend and activist Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera be solved” (see Figure 3.5b). Three years later, this same governor resigned in disgrace in connection with the forced disappearance of 43 teachers’ college students who were protesting peacefully in the same region. Leija Herrera’s murder remains unsolved, as do those disappearances and so many other acts of violence. In his public address to the Pride march that day, the then newly elected leader Luquín Jiménez called for the solving of other killings of sexual and gender minorities in the state, as well as for legalizing same-sex marriage. The video documentation shows that at the end of the march, activists assembled from across the state gave homage to the slain leader and called for equal rights for sexual and gender minorities in the state.



Figure 3.6 - Silent march for justice for Miramar. Zumpango, July 2011

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

After tragedy struck again in the nearby town of Zumpango with the killing of “Marimar” as described above, the community held a silent march in honour of the deceased, carrying aloft signs that read: “Justice: that impunity does not remain; the family and friends of Javier Sanchez ask for the solving of his death; no to homophobic crimes; we demand justice” (see Figure 3.6). Given widespread violence and impunity in the state, the swift, public, organized response to these and other murders of LGBTQ persons in Guerrero is striking because of the courage demonstrated by activists despite real dangers.

The 2012 Chilpancingo Pride march, part of the “Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera Sexual Diversity Cultural Week,” held in honour of the slain activist, continued this tradition of publicly denouncing violence against LGBTQ persons. It incorporated groups from across the state that also held Pride marches in several other municipalities in the weeks that followed. Also, a troop of *Chinelo* dancers participated in this march (see Figure 3.7). *Chinelo* is a comedic form of costumed dance associated with carnival that developed in the second half of the 19th century and mocks colonial (and later) efforts to Europeanize Mexico (Tranks 2006). Once again, García’s archive documents how use of the carnivalesque occupied urban public space and challenged entrenched social hierarchies (Browne 2007).



Figure 3.7 - Chinelo dancers, colonial symbolism in Pride events

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

The videos of this event show that the 2012 march was an exuberant affair, with hundreds of participants and thousands of enthusiastic spectators lining the traditional route that the march has taken since its first year. This 11th march would be the final march led by CEPRODEHI, the organization Quetzalcoatl Leija steered until his untimely death, though others have since picked up the banner for the annual Pride event and continue this tradition to the present day.

Processions, parades, beauty pageants, and drag shows

In this section, I reflect further on various types of events that play a role in the collective life of the LGBTQ community in Guerrero. In addition to the annual state Pride march in the capital city as described earlier in this chapter, activists in other cities and towns across Guerrero state temporarily occupy public space in a range of ways that I consider in this section. In addition to Pride marches, at least three other types of events give form to the political and social development of the sexual and gender minority community in Guerrero, including parades (or parade-marches, seen by organizers as

distinct from marches), beauty pageants (*certámenes*), and drag shows (*shows de travestis*). In this examination of events and the activism that produces them, I draw on detailed interviews conducted with activists in six of the state's seven regions as well as participant-observation in events in towns and cities across the state.

In Guerrero, transitory queer place-making builds on other longstanding traditions. For example, public religious procession in the markedly Catholic northern Guerrero city of Taxco, itself nothing short of archetypal, bleeds into the present day. I later saw its symbolic portrayal of violent suffering refracted through contemporary queer procession reflected on García Arzeta's archive (see Figure 3.4b above). A key informant explained to me that while the proliferation of Pride marches in small towns and cities across the state can be understood as a local manifestation of the global LGBTQ rights movement, these events also resonate with religious processions and with the historic use of public processions to announce public events, a practice that has been part of local culture for centuries (Encarnación, 2016). While its Pride events clearly link Guerrero to other such marches and parades around the world, in Guerrero the practice of public procession also links its LGBTTTI community to longstanding local traditions, often with a distinctly religious dimension. During the colonial period, processions led by standard bearers regularly heralded the arrival of the Spanish galleon ships in nearby Acapulco, loaded with goods imported from Asia.

I recall my own experience of this sort of more traditional performance while researching anti-queer/trans violence. Beating drums can be heard throughout the central part of the city. It is late evening, Holy Thursday, just before Easter. For many hours the procession winds through the narrow streets of this city built on the side of a mountain, the pilgrims heading to a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, high above the town. Thousands of people participate in the procession, organized into contingents from dozens of church groups, parishes, businesses, labour unions, and worker collectives—and of course several marching bands. It feels like the everyone from this small city is in attendance. Called the “Procession of the Christs,” each contingent carries a life-sized statue of Jesus on a cross. Laughter. Singing. Dancing. A religiosity that would make most liberal societies blush. Homosocial groupings of men of various ages accompany the ubiquitous litters bearing the devotional statues, they take turns shouldering the

sometimes rather significant burden. Clusters of mostly young women walk in front or behind.

The procession also includes hundreds of penitents, some carrying large bundles of thorny sticks, or self-flagellating with a whip tipped with metal studs or dragging chains behind their ankles. The penitents are barefoot, dressed in black, and hooded. Jovial confraternity combines with an aesthetic of self-denial that seems to speak to the nature of this place. I sense this is a community where bonds are strong and where a collective identity grounds its residents. And yet I wonder: Which ones will head north to cross the US border surreptitiously, never to return? Or die trying? Which ones will become involved in the drug trade, a social reality never far away here? Which of these mostly young people are queer, and struggling to understand a sexual or gender identity they fear will be judged discordant? But tonight at least, conviviality and steadfastness seem to reign. The last statue I remember from that procession was labelled “Christ of a Good Death” [Cristo de la Buena Muerte].



Figure 3.8 – Standard held by contestant in “Gay Flower of Christmas Eve, 2013”

(Source: W. Payne)

El Paseo del Pendón, literally “the walk of the standard,” is a traditional celebration in Chilpancingo that marks the beginning of Christmas festivities and involves a procession led by a standard bearer. Figure 3.11 shows a contestant in the “Gay Flower of Christmas Eve” [Flor gay de Nochebuena] competition, holding a standard reminiscent of the form that has traditionally been used to lead processions in the region. This politicized pageant was organized in response to the exclusion of trans women from a traditional beauty pageant held in conjunction with Chilpancingo’s annual fair in which cisgender women compete for the title of “Flower of Christmas Eve.” The use of symbolism steeped in local tradition links the LGBTQ community to centuries-old traditions like that of the announcing of the arrival of the trade ships or making fun of the Spanish colonizers. This deployment of recognized cultural symbols as part of political protest demonstrates their call for social recognition constructed in a manner that has unique legibility for the local community.

In recent years, smaller towns across Guerrero, such as Chilapa, Tixtla, Zumpango and Ometepec, have also become the sites of LGBTQ Pride parades, and as part of this research project I attended many of these public events. I propose that something distinct is going on, something that has to do with the scale of the communities involved and the dense family networks. These are relatively small urban settlements, no more than thirty thousand people and sometimes far smaller. They are also places where most residents have deep familial roots. As with many LGBTQ Pride celebrations throughout the world, the desire for inclusion in the body politic is a key element of these events, but inclusion has a different connotation precisely because of the size of these towns: The people standing on the sidelines of these march/parades are the neighbours and family members of those participating in the public expression of Pride in sexual and gender diversity. People already know each other.

An illustrative example is the celebration of LGBTQ Pride in Ometepec, the principal town of the Costa Chica region of Guerrero, the south-eastern region of the state, adjacent to Oaxaca. After seeing an online notice about an event entitled the “First Pride Parade-March of Ometepec,” I contacted the organizers and traveled to this remote city to observe and participate in the inaugural event in April 2013. According to the advertisement, the Parade-March was supposed to start at 5:00 p.m., though even a half

hour later the only evidence that something going to happen was the presence of an unattended pickup truck with speakers mounted to the back. A few minutes after 6:00 p.m. another vehicle arrived, draped in a large banner advertising the highly competitive LGBTQ beauty pageant that would be taking place later that evening. The banner spelled out the location, entry fee, and significant monetary prizes. The main event banner was then unfurled: “1st Gay Ometepec Parade—March 2013—For Gender Equity,” though I would later learn that the banner’s reference to gender had to do with the organizers’ concern for those who do not present as legible in a binary gender system rather than a concern for equity for cisgender women compared to cisgender men. The top left corner of the banner replicated the logo of “Our Gay Beauty Guerrero,” [*Nuestra Belleza Gay Guerrero*] a franchise of a national beauty pageant organization that was sponsoring the evening event.⁶² Then, a couple of young people arrived with a giant, street-wide rainbow flag, that I would later learn had been stitched together *pro bono* by a local seamstress from fabric purchased in Chilpancingo. One of the organizers told me that the event’s steering committee members had never actually attended a Pride march before but had watched YouTube videos of the Mexico City and Los Angeles marches to study what to include in this event. They also explained that the hyphenated title of “parade-march” was because it was meant to function as both a parade that would announce the evening beauty pageant as well as a political march demanding human rights based on sexuality and gender diversity.



Figure 3.9 - Ometepec's Agrarian House, with sign informing the public that the "Our Gay Beauty event" had been moved to another venue

(Source: W. Payne)

With little fanfare, the marchers began walking towards the centre of town, led by a solo figure, a young slim man dressed only in a black loincloth decorated with sequins, feathers, and small mirrors, with a matching mask. He also wore gloves and ankle strap stilettos, both black leather, and held a small rainbow banner with the name of a nearby rural county that has a largely Indigenous population. At the beginning, a couple of dozen people marched on sparsely populated sidewalks observed by people who had likely heard the dance music being blasted from the back of the pickup and walked out of their houses or shops to see what was happening. By the time we reached the Catholic Cathedral in the centre of town the march had grown to nearly 100 people with many others watching from the sidewalks. As we passed through the centre of town we also walked by the *El Centro Social Casa Agraria Emiliano Zapata*, a community-owned space connected to the local *ejido* (collectively owned land and the associated communal structures to manage it). The gate was adorned with a handwritten sign that informed the

reader that the “Our Gay Beauty” [Nuestra Belleza Gay] event has been moved to another venue called “My Castle” (see Figure 3.12). An organizer later told me that the leadership of the agricultural organization had rescinded the rental agreement for the LGBTQ beauty pageant the very morning of the event: “He said that they weren’t going to rent the place to faggots.” The same organizer expressed irritation that the town officials made them feel like they were doing them a favour in permitting the parade-march at all, underlining their view that the government’s role is that of service to the public, and supporting community events is simply part of the job of local government.

Over the course of the day several participants invited me to upcoming Pride events in even smaller Indigenous towns in the same region, including Azoyú, which held its first march in 2010, and San Luis Acatlán, where the giant Ometepec rainbow flag would make its next appearance. Over the course of my research I attended Pride processions in the state’s two largest cities (Chilpancingo and Acapulco) and three of its smaller cities (Chilapa, Zumpango, and Ometepec), and also learned about similar events in Taxco (its first Pride parade was in 2002), Iguala (where the 43 students disappeared), Zihuatanejo (like Acapulco, a beach destination), Atoyac (where leftist guerrilla movements emerged in the 1970s and again in the 1990s), and the western town of Ciudad Altamirano (where there is an LGBTQ contingent in the annual Expo parade), in addition to Azoyú and San Luis Acatlán. I would later learn that Tlapa, the unofficial capital of the Indigenous eastern part of the state, had held its first Pride march in 2017. While the nomenclature is not entirely consistent, there is a tendency to call events that have more specific political goals “marches,” while less overtly political ones, such as the one in Ciudad Altamirano, are often associated with a beauty pageant event and are called “parades.” First-time events were invariably small (under 200 participants, and in one case only four participants), and often marked by morbid fascination or even overt rejection, including the throwing of dirt and eggs, though many informants also talked about a shift towards greater acceptance and solidarity in relation to subsequent events.

While space does not permit a detailed study of the longstanding role of beauty pageants and drag shows in the disruption of traditional understandings of sexuality and gender in Guerrero, it is important to recognize that they play an important role. Beauty pageants and drag shows punctuate the spaces where queers gather in Guerrero. They

also connect Guerrero to other parts of the country through the pageant franchise system discussed above, and to other parts of the world through international tourism, especially in Acapulco and other historic tourist destinations in Mexico.

Flirting with the State: LGBTQ organizing in Guerrero

Initially, LGBTQ organizing in Guerrero was focused on creating Pride events and on access to HIV/AIDS treatment. Grupo Linaloe (mentioned above), *Metamorfosis* (which started the annual march in Zihuatanejo), the Taxco Gay Pride Committee, and Pungaragay (which organizes the LGBTQ contingent in Ciudad Altamirano's annual Expo parade) are examples of this organizing. A longstanding Acapulco organization called ASHOLES (The Association of Lesbians and Gays in the State of Guerrero) has focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and access to treatment, as well as discrimination and imprisonment of trans folk. Other organizations have shied away from the political to focus on the sociocultural realm, such as a gay sports organization in the Tierra Caliente region and the Amelia Robles Rainbow Cultural Centre [Centro Cultural Arcoiris Amelia Robles A.C.] in the state capital. Over the years many organizations have also sought official status as "civil associations" [A.C.] to apply for government grants for a host of programs. There are also many examples of radio and cable TV shows that have sought to address LGBTQ issues, sometimes with small-scale government support. All major political parties have cultivated relationships with the LGBTQ community through participating in events and allowing space for LGBTQ activists within their party ranks.

Everywhere, LGBTQ organizing is impacted by conflict and leadership struggles, something that has certainly marked organizing in Guerrero. Many informants named activist and media personality Manuel Castillo Jaimes (aka "Igor Pettit") as an especially polemical figure in Guerrero's LGBTQ politics. Initial media accounts concerning Quetzalcoatl Leija's murder even referenced a possible link to Castillo as discussed in Chapter 2, though these were never substantiated (nor has this homicide been solved, a matter that will be taken up in Chapter 5). Castillo has been involved in an organization called the Rainbow Acapulco that has had a role in organizing some Pride events in Acapulco, and for a time was also the "Governor's Advisor for Attention to Vulnerable Groups", appointed by his friend, and then Governor, Aguirre Rivero. In an interview I

conducted with him in Acapulco in 2013, Castillo characterized himself as the key figure in the LGBTQ movement in Guerrero. When I asked him to comment on where he thought the LGBTQ movement in Guerrero was heading, he spoke at length about his own personal political plans. After I pressed him to speak more generally about the wider movement in the state he said,

the lesbian and gay community in Guerrero is not organized, it lacks discipline, it prefers neither culture nor political development and is instead focused on seeking funding for beauty pageants and other frivolous and inconsequential events that amount to nothing except to leave the rest of society thinking that all homosexuals in Guerrero are travestis.

In a press conference held on June 29, 2012, the CEPRODEHI leadership announced the dissolution of the organization that had led the struggle for sexual and gender minority rights for nearly seven years. The prepared statement underlined that the organization's leaders had become convinced that Guerrero required full-time activists to lead the movement for the rights of sexual and gender minorities, something they were not able to provide. They listed advances they had made in favour of respect for the LGBTTTI community and expressed their certainty that new activist organizations would emerge to continue the work of fighting for the rights of sexual and gender minority rights in the state, something that has since transpired. That press conference marked a shift in the way in which LGBTQ leadership and organization manifests in Guerrero, a sort of turning point. The first long decade of the movement involved various forms of oppositional politics that pushed the state from the outside. There is also evidence of a longstanding pattern of seeking inroads with the state even at the expense of having an independent activist movement, a trajectory that seems to have led to a capturing of LGBTQ activism by the state.

After the demise of CEPRODEHI, several key informants told me that Castillo was instrumental in establishing the State Council of Sexual Diversity in the State of Guerrero, which included nearly three dozen representatives from throughout the territory and excluded others, apparently based on whether someone was in Castillo's favour. Starting in October 2012, this body contributed to the establishment of a series of

LGBTQ-focused offices in city halls across the state, including in Zihuatanejo and Chilapa, and later in other municipalities including Chilpancingo, Zumpango, Taxco, Petatlán, and Tecpan.⁶³ After Governor Aguirre was forced to resign in disgrace for his connection to the forced disappearances of the 43 student-teachers from Ayotzinapa, Castillo returned to his media work.⁶⁴

In an interview with Ramiro Sotelo Rizo, the Director of the Office for Gender Diversity in the City of Zihuatanejo, conducted in his office in January 2014, this long-time activist explained to me that his work was focused on LGBTQ issues, including involvement in the city's Pride events (he acknowledged that the Office's name was somewhat misleading as there was also a separate Office for Women's Issues). In Chilapa, Mayor Francisco Javier Garcia Gonzalez appointed long-time activist Joaquin Ortega Villanueva (aka "Letal", which translates to the English word "Lethal") as the head of the Office of Sexual Diversity there, while Taxco's mayor appointed two other activists as director (Jonathan Humberto Zagal Valladares) and subdirector (Victor Manuel Ocampo Villasana) of that city's Office of Sexual Diversity. In an interview I conducted with the Taxco activists-cum-functionaries in their office in December 2015, they explained to me that their work included providing supports to members of the LGBTQ community in relation to psychological wellbeing, physical health, economic development, and legal assistance, and that their work also involved organizing the Taxco LGBTTTI Pride parade. They did not seem especially perturbed when they told me that the mayor had instructed them that he did not want the local community "to fall into vulgarity" and expressed hope that they would have a "dignified march that didn't include nudity, like in Mexico City." While it is hard to argue against the establishment of municipal government departments focused on LGBTQ issues, the shift to government control of Pride events merits further attention, especially given that many municipal governments in Guerrero have been linked to organized crime. Also, the emergence of these offices seems to have coincided with a drop-off of LGBTQ activism drawing attention to ongoing impunity in face of violence against sexual and gender minorities.

The relationship between the LGBTQ sector in Guerrero and the state illustrates the limitations of rights-based social movements. An identity-rights-based movement in Guerrero has persisted even alongside a weak state. It has done this by making use of the

urban public spaces of its small cities and its capital to convey its message and draw people together while at the same time opts for strategic silence on wider socio-political issues to focus on sector-specific advances. While Latin American countries, particularly Mexico, stand out due to the high numbers of murdered sexual and gender minorities, its LGBTQ communities are also known for their use of organized mobilization to confront this violence, including official state violence and violence motivated by hate (Corrales and Pecheny, 2010; de la Dehesa, 2010). Guerrero is a notable example.

Some scholars have sought to disrupt the “Stonewall myth,” the idea that LGBTQ activism began with the 1969 riots in New York City (Podmore and Bain 2019). Nevertheless, others continue to frame the rich diversity of the transnational LGBTQ movement as a substantially linear process emanating from global cities in the United States and other Western countries and gradually spreading out towards peripheral places, and in so doing they obscure the importance of local sociospatial landscapes in peripheral urban spaces (Mizielńska, 2011; Misgav and Hartal, 2019). Davies and Featherstone (2013: 244–245) propose an approach to the study of transnational social movements that recognizes that they “are not the products of a singular network, but . . . rather the coming together of different dynamic trajectories of political activity,” trajectories that are “co-produced.” They point out that a preoccupation with “emulation, similarity and common understandings . . . [ignores] the radical plurality of political identities brought together” in transnational social movements. Mizielńska (2011: 98) says, “[i]t helps to see the US/Western model as an accidental one, which does not mark the general and universal pattern.” Río Rodríguez also calls for the disruption of this reductive narrative, underlining that urban justice has to do with “who has the ownership over and power to exist in the city, to define themselves and exert their rights to safety, belonging, and representation in urban spaces” (Haritaworn *et al.*, 2018: 33).

Rodríguez underlines the importance of using counter-narratives not to supplement the dominant narrative but rather to literally erase it. I have sought to enact such a palimpsestic erasure of the dominant idea that gay Pride has progressively spread from the global north to the global south, and to do so through the inscription of another, much more dynamic, multi-directional, story of social change in a particular place, one that draws on the transnational but is nevertheless fundamentally a local movement.

This thick description of Guerrero's LGBTQ community provides a sense of a local struggle for sexual and gender minority rights in a peripheral place, a movement that has faced challenges, including extreme violence against its members and leaders, as well as resistance and occasional solidarity from state power brokers. This struggle has advanced the movement's demand for greater inclusion of queer and trans persons in Guerreran society. At times, particular individuals and personalities have also used the movement for their own purposes. Amidst these challenges, LGBTQ activists in Guerrero have successfully formed new local traditions that draw on local and global imaginaries to provide periodic organized presence in the public spaces of its capital city and elsewhere in the state. Through regular collective intervention into urban space—including in rather small towns—events that has become part of the fabric of this place's everyday life, these activists have also drawn public attention to the violence to which its members continue to be subjected. This study shows that this movement has accomplished social and political advances that should not be discounted, even in the face of violence and insecurity.

This study has also shown that Guerrero's sexual and gender rights activists make regular use of transnationally recognized symbolism in conjunction with local cultural motifs to demonstrate that sexual and gender minorities are part and parcel of the local community and to demand inclusion in society and protection of their rights. In a context in which the state has shown itself to be unwilling or unable to protect even the most basic of human rights, the intervention of LGTBTTI activists into the political sphere is best understood as a courageous effort to incline society more broadly towards recognition of sexual and gender minorities as bearers of rights.

In a seminal piece entitled, "Homosexuality and the City," Aldrich (2004: 1731–2) underlines various ways in which queerness marks urban space, including the sexual topography of queer-friendly venues of sociability, the holding of "urban occasions" such as Pride parades and other events, the establishment of organizations focused on the liberation of sexual and gender minorities, the extension of urban sexual cultures, and the expansion of the cultural and social role of queers in the city. This review of LGBTQ identities and activism in Guerrero responds to Aldrich's (2004: 1733) calls for "studies of smaller cities and those without a gay and lesbian reputation" and shows that an

identity rights–based movement can coexist with a weak state by using its urban public spaces to convey its message and draw people together.

While most informants recognized that widespread violence against queer and trans people in Guerrero often has some direct or indirect connection to organized crime, informants did not necessarily see this as evidence of a particular strategy rooted in homophobia/transphobia but rather part of the widespread pattern of impunity with which everyone in Guerrero needs to contend. Also, starkly absent from the gatherings of the LGBTQ community in Guerrero and from its forays into the political through interventions with the state and municipal governments is any consideration of the wider socio-political issues affecting this part of Mexico, particularly in relation to organized crime. Furthermore, even when they chose to discuss the role of organized crime in violence against queer people, informants indicated discomfort, both verbally and through body language, in relation to talking about this because of the power that organized crime has in the state. I came to understand that the absence of any critical engagement with the violence of organized crime by LGBTQ organizing is because people feel that this would be too dangerous. Furthermore, while Guerrero is known for a long history of political resistance movements by peasants, Indigenous communities, the urban poor, teachers, and others, this study of a sexual and gender rights movement's periodic occupation of public space shows that it has not relied on alliances with other marginalized segments of society to call the state to account for violence against its members. I contend that this attenuated focus on specific identity-based rights is a poor substitution for the promise of a global regime rooted in human rights and the rule of law.

Lamentably, Guerrero is not alone in demonstrating that the promises of liberal human rights theory and the related state obligations to protect the rights of queer and trans folk are largely illusory. As elsewhere, everyday life in Guerrero shows the intertwining of anti-queer/trans violence and gender-based violence in a context in which such violence arguably creates the conditions for the expansion of impunity for anyone who would extend their reach for gain or power through nefarious means. Given the ascendancy of explicit political homo/transphobia in the United States coupled with persistent anti-queer/trans violence in Mexico even as the Mexican state engages in speech-acts denouncing this sort of violence, and recognizing the extent to which

Guerrero is produced in relation to sociopolitical dynamics elsewhere in the continent, one is left worried that the widely hailed but largely chimerical “time of apparent inclusion” (Stanley 2021) is in decline.

Formed in place: Xochipala as touchstone

In the final section of this chapter, I switch gears and turn to an exploration of what the historical record teaches about sexuality and gender in Guerrero, drawing on a specific example. Mexican scholar of queer theory Mauricio List Reyes (2010: 44) says that our rethinking of sexuality and gender in new ways and other places is not about “a utopia outside of our world or having to do with future times and places,” but rather concerns the “deconstruction of the silences of history and of our own discursive constructions, in different erotic body maps and in the imagining of and the enacting of new forms of community by differently desiring subjects” In this effort towards such a deconstruction, I engage with the complicated figure of Amelio Robles, a decorated fighter of the Mexican Revolution in Guerrero in the early 20th century introduced earlier in this chapter. He earned the title of colonel based on his skill and determination to vanquish the enemies of Emiliano Zapata’s vision of an agricultural society based on justice and Indigenous rights to land. Robles’s story and connection to territory provide a useful touchstone for unpacking how gender, sexuality, power, and violence interrelate in ways that belie simplistic understandings and are sometimes particular to Guerrero.

But my goal is not so much to search for understanding of the interplay among gender, sexuality, and violence in relation to Amelio Robles’s identity, something that other scholars have in any case already considered (Cardenas 1995; Cano 2006; Pérez Abarca 2007). Instead, this brief exploration once again focuses on place, specifically Robles’s hometown that has been shaped by both revolutionary war a century ago and organized crime in the present day. My analysis aims to reveal something about how this town called Xochipala, literally “the flower that paints red,” a territory shaped by violence and power, is mapped onto the bodies of its inhabitants, particularly Robles, but also others with links to Xochipala whom I encountered through this research. This link between territory and the body is useful to assist in making sense the embodied dimensions of violence that queer and trans folks face (Zaragocin & Caretta 2020). As

such, a consideration of the place-based stories of Robles and others can provide a more nuanced understanding of sexual and gender dissident subjectivity in this context. This section triangulates information from the scholarly literature concerning Xochipala and Robles with knowledge gained through several visits to the town and through extensive interviews that I conducted with key informants from Xochipala. To protect their anonymity, I do not always specify which informant provided specific details.

I first learned about Xochipala and its most famous son through an organization named in Robles's honour that was mentioned above, the now apparently defunct Centro Cultural Arcoiris Amelia Robles (Rainbow Amelia Robles Cultural Centre), a community enterprise that was dedicated to the promotion of culture and sport for LGBTTTI-identified persons in the state capital. The organization used the feminized version of Robles's first name, and this is important. After meeting that organization's leadership and learning that Robles had been identified as female at birth and throughout his childhood and young adulthood but then chose to live out most of the last seven decades of his life publicly identifying as a man in the same small town where he had grown up, I decided to visit his hometown.

Amelio Robles Ávila was born on November 3, 1889, in the small agricultural community of Xochipala, located about 50 kilometres north of the state capital of Chilpancingo, the youngest of four children of a prosperous farming couple who owned 42 hectares of land, most of it arable (Pérez Abarca 2007). In his youth he spent a decade as a mobile soldier participating in battles across the state and even beyond, and subsequently served in the military of the emergent revolutionary government. By his late twenties Robles returned to his birthplace and lived out his days as the widely respected patriarch of this town of a few thousand people that has been nestled in the dry hills of the state's central Sierra region for over 3,000 years. Robles lived well into his 90s and died on December 9, 1984. His memory is recorded in the name of the local elementary school (see Figure 2.3) and in the artifacts from his life retained in the village's community museum. However, "Amelio" was not his birth name, nor is it the name that his gravestone bears. Both his birth certificate and the marker of his final resting place refer to him as "Amelia," the feminized version of the same name, as does the museum, though in contrast the elementary school uses a masculinized version of his military title.

I made several visits to Xochipala to meet with people who knew him and to gain an understanding of the places that had shaped and influenced him. In this text I refer to him using the masculinized version of his name because that is how he named himself from at least his early 20s until his death at age 95 (Cano 2006).

My goal here is not to review all the details of Robles's life, as there is already a small though significant scholarly literature that has documented many aspects of his childhood, military service, adulthood, and old age (Cardenas 1995; Cano 2006; Pérez Abarca 2007). While Cardenas did not publish her account of Robles's life until after his death, she had interviewed him years earlier in his own home in Xochipala in 1980. Drawing on this experience as well as on archival materials, Cardenas concludes that Robles is emblematic of the figure of the warrior woman. In putting forth this framing of Robles, Cardenas outlines various aspects of his military trajectory, including his involvement in a village revolutionary club as a young adult, his leadership in organizing men from his village to respond to a call to arms from a Zapatista army general in Xochipala in 1912, his military conquests, various conflicts he endured in relation to his changing gender expression including with people in his own military contingent, his battle injuries caused by enemy gunfire, and even his experience of a last minute reprieve while facing a firing squad.

Cardenas also recounts details of his post-military life, including two stints in prison, one for killing his own half-brother (one informant told me that this had been in reaction to this sibling's incessant attempt to compel Robles to live as a woman), and Robles's role as both official and unofficial leader in his hometown, representing the community in protecting its natural heritage from incursions by logging companies and others. Cardenas acknowledges that Robles permanently adopted a masculine identity in all aspects of his life and received various honorifics including "Veteran of the Revolution," "Legionnaire," and "Meritorious Revolutionary" using the masculine version of his name, though his application for his military pension using the masculinized version of his name was ultimately unsuccessful because that version of his name did not appear in the official records of the revolutionary war (he did not apply using the feminized version of his name.) Nevertheless, Cardenas ultimately frames her account of Robles as an attempt to address the lacunae in the historical documentation of

the Mexican Revolution that she says has ignored the women who took up arms and took on military leadership roles. While her account documents that Robles was firmly attached to his masculine identity throughout his adulthood, Cardenas (1995) claims that her sources told her that on his deathbed Robles asked that his corpse be “dressed as a woman in order to entrust his soul to God,” somehow evidence enough to include Robles in the annals of women revolutionary fighters.

Edith Pérez Abarca (2007), author of *Amelia Robles: Female Revolutionary Zapatista of the South*, continues this framing of Robles as a notable revolutionary woman fighter, and almost exclusively referring to Robles using female gender pronouns. Pérez Abarca shows that Robles’s identity was shaped by the endemic violence of parochial rural space in Guerrero’s Sierra region in the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution: Robles’s father died before he turned 2, in rapid succession his mother remarried and had three more children, the stepfather physically and sexually assaulted Robles during his childhood, on two occasions as an adolescent—still presenting as female—Robles nearly killed his stepfather in response to this violence. Several years later under similar circumstances Amelio did kill the oldest of his three half-siblings (as discussed above). As such, Roble’s adoption of a public expression of maleness is framed by Pérez Abarca as a response to gender-based trauma.

In contrast to Cardenas and Pérez Abarca, Gabriela Cano (2006:36) characterizes Robles as transgender and sees his transformation as tied to the militarization of the territory where Robles lived: “[H]e forged a masculine identity within the rough environs of war,” resulting in “the radical and permanent transgenering of a young rural woman from the state of Guerrero . . . during the Mexican Revolution.” Cano (2006:38) also speculates that “Amelia Robles could very well be characterized as a butch lesbian who later became a transgendered male person” but rules out calling him ‘transsexual’ because, “his case involved neither surgery nor hormone changes,” and then declares that “Robles’s masculinization was established mainly through a gender performance,” though without providing evidence of these assertions. Cano (2006:41) argues that “evidence of the effectiveness of his masculine appearance is the medical certificate required for admission to the Confederation of Veterans of the Revolution . . . issued in 1948 . . . [that identifies Robles as male] without alluding to his sexual

anatomy.” The supposition is that Robles’s sexual anatomy—had any examination included it—would have corresponded to Robles’s assigned birth gender. However, there is simply no evidence of that either.

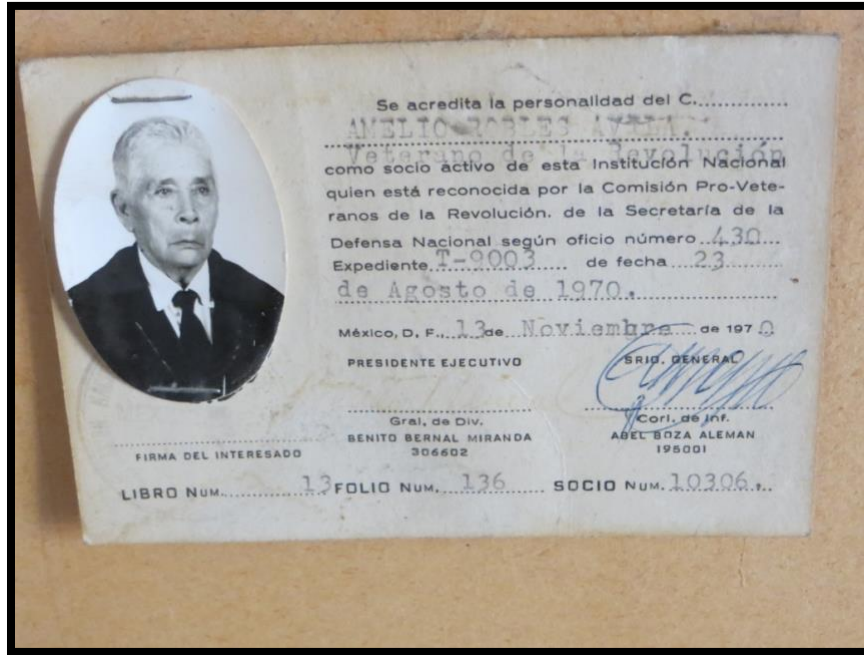


Figure 3.10—Robles credential as “veteran of the Revolution” – Photo taken on April 22, 2013 in the Coronela Amelia Robles Community Museum

(Source: W. Payne)

Cano (2006:39) also argues that Robles’s supposed “transgendering questioned the naturalness attributed to the feminine and the masculine, and subverted the ingrained notion of gender identity as an immediate and unavoidable consequence of anatomy that neatly defines men and women into social groups with immutable qualities.” Of course, this is true in the general sense, and examples from the lived experience of most people would likely support the delinking of gender identity and anatomy. It is notable though that scholars who have encountered the figure of Amelio Robles have consistently felt the need and the right to ascribe Robles with a gender identity that did not necessarily correspond with evidence of the way he identified. That may say more about the scholarly community than about Robles.

My concern is that these scholars may have overstated what can be known about Robles and his impact on the culture of Xochipala. For example, at least in my own

limited experience of this town through several short visits in 2013 and 2014, I did not get any sense that a binary understanding of gender has been disrupted. Various informants asserted to me that Xochipala continues to be a community marked by binary-gender, compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy in a way that is consistent with other places in Guerrero and elsewhere. Cano (2006:42) also posits that, “Robles’s successful gender transition simultaneously subverted and reinforced normative heterosexuality and the stereotyped masculinity it re-created,” though again this speculative analysis of Robles’s story and its impact is not supported with evidence. So why is Robles’s identity and relationship to his town significant? I argue that it is precisely because this town and region, this space and this territory, was able to provide a home to Robles through his various transitions and transformations, during a period that spanned from the beginning to the end of the 20th century. The next section considers this further.

Militarized queerness and “unimportant matters”

Mexican queer theorists Mauricio List Reyes and Alberto Teutle López (2010) used the phrase *florilegio de deseos* [anthology of desires] to recognize the move within the Mexican academy away from studying the construction of sexual identity per se and towards a consideration of the complex practices related to sexuality and homophobia that pays particular attention to class origins and social practices as well as to the political participation of sexually diverse subjects in Mexican society. Drawing on Foucault’s technologies of normalization of sexuality through which rules, obligations, and prohibitions are instituted in modernity, List Reyes and Teutle López (2010) argue that these technologies shed light on how the subject acts upon itself, including their own participation in the construction of the norms that end up providing meaning. These authors further observe that while the West shares a common history (scholars from the global north should note that these scholars include Mexico in “the West”), that we cannot deny that cultural processes are particular to specific social groups and as such, that the norms that Foucault says structure specific performances of sexuality may be particular to a context and are also best understood not as the imposition of restrictions but rather as a power that is itself involved in the constitution of the subject, or a discourse. List Reyes and Teutle López (2010) also stress the importance of de-centring

heterosexuality in our research of sexuality, gender, and the body and propose that scholars allow the concept of identity itself to stop making sense, and to think about it in more “lax terms” as a way in which subjects come to recognize themselves in a particular social context. Letting go of normative terms, these authors insist that identity becomes an ambiguous referent. With this “lax” sense of identity grounded in context in mind, I turn to what this brief encounter with Robles’s hometown of Xochipala, a small rural town of the state of Guerrero seen through the lens of one person’s story, teaches about sexuality and gender and their intimate relationship to violence.

Scholars have also considered the key role of the state in this connection of violence to gender and sexuality (c.f. Giles and Hyndman 2004, Fregoso and Bejarano 2010, Gaspar de Alba & Guzmán 2010, Crosby and Lykes 2019). In a compelling exegesis of the state origins of the bloody and highly gendered criminality that structures present-day Mexico, Dominguez Ruvalcaba (2015) rejects the premise that high levels of violence stem from some essential dimension of Mexicanness and instead outlines a close relationship between the modern liberal Mexican state and organized crime, an imbrication that has shaped political, economic, and cultural processes through its influence on expressions of masculinity since at least the 19th century. Dominguez Ruvalcaba is not especially concerned with some fixed “violent subject” but is rather focused on the formation of a “criminal culture” and “criminal nation” in which illegal syndicates have become a constitutive part of social control in Mexico through the imposition of implicit rules that build upon the existing sex-gender system, religious discourse, and national identity.

Dominguez Ruvalcaba (2015: 28) says that this convergence of the criminal and the political manifests in two forms of banditry: “insurgent bandits” and “mercenary gunmen.” The figure of the insurgent bandit emerges from a disjuncture in which that which is legal is often seen as illegitimate by those Mexicans—the vast majority—who have been excluded from the dominant order. As such, social rebellion becomes legitimate to the extent that Mexico has become defined by disobedience to the state. The related figure of the mercenary gunman, however, is also a product of this convergence of the political with the criminal, though this iteration of banditry serves those in power even as it transgresses the law. Dominguez Ruvalcaba argues that these two forms of

banditry both rely on criminal masculinity—what he designates as *lumpenmachismo*—and that the distinction between them often obfuscates their similarity and relatedness. The ways in which present day Xochipalans remember and understand this quintessential example of this figure of the bandit, and his place in the story of their community, points to the role of a weak state and the related context of violence in the formation of gendered and sexual subjects.

My first journey to Xochipala⁶⁵ set the pattern for subsequent visits: By mid-afternoon key informants insisted that it was dangerous for me to stay too late in the day and accompanied me to the town bus stop to catch the late afternoon minibús back to the state capital. While they felt confident that I was safe visiting during daylight hours, they underlined that a recent uptick in organized criminal activity in the region meant that the setting of the sun also marked increased danger for outsiders and residents alike. Through a series of visits that included formal and informal conversations I came to recognize in this place several touchstones useful in understanding the relationship between place, subjectivity, violence, and the state.



(a) Childhood home (b) Childhood home, detail (c) home at end of life

Figure 3.11—Houses where Amelio Robles lived

(Source: W. Payne, February 24, 2013)

During my brief visits I was able to visit various locations in and around the townsite key to this story, including places where Robles lived, the town cemetery, a former school building converted into a town museum, local government offices, and an important archeological zone. Both Robles’s childhood home and the house where he

lived during his final years are small adobe structures, with thick walls, wooden windows, and clay tile roofs typical of the town until recent decades when concrete block homes have become more common (Fig 3.9). The building he lived in towards the end of his life was attached to a newer structure where Robles's nephew lived, together with the nephew's wife and children. The town's cemetery sits on the top of a hill just north of the town and has been a ceremonial site since prehispanic⁶⁶ times. Also, the National Institute of Archeology and History (INAH) maintains the Organera Archeological Zone three kilometres south of town, including structures built well over 1,000 years ago and other artefacts that are over 2,000 years old.

With assistance from the National Council for the Promotion of Education (CONAFE), the town museum was established shortly after Robles's death in 1990 and was initially located in the house where Robles lived towards the end of his life, though in 2002 it moved into what had been the Colonel Robles Primary School after a larger school was built on the edge of town. Though the museum had officially closed in 2007 due to a lack of funding, I was granted access. It was in a state of disrepair due to water damage and lack of maintenance related to funding issues, but I was able to visit some of the exhibits including one former classroom dedicated to Robles and the Revolution and a second room dedicated to the town's archeological past. A third room was apparently dedicated to folk art, traditional dance costumes, and the preparation of traditional medicines, though I did not see it. A plan to seek funding to rehabilitate it, including a plan to re-establish the medicinal plant garden, has not yet met with success.



(a) 2007



(b) 2013

Figure 3.12—Amelio Robles decorated for service to the country and the Revolution
(Source of (a): Pérez Abarca 2007; Source of (b): W. Payne)

Cano (2006:42) argued that “Robles adopted forms of masculinity particular to his rural environment, a cultural code that included daring courage and constant shows of force,” and reported that, “[Robles’s] grandnieces addressed him as uncle or grandfather and learned of his sexual identity [sic] only after they became adults, since the subject of his queerness was never raised at home.” However, Xochipalans who knew Robles personally as a very private, religious man raised a concern about framings of Robles like this one using the concepts of queerness, trans, or lesbian, pointing out that these concepts do not correspond to Robles’s self-understanding as far as they knew, nor to how his sexuality and gender were understood by others in Xochipala during his lifetime. Also, my own research indicates that while these grandnieces did address Robles as grandfather [“papa Robles”] and did think that he was their paternal grandfather when they were very young, they also experienced schoolyard taunts from other children while still in primary school and it was in this way that they became informed about what was certainly common knowledge in the town at the time, that the person they knew as their grandfather had in fact presented as female until early adulthood. During one visit to the town, I was given permission to photograph several historic documents related to Robles’s life, including a captioned photo from a 1972 military ceremony in which Robles is decorated with a medal by General Juan Manuel Rodrigues, a photo that was previously included in Pérez Abarca’s (2007: 47) book about Robles (See Fig. 3.10b). However, that author seems to have cropped out the textual description that accompanies the photo that refers to Robles as “Amelio” and instead uses a feminized version of Robles’s name and title in the caption—“Source: Personal archive of Coronela Amelia Robles”—more consistent with the publication’s portrayal of Robles as a key example of a female revolutionary fighter.

Instead of fetishizing Robles’s sexuality and gender expression, I propose that it is a more productive exercise to try to understand how Robles’s choices were shaped in relation to place and historical happenstance. Context matters: in Robles’s youth his country became embroiled in revolutionary war, and these processes of territorialization

constituted a key context for the shift in how Robles presented his gender. One informant pointed out that Robles's "transformation" was acceptable precisely because he embodied machismo, something especially valued by the Zapatista army. While much of the focus on Robles has been in relation to his gender expression, it is important to note that there are other themes that punctuate Robles's life. Informants who knew Robles towards the end of his life told me that Robles's decision to join the Zapatista Army was motivated by three concerns, themes that became woven into the fabric of his whole life: gender rights and equality, the right of everyone to education, and the right of communities to use their own natural resources. One imagines that Robles would be especially concerned to see the epidemic levels of femicide in Mexico in the present day, the apparent incapacity of the state to ensure individual rights in relation to security, and the transnationalization of Guerrero's mineral wealth to such an extent that Canadian companies today dominate mineral extraction in the hills around Robles' hometown.

While informants spoke with great precision concerning details of Robles's life as a revolutionary fighter and his emergence as the key patriarch of Xochipala over several decades in the 20th century, my purpose here is not primarily to document historical facts—many of the details would be hard to verify. Rather, I am more interested in how Xochipalans speak of Robles today, what stories they choose to tell about him and the times in which he lived, and what this tells us about how space shapes subjectivity, how particular places are formed through what Massey (2005: 8-9) calls "coeval multiplicities" and are "the product of interrelations."

Prior to the revolutionary war, Robles was a student in a school dedicated to the education of young women. While he aspired to become a medical doctor, he faced a strong cultural imperative that pushed him towards the role of housewife and was actively pursued by a suitor named Celedonio Martínez. Robles rebuffed this man's attentions and moved to the nearby town of Tixtla with a fellow student named Leonor López, though López's mother subsequently pressured Leonor to return to Xochipala. Sometime later, General Juan Andreu Almazán went to Xochipala in the name of Emiliano Zapata to invite people to join the Zapatista army. Xochipalan Isidoro Olivares Navarro was put in charge of the hundred or so Xochipalans who joined the movement and the community set upon the task of organizing weapons, animals, and food for those

who had signed up. Robles's mother recognized that Amelio could not be dissuaded from signing up and so entrusted Olivares with her child's safety and sent three of her own employees [*peones*] along with the contingent to watch out for her child. One informant that spoke with me emphasized that this turn of events can be understood as key to Robles's escape of a certain destiny of domesticity. Leonor also initially joined the contingent but shortly thereafter Olivares arranged for Leonor's marriage and return to Xochipala, and Robles would not return to Xochipala until after Leonor's death in 1924.

