Pacific[ations]:

Security, nonviolence, and the 'war on drugs' in Mérida, Yucatán, 2007-2012

by

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Abstract

Drug-related conflict has perhaps been the central question of Mexican politics since President Felipe Calderón initiated the "war on drugs" in 2006. From 2007-2012, military and police presence in everyday life deepened across the country, and tens of thousands of people were killed. It in opposition to this scene of extreme violence that Mérida, Yucatán was relentlessly celebrated as the most secure city in Mexico, the "City of Peace." Through interviews with government officials and activists in Mérida, this thesis explores reverberations between i) the politics of Mérida's continuing declaration of nonviolence; ii) the mobilization of the abstract concept of security; and iii) the reconfiguration of state power under the "war on drugs." Chapter 2 explains the policies and practices enacted by Mexican and U.S. governments under the anti-drug banner. The ways in which life and landscapes in Yucatán were re-organized around protection against drug-related conflict is the subject of Chapter 3. This, what I term securitization, attempted to bring the circulation of bodies, drugs, and rumors in Mérida under control for the sake of the security and reproduction of the state. Chapter 4 explores the relationship between securitization, the story of nonviolence, and colonial identity categories. Here, I argue that the "City of Peace" is premised on the formation of pacified state subjects. These storylines converge in my central argument: constructions of nonviolence in Mérida from 2007-2012 were bound up with many different forms of state violence, ranging from the use of brute force to the quiet restriction of everyday conduct.
Preface

This thesis, including the design, analysis, and presentation of research materials, is the original work of the author. It was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board, certificate number H12-01013.
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Preface .............................................................................................................................................. iii
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ..................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... vii
List of Abbreviations ...................................................................................................................... ix
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................ x
Dedication .......................................................................................................................................... xii
Chapter 1: Prelude .......................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 2: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 6
  2.1 The historical moment of the "war on drugs" ........................................................................ 7
  2.2 Mérida, a fortress of security ............................................................................................... 19
  2.3 Structures of occlusion ......................................................................................................... 29
  2.4 Voices of the state, voices of resistance ............................................................................. 34
  2.5 Outlines .................................................................................................................................... 42
Chapter 3: A work of theatre ........................................................................................................ 46
  3.1 Introduction: (In)securities .................................................................................................. 48
  3.2 Zona prohibida ..................................................................................................................... 53
  3.3 12 bodies .............................................................................................................................. 61
  3.4 The cockroach effect ............................................................................................................ 71
  3.5 Conclusion: A work of theatre ............................................................................................. 83
List of Tables

Table 1 Security Indexes by State, 2011................................................................. 26
List of Figures

Figure 1 "City of Peace" .................................................................................................................. 2
Figure 2 Comparing homicide rates, 1990-2009 ........................................................................ 14
Figure 3 Mérida, Yucatán .............................................................................................................. 21
Figure 4 Scenes from el centro ..................................................................................................... 24
Figure 5 Scenes from Paseo de Montejo ....................................................................................... 24
Figure 6 Geographic distribution of organized crime related killings, 2011 ............................... 25
Figure 7 Yucatán's homicide rates in perspective .......................................................................... 27
Figure 8 Zona prohibida ................................................................................................................ 55
Figure 9 Scenes from March 13, 2007 I ......................................................................................... 58
Figure 10 Scenes from March 13, 2007 II ..................................................................................... 58
Figure 11 The cockroach effect ..................................................................................................... 74
Figure 12 SSP surveillance tower .................................................................................................. 76
Figure 13 17 video surveillance arches, Mérida's periferico ......................................................... 78
Figure 14 8 video surveillance arches, Yucatán's interior .............................................................. 78
Figure 15 Military retén at entrance to state of Yucatán ............................................................... 79
Figure 16 Retenes in Mérida, January 2012 ................................................................................ 80
Figure 17 Zamná, messenger of peace ........................................................................................... 92
Figure 18 "City of Peace" flag raising ceremony ........................................................................... 92
Figure 19 Performing the "City of Peace" and "Port of Peace" ......................................................... 94
Figure 20 Peace Park, Progreso, Yucatán ...................................................................................... 94
Figure 21 Problem areas vs. safe area, Yucatán Today ................................................................. 101
Figure 22 "Tranquility to live and do business" in Yucatán .......................................................... 104
Figure 23 Security statistics and police strength represented to potential investors.................. 105
Figure 24 "City of Peace" propaganda I.................................................................................. 119
Figure 25 "City of Peace" propaganda II.................................................................................. 121
**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGE</td>
<td>Attorney General of Yucatán (<em>Fiscalía General del Estado</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAN</td>
<td>National Action Party (<em>Partido de Acción Nacional</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PGR</td>
<td>National Attorney General (<em>Procuraduría General de la República</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Institutional Revolutionary Party (<em>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</em>)</td>
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<td>SSP</td>
<td>Secretariat of Public Security, Yucatán (<em>Secretaría de Seguridad Pública</em>)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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For those who have lost family and friends in Mexico's "war on drugs"
Chapter 1: Prelude

Feeling and breathing security

The ‘militaire’—the military institution, military sciences, the militaire himself...was specified...at the point of junction between war and the noise of battle on the one hand, and order and silence, subservient to peace, on the other.
–Michel Foucault 1

A restrictive conceptual apparatus has come to occupy dominant analytical space. Its vocabulary...is bound by the keywords of our moment and the urgent themes to which they speak: security, disaster, defense, preparedness, states of emergency and exception.”
-Ann Stoler2

In 2011, Mexican newspaper El Excélsior ran an article titled "Aytypical Security" that painted Mérida, Yucatán as the most secure city in Mexico (See Figure 1). In it, author Claudia Solera converses with Juan Soberones, who is sitting serenely on a bench in Mérida's central plaza late in the evening. "In Mérida, you feel and breathe security," he tells her, "For proof, I invite [everyone] to go out at night." I can picture such a scene. The nighttime air is humid, heavy. It is dark but the plaza is full of people crisscrossing its stone surface. Some are on their way to other places; some look as if they will stay several hours longer. On the long, rust-colored cement bench that delimits the plaza on one side, people lean back, their relaxed frames angled somewhere between facing the cathedral across the street and the person sitting next to them. I can hear the rambunctious chatter of young people, the more muted conversations of families, music starting to seep out of bars and restaurants, the crackle of street vendor grills, children scurrying about. This is a lively public space; there is no threat of violence. Solera, however, is

struck by the specificity of Soberones' statement: "[His] invitation sounds strange," she writes, "when in at least seven Mexican states—Distrito Federal, México, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Guerrero, Michoacán, and Chihuahua—61% of inhabitants prefer not to be on the streets at night for fear of narco-related violence."³ This is what marks off Mérida as different. Its reputation as the “City of Peace” is premised on opposition to other places in Mexico, places where people are said to avoid public space because of violence associated with Mexican President Felipe Calderón's "war on drugs."

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The proliferation of the "narco-violence" of which Solera writes is indisputable. In 2006, Operation Michoacán unleashed 6,500 federal troops and police in the state of Michoacán, an area allegedly by the Calderón administration to be under the control of drug cartels. Several "high impact" military operations in other cities followed, as did arrests, raids, and roadway controls carried out by municipal and state police across the country. The United States government provided support for these operations in the form of security equipment, training, and intelligence. By the time Calderón's tenure as president came to a close in 2012, the Mexican government officially recognized 60,000 dead. Molly Molloy places the body count closer to 130,000, with an additional 27,000 having disappeared without a trace.

That Yucatán has on the large part remained on the periphery of overt drug-related conflict is also indisputable. The state government reported one drug-related death in 2009 and two in 2010, figures that starkly contrast those of Chihuahua—3,345 and 4,427—for the same years. Mérida, its cultural and administrative capital, was chosen as the site for the 2007 U.S.-Mexican bilateral security talks, and was officially dubbed the "City of Peace" in 2011. Yucatecos are proud of the fact that entering public space is neither a dangerous pursuit nor a political statement. "Everything is tranquil here," they told me; "violent people" and "violent cities" are found in other parts of Mexico. The idea of nonviolence is what manages, regulates, and orders all political meaning in Mérida. References to it have multiplied: the city is replete

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5 Cory Molzahn, Octavio Rodriguez Ferreira, and David A. Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data Analysis Through 2012," Transborder Institute, February 2013, http://justiceinmexico.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/130206-dvm-2013-final.pdf. In 2013, the Peña Nieto administration recognized 26,000 people missing in addition to the 60,000 dead, though questions about the category of "missing" remains.


with flags, signs, park benches, and major infrastructure in its honor and military and police circulating in its defense.

If the focus is the slain body (what Michael Taussig calls "the crudest of empirical facts"), Mérida appears to be a sanctuary, standing in stark contrast to Mexico's narrative of extreme violence. Such a vision, however, assumes violence and nonviolence to be “discrete, separate, (oppositional) forces.” This thesis works outside of a dualistic framework, critically interrogating Soberones’ claim that Mérida “smells like security” and telling the complex stories of state building and subject formation that lie beneath the veneer of the "City of Peace." My title, Pacific[ations], captures its central argument: constructions of nonviolence are bound up with many different forms of state violence, ranging from the use of brute force to the quieter ways in which institutions and social norms restrict and discipline conduct in the city. Nonviolence attempts to manage flows of drugs, bodies, and rumors. Nonviolence polices Yucatecan civil society. Nonviolence obscures the less spectacular forms of violence that haunt the region. Nonviolence displaces calls for political change. Nonviolence silences.

The chapters that follow explain increased military and police presence in Mérida, lay out how life and landscapes in Yucatán were re-organized around the protection against drug-related conflict, and show the ways in which the narrative of nonviolence produced and foreclosed political possibilities. Altogether, they fashion an account not of nonviolence in (and of) Mérida

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10 Quoted in Solera, "Atypical Security."
as a *myth*, but rather as *system of meaning*. I do not, however, claim that feeling safe in Mérida is a farce, that preferring Mérida over the spaces of Mexico more affected by the drug war is a cultural construction, or that those who buy into the narrative of nonviolence have somehow been duped. My analysis, in short, is not oriented toward disproving stereotypes or making normative claims over whether a space, a system of governance, or an imaginary is ‘more’ or ‘less’ violent. I borrow the language of Kathleen Stewart in contending that the epistemologies and ontologies of nonviolence I work through here are “tense, contradictory, dialectical, dialogic, texted, textured, both practical and imaginary, and in-filled with desire.”¹² They flourish because of (as opposed to in spite of) the contradictions inherent in them.¹³

One of the arguments I make in this thesis is that the hardening of state power through Calderón's war on organized crime can be understood on a deeper level when examined in a place popularly considered outside its purview. Mérida *the place* is symbolically and materially significant in the broader maelstrom of questions surrounding violence and security in Mexico. Let me conclude this prelude by stating that it is also a place that I have come to know and love in many ways.

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Chapter 2: Introduction

[Mérida] is an island of security in a country sadly undergoing...difficult times. Security is the most important thing we offer.
- Francisco Lezama, chief of staff in mayor's office, Mérida

But pretending that everything refers to "drugs," to clashes between Tuta, Chapo and Barbas, seems a bit exaggerated, to say the least. The language we have all learned to discuss drug trafficking is of a deceptive clarity. We speak of the cartel, la plaza, the trafficking routes, the lieutenant, the hitmen, and come under the illusion that we understand. And it is a story so simple, so attractive from a narrative perspective, that it ends up being irresistible. A mayor was killed? It was organized crime fighting over la plaza. A gubernatorial candidate was killed? It was organized crime fighting over la plaza. An assassination attempt against the military, against the federal police? Organized crime, fighting over la plaza. It happened at a party, at a rehabilitation center, in a crevasse in the sierra of Durango, in the mountains of Guerrero? Organized crime, la plaza. Ciudad Juárez, Apatzingán, Teloloapan, Tantoyuca, Huejutla, Zacualpan de Amilpas? Organized crime, la plaza. A hundred dead, a thousand dead, 10,000, 20,000, 40,000? Organized crime, those routes, la plaza.
- Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo

**Pacific[ations]** is the story of how the "City of Peace" and the post-Operation Michoacán political climate of Mexico reverberate off one another. But breaking apart nonviolence, contemplating how it attains political economic, cultural, and aesthetic legibility, requires some contextualization. This chapter does exactly that. First, I provide a general picture of post-Operation Michoacán México, focusing on the ideological and material suffusion of its social, political and cultural landscapes by military agendas. Second, I analyze how the U.S. and Mexican state apparatuses are positioned in relation to cartels, drugs, and violence in mainstream political dialogue, situating Mérida and Yucatán in this milieu. I bring the chapter to a close by reflecting on some methodological obstacles I encountered while composing this narrative.

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chapter thus treads on "embeddedness" in multiple senses: the embeddedness of military ideals in civilian realms, Mérida's embedment in questions of transnational security and violence, and the politics of my own embedment in this project.

2.1 The historical moment of the "war on drugs"

Mexico has long been a pivotal link in the drug-trafficking chain that serves the North American market. In the 1970s and 1980s, trafficking organizations in Mexico operated under the jurisdiction of the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia. When interdiction campaigns cut off distribution routes in the Caribbean and southern Florida, routes shifted to Mexico. By the late 1990s, Mexican drug cartels had established their own trafficking networks, and by 2005 had become "highly sophisticated, vertical enterprises" with $142 billion annual revenue. At the time of writing, the most well-known were the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, the Tijuana Cartel, the Gulf Cartel, and Los Zetas. The drug trade now constitutes upwards of one fifth of Mexico's GDP, generating revenues for hundreds of thousands of farmers, and rippling off into transportation, security, banking, communications, and finance sectors. It is, in short, one of the country's most important industries.