In his later years, informants told me about how Robles would regale his grandnieces and grandnephews with stories about the revolutionary war, including his participation in well-documented moments such as when the Zapatista army went to Mexico City and helped depose dictator Victoriano Huerta from the presidency. Robles spoke of sitting in the presidential chair. An informant I spoke with said that Robles often told his young grandnieces that he went to the Revolution so that they would have access to education. But the stories Robles told also showed that how his revolutionary war experiences were generally much more local, including skirmishes that took place within a few kilometres of his hometown. One informant relayed to me that Robles had told his grandnieces of the use of violence against women as a weapon of war by government troops seeking to suppress the revolutionary forces of which he was part. Reportedly, when they arrived in a new area the soldiers would sexually assault women and girls and rob them of their gold jewellery. In one incident in the town of Apipilulco, just nine kilometres north of Xochipala, a short young woman (her stature seemed important to the informant) named Angelita Torres was apparently hiding among the goats and cows because of the approaching government forces when she was rescued by Robles, who is said to have "scooped her up onto his horse." Torres apparently then pledged to "serve Robles for her whole life, to be his helper." They did maintain a long-term relationship, and though they both spent extended periods of time in each other's towns, Torres always maintained her home in Apipilulco. They also later took on the care and education of a child together, the ill and malnourished granddaughter of Robles's half-sister. One informant I spoke with referred to the child—Reyna (Regula) Robles Torres—as a "foster child." However, another informant who was also present for this conversation corrected this categorization, recalling that the child's records actually identified Robles and Torres

as father and mother, explaining that “the registration process was much more lax at that time” (and so Robles’ gender was not verified). This story demonstrates the reproduction of normative gender roles, though with the obvious twist that the macho rescuer was widely known to have presented as female until young adulthood.

I also heard contradictory stories from informants from Xochipala about when and how Robles acquired the honorific of “colonel”. In one account I was told that this title was bestowed as recognition of his prowess in killing so many enemy fighters, though in another account his apparent role in killing a general of the opposing forces was the key event. Robles, alongside other Zapatistas, eventually accepted the Carranza government and for several years joined the ranks of the country’s armed forces. Remarkably, according to informants I spoke with in Xochipala, by 1926 Robles had returned to his hometown and—like other Zapatista leaders—would eventually take on the role of patriarch. One informant who knew Robles said that in his later years other old soldiers went to Xochipala to visit him, sometimes staying for several weeks, taking their meals along with Robles with his nephew’s family, and going to the local tavern for the occasional drink as they reminisced about the war. And while Robles was reportedly happy to show off the scars of the various bullet wounds that marked his body, one informant with intimate knowledge about the Robles family dynamics said that when the children asked him about presenting as female as a child and as a youth that Robles simply replied that those were “unimportant matters.” Using the terminology of Dominguez Ruvalcaba, there is evidence of a certain continuity with his longstanding identity as an “insurgent bandit” that continued into his post-revolutionary life. The mercenary gunmen of the present day would be an insult to Robles.

The past and present form each other

Xochipalans told me about Robles’s role in fulfilling the revolutionary commitment of ensuring community control of the land and its resources: Robles was instrumental in the creation of the town’s Office of the Commons [Comisaria de los Bienes Comunales], which continues to have oversight over the collective peasant tenancy of communally owned agricultural lands, forests, and mineral wealth.⁶⁷ In an incident in the early 1950s, a long simmering conflict related to a nearby mine led to the

posting of federal soldiers there. When Xochipalan women were sexually harassed by the soldiers, villagers attacked the military contingent and confiscated their weapons. The conflict left at least three people dead and military forces surrounded the town. Robles stepped in and negotiated a resolution with General Miguel Z. Martínez, one that reportedly avoided the burning down of the village. This same military commander had been long associated with extrajudicial executions elsewhere in Mexico, so this very local story resonates at the scale of the nation-state. Rath (2013: 121) says, “General Miguel Z. Martinez was well known within the military as something of a specialist in state violence . . . [H]is standard modus operandi [was that] of harassing, detaining, torturing, and executing groups of petty criminals, bandits and political dissidents.” According to these informants, Robles also took a leadership role with the Xochipalan contingent that participated in a 1960 student-led protest march that came to incorporate other dissident social groups in Guerrero. This protest movement culminated in the resignation of the state governor and in the conversion of the state university into an autonomous institution run by democratically elected leaders called the Autonomous University of Guerrero [Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero], the largest educational institution in the state where Ulises Salvador Nava Juárez taught before his murder (see Chapter 1).

I learned from key informants and witnessed how many of the sociospatial dynamics related to militarization and bossism⁶⁸ that structured Robles’s life from the late 19th century until his death in 1984 continue to impact Xochipalans and Guerrerens to the present day. The current iteration of Dominguez Ruvalcaba’s “criminal nation” manifests in the increased violence that both the state of Guerrero and, more specifically, this town have faced in recent years, produced through the competition among criminal cartels for control of the illegal economy and for the related patronage of government officials. In Xochipala, I saw evidence of ongoing militarization in the vehicular traffic that passed through this remote town during my brief visits, caravans of heavy-duty military vehicles filled with soldiers and police, some of whom had their faces covered so that they could not be identified. Xochipala’s municipal commissioner, Francisco Sandoval Medina, also told me of the establishment of the Guerrero State Rural Police, part of a network of local contingents in 18 towns across the Sierra region of the state that were meant to complement the work of the municipal police of the various towns.

The 13 men and two women who were in training to make up the Xochipala contingent of the rural police had been elected by the General Assembly of the town, I was told. The commissioner explained to me that all major decisions are made in Xochipala in this way, by the assembly of the town's citizens. He also underlined that the new rural police force was not part of the phenomenon of community-based self-defence groups in other parts of the state because these officers, upon graduation, were to become state employees. Funding challenges since then, however, have meant that the line between the new rural police force and the self-defence groups—sometimes called vigilante groups—has become somewhat blurred, and the open conflict has at times paralyzed local schooling (Flores Contreras 2020a). The commissioner sidestepped my questions about organized crime in the area.

Much as in the past, Xochipala is today formed in relation to exploitation of the earth through agriculture, mining, and forestry. The aridity and related scarcity of water means that the town has relied on another community that controls the water sources and charges a high price to neighbouring communities like Xochipala for access, while one informant told me that the state water agency CONAGUA does not get involved because of the high degree of sociopolitical conflict that marks this territory. I understood this as a reference to organized crime. I saw trucks labeled as “Media Luna,” the name of a gold mine owned by Canadian company Torex Gold Resources, located about 25 kilometres north of Xochipala in the municipality of Cocula, about halfway between between Xochipala and Apipilulco, mentioned above.

During one of my visits, community members took me to a high spot in the town and pointed out various key nearby places, including prehispanic ceremonial sites but also the locations of mining operations, including the now-defunct San Pedro mine as well as another Canadian owned mine called Los Filos, located “just beyond that ridge.” I asked if I could walk up to the top of the hill to take some photos of that notorious strip mine and was sternly warned that I would be putting myself in mortal danger because the cartels would not want me photographing the Canadian mines. Given the sudden change in tone, I did not pursue the matter of taking pictures of the Canadian mine, though I wondered at the ways in which ordinary life in this town is woven into so many transnational relationships. This experience reminds me of Zalik & Osuoka's (2020: 781)

argument concerning the operation of global north oil and mining interests in countries in the global south, that “extraction’s full costs may also comprise physical violence perpetrated by . . . armed groups.” Furthermore, Johnson & Zalik (2021: 385) call for a wider definition of extraction, through a recognition that the logics of extraction apply beyond minerals and petrochemicals and include “non-conventional nature-intensive and nature-exporting activities.” They reference industrial agriculture and tourism. This makes me further contemplate the linkages between the Canadian mine—apparently protected by the same cartels involved the industrial agricultural activities that produce heroin for the global market—and the sociopolitical violence people face, and how these linkages create the circumstance for anti-queer/trans violence.

Xochipala is on a strategic corridor related to the production of poppies and their derivatives. Nearby towns provide a local market for the sale of narcotics thanks to elevated levels of circulating money linked to the large transient work force of the two nearby Canadian-owned gold mines. While the Los Filos mine makes use of some Xochipalan communal lands, its operations mostly take place on lands owned by the neighbouring Carrizalillo Ejido⁶⁹.

Villagers from Carrizalillo have publicly denounced the use of their lands by the Guerreros Unidos cartel as a place to bury the remains of its victims. Specifically, they recall the arrival of dozens of cartel-owned trucks full of young people in the early morning hours of the very day that the 43 student teachers from Ayotzinapa, a nearby teachers’ college, disappeared without a trace in 2014. Those villagers speculate that the students are buried somewhere in their lands—and therefore near this Canadian mine—though government investigators ignored their reports for years and so far, no remains have been found there (Flores Contreras 2020b).

The last interview I conducted in Xochipala was with 27-year-old Brendita,⁷⁰ who was born in Xochipala and lived there until age 13 when she went to the US on a tourist visa and stayed until a few months before returning to Guerrero and doing our interview. She said that as a child she “always acted like a regular boy,” and only “started to change” after she migrated to Georgia, though she underlined that she was “always really female.” I asked Brendita if she identifies as a member of the LGBTTTI community, and she responded that she identifies as a woman. At 16 years old she told her parents she

wanted to transition. Brendita said they were immediately accepting and supportive, but that she waited until after high school graduation because the school she attended in Georgia had a strict dress code rooted in a binary gender framework. She said that growing up knowing how Robles had been understood and accepted by the town was an important part of her own story. After her family returned to Mexico she felt alone in the US and decided to also return home. She was surprised by her reception upon return, one of acceptance, respect, and inclusion, especially knowing others who had experienced rejection from their families and were forced to leave town. Brendita's narratives help illustrate the ways in which subjectivities continue to be shaped in relation to the contours of place and how this shaping has specific dimensions in Guerrero.

Conclusion

According to Dominguez Ruvalcaba (2016: 91) “[m]odernity is . . . a period of Latin American history in which queerness has had a prominent role in transforming social life to the point that it is possible to assert that modernization can also be viewed as a process of queering itself.” The outline of Guerrero's LGBTTTI movement provided in this chapter shows this queering of social life in this southern Mexican state. This consideration of the role of LGBTQ activism in a peripheral state capital city in southern Mexico addresses a gap in the literature. I have traced the emergence of the LGBTTTI movement in Guerrero in relation to both the global and the national movements for LGBTQ rights. This chapter also reviewed this social movement's increasingly close relation with the state, even as that state shows itself as weak and corrupted. The concluding section of this chapter has focused on how territory matters in the formation of sexual and gender identities in ways that disrupt binary and linear thinking about social processes, and also how this identity formation happens in place, in relation to home, belonging, and acceptance. I am reminded once again of the relationship between territory and the body that Zaragocin & Caretta (2020) underline.

This chapter starts to lay out the evidence that demonstrates elements of a queer theory of violence. Specifically, violence against queer and trans people occurs in the context of a state complicit with violent actors in a way that is gendered. This chapter also provides evidence of the LGBTQ movement's response and constraints in relation to

the state's complicity with violent non-state actors and the related perversely closer relationship between this movement and the state. Finally, this chapter shows the ways in which violence in Guerrero—including violence against sexual and gender minorities—is shaped by transnational factors. In the next chapter I consider how lethal violence against queer and trans people can be understood as formed through processes of enclosure that leave sexual and gender minorities exposed to harm.

⁵⁰ This quotation, translated from the original Spanish by the author, comes from a key essay written at the time of the emergence of the modern sexual and gender rights movement in Mexico.

⁵¹ Remarkably, local activists had nothing to do with the first public LGBTQ gathering in the State of Guerrero. That honorific is reserved for an international event that took place a decade before the first locally organized Pride march in the state's largest city and beach resort, Acapulco. In 1990, ILGA (then called the International Lesbian and Gay Association) decided to hold its 1991 annual gathering in a global south country for the first time, and chose Guadalajara, Mexico (Brito 2003). However, a prominent daily newspaper there called *Ocho Columnas* led a vitriolic campaign against the upcoming event. The city's mayor, many local business leaders, right-wing social organizations, and Guadalajara's Catholic archbishop all joined the attack. Two weeks before the event was to begin, the organizers announced its cancellation, noting that the situation of intolerance promoted by state authorities did not allow for the security of the participants. A strong public outcry followed—locally, nationally, and internationally—against the homophobia that had led to the cancellation of the event, and with the assistance of Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, an invitation was extended from then governor of the state of Guerrero, Francisco Ruiz Massieu, with support from Acapulco's tourist sector, to host the event in that city. Despite limited opposition from right-wing groups including the Catholic Church, a scaled back version of the event was held in Acapulco as per the original schedule (Brito 1991; Brito 2003). The gathering of queer activists from 30 different countries ended with a "parade of thanks to the people of Acapulco for their hospitality and solidarity," almost certainly the first public procession of sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero's history (Brito, 1991: 340). There is, however, no record of participation of local activists, nor has the event been registered as significant to the local LGBTQ movement as documented by my research.

⁵² I adhere to a poststructuralist view of culture, which sees it as fragmented rather than coherent, shaped through and the outcome of interaction through relations of power.

⁵³ List Reyes (2018: 75) concurs with other Latin American scholars regarding the limits, "of applying theoretical frames constructed in the so-called global north to [Latin American] sociocultural contexts given that they cannot explain the specific conditions under which sex and gender operate," and underlines the importance of drawing on the analysis of scholars from this region who have, "incorporated dimensions such as ethnicity, race and class in order to think about sexuality and gender in local contexts."

⁵⁴ Irwin *et al.* (2003: 6–9) argue that the published date was incorrect and that the arrests actually took place in the early morning hours of Sunday, November 17, 1901.

⁵⁵ Mexican poet and public intellectual Salvador Novo, member of a group of artists and poets called the *Contemporáneos*, was openly gay throughout his long career from the 1920s until his death in 1974, and—despite his protests to the contrary in his later years—reportedly emulated Oscar Wilde in his choices of adornment and clothes (Schuessler 2010: 40).

⁵⁶ The struggle for non-discrimination based on gender identity has taken longer. In 2019, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled that individual states must provide a reasonable administrative process for gender recognition based on self-identification (Human Rights Watch 2022).

⁵⁷ The delineation of regions is always a fraught activity. While Mexico is not usually understood as part of the global north, it is usually considered as part of both North America (at least since the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement) and of Latin America.

⁵⁸ Septentrional, a little-used English word, means northern. The term "Septentrional America" covered those areas that were part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain at that time, from California to Costa Rica.

⁵⁹ The key organizers of the early Chilpancingo marches were Eliel David Moyao Morales and Orlando Pastor Santos, later appointed the Director of Sexual Diversity for the municipal government of Chilpancingo in 2017. Moyao died in 2017 and Pastor died in 2020.

⁶⁰ The original Spanish version uses *guei*, a transliteration of the English word "gay" that results in a pronunciation that approximates its English equivalent. This spelling has since fallen out of use.

⁶¹ From the beginning local activists have taken turns organizing the annual event, though subsequent to the period covered by this dissertation the municipal government's Directorate for Attention to Sexual Diversity took over march organization.

⁶² Most of the pageant events I attended as part of the participant-observation research of this project were branded as "Our Gay Beauty" [Nuestra Belleza Gay] events and followed a recognizable beauty pageant format, including four phases: introductions (usually wearing an outfit that represented the town of origin of the participant, often with Indigenous motifs), formal wear, bathing suit, and talent sections (usually involving some sort of question). The winners of the various local competitions became eligible for participation at the state level (and presumably at the national level). There are similar networks of linked events under the banner of "Nuestra Belleza Gay" (NBG) in other places including Puerto Rico, Colombia and elsewhere. For a scholarly consideration of an NBG event in another part of Mexico, see Moctezuma Balderas (2021).

⁶³ I learned about the municipal offices for sexual and gender diversity in a piecemeal way, sometimes during an interview in a particular town, sometimes through seeing a Facebook post or news story about a new office. These offices are opened and closed at the whim of the particular incumbent mayor. For example, see the Facebook page of the Office of Sexual Diversity of Chilpancingo: https://www.facebook.com/todossomoschilpancingoLGBT?locale=es_LA. See this news account concerning the lack of resources provided to the Office of Gender Diversity in Zihuatanejo in 2019: <https://despertardelacosta.net/dejan-sin-oficina-a-direccion-de-diversidad-de-genero/> See this public record showing that the 2022 budget of the Office of Sexual Diversity in Taxco was nearly three hundred thousand pesos (about \$20,000 CAD):

<http://transparencia.servicioenlinea.mx/verfile.php?1N7ImpGNtaOytYurrK+IjMuG0Xi4pH5053HAvrKZnKXayZCV1qV9obTP06Rgvtil5Sq1J3B6bejrMqCZYaTyqy+j8SDnLd9vL2yho6ahYN824W6zHuQo6o56B9h9rT1aKyIquN1dLO3raH2cWQgorGurnh3qSPtMZZeaBzx+HldsSOrg==> Also, in Acapulco a key demand of the 2024 Pride march was the (re)establishment of a directorship focused on sexual diversity. See article in *El Sol de Acapulco* available here: <https://oem.com.mx/elsoldeacapulco/tendencias/activistas-piden-crear-direccion-de-diversidad-sexual-en-acapulco-13349698>

⁶⁴ As an appointee of and personal friend of then Governor Aguirre, Pettit's position ended when the governor was forced to leave office under a cloud of suspicion of having been involved in the forced disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teachers college. Igor Pettit continues with a regular radio show called "Controversias por la noche con Igor Pettit" [Controversies at Night with Igor Pettit].

⁶⁵ The colonial era Indigenous village of Xochipala was formally established in the 1590s, though there had been Indigenous settlement in the area for thousands of years. Despite its early inclusion in the Spanish Empire, the aridness of this region meant that this territory was never incorporated into the colonial era *encomienda* system and thus maintained its relative independence. While most people have Indigenous ancestry, the use of the Nahuatl language died out at least a century ago. According to a key informant who grew up there, Xochipala has been a largely endogamic community (marriages limited to people within the town), though with increased migration in recent decades this has started to change. While the dominant religion continues to be Catholicism, informants underlined that since the 19th century some families have practiced Presbyterianism and that the town has benefited by this denomination's focus on education. The town is known for good relations between Catholics and Protestants. Since at least the 1950s, circular migration of Xochipalans to and from the United States has also meant that remittances from family members in the US vie with agriculture as the most important source of income. Today, Xochipala's

population is said to be over 4,000 people, though one informant thought that this number may have been inflated by talks of a new mine at the time of the census. This same informant estimated that there are about 3,000 people living in various US cities who were born in Xochipala.

⁶⁶ I translate the Spanish word “prehisánico” as “prehispanic” rather than the more common form in English, which is “pre-Hispanic.” I do this in an effort to follow the strong scholarly tradition in Mexico of not defining that which preceded the colonial period only in relation to the society produced through colonization.

⁶⁷ Agrarian communities (sometimes called communal lands) and ejidos are both forms of community control of lands. An ejido is a form of collective land ownership that was (re)established by Mexico’s 1917 Constitution, agrarian communities (communal lands) are collectively owned lands that date back at least to the colonial period or before. For a greater consideration of these sorts of lands, see Morett-Sánchez and Cocío-Ruiz (2017).

⁶⁸ For an explanation of the role of bossism in Guerrerren society over time, see Endnote 28.

⁶⁹ See Endnote 66.

⁷⁰ Brendita is a pseudonym.

Chapter 4 - Anti-queer/trans violence and the Sallyport



Figure 4.1 – Sallyport of Zihuatanejo Prison

(Source: W. Payne)

Introduction

A sallyport is a space of transition. It is an architectural feature of prison design, specifically referring to the in-between space between the inner and outer gates of a prison. Usually positioned between two locked gates, one that opens into the space of the non-prison while the other leads further into the physical space and affective experience of circularity, this space is particular. It is a space that is especially regulated in ways that are different from the adjacent spaces outside and even inside the prison. The sallyport is a place of scrutiny, a place of examination, a place of identification, a place of confiscation, and a space of strip search. It is a place of handing things over, or of having material objects returned. It is a place where the body is especially investigated, disrobed, and reclothed. There is a particular gaze to the sallyport that is both panoptic and intrusive at the same time. So even as this space can mark a transition to a new life, either inside or outside of a carceral space, the sallyport can also be understood as a physical experience of bare life, in the Agamben sense. This chapter is about the *sallyport* as a metaphor for the experience of space for sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, illustrated through an examination of my experience of attending a drag show in the Zihuatanejo prison in 2014, and then through a consideration of violence experienced by queer and trans people in this state.

A chain-link fence is not enough. Above it, a double helix of razor wire has been interwoven through three horizontally arranged rows of barbed wire. I am here to attend a drag show. I enter the sallyport—that in-between space of scrutiny that lies between the outside and the inside—of the Zihuatanejo Centre for Social Readaptation (CERESO), a medium-security prison tucked away from the view of the international tourists that flock to the nearby beaches. A prison guard asks to see my identification and motions for me to remove my hat. The outside perimeter is only the first defence. Beyond the bailey—the prison’s thick outer wall—we enter a gap just wide enough for an armed guard to pass and then reach a cement wall at least six metres tall that is topped by another chain link fence and is also adorned with whorls of the same concertina wire. A guard tower watches over the entranceway. And although at first glance the turret appears unoccupied, just below the cornice that protects the unseen sentry of this present-day

bartizan from sun and rain, a camera has been installed to ensure that the panoptic obligation of this modern institution is fulfilled.

Viewed through the emergent body of carceral geographies literature (Allspach 2010; Moran *et al.* 2012; McWatters 2013; Turner and Peters 2017; Wilson Gilmore 2022), I use the metaphor of the sallyport to examine how these events—understood as confluences of trajectories (Massey 2005)—expose the differentially permeable boundaries faced by LGBTQ persons in a place whose liberality is put in doubt precisely by the transnational forces that also form it. Scholars of carceral geographies have highlighted the importance of recognizing how the logic of carcerality spreads beyond formal carceral spaces (Allspach 2010), how this transcarcerality is experienced through the body and in the context of mobility as an instrument of power (Moran *et al.* 2012), and that carcerality is both dynamic and at the same time oppressive and senseless (McWatters 2013). Wilson Gilmore (2022) laments that the function of carcerality in modern societies is to sort people based on who is in and who is out—well beyond the distinctions established by the walls of prisons—but also underlines that freedom is still a possibility and that freedom is itself a place. This chapter includes a review of violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities in the various regions of the state of Guerrero, read through the concept of the *sallyport*, my contribution to carceral geographies. This device of the *sallyport* seeks to illuminate the spaces of surveilled transition that magnify anti-queer/trans violence, to expose how enclosure sharpens the danger that queer and trans people face. This interrogation of the experiences of sexual and gender dissidents in this state serve to illustrate aspects of what I call a queer theory of violence.

The Sallyport: Mobilities and immobilities

This use of *sallyport* as metaphor builds on the material experience of passing through such a space (such as in a prison) but can also further our understanding of other scalarities, such as that of the nation-state and the transnational, in this case the continental. It relies on the proposal that boundaries and borders are always productive, that they produce something, that subjectivities are created, remade, disciplined and confined through processes of crossing, and that bodies are involved. Geographers have

considered the ways in which borders at the scale of the nation-state are dynamic processes rather than static lines in the sand. Think of the US-Mexico Border. Borders exclude. Borders contain. Prisons, like states, are defined by borders, by enclosure, containment and exclusion. I am interested in the transformations that occur in the crossing between the inside and the outside, and vice versa—and it bears mentioning that it is not always clear what is the inside and what is the outside—and what these transformations mean for the production and ongoing reproduction of the prison itself. My use of sallyport is meant to cast light on the concrete experience of those whose subjectivity is formed through the Zihuatanejo prison, located as it is on the periphery of the state of Guerrero in southern Mexico. I recall the material sallyport of the prison where hats are removed, identification is inspected, cameras and cell phones are confiscated, and bodies are searched. However, this inquiry is also meant to be analogical: I am interested in the sallyports of the state of Guerrero as well, the spaces of transition between Guerrero and not-Guerrero, the spaces of transition that might tend towards freedom rather than towards prison, the spaces that belie the proposal that Guerrero can be understood as a violent space akin to Goffman's (1961) total institution. In their consideration of the detention of migrants, Mountz *et al.* (2012: 526) propose that the tension between mobility and containment that accomplishes the regulation of mobility is key to the “technologies of exclusion” in which carceral institutions specialize. In order to imagine a different future than the present realities might at first suggest, these authors propose that it is important to contemplate exactly whose security is of concern in the state processes and structures that presently exist. Using the example of the detention of migrants, Mountz *et al.* (2012) underline a paradox in that subjectivities are created through the processes of detention that may not have existed prior to imprisonment. Subjectivities are formed in and through the sallyport.

The carceral geography of a drag show

Whereas totalizing views tended to regard prisons as institutional spaces that were absolutely spatially contained and socially insular, more recent, non-totalizing views have begun to reimagine prisons as dynamic spaces replete with temporal flows and social encounters that defy absolutist conceptions of prison as monolithic capsules of space and time.

McWatters 2013: 199

I draw on recent carceral geographies literature to guide this analysis of my experience of attending this performance presented by members of the local LGBTQ community in conjunction with the municipal government's Office for Gender Diversity to an audience made up of prisoners, some family members, and prison staff. I consider how the lives of those I encountered are shaped by a context marked by organized crime, violence, and impunity. The productive metaphor of the *sallyport* provides insight into the various (im)mobilities associated with the unusual cultural event of a drag show in a prison and is also deployed in the analysis of the wider transnational dimensions of the lived experience of sexual and gender minorities in and from Guerrero.

Prison designers have attempted to create the “totalizing institutions” of Goffman’s (1961) imagination, and Bentham’s panopticon is the symbolic approximation of this sort of striving. Scholars have questioned the conclusions implied by Goffman’s “total institution” in which the prison is seen as an example of an isolated and enclosed social space that is effectively detached from the rest of the world (Goffman 1961; Farrington 1992; Baer and Ravneberg 2008; Allspach 2010; McWatters 2013).⁷¹ While McWatters (2013: 201) challenges Goffman’s view and advocates going beyond seeing prisons “as totalizing spaces of absolute isolation, containment and dispossession,” this scholar also cautions against forgetting that prisons are still sometimes “absolutely oppressive or senseless.”

Wilson Gilmore (2022: 349) reminds us that while the modern prison is a central institution of carceral geographies in the world, it is “by no means [their] singularly defining institution” and underlines that these geographies “signify regional accumulation strategies and upheavals, immensities and fragmentations, that reconstitute space-time . . . to run another round of accumulation.” These geographies have to do with the fundamental logic of modernity, a logic that includes the story of Amelio Robles explored in the previous chapter, a historic queer revolutionary figure formed through Xochipala, a place I argued is simultaneously prehispanic and modern. This logic also encompasses contemporary prisons such as the one I encountered in Zihuatanejo. Wilson Gilmore (2022) recalls that prisons as we know them today emerged together with the capitalist system that requires group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death to

create the inequality that capitalism requires to function. I contend that the device of the *sallyport* is useful in challenging persistent understandings of prisons as contained spaces isolated from the outside world. It also provides insight into the understanding of political jurisdictions experiencing high levels of violence and impunity as formed through dynamics involving other spaces, and other territories.

This engagement with the device of the *sallyport* seeks to advance scholarly consideration of the transcarceral (Allspach 2010; Moran 2014) by queering it. Drawing on Allspach's concept of transcarceral spaces, Moran (2014: 35) proposes that the transcarceral refers to "spaces... in which released prisoners experience processes of re-confinement, [thus] extend[ing] the reach of the prison beyond its apparent physical boundaries." Moran (2014: 36) notes that while transcarceral can refer to physical locales where imprisonment is effectively extended, the concept also encompasses how incarceration is written onto the bodies of those who have experienced it: "the corporeal inscriptions acquired during incarceration act to construct bodily subjectivities which intersect with other embodied characteristics, particularly social class, to stigmatise and disadvantage released prisoners." Framing Guerrero through the concept of transcarceral space informed by the concept of the *sallyport* helps understand the subjectivity of sexual and gender dissidents in and from Guerrero.

Building on critiques of Goffman's "total institution" put forth by scholars who have engaged with the embodied nature of carceral mobilities through the lens of the transcarceral, I challenge persistent understandings of political jurisdictions experiencing high levels of violence and impunity as contained spaces. The transcarceral is a conceptual reminder that prisons bleed into the spaces of the non-prison. Furthermore, I argue that the idea of the transcarceral also illuminates how enclosures that are part and parcel of present-day North America have implications for those who are not considered to be the subjects of this political order, notably including sexual and gender minorities from Guerrero. The concept of the *sallyport* points to how carceral spaces shape spaces that are seen at first glance as being beyond the carceral.

Feminists engaged with geopolitics address the embodied and everyday emplacement of people marginalized through class, race and sexuality (Dixon and Marston 2011; Hyndman 2012), and prisons are specific sites of this emplacement

(Moran 2014). For example, the lasting stigma attached to former women prisoners who lacked access to adequate dental care while incarcerated, is something made visual in an ongoing way through their missing teeth (Moran 2014: 47). Moran uses the concept of transcarceral space to shed light on the ways in which the prison itself exceeds its boundaries in deeply corporeal ways that underlines the permeability of the prison wall and demonstrates that the carceral experience is always both deeply personal and embodied.

Sexuality is part of this story. A long tradition of prison scholarship includes prurient examinations of sexual subjectivities of those who find themselves within their walls, whether as inmates or even as guards (Kunzel 2008; Gibson and Hensley 2013). This scholarship has found that prisons, like all social spaces, are always sexual because the lived bodily experience of those within their walls is at play. Scholars of carceral geography who engage with the concept of the transcarceral recognize that the carceral institutional form is key to the formation of identities of people both within and beyond its confines and pay attention to the porous boundary between the institutional space and the universes beyond its walls. Similarly, a transcarceral understanding of North American continental geographies benefits from a recognition that sexuality is an integral element of the movement and confining of bodies. Scholars of sexuality see space as a manifestation of power. They propose that the spaces we inhabit are produced through embodied social practices, and view regulation at the scale of the body as key to a feminist epistemology at other scales (c.f. Browne, Lim and Brown 2009). Sometimes, this regulation makes some bodies more vulnerable to premature death, given that some lives can be taken with impunity. Although on that point, we need to remember Segato's argument that this impunity is not the unfortunate outcome of an inability of the state to act but rather the intended product of a political system that requires impunity as a prerequisite for its deployment of power.

As such, the state is central to carceral geographies. Moran (2015: 2) underlines that while carceral geographers are focused on carceral spaces and systems, they are also interested in the linkages to "an increasingly punitive state." While much related scholarship has focused on places where people are incarcerated, including individual experiences, siting and design issues, and the porosity between the inside and the outside,

Moran (2015: 110) recognizes that “[u]nderpinning all of this work is a notion of the relationship between the carceral and the state, in terms of incarceration itself serving the perceived needs of the state in providing an ‘appropriate’ response to offending behaviour ...” Moran (2015: 147) also relays that this scholarship stems from Foucault’s review of the shift from punishment as spectacle to regulation through surveillance and discipline.

But what exactly is the “offending behaviour”, the offence that the state seeks to address through the carceral? Bodies crossing borders that they have been told not to cross produce the offence. While the scholarship of carceral geography has started to explore carceral spaces beyond the prison, such as migrant detention centres and even gated communities, they have largely been silent on this matter of offence. Sexual and gender minorities have long understood that the offence taken matters to the extent to which the offended party has the power to act on their offence. Some bodies seem to simply “offend” others, sometimes through their very existence, or at least in their placement where those with more power view them as out-of-place. In the context of prisons, the subjugation of offending bodies is part of the design: The body encounters the state in particularly intimate ways. Wilson Gilmore’s (2022: 351) study of the role of prisons in the modern period sees them as crucial in the sorting of who is in and who is out and understands prisons as designed to extract from those bodies that are imprisoned the very “resource of life”, which she says is time. The analogy of the *sallyport* addresses the relationship of the scale of the offending body to other scalar formations implied by Wilson Gilmore’s argument. In the case of physical prisons, both those entering and exiting experience the scrutiny of the sallyport such that both identity and possessions are examinable. Sometimes, bodies are literally stripped down as they enter, or exit. However, the analogy also applies beyond the topographic design of a physical prison or space of incarceration and has relevance in the case of the topologies of power in the context of differential vulnerability to premature death. Queer and trans people in Guerrero do not only experience the scrutiny of the sallyport in specific, knowable places. Rather, this experience of being in a sallyport, of being subjected to the attention of the power to be stripped can occur anywhere, without warning. Notice that the sallyport operates regardless of whether the perceived offence is justification for enforced

inclusion (imprisonment) or for enforced exclusion (banishment), that bodies on the move are particularly at risk of sallyport scrutiny. And what is a queer geography of violence if not a study of the movement (and immobilization) of bodies?

I want to consider further this idea of the movement of bodies, and of mobility. Scholars of carceral geographies engage with the myriad ways in which mobilities are part of the experience of imprisonment (Moran *et al.* 2012). Mobility is more than movement, precisely because it concerns the social, with how both time and space have been abstracted:

[M]obility is central to what it is to be modern. A modern citizen is, among other things, a mobile citizen. At the same time, it is equally clear that mobility has been the object of fear and suspicion, a human practice that threatens to undo many of the achievements of modern rationality and ordering.

Cresswell 2006: 20

Following Cresswell's (2006) contention that mobility itself is an expression of power and agency, Moran *et al.* (2012: 447) call for more sustained consideration of the ways "in which the mobility is itself an *instrument* of power," and in which the movement itself is "coerced" in the context of the carceral. They propose the concept of "disciplined mobility [as] a means of conceptualising mobility with limited agency" and apply this to the transportation of prisoners to and between facilities, a context in which the prisoner's movement is clearly a manifestation of the will and the logics of the state (Moran *et al.* 2012: 449). For example, in their consideration of the movement of women prisoners through contemporary Russia, these authors propose that the experience of being transported might be understood as an Agambenian space of exception during which the prisoner slips beyond even the disciplining structures of the carceral system as they travel across space in windowless train cars, though still encumbered by the accoutrements of imprisonment, bars, locks, guards and the like. Moran *et al.* (2012) emphasize that it is the forced nature of the movement that disciplines the prisoner into the norms of the place where they are going, norms rooted in atrophied autonomy. My concept of the sallyport addresses how these experiences of force are part of the disciplinary mechanism that prisoners experience, and by analogy how force structures and delimits the lives of LGBTQ Guerrerens.

At this point I do want to reiterate that there is a normative aspiration for this dissertation project, that the effort to understand the violence that queer and trans people in Guerrero experience also seeks different trajectories. Wilson Gilmore (2022: 349, 352) says that the opposite of the carceral geography of modernity produced through the spatiality of racial capitalism through “group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death . . . [is] abolition geography, [which] starts from the premise that freedom is a place.” I argue that this place of freedom can be brought forth only through the dismantling of the sallyport. For Wilson Gilmore (2022: 352), “what is to be abolished . . . [are] the processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion that congeal in and as group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.” This is the sallyport. This scholar rejects fixation on offence and the related preoccupation with proving that subjugated bodies are somehow “innocent” as the basis of arguing that the carceral has simply gone too far. Instead, she argues that “human sacrifice . . . is the central problem that organizes carceral geographies” and calls on us to fundamentally “move . . . away from partition and exclusion” (Wilson Gilmore 2022: 363, 365). My articulation of the conceptual tool of the sallyport is meant to participate in this realignment away from the carceral. In the next section, I analyze my own experience with a physical carceral space as part of this study.

Drag in an unexpected place

Zihuatanejo is a mid-sized Mexican city with prehispanic origins located four hours west of Acapulco in a region of Guerrero called Costa Grande, best known for the modern tourist resort called Ixtapa established on the town’s western flank in the 1970s. Zihua—as it is known locally—is thus a regional commercial centre focused on the international traveller.⁷² This town has, however, not escaped southwest Mexico’s disintegration of the rule of law, nor the related assemblage of criminal cartels that has striated the country with violence in recent years. In January 2014, while visiting the city of Zihuatanejo to interview members of the LGBTQ sector regarding violence against their community and their response, a key activist invited me to attend a drag show they had planned for the following day. The good fortune of my visit coinciding with this unusual event they were planning to hold in an overcrowded regional correctional facility

gave me a privileged view of the texture of queer organizing by local activists in this place.

The next afternoon, he and other activists picked me up at my hotel and we headed to the prison where the show was to take place. As we passed through the prison's principal sallyport and arrived at the second of the prison's security gates, the guards seemed unperturbed by our contingent, a half-dozen gay men and trans women, and only asked us to leave our hats and phones with them. One of the guards did a perfunctory search of my bag. I was struck by the warm welcome the prison staff gave to one of the activists, the lead organizer of the event and the person who had invited me along. I asked the guards if I could keep my camera to document the show. They briefly conferred, and then one of them told me to check with the prison psychologist. That seemed odd, but then so did attending a drag show in a prison.

A couple more locked gates and we eventually arrived at a large open-air courtyard surrounded by a cinderblock wall at least eight metres tall and lined with a four-metre interior concentric circle of chain link fence. Razor wire topped both the wall and the fence. Plastic tarps of various shapes, sizes, and states of decay had been strung around the outer perimeter of the courtyard, providing a modicum of protection from the hot sun for several dozen men, at least a dozen women and nearly a dozen children, mostly sitting on moulded plastic chairs around tables. Fans faced the assembled spectators, providing a cooling respite from the hot, stagnant air. Some men stood in small groupings, seeming to enjoy the festive atmosphere that seemed more akin to a casual tropical venue near the beach than a prison courtyard. Everyone was dressed in civilian clothes, so it was somewhat difficult to distinguish between prisoners and visitors. I estimate that about a third of the prisoners of the facility were present for this event, by choice. While the prison does have a small women's area, I am not sure which of the women present were inmates and which ones were visiting loved ones. Prisoners seemed to be able to come in and out of the performance space as they wished, at least for the duration of the event. While I initially assumed that the children were there as visitors (it was after all visiting day), I later learned that at least some of the children who were present for this event likely lived in the prison with their mothers. Everyone faced the centre where I correctly assumed the performance would soon take place.



Figure 4.2 – Trans performers use prison conjugal area as green room

(Source: W. Payne)

The patio was basically a cul-de-sac, the entrance straddled by a hamburger stand, a shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe, four rather worn-looking arcade video games, and a door marked “conjugal area” (See Figure 4.2). Although the plywood walls were in disrepair, above the entrance to the patio I could still make out the words “educational classroom” written in cursive letters on the side of an elevated, rather precarious-looking room perched above us. When we initially arrived, the performers headed into the

conjugal area—temporarily converted into their green room—and one of the activists brought me to one of the tables set up for the event and introduced me to several inmates he knew. Then he presented me to a fit middle-aged man who said he was the prison psychologist. Although it seemed strange to ask medical staff about using my camera, I did as instructed. He said, “yes, of course,” and immediately left to collect it so that I would have it for the beginning of the show. Another person approached me and said they were from the municipal government. As we became acquainted, we realized that we had spoken by phone the previous day and were scheduled to meet later that same afternoon to discuss their work with the municipality in relation to sexual and gender minorities. The mayor of Zihuatanejo had appointed this person, Ramiro Sotelo, to the directorship of the awkwardly named Office of Gender Diversity the previous year, making Zihuatanejo the first of several jurisdictions in the state to establish an office focused on LGBTQ issues.

About a half-hour after our arrival the event began. First, the prison psychologist made a few introductory remarks. Next, the Director of Gender Diversity introduced me to the prisoners and their families and then led the children in a series of games, the winners earning various toys as prizes. After opening comments by one of the activists that I come back to below, the show itself began: three drag artists performed two or three numbers each. The crowd was polite, though many of the men did seem a bit uncomfortable, or perhaps they did not want to seem too interested in what was going on. Dressed in a two-piece outfit that showed off her midriff and wearing tan-coloured high-heeled shoes, Jeny performed first. I had met her earlier in the day as we had travelled to the prison together in a shared taxi. Next up was a heavier set trans woman I had not met. Her white pumps complemented her black and white tiger-skin printed toga. She was singing rather than lip-syncing, and the audience appeared quite attentive. Finally, wearing a short tight black dress with silver sequins and a lamé bow at her midriff with matching pumps, a striking trans woman was the final performer. At the conclusion of the show, the municipal official from the Office of Gender Diversity spoke at length about the health services that the city government, specifically his office, could offer the inmates and their families.

A buzzer summoned the prisoners to their cells for roll call, so after hasty goodbyes the performers and I headed to the prison's main gate. As we exited, I was introduced to the warden of the prison, a handsome man in his late thirties wearing blue jeans and a grey t-shirt that said "Wilson tournament" on it. Given his casual dress I remember wondering if perhaps he was on his day off. I commended him for allowing this drag show to take place. He responded that the thanks should all go to the activist who had organized the show, noting that the prisoners do not have many activities and that this event was a real gift for them. As we said our goodbyes, he asked me not to show the prisoners' faces in any photos I publish.

The drag show in the Zihuatanejo prison—and indeed my own happenstance participation in that event—provides a glimpse into the dynamics of power and subjectivity in a particular place. The people in this story—the activists, the prisoners, their families, their guards, the other prison staff, and the municipal officials—are deeply involved in the formation of a unique and telling space that I experienced and briefly became part of. It gives us a queer lens through which to view the texture of Guerrero in the present time, where violence, power, regulation, subjectivity, subjection, the state, the transnational, the economic, the cultural and the neo-colonial are all deeply implicated in its make-up.

Imprisonment in Mexico

Since the establishment of NAFTA (now CUSMA), Mexico has steadily increased its use of imprisonment.⁷³ In Guerrero, despite a flattening of the state's population due to emigration, an increased prison population includes significantly more people who have been deprived of their liberty for extended periods of time without due process. INEGI (2021) provides information about the proportion of inmates who have been incarcerated for eight or more years and also the proportion of inmates who continue to maintain that they did not commit a crime, and Guerrero is above average on both accounts.

The Zihuatanejo prison was built for 120 inmates but had come to hold nearly double that number, a situation similar to other prisons in the state (Castillo Pineda 2017; Camacho Servín 2017). Overcrowding has material consequences, often aggravated by

inadequate resources for the basic needs of the inmates. As such, prison riots and other forms of violence are a regular occurrence in the prisons of Guerrero. The Zihuatanejo prison was the site of one such riot when a conflict broke out between two groups of prisoners, one that had tried to raid the prison store and another that tried to stop them (Barrios Valverde 2009). The guards fired their weapons, and the prison director was himself locked up by prisoners for a period of time.

Other prisons in the state have also been the sites of violence and turmoil. For example, a prison riot at the Acapulco prison received support from hundreds of family members of prisoners who blocked the main entrance to the prison to protest poor food quality and limited visitor access (Covarrubias 2013). Prison breaks are also part of the landscape. For example, two prison guards were killed and nine prisoners escaped when an armed commando entered a prison in the town of Union, not far from Zihuatanejo (Ocampo Arista 2013). According to prison officials, these situations are attributed to poor living conditions for the prisoners, insecure infrastructure and insufficient staffing in most of the state's seventeen prisons. Police operations in the Chilpancingo prison uncovered large quantities of weapons, drugs, alcohol and other contraband, resulting in the transfer of eighteen prisoners to facilities outside the state, as well as the broad daylight assassination of the prison's warden in the months that followed (Anews Acapulco 2014; Notimex 2014; Pigeonutt & Ávila 2014). Prison riots in Chilpancingo, Acapulco and Iguala have left dozens killed and injured (Riña en penal 2015; Ferri 2017; Aristegui 2022a). There have also been break-ins to murder or extract prisoners. In one example, six armed individuals broke into the Iguala prison in the middle of the night, leaving nine people dead (Mueren 9 por balacera 2014). In a particularly dramatic event, 80 armed cartel members dressed in military uniforms extracted a recently incarcerated leader of an opposing cartel from a prison in Coyuca de Catalán, only to leave his tortured remains in the middle of a nearby highway a few days later with an attached message to the local community (Guerrero 2022; Aristegui 2022b). Prisons reflect Guerrero's state of violence and impunity and the movement through the sallyports that separate the inside spaces of the prisons from the rest of Guerrero are instrumental in the sustenance of this violence.

An LGBTQ community encounters a prison

As we were waiting for the show to begin, a young man named Marcos⁷⁴ struck up a conversation with me. Reading me as an international tourist, Marcos asked me if I was in town to go to the beach. When I told him I had recently dealt with a bout of skin cancer and so I avoid beaches, he replied that he too is ill, that he has HIV. His openness – both with me and with the many prisoners within earshot – surprised me and I said so. He said that disclosure of HIV status is not an issue in the prison. However, when he told me that he is using something called “magnet therapy” to treat the HIV infection, I heard my teacher voice insist that antiretroviral therapy is the only tried and true way to deal with HIV and suggested he speak with the town’s Director of Gender Diversity, who was sitting nearby, to arrange access to HIV medication. A few minutes later I observed this young prisoner approach this government official, who later told me that he would be calling the HIV clinic the following day to make sure Marcos had access to treatment.⁷⁵

Before the drag show began, one of the queer activists offered some reflections about the day’s event and then recited a poem for those assembled. The activist asserted that while many of those in that prison had done nothing to merit incarceration, that on the outside there were many who had. This comment reminded me of Wilson Gilmore’s observation that prisons function to sort those who are in from those who are out, an observation that aligns with Agamben’s deployment of the mobius strip to reflect on the twisted inclusion of those who are excluded. The poem that this activist recited is a well-known verse written by a Uruguayan writer, Mario Benedetti, during the dictatorship in his country. It is called “¿de qué se ríe?” [what are you laughing at?] The poem’s title refers to a photo of a laughing political leader published in a newspaper that the writer believed mocked the suffering of the people. The title question is also the refrain of the poem and serves to animate a challenging of the authority of the government official: “From your window you can see the beach yet ignore the shantytowns; while your children’s eyes show power, other children have a look of sadness; in the streets unmentionable things happen, while students and workers dot their i’s; what are you laughing at? . . .” I later learned that a rendition of this same poem recited at a recent political protest against a local political leader had led to the arrest of at least one person.

While the rather positive response by the prisoners and their families to a drag show explicitly linked to LGBTQ activism may seem somewhat surprising, it is important to note that there is a long tradition in Guerrero of family restaurants hosting drag shows as part of family-friendly events. In this part of Mexico, you can often watch a drag show on Thursday afternoon while eating a bowl of traditional corn soup, children in tow, in a family-style restaurant called a *pozoleria*. However, this is not the full story. One of the members of the local LGBTTTI community who participated in the prison drag show later told me that one prisoner had been excluded from the event that day at the request of the event organizers. He said that a young man named Johnny, accused of killing a 35-year-old man named Victor Bañuelos Betancourt by dousing him with gasoline and then setting him on fire, was being held in this prison at the time of the drag show.⁷⁶ The informant told me that following this horrific act of violence the victim—still alive at the time—was transferred to a specialized burn-treatment facility, located across the country in the state of Guanajuato, but that the extraordinary efforts to save the victim’s life were ultimately unsuccessful. My informant explained that those organizing the event had requested that the person accused of this crime be kept in isolation while the activists were in the prison.

This example of a drag show in a prison demonstrates that while sallyports are spaces of examination for everyone who passes through them, the scrutiny of the sallyport is differentiated based on identity and positionality. As an academic researcher from the global north, I easily slipped through, probably because those responsible for the task of scrutiny assumed they knew who I was and an a priori decision had been made to permit my entry. The scrutiny had perhaps already happened before I reached the actual sallyport. It is also notable that the queer activists faced little scrutiny that day as well. In contrast, I know from prior experience in Guerrero prisons that the arbitrary power of the sallyport can be invoked without warning. Visitors can face intrusive inspection, and after being stripped down, at least figuratively, are sometimes refused passage. Mobility is restrained. The apparent randomness of passing across this threshold produces feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt that reshape subjectivities. I have wondered at the happenstance appearance of the prison warden in the sallyport as we left. While he seemed genuinely grateful to the performers and was quite disarming in his interaction

with me, the disciplinary nature of the space was perhaps made evident by the clear direction he provided regarding the use of the photographic and videographic material I had obtained.

As I reflect on this strange experience, I am reminded that prison in Guerrero—like so many elsewheres—is as place of containment where any coincidence between guilt and detention is little more than incidental, where the turmoil of the North American continent’s twisted power geometries rises to the surface, where evidence of the premature death that Wilson Gilmore (2022) brought to our attention abounds, but is also a place where the layers of anti-queer/trans violence attached to gender and sexuality are occasionally transformed into resistance. This happenstance opportunity to participate in this event occurred during my efforts to meet with LGBTTTI activists in smaller centres across Guerrero to learn about the violence that sexual and gender minorities were experiencing. In the next section, I recount some of the accounts that I heard during this series of visits.⁷⁷

Violence, impunity, and resistance across Guerrero

As previously mentioned, Guerrero has historically been divided into seven regions⁷⁸: Centro (encompasses the state capital of Chilpancingo and a dozen adjacent municipalities, including several towns where I conducted interviews); Acapulco (the state’s largest city, located on the Pacific Ocean); Costa Grande (seven municipalities west of Acapulco and adjacent to the coast, including two towns where I conducted interviews, Zihuatanejo and Atoyac de Álvarez); Costa Chica (sixteen small municipalities east of Acapulco also adjacent to the coast, including the regional centre of Ometepec, where I conducted interviews); La Zona Norte (encompasses the cities of Iguala and Taxco where I conducted interviews, plus a dozen other small municipalities); Tierra Caliente (encompasses the major towns of Arcelia, Coyuca de Catalán and Ciudad Altamirano, plus several adjacent rural municipalities), and Montaña (a mostly rural region on the eastern side of the state predominated by Indigenous communities, which I did not visit as part of this research.) The sociopolitical realities in different regions of Guerrero impact the violence that these communities face. Relying on data obtained through in-depth interviews with LGBTQ activists triangulated with some hemerographic

data, this section provides a snapshot of recent violence perpetrated against LGBTQ persons in smaller cities across the state of Guerrero, including areas significantly reconfigured by the logics of organized crime. Chapters 5 and 6 also provide a more in-depth consideration of violence against queer and trans persons in the state's two major cities, Chilpancingo, and Acapulco.

Following the prison drag show, I had the opportunity to meet with Ramiro Sotelo, long-time queer activist and government functionary, to discuss violence faced by sexual and gender minorities in the Costa Grande region. He thought that activist efforts had made some gains in the local area and thought that this organizing was the reason why the strong pattern of lethal violence against trans and travesti identified persons in other parts of the state was not evident in Zihuatanejo or in the western part of the Costa Grande region. Like many other informants though, he was able to easily name queer persons who had been killed. Sotelo underlined the impact that Bañuelos Betancourt's murder in Zihuatanejo mentioned above had had on the community, though he also noted that it was a case that showed the role of mental illness and internalized homophobia—he asserted that the killer was himself gay—and also demonstrated what the state can do to hold a perpetrator to account. He also recounted the brutal murder of Francisco Mora Luviano, an elected official killed in Zihuatanejo in 2011 by two people including a minor teenager who Sotelo said had been an “intimate partner” of the deceased.

Samuel, a former journalist and queer activist from the Costa Grande town of Atoyac de Álvarez, also told me about several deaths of queer and trans persons. First, he recalled the killing of his friend José, a twenty-year old travesti sex worker from the nearby village of San Jerónimo. Due to experiences of discrimination and poverty, in 2001 José moved to Acapulco – a common trek for queer and trans people living in small towns - where he continued in sex work and became involved with drug trafficking. Within a few months he had been stabbed to death: “He was killed for being gay.” Samuel said that case was left unsolved because the family was poor: “[The killer] went unpunished, because they are from a very poor family... The authorities take no part in the matter... they ignore everything being a poor person, they don't pay attention to you.” As he remembered his long deceased friend, Samuel recalled the existential fatigue this young person had already experienced in their effort to find a way to live: “He dressed

like a woman in search of a space, that's what he said, he always used the phrase 'a space' ..."

Samuel also told me about a recent brutal killing of a travesti youth from the Atoyac area of Costa Grande. Francisco Garcia Galeana, aka La Pancha⁷⁹, a 16-year-old from a nearby village⁸⁰ known to do sex work in the area. While attending a wedding in the town of Ticui, just across a small river from Atoyac, the youth reportedly entered an adjacent abandoned factory to urinate where he encountered several "drugged up men" who tied him up, sexually assaulted him, and then threw him from a height onto the abandoned factory equipment below. Quick community response led to the jailing of the perpetrators. Samuel contrasted this case with that of a young man named Román Radilla who had left Atoyac and gone to the United States in search of a better life, only to be infected with HIV by someone he "fell in love with" who failed to disclose his seropositive status. Deported back to Mexico and unable to access treatment for HIV once home, this young person soon died. Samuel considered this case one of violence against a gay person because of the injustices involved, including the discrimination Román experienced from family and in the town upon his return.



Figure 4.3 – “1st Gay Pride Parade-March – Ometepec 2013”

(Source: W. Payne)

On my second visit to the Costa Chica region, I was able to interview Pedro, a key activist in Ometepec who had helped organize the city’s first Pride march a few months earlier. A sleepy regional centre several hours east of Acapulco, Ometepec has escaped the more intense violence that impacts most of Guerrero’s regions. Pedro said that Ometepec’s status as a city also means that queer and trans people do experience a modicum of social acceptance, in contrast to surrounding towns where violence directed at sexual and gender minorities is more commonplace. He recalled two homicides involving LGBTQ persons, a 38-year-old high school teacher killed in Ometepec, and a 32-year-old accountant from Ometepec who had moved to a suburb of Acapulco two years prior. From rumours in his own neighbourhood where the teacher had lived, Pedro had learned that the teacher’s intimate partner was most likely responsible, adding that the authorities had failed to provide any updates on the case. From a single news account in the local tabloid press, Pedro had also learned that the accountant, Esteban Santiago,

was likely killed by a sentimental partner as well. Pedro did not expect to learn that either of these cases will ever be solved. He also mentioned having heard of several killings of travestis in smaller nearby communities, including one that had occurred in Cuajinicuilapa, a county located an hour's drive south of Ometepec and known as an Afro-Mexican part of the state. Later, I also came across a news report about the killing of a trans activist from Ometepec named Jennifer Lopez⁸¹, someone I had marched with in the 2013 Pride event in that city. Listed in a year review of women "killed fighting for human rights" by *The Guardian*, Lopez's murder by stabbing has not been solved (Sekyiamah, Medanhodzic and Ford 2017).

They woke up dead

Tierra Caliente (literally, "hot lands"), an inland region of southern Mexico marked by low elevation and an extremely hot climate, includes much of southern Michoacan, the southwest corner of the State of Mexico, and the western region of Guerrero (also referred to as Tierra Caliente). Organized crime has a firm grip on this part of Mexico, including all the major towns in the Guerrero section. This presence has shaped the lived experience of sexual and gender minorities in particular ways. Careful adherence to security precautions advised by queer activists in the state capital who had encouraged me to make these visits to document violence impacting sexual and gender minorities structured my two visits to this part of Guerrero. I visited three towns, Arcelia, Ciudad de Altamirano, and Coyuca de Catalán, and interviewed ten people.

Prior to these visits, I had already heard of a series of killings of sexual and gender minorities in Tierra Caliente but was nevertheless unnerved by the litany of cases that each informant was able to recount in detail. Many of those interviewed told me about the death of Enio García Pineda, a 39-year-old local business owner killed in February 2012. Using an unusual turn of phrase that I would later hear from many other informants talking about homicides involving queer and trans persons, Mandela began to talk about Enio by saying: "He woke up dead." Reportedly, Enio was opening his boutique when two people entered, engaged him briefly about a clothing shipment, and then shot him dead. Mateo, a schoolteacher in his late twenties, told me that he had recently attended a memorial pass on the anniversary of the passing of Enio: "Everyone

in Altamirano thought he was marvelous.” Alfredo, an older gay man who worked as an event organizer, told me that Enio had been circumspect about his sexuality, and so was unsure if his sexual orientation was a factor in his death. Several journalists I interviewed concurred that Enio was an upright person, though Mateo mentioned a rumour had circulated that Enio was killed by one cartel for having business relations with an opposing cartel. Alfredo had also heard that Enio had made a complaint to the authorities about threats that he had received and wondered if that contributed to his death. None of the informants expected that this crime will be solved.

Several informants mentioned the murder of someone known as La Chacala, a travesti who worked in a local canteen, both as a server and as a sex worker. “That was her mistake,” commented Mateo, noting that La Chacala also sold drugs for one criminal group and was killed by an opposing group. Mateo continued: “She was working in the bar when an armoured vehicle arrived. Armed men opened the door with pistols firing and they took her away. Two days later she woke up dead in a vacant lot.” A brief note in a local newspaper provided additional chilling details about this homicide: “Yesterday, at 7 o’clock in the morning, Iván Aguilar López, 25 years old, also known as La Chacala, was found deprived of life on Aquiles Serdán Street, 100 metres from the Oxxo... The deceased was wearing women’s clothes... and a piece of cardboard nearby read as follows: “you’re next Damaris, Cesar, Toño, Amaury and La Campanita...” (Ejecutan de un balazo 2013). Two local journalists I interviewed told me that La Chacala was “apparently innocent” but was targeted because of a dispute between the killers and her intimate partner, someone whose whereabouts remain unknown.

According to these journalists, a series of related killings “of homosexuals” soon followed, including the murder of someone called La Paloma [The Dove], who managed a bar called Cuartel. Reportedly, several armed individuals entered the establishment and shot La Paloma dead. The journalists focused on the victim’s gender identity: “He was also wearing women’s clothes, skirt, high heels, but he was a man.” According to these informants, this victim was never properly identified, and no one claimed the body: “He wasn’t from here ... Some said he was from Tepetlán [Veracruz], others Zihuatanejo.” They also recalled the killing of a young gay man who worked in a flower shop in the nearby town of Coyuca de Catalán a couple of years earlier: “They dismembered him and

left his remains in a vacant lot.” When I asked why this person had been killed these informants said no additional information was provided by the authorities. The implication seemed to be that this was per usual and that as local journalists they had learned not to ask.

I met Tomás, Zeferino, Tania, and Esmeralda at the local HIV clinic. Through another informant from a different part of the state, I connected with the clinic’s doctor, who put me in touch with these patients, who had agreed to be interviewed. They began by listing names of LGBTQ people they had known who had been killed: “Iván... Marquitos... Rael... la Carla ... El Güero... the event organizer [someone clarified] . . . Israel . . . but he wasn’t travesti [someone commented] . . . He did dress up as a woman and put on makeup... [someone else responded]”. They told me more about the killing of Iván, age 20, someone they had known casually: “He was a strange dude... A travesti woman, very beautiful and liked to dress really well... really elegant. We met up in a bar, many travestis... dancing, singing, drinking, shouting, having sex with men...” They said Iván had been shot dead and that no one had been held to account. Then they told me that Marquitos had been killed in the hotel where he worked: “He was very friendly... a good guy... a hard worker and was also studying hotel administration... He was young, about 20 years old.” They never learned why Marquitos was killed. Then they told me about Karla, a trans woman in her late twenties who was also shot inside a bar where she worked. They said they also never learned why Karla was killed.

Then Zeferino then said he knew of another case, that of Roque Medina, age 40:

He was a good friend of mine ... He was openly gay, but he didn’t die because of stigma or social violence. He died... because of this useless war against narcotrafficking ... so many have died, more than one hundred thousand deaths, more than one hundred thousand forced displacements, more than fifty thousand disappeared. He was an outstanding person, my best friend, my brother, and one day they took him away ... That was a year ago ... They killed him, but no one was able to recover his remains from the morgue because he didn’t have family here. He was a teacher, a prominent teacher ... He was the principal of high school, had studied abroad, spoke seven languages... But after his death, nothing. Total impunity... I always told him to be more careful, that these are not peace times, that we are in a time of war ... He had a lover who was caught up in bad things... I would have liked to have done more for him... to let the world know of his death in this useless war.

This painful reflection shows how Tierra Caliente is simultaneously isolated from the rest of Guerrero and Mexico while at the same time deeply enmeshed in the patterns of violence that have taken hold. Diego was an older gay man who had recently returned to Ciudad Altamirano, the regional centre of Tierra Caliente, after living for thirty years in the United States. He had come back to take over a small family business. When I asked him how LGBTQ identified people stay safe in this context, he said that when things got especially uncertain that those with means leave, head to the coast or even to the United States, for a few weeks or a few months, and wait for the situation to calm down a little before returning.

In contrast to the tropical lowlands of Tierra Caliente located far from the beaten path, Guerrero's Zona Norte is a largely mountainous area in the northern part of the state bifurcated by an expressway called the Highway of the Sun that provides easy access to Mexico City and Cuernavaca to the north and to Guerrero's capital city Chilpancingo and the beaches of Acapulco to the south. Multiple research excursions brought me to Zona Norte's two cities, Taxco and Iguala, each of which has a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants. I conducted several key interviews with activists and other LGBTQ identified persons.

My first interview in Iguala was with Bety, an older trans woman who moved to Iguala from Cuernavaca several decades ago. She said Iguala is a relatively calm place for trans people, at least compared to the state's larger cities. Bety did recall the killing of a 17-year-old trans woman named Sherlyn in about 2007, someone she had known from a venue called the Hollywood Disco where they both worked as servers: "We had her working contraband because she was a minor." She said that Sherlyn and several other young servers had gotten into the habit of drinking quite a bit, at times arriving at work already drunk. One night, when Bety observed a guy chatting up Sherlyn, she had a bad feeling about the situation and so called a taxi and took Sherlyn and the other young people to the home of one of the young trans women in the group and then continued to her own home. A short time later, she heard a hard knock on her door: "Sherlyn has been killed," the woman who owned the bar let her know. She was in shock: No, I just took her home." Her boss explained that Sherlyn had gone out again, this time to another

disco, where she met up with the same guy and then headed back to his home. Reportedly, the man admitted that Sherlyn had tried to leave and that a conflict ensued. Her body was found a short distance from his house. She had been stabbed at least seventeen times. For a time, the perpetrator was jailed but was free again within a year: “Everyone was angry, but nobody did anything in response, not even the family. The family was really poor ... [To pursue a case, the authorities] want money.” Rafael, the owner of another disco, told me that the perpetrator’s father had also been involved and was also imprisoned for a time. Barbi, a trans woman who had her own hair salon, dismissed this homicide as no different from any other case involving a dispute between lovers in which the guy is drugged up or drunk.

David was an important queer activist in Taxco, someone who had helped organize LGBTQ events there for over a decade. According to him, Taxco is a very religious city, so sexual and gender minorities have long experienced social isolation in families and communities. At the same time, he insisted that homicides involving queer or trans persons were not common. However, he said that there had been a recent homicide involving a poor travesti. A few weeks before our interview, on August 15, 2012, a 22-year-old trans woman who went by the name Marcela had been found dead in a place called the Panoramic Lookout, a short distance above the town centre, shot in the head. She had worked as a housekeeper in the historical Hotel Casa Grande. David said that he had heard that Marcela has also been beaten and stabbed. He suspected that Marcela had been on her way home from work but was reticent to speculate regarding motive: “People are frightened because this sort of thing hasn’t happened before.” David was closely associated with three LGBTQ activists murdered in 2018 in a triple homicide in Taxco, forcibly removed together from a nightclub by armed actors and later killed. Once again the killings have not been solved, and while by all accounts organized crime was involved, motive has not been established.

Violence and impunity as produced in relation to permeable borders

As I traveled around Guerrero, there did not seem to be an end to the stories of violence against queer and trans persons. The suffering was overwhelming. Of note, this brief review does not include examples from Chilpancingo and Acapulco, the state’s two

largest cities and the sites of most killings of sexual and gender minorities. I consider some of those cases in Chapters 5 and 6. At this point, as I try to make sense out of this violence, I return to the metaphor of the sallyport. I try to understand this violence through the lens of carceral geography, and particularly through the metaphor of the sallyport. I argue that Guerrero should be understood as *a carceral environment* in the way that Turner and Peters (2017) use the term, for queer and trans persons and for others. For these scholars, carceral environment is an umbrella term for places of incarceration, prisons, detention camps, asylum centres, and other institutional spaces where people are held by force. At first glance, this framing does not make sense: more people leave Guerrero than any other Mexican state. Most head for Mexico City or for the U.S. border. In fact, there are more Guerrerens in Chicago than in any city in Guerrero apart from Acapulco. But those large numbers beg the question, why are so many people trying to get out of Guerrero? Further, to what extent can those left behind in Guerrero be seen through the lens of incarceration?

In their rejection of the prison as ‘total institution’ and in their proposal that we see prisons as heterotopias, Baer and Ravneberg (2008: 208) recall Foucault’s preoccupation with “places that seem totally unrelated to one another but that exist side by side, and in the process are symbolic of the rest of society.” They tell us that heterotopias are mirrors. As such, they propose that prisons are, “symbolic of other spaces as a ‘figurative microcosm’ of the rest of society” (Baer and Ravneberg 2008: 213). The socio-political architecture of North America has been formulated through the imposition of a neoliberal reform entrenched by NAFTA (now CUSMA) and epitomized in the expansion of the criminal networks that produce and distribute illegal drugs (c.f. Segato 2010). Key to these shifts are borders, and we do well to remember that the biopolitics of getting across borders (or not) is intimately related to geopolitics and to the political project – as much as the economic project - of neoliberalism (Hyndman 2012).

Farrington (1992) argued that the concept of the “total institution” originally proposed by Goffman is a particularly American myth that does not approximate the lived experiences of those who find themselves in prisons because carceral facilities are invariably interwoven into the social fabric of the wider society. He also proposed that this idea of the total institution is in fact harmful in that prisons are not capable of solving

the problem of criminality in society. In a similar way, borders are often seen in the public imaginary as total institutions that fulfill the functionality of selective restriction of crossings in ways thought to always be determinable and predictable. As in the case of prisons, this creates a false expectation that borders will solve real social issues that need to be dealt with in place.

In this chapter, I push beyond what scholars of carceral geography have delineated as the conditions for understanding a social phenomenon through the lens of carceral geography (Moran, Turner and Schliehe 2018), though recent consideration of gated communities examined using a carceral geography frame as discussed by these scholars signals the ways in which the carceral can be useful to understand a range of social phenomena. At the same time, these scholars have called for “continued interrogation of carceral conditions” and have recognized that “the social in its entirety is carceral” (Moran, Turner and Schliehe 2018: 680). The metaphor of the sallyport, a place of departures and of arrivals, a place of scrutiny but also of new possibilities, can provide an additional lens to understand the circumstances of queer and trans persons in Guerrero at the present time.

I propose that violence and impunity are produced in relation to permeable borders. Following Foucault’s edict to, “analyze... the ‘concrete systems of punishment’, study them as social phenomena that cannot be accounted for by the juridical structure of society alone, nor by its operation... (1977: 24),” it stands to reason that power is not located in individuals but in the interstices between bodies, across permeable borders, in the sallyports. Segato (2010) argues that the system of impunity that reigns in Mexico cannot be understood apart from the porous US-Mexico border, apart from the borderlands that Anzaldúa drew to our attention. This too is a sallyport, like the space of in between that formed me into a docile subject as I entered the Zihuatanejo prison, asking for permission, obeying directives. This is the sallyport that the families of the prisoners who also entered the prison that day walked through, but that also reformed them, encouraged their docile engagement with the state as represented in the officials of the prison and of the municipal government. This is the sallyport that the queer activists passed through as they entered the prison, that taught them to be docile queer subjects of the neoliberal state that is Guerrero, that is Mexico, that allowed them to briefly protest

but then gently nudged them towards docility, towards accommodation. This too is the sallyport that promised liberation to so many queer and trans persons encountered in this research project even as their lives were snuffed out in the very moment they had become visible.

Guerrero is not an island. Though torn apart by violence, it is important to recognize that it is not an isolated violence. It is a violence of the heights of late capitalism, which is transnational. Nothing stays in Guerrero. Everything leaves, though everything also passes through the sallyport. The people pass through. Their money passes through as they send it back, the remittances that make the next day a bit more tolerable for the millions left behind thanks to the millions who have left. The drugs pass through. The drug dealers pass through. The Canadian mining companies and their gold pass through. And all go through the sallyport. All are formed in this new crucible, the modern prison, the modern state of Guerrero, both striated by violence and populated by docile bodies. But of course, Guerrero is not unique. It is every place.

Somehow, this experience of the drag show in the prison also gives me hope. I have no illusions. There are clear indications that there are power dynamics in relation the machinations of state power that are reflected in this case, including in the very administration of the prison. However, I am still somehow lifted up by the fact that a prison, any prison, would allow queer activists the opportunity to organize a drag show for the prisoners and their families. This demonstrates a certain permeability across the prison border. Carceral mobilities may be about the extension of the prison beyond its walls but they are also about the ways in which institutional power functions to form us, to lead us towards docility, but also occasionally to expressions of agency and resistance.

In my research, I seek to understand the place, role and function of the LGBTQ movement in Guerrero, a social movement that has developed in the midst of a particularly horrific manifestation of liberalism, really illiberalism, created through the confluence of a quintessential neoliberal economic system that benefits drug traffickers and gold mine owners alike, a system with brutal traces of the pre-modern—tortured inert bodies have become a currency in Guerrero and elsewhere in Mexico in recent years. I am struck by the word “movement” in the moniker “social movement” that I employ in my descriptions of what I have observed. Movement: Clearly, the goal is to go

somewhere, to do something. The queer and trans informants who told me the stories of pain and harm recounted here probably hoped that in the telling that the sallyports they have come to know might tend towards leading people to some sort of freedom rather than to imprisonment. Is it a disciplined movement? Of course. Is it coerced movement? Of course. Will the sallyports we encounter sometimes strip us naked and tear from us the tools that we require to do our work? Of course. Yes somehow, through the embodiment of struggle and resistance that is implied in the moniker “movement”, the cracks that we need may in fact appear.

In this chapter, I have tried to further develop my use of the sallyport as metaphor for the experiences of space for sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, considering how subjectivity is formed through the sallyport. I have considered how the disciplined mobility of some queer people (i.e. leaving Tierra Caliente for short while when levels of violence are high) contrasts with the lack of mobility of others. I recognize that the sallyport is the location of these processes of disciplining, what Wilson Gilmore (2022) calls the processes of hierarchy, dispossession, exclusion, that result in an outcome for too many of premature death. Even in face of the violence that prisons in Guerrero perpetuate, the sallyport of the Zihuatanejo prison can also be seen as a space of resistance. In small ways, through this drag show queer activists have disrupted the logics of the prison-industrial complex. We also see queer attempts to remake the state through the development of LGBTQ directorships in various municipal governments across the state, even in face of such horrific violence against queer/trans people.

In this chapter I have also tried to further develop aspects of my contribution to a queer theory of violence. I have described the context marked by widespread violence and impunity, facilitated by organized crime and state complicity. Pansters’s typology of violence reviewed in Chapter 1 provides some insight into the violence documented here: While the violence described seems to most directly fit Pansters’s concept of a social motive for violence, at the same time the economic motives of organized crime seem to be served by the widespread impunity experienced by queer and trans people and others. One is also left wondering about possible political motivations for this type of violence, what power dynamics might be served. This chapter also shows evidence of a rapprochement between the LGBTQ sector and the state. Examples of this include the

prison's openness to queer activist presence in the facility as well as the institutionalization of queer activism through the position of directorship of queer matters in the municipality of Zihuatanejo, even as there is evidence of queer activism directed against the same local officials for their oppressive behaviour in other spheres. Finally, this chapter shows how queer and trans people are to some extent trapped in Guerrero by the geopolitical configuration of the continent, primarily by poverty in relation to national identity as Mexican. This entrapment leaves sexual and gender minorities more exposed to violence due to the continental geographies and how they are shaped by sallyports. In the next chapter I will continue this exploration of what I call a geography of impunity through a close reading of three homicides involving anti-queer/trans violence in the state's capital, Chilpancingo.

⁷¹ Of note, Schliehe (2016: 19) argues that scholars of carceral geography have too easily dismissed Goffman's concept of the 'total' institution and should pay greater attention to his consideration of the "semi-permeable insides and outsides."

⁷² In 2012, Zihuatanejo was listed as one of five cities in the State of Guerrero that made the list of Mexico's twenty most violent urban areas, an especially shocking statistic given that Guerrero accounts for less than three percent of the population of a country that has become world-famous in recent years for the wave of violence that has engulfed it. The level of violence in Guerrero has since increased.

⁷³ The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, now called CUSMA) came into effect in 1994. 1995, Mexico's rate of incarceration was 101/100,000; By 2023, it was 214/100,000, more than double the Canadian rate (85/100,000 as of 2020), though still significantly less than the U.S. rate (531/100,000 in 2021). www.prisonstudies.org

⁷⁴ Names of prisoners have been changed.

⁷⁵ Another informant told me that an inmate of this prison died of complications related to HIV, and though the prison director reportedly admitted that the prison lacks medicines for the prisoners, he also maintained that the death was not related to this lack. A more recent media report regarding the death of an inmate with HIV in the Acapulco prison suggests there may be deficiencies in access to HIV treatment:

<https://agenciairza.com/muere-en-el-cereso-de-acapulco-un-reo-que-padecia-vih-sida/>

⁷⁶ This incident is recorded by the Organization of American States on this 2013 registry of violence against LGBT persons: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/lgtbi/docs/registro-violencia-lgbti.xlsx>

⁷⁷ This section draws from the transcripts of interviews I conducted with informants with privileged knowledge about the topic as compiled in an NVivo node I entitled "killing of queers". The assembled extracts compiled in this node is 59 pages long.

⁷⁸ In 2021, Guerrero's Congress formally established an eighth region called La Sierra, a vast area in the central mountainous part of the state west of the capital city with no major towns. This new region includes parts of municipalities previously included in Tierra Caliente, Costa Grande and Centro. See:

<https://www.elsoldeacapulco.com.mx/local/estado/guerrero-tiene-octava-region-aprueba-congreso-creacion-de-la-sierra-9068199.html> For a map of the seven regions, see this report: Instituto Nacional Electoral (2006) Memoria del Proceso Electoral Federal 2005-2006 Guerrero.

<https://portalanterior.ine.mx/documentos/DEOE/MemoriasProcesos/memorias2006/12/00/cap01.pdf>

⁷⁹ “Pancha” is a feminized nickname version of the name “Francisco”. See also:

<https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/violan-y-asesinan-a-un-adolescente-homosexual-en-el-ticui-atoyac/>

⁸⁰ Samuel named the village as Corral Falso, while contemporaneous news accounts I consulted said the youth was from the village of Miranda Fonseca.

⁸¹ An account of this person’s death is available here:

https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/reports/2017/05/20/jennifer-lopez-campanita_ometepepec-guerrero-mexico_2d8d67c7

Chapter 5 - A Geography of Impunity: Killing queers in Chilpancingo, Mexico

What is the distance between ‘Let the flames purify your sins’ and ‘I killed him for being a faggot?’”

Carlos Monsiváis 2003: p.165

Introduction

Through a study of three homicides involving people who identified as sexual or gender minorities, this chapter interrogates how violence and impunity map onto the bodies of queers in the city of Chilpancingo, the state capital of Guerrero. While this city functions as the fulcrum for collective action in favour of LGBTQ rights in this state, it is also a primary hub of the high level of violence faced by people in Guerrero, in particular sexual and gender minorities. Making use of thick description of the brutal killings of three people between 2011 and 2013, this chapter continues the examination of the relationship between violence against members of sexual and gender minorities and a sociopolitical context in which physical violence has become a regularized part of daily life. Using a case study approach to these three murders of sexual and gender minorities in the capital city of this southern Mexican state, I interrogate the meaning of this violence: What does the state gain from these deaths? Otherwise stated, how does leaving violence directed against (some) sexual and gender minorities unpunished support the transformation of the political order that has been underway since the emergence of electoral democracy in Mexico towards the end of the 20th century? I also consider the extent to which the concepts of homophobia and hate crime capture the motivations of perpetrators of lethal anti-queer/trans violence, further noting that for a long time, scholars of hate crime focused only on sexual minorities to the exclusion of gender minorities. I also continue to question what it means for queers to pursue a human rights agenda in a context where the state lacks a monopoly of the use of force and where the power grids of the transnational dominate the political economy.

Furthermore, I pay attention to the importance of intersectional identities in the unfolding of each case, and consider how the state deploys feminized, sexualized, and queered bodies such that specific geographies of impunity can be understood as both rooted in gender, sexuality and socioeconomic class but also as tied to the state’s

project.⁸² I show how state complicity with gender-based violence is intertwined with its disregard for violence against sexual and gender minorities. The concept of femicide introduced in Chapter 1 sheds light on the role of the machista and patriarchal state in the production of violence against sexual and gender minorities (Lagarde y de los Rios 2010; Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2007, 2015). To accomplish these goals, I consider what Massey (2005) calls the dynamic simultaneity that underlies the three case studies. For Massey, the idea of dynamic simultaneity is rooted in an understanding of space (and also place) as always becoming through a process of evolution (rather than a succession of discrete realities that succeed each other over time.) In the citation that opens this chapter, Monsiváis (2003) points to how this evolutionary process leaves its traces.

In this consideration of the relevance of violence against sexual and gender minorities in this complicated situation marked by the ascendancy of organized crime in which the rule of law has been largely suspended, I begin by reviewing relevant theoretical offerings that help make sense of the violence against sexual and gender minorities I have investigated. After giving an account of Mexico and Guerrero as sociospatial formations created through economic and political processes inflected by colonialism, masculinity, and homophobia, I describe and analyze three homicides of sexual and gender minorities that took place in Guerrero's capital city Chilpancingo in the recent past. These cases include: the widely publicized killing of Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera, a 36-year-old man who was a prominent LGBTQ rights activist and who was beaten to death with rocks a half-block from the city's main square in the early morning hours of May 4, 2011; the murder of 18-year-old Almendra, also known as Antonio Calderón Peralta, someone who had been involved in sex work as a minor, and whose lifeless remains were found in a ravine on the outskirts of the city on June 9, 2012, a day after Chilpancingo's annual Pride march; and thirdly, the homicide of 55-year-old Salvador Becerril Gómez, Deputy Auditor General of the state government, killed by stabbing and multiple blows to the head with a blunt object in his home on March 4, 2013. I review the information that is available about each of these cases, but also consider the gaps in knowledge about these cases and what those gaps also say, and I also situate these killings in relation to the unfolding state formation in Guerrero. It should be noted that a normative goal of this chapter is to challenge the context of near universal

impunity in relation to the killing of sexual and gender minorities in this state, through a conscious remembering of the details of the lives and deaths of these three people and of the people who surrounded them.

I follow Massey (2005) in seeing time and place not as a series of discrete events but rather as the confluence of multiple trajectories that cannot be examined as slices of space out of time, as frozen instants. Massey (2005: 23) describes this as dynamic simultaneity, “the character of space as the dimension of plurality,” and proposes that “instantaneous sections [can be imbued with] their own vital quality of duration.” Pierce (2022: 25) explains Massey’s understanding of space as the co-occupation of coordinates by multiple trajectories that then “co-constitute one another through their spatial congruence.” This scholar emphasizes Massey’s view of space as incorporating all that it has been as well as what it can become. This leads me to other questions: How does death fit into this configuration of space? How do we ethically theorize the moment when a life is snuffed out, the place where this violence occurs? Salvador’s death can be located: he was killed in his home and one of the perpetrators has admitted as much. Almendra’s death cannot be located. All we know is the place where her body was left. Dumped, on the outskirts of town. We can presume to locate Quetzalcoatl’s death in the place where his inert body was found, adjacent to the main city square, though a security guard who was in the area at the time questioned this, and said he thought that Quetzalcoatl was killed elsewhere and then his body was moved.

My analysis also builds on Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba’s (2007; 2015) theorization of the role of masculinity in the construction of Mexico as a modern nation, particularly the iteration of Mexican masculinity he associates with the present-day long moment of narco-violence. He says this particular narco-masculinist figure breaks away from earlier versions of masculinity that were tied to the production of nation and is instead linked to the nation’s destruction. I argue however that this figure is still involved in the production of the nation, albeit in a new, perhaps unrecognizable form, even as this figure simultaneously participates in undermining the vestiges of the liberal state project. I also rely on the robust literature on femicide, particularly on Brazilian criminologist Rita Laura Segato’s (2010) key argument that the bodies of homicide victims are used to create impunity, and that particular bodies (women and queers, for example) have been

used in this way. Following Segato, I question how important it is to determine the motives of those who commit this violence, specifically the extent to which homophobia or transphobia are involved. I argue that this may not actually be the most crucial issue at hand, and an overdeveloped focus on the subjectivity of the queer victims may obscure a nuanced understanding of the perpetrator, including both the material and intellectual authors of the violence.

Finally, I build on the argument introduced in the previous chapters that Guerrero needs to be understood as both a Masseyian and carceral space created through multiple trajectories and through various forms of immobilization and scrutiny, including a significant transnational dimension. This transnational element cannot be ignored but is difficult to pin down precisely because the impunity that has been constructed silences people who might otherwise provide insight into the ways in which the transnational reinforces the existing dialectic relationship between impunity and acts of violence. I also propose that the violation of the rights of sexual and gender minorities – including the right simply to be alive - provides insight into the production of *homo sacer* that is key to understanding an expanding space of exception in Guerrero (and beyond), one that Agamben argues is a fundamental part of modernity.

Homophobia, the State, the police, and hate crime

There is a well-developed body of literature that considers anti-queer/trans violence, including the production of homophobia (Murray 2009), lethal violence motivated by homophobia and hate (Janoff 2005; del Collado 2007; Spade 2011; González Gómez 2021), linkages among homophobia, gender and masculinity (Mason 2001; Cruz Sierra 2002; Lozano Verduzco and Rocha Sánchez 2011; Diefendorf and Bridges (2019), the racialization of homophobic and transphobic violence (Fitzgerald 2017) and the role of homophobic violence in conflict situations (Serrano-Amaya 2018).

While it is clear that homophobia itself has been used to sociopathologize cultures not included under the banner of Euro-American, Murray (2009) points out that recognizing this nevertheless leaves uninterrogated the question of what homophobia actually is. This scholar argues that homophobia itself is an especially complex prejudice involving “tangled webs of power which work to create the illusion that this prejudice is

natural and/or legitimate,” and sees homophobia not as an individualized psychological disposition but rather as a “socially produced form of discrimination located within relations of inequality” (Murray 2009: ix, 3). Thus, context matters, and this scholar also points out that homophobia must be understood as produced through particular nationalisms and specific gender systems.

Nevertheless, in cases of violence against sexual and gender minorities, the recognition that homophobia is socially produced is useful only to a point when trying to understand the specific motivations of perpetrators. In a study of homophobic violence in Canada, Janoff (2005) draws on the work of other scholars to develop a typification of six justifications for homophobic behaviour. While this analysis does not disregard the social production of homophobia, it recognizes that perpetrators, officials, and the general public propose specific explanations for violence against queer and trans people. Janoff’s typification includes: 1) the repression hypothesis (which argues that perpetrators are secretly gay); 2) the irrationality/ignorance hypothesis (which argues that perpetrators act on the homophobic attitudes they learned in childhood); 3) the “political response” theory (which sees homophobic action as how heterosexuals protect their power—or even enjoy it); 4) the “sexual abuse victim who bashes” theory (which involves an effort to avenge childhood exploitation); 5) the “macho lesbian-basher” theory (in which the perpetrator sees lesbianism as producing indifference to hetero-masculinity); and 6) the “immature adolescent” theory (in which queer-bashing is seen as akin to a sport that is sanctioned by dominant stereotypes about homosexuality in society). Janoff (2005: 61) also draws on the work of other scholars and of evidence from secondary sources concerning violence against sexual and gender minorities to demonstrate the “disturbing links between misogynist and homophobic violence.” This scholar concludes that the evidence indicates that queer victims of violence are subjected to more extreme violence compared to non-queer victims of violence but recognizes that more research is necessary to substantiate this finding.

In a study of violence against queer and trans people in Mexico, journalist Fernando del Collado (2007) responds to what he calls the negligence of state institutions in their disregard of serious investigation of crimes against homosexuals. In a careful and detailed description of the lives and deaths of several murdered gay men, del Collado

outlines the complicated relationship between sexual orientation, homophobia, and the state. Building on the work of the Citizens' Commission Against Homophobic Hate Crimes [La Comisión Ciudadana Contra los Crímenes de Odio por Homofobia] to document 213 executions of homosexuals between 1995 and 2000, del Collado (2007) weaves together disturbing stories related to several prominent cases. They also underline the challenges that the Citizens' Commission faced in even identifying cases of violence against queer people in Mexico by summarizing the indicators that the Commission was forced to use to determine if a case likely involved violence against a sexual or gender minority amidst a paucity of or lack of access to information from official sources: 1) the form of the homicide (the cadaver is found naked, with hands and feet bound, gagged, beaten, with signs of torture, stabbed or strangled); 2) the wording of the journalist coverage (the victim is identified as a person with strange customs); or 3) limited information provided by the police (particularly, the use of the frame of "crime of passion"). The cases that del Collado explores in greater detail include: the murder of Mexico City queer activist Francisco Estrada Valle, one of a series of at least five gay men killed in 1992 in a case dropped by police after a tepid eight-month investigation despite valiant attempts to seek justice by Estrada Valle's mother; the killing of 18-year-old Luis Fabián Espinoza Yáñez in 2001, a case in which the persistence of friends and family to secure justice to some extent matched the apparent incompetence and homophobia of the police investigators, such that a perpetrator was finally apprehended; hate-motivated homicides of four gay men in 2005 committed by two ex-soldiers, Osiel Marroquín, known as "the sadist", and his accomplice Juan Enrique Madrid Manuel; and the killing of 33-year-old queer activist and psychologist Octavio Acuña in the central state of Queretaro in 2005, a case in which authorities unduly focused on the deceased's partner based on a false conclusion that the killing was a crime of passion to the exclusion of a serious investigation of the actual homicide. At the time of Acuña's murder, he and his partner were in the midst of a complaint of homophobia against police and other state authorities in relation to an incident that had occurred several months earlier. This homicide remains unsolved.

The frame of hate crime has gained traction in relation to understanding and addressing the killing of sexual and gender minorities. Over three decades ago, Herek and

Berrill (1992) wrote the book *Hate Crimes: Confronting Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*, which framed what they call “anti-gay violence” as motivated by hate in a way that is akin to targeted violence against people from other marginalized groups. The forward to this book is written by the Chair of the U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee on Criminal Justice in 1986, John Conyers Junior, who stressed that “hate crimes are extraordinary in nature and require a special governmental response” (Herek and Berrill 1992: xiv). Both authors had been involved in the political battle for recognition by government institutions of violence against gay men and lesbians as a serious matter that should be framed as hate crime, including the listing of sexual orientation in the U.S.’s Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1992. Scholars of hate crime continued to focus on sexual minorities to the exclusion of gender minorities. For example, Bell and Perry (2014) refer to “anti-LGB” hate crime and note that no trans people responded to the invitation to participate in their study so they did not include anti-trans violence in their analysis. Other scholars have however taken up the topic of hate crime against trans people (c.f. Witten and Eyler 1999; Willoughby *et al.* 2011). Some scholars have nevertheless raised concerns that framing violence against trans people as hate crime and the consequent seeking of a state solution to this violence fails to recognize that the state itself is the primary producer of harm for trans people (Spade 2011). They argue that seeing violence against gender minorities primarily through the lens of hate crime relies on the lie that trans people—especially those who are also poor or racialized—can somehow reasonably appeal to the state for protection.