In conventional Mexican usage, the term "drug cartel" refers to the organizations involved in the production or distribution of drugs. They are powerful groups replete with

17 See Bernazzoli and Flint, "From militarization to securitization," 449.
18 Ami C. Carpenter, "Beyond drug wars: Transforming factional conflict in Mexico," Conflict Resolutions Quarterly 27.4 (2010), 401-421. This was especially true for larger cartels.
19 Los Zetas morphed from the armed wing of the Gulf Cartel to a paramilitary group that generates funds through extortion and threats of violence in addition to drug trafficking. At least one third of the Zetas are made up of former Mexican military personnel who were trained in counterinsurgency tactics by the School of the Americas/Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. See School of Americas Watch, "Most Notorious SOA Graduates," http://www.soaw.org/about-the-soawhinsec/soawhinsec-grads/notorious-grads/3891-most-notorious-grads
21 Ibid.
personnel, arms, and logistical infrastructure, whose territorial controls are constantly on the move. \(^{21}\) Across their evolution, they "generally cooperated strategically, agreeing on regional agreements of division of Mexico's smuggling routes and alliances between regionally close cartels." \(^{22}\) Some are reported to have controlled distribution networks in the United States; most contracted different parts of their enterprise out to lawyers, pilots, and chemists. \(^{23}\) In neoclassical economic theory, however, a cartel is an organization of producers that seeks (either implicitly or explicitly) to fix prices and/or determine the output of a particular commodity. Because any "collusion" to regulate prices and output occurs outside of the "free market," cartels are illegal in many places. The cartel configuration is thus premised on the idea of secret deals, of conspiracy. \(^{24}\) Though the drug trade itself is illegal, the notion of "collusion" applies to the historical development of the Mexican drug cartels in one very important way: they functioned in and through their ties to both the Mexican state and members of U.S. law enforcement. That is, government officials at all scales "pursued opportunities for personal enrichment through illegal landholdings, bribery, theft of public money, and nepotism—and there is evidence that the cartels were supported by the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) \(^{25}\) as a wealth-generating


\(^{24}\) This is the political party created in the ashes of the Mexican Revolution that governed Mexico (controlling executive, legislative, and judicial branches) from 1929-2000.
enterprise." For this reason it does not makesense to conceptualize the Mexican drug cartels as, at one point back in time, having been autonomous economic groups. Their existence always hinged on a close relationship to government through an arrangement (moving drugs through "collusion" with government, police, and military officials) known as la plaza.27

President Felipe Calderón's 2006 declaration of war on organized crime shook la plaza to its core.28 Operation Michoacán, carried out in December 2006, was followed by several more military operations in 2007, including Operation Baja California, Operation Chihuahua, Operation Culiacán-Navolato in Sinaloa, Operation Sierra Madre in Sinaloa and Durango, Operation Guerrero, and Operation Nuevo León-Tamaulipas. At the time of writing, all of these were ongoing. In March 2007, Calderón and U.S. President George Bush met in the city of Mérida, Yucatán to discuss, among other issues, "drug-trafficking, transnational crime, and terrorism."29 Mérida was chosen as the site of the bilateral security talks because of its status as a city untouched by violence, which was said to be “spreading to” and “intensifying” in other parts of the country. There, Calderón and Bush reached an agreement to expand bilateral security coordination and cooperation.

Soon thereafter, U.S. and Mexican security officials privately engineered a new security agreement based on the U.S. provision of military equipment, police training, and legal

26 Carpenter, "Beyond drug wars: Transforming factional conflict in Mexico," 403.
28 This decision came on the heels of his 2006 election, the victory of which was widely questioned. Calderón immediately faced multiple challenges, including the launching of the Zapatistas’ “Other Campaign,” which worked to make connections with other anticapitalist projects, and a teachers’ strike and widespread rebellion in Oaxaca. The declaration of war can be interpreted as a demonstration of state power to both international and domestic audiences. See Gabrielle Schneck, "A War on Civilians: Disaster Capitalism and the Drug War in Mexico," Seattle Journal for Social Justice 10.2 (2012), 927-979.
education to the Mexican government. Congresses in neither country were privy to these negotiations. The Merida Initiative, a “Regional Security Cooperation Initiative” was authorized by the U.S. Congress in June 2008 for three years of $1.6 billion in total security aid to Mexico, Central American, and Caribbean governments. Of this, $1.3 billion in equipment and training for law enforcement, public security, and legal training went to the Mexican government, which later agreed to match these funds on a ratio of 13:1. The first year of the plan dictated $116.5 million in the form of maritime patrol planes and surveillance helicopters for the Mexican military, $73.5 million for “rule of law” activities, and most of the $48 million provided under the heading of “International Narcotics Control and Law” which went toward training and equipping the Federal Police. The plan continued in the same way the following year, with a larger portion of funds allocated to the police over the military. $450 million of additional aid in equipment for Mexican security forces was approved in 2010, and the Merida Initiative was renewed by U.S. Congress in August 2011. And since it was signed into law in 2008, "drug related violence" has proliferated.

I follow Gabrielle Schneck in taking "drug related violence" to mean two complex (and convoluted) power struggles. The first is the “ongoing contest for control of the drug business

30 Ibid.
31 Clare Ribando Seelke and June S. Beittel, "Mérida Initiative for Mexico and Central America: Funding and Policy Issues, Congressional Research Service, June 1, 2009, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/127288.pdf. A corollary of the Merida Initiative, the Central American Regional Security Initiative has since increased U.S. activity in Central America, an area that recently gained notoriety for being a crucial stopover for drugs moving northward from South America. For example, counternarcotic operations have recently begun to be conducted by the Drug Enforcement Agency in Honduras, something which only came to light after four indigenous people were killed by members of the Honduran military from a U.S. Department of State helicopter operated by U.S. agents. Dana Frank, "Honduras: Which Side is the U.S. On?" The Nation, May 29 2012, http://www.thenation.com/article/167994/honduras-which-side-us#
33 Colloquially known as federales, this heavily armed police force was created in 1998, but whose membership has increased dramatically during Calderón’s administration.
among cartels," which has taken place for decades.\(^{34}\) (It is crucial to recall that the Mexican state has participated in this struggle.) The second is “the militarized law-enforcement operations of the war on drugs fought by the Mexican security forces as part of the state’s antinarcotics policy,” which exploded onto the scene with Operation Michoacán in 2006 and has escalated under the Merida Initiative since.\(^{35}\) As employed here, the term "war on drugs" refers to maneuvers authored and executed by both the Mexican and U.S. governments under an “anti-drug” banner. This includes "high impact" military operations through which entire cities were occupied by the Mexican military (Operation Michoacán, Operation Chihuahua, Operation Sinaloa, and Operation Baja California), but also smaller scale operations conducted by municipal and state police. Unlike Schneck, I choose to keep the term "war on drugs" in quotation marks in order to remind the reader of the uncertainty with which I marshal it. Because it is constituted by multi-scalar representations, practices, and logics, the "war on drugs" carries multiple inflections and overlaps with similar denominations. It is neither interchangeable with the U.S. War on Drugs, a bundle of domestic and foreign policies enacted and carried out by the U.S. government since the late 1970s in order to eradicate the distribution and use of illegal drugs,\(^{36}\) nor the Merida Initiative. The “war on drugs” instead finds its legal embodiment in the

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\(^{34}\) Schneck, "A War on Civilians," 928.

\(^{35}\) Ibid. The term "Mexican security forces" does admittedly belie important distinctions between municipal police, state police, federal police, the Mexican Army (which includes the Air Force) and the Mexican Navy, including both what they do and how they are regarded by society at large. I try to be specific in the analysis that follows.

\(^{36}\) Charles E Reasons, "War on Drugs," in *Encyclopedia of Race and Crime*, eds. Helen Taylor Green and Shaun L Gabbidon, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), 880-884. In the U.S., the domestic policies of the War on Drugs have largely remained intact since their institutionalization in the early 1980s, and foreign military intervention under its banner has increased. Plan Colombia was the first outwardly oriented project of foreign military intervention in the War on Drugs. The majority of its budget was dedicated to military and police operations and equipment. Between 2000 and 2005, $2.5 billion from the Andean Counterdrug Initiative and $2 billion from the Department of Defense were funneled through Plan Colombia’s financial armature. The majority of these funds went to U.S. companies like Lockheed Martin (for radar systems and other surveillance equipment), Sikorsky (for Black Hawk helicopters), United Technologies (for refurbished Huey helicopters), and DynCorp (for other planes...
Merida Initiative, which is part of the U.S. War on Drugs, but cannot be limited to the juridico-legal frameworks of either of these policies.\textsuperscript{37}

Across the years of the "war on drugs," the number of Mexican troops deployed on domestic territory has increased from the initial 20,000 to over 50,000, and the number of officially recognized deaths associated with "drug related violence" have risen from 2,826 in 2007, to between 5,000 and 6,000 in each of the years 2008 and 2009, to around 15,000 in both 2010 and 2011.\textsuperscript{38} The geographical distribution of "drug related violence" has thus far mirrored geographies of "war on drugs" operations. Of the eight states whose levels of violence were above the national average in 2009, all had increased by more than 60\% between 2006-2007 and 2008-2009, and all of except Morelos (Baja California, Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, Nayarit, and personnel). Drug interdiction here was two-pronged. First, Plan Colombia was predicated on the idea that the drug commodity could be obliterated at its very origin. Thus, from 2000 to 2005, forty thousand hectares perceived to be areas of coca cultivation were fumigated with the glyphosate herbicide Roundup, in higher concentrations than used in industrial agriculture. Second, the U.S. government sought to constrict the movement of drugs within Colombia. The counternarcotics, military, and police, it was thought, would aid the Colombian state in regaining control over territories under the jurisdiction of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrilla forces, a radical social movement accused of funding its rise to prominence through drug-trafficking. See Connie Veillete, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” \textit{CRS Report for Congress}, 22 June 2005. Much work remains to be done in tracing the discursive and material connections between Plan Colombia and the Merida Initiative, especially because the recent history of Colombia is frequently trotted out as "evidence" for the success or failure of the current model of drug interdiction in Mexico.

\textsuperscript{37} Hard and fast distinctions between inner and outer features of the U.S. War on Drugs are increasingly difficult to make. This speaks to the new sort of "synergy, between foreign and homeland security operations" about which Stephen Graham writes. Much more work needs to be done on how these policies aim to manage bodies and spaces both \textit{within} the territorial boundaries of the U.S. and \textit{without}. Stephen Graham, \textit{Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism}, (New York: Verso, 2011).

\textsuperscript{38} Human Rights Watch, "Neither Rights Nor Security: Killing, Torture, and Disappearance in Mexico's War on Drugs," November 9, 2011, http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/11/09/neither-rights-nor-security. The politics of quantifying violence can certainly not be cast aside. Apart from the rather obvious questions of what kind of crime or what kind of death can be placed under the “drug war” umbrella, serious charges have been leveled against government and mainstream media for presenting downright duplicitous information. Journalist Laura Carlsen mentions one key example— the idea that “70\% of Mexicans are afraid to go outside for fear of crime”— bandied around, without any sources being cited. Carlsen notes that, in fact, people in Mexico identify the economic situation the most serious problems facing the country, by a ratio of two to one. This dynamic—the papering over of structural political economic problems with decontextualized references to drugs, narco, and violence—will be taken up in the chapters that follow. Laura Carlsen, "Drug War Doublespeak," 2009.
Sinaloa, and Sonora) were states to which the military had been deployed under the banner of public safety in 2007 and 2008. It is in these sites of high-impact military operations where the most brusque take-offs in levels of violence are visible (see Figure 2). The case of Chihuahua is especially dramatic. There, by 2010, 18% of total homicides in Mexico were committed despite housing only 3% of the population. And with roughly 40% of Chihuahua's population, Ciudad Juárez witnessed 65% of its homicides. Coahuila, Jalisco, Sonora, and Veracruz had lower to average levels of violence in 2006 but also underwent small-scale military deployment in 2007 and 2008. The homicide rates of these states took off around the time military forces were unleashed, reaching levels far above the national average. 39

On a micro level, la plaza as a system remains largely intact, and the lines between state and ‘criminal’ activities continue to be blurred. 40 Threats, kidnappings, and acts of physical violence not only impact those involved in the trafficking of drugs, but also people tangentially involved, like journalists reporting on the subject matter, local business owners who refuse to respond to extortion fees, economically marginalized people who are in many ways compelled to

39 Escalante Gonzalbo, "Homicidios 2008-2009: La muerte tiene permiso."

40 Carpenter, "Beyond drug wars: Transforming factional conflict in Mexico." Local and federal police and military personnel are bribed by competing cartels while simultaneously competing for jurisdiction over the most profitable points of entry to the United States.
Figure 2: Comparing homicide rates, 1990-2009

participate in the bottom rungs of the drug trade, and the family and friends of all of these groups. A pattern of highly dramatic acts of physical violence has emerged, including torture.

and forced disappearances among both Mexican security forces and the cartels. What is clear is that both politics and the rhythms of everyday life in Mexico have been impacted by the escalation of "drug related violence." When I mention the "historical moment of the 'war on drugs'" in the analysis that follow, it is this phenomenon to which I refer.

Mainstream political discourse during the "war on drugs" has tended to frame the escalation of violence as evidence of the success of anti-drug operations. Official explanation given in both Mexico and the United States are marked by what journalist Dawn Paley calls the "cartel wars discourse." This line of reasoning explains the upsurge of violence as a result of the shifting strategies of drug cartels, “adopt[ing] predatory strategies, increas[ing] aggression, extend[ing] their zones of operations, directly attack[ing] security forces and kill[ing] each other" under the pressure of the "war on drugs." “The bottom line is that you've got a major internecine battle, a kind of civil war among drug cartels," security and drug-trafficking expert Bruce Bagley stated; "It has intensified because stakes are high. There is a great deal of money to be made.” The 'cartel wars discourse' is thus characterized by a vision of violence as produced by and limited to the actions of the cartels, with police and military rarely, if ever, enmeshed in

42 Human Rights Watch, "Neither Rights Nor Security: Killing, Torture, and Disappearance in Mexico's 'War on Drugs." The Mexican military in particular has been reported to utilize particularly brutal tactics—beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence, and mock executions—for extracting information about organized crime.


44 Escalante Gonzalbo, "Homicidios 2008-2009: La muerte tiene permiso." He continues: "The official explanation, and that which practically all media subscribe, is that competition between contraband drug organizations—that kill each other off with the intent of controls transit routes toward the United States or the national drug market—accounts for the violence of the last couple years. I am not convinced. Or better said: it's not a sufficient explanation. This fight between contraband organizations without a doubt exists, and it without a doubt causes many deaths. But I can hardly believe that this completely explains the shift in the national [homicide] rates." My translation.

illegal activity. It is also characterized by the conviction that the victims of "drug related violence" are affiliated with the cartels or involved in drug-trafficking enterprises. Here, violence is framed “as a positive outcome of the war on drugs, as criminals kills criminals and essentially, it is argued, cleanse society of their negative influence.” While Calderón has recurrently lamented the widespread loss of the life his tenure as president witnessed, his administration has stated that 90% of the victims were implicated in the drug trade. It is crucial to note that, however, over 95% of murders suspected to be linked to the drug conflict are not investigated. 

Finally, mainstream political discourse on the "war on drugs" turns on an imaginary of abstract, creeping violence that possesses the capacity to infect society at large. Consider the picture Robert Bunker, a U.S. counter-terrorism expert, paints:

…Mexico is not on its way to becoming a ‘rotting corpse’ but potentially something far worse—akin to a body being permanently infected by a malicious virus. Already, wide swaths of Mexico have been lost to the corrupting forces and violence generated by local gangs, cartels, and mercenaries. Such narco-corruption faced few barriers given the fertile ground already existing in Mexico derived from endemic governmental corruption at all levels of society and, in some ways, it even further aided the ‘virus’ spreading through Mexican society from this new ‘infection’.

That U.S. counter-terrorism officials are anxiously looking southward is indicative of the militarized frame in which the U.S. government views drug-related violence in Mexico; so too is

46 Melissa Wright, "Feminism, urban knowledge, and the killing of politics," in Rethinking feminist interventions into the urban eds. Linda Peake and Martina Rieker (New York: Routledge, 2013), 42.
the fact that the Merida Initiative was tagged onto a U.S. Congress supplemental bill for the war in Iraq. Indeed, in 2011, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano speculated about possible linkages between major Mexican drugs cartels and Al Qaeda. "All I will say in an open setting is that we have, for some time, been thinking about what would happen if, say, Al Qaeda were to unite with the Zetas—one of the drugs cartels—and I'll just leave it at that," she remarked. Bunker, together with transnational organized crime expert John Sullivan, have even contemplated the possibility of deploying U.S. troops in Mexico. I quote from this scenario at length:

This future represents the extremely pessimistic and long-term end state for Mexico in which it is overrun by the Mexican cartels and their network of mercenary and gang associates. Increasing numbers of the populace will directly profit and identify with the developing narco-value system and view the Mexican federal system as a corrupt and hated police state...With state failure comes the division of the country into a patchwork of criminal free-states and enclaves dominated by fully developed third phase cartels which are, in turn, backed up by allied third generation gangs. Such a future would require the US to fully militarize its southern border against the threat of a hostile ‘new warmaking network’ of criminal-states. It also would result in a counter-insurgency campaign actively being conducted to stop the spread of the narco-value system within the United States and the establishment of full-blown criminal-enclaves north of the Rio Grande...While this sounds like a doomsday scenario – and it is – the actual probability of occurrence of [this future] is


improbable. The US simply would not allow this future to take place and, at the point it appeared the narco-insurgencies in Mexico were edging towards this path, the US would become involved increasingly in the conflict. To some extent this is of course already the case, with the US for some time now directly working where it can with the Mexican government. Initially, this would be in the form of economic and other indirect forms of aid such as the $1.4 billion multi-year Merida Initiative, including further training and outfitting of Mexican counterinsurgency units. If the criticality of the situation in Mexico continued to deteriorate, more direct forms of US military and law enforcement participation undoubtedly would be implemented, including the deployment of US forces directly into northern Mexico if warranted.51

The threat of lawlessness, always a militarized trope, thus looms large in the 'cartel wars discourse.' It frames drug cartels as a “criminal insurgency” (conceptually merging the two dissimilar phenomena of political insurgency and drug trafficking52) with the possibility of assuming control over the Mexican state apparatus.

It seems to me that in the 'cartel wars discourse,' the drug commodity carries within it the anticipation of organized crime, insurgency, and violence, all of which are cast in explicit opposition to the rational faculties of the state. Yet placing those legal and illegal practices in separate spheres belies the historical and contemporary interrelation of drug cartels, the government apparatus, security forces, and violence. The 'cartel wars discourse' generates a discursive regime that privileges state over bodily security; political actions like the Merida

Initiative are premised on hardening the Mexican state. I will return to this in the analysis that follows, but for now it is sufficient to note that the 'cartel wars discourse' needs to be conceptualized as a logic—and a self-referential one\textsuperscript{53} at that—because it operates as both a manual and rationale for the "war on drugs." It defines a quandary and structures a solution. In this way, violence serves not only as the stage upon which politics in and of Mexico continue to unfold, but also the central problem,\textsuperscript{54} leaving society mired in struggles over its social significance.\textsuperscript{55} It is against this dire backdrop that Mérida and its surrounding geographies have been relentlessly celebrated and promoted for being outside the space of "drug related violence."

### 2.2 Mérida, a fortress of security

Mérida is a sprawling city of just over one million people, considered by yucatecos to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the Americas (See Figure 3). "Haunting"\textsuperscript{56} might be a good descriptor for the many histories that are woven into its texture. Since the 1542 Spanish 'founding' of the city in the site of the centuries-old indigenous city of T'Hó, Mérida has been known as the White City. This name is derived neither from the lime-based paint commonly applied to buildings during the colonial period nor from the city’s cleanliness, but instead its

\textsuperscript{53} Paley, "Drug War Capitalism." As Paley notes, one of the defining features of the cartel wars discourse is its unconditional reliance on government information sources.

\textsuperscript{54} Tate makes a similar argument about the narco-politics of Colombia. Winifred Tate, \textit{Counting the Dead: The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 22.


racial purity. In a land where indigenous people outnumbered all other ethnic groups by a ratio of 5:1, Mérida was conceived of as a fortress of whiteness." The 25 central blocks of the city were reserved for the Spanish and their slaves or servants, and indigenous peoples were restricted to living on the outskirts. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the racial composition was 46% indigenous people and 56% people of Spanish and mixed descent, while the peripheral rings of the city and its surrounding rural areas remained virtually 100% indigenous. Some of the original walls and gates still delimit the centro from the rest of the city.

The centro is organized around a massive stone cathedral and government palaces painted in friendly pastel hues. I have come to know it as one of the few spaces in the city where people of different social sectors uncomfortably bump elbows (See Figure 4). This circulation—of businesspeople in suits, people conversing in Yucatec Maya, nuns, schoolchildren in uniforms, women in traditional Yucatecan trajes, unhoused people, tourists, university students filing in and out of libraries and cantinas, and people heading to work at one of the restaurants or tourist shops—renders the space a curious mixture of lightheartedness and tension. The rest of the city is much more socially segregated; movement across space is silently licensed or hindered by race and class. In daily life, there is a palpable preoccupation with “where” people come from, a question that hinges on lineage (embodied in last names) as well as neighborhood of residence. Indeed, to gain entrance to spaces commonly considered the domains of elite and

57 Michel Antochiw, Historia Cartográfica de la Península de Yucatán (Campeche: Grupos Tribasa, 1994).
upper-middle classes, people are often asked to show identification cards so they can be located socially as well as geographically.\textsuperscript{61}

Jutting out from the centro is Mérida's principal roadway, the Paseo de Montejo. It is a wide, floral boulevard (regularly traversed by police and military) lined by ornate manors that have been converted to high-end hotels, restaurants, and bank offices (See Figure 5). These manors were once inhabited by the owners of the dozens of henequen haciendas that surrounded the city. It was through the henequen hacienda economy that the state of Yucatán exploded onto the purview of the global economy in the nineteenth century only to recede back in the middle of the twentieth. In the process, it produced an extremely wealthy cadre of yucatecos.

\textsuperscript{60} Google Maps
\textsuperscript{61} Eugenia Iturriaga Acevado quoted in Roberto López Méndez, "Desnudan fuerte racismo que se practica en Mérida, Por Esto 2013, http://www.poresto.net/ver_not.php?zona=yucatan&idSeccion=1&idTitulo=203286
The northern half of the city is home to those that wield economic and political power. Here there are extravagantly wealthy areas: bright, tree-lined avenues, French and Italian architecture, malls and shopping centers, hospitals, and private schools. There are mixed neighborhoods as well, where fuchsia bougainvillea flowers spill over whitewashed concrete walls (some topped with three rows of barbed wire) that encircle most tracts of private property. The southern part of the city is where the working poor live here, many having recently migrated to the city from rural Yucatán. Homes in these areas are enclosed by fences made of stones; being just waist height, they afford quick glances into small front yards littered with barrels, panels of tin, and buckets.

This is the "City of Peace," a city whose surrounding geographies are said to have not been breached by "drug related violence" (see Figure 6). International news media in English and Spanish, (including CNN Español, El Universal, Reforma, The Economist, and the Guardian) have produced an array of cartographic representations of violence in Mexico since 2006. Though their methodologies and datasets vary (as do the level of entanglement with government methodologies and datasets), they all seem to proclaim Yucatán's nonviolence. Table 1, produced by CNN Español, charts “security indexes,” numbers which compile government statistics on kidnappings, violent theft, homicide, and perceptions of security, across the national space. Yucatán is marked at 1.4, a “security index” of less than 1/3 of that of the next safest state,
Querétaro, and dramatically lower than the 92.1 score given to Chihuahua. The National Consejo for Private Security in Mexico corroborates these findings with criminality indexing, positioning Yucatán as the safest state in the Republic with a rate of 2.8%, “a level similar to countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland,” and a homicide rate of 1.7 per 100,000, which is about 10% of the national average. Escalante Gonzalbo sets Yucatán apart for "always ha[ving] a homicide rate much lower than that of the rest of the country” (see Figure 7).

Since being officially labeled the "City of Peace" in 2011 (on which I will expand in Chapter 4), various homages to Mérida's nonviolence have been installed throughout the landscape. But I also must note that the construction of Yucatecan nonviolence goes much further than violent crime rates or municipal government propaganda—it is also a wholly experiential construction. Everyday conversations in the "City of Peace" are peppered with allusions to Yucatecan tranquility; I regularly hear Mérida described as a “fortress” or an “oasis” of security. “Nothing really happens here; everything is calm,” Yucatecos say. Todo tranquilo. This quality, they say, is cultivated by heat, humidity, and the slower and more fluid temporalities that mark life. It is also said that nonviolence is a product of peaceful Maya identity, and "neighborly surveillance." These qualities are unremittingly celebrated by the local government; here is a snippet from Attorney General Héctor Cabrera Rivero's blog:

Figure 4: Scenes from *el centro*\(^{66}\)

Figure 5: Scenes from *Paseo de Montejo*\(^{67}\)

\(^{66}\) Source: Municipality of Mérida’s Sector for Economic Development, Tourism. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU0L-8HqDYQ.

\(^{67}\) Ibid.
Figure 6: Geographic distribution of organized crime related killings, January 2008-September 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Security Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yucatán</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Querétaro</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baja California Sur</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiapas</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tlaxcala</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campeche</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonora</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guanajuato</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aguascalientes</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puebla</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veracruz</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintana Roo</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baja California</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalisco</td>
<td>42.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coahuila</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oaxaca</td>
<td>43.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colima</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrito Federal</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Luis Potosí</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estado de México</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michoacán</td>
<td>57.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morelos</td>
<td>59.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tabasco</td>
<td>60.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zacatecas</td>
<td>60.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nayarit</td>
<td>62.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nuevo León</td>
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<td>Guerrero</td>
<td>66.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sinaloa</td>
<td>68.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamaulipas</td>
<td>76.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Durango</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chihuahua</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Security Indexes by State, 2011

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Figure 7: Yucatán's homicide rates in perspective

We have received a lot of testimonies about Yucatán’s simple way of life from people who have only been living here for a short time. Walking in city streets at night, going shopping, working, going out to have fun on the weekends are the things that are praised about our state. You can partake in them without worry thanks to the low incidence of crime that the land of the Mayab\textsuperscript{71} enjoys. In contrast, we have also received testimonies of Yucatecos who, for business or family reasons, have had to suffer through living other scenarios, in other states of the Republic: fear of leaving the house, the possibility of getting in the middle of a shooting, bombing, or confrontation.\textsuperscript{72}

These imaginaries also refer to Mérida’s port city of Progreso. Only 35 kilometers away from Mérida, Progreso was constructed in 1871 to facilitate the transfer of henequen cultivated in Yucatán to its international markets and is now the principal site of oceanic shipping on the peninsula.\textsuperscript{73} I have included Progreso in my analysis for two reasons. First, it is chiefly through Progreso that Mérida is linked to the global economy, and together, the two comprise the centre of political and economic activity in the state of Yucatán. Second, Progreso too is clearly imagined and performed as nonviolent and has been officially labeled the “Port of Peace.”

The idea that Yucatán is ‘different’ from the rest of Mexico is expressed many ways, but widely accepted. And though the imaginaries I have described here cannot be entirely delimited

\textsuperscript{71}This is the name for the Yucatán Peninsula in the Yucatec Maya language.
by the years of the “war on drugs,” its political climate has attached new meanings and urgency to them. Along with the claim of peace, security, tranquility, and nonviolence, money has been poured into training, equipping, technologizing, and professionalizing state, municipal, and “special” police forces, modernizing weapons and radio communication technology, and developing a network of surveillance cameras throughout the city. There is speculation about the possible presence of "groups of Islamic radicals" in the Yucatán peninsula as well. Since 2009, the U.S. embassy in Mexico, its consulate in Mérida, and Yucatecan officials have been concerned the possibility that these groups could make use of the same routes as both drug traffickers and undocumented migrants, and in September 2012, the Yucatecan delegate of the National Migration Institute, Benito Rose Issac, announced that an alleged member of Hezbollah had been detained in Mérida. The question I ask in this thesis, then, is: what does it mean for the "City of Peace," the city after which the Merida Initiative was named, to also be named a site of multiplying security concerns?