An emerging scholarly and grey literature considers the extent to which the concepts of homophobia and hate crime capture the motivations related to lethal violence against sexual and gender minorities in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America (Boivin 2015; Migueles Ramírez and Careaga Pérez 2020; González Gómez 2021). *Letra S, Sida, Cultura y Vida Cotidiana* (which translates to Letter S, AIDS, Culture and Daily Life) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the human rights of LGBTQ people and those who live with HIV. Since 1996, they have published a monthly supplement of *La Jornada* newspaper as well regular reports on violence against LGBTQ persons based on their own monitoring of Mexican media (Letraese n.d.). These reports come out every few years. The coordinators of these reports have struggled with how to characterize lethal

violence against sexual and gender minorities. In 2012, they published a report entitled: “Homophobic hate crimes: A concept under construction” [Crímenes de Odio por Homofobia: Un Concepto en Construcción](Parrini Roses and Brito Lemus 2012). The report points out that at least three types of crimes against LGBTQ people in Latin America have been identified, including crimes of passion, hate crimes, and crimes in the context of discrimination and vulnerability. These authors argue that “the concept of hate crime . . . [should] not be reduced to a typology of acts but instead must consider structures that allow for and also explain certain forms of violence” (Parrini Roses and Brito Lemus 2012: 40). They propose that hate itself is a social construction rather than a purely individual emotion and posit that an act of violence can be considered a hate crime even without evidence that the individual conduct can be explained by hate. Of note, since 2018 they do not use the word “hate” in the titles of their annual reports and instead reference homicides, murders, and violent deaths of LGBT+ people in Mexico, though the website tab for accessing these reports is still labelled “hate crimes” (c.f. Letra S 2022).

González Gómez (2021) outlines the emergence of discourse regarding homophobia and hate crimes in the Mexican context. This scholar traces the origin of the concept of homophobia, defined as “the fear of being near homosexuals”, to publications produced by US based psychologists starting in 1971, noting that homophobia came to be understood as “explaining the motivations of people who attack, insult or harm homosexual persons”, either because of their own psychological repressions or due to ignorance (González Gómez 2021: np). According to this scholar, the concept of hate crime gained traction in Mexico in the mid-1990s due to activist political struggle in face of a wave of homicides involving gay men in Mexico City and against sex workers in Chiapas: “[A]ctivists and organized groups of the then lesbian-gay movement began to employ the concept of ‘homophobic hate crime’ [crimen de odio por homofobia] with the goal of making this lethal violence visible and in order to push institutions responsible for imparting justice to deal with these cases in an urgent way” (González Gómez 2021: np).

While this concept of hate crime due to homophobia has helped make such violence more visible and has challenged the prevailing idea that these are “crimes of

passion”, a framing that leaves the perpetrator somehow less culpable, González Gómez (2021: np) is concerned that this concept is also problematic because it relies on clever but finally unsound reasoning rooted in what is at its basis an irrational motivation, that of hate. This scholar recounts that the Citizens’ Commission Against Hate Crimes due to Homophobia (CCCCOH) promoted the adoption of this concept, including convincing Mexico City’s Attorney General to create a specialized agency focused on gender and homophobic violence and to include the typification of hate as an aggravating factor named in the criminal code that must now be considered in the prosecution of homicide. According to González Gómez (2021), this leads to the obscuring of the historical and structural character of many of these crimes.

However, the cases of violence against queer and trans people that I learned about during this research project indicated a linkage to gender more than to hate based on sexual orientation or gender identity. González Gómez’s own study (2021) supports this analysis. They reflect on Rita Segato’s argument regarding gender violence, that what matters is not sexual difference (i.e. male subject versus female subject), as in the sexual-corporeal condition of the individual, but rather the gender structure that places the individual in a regime of status, of relational positionality, and how gender structure intersects with other mechanisms to create a pattern of power rooted in hierarchy, asymmetry, subordination and domination. This scholar argues that Segato provides a key to understanding violence against queer and trans persons in Mexico: what matters is the submission of individuals to hierarchically constituted structures such as gender and sexuality. As such, the field of law is not enough: “the modern state has not resolved the problem of homophobia because it has not been able to overcome its own historic responsibility . . . its own status system and power structures” (González Gómez 2021: np). They conclude that the boys’ clubs [fraternidades de varones] of both the state and of organized crime continue to reproduce patriarchy as the axis that preserves order and secures their authority.

Masculinity, feminicide and the nation

This linkage of anti-queer/trans violence to both gender and to masculinity has been recognized by many scholars. In a detailed study of experiences of violence by

lesbians and gay men, Mason (2001: 118) draws on both feminist and Foucauldian theory to consider how “homophobia-related violence” is an instrument of power. This scholar points out that for women facing the possibility of male violence as well as for sexual minorities facing the possibility of homophobia-related violence, the enacted violence is more than simply painful but is also oppressive because it leads to “feelings of shame, worthlessness or guilt” and causes “fears... [that] can restrict everyday life, limiting pleasures and freedoms” (Mason 2001: 121). This scholar underlines that both types of violence also need to be recognized as productive, specifically in how they produce subjectivities through processes of subjection. Mason (2001) also argues that in the consideration of these sorts of violence, it is important to pay attention to who has power, who benefits from the deployment of this power, and how that power is deployed. In other words, scholarly consideration is needed regarding what violence against queer and trans person produces in relation to the gender system overall.

In their study of the relationship between homophobia and masculinity across the globe, Diefendorf and Bridges (2019: 237) note that “while opinion polls suggest people have become more supportive of LGBTQ people, research on the lived experiences of gender and sexual minorities is inconsistent with this shift.” They conclude that the contradictory results are rooted in the multiple measures of homophobia deployed by different researchers and that the nexus between masculinity and homophobia may be more persistent than some recent studies have indicated. Núñez Noriega and Espinoza Cid’s (2016) consideration of the linkages between homophobia and misogyny through the various ways they organize subjectivities, practices and institutions, as discussed in Chapter 1, point to the multiple homophobias at play that Diefendorf and Bridges (2019) consider. Mexican scholars of masculinities have also considered the complicated linkage between masculinities and homophobias. For example, Salvador Cruz Sierra (2002) considers the masculinist values behind the relations of power at work in crimes against homosexuals in Mexico. In contrast to other scholars, Cruz Sierra (2002: 8-9) thinks that queer activism has not caused additional violence against “male and female homosexuals” but rather has made this violence and responses to it more evident, exposing “many cases that are brutal and sadistic . . . as well as the inoperability and ineffectiveness of the legal system in cases of murders of homosexuals.” This scholar

further argues that homophobically motivated hate crimes and the lack of advancement in solving these crimes and punishing those responsible reflects the place of homosexuality “in a society of masculine and heterosexist domination” (Cruz Sierra 2002: 9). For Cruz Sierra (2002), homophobia simply exemplifies the heterosexism, the related fixation on the masculine-feminine binary, and the masculinist values that marks Mexican society in particular ways. In a study in which more than two hundred randomly selected people in Mexico City participated, Lozano Verduzco and Rocha Sánchez (2011) continue this exploration of the links between homophobia and hegemonic masculinity in Mexico. They argue that hegemonic masculinity is a synonym for machismo or patriarchy and has to do with the subordination of the feminine to the masculine. They also argue that since the characteristics of masculinity and femininity are culture specific and context dependent, hegemonic masculinity is as well. The results from the questionnaire completed by their study participants indicated a strong correlation between the degree to which participants identified with masculine traits and levels of homophobia. Interestingly, participants with characteristics these authors say are typically understood as masculine but are also socially desired—they list tenacity, determination, competency and affiliation in this group—are not associated with homophobia (though I am not convinced that these characteristics are necessarily especially masculine). They do conclude that their study shows a persistent link between gender and homophobia.

In a detailed consideration of Mexican masculinity entitled *Modernity and the Nation in Mexican Representations of Masculinity: From Sensuality to Bloodshed*, gender and queer studies scholar Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2007) provides a theory of Mexican maleness that argues that masculinity allegorizes the Mexican nation, produced through colonialism and postcolonial processes (what I call transnational processes). This scholar argues that the Mexican state is homosocial, formed through a dialectical relationship between hate and desire whose border is occupied by misogyny and homophobia. This scholar’s goal is to deauthorize the misogynistic and homophobic violence on which the domination of patriarchy is constructed.

This scholar sees masculinity as pivotal to the construction of Mexico as a nation within the broad narrative of so-called “Western civilization,”⁸³ established in the context of both modernity and colonialism and sees “modern civilization” more generally as a

“journey from sensuality to violence” (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2007: 2). Situating Mexico squarely within this narrative, Domínguez Ruvalcaba makes four key proposals about masculinity that are useful for this dissertation: First, in this modern system, “representation of masculinity is an allegory of the nation,” in which homoeroticism and machismo “intersect in the characterization of male sexuality.” Second, Mexican masculinity is, “an invention of modern colonialism,” in which the colonized male figure is formed through virile sensuality and through the exclusion and rejection of the feminine and the effeminate. Third, contemporary Mexico is dominated by a masculine homosocial order produced through misogyny and homophobia and in which power is delineated through a dialectical relationship between hate and desire. And fourth, “machismo is an epistemological instrument [that can be used] for critiquing both the state and violence” (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2007: 2-7). The close relationship between machismo (what other scholars call hegemonic masculinity), homophobia, and the nation, itself constructed through transnational processes, is key to understanding the painful knowledge⁸⁴ produced through the analysis of the killings of sexual and gender minorities considered in this chapter.

Some places experience periods of high levels of violence, and Guerrero is a prime example. Invariably, that violence is “organized” in some way or another, and sometimes it follows the script of what has come to be referred to as “organized violence”, violence that is generated by organized armed groups, sometimes acting within some version of the rule of law (police or military) while at other times outside of it—“at the margins of the rule of law” [al margen de la ley] is how this is expressed in Spanish—as defined by a recognized political system. The comparable term in English is “illegal activity,” though the Spanish version provides a spatial metaphor that recognizes the fragility of the rule of law. Regardless, elevated levels of violence are often accompanied by a high degree of impunity, that is, by a social context in which both perpetrators and victims can reasonably expect that those who commit acts of violence that are considered unlawful will not be punished. For Agamben (1995, 1998: 83), this is the logical outcome of the modern, liberal, sovereign state as it has been conceived in the west, that there will invariably be spaces of exception—lacunae—where law has been suspended, that these spaces of exception will produce bare life (Agamben borrows Walter

Benjamin's term), those, "who may be killed but not sacrificed," those whose killing will not lead to punishment for anyone. Furthermore, in this Hobbesian world, Agamben fears that these spaces of exception will eventually become the rule everywhere, that impunity will reign. This coming together of organized violence and impunity is already the reality of some parts of Mexico, particularly the state of Guerrero, though it is important to also pay attention to how this assemblage is formulated in relationship to the rest of the continent of North America. As discussed in Chapter 1, Guerrero's socioeconomic configuration is defined by the infestation of its economy (based on tourism, mining, industrial scale agriculture and drug trafficking) by organized crime, sustained through the perpetuation of impunity for most acts of violence.

Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2007) articulates several versions or figures of Mexican masculinity⁸⁵ that point to the functioning of Guerrero as a space of exception and are useful in the analysis of the case studies considered in this chapter. First, the *macho* is "the modern Mexican man", a figure from the late 19th and 20th century who is a modern heterosexual subject and is also colonized and racialized, a mestizo who is not from the metropole but rather from what Domínguez-Ruvalcaba labels a "dependent culture" (see also Sisk 2012). This figure is not a powerful or rational "man" but rather a sensual, hypersexual, rebellious, and angry figure. The macho is aggressive, dominant, but also sentimental and bearing a sense of inferiority, and a representation of "the national." A key iteration of the macho is the *pelado*, literally "the peeled one," or the one who is naked, and precarious (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2007: 103,168). The *pelado* is a braggart, whose life is formed through opposition and misfortune. Furthermore, this version of the macho is, "the human residue of the big city" (Ramos 1987, as cited in Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2007: 101), reminiscent of Butler's precarious life (2004, 2006) and in some ways of Agamben's bare life (1995, 1998). The *pelado* is a dominant form of masculinity in the marginal urban spaces of Guerrero, especially the peripheral neighbourhoods of Acapulco and of Chilpancingo, as illustrated in the cases discussed below.

Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2007) contrasts the *macho/pelado* with the *travesti*, the effeminate man, the cross-dressing man, the transvestite, seen as the enemy of the nation and considered useless to modernity because of reprehensible practices. The *travesti* signifies foreign influence, social corruption and illness, though Domínguez Ruvalcaba

notes that by the end of the twentieth century this figure has also started to convert into a “national man”, one who can reintegrate into the nation, in what is perhaps a Mexican version of Jasbir Puar’s homonationalism. The travesti figures prominently in the LGBTTTI community of Guerrero. Another figure Domínguez Ruvalcaba considers is the *mayate*, a figure Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2007: 131) calls “the queerest queer,” noting that *mayate* refers to “a character whose resistance to identifying himself as homosexual, despite his homoerotic practices, challenges the concept of identity ...” The *mayate* figures prominently in comments made by informants for this research project regarding the political economy of queerness in Guerrero. Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2007: 149) calls his final masculinist figure *the invisible man*, also *the violent man*, a monstrous figure who emerges in the 1990s. This is the angry and destructive, hyper-violent figure associated with contemporary organized crime. He is responsible for killing both women (femicide) and homosexuals. Rather than a representation of the nation, he is instead tied up with the nation’s dismantling, with destroying the national and modern order through the spread of terror and fear. This figure is tied to a loss of a social order based on citizenry, the destruction of the public sphere and to contemporary dangers facing Mexico, but he is also destroying himself in the process. For example, in response to the huge number of feminicides that have occurred in Chihuahua and elsewhere in the country, this scholar points out that there is no shortage of recent mainstream films that seek to portray these cases but that they invariably focus on the “sacrificed woman” and engage in a “politics of victimization” that ignores the political dimension of these crimes (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2007: 150). Of note, Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2007: 154) also roots this figure in the global order in which violence is part of “the ephemeral globalized economy” that abandons *the invisible, violent man*. I contend that this figure, marked by both violence and invisibility (through impunity), is the likely perpetrator in many cases of anti queer/trans violence in Guerrero.

Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2007) also points out that the authorities undermine any focus on the underlying impunity by “perpetuating the myth of inevitable victimization” that is rooted in the static figures of victim and perpetrator. Lamenting the “overrepresentation of the victim,” he calls on the reader “to admit that violence... is... a codified system of behaviour, an economy, and a process of political struggle,” and

points out that the tools of criminals – blackmail and coercion – are also the “forms of negotiation” used by politicians (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2007: 153-4). Furthermore, recognizing that by its nature, “a regime of violence defines a collectivity in terms of perpetrators and victims,” Domínguez-Ruvalcaba says that it is important to go beyond both the overrepresentation of victims as hapless, helpless and innocent, and also beyond the inadequacy of dismissing the perpetrator as simply either a monster or a logical outcome of his socioeconomic circumstances. Noting that, “violence perpetrated by men can be interpreted as eagerness to recover lost power,” Domínguez-Ruvalcaba also stresses that violence is, “the culminating action of a discourse of domination” (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2007: 155). They call on us to pay greater attention to the perpetrator, going beyond the simple tropes we are offered in order to depoliticize the work that the perpetrator is doing. In Guerrero, this depoliticization functions through looking away from a political economy rooted in an impunity created by organized and transnational criminal violence and instead dismiss the violence as somehow inevitable, natural and expected.

Furthermore, Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (2007: 157) points out that violence is, “a form of communication”, a point also taken up by Segato (2010) in her inquiry into the identity of the perpetrator in relation to the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez. Segato rejects the commonplace logic that the high levels of violence against women in Mexico are best understood as the result of a context marked by widespread impunity and instead argues that the systematic murder of women follows the logic of rape, that these are public crimes meant to establish unmitigated sovereignty over individuals. In her study of femicide in Chihuahua, Segato debunks the simplistic idea that the perpetrators are merely common thugs emanating from the poor classes, arguing that there is some evidence linking the sons of so-called “good” families to the murders. Furthermore, she argues that these murders are also “corporate crimes” designed to create the impunity that is necessary for the continuation and strengthening of what she terms “the Second State”. This nebulous entity is the criminal network that seeks to establish sovereign territory that rivals that of the state itself. Furthermore, in Guerrero and elsewhere in Mexico, there is ample evidence that Segato’s second state has thoroughly penetrated state structures. Segato suggests that violence, once, “constituted and crystallized within

a communication system, is transformed into a stable language and comes to behave in the nearly automatic fashion of any language (2010:81).” She laments that this language of violence – like all languages – once learned is difficult to forget. I argue that the case studies considered in this chapter suggest that killing queer and trans people in Guerrero functions as this sort of communication system and serves to strengthen the second state in this marginal southern corner of North America.

Concerns for informants and methodological safety

Thanks to the many key informants who agreed to participate in confidential interviews as part of this project, I have details worth including in this chapter concerning the lives and deaths of the three people considered, information not widely known. I have struggled with how to convey this very detailed information I obtained in confidential interviews in a way that does not completely erase the speakers but at the same time does not identify them. To camouflage the sometimes intimate and complicated nature of particular relationships between informants and the homicide victims and to protect the anonymity of the sources, I have found it necessary to use rather vague phrases like “someone close to the person who was killed” or “a key informant with reliable knowledge about the perpetrator”. More specifically, I do not generally ascribe specific comments or information to particular informants. While each key informant interviewed for this project is identified either by pseudonym or by name (in a few specific interviews with people interviewed in their official roles) in Appendix 4, in most cases the common practice of using these pseudonyms when reporting specific information was not adequate for protecting anonymity and confidentiality and so has been eschewed.

The perpetrators associated with the three homicides considered in this chapter emerge as examples of Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s third type of Mexican masculinity, the angry, destructive, hyper-violent figure associated with contemporary organized crime, the figure Domínguez-Ruvalcaba says is destroying the national social order. In all three cases we encounter perpetrators who exhibit extreme viciousness, and apparent indifference to the pain and suffering they cause. However, the perpetrators are similar in additional ways: they all knew the people they killed, intimately; they were all purported to have connections to organized crime; and afterwards, they all fled Chilpancingo.

The focus of the following section is on Carlos Eduardo Cruz García, alias “El Chato” [“Pug-nose”], one of Salvador Becerril’s killers, about whom I have considerable information, though I also make comments based on what is known about “the Wolf” and about “Felix”, the most likely perpetrators in the other two cases, the killing of Quetzalcoatl Leija and of “Almendra”. Following this analysis, this chapter ends with some preliminary thoughts on the place of the nation and of the state in these tragic stories, with a focus on how this examination helps extend the thinking of Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, Segato, and Agamben to gain further insight into the imbricated relationship between subjectivity, violence, and the modern state.

The site

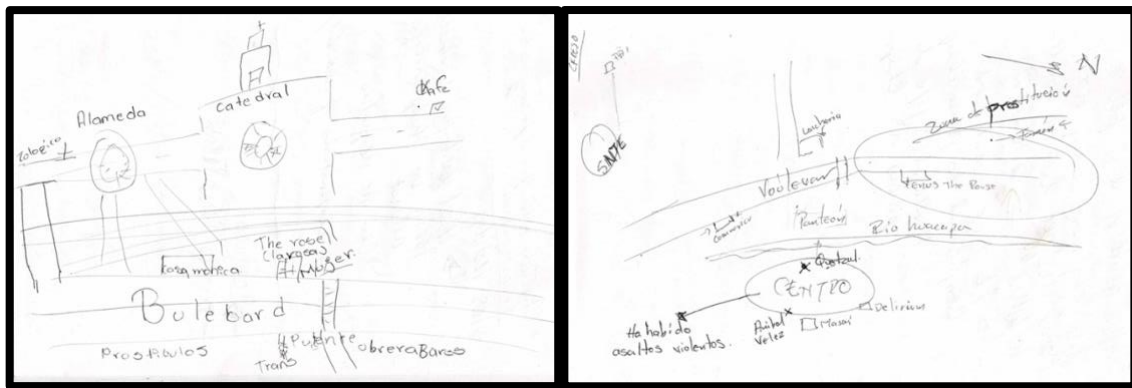


Figure 5.1 – “Mental maps” of Chilpancingo created as part of interviews by informants (Lilia and Montesquieu)

The three homicides considered in this chapter all took place between 2011 and 2013 in Chilpancingo, the capital city of the state of Guerrero. In order to tell these terribly sad stories, I rely on published reports from various media sources as well as on confidential interviews with people who knew the victims. All three were publicly identified as sexual or gender minorities and all were killed through the deployment of extreme violence at close range using either sharp or blunt objects. Beyond that, the characteristics of the cases diverge. One was a relatively young, struggling but middle-class LGBTQ rights activist who had organized many public events and had himself been documenting cases of homicides involving sexual and gender minorities in the state; one

was a relatively poor trans-identified sex worker still weakly attached to the family home and who had only reached the age of majority about a week before her death; and one was a gay man from a wealthy family well positioned in the state government and known as a friend of the then state governor, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, who was himself forced out of office a year later because of his ties to the perpetrators involved in the forced disappearances of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Teachers College in 2014.

Chilpancingo de los Bravo is a mid-sized city, home to nearly 200,000 people that is nestled between two chains of low mountains on both sides of the Huacapa River, a formerly important river now reduced to a stinking concrete embanked drainage ditch. As the capital city of the State of Guerrero, its economy in large part depends on the presence of governmental institutions and principal campuses of the state university, the Autonomous University of Guerrero. The four traditional neighbourhoods that conjoin at the city's main square, each centered on a historic church building and marked by narrow streets, are surrounded by a sprawling urban expansion that reaches up the hills on both sides of the valley, the poorest and most poorly served neighbourhoods mostly located at the edges of the urban expanse. Both new and historic government buildings as well as a 19th century cathedral and a few commercial buildings flank the aforementioned main square. The public university has a downtown campus located along the west side of the centrally located Alameda Park as well as a larger and newer main campus, located a short distance south of the central area of the city.

The increase in organized violence that is impacting the state has especially hit the capital, and so it is not unusual to hear or read reports of lethal violence. For many years Chilpancingo registered as among the most violent cities in Mexico.⁸⁶ As outlined in Chapter 3, Chilpancingo has also been the site of LGBTQ activism since the beginning of the 21st century - the first annual Pride march took place in 2002. Given that it is the centre of government for the state, much of the political work calling for policy and legislation in support of LGBTQ rights and in favour of the protection of these sectors from acts of violence has taken place here over the years. In recent years, the city has also consistently had at least one gay bar, and sometimes more than one, though these businesses – like many others – have been subjected to the forced payment of a tax (called a “cuota”) by whichever armed group has control of the “plaza” (a sort of

recognized territorial sovereignty, often negotiated with local officials and police). Many informants told me that the closing of bars is often explained as a result of an inability to pay this tax. As well, there are many other bars and taverns scattered around the city, including a class of such businesses variously called *tavernas* [taverns], *loncherias* [literally, lunch counters] or *prostibulos* [brothels], where drinking and dancing are integrated with sex work. These are usually located in poorer areas further away from the centre or along a road colloquially referred to as *the Boulevard*, a centrally located artery of the city that nevertheless remains peripheral to the main social, economic, and commercial zones of the city. This thoroughfare runs alongside what is left of the Huacapa River and is lined by a range of light industrial and commercial sites interspersed with these alcohol-serving establishments (See Figure 5.1 for depictions of the city from the point of view of queer and trans people).

Activist Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera



Figure 5.2 – Burial of Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera was born on September 28, 1974, the oldest child of José Luis Leija and María Guadalupe Herrera. Considered a middle-class Roman Catholic family (though José Luis would later convert to evangelical Christianity), both parents earned master's degrees and worked in professional jobs. An informant who

knew Quetzalcoatl as he grew up said that from a young age, he was a particularly analytical child, and demonstrated an affinity towards the intellectual while scrupulously avoiding physical activity. Also, since early childhood he exhibited what was characterized by several informants as effeminate behaviour. While some sources claimed that Quetzalcoatl's father responded to his behaviour by way of beatings, another source said that the physical punishment to which he was subjected as a child was not unlike that received by his brothers and by other male-identified children in that time period. One informant speculated that Quetzalcoatl treated his own younger siblings rather harshly, as a reaction to his father's treatment of him. As an adult, he almost always dressed rather formally, rarely seen without a dress shirt and dress pants (at times somewhat worn), even on festive occasions such as Pride.

Quetzalcoatl's application to study at the junior seminary in Tixtla was unsuccessful and so he completed most of his primary and secondary schooling in public institutions in Chilpancingo, except for a two-year period when the family lived in the city of Puebla. He reportedly experienced significant levels of bullying from peers in school. For a short time, he studied at a protestant seminary in Mexico City, then spent one semester studying tourism at the Autonomous University of Guerrero in Acapulco, and then several months in a Catholic seminary in Germany before returning to Chilpancingo to major in communications and later law. According to several informants who knew him well, when studying in Acapulco, Mexico City and Germany, Quetzalcoatl experienced conflict with others, possibly having experienced sexual harassment and bullying, something that may have contributed to his short sojourns in those institutions. He never completed a university degree.

Quetzalcoatl was considered intellectually gifted, reportedly spoke several languages including English, French, German and Arabic—for the most part self-taught—and had a strong affinity for exploring various religious and cultural expressions, though by the end of his life had become quite antipathetic towards organized religion. An informant who knew him well speculated that his prior affinity to organized religion was related to his sexual orientation as a gay man and a seeking out of homosocial environments. Quetzalcoatl started to publicly self-identify as gay at around age thirty, later coming out to his family, and had at least one male partner, though sources close to

him report that the relationship ended badly. Several informants noted that he was addicted to alcohol and that when drinking he sometimes exhibited behaviours characterized as arrogant and erratic, and furthermore reportedly made imprudent choices especially given the security situation in the city where he lived. He was known for walking long distances, even in the early hours of the morning, at least sometimes as a measure to save money that would otherwise be spent on bus or taxi fare, and for frequenting drinking establishments that generally served the poorer classes of Chilpancingo.

In about 2005, he began his involvement in LGBTQ activism, and soon sought out other activists with whom to collaborate. Together with others, in November 2005 he founded a state-wide LGBTQ organization called CEPRODEHI (discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3) which he led as president until his untimely death in 2011. During those years, Quetzalcoatl led many initiatives, including organizing the state capital's annual Pride marches, initiating public education campaigns related to HIV, and leading campaigns to push the state government to pass legislation to protect the rights of LGBTQ persons. Quetzalcoatl also meticulously documented the killing of sexual and gender minorities around the state, relying primarily on media reports and word of mouth, in order to bring these to public attention. These data seem to have been lost after Quetzalcoatl himself was killed. Those close to him report that the formal registration of CEPRODEHI was meant to provide Quetzalcoatl with an income through government funded projects, reportedly a common mechanism for supporting activist work in Guerrero. Quetzalcoatl also received assistance from a cousin and an aunt in relation to his activism, the latter having provided free use of office space as well as a room where Quetzalcoatl sometimes lived. He was also involved in party politics, reportedly associated with three different major political parties at separate times, and in 2008 was a candidate on the PRD plurinominal list⁸⁷.

On the night of his death, he had been drinking in at least two establishments, all located a few blocks from the main square of Chilpancingo, including a hookup place [lugar de lige] called The View. His lifeless body was found in a pedestrian-only side-street adjacent to one of the government buildings that line the main square. His death was widely reported in the local and international media, including in an urgent action

issued by Amnesty International. In a strange coincidence, hours before this murder a local cable TV station broadcasted a prerecorded interview Quetzalcoatl had given about the need for respect for sexual diversity. Reportedly, in one of the bars he frequented that evening, Quetzalcoatl requested that the TV channel be changed to this interview so that he and his friends could watch it. I suspect that this was not his first appearance on cable TV and there is no evidence that the show was especially impactful or that its emission was connected to his death. A small funeral attended by family and some LGBTQ activists was held in a local Catholic church, followed by burial at a local cemetery (See Figure 5.2).

Quetzalcoatl's parents made a formal request to the State Secretariat of Public Security that they investigate the homicide. Although several rumours circulated regarding who may have been responsible for his death, to date the crime has not been solved. One young man, who went by the nickname Angel or Angi, was reportedly accused by the authorities of being responsible for the crime and subsequently left the area, though informants who reported this to me did not see this person's departure from Chilpancingo as confirmation of guilt. Rather, they believed that it is more likely that this person is innocent of the homicide but could not be confident that the authorities would not hold him responsible regardless of his lack of guilt as some kind of perverted form of the delivery of justice. Another young man, apparently called Felix, with a history of violent crime and rumoured ties with organized crime, is said to have subsequently claimed during an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting to have killed Quetzalcoatl and two other gay men as well. Informants said that this man was also no longer seen locally and was presumed to be in hiding. These sources also told me that this information was shared with the police but that the police still insisted that Angi was the responsible party, claiming that video security footage existed showing Angi and Quetzalcoatl arguing some time before the homicide.

After Quetzalcoatl's murder, investigating officials met with his family on multiple occasions; they also reportedly requested a financial contribution to assist with the ongoing costs of keeping the investigation open, citing budget limitations. One informant thought that the family may have made such a contribution on at least one occasion while others suspected that the family did not comply with these requests, at

least in part because they did not believe it would change the outcome of the investigation. Apparently, this type of request – though clearly illegal - is not uncommon. Within a year of Quetzalcoatl's death his own mother also died prematurely: "The death of her son killed her too," said one informant.

Following the killing of Quetzalcoatl, several possible scenarios of how he was killed circulated in Chilpancingo and were mentioned in the local press. As discussed in Chapter 3, media reports suggested that another LGBTQ activist named Igor Pettit, the governor's special representative for marginalized communities and someone with whom Quetzalcoatl had reportedly been in conflict, may have been the intellectual author of the crime. Another rumour that circulated in the LGBTQ community was that Quetzalcoatl was the victim of an attack by a group of *mayates* known to accost gay men in the central part of the city (*mayates* are lower-class straight-identified young men who participate in same-sex sexual relations with openly gay men in exchange for material favours). One informant told me that a security guard stationed where Quetzalcoatl's body had been found had reportedly heard sounds indicating a commotion and had speculated that the crime had been committed elsewhere and that those responsible had subsequently dumped Quetzalcoatl's body in the location where it was later found. Some informants indicated that the lack of resolution of the case is unsurprising given the high level of impunity in the state and cited other unsolved killings as evidence that the justice system is unlikely to make the necessary effort to hold to account those responsible for this crime as well.

At least two more murders of gay men occurred within days of Quetzalcoatl's death, both killed through blunt force trauma, leading one informant to speculate about the possibility of a serial murderer. Several informants were surprised that none of the many security cameras in the downtown core had produced images useful for solving this crime, noting that the police had said that some of these recordings produced by the surveillance cameras of banks had been erased before the police requested them, while others were too grainy to shed any light on the case. More than one informant mentioned that members of the LGBTQ community withheld relevant information from the police because they did not trust the authorities and consequently feared for their own safety if they divulged evidence that might incriminate someone willing and able to retaliate.

Despite the lack of resolution, most informants concluded that the killing of Quetzalcoatl should be considered a hate crime motivated by homophobia and rejected the premise of state officials that it was a crime of passion, though one informant did express a suspicion that this death was perhaps linked to the victim's "personal problems" rather than to his involvement in "social struggle". One informant speculated that the murder could have been committed by state agents themselves, though this informant then underlined the importance of not associating them with this speculation in my writing or public speaking. Other informants noted that Quetzalcoatl's death was at least convenient for state authorities who had faced scrutiny in relation to the campaign this activist led demanding the solving of the many killings of sexual and gender minorities in the preceding years. Some activists asserted that Quetzacoatl was deliberately killed because of his work in favour of LGBTQ rights, and I also heard reports of two other local LGBTQ activists receiving anonymous telephone threats or warnings indicating that they too were also in danger and that there was a list of gay activists slated to be killed.

Three different investigators were assigned to Quetzalcoatl's file over the course of the first year after his death. In a meeting I had in the office of the state human rights commission some twenty months after Quetzalcoatl's death an official told me that a formal complaint had been laid with their offices claiming unlawful negligence and procrastination by state officials in the investigation of the case. On March 13, 2013, I also met with a prosecutor related to the case, Everarda Pineda Andraca, who works in the special unit of the State Attorney General's office responsible for feminicides, including homicides involving sexual and gender minorities. Pineda told me that the case of Quetzalcoatl's murder was still open but that she was not authorized to give specific information. She said I could contact Anacleta Lopez Vega, the General Coordinator of Advisors of the Office of the Attorney General (Coordinadora General de Asesores de la Procuraduria) to make such a request. I was able to arrange a meeting with Lopez Vega and we spoke at some length. Lopez explained that in Guerrero the crime of "femicide" was defined as a murder in which the perpetrator was someone close to the victim (spouse, lover, brother), and underlined that it is considered a less serious type of homicide. At her suggestion I made a formal written request for information, though

despite assurances that a fulsome response would be forthcoming, I never received any information from formal state sources regarding the killing of Quetzalcoatl or any other homicide involving sexual and gender minorities in the State of Guerrero.

After Quetzalcoatl's death, others continued the work of CEPRODEHI. In June 2012 the surviving activists organized a week-long LGBT rights event in Chilpancingo's central square in Quetzalcoatl's honour, making use of several adjacent government buildings and a large tent in the middle of the plaza for cultural, academic, and social events and art installations. They also organized several Pride marches in different cities and towns across the state in quick succession, but then a month later they announced that the organization was shutting its doors. It is hard to know all the factors that may have led to that decision, but it seems to have involved a combination of burnout, conflict among LGBTQ activists in the state, and fears by some of those who had taken over the leadership of CEPRODEHI that their own lives were at risk in taking over the reins after Quetzalcoatl's death. More than a decade later, the lack of resolution of this homicide remains a concern for the Guerrero LGBTQ community such that even in the 2021 election campaign at least one candidate for state governor publicly committed to revisiting this case if elected (Covarrubias 2021). She lost the election.

Almendra, AKA Antonio Calderón Peralta



Figure 5.3 - Almendra's clothes on the day of her death. Photo taken at morgue

(Source: [Sasha] Emiliano García Arzeta)

All the photos I have seen of Almendra were taken after her death. These included images taken by the coroner at the morgue after Almendra's remains had been transferred there as well as others taken in the out-of-the-way ravine where her body was found, photos that were published in various local newspapers alongside short, puerile, uninformative accounts of what the authorities surmised about her death. By the time these images were produced Almendra's face had been bloodied, bruised, and distorted, the outcome of a vicious attack. Although I met with people who were close to her in life, I decided not to ask them for photos. This was a methodological choice, as the photos shared may have further exposed the sharer, my informant. To avoid her further

dehumanization, I have decided not to reproduce the images of her lifeless body in this document. Instead, I have included a photo from the morgue showing the clothes she was wearing at the time of death (See Figure 5.3). While sometimes those who have been victims of lethal violence can be memorialized through the reproduction of their images when alive, it seems to me that in this case remembering Almendra is best done through telling something of her story.

I never met Almendra. After the week-long Pride event held in honour of Quetzalcoatl's memory in June 2012, I joined together with several organizers of this impressive venture to debrief and celebrate. Late evening, as we wound down our time together, the activists received a phone call: someone had been murdered in the early morning hours, beaten to death, and left in a ravine on the outskirts of Chilpancingo. The victim was identified as travesti and I noticed that the activists used the more typical masculinized version of this word. Un travesti. One activist expressed outrage that lethal violence perpetrated against their ranks once again coincided with their Pride events. Those gathered briefly discussed the importance of ensuring that the person's family learned of their death without delay and so decided to put a notice on their Facebook page asking for assistance in identifying the deceased. They brainstormed possible text for the press release they would later send, and my research notes include this initial draft: "One more of us has been killed. We have learned of the death of another person of sexual diversity, who appears to be a travesti, in the Santo Domingo neighbourhood."

Then, the activists decided to go to the city morgue in hopes of learning the identity of the deceased. They asked me to go with them. Forensic doctor Atilano showed us a series of photos she had taken of Almendra, while her lifeless body rested on the examination table in the adjacent room. I jotted down the description of Almendra the doctor provide us: "Slim, 1.66 metres tall, shoe size 24, long hair, no makeup on face, second toe longer than the big toe, scar on her right knee that is keloid and looks like a star, fairly dark skin, light brown eyes, straight medium nose, regular mouth and lips, black and white zebra-striped lycra dress, toe nails poorly maintained [she said this indicates poverty], part of skin on skull is missing [she said this is likely due to having been wounded there and that skin and hair was later removed by an animal] body wrapped in two black garbage bags and in a piece of green fabric." The forensic doctor's

assessment was that this had not been a crime of passion and that the victim's wounded hands indicated that she had fought for her life. Hoping that it would help to identify her, we went to the office of one of the activists to finalize the press release and send it out. The following day, several local papers ran articles about this case, including these headlines: "Body of a travesti found lying in a ravine in Chilpancingo"; "Gay beaten to death; body thrown into a ravine"; "Young travesti killed". Horrific photos of Almendra's brutalized body accompanied each account. While authorities initially estimated that she was 25-30 years of age, later news reports recognized that she was barely 18 years old when her life was snuffed out. As is often the case with adolescent sexual and gender minorities impacted by violence, officials and the media generally characterized Almendra as an adult, though one well-known trans activist later underlined to me that it was important that Almendra had only reached the age of majority a short time before her death: "she was really still a minor." Almendra's family quickly recognized that the tragic news accounts pertained to their child and immediately claimed her body from the morgue. While her legal name was Antonio Calderón Peralta, her family called her Toni or Toño, or in some cases used her chosen name, Almendra, which means almond. Later that day, some LGBTQ activists trekked up to a poor neighbourhood called Ombu, located high up on the hillside above Chilpancingo, to attend the wake, gathering with Almendra's family in her grandmother's house, the same home where Almendra had grown up. The activists brought food staples for the grieving family. Presumably in response to CEPRODEHI's media release, the Interamerican Commission for Human Rights issued a public statement calling for a full investigation. With that, the public record of Almendra's life and death end. Though I would later learn that a police investigation was opened, as far as I could determine nothing of consequence occurred as part of that process.

Several months later I was able to interview several people who had known Almendra. Even if Almendra's gender identity was confusing to her family and others, over the course of those conversations it became clear to me that she was much loved and is dearly missed. I also learned that the family had since lost another member; a teenaged cousin and childhood playmate of Almendra had also recently disappeared without a trace. The silences that punctuated the conversations underlined what everyone assumed,

that organized crime was responsible and so care needed to be taken, even in an anonymous, confidential interview, to which they had given their consent. Informants told me that while government investigators had spoken with family members on several occasions about Almendra's death, that the family had been simply unsure if the officials were trustworthy and so had said little and had made no effort to stay in touch after the family was once again forced to move and displace themselves to yet another poor neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city.

From a young age, Almendra lived in the home where the wake would later take place, in the working-class neighbourhood of Ombu on the outskirts of Chilpancingo, as described above. As a child she lived with her mother, grandmother, and other family members, and had attended a local school, either Emiliano Zapata or Plan de Ayala depending on the informants I interviewed, in a geographically and socially marginal neighbourhood where reportedly few people live openly as sexual or gender minorities. In her final years, Almendra had a close relationship with her older sister and that sister's children. Said to have been a hyperactive child who didn't like school, Almendra stopped attending classes by the middle of first grade and spent her childhood "roaming the streets". People remember her as an independent and fearless child. She never learned to read. By age thirteen she had become friends with a trans woman named --- who worked in a local loncheria (literally, lunch counter or diner, but as noted above, the term refers to a business that is somewhere between a bar and a brothel). It was at this point that Almendra started to "dress up and wear makeup". By age fifteen Almendra was living her life as a woman.

According to newspaper reports, at the time of her death she resided in the PRI⁸⁸ neighbourhood, a working-class neighbourhood established in the mid-twentieth century, south of the centre of town and some distance from where she grew up. When I went there to learn more information about Almendra, no one seemed to remember her. This may have been convenient amnesia or simply because of the transient nature of the housing in this zone. Almendra had shared a rented home with her mother, her sister and her sister's children, though she apparently sometimes stayed with an older man who she was "going with," a person known as "the Wolf" [El Lobo] – one person with intimate knowledge referred to him as "a ferocious wolf" - a man said to have "liked to be with

little faggots” and who was known to beat Almendra. She also worked in a brothel (in this case called a “pozoleria” - in reference to a traditional Mexican corn soup, though once again they do not sell food) in another poor part of town. One report said this business was in the Omiltemi neighbourhood. The Wolf also obligated her to do sex work so he could live off the money she earned (or stole, according to one informant) from her clients. Almendra’s scars – documented by the forensic team after her death - were attributed to the beatings she had received from this man. Some time prior to her death, Almendra had made a formal complaint against him and had told people that she wanted to leave him. The Wolf is said to have been a bricklayer by trade and was originally from the town of Chalma in the State of Mexico (the state that surrounds Mexico City on three sides but does not include it).

On the day of her death Almendra attended a family gathering and so had already been drinking by the time she went to the bar/brothel where she worked. For quite some time she danced with four young men only slightly older than her—“schoolboys” [escoleros] according to one account. They were reportedly making fun of her and treating her poorly and so were ejected from the bar by the woman in charge. Although the matron owner tried to convince Almendra not to leave with the others, she nevertheless followed the young men out and was seen leaving on the back of a motorcycle of one of the young men. The others left in a taxi. Apparently, she and at least the young man with the motorcycle went to a couple of other bars in the Boulevard section of Chilpancingo, one called Casavera, and another called Tasmania, although no one remembered when Almendra finally left or even whether she left alone or with someone else. She was killed in the dead of night in a place that remains unknown, and later dumped in the ravine. The homicide was never solved, though people that knew her pointed out that the man known as The Wolf, who come around on nearly a daily basis prior to Almendra’s death, never came around again and seems to have completely disappeared from Chilpancingo. Informants expressed their various suspicions about who is responsible for their loved one’s death, but felt certain only about one thing, that in the case of Almendra’s murder that justice will never be served. Those who cared about Almendra also continue to fear that the violence that killed her could still reverberate against them too: “We don’t want to have problems.”

Almendra is buried in Chilpancingo’s new cemetery, the grave marked with an iron cross that her uncles made in her honour. She never attended a Pride march and informants were even unsure if she knew about them, and while her death was included in a registry of murdered trans persons compiled using media references by Transgender Europe (Transrespect.org), she is listed as n.n., no name. Loved ones remember that at dawn on the day Almendra died an unusual bird sang at their window, one they had never seen before and have not seen since. No one has been held to account for her death.

The pink panther: Salvador Becerril Gómez



Figure 5.4 – Condolences expressed by various entities regarding death of Salvador Becerril Gómez

(Source: El Sur, Tuesday, March 5, 2013, p.11)

On March 3, 2013, a text message from a key Chilpancingo activist informed me of the killing of 55-year-old Salvador Becerril Gómez: “...a homosexual has been found murdered in his home... a friend of mine and a public official... every newspaper will cover this story as he was the Special Auditor of the State.” Other text messages

followed, from this and other activists, including one that read: “the power of the State will make certain that this case is resolved... even if a sacrificial lamb is required.” The prediction was accurate.

With assistance from local activists, I identified twenty-four news stories from across Mexico published within a day of this homicide. Most repeated the same basic information, though with some variation: Becerril’s chauffeur found his boss’s lifeless body at eight in the morning, clearly having suffered great physical harm: “punched and stabbed” . . . “stoned to death” . . . “beaten in the head with a pipe” . . . “bathed in blood . . . blunt blow to the head.” The accounts did not spare the details of the brutal killing. Most mentioned that the Red Cross paramedics had made the death pronouncement and that Guerrero’s Forensic Medicine Service (SEMEFO) had taken Becerril’s body to the city morgue to conduct the required autopsy before releasing his remains to his family. Most reports also included precise information concerning the location of the home where Becerril had lived and had been killed, and details regarding what electronics the assailants had taken with them when they left in Becerril’s government-assigned vehicle. Initial accounts stated that the motive for the homicide was unknown, though a few mentioned that because of the lack of evidence of forced entry that it was presumed that he had been killed by someone with whom he had been socializing.