2.3 Structures of occlusion

Despite all of this talk of the Merida Initiative, Pacíficas is not a story of the security agreement in and of itself. The chapters instead detail reverberations of the city of

74 From contact onward, Yucatán was considered a peaceful province of New Spain, yet one relatively separate from the rest of New Spain. Indeed, Yucatán was only connected to the rest of New Spain by way of boat. For this reason, a distinctly Yucatecan culture and politics developed among the European peoples who colonized the peninsula. Indeed, the governorship of Víctor Cervera Pacheco from 1999-2001 reignited regionalist sentiment, and saw the cropping up of the Yucatecan separatist flag, the resurgence of the Yucatecan Hymn in public venues, as well as more substantive grasps for federal power to be transferred to regional and local realms. Luis Alfonso Carrillo Ramírez, ed. Perder el paraíso: Espacio urbano, empresariado, y globalización en Yucatán (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2006).

Mérida (both its materiality and what it represents) in the broader militaristic paradigms I have described here. As Geraldine Pratt reminds us, discourse come into being in and through certain practices in certain places. She writes, "They are socio-spatial circuits through which...narratives are circulated, legitimated, and given meaning." This thesis gives Mérida the place weight in the historical moment of the "war on drugs" and its saturation with the cartel wars logic. The positioning of Mérida as the exemplar city for legal, political, and economic ties between the United States and Mexico, I contend, reveals many lines of reasoning that run through policies authored in the name of U.S.-Mexican security.

I originally conceptualized this project as a localized exploration of the Merida Initiative. Put simply, I wanted to ask how a transnational security agreement materialized in a city considered not to be affected by "drug related violence," how it was concretized in the place after which it was named. I arrived in Mérida in May 2012 with these questions in mind, and by August I had conducted fifteen structured interviews. However, even when gently pressed, the government officials with whom I spoke did not provide me with any numbers, maps, or definitive information on the deeper military and police presence in the city. No one seemed to know anything about the Merida Initiative; no one seemed to have anything to do with its funds or its operation. It may also be that these people, for security purposes, were not allowed to speak about such things. Statements made by police officials especially were peppered with addendums like "I can't really say more." Across those sweltering summer months, I also had a multitude of conversations with people of varying social backgrounds that helped me get a grip on the lexicon of the place. Triangulating these structured and unstructured conversations with government

documents and popular media, I was overcome with the eerie feeling that techniques of surveillance were tested and installed throughout the city, but that there was no agent behind these reconfigurations. As Laela, an activist and scholar from the U.S. who settled in Mérida after having worked on anti-'war on drug' campaigns in central Mexico, said of civilian perceptions of securitization in Mérida and the deeper military and police presence it entails, “They feel like they are not supposed to know, but also that stuff is changing. It’s not as obvious [as in other parts of México], but it’s probably happening.” I could not shake the sensation of Mérida’s urban spaces being reconfigured by an omnipotent, disembodied force.

I have since arrived at the conclusion that the ambiguity surrounding the Merida Initiative, the "not knowing how it works," is actually a central element of how it works. It is useful here to think of the initiative as what Jean Baudrillard would call a simulacrum. According to Baudrillard, the simulacrum is a replica of a truth that does not actually exist, but is taken by people to be true. It thus comprises a sort of hyper-reality. But because the original authentic truth that the simulacra allegedly represents does not actually exist, it is the hyper-reality that comes to operate as reality. What first led me to think of the Merida Initiative as simulacrum was the sheer difficulty with which I found any definitive information on what was being done by both the U.S. and Mexican governments under the its banner. My original research plan quickly became overshadowed by a very different question: why was it so hard to find conclusive information about this transnational policy? At first I wrote off this difficulty as part of my own deficiencies in research. I was trained as an historian, and my exploration of the

Merida Initiative was my first venture beyond the dusty world of archives. But after a year of raking through government documents and speaking to government officials and activists in Mexico (as well as the United States and Canada), it became clear that the barricades I encountered were are not anomalies. They are built into the very architecture of the Merida Initiative.

As it stands now, the Merida Initiative is constituted more by its rhetoric than by its substance. Details of the agreement were and are kept secret. Because the public is largely not privy to information concerning its operation, we are left to grapple with the hyper-reality engendered by president press conferences and a few Congress briefs. The documents focus on the different technologies, training, and equipment provided by the U.S. government to the Mexican government without paying credence to what purpose they are meant to serve, through whose hands they pass. The public is occluded from the material operations licensed by the Merida Initiative. We are only informed of what it represents—the strength of the state in the face of drugs and violence—and not what it does.

This structure of occlusion is fundamental to the “war on drugs,” to the cartel wars logic, and to the ambiguity of U.S. involvement more broadly. There are so many questions. What

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79 This is a question I have found to be immensely difficult, especially because my requests to speak to people affiliated with the U.S. consulate in Mérida were denied. Multiple phone calls and emails failed to be returned. One day, I waited in line for two hours at the U.S. embassy just to be able to pass through various security checkpoints. My belongings were taken from me and placed in a sterile plastic bin; my body was patted down by a security guard. I made it into the embassy, and was led to a representative from whom I was separated by a thick panel of glass. I slid my letters of introduction to her, and explained that I was interested in talking to someone at the embassy about U.S. perspectives on safety and security in Yucatán. The request, which I had tried to purify of any overt political overtones, was met with a quizzical stare and I was politely turned down; various brochures detailing resources for the ex-pat community in Mérida were my consolation prize. Despite my inability to acquire definitive information about its degree and form, it is clear that many in the city consider U.S. military involvement in Mérida (beginning with the bilateral security talks in 2007) indicative of U.S. imperialism. The student activists with whom I spoke especially renounce U.S. involvement in the Calderón administration, with one remarking as a group, they were fed up with the "surrender and submission of the state and federal governments in the face of the empire."
does it mean that the United States government continues to be economically implicated in “the war on drugs?” As Schneck observes

the hefty amounts of continuing aid directed at [the Merida Initiative model] suggests that U.S. policy makers have identified a clear interest in furthering the militarization of Mexico’s war on drugs; it also means that in the brutal escalation of violence in recent years has been funded, at least in part, by U.S. taxpayers.\(^8^0\)

And what of the explicit articulation of a hemispheric security consciousness in the Merida Initiative—evidenced by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice statement that it would “make America more secure, but…most importantly, make our regional partners more secure in the shared space we have?”\(^8^1\) This thesis aims to confront both of these questions. For the reader who questions the connections I draw between things said and done in Mérida and the Merida Initiative, let me highlight that shifts in security strategies throughout Mexico in the last six years are the product of a significant increase in domestic security-related spending, an increase that was stipulated by the Merida Initiative. The fact that Mérida has undergone changes across these years funded in part by the Mexican national government (elaborated on in Chapter 3) suggests their interrelation with the initiative. But perhaps more importantly, recall that the Merida Initiative is the legal embodiment of an overarching logic of militarism, the cartel wars logic. While my exploration of this logic in Mérida in rife with uncertainty about the actors and capital imbricated in these processes, I am more interested in the way a logic (the cartel wars logic), a place (Mérida, including all of its textures and histories), and a context (“drug-related violence”) fold into or resonate through one another.

\(^8^0\) Schneck, "A War on Civilians," 932.
2.4 Voices of the state, voices of resistance

What *Pacifications* attempts to do, however, is perform an inquiry of state power. I conceptualize the state here as an intricate—motley even—collection of institutions and practices that, as Max Weber once said,

> is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory. Note that 'territory' is one of the characteristics of the state. Specifically, at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence.  

That the monopoly on lawful violence is fundamental for the realization of *legitimacy* is worth highlighting. It is also that which allows state violence to make or break different meanings and interpretations in the historical moment of the "war on drugs."

I situate this project precisely where state building and the formation of subjectivities come together, which entails considering both how subjectivities are part of the production of the state as well as how the state forms citizen subjectivities. Part and parcel of this, as Bourdieu argues, is how the state accumulates 'capital,' a term he means to encompass cultural, physical, and symbolic capital as well as the economic.  

Banister makes the case for taking Bourdieu's paradigm to Mexico:

> This so-called symbolic production typifies the [Mexican] state's affective power. Through the construction and deployment of 'subjective principles of

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organization,’—in Mexico a process intimately linked but not limited to bureaucracy—it deeply influences the way we perceive, experience, and act upon the ostensibly objective order.\(^{84}\)

This thesis follows Banister's lead by untangling the practices and utterances through which the state comes into being, practices and utterances that are predicated on stabilizing the "cartel wars logic" and the social order in Mérida. But it is crucial to note that this is a contentious process. He writes:

> The outcomes of such practices...either imperil or bolster the framework of domination through which the state's role as supreme social mediator, its apparent autonomy, is enacted. Political power here is not simply top-down, bottom-up, or center-out.\(^{85}\)

I attempt to walk that uncertain line between political power as diffuse, saturating everyday social relations and practices, and as something that is wielded strategically by those at the top of the social order. Taking the voices of the state seriously, according to Banister, might help us get around “a neatly nested, hierarchical configuration of power,” and instead attend to “its uneven distribution and circulation, its fragmentation through geography.”\(^{86}\)

> Though the state may have a surface appearance of unity and coherence, it is vital not to “reify it into a thing that acts, speaks, responds, and can be broken."\(^ {87}\) My project is not to decipher how state power operates in a definitive sense, but instead to grapple with effects and intelligibility. Thus, though the stories I tell this in this thesis are bound up in the project of interrogating the state (both its power to weave legitimizing tales and its power to inflect

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\(^{85}\) Ibid., 465.

\(^{86}\) Banister, "Stating Space in Modern Mexico," 460.

physical violence), they proceed from the understanding that its voices are multifarious and often contradictory. I say more about the people with whom I spoke in the chapters that follow, but here let me note they occupy positions of power in government or police offices, including the Office of the Yucatán Attorney General, municipal governments and police departments of Mérida and Progreso, and different sectors of the Yucatán state government. They in many ways have “accepted and peddled the security fetish,”88 but not always in straightforward ways.

Setting up my interviews with this group of people (largely white, belonging to upper and elite classes) was only possible because of longstanding connections I have with people in Mérida.89 One oppressively hot evening in June, for example, I attended an art exhibition with my good friend Javier, where his sister was to present a painting. I vastly underestimated the extravagance of the event, and arrived in a cotton sundress. While sauntering through the colonial estate, Javier pointed out an elite government official who had had a hand in state and federal politics for quite some time. He introduced me, mentioned a mutual connection, and successfully requested an interview on my behalf. Being able to talk with this person was thus contingent on two things. First, I had to be at an event whose attendees were almost exclusively white and upper-class. Second, I had to be with someone who recognized a prospective informant, took the initiative to gain her confidence and introduce me. As many of these first interviewees were pleased to refer me to others, the process became easier as time passed. Twitter also became useful for making contacts and gathering information. Nevertheless, networks that I had already established in Mérida were absolutely fundamental to being able to speak with people with governmental or police affiliations.

89 After fifty emails I sent out to different police and government officials failed to receive a response, I realized I would need to take a different direction.
There are other reasons why these often elite level government officials. My physical stature was certainly important. Most of the people affiliated with government or police bodies I spoke to were men, and seemed downright eager to sit down and have a conversation with me. On more than one occasion, I was openly flirted with, one person scribbling a request to take me out for dinner and drinks on a piece of paper during the interview and sliding it across the table so as to not be captured by the tape recorder. Julie Cupples discusses this infusion of the research process with sexuality, including being "unexpectedly positioned by others as an object of desire." For me, this had much to do with the general valorization of fairer skin and ojos claros (blue, green, or hazel eyes) in Mérida, as with the idea that women from the U.S. are more open than yucatecas in a sexual sense. Though I turned advances down, I certainly seized upon the play of sexual politics to both set up interviews and access more information. In addition to these labels, it is quite possible that I characterized a "different" kind of gringa by the people with whom I spoke. Given the preponderance of tourism (the resorts of Cancún and Playa del Carmen are not too far away from Mérida) as well as the fairly large population of ex-pats in Mérida, yucatecos of all stripes are used to encountering people from the U.S. and Canada. I found people to be quite friendly and open to helping me with my research because I was interested in local politics, because my Spanish was good, and because I was well-versed in Yucatecan idioms and conventions.

But that I was a young woman from the United States came to be important in other ways. During her interviews with Colombian military personnel, Winifred Tate describes how she was imagined to be an innocent and apolitical figure that needed to be educated in the

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masculine matters of security. I noted the same dynamic in my research. Assumed to be ignorant and disconnected from the local political schema, people explained things in greater detail to me. The flip side of this is that my U.S. passport and the fact that I came from a research institution in Canada also bestowed upon me an air of importance. As was for Tate, gender imprinted my various research relations, but “it was my ‘Americanness’ that got me in the door.” Thus, the “privileged weight attached to the idea of ‘America,’” played a fundamental role in this research project, an idea shaped by material histories.

The evening before the 2012 presidential elections made me intensely aware of this "privileged weight." I had spent the day seriously evaluating arguments made about the apparent trade-off between human rights and national security in Mexico. I sent an article to a friend with whom I had argued earlier about the same topic. That night, we met for a proper debate. I restated the premise of the article, to which throughout this thesis, I maintain adherence—that the Bush-Calderón security model places the security of the nation-state ahead of corporeal well-being. Andrés did not explicitly disagree with the article, and entertained my exasperated distillation of it over drinks. At first meandering between the arguments of the article and everyday experiences of security, our conversation drew tenser and tenser; one hour turned to four. I asked for the bill, paid it, stood up, and sauntered out of the bar, aware that my evasion of local gender rituals, a deliberate attempt to be taken seriously as a twenty-something white

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91 Winfred Tate, *Counting the Dead*, 19.
92 Ibid. The terms "America" and "American" in this quotation are meant to denote a person coming from the United States. Throughout the thesis, I stick to "United States" and "person/people from the United States."
93 See Jennifer Hyndman, "Feminist Geopolitics Revisited: Body Counts in Iraq," *The Professional Geographer* 59.1 (2007), 35-46; and Juanita Sundberg, "Masculinist epistemologies and the politics of fieldwork in Latin Americanist geography," *The Professional Geographer* 55.2 (2003), 180-190. In the realm of U.S.-Mexican relations, these histories are characterized by the transfer of surplus value from Mexico the United States, the mammoth tract of land turned over during the Mexican American War perhaps being the starkest example.
woman who looks even younger than twentyomething, could be interpreted as U.S. chauvinism or ignorance. I wanted him to understand my argument; understand and accept it as true.

"It’s not that I think you’re naive. I mean, there are a lot of things about you and your project that I don’t understand. If I were from the U.S., I wouldn’t give a damn about what is going on here. I would be writing a thesis on gringo issues," Andrés said on the walk to the bus stop, "Because really, you aren’t obligated to think about Mexican issues the same way I am obligated to think about gringo issues." This statement made me nervous, for it certainly was not a compliment, but rather a recognition of the difference between us, of the mobility and privilege engendered by my whiteness, my U.S. passport, and the fact that my dollar was worth more than his peso. It is also indicative of the importance of the unequal geopolitical relationship between the United States and Mexico, a relation that was the very condition of the possibility for my fieldwork, and that which obligates Andrés to think about gringo issues.

All of this speaks to the complex politics of fieldwork on U.S.-Latin American relations, which cannot be separated from the history of area studies strains of the social sciences more broadly that have been linked to the institutions, economic systems, and structures of feeling inhering in the twin notions of U.S. expansionism and U.S. exceptionality. And here it is important not to forget the particularly nefarious history of the geographical research funded by the U.S. Army in Mexico. My choice to investigate the historical moment of the "war on drugs" was, in part, a way for me to grapple with my own personal implication in it, to "we[d]

94 Sundberg, "Masculinist epistemologies and the politics of fieldwork in Latin Americanist geography."
political goals with academic interventions." It was also a way for me to reflect on the way "United Statesians are shaped by 'empire as a way of life,' wherein state funding, popular culture, and subject identifies are harnessed to support militarization at home and abroad," a topic to which I return in the conclusion.

I drew on my networks in Mérida to link up with human rights and #YoSoy132 activists in the city as well. Though I only conducted a few structured interviews with these people, I did tag along with them to some of their meetings and events. Time spent with these activists would officially be called moments of “participant observation.” However, because many of the people I met with were also in their mid-twenties, hanging out with them felt like hanging out with friends. The logic behind my decision to speak to these people is straightforward. I was (and remain) inspired by their politics, and felt that their insights would offer a critical perspective on Mérida's position in the broader context of the "war on drugs."

Given the slew of accusations of human rights violations leveled against security forces in other parts of Mexico, I wanted hear about whether there were any analogous local human rights concerns in Yucatán. My analysis of the arrest of several people protesting the presence of George W. Bush in Mérida was only possible because of the reports and document prepared by the human rights group Indignación. But beyond this specific issue, my conversations with human rights activists were instrumental in arriving at an understanding of the gravity of the questions I asked about security in Mérida. For example, I asked Laela how I might go about making contacts in the police department. She simultaneously raised an eyebrow and lowered her

coffee cup. “I don’t know, I can’t think of a good way to get in there,” she said. “I mean, most of
the people I know who work in this kind of stuff [human rights]…are being watched and
followed by security forces.” Though she was quick to assure me that this was “nothing like the
surveillance of lefties in Chiapas,” Laela and others help me realize that underneath the veneer of
Yucatecan tranquility exist serious struggles for power.

The decision to engage local #YoSoy132 activists came about rather organically. Most of
my research was conducted in the months leading up to and following the 2012 presidential
election. Those involved in the movement, middle-class university students, were very active in
protesting against the return of the PRI (Revolutionary Institutional Party) to the presidential
palace, calling its collusion with mainstream media a "perfect dictatorship" and drawing
connections between the way political action (including their own) has been criminalized in
recent years and the Dirty War of the 1960s and 1970s, in which the PRI government violently
repressed, tortured, and disappeared people involved in leftist student movements. While the
movement is not specifically rooted in critiquing the government’s role in fomenting “drug-related violence,” conversations with #YoSoy132ers helped me place my exploration of
nonviolence in historical context, and see that questions of violence in the narrowest of senses—
killing and death—are often tied up with structural forms of violence.

A final methodological note: though I do not ascribe to the argument that to be
somewhere confers upon the researcher more authority on the issue at stake, the fieldwork
experiences I have described here were instrumental in the formation of the arguments I advance.
Indeed, the moments that rattled me from my pre-conceived notions, that truly shook me to the
core, mostly occurred in casual conversations. A certain offhanded comment or a basic flippant
remark—like that of Andrés—would make me realize that the categories of thought I wanted to
"impose on my 'object of study" were utterly useless. They reveal the blurriness, if not the precarity, of the boundary that is held up between ‘research’ and ‘everyday life.’ To be sure, the structured interviews I conducted were important, but I came to see them as a way to confirm, highlight, or call into question things that had drawn my attention in everyday conversation. This, I think, has allowed for a more complex analysis, and means that many of the arguments I make in the pages that follow have their roots in the mundane. When I specifically quote an interviewee or reference a particular image, trope, or utterance, it is because they exemplify broader themes or trends. I also pay attention to how things are left out of the story of nonviolence, or, in the words of Judith Butler, that which must be excluded for the “economies of discursive intelligibility to function as self-sustaining systems.” This is part of the project of attending to unstable locations and ingredients of state power and the ways in which it is naturalized.

2.5 Outlines

Violence is both destructive and productive; it generates “new senses of dimensions, new ideas about community and citizenship, and new notions of participation and organization.” The same can be said for nonviolence. It is thus my entry point into the "war on drugs" and the new feelings and political structures it produces. Across the chapters that follow, I untangle the logics at work, the political economic interests at stake, and the imaginaries enlivened by nonviolence, unpacking the ongoing armoring of statecraft both materially (in the sense of more

100 I use pseudonyms through the thesis, whether quoted from structured interviews or everyday conversation.
equipment and personnel devoted to security-related tasks), and culturally (with the proliferation of discourses and performances that shore up state power).

Chapter 3 delves into the securitization of Yucatán from 2007-2012, focusing on two key moments—the reconfiguration of the city for the 2007 Bush-Calderón security dialogues that led to the enactment of the Merida Initiative, and the emergence of twelve headless bodies near Mérida in 2008. By securitization, I mean the various processes through which life and landscapes in Yucatán are re-organized around protection against "drug-related violence."

Conceptually speaking, this chapter is driven by two paradoxes, the first being the securitization of Yucatán despite being widely considered outside the space of the drug war, a nonviolent place. I contend that securitization is largely performative, predicated as it is on projecting an image of rational state control. The second paradox is that of the conflicting logics employed by U.S. and Mexican state actors regarding security in Yucatán. If both the presence and lack of dead bodies in public spaces are taken as evidence for the success of securitization, what exactly does security mean? As a whole, this chapter makes the case that securitization in Yucatán hinges on the practical and performative security of the state apparatus, often at the expense of ordinary bodies. It is phenomena like these that lead scholars of feminist geopolitics in particular to query “the role of the state as a security provider, suggesting that in many of today’s wars, states may actually be threatening their own populations, either through direct violence or through tradeoffs that tend to get made between warfare and welfare.”

Chapter 4 thinks through the relationship between the proliferation of state discourses and performances of nonviolence (in and of Mérida) and the processes of securitization described in

Chapter 3. Its ultimate objective is not to detail the experience of violence and or its lack, but to consider the ways in which its narratives legitimize and produce worlds. I argue that the code of nonviolence is, at its heart, concerned with the formation of malleable and compliant subjects. And in addition to granting the state apparatus legitimacy, constructions of nonviolence participate in the perpetuation of social order and occlude less spectacular forms of violence. For this reason, there are exemplary of what Mark Neocleous deems the "security-identity-loyalty complex," which makes use of loyalty as a "political technology of security and identity, coming to shape social behaviour in all sorts of ways thought to be important to social order."¹⁰⁴ The convergence of Chapters 3 and 4 can be located in the militaristic fantasy of the “meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine”¹⁰⁵ underpinning the securitization, on one hand, and the “automatic docility”¹⁰⁶ that is cultivated in and through the code of nonviolence.

The "war on drugs," as Neil Whitehead notes, "creates a cultural poetics for violence that legitimizes government policies and discredits dissonant voices, whether internal or external, to the canopy of security that enfolds us."¹⁰⁷ The main objective of the final chapter is to build a different kind of cultural poetics. I return to thinking about the cartel wars logic from a broad perspective and detail some powerful critiques emanating from intellectual and activist realms. I also return to some of quandaries I posed in this chapter, among them, the relationship between patent manifestations of physical violence and its more under-the-radar forms. Nonviolence in Mérida here becomes my toolkit for posing an alternate framework for conceptualizing violence, one that treads on its imbrication with the rhythms of everyday life.

¹⁰⁴ Neocleous, Critique of Security, 34.
¹⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 169.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
Chapter 3: A work of theatre

The state securitization of Yucatán, 2007-2012

Benjamin’s comment that ‘a consideration of the police institution encounters nothing essential at all. Its power is formless, like its nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states’ in fact captures the tangible, all-pervasive and ghostly presence of the state in general.
- Mark Neocleous 108

Terror systems transform human bodies into surfaces, available for political inscription.
-Diana Taylor 109

Though Yucatán is widely considered a safe, secure, and tranquil space, the "war on drugs" has reconfigured sociopolitical and material landscapes across the state. The years 2007-2012 saw the highest investment under the heading “security and justice” to date in the state of Yucatán, bringing about slow, creeping kinds of changes. The securitization of Yucatán across these years—training, equipping, technologizing, and professionalizing state, municipal, and “special” police forces, modernizing weapons and radio communication technology, and developing surveillance faculties—was (and is) driven by the state's goal, in the words of Attorney General Héctor Cabrera Rivero, of “unit[ing] the forces of the government and their institutions with the strength of the citizenry” to protect tranquil Yucatán against the threat of "drug-related violence."

One morning I spoke to Gabriel in the Office of the Yucatán Attorney General about these dynamics. Seated across a broad table from me in a chilled office room, he had kind green

eyes and nodded constantly. He entertained my questions the way a primary school teacher might entertain the questions of a young student.

Paige: Can I ask you a question? Okay, why so secure, so tranquil? I mean, Progreso and Mérida… [trails off].

Gabriel: Well… [trails off].

Paige: I just don’t understand why, like everyone says, nothing happens here. [Pause.] I know this is a very complex question.

Gabriel: In the underworld, they say that the southeast [the Yucatan Peninsula] is a place where the families of the *narcos* live. I mean, I can’t really guarantee anything, but they do say that. The *narco* isn’t going to work here, ravage the place where his wife and kids live. People ask: why so many luxury cars? Why so many huge, gigantic houses? What kind of businesses do these people run? This is what people say.

Paige: And do you believe it?

Gabriel: Um, I don’t know. They say that. But don’t believe that people say these things all the time. It’s not really a conversation topic. But sure, if you ask questions, people will say these things. And yes, I have heard it.

Paige: Okay, and…

Gabriel: [Interrupts] But no, no, no. You ask the government, the government responds that it is due to the fact that we have an excess of security. We have a lot of really well prepared state police forces, we have, um, a series of things really well, um, planned. But in the underworld, I don’t know, I’m unaware, I can’t be sure.
In our conversation, Gabriel nodded to the rumor that circulates most widely in everyday conversations about safety and security in the Yucatán. The story goes that major drug cartels have corralled the area off as neutral area. I remember very clearly hearing this for the first time a few years back when walking the city with a few friends at dusk. They stopped to light cigarettes, and I made a blasé comment about an opulent gated neighborhood I had previously noted. “Well, yeah. That’s where the families of the *narcos* live. That’s why nothing really happens here. It’s sort of a safe zone,” someone said after taking a long drag. Since then, I have found allusions to Mérida as a *narco*-mandated safe zone crop up in everyday conversations with frequency.

Evaluating the objective truth of this rumor would be almost impossible. I felt it necessary to include in the story, however, because of how widely it circulates. Whether the rumor is true or not seems less important if we consider its performative capacities. What does it mean if people *act* as if it were true? What does it mean for their beliefs on matters of safety and security in the historical moment of the "war on drugs" to be conditioned by this rumor? What if the general climate of "not knowing" is the most important thing of all? Michael Taussig describes a similar dynamic at play in the narcopolitics of Colombia's Pacific Coast: "Nothing was what it seemed, and surreal fantasies and rumors provided the basis to most everything else." Taussig suggests that this plays an important role in "sowing terror," which is something this chapter explores.

But while this rumor is the central thread in narratives of ‘nonviolence’ in the region, it is not the subject of this chapter. For in my experience, people in positions of power (whether in

government or police offices) are reluctant to mention this rumor and the blurred distinctions between organized crime, the state, and civil society it connotes. They preface any references to it with the caveat that “some people do say that, but you know how people talk,” and instead place the state and the world of drug cartels and violence in separate spheres. Like others with whom I spoke, Gabriel cultivated an image of state control and expertise. In his vision, Yucatán is veritably suffused with security, free of wounded or lifeless bodies purely by virtue of the rational faculties of the state and its security forces. “Our rates of violent crime are lower than those of Switzerland! Lower than Ireland! Lower than Sweden! You won’t see any dead bodies here!” he later exclaimed. His statements are illustrative of what could perhaps be called the Yucatecan variant of the “cartel wars discourse” described in Chapter 1. As in other places, this discourse frames the project of securitization in response and opposition to violence, but in the Yucatecan context we also have the absence of violence being explained through the ongoing hardening of statecraft.