All initial reports mentioned that he was the Special Auditor of the Office of General Auditing of the State [Auditor Especial de la Auditoria General del Estado], a prestigious position to which the PRD controlled state congress had elected him the year previous. Many articles referenced his prior long-time involvement in the PRI party [Partido Revolucionario Institucional], that he had cofounded the “Democratic Current for the Dignification of the PRI” in 1990, but also that he had been expelled from the PRI in 2011 after supporting the (successful) run for office of Guerrero’s then Governor Angel Aguirre as the PRD candidate (Aguirre had previously served as the state’s interim governor under the PRI banner)(El aguirrista Salvador Becerril 2011). The news accounts also mentioned that Becerril had remained a close confidant of the governor, the implication being that his appointment as Special Auditor was assisted by this friendship. One account said that prior to being appointed to this prestigious position that Becerril had held the position of director in the state’s Secretariat of Finances (Asesinan en su

domicilio 2013). Some accounts underlined that their information had come directly from the State Attorney General's Office [Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado] and a few also mentioned that the Guerrero Attorney General herself had been to the crime scene, along with official investigators from several different state entities (c.f. Ramos 2013). Some news stories published graphic photos of the deceased, while others used official looking photos of Becerril wearing suit and tie. A few mentioned his nickname, "panther", though none included the full version that his friends knew him as, "pink panther", an oblique reference to his sexual orientation.

Salvador Becerril was from a well-to-do family. He lived his whole life in the central Chilpancingo neighbourhood of Vicente Guerrero, a stone's throw from this city's Alameda Park⁸⁹. At the time of his death, he lived in the Ruffo Figueroa subdivision, also known as 'El Ruffo', a planned community originally built at the northern end of this neighbourhood in the late 1970s, meant to house the families of the then growing state bureaucracy, though as new wealthy neighbourhoods sprang up further from the city centre this urban enclave became a working-class neighbourhood that remains conveniently located near the historic heart of the city. Becerril was predeceased by both of his parents and was estranged from his brother and sister at the time of his death, a distancing rooted in a familial schism that dated back to when Becerril disclosed his sexual orientation to his family three decades earlier. He reportedly dedicated significant personal resources to the improvement of the family-owned houses. After coming out he was compelled to move out of the family home and eventually rented an upscale residence a few blocks away on a road ironically named 'Health and Assistance Street.' That is where he died.

Given his high-level government position, well-positioned family and close friendship with the governor, the proliferation of media coverage and published homages to his passing by both governmental and private entities was not surprising. While initial reports speculated that the homicide may have been related to the functionary's work, two days later the well-known Mexican publication *Proceso* (Apuntan a móvil 2013) informed readers that investigators concluded that it was a crime of passion. Citing an unnamed government source "close to [Governor] Aguirre's team," this account posited that more than one perpetrator was involved in a crime they characterized as "sadistic and

ferociously brutal.” They described in detail how the victim had received “many blows to the head with a bronze statue and that he had been stabbed five times in the chest.”

The *Proceso* account also reported that the Attorney General had assigned the case to the “Specialized Unit” responsible, “for the investigation of the crime of homicide committed against women and other persons with a sexual orientation or preference or gender identity or expression [sic] [Fiscalía Especializada para la investigación del delito de homicidio doloso cometido en agravio de mujeres y demás personas con orientación o preferencia sexual o por identidad o expresión de género],” a unit headed by agent Everada Pineda Andraca mentioned above (Apuntan a móvil 2013). The investigations of the other two homicides considered in this chapter were also assigned to this same specialized unit. As previously mentioned, this same agent later told me that her unit was responsible for the crime of femicide the overarching term she said covered this type of killing and that “femicide” was considered a lesser form of homicide precisely because these killings were assumed to be motivated by passion, something she characterized as a mitigating factor.⁹⁰ The *Proceso* article also noted that both the Guerrero State Attorney General Garzón Bernal mentioned above and the Chief of Police for Guerrero’s Ministerial Police Marcos Juárez Escalera violated standard protocols for the preservation of evidence when they entered the crime scene.

Six days after this homicide, a flurry of news coverage announced the arrest of a suspect: Carlos Eduardo Cruz García, age 18, also known as “Pug-nose” [“El Chato”], was apprehended in his family home, not far from the site of the homicide (though many news accounts mistakenly located the arrest in a different neighbourhood on the other side of town.) The various reports clearly drew from the same source, a summary of Pug-nose’s “ministerial declaration”, a formal statement typically given by an accused following an admission of involvement in a crime in Mexico (Covarrubias 2013). According to this account, Becerril had welcomed both Pug-nose and another young man, David Guinto Sandoval alias “El Chaval”, into his home between 9:30 pm and 10 pm and served them juice. Pug-nose’s account said that after drinking the beverage he felt dizzy and suspected that Becerril had laced it with something meant to cause this effect. Pug-nose’s official statement also said that Becerril then tried to caress him, that Pug-nose responded with punches, that Becerril then attacked Pug-nose with a knife, that Pug-nose

successfully wrestled the knife away from Becerril and used it to stab Becerril in the chest, that at the same time Guinto hit Becerril over the head with a heavy object, and that this was followed by a brawl that left the room in a state of disorder and Becerril dead. According to Pug-nose's statement he then went to the washroom to try to stop the bleeding of a wound on his hand, then the two youth took some electronics and the cash from Becerril's wallet and left the scene in Becerril's vehicle. While the stolen vehicle was later recovered in the eastern pacific coastal area of the state, Guinto remains at large. Pug-nose had just turned eighteen a few days before the killing, while Guinto is a couple of years older.

The day after Pug-nose's arrest, a news account reported that his family members had laid a formal complaint with the State Human Rights Commission against the arresting officers, claiming that Pug-nose was detained in an arbitrary manner. The family said that Pug-nose was arrested because of a prior conflict between the accused and an official in the Office of the Attorney General who was also father of Pug-nose's girlfriend, and that the confession was extracted by the arresting officers through torture and death threats (Flores Contreras 2013). Days after Pug-nose's arrest, a blog post attributed to local journalist Carlos Navarrete cited an "anonymous source" who claimed that Pug-nose was known in the Chilpancingo "lesbian-gay community" as someone who had charged for sexual favours since he was 15 years old, though it seems important to me to that this account failed to acknowledge that this constitutes the sexual exploitation of a minor by adults. The unsubstantiated account from Navarrete (2013) also claimed that Pug-nose had been involved in other killings of sexual and gender minorities.

I interviewed several people who either knew Becerril or knew one or both young men responsible for his death. Some informants identified as LGBTQ. Most had lived in the same part of Chilpancingo as both Becerril and the two youth who likely killed him, while some also knew the Becerril, Cruz and Guinto families. This set of informants spoke with great precision, and each in their own way sought to be clear regarding what they knew, what they suspected, and what they assumed. In this section I seek to faithfully communicate these nuances in the telling of this unhappy story. The news of the crime impacted the informants in a range of ways, from surprise and incredulity to a sense that this outcome sadly followed on from what they already knew about those

involved. These informants provided additional information that is useful for understanding the complications of this tragedy, including that Becerril knew the people who killed him, and that at least in the case of Pug-nose that this connection had spanned many years. They told me that Pug-nose grew up a few doors away from the Becerril family home, and that the murdered bureaucrat had first befriended the young Pug-nose nearly a decade earlier. One informant said that Becerril had known Pug-nose, “since he was a snot-nosed kid” [desde que estaba mocoso], and then pointed out that given the age difference Pug-nose could have been Becerril’s child, or even grandchild.

“It was a really ugly killing, truly vicious,” commented one informant, who underlined that the current context of widespread violence and impunity gave license to those who are inclined to harm sexual and gender minorities. However, another informant, someone with intimate knowledge of the parties involved in this case, commented that the degree of violence involved in some killings of gay men might be better understood not as hate crimes but rather as acts motivated by revenge: “In many cases we [older gay men] have ourselves abused these very young people who been with us.” Another informant who had been friendly with the presumed perpetrators commented, “I never imagined that they were capable of such a brutal act of violence.” This informant commented that Guinto never demonstrated aggressiveness or maliciousness or even the use of foul language [groserias]. This informant saw addiction as the root cause: they [Pug-nose and Guinto] have, “lost everything because of the stupidity of [drug] addiction.”

After leaving Becerril dead or nearly so in his apartment, Pug-nose and Guinto drove around the city for several hours in the deceased’s vehicle, drinking, shouting, and honking the horn, and partying with friends. One informant commented: “They went crazy... they were not in their right minds.” In the early morning Guinto dropped Pug-nose off at his house, apparently committing to return in the afternoon to divide up the loot from Becerril’s house. Perhaps then, as the sun rose on their drunken stupor, the gravity of the matter started to sink in. By all accounts, Guinto then headed to the Pacific coast, east of Acapulco, where he reportedly had family. Becerril’s vehicle turned up several days later in that area. Pug-nose went west, into the sparsely populated Sierra region of the state. Informants said that Pug-nose’s mother taught school in that region.

Within hours of the chauffeur's early morning discovery of Becerril's body, family and friends quickly learned of the killing. Authorities told family members that Becerril was stabbed multiple times and beaten with a bronze statue, and that he vigorously tried to defend himself before he succumbed to his wounds. Becerril's wake took place in his sister's house, one of the family homes where Becerril had lived in his earlier years.

Becerril's death was not his first encounter with violence. For many years, he had lived with noticeable scarring on his face, the result of an earlier attack. One informant said that Becerril himself had once told him that in his youth he had been involved in a bar fight in which the other person used a broken bottle to, "completely destroy his face..." leaving him with "a face like a map, full of scars..." Another informant said that Becerril had been sexually involved in some way with the perpetrator who had scarred his face. Informants agreed that Becerril never made a formal complaint because that would have inevitably ended his then nascent political career by publicly revealing the open secret of his sexual orientation. One informant said this prior attack led to depression and addiction, that Becerril, "sank into alcohol use for a long time," but also noted that Becerril had stopped drinking several years prior to his death and that this was key to his resurgent political career.

Another, well publicized incident involving violence against Becerril took place on February 11, 2011, when PRI Party brass aggressively removed Becerril from the party's statewide political congress because he had publicly supported a friend's successful gubernatorial run as the candidate of a different political party. This garnered significant media attention because Becerril had been a PRI Party State Councillor at the time, a key decision-making role in this political party that has played such a significant role in shaping Mexico over the past century. Party officials saw this as a serious violation of his party membership, which explains their outrage when he showed up at the party's congress. Becerril did make a formal complaint with the Guerrero Human Rights Commission (CODDEHUM in Spanish) against the Guerrero PRI Party's then leader, Efen Leyva, accusing Leyva of uttering death threats against him (Denuncia CEPRODEHI amenazas 2011).

One informant pointed out the contrast between Becerril's confidence in making public use of state institutions to challenge the politically motivated attack compared to

his decision not to seek redress when he experienced violence related to his personal life as a gay man. On this matter of the vulnerability of sexual and gender minorities, in my interview with well-known LGBTQ activist, journalist, and former government official Igor Pettit, mentioned above, Pettit insisted that Becerril's sexuality was key to his killing, though also blamed Becerril for imprudent behaviour and underlined that this case is not a simple matter of homophobic violence: "He was killed for being gay... He was killed because he was a gay man who let in whoever passed by his house at 3 a.m. That's not the same as a simple case of a hate crime committed by a homophobic person who hates homosexuals."

While most informants attributed the quick arrest of one of the presumed perpetrators to Becerril's prominence in Guerrero society, an especially key informant with privileged knowledge of the matter disagreed with that interpretation. This informant said that the arrest was facilitated by the father of the accused's girlfriend because of a longstanding conflict between Pug-nose and the girlfriend's father and thought that without this prior history that no arrest would have happened. An investigator in the attorney general's office, the girlfriend's father was reportedly already unhappy with his daughter's choice of boyfriends and had previously taken ultimately unsuccessful legal action against Pug-nose, accusing the young man of kidnapping his daughter. After the homicide, the girlfriend's father reportedly tricked the young man into revealing his whereabouts, which led to his arrest. This informant speculated that the quick arrest of someone in relation to Becerril's case did not so much demonstrate an exception to the rule of impunity but instead showed how those in positions of power in Guerrero are able to use that power to achieve their own personal goals. A final homage to Becerril's life included as part of the Mexican LGBTTTI Obituary project mistakenly states that both youth involved in his death were arrested (Voladora 2015).

Encountering "Pug-nose", the destroyer of the nation

It is in the mundane details of the lives of the people tied to these sad stories that we can start to grapple with Domínguez-Ruvalcaba's third figure of masculinity, "the violent man." This is the figure they say came onto the scene during late 20th century Mexico's turbulent emergence as a democratic country amidst an unprecedented eruption

of organized homicidal violence. In this section I focus on Pug-nose, one of Becerril's killers, though I also discuss other alleged perpetrators related to these cases when relevant information is available. I do not offer the following recounting of assertions and speculations concerning what happened in specific circumstances as a factual account but rather simply as the information provided by the various informants based on their partial knowledge, perspectives, and even motives (Haraway 2020). These assertions and speculations are of interest to this study not necessarily because they are true – the goal is not to substitute for the missing journalistic and juridical considerations of these cases – but rather, they are of interest as through them we can come to know something about the characters involved and their worlds. As already noted, a limiting factor that is especially relevant for this section is that it is not possible to sketch out anything about the key informants because of the concern that doing so could violate the commitment of confidentiality under which interviews were provided.

One informant said that Pug-nose's mother started her association with people involved in drug trafficking in junior high school and became romantically involved with Pug-nose's father, Jesús Álvarez Olaís, through this connection. "He didn't have a father," said one informant, while another informant said that Pug-nose's father's involvement in organized crime meant that he was usually absent from the family home. His mother was also often away due to her studies and later due to her employment as a teacher in a rural area some distance from the city. As a result, Pug-nose's maternal grandmother had a significant hand in raising him. When Pug-nose was fifteen, his father was shot dead in the town of Petaquillas, a short distance from the state capital where Pug-nose lived, an event that certainly impacted the teen. While news accounts obliquely referred to Álvarez Olaís as, "the owner of several hardware stores", a key informant told me that he had also been a money-lauderer for a cartel and that his death had been the result of a dispute with his own local cartel boss (Ejecutan a tiros 2009). One informant remembered Pug-nose as a quiet child who himself started to get involved in the world of drugs and gangs at around sixteen years of age, very shortly after his father's death, and reportedly through former associates of his own mother. By this time, however, his mother had remarried and was no longer involved in the world of drug trafficking.

As mentioned above, several informants noted that Pug-nose and Becerril knew each other for many years prior to Becerril's death. An informant with intimate knowledge of the details of Pug-nose's life said that during his childhood the Cruz and Becerril families were neighbours and on very friendly terms. Reportedly, Becerril would always say "good morning" or "good evening" to Pug-nose when he was a small child, and over time Becerril started to invite the youngster into his home, offering him soda pop or chocolate milk and playing board games with him, such as Chinese checkers [damas chinas], or allowing him to watch television. Pug-nose was nine years old when this started, though three years later Becerril moved a few blocks away to the Colonia Rodolfo Figueroa and these visits stopped.

About four years later, when Pug-nose was sixteen years old and after his father's death, Pug-nose and Becerril reportedly happened to cross paths in the street and Becerril invited the teenager to visit him in his new home. Becerril started calling Pug-nose on the phone, ostensibly to, "come on over and watch a film." Pug-nose usually brought along his friend David Guinto, and for the next couple of years they regularly visited Becerril at his home, every few weeks. The informant told me that the youth were enticed by being able to watch Becerril's very large television while eating pizza that Becerril ordered, and smoking marijuana. This same informant also said that Pug-nose and Guinto had also known each other since childhood, that they had a close and complicated relationship, and that Pug-nose became jealous when Guinto developed intimate friendships with other male-identified people.

Key informants said that Pug-nose and Guinto were among many adolescent males who regularly visited Becerril in his home over several years, motivated by a steady supply of alcohol and money that Becerril provided. One informant commented further: "I can't prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Becerril paid them for sexual relations... but this is a small town and people here know everything about these young men..." Another informant also said that Pug-nose and Guinto were known to be "mayates." Usually, this term is not understood as an indicator of someone's sexual orientation, though one informant disagreed, commenting that, "the mayates of today are the 'passives' of tomorrow." Other informants also mentioned that Pug-nose was long

involved in the mayate lifestyle, one saying that this began by age twelve or thirteen, though another informant said that Pug-nose himself denied this.

Both Pug-nose and Guinto publicly identified as heterosexual. According to one informant, both of Becerril's assailants also came from well-to-do families [familias fresas], though other informants suggested this may not have been the case. While most informants said that Pug-nose was in his final year of high school at the time of his arrest, one key informant insisted that Pug-nose had already finished high school prior to the killing of Becerril and was studying dentistry. Another informant said that Guinto had been studying law at a local university. This informant also said that Guinto's father was a director in a government department responsible for religious matters while his mother was an insurance reports investigator, though they also said that Guinto's family moved away from Chilpancingo after the killing of Becerril and Guinto's subsequent disappearance.

Two different informants with intimate knowledge of Pug-nose and Guinto said that the pair had a history of involvement in criminal activity well before killing Becerril. One informant recalled hearing coded conversations between the youth concerning "a matter involving a great deal of money" [un business de mucho dinero], not long before the killing of Becerril. This same informant also described an incident that took place a short time before the killing of Becerril in which Pug-nose, possibly in coordination with Guinto and one other person, used subterfuge to steal someone's new smart phone. Reportedly, this took place during an informal private gathering and resulted in some level of physical conflict between the parties.

Several informants mentioned having heard that Becerril had taken Pug-nose and Guinto to Acapulco on a holiday in the days prior to the killing of Becerril. Another informant said that Pug-nose had already been drinking for several hours when he and Guinto went to Becerril's home. Reportedly, Pug-nose claimed that Becerril owed Pug-nose and Guinto eight thousand pesos [about \$650 USD at that time] for cocaine that Pug-nose and Guinto had sold Becerril the day before and that collecting the payment was the purpose of their visit to Becerril's home the night of the killing. Pug-nose also reportedly said that it was the first time Becerril had bought cocaine from him and that his supplier was pressuring him for payment. The informant told me that Pug-nose said

that the cocaine was for Becerril's "supposed husband", a young man apparently about Pug-nose's age.

Pug-nose reportedly claimed that after being welcomed into Becerril's home that Becerril responded to the request for payment for the cocaine by saying, "we'll get to that, let's wait a bit," but then Pug-nose says he started feeling dizzy, like his body was heating up, and experienced a feeling of desperation, and that then Becerril sat next to him and started to "grab" him. Pug-nose reportedly claims that he said, "hold on, relax," and pushed Becerril away, that he continued to insist on payment of the monies apparently owed, but when Becerril continued to make sexual advances towards him that he began to strike back. As has been widely reported, Pug-nose claimed that Becerril spiked the beverage he gave Cruz that night. According to a key informant, Pug-nose has said that he suspects that he had been given something called "yumbina", a medication normally used with cows to stimulate sexual activity.

In the context of the violence that resulted in Becerril's loss of life, Pug-nose reportedly said that he dislikes when a man touches him and claimed that this was the first time this sort of thing had happened to him (this contrasts with reports from other key informants that Pug-nose was a known mayate). Pug-nose also reportedly claimed that he is not homophobic, insisting that he had no reason to discriminate against gay men. Reportedly, Pug-nose said that when Becerril tried to grab his leg that Pug-nose called him a "slut" [puta] and hit Becerril in the face in the apparent expectation that the matter would end. This same informant said that Pug-nose maintains that at that point Becerril left the room and then came back with a large knife and that Pug-nose thought that Becerril was intent on killing him. Pug-nose reportedly also maintains that Guinto only hit Becerril with the bronze statue of Poseidon after Becerril had slashed Pug-nose's hand and had tried to stab him in the stomach, at which point Pug-nose reportedly wrestled the knife from Becerril and used it against him. Pug-nose reportedly admits that after losing control of the knife Becerril tried to flee but that Guinto then held Becerril down while Pug-nose repeatedly stabbed him, though Pug-nose also reportedly maintains that they left Becerril unconscious but not dead and that it had not been his intention to kill Becerril.⁹¹

One thing I learned from this key informant, a piece of information that was not in any of the media reports, is that Guinto immediately took Pug-nose to the Red Cross clinic, located about 600 metres away from the site of the homicide, where he received medical attention. Reportedly, Cruz made up a story to explain the wound and law enforcement was not contacted despite the obvious lie. According to this version, it was only then that Guinto and Pug-nose picked up Pug-nose's girlfriend and began to joyride around Chilpancingo for the rest of the night, buying and using both cocaine [perico] and crack cocaine [piedra]. Pug-nose reportedly says that these actions were motivated by the shock and fright they felt after what had just transpired. According to this version, at about 5 am Guinto drove Pug-nose and his girlfriend to their home and then left for the coast. Pug-nose reportedly maintains that it was only when he later woke up and saw a newspaper that he learned that Becerril had been found dead that morning in his home.

At that point Pug-nose reportedly fled to the Sierra region of the state, eventually arriving in the town of Tlacotepec where he stayed with friends who were involved in poppy and marijuana production in that part of the state, which is under strong control of organized criminal elements. According to this source, Pug-nose said that that several days later his girlfriend's father, apparently an investigator with the Office of the Attorney General, contacted Pug-nose by phone and told him that the authorities knew where he was and were setting up a dragnet to capture him. Media reports said that Pug-nose was located by tracking Becerril's phone, though Pug-nose reportedly later insisted that while he did have the deceased's phone in his possession, he was not contacted through it. Pug-nose reportedly says that his girlfriend's father deceived him by saying that he was going to help Pug-nose out. Because of this offer, Pug-nose reportedly says that he went to the home of the girlfriend's father located in the Bugambilias neighbourhood in the south of Chilpancingo - not his own home as was reported in the media - and when he knocked on the door was arrested at gun point by five officers from the State Judicial Police. Pug-nose maintains that once they arrived at the Office of the Attorney General's facilities that these officers - including his girlfriend's father - tortured him, first by bandaging him from head to foot, leaving only his nose and mouth uncovered, and then by beating and choking him.

After his arrest, Pug-face was imprisoned in Chilpancingo's Regional Centre for Social Readaptation [CERESO is the Spanish acronym for this countrywide network of prisons], located in the southern suburbs of the city. About a thousand prisoners are housed in a complex built for far fewer. During the time that Pug-face has been incarcerated in this facility, it has been rocked by a series of violent incidents, including periodic raids by various police forces involving the confiscation of weapons and other contraband from prisoners and resulted in multiple serious injuries. In another incident that took place in August 2014, the prisoner director was ambushed in his car near the prison and shot dead (Matan al director 2014). This weak state control extends to other facilities in Guerrero as well as to all other aspects of the criminal justice system (as discussed in Chapter 4).

While Mexico began transitioning to a new oral adversarial judicial system in 2008, the proceedings against Pug-nose after the 2013 killing of Becerril were nevertheless conducted according to Mexico's longstanding paper-based, inquisitorial system. The countrywide system reforms were instituted precisely because the inquisitorial system was marked by significant judicial and prosecutorial discretion without accountability structures, a situation that had led to widespread corruption, and Guerrero has long been cited as a key example of this (Kyle and Yaworsky 2008; Navarro 2014; Open Society Foundation 2015; Sierra 2015; Arcos Vélez 2018; World Justice Project and Lawyers with Cameras 2018). A 2015 report concerning Guerrero's justice system underlines that Guerrero's epidemic of serious crime and impunity is rooted in politics and consequently the slow transition to the new adversarial system is linked to entrenched structural issues including the infiltration of the police by organized crime, the hold on power that a small number of elite families have over public institutions, and the resultant neglect of "poor, rural, and [I]ndigenous populations, [thus] feeding... cartel recruitment..." (Open Society Foundations 2015:7). A key informant for this project with professional knowledge of the legal system explained that records of criminal convictions are considered private information in Mexico so without extraordinary journalistic efforts there is normally no public information available regarding how any specific matter concluded, including whether there was a conviction and what any associated sentence was. The cases considered in this chapter must be

understood in this context of impunity and informational opacity, one that shapes outcomes for victims, their loved ones, the public, and those accused of crimes.

When I last spoke with key informants some thirteen months after the killing of Becerril, the judge assigned to the case, Abimael Rodríguez Nava, had not yet ruled on the case nor provided a sentence, though reportedly Pug-nose was anticipating a sentence of 50 years of imprisonment, apparently the maximum sentence for first degree available. Pug-nose reportedly said that his court-appointed lawyer was of no assistance and that he had hired a lawyer privately for a time but that it had been a waste of money because the private lawyer was also ineffective. At the time, Pug-nose was anticipating that there would be a face-to-face meeting with the judge that would also be attended by an administrative official [secretaria de acuerdos], his own lawyer and “the aggrieved”, presumably a reference to Becerril’s family. Over a year after the arrest, Cruz also continued to maintain that officials had violated the law by arresting him without an arrest warrant and that they had tortured him after the arrest.

This same informant said that while Pug-nose himself admitted being responsible for Becerril’s death that he thought that the charge should not have been “murder” [homicidio calificado] but rather the lesser charge of “manslaughter while fighting” [homicidio en riña]. Pug-nose reportedly believed that Becerril’s past conflicts as discussed above should have been given greater weight in the case and that others had told him that they were happy that Becerril had been killed. This informant also claimed that Pug-nose admitted to having been an intermediary for more than one contracted killing prior to the death of Becerril, though it is not clear that these earlier killings involved sexual or gender minorities. Another informant said that the judge had rejected Pug-nose’s argument that he was simply defending himself. My latest information is that Pug-nose’s relationship with his girlfriend continued after his incarceration and that she subsequently gave birth to a child that Pug-nose fathered.

Far less information is available about the other alleged killers related to the cases considered in this chapter. Both Angi, the person the police insist was connected to Quetzalcoatl’s death, as well as Felix, the person who reportedly claimed to have killed Quetzalcoatl, seem to have left the Chilpancingo area without a trace. Similarly, the presumed killer of Almendra who went by the nickname “the Wolf”, the man who was

known to have been both physically abusive towards her and to live off her sex work earnings, seems to have successfully dropped out of sight. Finally, there is no indication that authorities were ever able to locate David Guinto, the other accused in the killing of Salvador Becerril, after he fled in the victim's vehicle hours after the killing. What is clear is that at least one of the alleged perpetrators in all three cases likely had links to organized criminal organizations.

Chilpancingo's geography of anti-queer/trans violence

As queer subjects, all these victims' lives and deaths are suitably examined regarding where they stood in terms of marginality, in the geographic sense, but also in social and political terms (Misgav and Hartal 2019). All queers are not the same. And yet, there is a certain horrific symmetry to the geography of these cases on several levels, including where the victims lived out their lives, where their lives were taken from them, and where the presumed perpetrators went following the killings. At first glance, it seems that all three victims encountered their perpetrators in a context of seeking sexual intimacy, though it may be more accurate to recognize that Almendra was also seeking work. Furthermore, all three victims were killed by some form of blunt force trauma.

Becerril lived at the centre of urban life, both in terms of his residence, but also in his professional career, and even his brutal demise only transpired after he had invited people into his own home. The geography of Quetzalcoatl's life and death was also marked by an association with the centre of urban space. However, for Quetzalcoatl, this placement in the centre was something he fought for, navigating forces of exclusion that did not necessarily seek to include him. He was literally known for his walking to and from the centre of Chilpancingo, and this walking was as much a product of financial need as it was an exercise of his autonomy. Quetzalcoatl met his demise in the political and geographic centre of the city, though the location where his lifeless body was found, down a short alley from the main historic square of this state capital, the very place he had for so many years led Pride marches and other political events, is symbolic of how his pursuit of inclusion for himself and others was never fully realized.

Finally, Almendra lived and died on the periphery of urban life. Queer activists who attended her wake later told me that they themselves did not ordinarily venture so far

into the remote informal neighbourhoods located on the edge of Chilpancingo, while those close to Almendra did not think that she was aware of LGBTTTI political organizing in the city. While public education had reached her neighbourhood by the time she was born, she easily evaded its grasp from a very young age, probably because the educational system itself was ready to confirm that marginality was her lot in life when it did not address her truancy. She found a certain home in places far from the geographic and social centre of urban life. Even as a child, she spent much of her time “in the street”. This association with marginal urban spaces is also reflected in the grimy brothels where she later worked and the decrepit taverns where she is last known to have been, literally located “on the Boulevard”, that most symbolic of Chilpancingo’s thoroughfares, a quintessentially marginal space that shaped Almendra’s subjectivity. This marginality is also reflected in where her lifeless body was found, in an out-of-the-way place on the edge of the city, in a ravine. It is further evident in the fact that authorities did not trace her whereabouts for the last hours of her life and did not even determine where she was killed let alone who was responsible.

The alleged perpetrators all fled, and most have been successful at eluding law enforcement on an ongoing basis. Almendra’s likely perpetrator, the Wolf, was already a migrant in Chilpancingo, apparently having come in search of construction work, so his quick departure after her demise surprised no one. Both Angi, the person the police consider the prime suspect for Quetzalcoatl’s murder, as well as Felix, the person that key LGBTTTI informants say was the killer, have also left the area without a trace. Reportedly, Angi had at least one meeting with the police investigators before he left, while Felix stayed long enough to reportedly claim responsibility in a self-help group before his departure from the area. This is either a case of police incompetency or evidence of their utter lack of concern for this case. Even in the case of Becerril, while authorities had key information regarding the whereabouts of both perpetrators shortly after the discovery of the killing of this prominent member of Guerrero society, it was apparently only when these circumstances combined with a personal vendetta of a well-positioned law enforcement officer that an arrest occurred.

All three cases show the ineffectiveness of state institutions in holding people to account for murder, despite longstanding calls for addressing anti-queer/trans violence by

LGBTQ activists who have framed this sort of violence as hate crimes. But the outcomes for the alleged perpetrators also indicate that they remain encumbered by transcarcerality, that condition of imprisonment that persists beyond prison walls. In a context marked by impunity, these accused yet untried perpetrators are converted into outlaws and vagabonds. Wherever they are they are stuck in a sallyport, an in-between space between imprisonment and the condition of the citizen subject who can freely move. While we are led to conclude that the impunity in which the criminal acts studied in this chapter still remain means that the victims of these terrible crimes are reasonably understood as homo sacer, people who can be killed by anyone, in a strikingly similar way, those accused perpetrators who have fled can also be understood as homo sacer, as people who cannot reasonably trust that the state will provide them with fair court proceedings for the crimes of which they are accused (Agamben 1995, 1998).

Strikingly, all three cases studied in this chapter were assigned to the Attorney General's so-called "femicide unit", though the way this state institution deploys the term "femicide" mocks the origins of this concept (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Lagarde y de los Rios 2010). Such a referral of a case to this unit thus becomes a "death sentence" for justice itself, in that those killed whose cases are assigned to this unit become "less than" humans in the social context of Mexico.⁹² This could also be read as these lives lost being feminized, somehow less than the homicides of men. As outlined in Chapter 1, the term "femicide" specifically calls attention to the role of the state in creating the conditions for the killing of people because of their gender (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Lagarde y de los Rios 2010). The concept is meant to draw attention to the many ways in which the state contributes to the conditions that lead to the killing of people because of their gender and to the impunity in which so many such cases are too often left. Yet in Guerrero, where already most people assume that the state will do nothing in the search for justice in any case of homicide, the state itself used this term "femicide" as a catchall for homicides in which women, queer and trans people have been killed. Furthermore, there is the assumption implicit in the assigning of these cases to this specialized unit that the motivation involved in these brutal killings is covered by the idea of "crimes of passion", with all the dismissive power of that concept, somehow relegating these killings to a category of the understandable and not especially important.

The state dismisses this violence as an “outburst”, unworthy of “real” investigation, and thus its marginalization is institutionalized in the justice system. This occurs at a scale much bigger than that of individual bodies, perpetrated by the very institutions responsible for investigating their destruction. The outcomes of the three cases studied in this chapter exemplify this contemptuous position of the state in relation to crimes that are better understood as political violence at the scale of the body, crimes that demonstrate how organized crime, what Segato calls the “second state”, has filtered into the interstitial spaces of the state, leaving queer and trans people (and everyone else) at risk.

Through this study of three horrifying killings, we see the merging of several iterations of masculinity considered by Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *the macho*, *the pelado* (the urban version of the macho), into Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s invisible/violent man. While Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s third figure, *the invisible/violent man*, may be about the destruction of the nation, I contend that he is also about the production of the nation-state in a new form, an unrecognizable form, though one that is in genealogical succession with its previous forms, again in the tradition of the colonized as articulated in Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s first male figure, *the macho*. The *invisible/violent* man is hard to see, is resistant to showing itself, because of impunity and because of a weak state. We need to recognize that this figure is in a collaboration of sorts with the powers that control the weak state and the second state. Again, we cannot see them very clearly. Ayotzinapa – the forced disappearance of 43 student teachers in Guerrero - was another glimpse of impunity. What this research shows also is that in Guerrero, the *mayate* also merges with this figure of *the invisible/violent man*. That the *mayate*, the figure that Domínguez Ruvalcaba calls the “queerest queer” becomes the invisible/violent man is key to understanding this transformation of the state, apparently an emergent democracy, into a configuration in which transnational forces (from organized crime and tourism to transnational mining corporations) play a decisive role in ensuring that impunity reigns. The homophobia and misogyny that Domínguez Ruvalcaba argues have long been key to the Mexican state configuration are deployed in new ways in this emergent formation that relies on the second state.

Thus, we have seen how the state deploys feminized, sexualized, and queered bodies such that specific geographies of impunity can be understood as both rooted in gender, sexuality and socioeconomic class but also as tied to the state's project. This new social configuration is one in which the *mayate* (i.e. Pug-nose, perhaps also the Wolf and Felix) is able to insist that he is not homophobic even as he kills queers. This assemblage involves a performance of the protection of human rights—the state shows up—but it is questionable whether rights were protected or if justice has been served. In many ways, the social configuration that has emerged in Guerrero is an Agambenian nightmare, a space of exception, but one that implicates the continent, North America. Guerrero is one of the lacunae, the gaps, the spaces of exception where life is worth little. Of course, this is the product of bordering practices, including free trade agreements, the politics of 9/11, of the border's deadly and distinctly necropolitical role that reaches south to Guerrero. This political space is relational, not a container (Massey). The binary of victim and perpetrator sometimes falls apart, while the state and the second state's treatment of feminized, sexualized, and queered bodies projects outward brutality, even minor outrage, and yet seeks only a veneer of justice in ways that buttress the salient masculinity of Mexico as paternal government-knows-best and violent narco-state simultaneously but not always or everywhere.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked “what does the state gain from these deaths?” The state's longstanding complicity with misogynist violence is a technique to create the impunity that provides the bedrock for the emergent state formation. These case studies provide further evidence in support of my proposal for a queer theory of violence. First, they show how the state's complicity with violence has further twisted gender-based violence together with anti-queer/trans violence in a way that ensures the endemic violence and resultant impunity needed for a state configuration marked by neoliberal transnational integration and a strengthening of the second state. As such, these deaths can be considered political violence at the scale of the body (Mayer 2004). Second, these cases show that efforts by queer/trans activists for recognition of human rights fails to bring about justice, even as the LGBTQ sectors are drawn into a tighter relationship with the state. Finally, these cases show that the sallyport itself, that socio-spatial arrangement that strengthens the transnational dimensions of violence experienced

by queer/trans folk and others, continues to swallow people up—as both victims and the accused become bare life. In the next chapter I will consider the role of tourism in relation to the intersection between violence and impunity with sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero.

⁸² I am grateful to Gabriela Jiménez who offered this suggested framing during a presentation of a preliminary version of this chapter at the Sex Salon, a monthly academic event hosted by University of Toronto’s Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity. The presentation took place on October 29, 2015.

⁸³ Although many from the global north might not see Mexico as part of the ‘western world’, many - perhaps most - Mexican scholars do. Mexico was shaped by the colonial impositions of three centuries of Spanish rule during a time when that European country was itself becoming ‘modern’. Furthermore, Mexico’s independence movement looked to both the U.S. and France for inspiration. Additionally, Mexicans speak of *malinchismo*, a sort of love-hate relationship with the powerful outsider that is a thread that runs through historical and contemporary Mexico.

⁸⁴ Ranu Basu introduced me to this concept of “painful knowledge” as knowledge people have gained through the pain of their own lived experience.

⁸⁵ This author is concerned with gender, not sex. So the use of the term “man” refers to a particular iteration of gender, not sex (biological or otherwise).

⁸⁶ In 2015, Acapulco ranked even higher than Chilpancingo on this list of most violent Mexican cities, making Guerrero the only state that year with double billing among the top five. By 2021 because of further deterioration elsewhere, Guerrero no longer stands out as the part of Mexico with the highest homicide rate.

⁸⁷ Mexico’s Chamber of Deputies, the lower house in the Mexican Congress of the Union, includes 300 uninominal representatives (deputies) elected in the country’s 300 electoral districts plus 200 plurinominal representatives (deputies) chosen through a proportional representation system.

⁸⁸ While the neighbourhood was named for a major political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party by party militants at the time of its founding in the 1960s, this does not seem to define the neighbourhood in any significant manner in the present day.

⁸⁹ An alameda is a public walkway or promenade shaded with trees. In Mexico, some cities have alameda type parks, usually located a few blocks away from the main square.

⁹⁰ When I pointed out that this use of the term was at odds with the scholarship concerning femicide and feminicide, which reject the minimization of such crimes, she responded that this is simply how the term is defined in the legal system in Guerrero and seemed otherwise uninterested in discussing the term.

Chapter 6 - Territorial inequality driven by tourism and shaped by violence: A queer mapping of urban space in Acapulco, Mexico

Introduction

This chapter continues this dissertation's spatial analysis of violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero through a consideration of the lived experiences of violence in recent decades by queer and trans persons in Acapulco, the state's largest urban centre.⁹³ For 500 years, this city has been shaped by colonialism, globalization, and socioeconomic disparity. A significant node in the Spanish colonial empire, a key destination during the 20th-century rise of international tourism, and a place now securitized as "violent," more recently this urban space is also the site of evolving LGBTQ movements and shifting patterns of queer tourism. Transnational relations run through Acapulco's history: by the 16th century, Spanish trade with Asia was established as the primary focus of this port city, a dominance that lasted until the Mexican war of independence in the early 1800s. In the nineteenth century, the State of Guerrero became a key node in the political emergence of a modern, liberal Mexico, though Acapulco's role diminished given the end of the trade route connecting it to Manila. In the twentieth century, Acapulco developed into a thriving tourist destination. In the 21st century, due to changes in the global drug trade, Acapulco is now striated by violence. This chapter theorizes the situation of sexual and gender minorities in this fractured southern Mexican city, a city where urban planning processes are driven by tourism and map into the lives and bodies of queers in complicated ways.

The frame for this analysis of the city of Acapulco is the concept of "territorial inequality," a term coined by urban scholar Óscar Torres Arroyo, whose seminal work examined the emergence of this southern Mexican city as an urban space formed through a process of haphazardly planned socioeconomic segregation driven by tourism, itself shaped by market-forces and corporate goals (Torres Arroyo 2017, 2019). This chapter also reconsiders proposals made by queer theorists Lionel Cantú and Jasbir Puar regarding the tangled role of tourism in shaping sexualities, urbanization patterns, and state practices structured through colonial, neoliberal, and liberational processes, to theorize queer dimensions of the development of this city (Cantú 2002; Puar 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Once the international sun city destination of Hollywood stars and

international tourists (see Figure 6.1), Acapulco is now known as a place heavily impacted by the violence of organized crime. While a steady flow of tourists from Mexico City arrives for weekend jaunts, carefully protected by the tourism industry, international visitors are advised to stay clear because of the homicide rate, at least 110 per 100,000 people (Statista 2023). Between 2007 and 2021, Acapulco was consistently ranked among the top ten Mexican cities in terms of homicide rates, while Mexico itself is near the top of the list in terms of homicide rates in the hemisphere and indeed in the world (Calderón *et al.* 2021).



Figure 6.1 - Scenes from the tourist zone of Acapulco in 2014

(Source: W. Payne)

Acapulco provides an important case study as a site where class, race and gender intersect with sexuality such that it has been a destination for some queers while also being dangerous and unpredictable for others, a sociopolitical space where norms of masculinity have collided with an assemblage of expressions of sexuality imbued with patterns of exploitation that have gained the attention of the state. This chapter uses ethnographic research to consider the place of queerness in the unequal social processes in a city marked by organized violence that also aspires to global status even as it struggles with an antipathetic reputation. This exploration responds to the call to look beyond the metropole for new spaces of the political and consider the processes of subalternity through which, “post-colonial subjects make a place in the world” (McCann *et al.* 2013: 585), and also heeds Brown’s (2008: 1225) proposal that urban homosexualities outside the global north need to be theorized, “on their own terms, taking into account local histories, geographies and Indigenous conceptualizations of homosexuality.”

In their discussion of what they call the “contemporary urban-global condition”, McCann *et al.* (2013) remind us to pay special attention to the ways in which the urban can be understood as an “assemblage” marked by heterogeneity, contingency and instability such that local action invariably develops based on examples from elsewhere even as it is also deeply rooted in the locale. They call upon us to see cities of the global south beyond simplistic stereotypes, to understand them as assemblages that are part and parcel of the story of the molding of urban space writ large in the present day, and they encourage us to engage with the “process of subalternity” that takes place in southern cities in which subaltern subjects are always seeking to “make their place in the world” (McCann *et al.* 2013: 584, following Roy 2011). These authors caution scholars to steer clear of the divide between theory and ethnography that too often means that global south cities are studied based on their idiosyncrasies while northern cities are theorized as instructive of the universal truths of urban spaces. While I seek to engage the place of sexual and gender minorities within the assemblage of contemporary Acapulco, I also keep in mind that these subaltern subjects are not merely representatives of translated identities transplanted from the global north compelled to fend for themselves in a new and strange environment but rather, these subjects are protagonists of their own place and

time such that their subjectivity is forming as a unique assemblage in the crucible of the present-day urban-global condition in a particular national and local context, with its own history, its antecedents, and its influences.

In this chapter, I pay attention to the sharp increase in physical violence related to the international drug trade and organized crime, exploring how the social inequality created by tourism has provided the context in which organized crime has encountered fertile soil in which to flourish, where the most marginalized members of the LGBTTTIQ community are further exposed to harm. This chapter considers specific examples of these processes, grounded in material experiences and a particular place. Thus, it provides another response to the longstanding scholarly question posed by Cantú, Puar, and others, one that also considers other transnational processes well beyond tourism: which queers benefit from tourism?

First, I summarize and extend Torres Arroyo's analysis of the unfolding of Acapulco from a small port town to one of Mexico's most popular tourist locations, even amidst high rates of homicide. Second, I reexamine the scholarly literature about queer tourism in relation to this research project. Third, I examine the case of the "Gay Queen killings" and draw on the life stories of nine people interviewed as part of this research project who identify as LGBTTTIQ⁹⁴ and live—or have lived—in Acapulco, to offer a queer mapping of this city of socioeconomic contrasts, peripherally situated in the global south yet with longstanding entangled transnational connections. Fourth, I draw on reflections from these interviews concerning the dynamics of sexual and gender minorities in historic and contemporary Acapulco to contemplate the high level of violence and impunity that impacts sexual and gender minorities. These complicated intersectional stories of exploitation, violation, and at times liberation combined with those of the emergent dominance of organized criminality, illustrate the effect of socioeconomic segregation on the lives of members of the LGBTTTIQ community (c.f. Irazábal & Huerta 2016). These interviews, a subset of the larger set of conversations that are part of my dissertation examining violence against queer and trans persons in the state of Guerrero, help illustrate the relationship between tourism, queerness, and the socioeconomic segregation that Torres Arroyo (2017, 2019) describes. Finally, I consider how the nexus between queerness and tourism results in troubling outcomes at the

interface between the interpersonal and the urban (Cantú 2002; Puar 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

The genealogy of a segregated city

For nearly eight decades, the principal promoter of tourism in Acapulco has been the federal government, though over time the state and local governments have also played increasingly important roles (Sackett 2022; Torres Arroyo 2017). Starting in the mid-twentieth century, this led to what Sackett (2022: 443) calls “the partition of Acapulco into tourist resort and Mexican city...[because] the public funds that poured into Acapulco promoted displacement and heightened inequality.” Torres Arroyo (2017) outlines how tourism has left its imprint on this city’s infrastructure through the creation of a service-based local economy that prioritizes tourism establishments at the expense of working-class neighborhoods and has resulted in the deterioration of the natural environment due to ill-planning. Figure 6.2 provides a map tailored to the data included in this chapter. The reader is encouraged to consider printing the map to consult it regularly to better conceptualize the spatial and territorial dimensions of this study.