3.1 Introduction: (In)securities

This chapter delves into the material and discursive landscapes of securitization in Mérida in the historical moment of the "war on drugs." I explore two scenes in these landscapes: the reconfiguration of Mérida’s urban spaces for the 2007 Bush-Calderón bilateral security talks that eventually led to the enactment of the Merida Initiative, and the actions generated by the materialization of 12 decapitated bodies in the city a year and a half later. I then show how these
incidents advanced the construction of walls, checkpoints, and networks of surveillance in the years that followed. This is what I mean by securitization, the state maneuvers driven by the narrative of security ("security risks here, security measures there, security police everywhere"), governing and order spaces, bodies, and imaginations in its name.

I should note that my use of this term as opposed to 'militarization,' is deliberate. This is because the latter operates as if society were, at one point in time, 'untainted' by military institutions or agendas. Bernazzoli and Flint write:

> The acceptance of an ontology of militarization, or processes that take the 'civilian' and make it 'militarized,' involves a number of false binaries: inside/outside; foreign/domestic; war/peace; violence/nonviolence; state/society; military/society; as well as military/civilian.

A great deal of attention has been drawn to the fact that the “war on drugs” involves the illegal unleashing of the Mexican military on domestic territory. And while the imposition of a formal military apparatus on the realm of the civilian, as in, for example, Operation Chihuahua, where the federal government ordered over two thousand federal troops and police to descend upon (and permanently establish themselves in) Ciudad Juárez, is an important issue to highlight, recall that Mérida was not the site of a high impact military operation. The reconfiguration of life and landscapes by securitization in Mérida has on the large part unfolded in a subtle, more insidious manner. The concept of securitization highlights—instead of

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114 Bernazzoli and Flint, "From militarization to securitization," 449.

115 Thanks to Alex Pysklywec for pointing out the glaring example of Chiapas, which has been occupied by the Mexican military since the mid-1990s, demonstrating that this phenomenon cannot be temporally circumscribed to the years of the "war on drugs."

disavowing—the mutable nature of such binaries. It looks to the evolution of Mérida's landscapes not only as the result of the actions of Mexico's formal military apparatus, but a wide variety of actors that link logics derived locally, logics derived from the federal Mexican government, and logics derived from the United States. But perhaps most importantly, the notion of securitization speaks to the multiplicity of practices that are carried out under the anti-drug, anti-crime banner in Mérida, ranging from the plain use of military and police force, to the regulation of conduct and movement through subtler means.

While the military/civilian and state/society dichotomies are without a doubt conceptually unstable, it would be a mistake to suggest that the "war on drugs" context has not in some shape or form broadened and deepened military involvement in everyday life in Mérida. It is impossible to make clear-cut distinctions between practices that are "securitizing" or not, and spaces that are "securitized" or not, but things in Mérida have certainly changed. I understand these changes (in both mechanism and effect) as new forms of state policing. Put simply, securitization is *policing* in the name of *security*.

Mark Neocleous understands 'policing' to be the "constitutive power of the state over civil society."\(^{117}\) It is about administration, management, order, and is not limited to The Police, those uniformed people (usually men) traditionally associated with the term. This is a more open and fluid conception of police—as the *institutions* afforded the right to use force, as a *verb* bound to state power, and as *people* in the flesh—and it gets us closer to understanding Mérida's shifting landscapes of security. My task in this chapter is thus to consider how the police

\(^{117}\) Neocleous, *The fabrication of the social order*, xiii.
function in Mérida has, in the words of Dominic Corva, "thickened,"\textsuperscript{118} in the historical moment of the "war on drugs." A focus on policing doesn't belie the crucial historical distinction between the police and military (they were established with quite distinct functions after all), but considers how they both participate in what Neocleous calls "order-building."\textsuperscript{119}

These shifts in landscapes begin with U.S President George W. Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderón's security dialogue in Mérida, a gathering that would eventually lead to the enactment of the Mérida Initiative. It may seem incidental to the broader context of the "war on drugs," but recall that the meetings were part of the institutionalization of the cartel wars logic. Where they are located in the chronology of violence across Mexico is even more important. President Calderón declared war on organized crime in December 2006 with Operation Michoacán. Operation Baja California followed shortly thereafter in January 2007. Bush and Calderón convened in Mérida in the middle of March 2007, and Operation Chihuahua began as the same month drew to a close. The Merida Initiative was formally announced in a joint statement in October, and not signed into law until June 2008. This means that Bush and Calderón discussed U.S.-Mexican security in Mérida less than three months after the permanent presence of military forces in Michoacán was first established, and before the occupation of Ciudad Juárez. Thus, the dialogue took place before the extreme escalation of "drug-related violence" across the country. If you take the cartel wars logic to begin with the enactment of the

\textsuperscript{118}Dominic Corva, "Biopower and the Militarization of the Police Function," \textit{ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies} 8.2 (2009), 171. On "thickening," Corva notes, "The widespread cultural stigmatization of "drugs" in the U.S. has catalyzed to a significant degree the thickening of the police function, particularly throughout the U.S. and Latin America. As long as "drugs" are embedded in the U.S. biopolitical economy of transnational fear, the U.S. narco-industrial complex will augment the militarization of liberal democratic state-society relationships through the police function throughout the world (albeit in an uneven and contingent fashion)."

\textsuperscript{119}Neocleous, \textit{Critique of Security}. 
Mérida Initiative in June 2008, it seems to be a response to the escalation. The meetings are important because they reveal the way the logic neither was nor is a response to violence at all. Instead, it is interwoven with it.

This point collides with the overarching objective of this chapter, which is to explore both how people are drawn into the narratives of the cartel wars logic and how it is employed as a means of social control. Part of this is to consider the priority granted to state over corporeal well-being in the securitization of Mérida, but it is equally a story of political terror and violence. Securitization, I contend, has everything to do with the ways in which the state inscribes “threat” onto different bodies in public spaces, invoking security as an undisputed, universal human value in the process. As Neocleous contends, however, such appeals to security operate "in a way that is already predisposed towards the exercise of violence in defence of the established order." What does it mean for both the presence and absence of dead bodies in public spaces of Mérida to be mobilized as evidence for the success of securitization in preserving a climate of nonviolence? What does it mean for the public gathering of bodies in political action to be labeled a threat to that climate? And how do these questions flow into Gabriel's nod to Yucatán's "excess of security?"

120 This is one of the fundamental contributions scholars of feminist international relations and feminist geopolitics have made. These scholars challenge the notion that threats to safety and well-being originate from outside the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, and ask the crucial question of whose lives are improved by security-related projects. See Jennifer Hyndman, "Minding the gap: bridging feminist and political geography through geopolitics," Political Geography 23.3 (2004), 307-322 and J. Ann Ticker, "You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements Between Feminists and I.R. Theorists," International Studies Quarterly 41 (1997), 611-632. Though my analysis is in many ways limited to the logic of security, and does not extend to how it is experienced by different groups of people in Yucatán, it is very much informed—and inspired—by feminist geopolitics.

121 Neocleous, Critique of Security, 5.
3.2 **Zona prohibida**

As the capstone of his March 2007 tour of Latin America dedicated to "advancing the cause of social justice in the Western Hemisphere," U.S. President George Bush was scheduled to meet with Mexican President Felipe Calderón in Mérida. Issues such as transparency, the "rule of law," immigration, and security were on the agenda.\(^{122}\) From the perspectives of the Bush and Calderón administrations, Mérida was an impeccable location for this dialogue. It was taken for granted that they would encounter little if any popular resistance to their presence in the area. Indeed, the meetings proceeded without interruption and institutional seeds for the Merida Initiative were planted. The Joint U.S.-Mexico Communiqué released as the meetings came to a close focused on the "twin pillars of security and prosperity,"\(^ {123}\) with the question of the "continued threat to both nations posed by organized crime and drug trafficking" figuring prominently. Bush and Calderón proclaimed their plans to "confront [it] head on." The presidents highlighted this project as "one of the most important priorities of [Mexico's] domestic agenda," stating the country would "benefit from increased support from and cooperation with the United States." Other than hinting that this support and cooperation would entail greater coordination between law enforcement bodies in both countries, no further information was given.\(^ {124}\)

What this communiqué does not reveal is that the U.S. and Mexican governments significantly restructured Mérida under the banner of security for these meetings. In the weeks leading up to the arrival of the presidents, the U.S. Secret Service assumed control over Mérida’s

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\(^{123}\) On the front of "prosperity," the meetings established a binational working group centered on transitioning to full free trade of agricultural goods, especially corn and dry beans.

international airport to facilitate the transfer of government functionaries and security personnel and equipment. At least seven U.S. military planes arrived bearing what extraofficial reports called “sophisticated security equipment” and “first-class security technology.” Two surveillance towers connected to the central offices of the Yucatán state police were constructed along Mérida's main boulevard, Paseo de Montejo, and metal fences were erected to cordon off what colloquially came to be known as the *zona prohibida*. This "forbidden zone" encompassed parts of Paseo de Montejo, the U.S. consulate building, and the city surrounding where the presidents planned to stay. The shuffle and circulation of people was restricted in forty seven city blocks.

As the meetings drew near, the shifting of landscapes in the name of security bore deeper imprints on everyday life in the city. U.S. and Mexican agents were stationed at various visible and hidden points along the *zona prohibida*. The metal fences were replaced by ten-foot-tall solid metal barricades (see Figure 8) that prevented access and completely obstructed visibility. Its few entrances were heavily guarded, and access to the area was restricted to high-level government officials and industry leaders. Rumors also circulated of devices installed at strategic points on Paseo de Montejo that would scramble cellular telephone service. 3,000 U.S. Secret Service agents, Mexican Federal Police, and members of the Mexican Army dotted surrounding spaces, as well as 300 U.S. military snipers. The Secret Service agents were dressed as tourists. Mexican military forces and state and municipal police equipped with shields, batons, and tear gas patrolled the area surrounding the *zona prohibida*, enforcing the 9:00 pm curfew that had

been instituted. In nearby Hacienda Temozón, where one of the meetings was planned to take place, all of the stray dogs were rumored to have been killed.

Figure 8: Zona prohibida

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128 Hacienda Temozón Sur is part of a collection of five haciendas restored by the former chair of Banamex bank, Roberto Hernandez, Temozón Sur. It now functions as an extremely exclusive hotel, one of the U.S. based company Starwood’s Luxury Collection meant to represent the "distinct culture" of the region. The framing here is premised on attracting elite tourists who are interested in exploring the belle époque of the region, the height of the henequen economy, with any allusions to the violence of plantation society and its socio-spatial segregation expunged. But also central to the way these spaces are framed by Hernandez’s group (and the Starwood Luxury Collection at large) is that they "create opportunities for locals who would never have had the chance to earn a living…after the henequen crisis." Matilde Córdoba Azcárate, "Thank God this is not Cancún!" Alternative tourism imaginaries in Yucatán, Mexico," Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change 9.3 (2011), 183-200.

The arrival of Bush and Calderón was accompanied by a swarm of fifteen Blackhawk helicopters and military jets deployed from a U.S. aircraft carrier anchored near Progreso—an uncommon sight in Mérida. Joaquín, a boisterous human rights activist in his thirties described the "sense of exceptionality and strangeness" of their presence. When I asked him to expand on his nod to oddity, he explained that the vast majority of meridanos knew that the reconfiguration of urban space was prompted by the impending bilateral dialogue. But despite knowing this, the feeling of "not knowing"— not knowing who or what was behind the transformations in the cityscape, not knowing which laws were in effect or whether civilian rights still existed, and not knowing what would happen next—was widespread. This disruption of city life led the Yucatecan human rights groups Indignación to proclaim the city a "virtual state of siege," where the "total freedom" of U.S. and Mexican military (including naval ships in nearby Progreso, aircraft hovering above, and military vehicles and security personnel scattered throughout) in the city produced spaces where rights to free movement and expression, privacy, and personal security were suspended.130

This was not taken lightly by some people in Mérida, and various acts of protest— independent theatre productions, "protest music," and different forms of urban art—unfolded during the week leading up to the Bush-Calderón dialogue. There were demonstrations around the zona as well, until access to Paseo de Montejo was blocked by Mexican military forces. One report surfaced of a demonstrator being struck in a violent manner by police for being too close

to the *zona*. Then, in the early evening of March 13, a group comprised mostly of university students from Mérida, but also people from other parts of Mexico and ex-pats, gathered at the Santa Ana Park. I was told that they departed for the *zona prohibida* and the Fiesta Americana Hotel, where Bush was staying. They marched as dusk fell, voicing contempt in rhyme—*Bush asesino, no eres bienvenido; Señora Hinojosa, ¿por qué parió esa cosa?; gobierno panista, cachorro imperialista*—for both the Bush and Calderón administrations. This included demonstrating against U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Bush's very presence in Mérida was disputed as well which, as they saw it, was indicative of a presence of the U.S. military in all corners of the world. And in their corner, the Calderón government had welcomed and facilitated this presence.

Yet the march was also a response to the restriction of civilian visibility and mobility, or the "sense of exceptionality and strangeness" that had descended upon the city. Upon reaching the *zona prohibida*, they physically rattled the metal barricades and covered them with red handprints (See Figures 9 and 10). After several hours, they marched to *el centro*. Reports surfaced of glass and windows being broken near the government palace. No one, I was told, was apprehended *in flagrante delicto* for these acts. But they were the rationale for a riot police operation, in which upwards of 500 members of state and municipal police rushed *el centro* and

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131 Ibid. This prompted the filing of a request for the National Commission of Human Rights to send representatives to Mérida to document the "restriction of individual guarantees that Yucatecan community is suffering" and any violation of the right to free expression and demonstration...because of the presence of George W. Bush in our country."

132 I constructed this story in part through informal conversations with people in Mérida as well as Youtube videos. Many of the people I spoke to mentioned that key parts of it were left out by mainstream news reports, especially the Diario de Yucatán, as well as the state of Yucatán's human rights commission, COHEY.

133 In English, the first is "Bush, assassin, you are not welcome." The second translates to "Mrs. Hinojosa, why did you give birth to that thing?" and refers to President Calderón's mother. The last is a jibe at Calderón's political party, the National Action Party or PAN: "PAN government, imperialist whelp." "Rechazo a la visita de Bush en Mérida," March 14, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEY0FNvfvHo.

134 Fernández Mendiburu and Capetillo Pasos, "Denuncias de violaciones previas a la visita de Bush."
arrested 48 people. Testimonies collected by Indignación suggest that the arrests had little if anything to do with the broken windows that purportedly prompted the police operation. Instead, these people were detained for being young or dressing a certain way. Witnesses also reported that the arrests were accompanied by poor treatment and physical strikes—Gerardo González Miranda had multiple ribs broken, for example—and were not informed of why they were being arrested.

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135 "Ante las violaciones a derechos humanos, la procuraduría debe desistir de la acusaciones contra detenidos del martes 13," Indignación, March 20, 2007, http://indignacion.org.mx/2007/03/20/ante-las-violaciones-a-derechos-humanos-la-procuraduría-debe-desistirse-de-las-acusaciones-contra-detenidos-del-martes-13/. A related note: Victor Quintana has called the "war on drugs" a “juvencidio,” or a situation in which youth are persecuted and/or killed with impunity. We see this dynamic at play throughout Mexico under the regime of the "war on drugs." As Wright observes in Ciudad Juárez, the murder of people of the ages 20-24 has climbed 400 percent from 2008-2012. Wright, "Feminism, urban knowledge, and the killing of politics," 2013.

136 "Ante las violaciones a derechos humanos," Indignación. In 2011, Gerardo González Miranda left Mexico permanently; he felt he was in danger for his participation in various social movements. "In Mexico I suffered a lot of violence...Yes, my fears were founded by the state's very bad treatment of me, torture, mockery, confinement, and indifference," he writes. Gerardo González Miranda, "Companer@s les agradezco mucho su atención," March 21, 2011, http://gerardo.desaparecido.blogspot.ca/. My translation.

137 Images retrieved from "Rechazo a la visita de Bush en Mérida, Yucatán," March 14, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFY0FNv1Ho"
The following morning, another person was arrested and detained, bringing the total to 49 young people. Some of the detainees were held in buildings of the Secretary of Protection and Roads (SPV); the remaining in the municipal police buildings. They were not allowed contact with lawyers or family members. Hours later, they were then transferred to the Yucatán Office of the Attorney General. According to further testimonies gathered by Indignación, the majority of the detained were "victims of physical and psychological torture and cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment."

One person reported being beaten and “zapped” by various police while being moved from *el centro* to the municipal police building. He describes being brutally beaten by an unknown number of people in his cell. Bruises and other lesions on this person as well as on the other detainees were noted by workers at Indignación long after they had been arrested. Two months later, several of those arrested on March 13, 2007 remained in jail cells.

Contemplating the rational objectives of this kind of punishment is a dangerous game, as there are many psychosocial dynamics that bear on a situation in which a person or a group of people inflict extreme physical violence on another. But I am inclined to believe Taussig’s argument that “the need to control massive populations through the cultural elaboration of fear” played a crucial role. According to Joaquín, the detention served as a lesson to the people of Mérida, "especially [to] young people. It was clear. Nothing against their [the government's] interests would be tolerated." Diana Taylor argues that political terror is most effective in

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138 Images retrieved from Ibid.

139 Ibid. See also “Observaciones a la recomendación 19/2007 de la Codhey relativa a los hechos del día 13 de marzo de 2007,” *Equipo Indignación A.C.*, Received via email September 2012.


141 Taussig, “Culture of Terror, Space of Death,” 469.
managing groups of people when it engenders in those people the sensation that they easily could have been one of the victims.\textsuperscript{142} For this reason it is worth highlighting that, following Indignación reports, the 48 detainees were not linked to the original acts of window and glass breaking in the government palace that were said to have prompted the riot police operation. Instead, the arrests seemed to be quite random, a phenomenon that Taylor argues is essential to not only "reduce[ing] the victim to powerlessness, but also the spectator,"\textsuperscript{143} and serves to "atomize the victimized population and to preclude the possibility of solidarity and mobilization."\textsuperscript{144}

How Mérida \textit{the place} was reconfigured for the Bush-Calderón security talks both exemplify and augur the priority given to \textit{state} over \textit{bodily} security in the historical moment of the "war on drugs." U.S and Mexican statecraft restricted access to and visibility of different spaces in Mérida for people whose traverse these spaces—workers, students, families—in their everyday lives. The flip side of this is that state visibility of and accessibility to the city were vastly expanded for the soldiers, police, and elite actors associated with both the U.S. state and the central Mexican state. The helicopters above the city and the insertion of snipers and surveillance cameras throughout the urban landscape are an even more explicit example of this. Finally, that the vast majority of the decisions concerning shifting bilateral security imperatives during the meetings were not made public\textsuperscript{145} demonstrates a broader structure of occlusion at play. Thus, the Bush-Calderón dialogue in many ways foreshadowed the clandestine character of the Merida Initiative. And that the detained were not informed on the charges filed against them

\textsuperscript{142} Taylor, \textit{Disappearing Acts}, 130.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{145} "President Bush and President Calderón Participate in a Joint Press Conference," The White House.
exemplifies the general sentiment of uncertainty among the civilian population, where basic questions of why, where, and when went unanswered by the state.

Central to this material-discursive regime of state over bodily security is the positioning of political assembly in public space as a threat to the state apparatus, and state security as something that must be vigilantly guarded. The mere gathering of bodies in public spaces to which entrance had been restricted or under intense surveillance by both the U.S. and Mexican states warranted repressive action. The most explicit materialization of this structure of logic was on the protestor who was beaten, “zapped,” and tortured. Here we see complete state impunity, for it was the victim of torture who was incarcerated (and in the wake of the events questioned by a state court judge: “Are you absolutely certain that George Bush is guilty of genocide?” and “Do you know what genocide means?”146). Torture’s enactor in this case, however, remains a ghostly figure never charged with a crime. I keep these ideas in the forefront as I turn to my next scene.

3.3 12 bodies

A year and a half after the Bush-Caldéron security dialogue (and two months after the Merida Initiative was signed into law), 11 beheaded bodies were found in Chichi Suárez, an ex-hacienda located on the outer ring of Mérida. At this point in time, the escalation of violence across the nation was in full swing; the total number of drug-related deaths for August 2008 had

surpassed the number for the full year of 2007. Violence was reported be "swelling," "growing," and veritably "bleeding" the nation. In Yucatán, however, nods to the tranquility and security of the region began to circulate at a quickening pace, and it was during this period that theories meant to explain the lack of "drug related violence" proliferated. In diplomatic wires from Mérida to Washington, for example, the U.S. consulate in Mérida quoted Yucatán state prosecutor José Alonso Guzmán Pacheco in arguing that the absence of organized crime in the region was due to it always having been “geographically isolated from the rest of Mexico.” Another local government official explained the lack of narco-related crime in the region by the large numbers and cultural sway of Maya peoples, a “naturally passive” indigenous group whose modes of social interaction and organization were incongruous with “crime and delinquency.” In short, anxiety was widespread, but it was an anxiety bound up in the idea that violence elsewhere could creep into and contaminate the space of nonviolence.

Different versions of the story of the 12 bodies reported various kinds of marks on the them, such as tattoos in the shapes of dragons or stars, wrists bound by handcuffs, and more generalized signs of torture. Reports of Z-shaped slices in the skin of the victims also surfaced, meant to signify the work of “Los Zetas.” The following day, another headless body bearing the

151 Ibid.
same markings as the other eleven cropped up in Buctzotz, a community located about eighty miles east of Mérida, quite close to the archeological site of Chichen Itzá.\(^{152}\)

The Office of Special Investigations against Organized Delinquency (SIEDO) and the Mexican military were immediately called to join in the investigation and to seal off the Yucatán peninsula from the rest of Mexico.\(^{153}\) The investigation that ensued was characterized by anxiety over whether the bodies were from the state of Yucatán or elsewhere. At first, the government assumed they were “drug dealers” from another part of Mexico, but police later established ten were Yucatecan. There was also intense speculation about where the executions had taken place. Most were convinced that the twelve people had been killed outside of the city limits of Mérida, and perhaps even outside of Yucatán. However, investigators confirmed that the murders had been committed in a house a mere two blocks from the Paseo de Montejo.\(^{154}\)

In the immediate wake of the bodies being found, Governor Ivonne Ortega Pacheco requested that local police be backed up by federal agents. The Mexican government responded by sending 130 members of the Federal Police to secure “sites of public interest” in Mérida.\(^{155}\) Police and military checkpoints were installed at different points of entry to the city,\(^{156}\) while the local government sent letters to residents warning of the looming threat of narco-related


\(^{153}\) Fuente, "A un año del terror.”.

\(^{154}\) Ibid.

\(^{155}\) “Yucatán seeking to remain an oasis of tranquility,” \textit{Wikileaks}.

\(^{156}\) “Encuentran 12 decapitados en Yucatán,” \textit{Radio Motul}.
violence.\textsuperscript{157} Military forces joined in on the securitization of the peninsula at large, especially along the highway from Mérida to Cancún. The next morning, federal police and military members detained three people, Víctor López García of Veracruz, Manuel de Jesús Poot Ek of the Yucatecan city of Tizimín, and Juan Camacho Coronado of Monterrey, near Cancún. An ax with traces of blood, a shovel, and guns and cartridges of the Mexican armed forces. They were subsequently transferred to a high security facility in Puente Grante, Jalisco.\textsuperscript{158} On October 26, 2008, they were formally indicted for 'organized delinquency,' 'crimes against health,' and homicide. Two of them had admitted to belonging to \textit{Los Zetas} and being in charge of burning bodies. To my knowledge, they are still there.\textsuperscript{159}

There are three issues I want to highlight about this scene. The first deals with how the decapitated bodies were classified, not least because material bodies are the ingredients\textsuperscript{160} with which the state concocts its tales about security and the threat of violence. At this point during the unfolding of the “war on drugs,” for a murder to be catalogued as a “homicide allegedly linked to organized crime” it had to “meet two of six specific criteria resulting from official investigations into the activities of individuals presumed to be involved in organized crime.” The criteria were as follows:

1. The victim was killed by high caliber firearms.

2. The victim presents signs of torture or severe lesions.

\textsuperscript{157} An interviewee informed me of this.
\textsuperscript{158} Fuente, "A un año del terror."
3. The victim was killed where the body was found, or the body was located in a vehicle.

4. The body was wrapped with sheets (cobijas), taped, or gagged.

5. The homicide occurred within a penitentiary and involved criminal organizations.

6. Special circumstances (e.g., victim was abducted prior to assassination (levantón), ambushed or chased, an alleged member of a criminal organization, or found with a narcomessage (narcomensaje) on or near the body).\textsuperscript{161}

These murders met two of the criteria: signs of physical abuse and "special circumstances" that linked the act to Los Zetas. With respect to the latter, the three men detained in Cancún were immediately characterized as belonging to this group.\textsuperscript{162} The murders were said to have been a strategic threat to narcomenudistas (small scale drug traffickers) working out of Mérida.\textsuperscript{163} The list of victim identities released included name, place of birth, place of residence, and age. The only other data provided were crimes for which the person had previously been processed, and any additional information that indicated proclivity toward narco-related activity. Manuel Rosado Chan, for example, was described as “34 years old, born in Mérida, lived in Kanasín, and was processed on two occasions for ‘crimes against health,’ including possession of cocaine and possession of cocaine hydrochloride.” In the same vein, Miguel Angel Puerto Gutiérrez was a “35 year old residing in his hometown of Progreso who had been previously processed for

\textsuperscript{161} Molzahn, Ríos, and Shirk, "Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis through 2011." In 2011, the label "homicide allegedly linked to organized crime" categorization was changed to "homicides allegedly caused by criminal rivalry."

\textsuperscript{162} Fuente, "A un año del terror."

\textsuperscript{163} "Encuentran 12 decapitados en Yucatán," Radio Motul.
cocaine possession. He was a taxi driver involved in *narcomenudeo*, especially with foreign tourists.  

In this system of corporeal categorization, the label “homicide allegedly linked to organized crime,” was tremendously malleable. U.S. consul to Mérida Karen Martin argued that the decapitated were “street sellers of drugs.” The Calderón administration and Yucatán state governments were also prompt in their charges that all of the victims were involved in the trafficking of drugs. They made a further argument as well. Such an extreme demonstration of violence, Calderón officials asserted, was provoked by the disintegration of the economic and political clout of the cartels. In other words, the Yucatán beheadings “show[ed] that arrests and drug seizures have hurt the cartels, prompting them to lash out with increasing savagery.”

Deborah Thomas notes the tendency for episodes of violence like this to be depicted as inherently irrational: “The perpetrators...are seen as immutably bereft of moral responsibility or human empathy, and their behavior is seen to be patterned by a pathological culture that they cannot help but reproduce.” But it is more complicated. The spectacular act was painted as the rational response to drug interdiction actions that threatened the profit-generating enterprise of the cartel. The dead bodies signaled the triumph of nationwide securitization efforts (at this point proceeding open throttle) in putting pressure on the self-contained world of drug trafficking. They were left, the story goes, with no choice but to employ extreme physical violence, for their very existence was precarious. Such a framing resulted in the declaration that those killed were invariably part of this illegal world and thus deserving of death. To senior state

164 Fuente, "A un año del terror."
165 Ellingwood, "Drug war bodies are piling up in Mexico."
actors affiliated with Mexican and U.S. governments, violence was taken to mean the cleansing of society as criminals kill each other off. In other words, the 12 mutilated bodies were enrolled by the state as evidence of the *success* of the program of securitization unfolding across the country.  