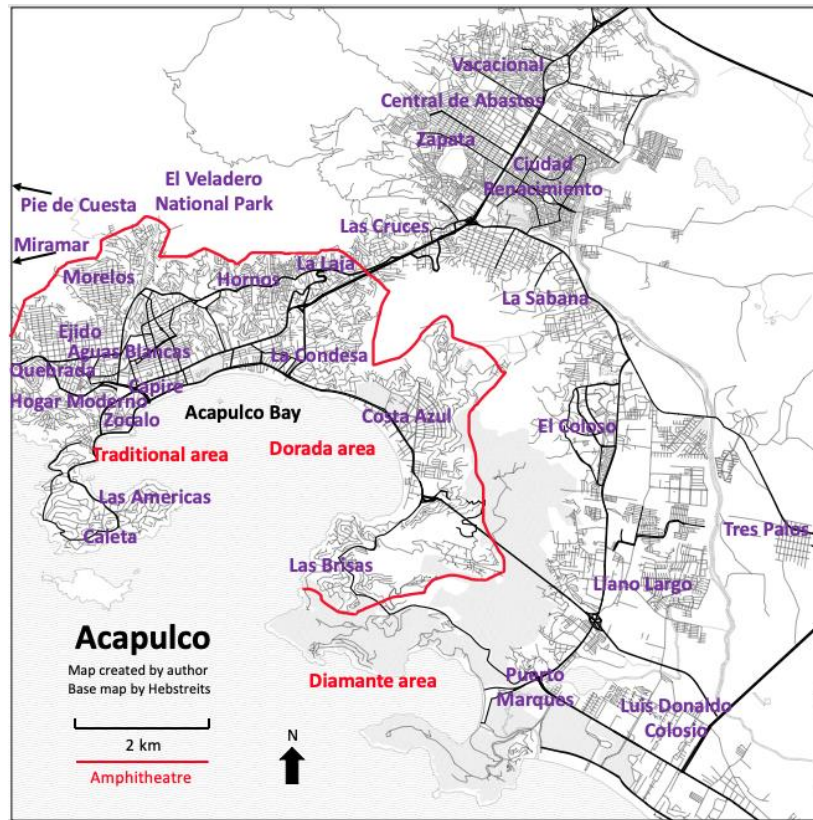


Figure 6.2 - Places in Acapulco referenced in this study

(Source: W. Payne)

Over time Acapulco's population has grown rapidly, substantially through the arrival of so many impoverished people in search of work in the tourist economy. As such, Acapulco's urbanization is intimately tied to the story of its working-class neighborhoods, many of which have been established through large-scale squatting supported by social organizations, sometimes in complicity with government officials (Sackett 2022; Torres Arroyo 2017). The largest and most successful "land invasion" was established in the La Laja neighborhood in 1958 (Sackett 2022). However, processes of segregation continued to reinforce the partition of Acapulco, such that now more than half of the residents live in poverty, face a precarious labor market, and live in substandard housing in peripheral neighborhoods that lack basic infrastructure and services (Torres Arroyo 2019).

Experiences of social exclusion are shaped through the intersection or blending of discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, and class (Irazábal & Huerta 2016). The socially and economically disadvantaged areas of Acapulco are made up of various social groups including women, youth, people living with HIV, people living with disabilities, the elderly, and others, who become the target of practices of systematic discrimination (Torres Arroyo 2009). The disadvantaged and precarious conditions for these people are subsequently reproduced as an inheritance throughout their lives (Torres Arroyo, 2009: 14). Thus, the study of socioeconomic segregation and discriminatory practices in the city of Acapulco is key to understanding the precarious exercise of rights of particular social groups (Bailey 2022; Torres Arroyo 2009, 2019).

Segregation needs to be understood not only as the unequal distribution of social groups in space but also as a temporal process (Rodríguez Vignoli 2001). Torres Arroyo (2009, 2017, 2019) outlines that the segregation of Acapulco, itself a sociospatial manifestation of inequality, is also constantly transformed because of marginalized communities push back against the inequality. As such, Torres Arroyo sees territory as a material and symbolic resource inherent to social reproduction whose appropriation reflects existing inequalities related to resources, opportunities, and rights. Therefore, an analysis of the spatial dimensions of the life stories of members of the LGBTTTI community associated with Acapulco can provide further insight into how tourism matters to queers. Following Massey (2005), Torres Arroyo (2019) sees territory as space constructed through multiple interrelations at various scales and sees the resultant spatiality as the basis of the ongoing production of new trajectories, spaces and relations. They also argue that the sociospatial development of Acapulco provides a representative example of the transformation of territory through segregation and that the tensions *in and for* territory, not only in relation to the actual appropriation of urban space but also with regards to how different groups exercise their membership in the urban community, are shaped by conflict between the vision of tourist-based development and the lived experiences of those in the working-class neighbourhoods in the periphery of the city (c.f. Torres Arroyo 2019).

While Acapulco's history goes back many centuries, as late as the 1920s it was still a small population centre where less than 10,000 people lived in what is now called

the “old town,” the area adjacent to the city’s main square, the “Zocalo” (Sackett 2022; Torres Arroyo 2019). Until then, distinct socioeconomic sectors of society lived interspersed with one another. However, as geopolitical events led to restrictions on international tourism in Europe in the 1930s, US companies started building tourist facilities in Acapulco. This set off changes led by the federal government that included a large tourism campaign, the promotion of infrastructure and service development, waves of migration from other parts of Guerrero, and the establishment of the first subdivisions, residential zones, and working-class neighborhoods (Torres Arroyo 2019). Furthermore, public authorities at all three levels of government set a precedent of privileging private sector development, starting with the expropriation of nearby *ejidal* (communally owned) lands for tourism development, justified based on “public interest” (Torres Arroyo 2019). This established a pattern of private concentration of land ownership and price speculation that continues to the present day.

Tourist development then shifted to coastal areas further away from the “traditional”⁹⁵ port area, though the constant tension between those with economic interests in the development of tourism versus growing numbers of economically impoverished people led to haphazard urban development. The 1940s were characterized by tourism dominated by international hotel chains and uncontrolled development up the slopes of the hills that surround Acapulco Bay (referred to as the amphitheatre), without regard to the environmental impacts (Torres Arroyo 2019). Already, the physical distancing of different socioeconomic sectors paralleled unequal access to public services. The city’s tourist boom took off in 1950 and continued into the early 1970s, a period characterized by “jet set” national and international tourism (Sackett 2022). However, the rapid expansion of the city was shaped by haphazard market-led development countered by popular mobilizations rather than by any organized development plan. Many peasant and popular groups were successful in gaining practical access to land and services in this period, though often without formal recognition of tenure or guarantees (Torres Arroyo 2019).

The tourist zone expanded to encompass the entire Acapulco Bay, including the Traditional area and the Dorada [golden] area, while land invasions established many irregular neighborhoods and settlements inland from the coast. This urban expansion was

marked by large-scale private investment in tourism, though the Mexican state also played a lead role in financing and administering this expansion (Sackett 2022; Torres Arroyo 2019). Specifically, the state fulfilled the tourism industry's demand for consistent utilities and services, to the detriment of the local community and the natural environment (Torres Arroyo 2019). This pattern continued to produce greater territorial inequality, environmental contamination, and a deficit of urban infrastructure and services, issues that especially impacted upon those living in the squatted neighborhoods on the periphery. At the same time, the availability of employment did not keep up with the increasing numbers of people looking for work, due to new arrivals from the countryside.

Starting in 1972, a period of stagnation set in, marked by a reduction in both national and international tourists (Torres Arroyo 2019). This shift was shaped by a reduction of international tourists to Mexico, a shift of international tourists to a growing list of other destinations in Mexico, and the deterioration of the natural environment in Acapulco. The state tried to reassert control. In 1980, the national government established El Veladero National Park adjacent to Acapulco and then compelled about 120,000 people to move from their informal communities to the then newly established (and ironically named) Ciudad Renacimiento (Renaissance City), located on the leeward side of the amphitheatre, far from the tourist zone. Five decades later, this peripheral part of Acapulco, infamous for social exclusion and violence, also continues to be characterized by a paucity of services and infrastructure (Sánchez Huerta 2018). Neoliberal relaxation of development regulation in the 1990s in the context of the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement included the dismantling of legal protections afforded to communally held lands such as the former ejido of El Llano Largo. It also led to the haphazard profit-motivated development of both the Diamante luxury resort area as well as low-income private sector housing further inland in areas especially vulnerable to weather events. By 1990, Acapulco's population had passed the half-million mark and informal settlements covered more than 70 percent of the urban area (Torres Arroyo 2019). To facilitate the further expansion of the tourist zone, aggressive government action sought to regularize landownership by continuing to move those living on squatted lands to more peripheral areas.

According to Mexico's National Commission for Human Rights, nearly 70% of Acapulco's residents now live in poverty in a city that is among the most dangerous in the world, thus producing an unprecedented level of vulnerability to both structural violence (poverty and inequality) and physical violence (Donoso Jiménez *et al.* 2018). This government body accuses the state of creating a divide between first-class and second-class citizens in what is otherwise a very wealthy city. Lower-income residents are trapped in tiny, poor-quality housing isolated from the rest of the city and with poor access to urban infrastructure and services. Poor public transit and deterioration of roads have added to the isolation of lower-income residents who have no other option than to live far from the city centre in neighborhoods lacking cultural and recreational facilities and with significant limits to access to public education and healthcare. In contrast, Acapulco's municipal government has created many regulations related to urban planning that prioritize municipal services for exclusive zones catering to national and international tourists to the detriment of working-class and middle-class areas. Since 2007, this segregated landscape has been further compromised by the infiltration of organized crime at all levels of society, a circumstance that creates unacceptable levels of vulnerability for most people outside of the tourist zone, and in particular ways for sexual and gender minorities.

Towards a queer theory of tourism's impact on urban spaces

The task of queer theorists ... is to embrace the critique of identity to its fullest extent by abandoning the search for an inherently radical queer subject and turning attention to the advancement of a critical approach to the workings of sexual normativities and non-normativities ...

Oswin 2008:96

In 2002, Jasbir Puar published the article "A Transnational Feminist Critique of Queer Tourism," in which she lamented the "celebratory tone of queer visibility politics" that ran through many of the submissions to a special issue on queer tourism that Puar had recently initiated (Puar 2002a: 935). Puar (2002a: 935) was concerned that considerations of gay and lesbian tourism generally failed to recognize their neocolonial

context and that the focus on the celebration of “liberatory disruptions of heterosexual space” failed to consider simultaneous “racial, class, and gender displacements.” In this foundational piece, Puar (2002a: 936) called on scholars to do two things: to recognize that claims of space, even “queer space,” are always also processes that are “informed by histories of colonization,” and to “think about queer tourism and space through some kind of theory about intersectionality.”

In places formed through transnational tourism and other colonial processes, sexuality itself is a tool of power that maps differently onto the bodies of individuals who are included under a rather fictitious umbrella called LGBTQ (or other variations) in ways that reinforce other exclusions such as race, class, nationality, and gender. Puar (2002c: 1) says that there has been a certain resistance to scholarly considerations of queer tourism because it “intrudes on many of our personal and professional desires for mobility and travel.” Puar proposes that scholars need to take seriously the relationship between queer tourism and processes of neocolonialism through which sexual identities are both shaped by and in turn shape economic and cultural patterns. Puar also laments that “less has been written about the impact of such tourism on the sites visited ... [and how] local homo/sexual cultures are affected by queer tourism” (Puar 2002b: 104). In this call for greater consideration of those who are “touristed upon,” Puar (2002b: 126) also points out that in the present context of increased border vigilance for some, “gay tourism functions as an ironic marker of a cosmopolitan mobility available to a very few bodies.” Hence class, race, other categories of social location *and* physical location matter.

Scholars have also considered the roles of sex tourism and sex work in contexts marked by same-sex sexual activity in tourist destinations, noting the fluidity between the two constructs (Cantú 2002; Mendoza 2013; Vargas Rojas and Alcalá Escamilla 2013). They have paid attention to how sex tourism is integrated into economies of the sale of sexual services, and to how sex work encompasses a range of relationships, among them ones framed as romance and friendship (at least by one party) (Mendoza 2013; Vargas Rojas and Alcalá Escamilla 2013). Cantú (2002: 140) offers a look at the development of gay and lesbian tourism in Mexico and its effect on Mexican sexualities, observing that “dimensions of both sexual colonization and liberation are at work.” Cantú proposed that tourism is itself a form of migration that shapes the political economy of sexuality in

Mexico in a context in which identity and practice are often delinked. Mendoza (2013) points out that characterizations of the motivation for tourists to engage in sexual activity with locals are too often focused on the (often international) tourist and thus decentre the experiences, motivations, and identities of the non-tourist, including the idea that this is “work” for them, and to some extent the domestic tourist as well. In their consideration of Acapulco, Vargas Rojas and Alcalá Escamilla (2013) conclude that, in the context of tourism, sex work by male-identified persons has become part and parcel of the life of the gay community in that city such that it becomes an employment possibility for a range of people seeking greater income. These authors also uncover a range of forms of violence to which those who take on the role of a sex worker are often exposed, including physical violence, robbery, illness, sexually transmitted disease, and extortion by public officials. In this chapter, I take this one step further by exploring some of the troubling ways in which tourism is part of the processes of subalternity related to sexuality and gender diversity in Acapulco in the context of organized crime.

In an innovative consideration of the political economy of sexuality in Mexico, Cantú (2002: 141) argues that Mexican sexual identities should be “understood as multiply constituted and intimately linked to the structural and ideological dimensions of modernization and development,” and more specifically that Mexico’s so-called “homosexual subculture” has been transformed through queer tourism. Writing at the beginning of the 21st century, Cantú (2002: 159) observes that, “while anthropologists working in Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s asserted that “gay” identities did not exist as they are understood in an American [U.S.] context, this is no longer so.” He argues that queer tourism has expanded the space related to commodification, leading to the creation of simultaneously liberating and exploitative sites. Cantú (2002: 161) links this change to the Mexican government’s late 20th-century tourism development project to redirect urban migration from its largest cities to other parts of the country, and comments that “although the rise of gay and lesbian tourism in Mexico was not a planned outcome of the nation’s tourist development project, it has caused important sociopolitical reverberations.” Cantú argues that this action contributed to Acapulco’s popularity as a queer vacation destination in the 1980s and early 1990s, though this city was later supplanted by Puerto Vallarta.

Recent scholarly literature regarding the linkage between queerness, tourism, and territoriality provides further insight into the implications for non-tourists: so-called “locals” in Mexican tourist destinations (Bailey 2022; Monterrubio 2021). In a study based on field research in Acapulco, Monterrubio (2021) draws attention to the significance of gay spaces in tourism destinations for “locals,” those who call the destination “home.” They outline how gay tourism spaces provide locals with opportunities for escape, building identities, socializing, cruising, and learning. While the spaces often exist because of tourism, in many cases the key interactions for local queers are with other locals. In a recent study of international gay tourism in Puerto Vallarta, Bailey (2022: 478) also asks: “How does gay tourism affect the destination site itself?” Bailey pushes us to go beyond the purported acceptance and inclusion asserted by marketing campaigns and tourists and to also consider “larger systems of inequality such as class, gender, and race” (Bailey 2022: 480). The study at hand builds on this scholarship by considering additional spatial, temporal, and institutional dimensions of these questions.

According to Oswin (2008: 89), the integration of insights offered by queer theory with those provided by other theoretical traditions offers an approach to space and to queer geographies that allows us to push back against simplistic understandings of the negotiation of space rooted in what Oswin terms, “liberal frameworks of oppression and resistance.” Oswin reminds us that queer theory is principally about questioning the fundamentals of “sexual identity politics” through its recognition of the fact that sexual identities are produced in contexts marked by power and cannot be understood outside of those dynamic forces. As such, this approach provides an opportunity to engage with what this scholar calls the “fractures within queer cultural politics” that become apparent through doing “embodied analyses” of the power dynamics that exist in sexual-spatial configurations by recognizing the existence of other social processes apart from gender and sexuality, such as dynamics linked to geopolitics, race, migration and globalization among others (Oswin 2008: 90).

Oswin follows other scholars in valuing an approach that goes beyond a search for something called “queer space” and instead considers the ways in which, “sexuality is used as part of broad constellations of power across the heterosexual/homosexual divide”

(Oswin 2008:90). These insights allow us to recognize that simplistic understandings of queer spatial dynamics as processes of the colonization of heterosexual space by sexual dissidents can end up obscuring other dynamics of exclusion and other assemblages of transient subjectivities that are emerging and transforming themselves in an ongoing way in particular places. In the case of Acapulco, layered configurations and relations of class, race, nationality, and migration infuse the stories and making of spatial arrangements that end up being harmful or fatal to some who transgress sexual or gender norms while being protective of the life chances of others who may also identify as sexual minorities.

Geographers of sexuality have also cautioned against the temptation of using global north urban centres as models for other spaces, warning scholars of the easy slippage that tries to equate homonormative gay urban space with the space of sexuality (Brown 2008). To inoculate against these intellectually suspect tendencies, Brown proposes that scholars considering the spatiality of sexuality look to cities beyond the metropolises of the global north and to study across the whole city rather than simply the sites that will be recognizable to the “gay international.”⁹⁶ Brown argues that what is often called, “social liberalism”, the expansion of space for rights for some queers in some places, is actually better described as the “sexual politics of neoliberalism” that privileges gay white men of a certain class (Brown 2008: 1225). Brown urges us to consider, “how these identities are being understood in diverse settings and how they are becoming modified in local contexts and in relation to [I]ndigenous identity formations...” (Brown 2008:1226). Similarly, Muller Myrdahl (2013: 279) calls for a consideration of the mutual constitution of subjectivities, processes, and places in specific geographic contexts, and proposes that scholars embrace a conceptualization of, “the embodied and emplaced geographies of everyday queer lives in geographically-specific terms.” This scholar insists that we recognize that “queer place making” regularly happens in places beyond the metropole and argues that oral history narratives can be used to “elicit the material practices of queer life and geographical process of urban change in order to understand and theorize the role of social difference ... [in the] hinterland...” (Muller Myrdahl 2013: 282). In a sense, Acapulco is such a hinterland, though clearly not separate from the metropole. The following account of a violent attack

on a queer event in Acapulco demonstrates a painful version of this queer place making.

The Gay Queen killings

On November 30, 2015, a news report announced that Acapulco's "Gay Queen" Party had been stormed by a "commando" of unidentified gunmen: "Coronation of the Gay Queen in Acapulco ends with three dead and five injured" (Matan a tres hombres 2015). The horrific incident took place in the neighbourhood of Tres Palos, a working-class suburb built on drained swamp land about nine kilometres inland from the upscale beachfront Diamante area of Acapulco. Around 2 am, authorities received an anonymous emergency line call alerting them of an attack in progress at an event that had been organized by a well-known event organizer named Henry Carrera together with Mexican comedian Tico Mendoza (Mata Mata 2015). Those killed were Waldo Giovanni Cortez Rodriguez, 33 years old, a bank teller, Álvaro Serrano Calleja, 34 years old, a truck driver, and Andrés Serrano Cortez, 23 years old, a university student.

Numerous other news stories quickly followed, first in Spanish and soon also in English, though with limited additional and at times contradictory information. Some accounts told of delinquents who without warning directed a burst of machine gun fire at the participants inside the community's basketball court, those killed said to have drinks in hand at the time of death, while other accounts said that at least one victim was shot inside a car in the roadway adjacent to the venue. A few news reports included gruesome photos of the bloodied faces and inert bodies of the victims. One account said tourists from all over the country were at the event, transported on buses from nearby tourist areas (Mata Mata 2015). While many accounts identified the victims as "homosexuals", a comment left by a self-identified yet unnamed organizer of this event disputed this, claiming that the three victims were, "heterosexuals who had only gone to the event for some clean fun like any other person" (Muertos, 3 homosexuales 2015).

In an account published the following day by *El Sur*, a well-respected local newspaper, journalist Carlos Moreno noted that the interrupted event was a beauty pageant called "Gay Queen Tres Palos 2015", that it took place in the basketball court located in front of the town offices and local church, and that, "most participants were from the gay community, some of them dressed as women" (Moreno 2015). That author

noted that the authorities were not providing details of the incident: “The case is being handled by the authorities under a complete hermetic seal,” and added that other reports indicate that there were two gunmen involved and that family members had refused to hand over the bodies of the deceased to the authorities, instead taking them to their homes.

By the next day, many international news outlets also covered the story in both Spanish and English accounts, repeating the basic facts previously recorded by local media, and adding that Acapulco is the city with the highest number of homicides in Mexico. Several news accounts mentioned that Acapulco is in the state of Guerrero, where 43 student-teachers were forcibly disappeared the year before. One account from *Towleroad.com* noted that, “[i]t is unclear whether the attack was fuelled by anti-gay hate” (Mandell 2015). *The Advocate* also concluded its account of the attacks by noting that, “[i]t wasn’t immediately clear if the Sunday attack on the Reina Gay festival in the resort town was specifically antigay or part of the generalized violence plaguing the region,” noting that Acapulco had the highest homicide rate in Mexico and that several schools in nearby areas had recently suspended classes due to violence (Ring 2015). Reader comments linked to *The Advocate* account of this incident were telling. One person wrote, “Mexican people suffer enough without having some of their own people act worse than animals. I like Mexico and love Mexican people, but I doubt I will ever go to Mexico again. Sad.”

The near total silence regarding this case by local queer activists is striking. A couple of activists linked the basic news accounts to social media, though without additional comment, while a couple of out-of-state activists asked for more information. One well-known local activist named Alberto Mogollon, a leader of the organization Association of Homosexuals and Lesbians of the State of Guerrero (ASHOLE) wrote,

It was a gay event yes... These occurrences took place outside the party [...] terrible death of people THAT ARE NOT GAY NOR TRANS ETC... these are settling of accounts between Narcos and it happens that this party took place in the rural area of Acapulco Tres [P]alos.

One Facebook posting of a news account of the attack was followed by homophobic comments including one which posted an image of Bart Simpson containing

the words “fucking faggots” [pinches jotos]. Apart from a couple of messages of support, the Facebook page of the event organizer was silent on the issue of the killings.

This brief scurry of attention to Acapulco lasted only a few days. Since then, there has been silence. No further effort seems to have been made to clarify who the victims were, who exactly killed or injured them, or why they were attacked. Even the location was left obscure: Tres Palos is in the municipality of Acapulco, but it is a rural town at some distance from the coast and separated from the urban space of the city of Acapulco by farmland. And who were the tourists who had apparently been brought to the event by bus? News accounts never followed up on this. This horrible story provides a touchstone for this chapter’s exploration of violence against queer and trans persons in Acapulco by showing how a part of the city formed through the sociospatial processes of economic inequality described by (Torres Arroyo 2017, 2019) becomes a focal point for the intersection of the violence of organized crime with queer subjectivities that is read through the reductive lens of the gay international. In the next section I draw on primary ethnographic research to further consider these themes.

Queers in space: Ethnographic data as points on a map

Interviews with nine individuals⁹⁷ with knowledge of the dynamics of the LGBTTTI sector in Acapulco (six identified as gay men, two identified as trans women, and one identified as lesbian), as well as participant-observation in Acapulco during six research trips that ranged from two days to two weeks in length, provides the basis for further grounded analysis of anti-queer/trans violence in Acapulco. These interviews form part of the larger dissertation project that looks at violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities across the state of Guerrero. When taken together, the story these selected interviews tell is not a singular narrative of gay liberation but is rather a demonstration of the layered ways in which many of those whose sexuality and gender marks them as marginal to mainstream society are also formed by other dynamics including class, race, and citizenship. These ethnographic sketches are meant to provide points on the queer map of a segregated Acapulco. Continue to use the map provided to locate the places in these stories (see Figure 6.2).

Scholars have documented public homoerotic activity in Acapulco as far back as the colonial period when the port was the site of encounters among military men, sailors, and even prisoners from across the globe, arriving on Spanish galleons (Vargas Rojas & Alcalá Escamilla 2013). While Acapulco has been a globally renowned tourist destination since the early 20th century and even had an internationally known gay scene before Mexico City, the territorialization of space by queers has always been weak. This means that there is no distinct area of the city widely known as “queer space”, such as a gay village or a “lgbtq district”, though Playa Condesa is sometimes called a gay beach. Following Cantú (2002), contemporary Acapulco can be understood as the nexus of a range of migration patterns, including Mexican and international tourists who come for a few days or months at a time and stay in a vast array of hotels and vacation homes targeted to a range of budgets, as well as tens of thousands of Mexicans who have emigrated from other parts of the state or of the country in search of employment. Of course, sexual and gender minorities are found amidst all these groups and thus are fully part of the social and geographic diversity that marks the city of Acapulco. For example, while there is a somewhat recognized “gay zone” in the coastal neighborhood of Condesa where a few gay bars are located (several kilometers east of the “old town” historical center), these venues and this neighborhood do not constitute the only or even the primary geography relevant to sexual and gender minorities. One informant estimated there are at least fifty establishments across the city where men connect with other men to arrange sexual encounters, though most of these venues are not explicitly gay and few are on the tourist circuit.

I met with Arturo in his spartan fifth-floor walk-up apartment, near the city’s Zocalo. Our interview took place on his balcony, with its expansive view of Acapulco Bay. Arturo was a charming Mexican middle-class proudly gay man in his late seventies who, after five decades living and working elsewhere in the country and in the US, retired to the historic district of Acapulco. Neighbors called him “grandpa.” When he was five years old, his father was appointed chief of Acapulco’s customs office, and the family moved from Mexico City to this same neighborhood. He recalled that at the time—the 1940s—the coastal highway was a dirt path, and the beach came right up to the Zocalo of what was then little more than a fishing village. Arturo has known he was gay

since his first sexual experience with a male cousin as a nine-year-old, something he said was later confirmed by a love affair with another student in his teen years. After attending university in the US, he returned to Mexico City where he had a career as a bureaucrat before retirement.

As a young man in the 1950s, Arturo developed a strong platonic friendship with an older man who allowed him use of part of his home in an affluent area of Acapulco called Costa Azul as a *pied-à-terre* when Arturo could get away from work. Arturo fondly remembered the Acapulco of those days as “a city of the big American movie stars, the place where the Kennedys honeymooned and where jet setters and politicians rubbed shoulders.” He said that there was little violence: “There was no organized crime in that time period, those sorts of things didn’t happen here, and you could bring whoever you wanted to your house [for a sexual encounter].” Arturo also recalled that there were regular drag shows at a venue just outside the historic center in the Aguas Blancas neighborhood, attended by international and national tourists alike. By 2021, this corner of Acapulco once known for its bordellos and cabarets had become a ghost town and a no-go zone due to upwards of 30 homicides per month in what is roughly a ten-block area (Castro, 2021).

Svend was a US citizen in his early seventies from California who first lived in Acapulco in the late 1960s and was revisiting old haunts in Acapulco at the time of this research project. He agreed to an interview for this project. When he first came, many of the big hotels that now line the coast were not yet built, and the coastal highway was a single-lane road alongside an open beach. He commented that Acapulco has had a long tradition of young Mexican men becoming sexually involved with foreigners at least as far back as the 1930s, a phenomenon he said coexisted with a high level of machismo and homophobia. He recalled bringing his “first ‘boy’” (his terminology) back to his hotel in the historic center (near the Zocalo) for a sexual encounter during his initial visit to the city in 1969. Several other informants also told me that until a few years ago, La Placita restaurant (see Figure 6.3) on the main plaza had been a key hangout for teenage sex workers, including minors.



Figure 6.3 – Decrepit sign above La Placita restaurant adjacent to Acapulco’s Zocalo.

(Source: W. Payne)

At the time, Svend said the historic centre “wasn’t so rough” but in the mid-eighties it started to deteriorate, a phenomenon he linked to the increasing numbers of Mexican national tourists: “We had villas and we had servants. It sounds very colonial but it’s true.” His blatant celebration of inequality is noteworthy. Svend said that he began living full-time in Acapulco in the early eighties because his sexuality had made his life “unmanageable” in the US. He described a high-risk lifestyle that he found invigorating, including constant brushes with danger at a time when a public gay life oriented towards international tourists existed in the interstices of the law: “There were always raids and police pay-offs with all the bars. I mean constantly.” Svend said that soon after first visiting Acapulco he bought a home near the historic center of town in the upscale Quebrada neighborhood, and later lived in the high-end Las Brisas neighborhood on the east side of Acapulco Bay. He lived there for many years before moving to Southeast Asia in 2000 (I wondered if this move was to escape the increased policing of the sexual exploitation of minors in Acapulco at the time).

In her fifties, Pati identified as both trans and gay, though added that she used to identify as a woman but no longer wanted to bother with the effort involved in dressing the part. At the time of our interview, Pati managed a brothel in the nearby state capital Chilpancingo, though had lived in Acapulco for several years in her⁹⁸ youth. Originally from a small town north of Acapulco, at age 15 she fled to Mexico City to escape her “macho” father. While working as a dishwasher in a restaurant there she met a young man who offered to take her to Acapulco by airplane. Jumping at the opportunity, she quickly abandoned her patron and soon moved in with her older gay brother who had moved to Acapulco many years earlier. Her brother worked as a quartermaster in the Acapulco port area (east of the Zocalo), and she lived with him for several years, on and off.

During her brief stay in Mexico City, Pati began a career as a *travesti* sex worker, something that she continued in Acapulco and Chilpancingo: “I worked the street for about ten years.” She recalled finding clients in the bathrooms of the Rios cinema and other movie houses in the downtown Capire neighborhood of Acapulco where she and her brother also lived. She recalled that *travesti* sex workers warned each other about dangerous clients: “They call them faggot-killers [*mataputos*]” She remembered the same police raids as Svend, which also led to her decision to leave Acapulco. At one point in the interview Pati mixed up the terms “raid” and “operation,” the latter a reference to violence committed by organized criminal elements in the present day, though then noted that the distinction is largely insignificant since so many of those now involved in organized crime previously worked as police officers. Pati also recalled that drag shows were a much more elaborate experience in the 1980s in Acapulco and other tourist destinations, so she joined up with a group of other *travestis* to create a drag show that they took on the road for several years.

Bobby was a Canadian in his sixties, whose connection to Acapulco began in the 1970s, and who permanently relocated to this city in the late 2000s. He lived in the Americas neighborhood until his death—he was murdered in June 2013, two months after being interviewed for this project (Payne, 2019). While Bobby had only lived in Acapulco permanently for a few years, he said that he had been visiting Acapulco regularly since the early 1990s. He lived in what he described as a villa in a wealthy-class

enclave at the end of the Playas peninsula that extends south from the historic center. Bobby characterized the young men involved in sex work as “obviously gay,” disregarding the impact of dynamics of socioeconomic class. He said that until the mid-2000s, older foreign gay men came to Acapulco in pursuit of sexual activity with adolescents as young as fifteen years of age: “It used to be in the Zocalo at night there would be dozens and dozens of guys trying to get you to go with them for money.” Bobby said these youth, many of them minors, came from elsewhere in Mexico, in search of these connections. Bobby dismissed arguments he had heard that the foreigners were compelling naive young men into a way of life that was not of their choosing: “These guys...at fifteen...are wiser sexually than a Canadian at twenty-one,” buying into what is/could be seen as an age-old colonial trope. Bobby said that this pattern of street-based sex work involving Mexican adolescents and older tourists significantly decreased in the mid-2000s after a series of high-profile arrests of foreign tourists, accused of exploiting minors. This brief look into Bobby’s segregated life illustrates the colonial dynamics of queer tourism in this city.

In his mid-thirties, Ignacio owned a small stand on Condesa Beach where he sold clothing and refreshments, though he lived in Las Cruces, a more affordable neighborhood located about an hour from the tourist section of the city. He was born and raised in another peripheral neighborhood far from the tourist zone. For several years, Ignacio moved back and forth between Acapulco and California, following a longstanding pattern of Mexicans seeking work in the United States and regularly returning home to visit family. He stayed in the US for a year or more each time, though because he did not have a visa it cost him as much as \$3000 United States dollars to cross the border using the services of a “coyote” (smuggler). Ignacio discussed the street-based sex trade that had operated in the Zocalo area a few years earlier. He said that at its height, around 2005, about fifty Mexican male youths from across the country had worked in that neighborhood, paying \$200 pesos per week (about \$15 United States dollars at the time) to the organized crime group that controlled that area, though this number had dwindled to two or three youth by 2013.

Ignacio told me about his deceased lover Brandon, a 17-year-old who had been involved in drug trafficking and had been killed a year and a half earlier by the organized

crime group that Brandon had worked for, because of a bad debt. Ignacio said that Brandon's short life had been marked by deprivation. As a small child, Brandon had also lived in the Las Cruces area with his parents until they separate. Then, his mother moved to another city, and for a while, Brandon lived with his grandmother in the La Sabana area, known for flooding, poor infrastructure, and homicides. After that, he was in the care of the government agency responsible for child welfare in the Renacimiento neighborhood and then in a privately run youth shelter located near Acapulco's Zocalo.

While Brandon lived with Ignacio in Las Cruces, Ignacio encouraged him to enter a residential addiction treatment program located near Ejido, a process that initially seemed to show some signs of success. But Brandon felt unable to resist the draw of the drug culture and easy money he had access to in the traditional area of Acapulco. Ignacio said that Brandon's lifeless body was found in a hilly area above the Miramar neighborhood. With help from friends, Ignacio organized a funeral service and burial for Brandon, though none of Brandon's family members were present. Ignacio also commented that at least four other young men Brandon knew from his time in the group home had died under similar violent circumstances.

Eva, a transgender woman in her late thirties, worked as a male stripper and sex worker in her youth in Acapulco before living in several cities elsewhere in Mexico and the US for many years. She described herself as a restless and hyperactive person who does not like to stay in the same place for too long: "I have lived in many different places, Mexico City, Zihuatanejo, Ciudad Obregon, Puerto Vallarta, the United States, and of course Acapulco where I am from." For financial reasons she has not yet gone through gender-affirming surgery but said that if she had the money she would do so.

Eva grew up in Hogar Moderno ("modern household" in English), a working-class neighborhood in central Acapulco not far from the historic zone. "When I was fifteen, I told my parents that I was gay," she said. She talked about being bullied in school and about violence at home: "When I came out to my parents...my father hit me a lot." A short time later, she left school (she had completed grade 10) and found employment working in several poorly paid service positions: "When I was 18 years old, I worked as a [male] stripper in a bar, dancing. That was where I first got to know the gay world." Eva said that her clients were tourists, mostly Mexican though there were some

American clients as well. She said she started dating a man who worked in the same bar: “He was the love of my life, my first boyfriend, he loved me, and he also made me suffer ... I was very young and innocent, and I didn’t know anything about life yet.”

At age 21, Eva moved out of her parents’ home and into a guesthouse in Condesa that catered to foreign gay men, exchanging her labor for tips and housing. She accepted an invitation from an older gay couple to join them in the United States and stayed in California for about four years, where she worked doing drag shows. She returned to Mexico because her parents were both ill and because things had worsened for undocumented immigrants in the United States after 9/11. For about a year, she worked as the head waiter of a restaurant in Acapulco’s tourist zone. Then she moved to Puerto Vallarta for several years, doing drag shows and occasional sex work. At the time of our interview, she had again returned to Acapulco to be closer to her recently widowed mother.

At the time of the interview, Eva worked as an assistant in a hair salon and performed in drag shows. She did weekly performances in a pozoleria-style family restaurant in the Zapata neighborhood, far from the tourist zone (see Figure 6.4 of a similar performance by another artist in the Renacimiento neighborhood). Pozole is a popular Mexican soup made with hominy corn, and a restaurant that specializes in this soup is called a pozoleria. This kind of restaurant also commonly employ drag performers on Thursdays to draw customers⁹⁹. Eva said that she still travelled by public transit due to the cost of taxis, “even though people say that it is dangerous.” At the same time, she noted that she drinks very little and has become a homebody apart from the shows, evidence of her prioritization of personal safety. Eva is HIV positive and thinks she was likely infected by an American client as an adolescent when she was first involved in sex work, at the aforementioned Condesa guesthouse.



Figure 6.4 – Drag performance in a pozoleria-style restaurant in the Renacimiento area of Acapulco

(Source: W. Payne)

Nanci was a psychologist who grew up in Morelos, a working-class neighborhood adjacent to the traditional area of the city. While she held several professional positions, she also encountered significant employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. As a university student, she came out as lesbian and initially experienced familial rejection, though she noted that this reaction was soon alleviated because she has taken on the role of economic provider for her divorced mother.

She recalled being cautioned as a child by her father to avoid the Zocalo area because of child exploitation by “gringo and Canadian tourists.” Nanci identified two places where trans and male sex workers now operate, including in the Condesa neighborhood around the bars, as well as along the coastal road that runs alongside the downtown beaches (including Condesa beach). She referred to the trans sex workers using the derogatory term *vestida*, using the term interchangeably with *travesti*. Nanci also distinguished between *chichifos* and *mayates*. She explained that both are straight-

identified, male-identified and cisgender, but that *chichifos* (often minors) usually restrict their services to receiving oral sex, while *mayates* enter long-term economic relationships with trans women who have some degree of economic stability through steady employment such as hairdressing. While the clients of the three categories of sex workers she described are largely local Mexican men, she explained that these subjectivities are a product of the societal inequality produced in the context of tourism and that these identities would likely not persist in a society marked by greater equality and opportunities for these people.

While in university, Nanci became close with another woman. After a rocky relationship, they eventually went their separate ways. Sadly, this friend's own economic and familial circumstances were especially unstable, something that led her to drug addiction and to being forced into prostitution by an intimate partner who pimped her to whoever was willing to pay. A few months after they had drifted apart, Nanci learned that her friend had been brutally murdered in a hotel room, a crime that has not been solved. Nanci insisted that her friend died because of her vulnerability as a woman, as a lesbian, and as someone without economic resources. She also explained that organized crime impacts the LGBTTTTI community precisely because of the elevated levels of vulnerability that members of this community experience in Acapulco. Nanci is working with others to establish a community organization that will provide support to sexual and gender minorities who find themselves in difficult straits.

At age 15, Juan's father reacted violently to the news that Juan identified as gay, and so this young person left home. The place he fled was a working-class neighborhood in Pie de la Cuesta, several kilometers west of Acapulco, a town where his grandparents and extended family also lived. He counts himself fortunate to have had a friend in nearby Acapulco who was able to take him in. Prior to leaving home, Juan had already started performing as a drag artist, and so was soon able to rent a room for himself. After about a year, the relationship with his parents significantly improved because they reconsidered their attitudes towards Juan's sexual identity, and so he returned to the family home. These experiences led Juan to engage with LGBTTTTI activism and he has been involved with local and state campaigns against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. He has also worked as a housekeeper in several different

tourist hotels including the Twin Towers in the Condesa neighborhood. He completed junior high school as an adult.

Juan lamented the many cases he knows about in which gay men and *travestis* have been subjected to extreme violence, sometimes fatal. He outlined three emblematic examples that illustrate the types of violence that sexual and gender minorities in Acapulco need to worry about. One case involved a 40-year-old gay man brutally beaten to death in the El Coloso neighborhood. Another involved the murder of a *travesti* found dead in the La Laja neighborhood. She was involved in street-level drug trafficking and so the assumption is that she was killed in relation to that connection. The third involved the disappearance of a gay man in Luis Donaldo Colosio's neighborhood, someone who was known to sell cocaine and marijuana in the area. Neighbors saw armed subjects enter his home and take him away. Juan explained that people who identify as *travesti*, transgender, transsexual, or lesbian in Acapulco have reduced employment opportunities, even more restricted than gay men, and that the result is that they are more likely to become embroiled in organized crime as petty actors, a circumstance that too often leads to danger, violence, and death. He lamented that LGBTTTI activists are especially wary of becoming involved with cases that involve organized crime precisely because of the added risk and uncertainty. Juan identified Zapata, Ciudad Renacimiento, Vacacional, and Central de Abastos—all located in the northern part of the city far away from the tourist zone and widely known to be captured territory of organized crime—as the most dangerous for the LGBTTTI community.

Gustavo, a gay man from a middle-class Acapulco family, also found himself involved in LGBTTTI activism from a young age. He explained that in the late 1990s, a group of 10 government workers began to meet because they were concerned with the municipal government's regular arrests of *travesti*, transsexual, and transgender persons. They sought out meetings with various municipal leaders, including the Secretary of Public Security as well as the city's mayor. Gustavo recounted how this led to the development of LGBTTTI activist spaces that contributed to the establishment of annual pride marches and other political and educational campaigns against discrimination (see Figure 6.5). In 2014, in face of discriminatory action against the public display of the Pride flag by students in the Faculty of Tourism of the Autonomous University of

Guerrero, located in Acapulco's Hornos neighborhood, activists were able to provide organized support for the students.

The sad story of the Gay Queen killings, coupled with the lived experiences of the informants whose life stories inform this dissertation project, add to the geographical analysis of anti-queer/trans violence that this project provides. An intersectional understanding of queer/trans identities demonstrates that the geographic distribution of violence against sexual and gender minorities is strongly impacted by socioeconomic markers and that transnational dimensions of these identities and of the lives of these people shape exposure to these forms of violence. The long view of the state's involvement in shaping the territorial inequality in relation to the development of tourism outlined by Torres Arroyo (2019) clearly maps onto the lives of queer and trans people in Guerrero in ways that sometimes result in harmful and even lethal consequences. The international queer press deploys a construction of Mexico shaped by U.S. homonationalism that leads to a caricaturizing of the lives and deaths of queer/trans subjects in Guerrero. In the next section, I consider further implications of the role of tourism for sexual and gender minorities in Acapulco, Guerrero's largest city.

Analysis of a Contradiction



Figure 6.5 – Acapulco’s annual Pride march (2013)

(Source: W. Payne)

According to recent research conducted by Mexico’s National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI 2021), 7.4% of Guerrerens identify as LGBTTTIQ, a higher percentage than all but three of Mexico’s 31 states, much higher than the national capital, and well above the national average of 5.1%¹⁰⁰. This is a striking result that does not obviously correspond with other socioeconomic markers that are usually associated with these identities and thus suggests the need for further research. This relatively high level of LGBTTTIQ identity in Guerrero is likely related to a combination of longstanding cultural patterns of tolerance of so-called non-normative expressions of

gender and sexual identities in this state, coupled with the migratory and identity-related processes related to tourism. At the same time, Guerrero is cited as having more killings of sexual and gender minorities than any other political entity in Mexico except Veracruz and Mexico City, which both have populations nearly triple the size. The complicated stories told by the research subjects of this study and indicated by ethnographic and secondary sources suggest three frames that together help explain the set of dynamics that matter for members of the LGBTQ community in Acapulco: liberation, exploitation, and violation.

Queer tourism has led to liberation experiences for many LGBTQ-identified foreigners, such as Svend and Bobby who sought to escape the constraints of social exclusion in the US and Canada. This seeking of liberation through opportunities for identity expression has contributed to the constant flow of international tourists to destinations such as Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco (Bailey 2022). At the same time, tourism has also led to experiences of liberation for many queer Mexicans through the mechanisms identified by Monterrubio (2021). The range of spaces and businesses that provide LGBTTTIQ persons with places where minority identities are welcomed has been augmented over seven decades of tourism in Acapulco, attracting millions of visitors from other parts of Mexico and beyond. The Mexican informants who contributed to this study showed that their identities have been built through the possibilities afforded to them by a city created by tourism. Locals have opportunities to socialize and seek sexual encounters that would likely be less available elsewhere, and this context certainly contributes to the notable level of LGBTQ activism in Acapulco and in the state of Guerrero (Payne 2020, 2023). Monterrubio (2021: 50) concluded that LGBTTTIQ tourism spaces are key to providing locals with opportunities to “be gay at home,” and this study reinforces this assertion. As well, some LGBTQ individuals, including Nanci and Juan among so many others, have advanced in educational attainment and employment in ways that are tied to the tourist economy.

Bailey (2022, 489) underlines that queer tourism contributes to the availability of acceptance and inclusion, but that this is restricted to those who can afford it, and that the related forms of consumption “create stratification within the LGBTQ+ community.” In Acapulco, tourism has long been and continues to be the occasion of a range of

experiences of exploitation that impacts upon people in different ways, something made evident through the experiences of those interviewed for this study. The extreme economic inequality produced through this often-unplanned urban space marked by segregation and exclusion allowed many tourists and locals opportunities to sexually exploit young people who lack adequate economic resources or social support. The circumstances of spatial segregation have contributed to the vulnerability of many LGBTTTI-identified persons, including Eva, Ignacio, and so many others.

Several informants spoke in detail of patterns in which international queer tourists have exploited poor young people in Acapulco. Svend spoke of what he called a “child-porn ring” operated by Americans out of a mansion in the Condesa neighbourhood. He said that the ringleaders were eventually arrested by Mexican authorities in relation to a joint US-Mexico law enforcement operation called “Operation Mango”¹⁰¹. While official records of this operation are scarce, this seems to refer to an investigation conducted by the Child Exploitation Section of the ICE Cyber Crimes Center.¹⁰² According to this source,

Operation Mango [was] an extensive investigation that closed down an American-owned beachside resort in Acapulco, Mexico, which offered children to sexual predators. The resort was a haven for pedophiles that traveled to the facility for the sole purpose of engaging in sex with minors. The proprietor of the business was convicted.

Svend said that after the US investigation concluded, the Mexican government “picked up the threads”, leading to the arrest of seventeen gay men accused of sexual involvement with minors, including Americans, Canadians and Mexicans. Svend said that he considered this an “anti-gay sweep” in which “almost any known gay person” was arrested, though he conceded that many of them were indeed involved in sexual activity with minors connected to an orphanage.

Bobby also described this “arrest of the seventeen” in which a large group of men, mostly Americans and Canadians, were charged with pedophilia by Mexican officials: “Three of them committed suicide in jail that I know of... and another one died out of jail.” He said they had dropped the charges against that last man but after he was released from prison, he was murdered in a crime that remains unsolved: “I guarantee if there is a gay murder and unless somebody’s got money pushing them, they’re not going

to do anything about it.” Bobby attributed the lack of proper investigation into crimes like this to homophobia. He linked what he considered sloppy policing in which innocent people were arrested together with people who were truly guilty of sexual abuse of children to the demise of a gay nightlife in Acapulco:

So now you go to the gay discos who do you find? They’re damn near empty... The gays aren’t coming because they are terrified that these fucking police and city officials don’t understand the difference between [sic] a normal gay person that’s looking for a healthy relationship, same as a straight man or woman that’s looking for a healthy relationship.

Acapulco’s geography also extends beyond Mexico’s borders. The involvement of American tourists in Acapulco with the smuggling of Mexican youth into the United States. was another theme that came up in two different interviews. Svend said that he helped some of the young men with whom he had been sexually involved enter the United States, and then helped them obtain employment once there. He said that on the first occasion, he paid a human smuggler US\$50 to bring two young men across the Rio Grande in a rowboat and then he picked them up on the American side and transported them further north in the United States in his own pick-up truck, hidden in a compartment behind the cab. He added that on later occasions he opted for a less dangerous choice (for him) and paid “coyotes” (professional smugglers) larger sums of money to have young men brought to the destination. In a remarkably similar case, Eva recounted that when she was young and still male identified, she did “escort work” with American tourists at a guesthouse owned by an American man. She said that many of the clients of the guesthouse suggested that she go with them back to the United States. As mentioned above, she eventually accepted an offer from an older gay couple to help her get into the United States. However, the invitation came with strings attached: They requested that she also arrange for their “boyfriend” to go with her to the United States. The American couple paid for plane tickets to Tijuana for both her and the young man and then the American couple brought them across the border by hiding them in the trunk of their car: “We were in the trunk from about 3 or 4 pm until about 11 or 12 in the evening...”

Something that stands out in this examination of the experiences of LGBTTTIQ persons in Acapulco is the rapid expansion of the power and territory of organized crime

here and across the state of Guerrero. Organized crime has aggravated and accentuated pre-existing conditions that already led to adverse outcomes for some sexual and gender minorities due to segregation and the related production of vulnerability. The shift of organized crime towards Acapulco has been part of a continental realignment of drug trafficking provoked by transnational shifts such as NAFTA (now CUSMA, 9/11, the 2007 financial crisis, the “war on drugs,” the opioid crisis, and border dynamics (Gregory 2011; Robles, Calderón & Magaloni 2015; Realuyo 2019; Hidalgo, Hornung and Selaya 2022)). So many of the informants told sad but very common stories of lethal outcomes. While the successive waves of organized violence have certainly impacted all sectors of Acapulco’s population, my research indicates that LGBTQ-identified persons may be more likely to be exposed to the violence fomented by organized criminal entities that seek to maintain their expansive economic and political power (as discussed in chapters 4 and 5).

As mentioned above, informants discussed the important role that Acapulco’s main plaza, called the “zocalo” and located in the centre of “old town”, long played in connecting foreign tourists to young male sex workers. As a young man in the 1990s, Eva recalled that she regularly accompanied the man who owned the guesthouse that catered to an American clientele to the zocalo where young sex workers were known to hang out. Eva said that she even helped him choose which young guys he would bring back to his guesthouse to introduce to his older foreign gay clients. Bobby also described the change in the presence of sex workers in the central plaza of the historic centre in recent years due to the action of organized crime. He said that that the presence of sex workers was relatively common until the late 2000s. Arturo also explained that until 2011, the Zocalo had been a place where it was easy to find young male sex workers, that they had regularly hung out in an open-air patio called “La Placita” (see Figure 6.3).

Arturo also discussed how the imposition of the “tax” by organized crime that required the male sex workers to pay a weekly amount¹⁰³ to the armed group led to a rash of retaliatory violence against those young male sex workers who did not or could not pay. Arturo said that these youth were taken away from La Placita and later found dead in abandoned lots. He said it is well-known that the police were informing organized crime elements about which young men were working in the sex work, demonstrating for him

the involvement of the state in the violence. He also explained that some of the *mayates* also sold drugs for the organized crime groups and that he knew of a couple of cases in which these young men failed to pay for the drugs they had sold and were subsequently killed for this violation: “God may forgive you, I may forgive you, but the mafia never forgives.” Pointing out that La Placita was by then boarded up, Arturo says that there were no longer sex workers operating in the main square but that some *mayates* still worked in the “Plaza de Mariachis”, a tavern that stays open 24 hours a day located just east of the historic centre. Like Nanci, Arturo underlined that the phenomenon of the *mayate* is fundamentally related to economic class rather than sexuality and that this social construct flourishes in Acapulco precisely because it is a city where there is no middle class.

Conclusion

The mapping of the stories included in this chapter show that queerness is not in itself a corrective for other forms of marginalization. Instead, these stories reveal the multiple ways in which the nexus between queerness and tourism results in troubling outcomes at the interface between the interpersonal and the urban, including the sexual exploitation of minors, and at least in the case of Acapulco, links between a tourist economy and violent death. Which queers benefit from tourism? In different ways, this is the central question that both Puar (2002b) and Cantú (2002) ask us to consider. Puar (2002b: 113) observed that “the specter of the native, the other, the ‘third world’ ... encourages a continuity of colonial constructions of tourism as a travel adventure into uncharted territory laden with the possibility of taboo sexual encounters, illicit seductions, and dangerous liaisons,” something sadly reflected in the lives of the people interviewed for this project. Cantú (2002: 147) showed that Mexico has been marketed as a place that is both “just like home” and at the same time “exotic,” that tourists have been sold a form of homoeroticism that is in equal measures a raw or pure form of sexuality but also dangerous.

The stories included here demonstrate that this view has been purchased, and that tourism tends to reproduce and amplify existing inequalities between queers, those dynamics of exclusion that Oswin (2008) called us to examine. Torres Arroyo (2019:

317) insists that poverty and social exclusion are the manifestations of a century of tourist policy and related urban planning in Acapulco and that the territorial inequality produced inhibits the full exercise of the social rights of those impacted in spatially evident ways. The infiltration of an already distorted social fabric by organized crime has further aggravated the harm experienced by some sexual and gender minorities.

Tourism is invariably a geopolitical project marked by the strengthening of uneven geographies through the reenactment of colonial relations, leading to a concentration of state power in dialectical relationship to subaltern dispossession (Ojeda 2024). This chapter has revealed the extent to which the violence and impunity of organized crime in Guerrero is facilitated by state action in the state's largest city in particular ways in the context of international tourism. The examples discussed here also show that anti-queer/trans violence overlaps with gender-based violence such that the state's complicity with both is intertwined. The stories told here also show that the human rights approach of LGBTQ activism is constrained by organized crime and by the complicity of the state with it. Finally, the transnational dimensions of the violence experienced by queer and trans persons in Acapulco—as in other parts of the state of Guerrero—lock sexual and gender minorities into circumstances where lethal violence becomes likely. This impact of the transnational means that escape from this sallyport of exposure of bare life to forms of violence that can be perpetrated by anyone without restriction is severely limited. In the concluding chapter I will revisit how these themes contribute to my key arguments for a contribution to a queer theory of violence.

⁹³ A version of this chapter has been published as: Payne, W. (2023) Territorial inequality driven by tourism: A queer mapping of urban space in Acapulco, Mexico. *Urban Planning* 8(2): 249-261

⁹⁴ See endnote 1.

⁹⁵ The oldest part of the city of Acapulco is referred to locally as “Traditional Acapulco”, belying the Orientalist tendencies of tourism itself.

⁹⁶ For an inciting critique of international LGBTQ politics, see Joseph A. Massad's book, *Desiring Arabs*.

⁹⁷ To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the informants who agreed to participate in this study, names and other identifying markers that could be linked to them have been changed.

⁹⁸ Although Pati seemed somewhat disinterested in specifying her gender identity, others who knew her consistently referred to Pati using feminine pronouns. I have adopted the same practice here.

⁹⁹ Sometimes, a venue may still retain the name “pozoleria” as it indicates that they have drag shows, even if they no longer sell food.

¹⁰⁰ According to this research conducted by INEGI (2021), the three states with a higher percentage of people identifying as LGBTI+ are: Colima (8.7%), Yucatan (8.2%) and Queretaro (8.1%).

¹⁰¹ According to Mattar (2007) of The Protection Project, *Operation Mango* was an undercover operation that “targeted a child sex resort set up in Mexico by a number of American citizens”

¹⁰² This information comes from the IT Law Wiki available (as of October 21, 2022) at https://itlaw.fandom.com/wiki/Child_Exploitation_Section.

¹⁰³ Bobby also discussed the charging of this ‘quota’ that he said led to a significant reduction in the numbers of male sex workers in the Zocalo, though he also argued that the homophobia of specific politicians was another aspect of the story.

Chapter 7 - Targeted for Harm: Violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero

Introduction

This dissertation provides a sideways glance at the layered violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico, including the role of the state and organized crime, in perpetuating the conditions of impunity that continue to reign, the resistance raised by activists to counter these violations, and the transnational context that has created the conditions that have led to this harm. This concluding chapter summarizes the findings, provides additional comments regarding the meaning of this violence and the resistance to it, and suggests additional avenues for future investigation. Despite significant advances in the realm of LGBTQ rights, Mexico continues to have among the highest level of hate crimes against sexual and gender minorities in the world (Langner 2014; Moloney 2019). Despite its relatively small population, Guerrero continues to register as a Mexican state with significant lethal violence against sexual and minorities compared to other parts of the country (García 2018; Letra Ese 2022). Germane to this story, Guerrero is also the site of an entrenched presence of organized criminal networks, themselves entangled with the state and with transnational connections, including both illicit and licit economic activities (ICG 2020; Santaolalla 2023). This project has considered the relationship between violence against sexual and gender minorities and a sociopolitical context where all forms of violence have become a normalized part of daily life.

In this chapter, I provide some additional thoughts about the relationship between social movement, subjectivity, violence, the state and the international at the present time in Guerrero, Mexico, a contribution to a queer theory of violence. Two masks I acquired early in my fieldwork serve as a touchstone to engage with the anti-queer/trans violence that is the focus of this dissertation. The masks, entitled “The Closet” and “The Girl”, ground my articulation of the modern nation-state as an assemblage of power state in a particular place in the early 21st century, shaped by what precedes, supercedes, and borders it, a configuration that can only be understood through a consideration of sexuality and gender. As part of this attempt to formulate an intervention towards a queer

theory of violence, I develop the concept of *the abdicating state* to describe the emergence of this specific iteration of the modern state formed in face of relevant transcontinental neoliberal forces. This dissertation seeks to trace these maps of meaning in relation to violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico. I have argued that the state deploys feminized, sexualized, and queered bodies such that specific geographies of impunity can be understood as both rooted in gender, sexuality and socioeconomic class but also as tied to the state's project. But I have also argued that the state cannot be understood as a container. Building on my concept of the *sallyport* as an illustrative metaphorical tool, I articulate how the context of Guerrero, Mexico, provides insights into the relationship between violence against queer and trans people and GBV, how a context of impunity coupled with complicity leads to perverse engagements of LGBTQ activists with the state, and the ways that homonationalism contributes to a nefarious transnational context that worsens violence experienced by queer and trans people. As argued above, the global north homonationalist framing of Mexico reinforces the sallyport that exacerbates anti-queer/trans violence in Mexico and in Guerrero more specifically.

Learning from folk art

During this research, I came across two hand-made masks made by a local artist that point to the layered violence experienced by queer and trans people in Guerrero. Together, these masks have become a touchstone for this project. According to Carruthers (2001: 356), Mexico's folk art provides a window into the expression of its culture and identity: "[folk art] is rich in primordial ties to place, nature, cultural memory and tradition." Furthermore, the layered interactions of traditional culture, tourism, proximity to northern markets and migration have provoked a hybridization that manifests in folk art in particular ways (Carruthers 2001). Masks are a ubiquitous form of folk art to the present day. They have also been part of Mesoamerican culture since long before the arrival of Europeans, and though undervalued in the nineteenth century, their popularity once again grew as part of a widespread revaluation of traditional Mexican life since the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th Century (Lechuga 1995). To meet the demand for traditional masks by folkloric dancers, collectors, and tourists, they are still

hand crafted in many parts of Mexico, and in small communities the mask-maker is usually seen as someone with specialized knowledge (Lechuga and Sayer 1995).

The metaphor of the mask figures prominently in Mexican Nobel Prize for Literature winner Octavio Paz's (1950/1985) classic poetic work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, in which he explores Mexico's people, character and culture. For Paz, "mask" is a trope that speaks to the impervious face of the national character in face of the unpredictable violence that comes from others:

The Mexican... seems to me to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself: his face is a mask and so is his smile... Even in a quarrel he prefers veiled expressions to outright insults... The Mexican is always remote, from the world and from other people. And also, from himself.

Paz 1950/1985: 29

Paz says that oftentimes, these masks function as a sort of necessary "death mask" in face of the stigma that clings to both the individual Mexican and to "the flesh of his (sic) country" and allows for shutting off from the world of the European that sees Mexico, "on the margin of universal history" (Paz 1950/1985: 63-65). Paz also links this congelation of the face of the Mexican into a mask back to the Conquest and to the imposition of a foreign religion: "The paralysis of colonial society, and its eventual hardening into a pious or ferocious mask, seems to have been the result of a [particular] circumstance . . . : the decadence of European Catholicism as the source of Western culture coincided with its expansion and apogee in New Spain (Paz 1950/1985: 167). Ultimately, Paz concludes that the only way forward is to remove the mask and, "reveal... at last the genuine human being it disguised" (Paz 1950/1985: 171). Though we are left wondering whether this is really possible, or does the mask become fused?¹⁰⁴



Figure 7.1 – Tlapa contingent in 2012 Chilapa Pride march
(Source: W. Payne)

In his book *Behind the Mask: Gender Hybridity in a Zapotec Community*, Alfredo Mirandé (2017) draws on Paz’s metaphor of the mask as a key to his study of the figure of the *Muxe*, a recognized social identity marked by “unfixed gender” - somewhat akin to transgender - which has long been part of Indigenous society in the Isthmus region of Mexico’s Oaxaca state. Mirandé (2017:29) recognizes that “the rules defining gender [are] different in Juchitán...” but then comments in a way that also reveals these prejudices, that, “these young men who masquerade... as women hid[e] their identity behind cultural masks.” Guerrero’s Montaña region—where nearly three-quarters of the population identifies as Indigenous—is adjacent to Oaxaca, and the question of to what extent the cultural continuities evident between these two states include resonances related to gender identity and expression does merit further research.

Mirandé (2017:66) subscribes to Paz’s view that masking has to do with self-protection and notes that sexual and gender minorities in many locations have often needed to “assum[e] a mask and a front...” in order adhere to “a homonormative ideology” they perceived as necessary for survival. Mirandé however later adjusts his view of the *muxe* and proposes that it is really the *mayates* (“men who have sex with muxes but identif[y] as men”) who are “truly in the closet or hiding behind a cultural

mask...” (Mirandé 2017:108.) Finally, Mirandé (2017: 192) concludes that in the cases he studies in Mexico, “mask” is also tied to transformation or even the surmounting of binary gender harnessed to biological sex through a place-specific form of transvestism that has been incorporated into the local culture.



Figure 7.2 – Traditional masks used in 2012 Chilpancingo Pride march
(Source: W. Payne)

In the context of pride marches, masks have been widely used to participate without revealing one’s identity (Quiroga 2000). This is true in Guerrero, as seen in the photo depicting the 2012 Chilapa Pride march (see Figure 7.1) in which the contingent from the town of Tlapa, the principal population centre of the Indigenous Montaña area, are wearing masks in order to obscure their identifiability by the viewing public or in the ubiquitous press photos.¹⁰⁵ Masks are also used in other ways in Guerrero Pride marches, such as the inclusion of traditional regional masks in the Chilpancingo march that depicted colonial figures, masks usually used in place-specific folkloric dances (see Figure 7.2). This example shows how the Pride marches in Guerrero incorporate culturally relevant motifs to tie the LGBTQ community to the local social space. This was previously discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to the use of the concept of *usos y costumbres* by queer/trans activists during a Pride March to evoke colonial period legal

language recognizing Indigenous rights as a precedent for the assertion of queer/trans rights in the present day.



Figure 7.3 - “The Girl” and “The Closet” –
Masks made by Osvaldo Salmerón González
(Source: W. Payne)

Guerrero artist and queer activist Osvaldo Salmerón González produced the folk art masks depicted in Figure 7.3. I first encountered these objects in an event dedicated to the assassinated queer activist Quetzalcoatl Leija Herrera, whose story is told in Chapter 5. I later purchased these two masks from the artist. This pair of masks is useful in helping us to assay the pattern of lethal violence directed against sexual and gender minorities in the context of an emergent LGBTQ rights movement in this part of the world. These iconic masks offer a glimpse into relevant socio-spatial realities. They also help ground our understanding of the modern nation-state as an assemblage of power in palimpsestic connection with that which precedes, supercedes and borders it, as advanced by Puar.

The first mask is entitled *La Niña* [The Girl]. Though it has a skeleton-like face, the mouth formed using small black beads, likely plastic, and the eye-sockets surrounded by sequins painted black, the mask nevertheless evokes a certain sense of frivolity. The forehead is covered with transparent sequins with a large rose-coloured bead in the centre, adorned with a small rosary. The cheeks, nose and chin are painted black and the chin is also adorned with black sequins. A row of large clear beads underlines each eye, the beads set in fuchsia-coloured glitter. The bone-white skeleton face is framed by a black bonnet covered with colourful flowers made from dyed corn husks with a fuchsia-coloured lace veil hanging from the bonnet's brim, partially obscuring the face.

The second mask is disconcerting in the way in which it suggests extreme violence. It is entitled *El Closet* [The Closet] and depicts a pale-coloured face framed with rainbows on both sides. The eyes are covered over by a silver-coloured rectangle certainly meant to look like a metal plate. The rectangle appears as if stitched to the face using thick cord. A second smaller silver-painted rectangle similar to the first covers the mouth and is configured to look as though it is attached to a face using six large screws. Red paint appears to leak from where the cord and screws attach to the face, clearly meant to depict dripping blood. Both masks are covered with a shiny lacquer.

The first mask certainly pays homage to the cartoonesque artwork of José Guadalupe Posada, a prominent Mexican artist from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whose images of dancing skeletons including the figure of La Catrina, an elegantly dressed female skeleton figure, evoke a longstanding preoccupation with death in Mexican art and remain an important Mexican cultural motif. Other contemporary Mexican artists such as Nahum Zenil concerned with the interplay of sexuality, gender and Mexicanness have found inspiration of Posada's work (Kost 2017). The inclusion of this mask as part of the 2012 Sexual Diversity Week in Chilpancingo, Guerrero underlines the palimpsestic importance of evolving depictions of gendered death for this project. In contrast to the decided Mexicanness of the first mask, the second mask and its title evoke the contemporary global movement for LGBTQ rights. The closet and the rainbow are both symbolic tropes adopted from the sexual and gender minority rights movement of the U.S. The brutal depiction of silencing and blinding suggests an almost medieval type of violence but also provokes the viewer to think of the

extreme violence that many parts of Mexico including Guerrero face today, spawned by transnational organized crime and impunity.

Together, these masks can represent the emergent LGBTQ rights movement in Guerrero and the pattern of lethal violence directed against sexual and gender minorities that they face. It is significant that their first public showing took place in the context of a human rights focused event in a city facing almost unprecedented levels of impunity for violent crime of all sorts. Like many recent LGBTQ events in Guerrero, this cultural week benefited from support from government. Furthermore, the associated Pride marches in Chilpancingo, Acapulco and other towns in the state included prominent contingents of all major political parties. It is striking that in a context in which most sexual and gender minorities cannot reasonably rely upon the state to ensure their personal security and bodily integrity, nevertheless there is a certain rapprochement between the sexual and gender minority sectors and the state. At the same time, the socioeconomic space of Guerrero has been formed through a layered colonial history rooted in conquest and tied to transnational trade (for two centuries, the port of Acapulco was a key link between the Spanish colony of the Philippines and Madrid). As has been outlined in earlier chapters, this pattern continues to the present day through tourism, mining, and the transnational drug trade. Acapulco, Ixtapa and Taxco remain important holiday destinations for millions of tourists whose presence reconfigures subjectivities, though the recent U.S. state department's upgraded travel alert is certain to have an impact, claims for mineral rights – mostly by Canadian mining companies - cover much of the state of Guerrero, and most heroin sold in the U.S. is sourced from Guerrero poppy fields controlled by a brutal configuration of organized crime with transnational connections.

An interrogation of impunity

I began this dissertation with a guiding question: *What insights can be generated through a spatial analysis of violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico?* This project goes some distance in identifying key insights that have emerged through an analysis of the experiences of LGBTQ persons in Guerrero in the early 21st century, a process guided by the tenets of Grounded Theory. I also recognize that my

research trajectory crisscrossed other trajectories in ways that revealed some of what Massey calls the “coeval multiplicities” at play. The “research events” that I encountered are better understood through this lens of coeval multiplicities, as the confluence of multiple trajectories. This project has revealed Guerrero as an Agambenian zone of indistinction marked by aleatory sovereignty (Dunn and Cons 2014), as a place shaped by a topology of impunity in relation to violence against sexual and gender minorities.

The evidence included in this research project shows that the ways in which violence is intertwined with gender and sexuality in Guerrero at present is not a reflection of some essential part of this place. Rather, it is the product of socioeconomic processes that link Guerrero to the rest of Mexico and to the rest of the continent, processes that reinforce the state of impunity faced by people in this state, with particularly egregious outcomes for some sexual and gender minorities. Following a description of the conceptual framing of the study (Chapter 1) and a consideration of the methodological approach I have taken (Chapter 2), this dissertation documents the results of this study (Chapters 3-6). Of note, as the project was facilitated through connections with LGBTQ activists, in the ordering of this material it made more sense to begin with a consideration of the third area of inquiry, what queer and trans people do to protect themselves. The primary strategy beyond individual security practices that I learned about was queer/trans activism focused on LGBTQ rights, with a particular emphasis on violence and what the state is not doing about it. As such, Chapter 3 examines the LGBTQ activist history in Guerrero, with a focus on the movement in the capital city, Chilpancingo. Chapters 4-6 provide three distinct accounts of the sort of violence experienced by sexual and gender minorities across the state. Chapter 4 begins with a reflection on my experience of attending a drag event in a prison, and then provides an account of some of the stories I heard as I travelled to towns and small cities across the state. Through a focus on three horrific murders, Chapter 5 provides a close reading of violence experienced by queer and trans people in the state capital, Chilpancingo. Chapter 6 draws on urban scholarship to provide a spatial analysis of the tourist centre of Acapulco and the experiences of violence by sexual and gender minorities in both highly urban and peripheral city spaces.

The project has included three areas of inquiry: First, this project has made a modest contribution to the enormous task of documenting the geographic distribution of

violence against sexual/gender minorities within specific urban areas and across the state of Guerrero. Second, I have queried the role of the state in the violence that informants have recounted to me. Third, I have examined some of the strategies that sexual/gender minorities employ to protect themselves. Throughout, I have examined the impact of transnational dynamics. In this next section, I include some reflections on the findings of this research project in relation to these three areas of inquiry.

Documentation

This research has contributed to an understanding of the circumstances that lend themselves to trans/lesbi/homophobic violence in the context of Guerrero. The march of violence in Guerrero is relentless, as seen through the daily accounts that pepper the newspapers, accompanied by graphic images in the tabloid press. Furthermore, violence against queer and trans people is a piece of a larger story and cannot be isolated from the wider context of impunity.

Using an intuitive process of exploration of what it means for queers to live in a place marked by high levels of process, this project has sought an engagement with the *doing* of feminist geopolitics. Part of this engagement included paying attention to the guidance of trusted advisors from the LGBTQ community in Guerrero. The methodology has included a commitment to an approach shaped by Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006), which includes a commitment to ensure that theorization emerges directly from research findings. This approach also includes a recognition that the researcher is constitutive to the production of the data in that the researcher is always one of the research subjects of any project. Specific methodological practices of Grounded Theory, including theoretical sampling and the emphasis on coding memo writing throughout the research process, led me to consider specific geographical contexts such as that of Xochipala, Tierra Caliente, Chilpancingo, Acapulco, Zihuatanejo, and Ometepepec in greater detail, and to recognize the emergent themes that led to the data-focused chapters of this dissertation as well as several related publications (Payne 2019; Payne 2020; Payne 2023).

This research project included going to six of the seven regions that comprise Guerrero. While violence against queer and trans people has occurred throughout the state, the findings of this study indicate that there are clear patterns. Much of this sort of

violence occurs in cities, especially Acapulco and Chilpancingo. Also, areas especially impacted by the presence of organized crime seemed also to be the sites of higher levels of violence against queer and trans persons, including the cities mentioned above as well as the Tierra Caliente region in the western part of the state. I heard fewer stories about violence against sexual and gender minorities in Costa Grande and Costa Chica (the regions adjacent to the Pacific Ocean, located west and east of Acapulco). I also heard few stories about this sort of violence related to Montaña region, the one region I did not visit.

While the results of this study do not indicate that organized criminal elements are especially motivated by homophobia or transphobia, there is an indirect link in that lethal anti-queer/trans violence does tend to impact people from marginalized groups in ways that overlap with exposure to the violence of organized crime, itself shaped through transnational dynamics. One informant said that there are many queer and trans people being murdered simply because there are many people being murdered across the board. He did not think that there was anything exceptional happening with regards to sexual and gender minorities. Other informants explained that some queer and trans persons also experience marginality through poverty and that the combination makes them more likely to be targeted with lethal violence. Many of the cases of lethal violence involving queer or trans people that I learned about during this project indicated that the victims had linkages to sex work, working-class drinking establishments, brothels, and involvement in street-level drug trafficking, social spaces that have been colonized by organized crime as well. This project also documented the fascinating development of a queer/trans rights movement and its focus on periodic occupation of public space amidst this context of violence and impunity, albeit a social movement that carefully sidesteps the organized crime dimensions of the violence sexual and gender minorities face.

Role of the state

The evidence presented in this project shows a state unwilling and unable to take concrete action to protect the lives of queer and trans people. This project has considered the role of the state in the extreme anti-queer/trans violence in Guerrero. I sought to study the extent to which legal protection might exist in law and whether such protections had

an impact in the lives of sexual/gender minorities. Even as official state policy at the national level and to some extent at the state level has shifted towards a rights regime that includes recognition of sexual and gender minorities, including state legislation against discrimination and the inclusion of anti-queer/trans violence under the rubric of femicide, the evidence did not identify concrete results. In fact, while in Guerrero gender-based violence continues to persist at epidemic levels, the interpretation of what constitutes femicide by law enforcement officials interviewed as part of this project suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of femicide as put forth by Mexican feminist scholars and activists. While the term femicide is meant to recognize that in a machista state women and girls are targeted for violence in a gendered way and that the state is complicit in this violence, in Guerrero there is an indication that state officials involved in the investigation of cases classified as femicide see the designation as a mitigating factor, one in which the violence involved is minimized. Official and journalistic accounts of anti-queer/trans violence tend to easily dismiss it under the category of crime of passion, that the law can largely ignore. The evidence also shows that the lack of an impactful response by the state on widespread gender-based violence in Guerrero is linked to state inaction in relation to anti-queer/trans violence, which to a large extent seems to be a category of gender-based violence in the Guerrero context. The evidence also made clear that a key aspect of the state's inaction in relation to anti-queer/trans violence is tied to the way in which the state itself is intertwined with transnational organized crime, resulting in what I refer to as the *abdicated state*, a state configuration that has to a large extent relinquished its monopoly on the use of force through its imbrication with transnational economic forces including organized crime but also involving international tourism and mining. It is not that the state has abdicated its power, but rather, that it has abdicated its responsibility to protect human life. I am not arguing that Guerrero is a weak state; on the contrary, it is a strong state configuration that makes choices about its deployment of power.

Strategies for protection, including activism

Three interrelated societal shifts have taken place in Guerrero in the first long decade of the 21st Century. First, it is important to note that despite real setbacks and too

often deadly obstacles, there has been a democratization of political processes in this state, part of a larger shift across Mexico. Second, the LGBTQ rights movement has made real inroads including changes in public attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity as well as legislative advances that address rights and discrimination. However, the third sociopolitical arc that continues to impact all Guerrerens is the unleashing of violence associated with organized crime, entrenched through its imbrication with state actors as described above. This project has provided a snapshot of LGBTQ activism in Guerrero, including how this activism has contributed to shifts in societal attitude but also including the extent to which this social movement remains mute on key aspects of the violence experienced by queer and trans people. Therefore, Guerrero's LGBTQ movement can only be understood as unfolding under, or in relation to, the clientelist, corporatist state, a context that Dominguez Ruvalcaba (2015) describes as akin to feudalism because more often than not, organized crime is the law. They underline that gender violence is key to this system: "Gender violence is not merely a supplementary aspect of the violence of organized crime, but rather its form and its meaning" (Dominguez Ruvalcaba 2015: 179).

This research also revealed some specific strategies that individuals take to enhance self-protection and safety. For example, one informant from Tierra Caliente – a remote part of the state especially impacted by the violence of organized crime – told me that violence there comes in waves and that queer and trans people sometimes avoid violence by leaving the region for a few weeks when a wave of violence begins. They head to one of Guerrero's coastal cities as tourists or leave the state altogether, only returning to Tierra Caliente once things have "settled down". This informant acknowledged that this option is only available to a minority of queer and trans persons who have the economic means.

A modest contribution to understanding anti-queer/trans violence

Throughout this research project, I have sought to keep in focus the idea of subjectivity as an event (Puar 2013). This meant paying attention to my own positionality and its impact on the research. A key goal has also been that this project be accountable research, which means that I have sought to focus on themes that are important to the

participants, individually and collectively. This project makes a modest contribution to a queer theory of violence through the advancement of three arguments. First, this project shows how a context of widespread violence and impunity results in the intertwining of gender-based violence with anti-queer/trans violence. Secondly, recognition of this context of violence rooted in organized crime, impunity and state complicity as a form of political violence is key to grappling with the limitations of a human rights approach to anti-queer/trans violence, given that this violence can only be understood in relation to this assemblage. Thirdly, the transnational dimension of the context that has led to this condition of impunity in relation to anti-queer/trans violence is fundamental, something reflected in the concept of the *sallyport* and how homonationalism emanating from the global north helps to maintain the enclosure that too often makes this violence inescapable. This dissertation project involved active participation with queer/trans activists and scholars in Guerrero, Mexico, focused on the normative objective of challenging anti-queer/trans violence. As outlined in the first chapter, this project has been informed by my previous research on anti-queer/trans violence in Colombia (Payne 2016) and has also led to three scholarly publications, entitled, “The researcher-witness of violence against queers: One scholar-activist’s pathway through lament” (Payne 2019), “Queer urban activism under state impunity: Encountering an LGBTTTTI pride archive in Chilpancingo, Mexico” (Payne 2020), and “Territorial inequality driven by tourism: A queer mapping of urban space in Acapulco, Mexico” (Payne 2023). In this section, I offer concluding reflections on these contributions.

Contribution 1

This project has grappled with how to understand the extreme violence against sexual and gender minorities in Guerrero, Mexico. Scholarly and activist intervention in recent decades has centred the concept of hate crime as explanatory in relation to anti-queer/trans violence (Cortez *et al.* 2021). These scholars define hate crime as criminal acts motivated by bias and argue that the purpose of designating hate crimes as either aggravating circumstances or as separate crimes is to “send a strong message that society as a whole is willing to protect its most vulnerable members” (Cortez *et al.* 2021: 116). They underline that Mexico stands out as a country that protects sexuality and gender

minorities from hate crime, that the only countries in the world that have stronger protections are Canada and Uruguay, though they also point out that not all Mexican states have this sort of legal protection articulated in law. Guerrero does not. Furthermore, the cases of violence against queer and trans people in Guerrero that I learned about during this research project indicated a linkage to binary gender more than to hate based on sexual orientation or gender identity (though it is important to also recognize that these concepts are not in themselves mutually exclusive and are connected through a dialectical relationship.) These findings point to the limitations of the concept of hate crime to conceptualize and address violence against queer and trans people and indicates that gender structures are particularly relevant.

Gómez (2007) distinguishes between two uses of physical violence motivated by social prejudice, which they name *hierarchical* and *exclusionary*. A hierarchical use of violence is motivated by the “logic of discrimination [that] seeks to maintain ‘the other’ as inferior while the logic of exclusion seeks to liquidate or erase ‘the other’ from the social world” (Gómez 2007: 4). They argue that in societies that adhere to “compulsory heterosexuality” (most societies, according to Gómez), non-heterosexual identities are usually targeted for exclusion rather than subordination. Because of this, Gómez (2007) argues that strategies designed to deal with discrimination alone may be insufficient and sometimes even detrimental if there is a failure to recognize exclusionary violence. In my research, I was surprised to find out that compulsory heterosexuality seems less entrenched in Guerrero than in other parts of Mexico and North America. Alongside high levels of violence against queer and trans persons, my research also noticed not insignificant levels of acceptance of sexual and gender diversity. It seems to me that Gómez’s lens of subordination, usually associated to gender hierarchy, provides a better frame for understanding anti-queer/trans violence in Guerrero. This follows the work of other scholars, such as Thomas’s (2011) proposal that violence is not a cultural phenomenon but rather the outcome of gendered and racialized class formations, and that of Macías-Gonzalez and Rubenstein (2012), who see societal negotiations regarding gender as key to Mexico’s historical transformations. This link between anti-queer/trans violence and gender also aligns with the assessment of Loken and Hagen (2022:8), who conclude that “states, groups and individuals target gender minorities... because they fail

to express femininity and masculinity in ‘acceptable’ ways...,” that the violence used enacts “gender subordination,” and that simple existence of legal protections in a particular jurisdiction does not mean that social violence and discrimination will be eliminated. This is an apt description of the social space of queers in Guerrero. While my research did detect a widespread pattern of violence against sexual and gender minorities, it is important to note that I did not find evidence of a regulatory purpose for this violence that is employed in a systematic way by organized criminal groups, nor other evidence of hate as a primary motivator.

Contribution 2

The second contribution to a queer theory of violence that this project makes concerns the role of the state in relation to anti-queer/trans violence, including the impact of LGBTQ activism as a motivator of concrete action in relation to this category of violence. I draw on Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s (2016) understanding of Mexico as a modern nation-state shaped by queerness as outlined in the book *Translating the Queer: Body Politics and Transnational Conversations*. This scholar argues that modern nationalism in Latin America is a synthesis of a need for a unified mythic form that draws on many symbolic commonalities, together with a desire to be seen as a “civilized” nation-state. In this context, they say that five main themes of Latin American queer studies have emerged: “First, colonial queerness opens the way to understanding coloniality as a form of reduction of the multiplicity to a binary heterosexual norm Second, modernity installed the notion of the secular nation and the concept of the science of medicine and criminology by which bodies are controlled, punished, secluded, and expelled from communities... Third, LGBT politics... has articulated a revolutionary queer program... Fourth, trans politics emerged from the victimizing, endemic transphobia in Latin America... [and] Fifth, one of the biggest challenges in the field of sexuality is the issue of coercive and forced sexuality” (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2016:167-9). For Domínguez Ruvalcaba, the Mexican state has emerged as a key object of study, given its imbrication with violence and impunity on the one hand and with gender and queerness on the other. Domínguez Ruvalcaba (2015, 2016) says that femicide and anti-queer/trans violence are at the crossroads of this imbrication and that this crossroads

is the site of the very disintegration of the nation-state. This dissertation project has described an example of this disintegration of the state by exposing efforts by state officials to delegitimize the political power of the concept of femicide through the domestication of the concept. The evidently common practice of state officials in Guerrero of relegating cases of lethal violence against both women and sexual and gender minorities to a category of violence named “femicide” and then to link this category to the longstanding trope of “crime of passion” serves to depoliticize such violence. I propose that this relegation serves to further corrupt the state itself.

In research that considers femicidal violence in southeastern Mexico, Frago Lugo (2021) insists that the study of femicide must go beyond a consideration of the victim-perpetrator relationship and the individual motivations involved. This scholar revisits Marcela Lagarde’s original proposal that femicide is part of a continuum of violence that includes structural violence as well as the institutional violence that occurs when those impacted by femicide seek justice and reparations. This scholar calls for a focus on the social conflicts and power dynamics involved. Similarly, the frames of homophobic violence and hate crime against sexual and gender minorities also tend to foreclose a consideration of the roles of structural and institutional violence.

Because the state in Guerrero has effectively renounced its role as the guarantor of the rule of law, I call it an *abdicated state*. While it retains the vestiges of a liberal state configuration, a situation of violence and impunity shows that the accumulation of wealth and power supersede state action to protect the social order. This is not true everywhere in Mexico. In their examination of the role of democratization in the reduction of crime rates in recent years in Mexico City, Luccisano and Macdonald (2017) argue that a mixed model approach that combines law enforcement with social development has been key. They criticize the trope that links poverty to violence, pointing out that higher levels of violence are linked not to places impacted by poverty but rather to contexts marked by inequality and social exclusion. They also push back against the proposal that places experiencing heightened levels of violence must also have weak states, noting that in some cases the state has simply entered into a symbiotic relationship with nonstate violent actors (Luccisano and Macdonald 2017: 136). I contend that Guerrero is a case in point. These authors argue that greater attention is needed to the

ways in which social policies focused on reducing poverty and inequality can lead to a reduction in violence. In the context of the process of democratization that has taken place in recent decades, these authors observe a shift from clientelism (as previously discussed, an exchange of political support for social benefits through the coercive subordination of clients by the state) to a form of semi-clientelism (threat of withdrawal of benefits to ensure political support) that “may be a necessary ingredient in the maintenance of the city’s strong commitment to expanding social programs... [that] may also reduce crime and violence by increasing the presence of the state in the lives of individuals . . . ” (Luccisano and Macdonald 2017: 139). In Guerrero, clientelism remains strong. Furthermore, to some extent LGBTQ organizing has been complicit with this clientelism through collaboration with the clientelist state instead of joining forces with other sectors of society seeking greater social equality. The result is lip-service by the state to the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities without significant action in response to lethal violence directed towards sexual and gender minorities.

In their study of violence in Michoacan, the Mexican state that lies directly west of Guerrero similarly impacted by organized crime, Maldonado and Guerrero (2022) examine how victims and others impacted by forced disappearance, gender violence, and assaults on LGBTQ people and sex workers have tried to effect change. These authors examine how activist organizations from these sectors have used a combination of formal legal instruments combined with public pressure through the media and by lobbying officials and elected representatives. Maldonado and Guerrero (2022: 78) coined the term “sociolegal activism” to describe this multipronged approach to fight the lethal combination of criminal violence and institutional violence (including acts of violence committed by state institutions as well as state obstruction of activist efforts to seek redress) that their members have faced. Although these authors concede that some advances have been made, they conclude that these advances have not yet made a significant difference (Maldonado and Guerrero 2022: 90):

[I]n light of criminal and institutional violence, the potential of sociolegal activism to effect change is limited. Organizations may achieve laws, rulings, or recommendations, but these do not directly result in important structural changes, better social conditions, or a real reduction in rates of violence or stigmatization.

These authors acknowledged that LGBTQ activists have made legislative and institutional progress, including legal recognition of same-sex marriage and a gender identity law that allows for the changing of gender identity on official documents, but lament that these accomplishments are of little import. Maldonado and Guerrero (2022: 90) conclude that “thick webs of impunity and corruption... directly affect the potential for accessing justice.” This limited influence is similar to what I observed in the case of Guerrero. Jean Franco (2013) coined the term “extreme masculinity” for the confluence of massacre, rape and desecration of bodily remains tied to layered transnational dynamics of the sort that is engulfing Guerrero and other parts of Mexico. This scholar links this configuration of masculinity back to a particular face of modernity rooted in the conquest of the Americas that she calls “cruel modernity”. Building on Franco’s ideas, the concept of the *abdicated state* is useful to describe the particular assemblage of a liberal performance of rights-language detached from material consequence of violence that exists in Guerrero, one that seems to result in this strange tight association between the state and LGBTQ activists because it allows for a public performance of adherence to liberal values without manifest difference in the lives of marginalized subjects. Stanley (2021: 14) argues that this state of affairs is not surprising because what we have come to call the “liberal state” is “more precisely the para-colonial democratic state [that] can never be anything other than an engine of brutality.”

In contrast to Stanley’s rejection of any possibility for the redemption of the modern liberal state as a potential vehicle to challenge the oppression of queer lives, in a book entitled *A Queer Theory of the State*, Huneke (2023) argues for a realignment of queer theory away from radical approaches that have little interest in the state and favours a more pragmatic approach brings together its anti-normative impulses to a recognition of an empirical need for the state. While Huneke (2023: 42) values queer theory’s tradition of exposing the hypocrisy of the liberal state, this scholar laments the resultant paradox: “a boundless faith in the utopian horizon of queerness yoked to an absolute rejection of humans’ capacity to govern themselves.” This scholar argues that many radical queer theorists view the state as a “monolithic whole” and calls for a rethinking of that view and for recognition that the state is “a muddled assemblage of competing and conflicting

parts that can be pressured, threatened, and cajoled into acting in the interests of the marginalized” (Huneke 2023: 50). Ultimately, this scholar calls for a queer state, one that is deeply democratic, both in terms of democratic means but also democratic ends (that prioritizes the common weal). However, Huneke’s optimistic prognosis for the future of a queer state takes the global north context as the standard and fails to grapple with the transnational dimensions of state configurations experienced by sexual and gender minorities living in liberal states in the global south. This leads to the third contribution towards a queer theory of violence that this dissertation seeks to offer, a recognition that the transnational matters.

Contribution 3

I have developed the concept of the *sallyport* to capture my argument that a queer theory of violence cannot ignore the transnational. Both the historical palimpsests that have shaped Guerrero as a sociospatial space, as well as the present day transnational dynamics related to Mexico’s place in North America, are important to understanding the confluence of violence that queer and trans people in Guerrero face. My take on this aspect of a queer theory of violence has benefited from Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s consideration of the ways in which Mexico has been shaped through colonialism and neo-colonialism. This scholar sees modernity as a process in which ideas flow through the networks formed through free-trade imperialism, including racialized ideas about the body and about sexuality (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2007). In *Translating the Queer*, this scholar outlines how processes of coloniality foreclosed many expressions of sexuality and gender through the importation of modern processes of subjection of the body. Domínguez Ruvalcaba recognizes that LGBT and trans politics in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America do provide a “revolutionary queer program” that is informed by transnational ties, though laments that transnational queerness is also linked to the imposition of “coercive and forced sexuality” for some Mexicans through sex slavery and sex service (Domínguez Ruvalcaba 2016: 168). This dissertation project exposes how anti-queer/trans violence in Guerrero is linked to transnational queerness in ways that leave some bodies eclipsed from the option of consumer in the transnational neoliberal marketplace and instead are relegated to what Domínguez Ruvalcaba calls “consumed

bodies”. The metaphor of the sallyport interrogates the physical and metaphorical spaces of examination to which many queer and trans folk in Guerrero are confined, the ways in which the political structures strip some people naked through enclosure (c.f. Haritaworn *et al.* 2018). The concept of the *sallyport* seeks to expose the congelation of power relations that permit nothing more than a bare minimum and anemic version of the autonomy promised by liberalism. At the time of writing, I became aware of a recent announcement by Mexico City’s head of government (i.e. mayor) Martí Batres¹⁰⁶ regarding planned legislation that will punish transfemicide—femicide that involves the murder of a transwoman—with 70-year prison terms (Sosa 2024, August 24). While on the one hand, this legislative change signals a significant societal shift in how a particularly egregious form of anti-queer/trans violence is managed, at the same time I am left wondering if the further institutionalization of the concept of femicide, like hate crime before it and elsewhere, will serve to positively enhance the lives of sexual and gender minorities or if this change will simply provide a discursive tool for the further strengthening of the para-colonial democratic state.

Limits, challenges, and recommendations for future research

It is important to reflect on the limitations and shortcoming of this dissertation project. A key limitation was the object of study itself, the high level of lethal violence and the related situation of near complete impunity for homicide and other crime. From the beginning, the research plan sought to recognize this limitation in terms of both the ethics process and the safety plan to try to ensure that those who participated in the research were not put in further danger because of this research. A key element of the research plan involved incorporating the direction of trusted local advisors from the activist community, both to help direct the focus on the research process itself but also to mitigate possible danger for the researcher. This meant that the research plan precluded any significant attempt to engage directly with perpetrators of violence against sexual and gender violence or with known participants in organized crime. This also meant that it was important to act with great care in relation to people associated with the state, precisely because of the ways in which the state apparatus is intertwined with the second state, organized crime structured by clientelism.

Over the course of the field work stage of this project and since, the context of violence has continued to worsen. As such, while this dissertation project has documented widespread anti-queer/trans violence in Guerrero, there are nevertheless significant gaps in knowledge because of this limitation. Fractures among LGBTQ activists in the state, certainly related to this context, also likely meant that even people who agreed to be interviewed for this research project were circumspect regarding some aspects of the subject of inquiry. This research project was also framed from the beginning as accountable research: the methodology of Grounded Theory was used to shape the direction of the research in an iterative way that was to be accountable to the community experiencing anti-queer/trans violence. Given the worsening security situation, it was not possible to present research findings in Guerrero, as had been planned.

While my own outsider positionality did make it possible to conduct aspects of this research that may have been riskier or impossible for someone from Guerrero, at the same time this meant that I lacked everyday knowledge about social relations. As a result, I certainly missed important information while conducting participant-observation research and interviews. Interviewing itself demands a sophisticated set of skills, something that is accentuated by a commitment to the open-ended inquiry mode required of grounded research. Over the course of conducting more than four dozen in-depth interviews I tried to finetune my skills regarding how to ensure that the exchange was rooted in shared power and a common goal of creating knowledge about anti-queer/trans violence. I was not always successful. Furthermore, in the analysis of the interview transcripts, I became aware that the complex community ties and the context of widespread impunity meant that maintaining anonymity demanded that I sometimes erased the interview subjects themselves from the record to ensure that the information they shared with me will not be linked back to them. Also, I abandoned my initial plan to use the technique of mental mapping when some research subjects seemed uncomfortable with it, though in retrospect the maps that four research subjects did produce have proved to be especially useful and I wonder if further experimentation with the technique might have been productive. Another sad reality of this research process is that at least five research subjects connected to this project have died prematurely since the initiation of

this research process, including two who were murdered in crimes associated with their sexual identities. While I feel certain that their deaths were unrelated to this research project, their untimely passings did foreclose any possibility of follow-up.

This research project also encountered significant challenges in securing reliable data from state sources regarding the field of study. Significant efforts to triangulate information from informants with official data were generally unsuccessful. Wil Pansters, a seasoned researcher of violence in Mexico comments on this challenge: “Whereas citizens worry about increasing levels of violence and insecurity, official statistics on especially nonlethal crime and violence in Mexico are generally considered untrustworthy and believed to be well below real levels” (Pansters 2012: 12). Other scholars and journalists confirmed that getting this sort of data from official sources is a longstanding challenge in Mexico and particularly in Guerrero. As a result, my initial plan to create a list of sexual and gender minorities who have been murdered in Guerrero has not been possible because of the significant gaps in knowledge. Two other dimensions of the initial plan for this research project, the inclusion of the dimension of Indigeneity and the plan to include a secondary study of an activist organization in Cali, Colombia as a foil for this study of anti-queer/trans violence in Guerrero, proved unworkable given the restraints of a solo dissertation project.

This consideration of the limitations of this research project and the challenges faced over the course of the dissertation process also indicates some possibilities for future research. An important area of further research is additional consideration of the usefulness of the concepts of homophobic/transphobic violence and hate crime motivated by sexuality or gender. I do remain convinced that one way to gain additional insights into this area of violence is to gain additional knowledge regarding the perspectives and realities of perpetrators. This would shed additional light on anti-queer/trans violence, though clearly careful work is needed to figure out a research design that would allow for that sort of research.

I also think it is important to ask to what extent do the concepts of homo/transphobic violence and hate crime really encapsulate the lethal harm to which they are attached? Perhaps a new term is needed. Calling these killings homophobic or transphobic homicides or hate crimes may preclude deeper understanding by focusing the

gaze too much on the individual perpetrator. Of course, even in this consideration of the need for additional explanatory terminology, the way in which the concept of femicide—itsself coined to push beyond the myopic view of individual motivations—has been coopted by the state in Guerrero, is a sobering indication of the limits of these conceptual efforts. In their consideration of femicide in southern Mexico, Frago Lugo (2021) calls for additional research into the matter of reparation and apology at the societal level and into the suffering that what Frago Lugo terms the “indirect victims”, those who face roadblocks in seeking redress in the criminal justice system. This scholar’s recommendations also apply in the case of anti-queer/trans violence.

Final thoughts

I have grappled with how an undertaking such as a dissertation project focused on lethal violence might manifest in concrete change. Sontag (2003: 40) asks, “What does it mean to protest suffering, as distinct from acknowledging it?” The implication is that an ethical approach to suffering must include a normative dimension. She observes that there seems to be an eagerness to view bodies in pain that is nearly as strong as the desire to see them naked. Sontag (2003: 42) goes on: “Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of... extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it... or those who could learn from it.” By looking at violence and its effects, we acquire an ethical responsibility to act. Judith Butler (2010: 77), following the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, makes a similar point: “it is the face of the other that demands from us an ethical response.” This dissertation has sought to increase understanding of violence faced by sexual and gender minorities in a particular place, with the goal of contributing in at least some small way to its reduction.

This dissertation opened with an account of the 2023 murder of Ulises Salvador Nava Juárez, an LGBTQ scholar-activist from the Autonomous University of Guerrero who was gunned down while attending a political event focused on the rights of queer and trans people at the other end of the country, in the city of Aguascalientes. Three weeks after what can only be characterized as a public execution, authorities announced that they had identified the likely culprit yet insisted that any more details including the name of the accused needed to be kept secret (Díaz 2023). A year later, at the time of

writing, no further clarification of Nava Juárez’s murder has come to light. A few months after Nava Juárez’s murder, Mexico’s first openly non-binary judge, Jesús Ociel Baena Saucedo, was themselves murdered in a crime that has not been clarified to the satisfaction of Mexican LGBTQ activists (Sanabria Pacas 2024). In their last public appearance prior to being murdered, Baena Saucedo denounced the lack of progress in solving Nava Juárez’s killing. The story told by this research project continues to unfold. In their consideration of anti-queer/trans violence, Stanley (2021: 17, 20) underlines the importance of recognizing how anti-trans/queerness “spectacularly endures” amidst “the ruins of modernity’s still unfolding catastrophe,” and calls on us to participate in the end of anti-queer/trans violence. While the dead are likely indifferent to our efforts, the living and future generations are not.

¹⁰⁴ Alison Crosby posed this question about the fusing of the mask; This made me think of Gloria Wekker’s (2006) conclusions about the impact of colonialism on subjectivity.

¹⁰⁵ The Tlapa contingent told me this after I took the photo.

¹⁰⁶ Batre was nominated by Mexican president Claudia Sheinbaum to replace her as Head of Government of Mexico City when she resigned to pursue her presidential campaign.

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Appendix 1 [Map of State of Guerrero, showing regions and bordering states]



Source: Official Bulletin of the Government of the State of Guerrero, October 10, 2023

Appendix 2 - Maps are made through journeys (A reflection on a research process)

The painted books of Mesoamerica represent an amazing legacy of the religious and historical knowledge acquired by pre-Columbian people of Mexico and northern Central America... The vast majority of them were [however] destroyed in the misguided efforts of early Spanish priests to stamp out all vestiges of the heathen religions of the native peoples.”

Bruce E. Byland, p.xiv



Figure A2.1 – Guerrero: A queer research trajectory
(AKA a scholar’s journey refracted through a Mexica lens)

As part of my attempt to take Massey’s consideration of space seriously, throughout this research process I have grappled with how to represent the research journey I have taken. This has led me to make a map that seeks to depict the physical, intellectual and affective travels involved in this investigation. My cartographic effort has drawn on Massey’s thinking about space and mapping and her attention to the ways in

which European maps and Mexica depictions of space speak at cross-purposes because they are fundamentally based on different logics. I also rely on secondary commentaries to incorporate some specific elements of pre-colonial Mexica documents in my own cartographic project as an exercise in trying to shift my own way of seeing the space that is Guerrero. A notable scholar of pre-contact Mexica documents Bruce E. Byland (1993) argues that while no pre-Columbian maps—at least in the sense of two-dimensional depictions of landscape in a form recognizable in a western register—survived the widespread destruction of pre-Columbian written materials, representations of space in the few surviving codices as well as the many maps produced in the early post-conquest period by Indigenous scribes to assist colonial tax collection indicate that it is likely that such documents existed.

Massey (2005) reminds us that Mexica thought did not conceive of space and time as abstract but instead as rooted in the concrete. As such, she underlines the importance of the use of footprints to represent trajectory in spatial representations in both pre-contact and early colonial period Indigenous documents (see also Berdan and Anawalt 1997: 147; and Arellano Hoffman *et al.* 2002: 139.) Massey points out that trajectory is a key element of Mexica understanding of cosmology and contrasts this vision of space/time with the colonizer view of Indigenous space and culture as static, directionless, simply waiting to be impacted by the directionality imposed by Hernán Cortés or for that matter by his counterparts in the present day. I seek to incorporate this thinking into the mapping of my research journey not to exoticize the space of Guerrero but rather to recognize different, even competing, epistemologies and ontologies.

The process of making this map (Figure A2.1) has helped me characterize the fieldwork journey related to this project. I carefully re-read my field notes, coding them as I read, in order to remember the insights that had occurred to me during the sometimes draining process over the course of several fieldwork stints of researching, so many meetings with people and so many events attended, but also the entering into the relevant spaces of the everyday related to the violence that marks the lives of sexual and gender minorities in the state of Guerrero. In the making of this map, I also sought to pay attention to pre-Columbian concepts regarding journeys, specifically the Mexica maxim that journeys only go forward.

Also, as part of this process I turned to the tools of prehispanic Indigenous map-making, starting with amate, a type of bark paper with pre-colonial roots. Amate was nearly lost because of a colonial era ban, but its production was revised in the mid-twentieth century by Otomi people in the state of Puebla and has flourished because of uptake by Nahua artists in the state of Guerrero. My paints are modern – acrylic – though I chose colours that approximate the pallet used in various codices from the pre-Columbian and early colonial period of Mexico that I have consulted, especially the Borgia codex, made famous by Alexander Von Humboldt who came across it in Rome shortly after his early 19th century visit to the state of Guerrero (Byland 1993: xiv). The symbols and images I have copied, borrowed and created, seek to communicate something about the meaning-making involved in this research process in a decidedly syncretic assemblage.

In this effort, I relied on photographic images of the original Borgia codex, as well as the 20th century restoration of this manuscript by Díaz and Rodgers (1993, with commentary by Byland). According to Byland, the Borgia Codex, named for a Catholic cardinal who acquired it in the late 18th century, was in fact painted a few decades before the arrival of the Spanish somewhere in Mexico's central highlands, likely in what is now the state of Puebla (which borders Guerrero on the northeast). The document made its way to Italy in the early colonial period, thus escaping the Spanish large-scale destruction of pre-colonial texts, and ultimately ended up in the Apostolic Library of the Vatican two centuries ago where it remains. Scholars consider the Borgia Codex a key document among the surviving painted books of Mesoamerica and surmise that it was used to document religious beliefs, to provide information on the supernatural characteristics of different regions of the world, to guide ceremonies for the installation of new rulers, and to divine the future.

The Borgia Codex was a prognostication tool to help predict what will happen in the future. It provided descriptions of the supernatural forces and deities that influence the world and outlined the formal ceremonial processes for the establishment of new rulers (Byland 1993). This is consistent with the scholarly observation that Mesoamerican thinking saw history as cyclical, predictable and alterable (Joyce Marcus, 1992: 9). The Borgia Codex represents the earth, the plane of our existence, as a disk with five cardinal

directions, the four standard cardinal directions plus the centre, “a kind of linchpin connecting the four directions and linking them to the abodes of the gods above and below the disc of the Earth” (Diaz and Rodgers 1993: xix). I propose that we think of the objects of social science as the gods of our day. As such, we can see things like sexuality, identity, subjectivity, governmentality, violence, power, borders, mobility, the state, and so on, as our deities, forces that we create and which create us.

Given that this research project was initiated in response to the killing of a prominent queer rights activist named for the prehispanic deity Quetzalcoatl, I have tried to pay particular attention to this archetypal figure whose name translates as “the feathered serpent” and who is considered the god of rebirth and renewal. Quetzalcoatl Leija’s parents were professional class mestizos, Mexicans who in their youth associated with leftist movements. Because of their interest in prehispanic history, they named all but one of their four children after Indigenous deities, including their oldest son Quetzacoatl, who would provide important leadership to the sexual and gender rights movement in Guerrero until his untimely death.¹⁰⁷ The deity Quetzalcoatl figures prominently in the Borgia Codex as a creator of the world and maker of civilization, so it seems notable that his namesake sought to be a transformative force in his own day (Byland 1993: xv).¹⁰⁸

My map relies on the outline of the modern state of Guerrero, as per boundaries defined since the mid-19th century. Depicted on the bottom left side of the frame of my map is the replica that I produced of the Borgia codex depiction of Xochipilli. This deity from the pre-contact Indigenous Mexican pantheon sometimes called the Prince of Flowers is considered the patron of homosexuals and male prostitutes (Díaz and Rodgers 1993: 65).¹⁰⁹ My inclusion of this figure is meant to recognize how queers have long played a notable role in Mexican society, since prior to contact. On the right side of the frame towards the top is my rendition of the Borgia Codex depiction of the deity Mictecacihuatl, the Queen of Mitlan, the place of the dead (Diaz and s 1993: 60). Together with her spouse, she is said to rule this place and has the specific role of guarding the bones of those who have passed on, and of presiding over the related rituals. I included this figure in recognition of the honoured place given to the concept of death in Mexican society, since prehispanic times.

A prominent element of the Borgia Codex is the use of enclosures to bound scenes or sequences. My own map is framed by an enclosure inspired by the one on Codex Borgia's plate 29, "formed by the body of a goddess of death" (Byland 1993: xxiii). Notice the intertwined lines that are embedded in the enclosure wall. In my map, these are meant to depict the sallyport space of violent scrutiny that I argue is crucial to understanding the dialectic relationship between the inside and the outside of geopolitical spatial formations regardless of scale. This part of my meditation is meant to point to the ways in which the lives of sexual and gender dissidents in Guerrero are structured by restrictions at the scale of the body, of the community, but particularly at the scale of the region, the nation and the transnational.

The Borgia Codex includes sequence of enclosures that culminate in the birth of Quetzalcoatl from between two flint knives that are embedded in the body of the Goddess of Death (See plates 29-32; Byland 1993: xxiv). Byland proposes that Quetzalcoatl, in keeping with his role as creator of the most recent iteration of civilization, can thus "emerge ready for what is to come." Enrique Florescano (1999:1) says that "Quetzalcoatl is a great mythical figure evoking wisdom and civilization [who is] reborn during each period of history, but with a different face each time around... [who] retains the halo of the ancestral aura but also possesses new meanings and a psychic charge that intermingles present yearnings with reverberations from the past." The representation of Quetzalcoatl included in this sequence in this prehispanic document inspired my own depiction of this deity at the top-left corner of my own map. I included this figure to recall the 21st Century queer activist Quetzalcoatl Leija, someone who symbolizes the emergent societal structures formed through the struggle for queer liberation inflected with ancestral wisdom, event amidst the present-day crucible of death that encompasses Guerrero.

A key finding of the research that informs this dissertation is the role played by LGBTQ community leaders in reshaping Guerrerren society, even amidst so much strife. The narratives I collected illustrate an effort to enter the messiness of the political with the goal of changing history, at least in relation to the place of sexual and gender minorities within Guerrerren society. Byland and Pohl (1994: 156) propose that the Borgia Codex's plates 35-38 constitute instructions regarding how to elevate someone to the role

of community leader, underlining that, “the codices chronicle a prescribed charter of symbolic political behaviour...” A prominent element of this section of the Borgia Codex is a road marked by footprints depicting the transport of a sacred bundle from a “Temple of Heaven” to where it would be ritually opened as part of the establishment of a new political regime, a process that culminates in self-sacrifice on plate 53. In my mapping, this “sacred bundle” in the present day is the pursuit of a political configuration based on human rights in face of violence and impunity, a pursuit that in the case of Quetzalcoatl Leija also leads to self-destructive behaviour that is a factor in his death by homicide.

One of the various symbols I used to represent aspects of the space I encountered through my research journey is the *pendón*, a religious- or military-style standard, which I use to symbolize LGBTQ Pride parades in which I participated. This symbolism is based on a conversation I had with a trusted informant in April 2013. We had travelled to the town of Tixtla to attend a Pride parade that was to be followed by a *travesti* beauty pageant. My informant was an older, educated man originally from the Dominican Republic who has lived in Guerrero for many years. On many occasions he provided a wealth of insight into the dimensions of the cultural space that were not self-evident, at least to me. That day, I asked him why he thought LGBTQ marches and parades seem to be particularly welcomed in the towns and cities of Guerrero, in contrast to other parts of the country and beyond. He explained that in Guerrero, especially in the Centre Region (the capital city of Chilpancingo and adjacent areas) there is a long history of using parades, called *pendóns*, to announce events. He said that the word comes from the word *pregón*, which means ‘announcement’ and that this penchant for parades comes from the colonial period tradition of announcing that a ship from the Philippines will soon arrive in Acapulco. This was a way of letting people know that the *feria* (fair), where wares from across the ocean would be available for sale, would soon begin. Because of this history, he said there is a cultural disposition towards parades, one that has coalesced with a particular configuration of gender and sexuality that is somewhat distinct in this part of southern Mexico. The standards representing some of the Pride marches on my map are emblazoned with rainbow colours.

I have used the symbol for ‘thief’ from the Mendoza Codex to represent the way in which organized crime is reshaping the space of Guerrero (Berdan and Anawalt 1997:

236). I have located this glyph - which represents the cutting of a lock of hair using an obsidian blade - in two locations, outside of Guerrero's northern border (to represent the incursion of cartel violence from beyond the state), and in the western part of the state to represent the reconfiguration of many corners of the state through drug trafficking organizations. The glyph of two flags and three dots just above the town of Ayotzinapa signifies forty-three in the pre-Columbian number system and represents the student-teachers from the teachers' college in that town who were forcibly disappeared in 2014 (Berdan and Anawalt 1997). The presence of transnational mining companies is represented by the Mendoza Codex glyph for gold dust, one type of tribute paid by some tributary towns in what is now Guerrero to Mexica rulers prior to conquest. This is depicted as a gourd bowl with dots above it (Berdan and Anawalt 1997: Folio 39r). A seashell of the coast of Acapulco, representing the role of tourism in this state, is based on the Mendoza Codex glyph for the tributary item of shells required of communities in what is now the Costa Grande of Guerrero (Berdan and Anawalt 1997: Folio 38r). Poppy growing is represented using the Mendoza Codex glyph for flowers (Marcus 1992: 122). Kyle (2015) attributes poppy production for staving off the depopulation of rural Guerrero. The shield symbol in the Costa Chica region is based on a Mendoza Codex glyph associated with this region and symbolizes the self-defence movement in Guerrero that is especially strong in this area. Finally, I have placed a Mixtec glyph representing a Catholic church to represent the way in which that religion is part of forming this space (Marcus 1992: 172).

This brief mediation on the map that I created is meant to ponder the palimpsests involved in the social processes considered in this research.

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Appendix 3 - Informed Consent (Spanish and English versions)

Consentimiento informado

Titulo de investigación: Muerte y resistencia: Lo queer ante la violencia y la impunidad en Guerrero, Mexico

Investigador: William Payne, Candidato a doctorado, Departamento de Geografía, York University, Toronto, Canadá. Correo electrónico: wpayne@yorku.ca

Supervisor de tesis: Dr. Jennifer Hyndman

Propósito de la investigación:

Este proyecto de investigación está enfocado en la situación de minorías sexuales y minorías de género (hombres gay, lesbianas, bisexuales, personas transgenero, transexuales, travestis, intersexuales etc.) que viven en lugares donde el nivel de violencia generalizada y de impunidad es alta. El objetivo es entender las formas en que las minorías sexuales y minorías de género se ven afectadas por la violencia, para comprender las razones por las que estén tan afectadas y para entender sus estrategias en relación con esta violencia. Este proyecto de investigación está enfocada en el estado de Guerrero (México) y también incluye un estudio limitado del trabajo de activistas trans enfrentando una realidad parecida en Cali, Colombia. Esta investigación está interesada en las experiencias de todas las minorías sexuales y de género, incluyendo aquellas que no han sido directamente afectadas por la violencia, así como las/los que han estado más directamente implicadas, por ejemplo, porque han sido víctima de violencia motivada por la trans/lesbi/homofobia o porque han estado asociado con un grupo armado que puede o no haber estado involucrado en esta clase de violencia. El investigador realizará entrevistas individuales y organizará grupos focales, así como desarrollo de técnicas de observación-participación directa en los sitios de campo. Los resultados de esta investigación serán presentados en una tesis doctoral y también se utilizan en otras publicaciones académicas y no académicas.

¿Qué se le pide que haga en la investigación?

Durante esta entrevista, se le pedirá a los participantes compartir su propio conocimiento de este tema. No se requerirá incriminarse usted mismo si usted ha estado directamente involucrado en actividad criminal. Se espera que la entrevista tenga una duración aproximada de dos horas. En algunas ocasiones, se les pedirá a los participantes atender una entrevista de seguimiento, cuya duración será de aproximadamente una hora, y en una fecha posterior a la primera, después de que el investigador ha tenido la oportunidad de revisar la transcripción y notas relacionadas con la entrevista inicial.

Riesgos y molestias:

Durante el desarrollo del proyecto, el investigador llevará a cabo esta entrevista de tal manera que no se ponga en riesgo la integridad de ninguno de los participantes como resultado del consentimiento para participar en esta entrevista. El investigador estará dispuesto a oír hablar de las medidas y acciones adicionales que se pueden tomar para

asegurar que el proceso de desarrollo de la entrevista no represente ningún riesgo personal. La participación en esta investigación también podrían desencadenar los recuerdos de traumas del pasado que le llevan a buscar apoyos de salud mental, y entonces el investigador está dispuesto a ayudar en la identificación de los servicios disponibles a petición.

Posibles beneficios:

Este proyecto de investigación tiene la intención de contribuir a una mayor comprensión de las formas en que la violencia afecta a las poblaciones vulnerables a fin de contribuir en la reducción de la violencia en el futuro. Todo participante, tendrá el derecho a pensar por qué está eligiendo participar en esta investigación. Como participante, usted podrá decidir participar porque está esperando contribuir a que este proyecto logre sus metas, además de encontrar un beneficio emocional o psicológico para compartir el conocimiento que tenga sobre este tema.

Participación voluntaria:

Su participación en la investigación es completamente voluntaria y usted puede optar por dejar de participar en cualquier momento. También puede optar por no responder a preguntas específicas. La decisión de un participante de no responder a preguntas específicas o no seguir participando no influirá en su relación o en la naturaleza de su relación con el investigador, o con el personal de la Universidad de York, en la actualidad o en el futuro.

Retirada de estudio:

Usted puede dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo, si así lo decide. Su decisión de dejar de participar, o negarse a responder a las preguntas particulares, no afectará a su relación con el investigador, la Universidad de York, o cualquier otro grupo relacionado con este proyecto. En el caso de que usted se retire del estudio, todos los datos asociados recogidos serán destruidos inmediatamente siempre que sea posible. Si usted decide dejar de participar, seguirá siendo elegible para recibir cualquier compensación comprometida para los gastos de viaje previamente acordados en relación a la participación en este proyecto si aplica.

Confidencialidad:

Los datos serán recolectados a través de notas escritas a mano y, si está de acuerdo, por medio de una grabación digital. No hará marcadores de identificación, incluyendo su nombre, asociadas con cualquier documentación o grabaciones de entrevistas u otras interacciones con el investigador. Estos datos se guardarán en armarios cerrados con llave y los documentos electrónicos también estarán protegidos por contraseñas seguras y con cifrado. Las transcripciones y notas de campo relacionados con esta entrevista sólo serán revisados por el investigador y por su comité de supervisión. Cada esfuerzo se hará para eliminar los marcadores de identificación al hacer uso de elementos de esta entrevista en las publicaciones o informes por escrito por el investigador con el fin de guardarle a usted en el anonimato y para asegurar que su información personal es confidencial. Los datos se conservarán durante cinco años después de la finalización del proyecto de investigación y

al finalizar este periodo, ésta será destruida. La confidencialidad será proporcionada a la medida de lo posible por la ley.

¿Preguntas sobre la investigación?

Si usted tiene preguntas acerca de la investigación en general, o su papel en el estudio le invitamos a ponerse en contacto con el investigador o con la supervisora del proyecto. William Payne es el investigador y puede ser contactado en wpayne@yorku.ca. La doctora Jennifer Hyndman es la supervisora del proyecto y puede ser contactada por correo electrónico a jhyndman@yorku.ca o por teléfono al +001-416-736-5663. Las preguntas también se pueden dirigir a la oficina del programa de Geografía de la Universidad de York en +001-416-736-5107.

Este proyecto de investigación ha sido revisado y aprobado por el Subcomité de vigilancia de investigación que incluye participantes humanos de la Junta de vigilancia de ética de la Universidad de York y se ajusta a las normas de ética de la investigación de las directrices del Canadian Tri-Council. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta acerca de este proceso o sobre sus derechos como participante en el estudio, puede comunicarse con la Gerente Senior y Asesor de Política de la Oficina de Ética de la Investigación, 5to piso, York Research Tower, Universidad de York, tel: +001-416-736-5914 o por correo electrónico: ore@yorku.ca

Derechos legales y firmas:

Yo _____, doy mi consentimiento para participar en el estudio titulado: “Muerte y resistencia: Lo queer ante la violencia y la impunidad en Guerrero, Mexico,” realizado por William Payne. He comprendido la naturaleza e importancia social de este proyecto y deseo participar en el mismo bajo mi propia voluntad. Al firmar este formulario mis derechos legales permanecerán intactos y no renuncio a ninguno de ellos. Mi firma abajo indica mi consentimiento. Entiendo que también puedo indicar mi consentimiento verbalmente y sin necesidad de firmar este documento e informando al investigador que doy mi consentimiento aunque rechace firmar el mismo.

Firma: _____
Nombre de participante:

Fecha

Firma _____
Investigador principal: William Payne

Fecha

Al marcar esta casilla, también doy mi consentimiento para la grabación de las entrevistas. Por privacidad, sólo el investigador y la persona responsable de la transcripción de material de la entrevista tendrán acceso a la grabación.

Guía

*¿Qué sabe usted acerca de la violencia contra las minorías sexuales y de género en _____? ¿Sabe de casos específicos en los que las minorías sexuales fueron los objetivos de la violencia? ¿Quién fue el responsable de la violencia? ¿Cuál fue el propósito de la violencia? Por favor, dar detalles y ejemplos.

*¿Cómo ha evolucionado la situación general de violencia en _____ en los últimos años? ¿Cómo afecta esto a las minorías sexuales/de género? ¿Qué hacen las minorías sexuales para reducir la posibilidad de violencia en sus vidas en este contexto de incertidumbre?

* ¿Qué sabe usted acerca del movimiento por los derechos de las minorías sexuales en _____? ¿Qué avances y retrocesos se han producido? ¿Qué sabe usted acerca de los cambios en el nivel de protección legal a las minorías sexuales/de género por parte del Estado? ¿Qué impacto tienen estos cambios en la legislación o en la política para las minorías sexuales/de género? Por favor, dar detalles y ejemplos.

* ¿Se muevan o cambian de lugar de hogar las minorías sexuales/de género dentro / saliendo de _____? ¿De qué manera están relacionados estos movimientos con la violencia contra las minorías sexuales? ¿Usted conoce casos en los que las minorías sexuales no han estado libres a hacer una mudanza o cambio de hogar que querían hacer?

Informed Consent

Study Name: Death and Resistance: Queerness in the face of violence and impunity in Guerrero, Mexico

Researcher: William Payne, Doctoral candidate, Department of Geography, York University, Toronto, Canada. Contact info: wpayne@yorku.ca

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Hyndman

Purpose of the research:

This research project concerns the situation of sexual/gender minorities (trans persons, lesbians, gay men, and so on) living in places where the levels of generalized violence and impunity are high. The goal is to understand the ways in which sexual/gender minorities are affected by violence and to understand the reasons why they are so affected. This research project is focused on the state of Guerrero (Mexico) and will also include a contained study of the work of transgendered activists in face of a similar reality in Cali, Colombia. This research is interested in the experiences of all sexual/gender minorities, including those who have not been directly affected by violence as well as those who have been more directly involved, for example because they have been the victim of violence motivated by trans/lesbi/homophobia or because they have been associated with an armed group that may or may not have been involved in this kind of violence. The researcher is conducting interviews and focus groups, and is also doing participant-observation research in the field-sites. The results of this research project will be presented in a doctoral dissertation and will also be used in other academic and non-academic publications and settings.

What you will be asked to do in the research:

During this interview, you are asked to share your own knowledge of this topic. You are not being asked to incriminate yourself if you have been directly involved in criminal activity. This interview is expected to last approximately 2 hours. Sometimes, participants are asked to agree to a follow-up interview of approximately one hour at a later date, after the researcher has had a chance to review the transcript and notes related to the initial interview.

Risks and discomforts:

It is the researcher's goal to conduct this interview in such a way that you are not put at risk because you consent to participate in this interview. The researcher is eager to hear of any additional measures that can be taken to ensure that the process of doing this interview does not put you at any risk. Participating in this research could also trigger memories of past trauma that will lead you to seek mental health supports, and so some suggestions are included in this document.

Possible Benefits:

This research project is meant to make a contribution to a better understanding of the ways in which violence affects vulnerable populations so as to help in reducing such violence in the future. You have a right to think about why you are choosing to participate in this research. You may decide to participate because you are hoping that your participation can help this project achieve its goals. Also, you may find that there is an emotional or psychological benefit to you to share knowledge you have about this topic.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and that you may choose to stop participating at any time. You may also choose not to answer specific questions. A participant's decision not to answer specific questions or not to continue participating will not influence their relationship or the nature of their relationship with researchers or with staff of York University either now or in the future.

Withdrawal from study:

You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. If you decide to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive any promised compensation for travel costs for agreeing to be in the project.

Confidentiality:

Data will be collected using handwritten notes and, if you agree, by way of a digital recording. No identifying markers including your name will be associated with any documentation or recordings of interviews or other interactions with the researcher. This data will be kept in locked cabinets and electronic documents will also be protected by secure passwords and encryption. Transcripts and field-notes related to this interview will only be reviewed by the researcher and by his supervisory committee. Every effort will be made to remove any identifying markers when making use of elements from this interview in publications or reports written by the researcher so that you remain anonymous and your personal information is kept confidential. Data will be kept for five years after the completion of the research project at which time it will be destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions about the research?

If you have questions about the research in general or their role in the study you are welcome to contact the researcher or the researcher's supervisor. William Payne is the researcher and can be contacted at wpayne@yorku.ca. Dr. Jennifer Hyndman is the researcher's supervisor and can be contacted via email at jhyndman@yorku.ca or via telephone at +001-416-736-5663. Questions can also be directed to the graduate program office of the Geography Department at York University at +001-416-736-5107.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, tel: +001-416-736-5914 or email: ore@yorku.ca

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in the study entitled, "Death and Resistance: Queerness in the face of violence and impunity in Guerrero, Mexico," conducted by William Payne. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent. I understand that I may also indicate my informed consent without signing this document by informing the researcher that I do in fact consent but do not wish to sign my name on this document.

Signature _____ Date
Participant name:

Signature _____ Date
Principal Investigator: William Payne

By checking this box, I also provide consent for audio recording of interviews. I understand that only the investigator and the person responsible for transcribing interview material will hear the recording.

Sample questions for interview schedule and focus groups:

*How has the general situation of violence in ___ changed in recent years? How does this affect sexual/gender minorities living here? What do sexual/gender minorities do to reduce the possibility of violence in their lives in this uncertain context?

*What do you know about violence against sexual/gender minorities in ___? Do you know of specific cases in which sexual/gender minorities were the targets of violence? Who was responsible for the violence? What was the purpose of the violence? Please give details and examples.

*What do you know about the movement for sexual/gender minority rights in ___? What advances and set backs have occurred? What do you know about changes in the level of legal protection afforded sexual minorities by the state? What impact do these legislative or policy changes have on sexual minorities? Please give details and examples.

*Do sexual/gender minorities move within/from (place)? In what ways are these moves related to violence against sexual/gender minorities? Do you know of cases in which sexual/gender minorities have not been free to move when they wanted to?

¹⁰⁷ It is not common to do so, though there are notable exceptions. One is that of Cuauhtémoc Cardenas, the son of mid-twentieth century reformer President Lázaro Cardenas, whose 1988 election as president was thwarted by fraud. The original Cuauhtémoc was the last emperor, elected in a quasi-democratic city-state system of the Mexica after the death of Moctezuma and his brother Cuitlahuac, and was ultimately put to death by Cortés because of his fear that Cuauhtémoc would lead a successful revolt against the ruling Spaniards.

¹⁰⁸ According to Paz (1950/1985), “Quetzalcóatl... is the sun-god of the priests, who consider voluntary self-sacrifice the highest expression of their doctrine of life and the world... Quetzalcóatl is a priest-king who respects ritual and the decrees of destiny, refusing to fight and dying in order to be reborn.”

¹⁰⁹ Murray (2004/2010) says that Xochipilli is the male aspect of Xochiquetzal, the feathered flower of the maguey, and that Xochiquetzal had a positive aspect in which “s/he was the deity of loving relationships and... of artistic creativity,” as well as a negative aspect in which “s/he was the deity of sexual destruction... [and as such] incited lust, rape, venereal disease and piles.”

Appendix 4 - Interview Participants
(names are pseudonyms unless stated otherwise)

Mexico

Date	Name	Identities	Occupation	Age	Interview Location	From*
Aug 25, 2012	Lilia	lesbian	clerk	20	café, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo
Aug 26, 2012	Montesquieu	gay; male; activist	teacher	37	café, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo
Aug 26, 2012	Mario	gay; male; activist	government worker	40s	café, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo
Aug 27, 2012	Miguel	gay; male; activist	journalist	30s	informant's home, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo (Acapulco)
Aug 28, 2012	Barbara	trans; female; activist	sm. business owner	48	informant's business, Tixtla	Chilpancingo (from town in the Sierra region; lived in U.S.)
Aug 29, 2012	Leo	gay; male; activist	sm. business owner	40s	restaurant, Chilapa	Chilapa
Aug 31, 2012	Paco**	gay; male; activist	teacher	40s	restaurant, Taxco	Chilpancingo
Sept 2, 2012	David	Gay; male; activist	education worker	34	café, Taxco	Taxco
Feb 5, 2013	Bety	trans; female	sm. business owner; performer	44	informant's home, Iguala	Morelos

Feb 6, 2013	Cher	trans; female	sm. business owner	Late 20s	informant's business, Iguala	Iguala
Feb 6, 2013	Emmanuel	male	medical doctor	30	informant's office, Iguala	Iguala
Feb 11, 2013	Rafael	gay; male	medical doctor	40s	informant's office, Iguala	Iguala
Feb 11, 2012	Mandela	trans; female	journalist	40s	informant's office, Iguala	Iguala
Feb 22, 2013	Sandra**	lesbian; male; activist	business owner	40	restaurant, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo
Feb 28, 2013	Miguel Soria***		lawyer, nat'l human rights commission		Informant's home, Mexico City	Mexico City
Mar 1, 2013	Darin	gay; male	sm. business owner	20s	private residence; Arcelia	Arcelia
Mar 1, 2013	Mateo	gay; drag performer; male	teacher	20s	private residence; Arcelia	Arcelia
Mar 2, 2013	Raul/ Marta		Both journalists	40s	Informants' office	Altamirano
Mar 2, 2013	Alfredo	gay; male	event organizer	60s	informant's business, Ciudad Altamirano	Ciudad Altamirano
Mar 3, 2013	Diego	gay; male	small business owner	58	Informant's business,	Ciudad Altamirano

					Ciudad Altamirano	(was in California for 30 years)
Mar 6, 2013	Alejandro Brito***		journalist; Letra S	-	informant's office, Mexico City	Mexico City
Mar 8, 2013	Pati	trans, gay	business owner		informant's business, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo
Mar 12, 2013 (x2)	Margarita (and others)	female	nurse		informant's childhood home, Xochipala	Chilpancingo
Mar 16, 2013	Angel	gay; male	lawyer	40s	informant's home, Mexico City	Mexico City
Mar 19, 2013	Juanito	male	historian	40s	restaurant, Chilpancingo	Xochipala
Mar 21, 2013	Alberto	gay; male; activist	tourism worker	20s	restaurant, Acapulco	Pie de Cuesta
Mar 22, 2013	Igor Pettit (Manuel Castillo)* **	gay	government official; journalist	50s	restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco?
Mar 23, 2013	Nanci**	lesbian; female	women's shelter worker	30s	restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco
Mar 24, 2013	Sonia**	heterosexual; female; activist	NGO worker	30s	restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco

Apr 2, 2013	Sonia	Heterosexual; female; activist	NGO worker	30s	restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco
Apr 3, 2013	Nanci	lesbian; female	women's shelter worker	30s	restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco
Apr 3, 2013	Fernando Reyes Banos** *		academic		restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco
Apr 4, 2013	Elena**	lesbian; female; activist	NGO worker	30s	restaurant; Acapulco	Tecpan
Apr 5, 2013	Rosa Maria** ***		PRD LGBT National Leadership Team		restaurant; Acapulco	Mexico City
Apr 8, 2013	Tomas/ Zeferino/ Tania/ Esmeralda	gay; male/ gay/ trans; female/ trans; female	Accountant/ hairdresser/ hairdresser/ -	30s/ 20s/ 20s / 20s	HIV clinic at regional hospital, Coyuca de Catalán	Ciudad Altamirano
Apr 14, 2013	Samuel	gay	journalist (left profession due to violence)	30s	restaurant; Atoyac	Atoyac (Zihuatanejo; Chilpancingo)
Apr 16, 2013	Arturo	gay; male	office worker (retired)	70s	informant's home, Acapulco	Acapulco (Mexico City)
Apr 16, 2013	Bobby	gay; male	business owner (retired)	late 60s	restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco (Canada)

Apr 16, 2013	Ignacio	gay; male	ambulatory salesperson	30s	restaurant, Acapulco	Acapulco
Apr 16, 2013	Svend	gay; male	Academic (retired)	late 60s	restaurant, Acapulco	Thailand (Acapulco, U.S.)
Jan 10/11, 2014	Oswaldo* *	gay; male; activist	teacher	50s	bar/restaurant, Zihuatanejo	Zihuatanejo
Jan 11, 2014	Ramiro Sotelo** *	gay; male; activist	Director of LGBT Affairs for municipality		informant's office, Zihuatanejo	Zihuatanejo
Feb 13, 2014	Agustin	gay; male; activist	university student	20s	café, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo (United States)
Feb 13, 2014	Pablo	gay; male; activist	performer	33	café, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo
Feb 17, 2014	Enrique	gay; male	architect	37	café, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo
Feb 18, 2014	Graciela	gay; trans; female	sex worker	20s	bar, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo (small town in Sierra, Guerrero; Cuernavaca)
Feb 20, 2014	Pedro	gay; male; activist	accountant	32	informant's business, Ometepec	Ometepec
Feb 22, 2014		four family members of murdered	homemakers; retail workers	20s-60s	informants' home, Chilpancingo	Chilpancingo

		trans woman				
Feb 25, 2014	Lisa	trans; female	performer	35	Hotel, Acapulco	Acapulco (United States)
Mar 3, 2014		sister; brother of murdered gay man	communicatio ns; musician	38; 32	café, Puebla	Puebla (Chilpancingo)
Mar 15, 2014	Arturo	gay; male**	office worker (retired)	70s	informant's home, Acapulco	Acapulco (Mexico City)
Mar 19, 2014	Juanito	male	historian	40s	informant's home, Xochipala	Xochipala
Mar 24, 2014	Francisco Sandoval Medina		municipal official		informant's office, Xochipala	Xochipala
Mar 24, 2014	Lupita	trans; female		27	informant's home, Xochipala	Xochipala (United States)
Mar 25, 2014	Jason	heterosexua l; male	prisoner	19	prison, Guerrero	Guerrero
May 24, 2014	Gustavo	gay; male; activist	government worker	30	skype	Acapulco

*Town or municipality informant identified as place of residence (past places of residence in brackets, if mentioned).

**Interview not recorded (usually, a preliminary or follow-up interview); all other interviews were recorded.

*** Informant's actual name; all other names are pseudonyms