That the “wounded or slain body” is primary fodder for the narratives of the state implies a fundamental role in the formation of subjectivities as well. This leads me to my second point: the way the incident immobilized the daily rhythms of Yucatán's capital city. These twelve bodies (which to date represented the largest execution since Calderón declared war on organized crime) generated a climate of fear by *calling attention to violence that could possibly ensue* in Yucatán as it had in other parts of Mexico.

After an emergency meeting with state municipal police and the Secretary of National, Attorney General of Yucatán José Guzmán Pacheco urged Yucatecans to remain calm. But the general sentiment was that these decapitated bodies signified a shift in how security was to be effected in Yucatán. At the press conference, a journalist remarked, “This time, it’s not an ‘isolated case,’ like authorities usually say when there are narco-related crimes in the region.” Pacheco responded, “No, it’s not an isolated case, but we hope it doesn’t happen again.” In a

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167 As outlined by Melissa Wright, this is the same logic in operation in Ciudad Juárez. Bodies are enrolled by the Mexican and U.S. states as evidence of the success of an intensified military presence, “provid[ing] the raw materials for this politics.” In labeling these bodies as implicated in “organized crime,” the state mobilizes them (marked or unmarked by race, gender, wounds or scars) and the spaces within which they circulate (or are killed or dumped) as evidence of triumph of securitization in interrupting the activities of drug cartels. To human rights activists in the city, on the other hand, such bodies are physical reminders of state complicity and impunity in the explosion of violence. Wright, "Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide."

168 Mbmebe, "Necropolitics."

169 Quoted in Boffil Gómez, "Hallan en Yucatán 12 decapitados."
tour of indigenous municipalities days later, the governor asserted “We will not let something like this happen again.” In January 2009, Karen Martin echoed this sentiment in a diplomatic cable to Washington, asserting, “though Yucatán has not suffered the same level of violence that is seen in other parts of Mexico, a few high profile criminal acts committed here in 2008 serve as a reminder that it is part of the narco-conflict that exists in all of Mexico.” The message goes on to cite different analysts consulted by the embassy, all of whom suggested that violence in the region was expected to intensify, despite the widely circulating rumors of a truce established between large cartels and narcomenudistas:

Currently there are no indications of a decline in violence. The drug cartels have demonstrated to be remarkably innovative in their attacks and resistance to the offenses of the state. They are powerfully armed and have deeply infiltrated security institutions.

The panic, in the words of Martin, that “the worst was yet to come” was actively fomented by municipal and state governments. David, a #YoSoy132 activist, explained that letters from the municipal government and state governments were sent out to people, warning that “violence related to drugs and the cartels” in the area was expected to increase. He laughed while telling me about this widespread paranoia, and later on in our conversation declared that it faded within a month or two. But he was precise in emphasizing the terror induced by the appearance of the bodies:

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170 Ibid.
171 Yucatán seeking to remain an oasis of tranquility, "WikiLeaks.
172 Ibid.
It scared all of us. We hadn’t seen violence so explicit until that happened. 12 bodies without heads? It was a shock, to the whole city. There was a panic, everyone was like, fuck, this is the start of the violence, this is the start of the war here. It’s going to be like it is in the north. It was a big deal, it was talked about a lot. People panicked, thought that there were going to be kidnappings, thought a narco group has penetrated Yucatán and was going to change the way things are done here. Everyone stayed in their houses. Stuff like that.

This dynamic exemplifies the other side of the malleability of "homicides allegedly linked to organized crime" in the context of the "war on drugs." Yucatán’s default state of tranquility had been contaminated by violence, and the only solution was to armor the state apparatus so that it would never happen again. “What did the government do [in response]?” David asked rhetorically; “They said, we’re going to fortify security. And you saw police and military all over the place. For people to feel more protected.” Here, it was the lack of slain bodies in public space (seen as Yucatán’s default condition, the condition of nonviolence that had been sullied by the 12 bodies) given as a reason for broader military and police presence.

What I want to highlight here is that both the presence and absence of dead bodies were mobilized in the service of securitization in this scene. On the one hand, the bodies represented the success of securitization in putting pressure on Los Zetas and flushing society of fifteen criminals—twelve that had been decapitated and three than had been incarcerated. On the other, the normal lack of slain bodies in the public spaces of Yucatán was framed as something that needed to be protected in the face of a violence threatening from all directions. Whether the victims or those arrested for the crime were involved in narco-related activities is beside the
point—the contradictory production of bodies illustrates the self-referential character of securitization in Yucatán.

Finally, political terror can be seen working at multiple levels in this scene, effected primarily through a publicly staged theatricality. The targets of these nefarious actions were not limited to those murdered; the bodies were displayed for the entire city to behold. It was an act of violence for public consumption, designed to make an imprint on Yucatecan society and culture. The heads, notoriously absent, took on an alluringly repugnant character. People wondered where they were. Spectacles like these, Diana Taylor contends, seek to draw an audience in and paralyze it at the same time. But unlike the state repression of March 13, this act of terror was not premised on the state presenting an arbitrary selection of victims to a particular group of people. Instead, the government was adamant in arguing that the victims were involved in illegal activity. The message was that if you don't get involved (si no te metes) violence will not befall you. The emphasis was on the individual as a responsible and rational actors. And the effect was to cause people to ponder what the dead did to deserve such horrific treatment.

Crucially, this reflection was not limited to the possibility of drugs, cartels, and violence “penetrating” Yucatán. It was also tied to the uncertainty of whether or how the government was involved. David framed everyday conceptualizations of August 2008 like this:

It’s believed that the beheadings were [the result of] a misunderstanding between narcos. Or between the government and the narcos. Maybe the narcos

said, we’re gonna do something that makes a lot of noise about violence in Yucatán, so that people go wild. Maybe the government decided not to do something that the narcos told them to do. I don’t know, and as a punishment, they did this. I don’t know. I doubt, though, that it was only between narcos. I think the government had something to do with it.

It is this ambiguity about state involvement that renders the political terror of this incident so insidious. In addition to embodying the ever-present threat of "drug-related violence," the 12 victims represented the ever-present possibility of state violence.

3.4 The cockroach effect

Materially speaking, the two scenes I have just described have left indelible marks on Mérida’s landscapes of security. The March 2007 security talks injected the city with military and police equipment and personnel, setting in motion the more gradual processes of securitization that have typified the city since. For people embedded in Yucatán’s government apparatus, the surveillance equipment installed for the security talks represents an inheritance for the future safety and security of Mérida, and the various technologies imported into the city continue to be cited as one the principal reasons for its nonviolent character. Meridanos told me the 26 surveillance cameras provided by the U.S. government have since been installed along the highway encircling Mérida’s city limits, thus becoming an enduring component of its geography. The August 2008 beheadings solidified the presence of Mexican military forces in Yucatán as well, conducting various operatives and establishing military control points across its landscapes. Both of these scenes are also important for their symbolic clout. March 2007 illustrates the conceptual merging of “bodies on the street” with “insecurity,” whereby the amassing of bodies
in public spaces is rendered a threat to state security. And the events of August 2008 are still political fodder in discussions of public safety and security, the bodies representing what could possibly befall Mérida should control be lost.

The project of remaking Yucatán in the name of security took off in the wake of the August 2008 beheadings and is largely ongoing. Changes in forms of policing civil society in many ways reflect the vision of the region as a safe and tranquil place that must be protected, and threats rooted out. According to Attorney General Hector Cabrera Rivero, securitization is underpinned by the "cockroach effect," or the idea drugs, violence, and general criminality from other areas of Mexico might come to Yucatán, “trying to hide from justice.” This widely circulating idea both produces the problem of "drug related violence" in a certain way, and structures responses to it. It is similar to the metaphor of infectious disease, which "is said to come from 'outside,' to 'hide' within cells and to 'elude detection.'" Think of the kind of imagery the cockroach brings to mind. It survives for long periods of time without sustenance, often concealed from view. It moves furtively in the shadows only to burst unexpectedly into purview. And one quickly becomes many. A cockroach infestation is never desirable. Its only action is to multiply, occupy more space.

Cabrera Rivero argues that the only way to prevent a cockroach infestation is to preemptively extinguish threats, either through direct intervention (patrols and raids) or by defensive measure (alarms or surveillance cameras). In the historical moment of the "war on drugs," references to the "cockroach effect" have been plentiful across Mexico, but what is

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175 Bell, "Hybrid Warfare and its Metaphors," 226.
different about its dissemination in Yucatán is the ambivalence it signals vis-à-vis the securitization of other regions. Anti-drug operatives elsewhere are seen as having the potential to push criminals into the nonviolent space of Yucatán (See Figure 11). Cabrera Rivero notes:

Experts worldwide agree that it is better to strengthen regions that appear to be free of criminals. When the “sprayed roach” effect expels them from [where they came] it will be very difficult for them to get a foothold in these healthy sites, precisely because [our] surveillance and communication are very agile, and they won’t be able to find any accomplices.\(^\text{176}\)

Nonviolent space is here positioned as a possible refuge for delinquency, and can only be conserved by a variety of police and military initiatives.

The first of these initiatives is the hardening of statecraft by "professionalizing" and "integrating" security forces, including the coordination of the security-related tasks of the Mexican Armed Forces, the Mexican Navy, the Federal Police, federal and state Attorney Generals, and state and municipal police in Yucatán,\(^\text{177}\) and the outfitting of police forces with “modern” vehicles and more “sophisticated” radio communication and data analysis technologies. Saidén Ojeda, head of the Secretary for Public Safety (SSP), affirmed that from 2008-2012, over $800,000,000 pesos (the equivalent of about $60 million US dollars) were invested in equipping, training, and better paying the Yucatecan state police force, and over 730 new full time positions were added.\(^\text{178}\)

\(^\text{176}\)Ibid. My translation, my emphasis.
\(^\text{177}\)Commander Emilio Fernando Zacarías Laines would later hail these blurred lines for maintaining the climate of peace, stating in 2011 that “at a checkpoint, if at any moment we begin to feel overwhelmed, we have the support of the military, of the federal [police] forces, and of the Ministerial Police. If we don’t trust our comrades, we won’t be strong. It’s the union that is strong." Quoted in Solera, "Seguridad Atípica."
\(^\text{178}\)Fuente, "Yucatán ha invertido 800 mdp en seguridad." Much of this new equipment was presented in public ceremonies of police recognition (See Figure 4). In 2010, for example, Governor Ortega Pacheco presided over an event in which forty-five new fully-equipped vehicles (fifteen RAM trucks, 14 Dakota trucks, ten Police Chargers
and six police-type Tahoe trucks, totaling just under 26 million pesos) were put on display for civil society. See also Rafael Gómez Chi, "Amplio reconocimiento a policías estatales," Por Esto 2010, http://www.poresto.net/ver_nota.php?zona=yucatan&idSeccion=1&idTitulo=179757. The details of professionalization and training programs in Yucatán are largely veiled in secret, as is how they are financed. Randal C Archibold, "Wanted: Officers to Retake Mexico," The New York Times March 12, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com Reports from police training programs in other Mexican states, however, point to “federal grants” as the source of funds. /2011/03/13/world/americas/13mexico.html?pagewanted=all. I am inclined to believe these grants are part of the Mexican government’s agreement to follow the Merida Initiative model and match the U.S. government’s funds on a ratio of 13:1.

The professionalization of the state police force was also advanced through training programs conducted by military, police, and private security experts from around the world. The National Police of Colombia, for example, conducted multiple training courses and workshops (described as "elite" by Attorney General Hector Cabrera Rivero) in Yucatán across these years, and training programs in “physical preparation,” “personality, attitude, and mental state,” “management and use of arms,” and “communications techniques” given by experts from France, Colombia, Israel, and the United States also took place. These courses complemented those given by the U.S. FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigations) and SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics), in reference to which Saidén Ojeda stated, “What we will never do is rest on our laurels. Because, to preserve our security, you have to work all day and all night, and that implies training. To be the best.”

We also see the further expansion of the capabilities of the state to mark and monitor bodies. As Steven Graham notes for military urbanism more broadly, these kinds of control technologies bleed into urban rhythms of life and built environments: “Layered over and through everyday urban landscapes, bringing into being radically new styles of movements, interactions, consumption and politics, in a sense they become the city.” On this front, we have the development of the network of surveillance cameras across the state, increasing from 26 in 2007 (all in Mérida, most of which were the residue of the Bush-Calderón dialogue) to 200 in 2012.

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with 140 belonging to the SSP and sixty under the control of the municipality of Mérida. The surveillance network is currently being complemented by the gradual installation of similar mechanisms in Progreso, Kanasín, and Tizimín, as well as along the highway entrance to Yucatán on the border it shares with Quintana Roo. With this system of surveillance cameras, complemented by mobile surveillance towers (see Figure 12), images of "points of interests," most of which are in Mérida, arrive to a monitoring centers at the SSP, where twenty four people are currently employed.\textsuperscript{183} The surveillance of people in Mérida also extends to the corporeal level, as Yucatán became the only state in Mexico to employ a system of biometric identification, both of fingerprint and iris.\textsuperscript{184}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure12}
\caption{SSP surveillance tower\textsuperscript{185}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{183} Fuente, "Yucatán ha invertido 800 mdp en seguridad."
\textsuperscript{184} Solera, "Seguridad Atípica."
\textsuperscript{185} Photo by author.
The SSP aims to expand this network to 428 cameras in the coming years, as well as construct 26 video surveillance arches in Yucatán's highway system (see Figures 13 and 14). "We are not putting more cameras in. We're establishing a system in Yucatán that will not only capture images but also analyze them, immediately generating actions and decision-making on security matters," newly elected Governor Rolando Zapata Bello remarked.\(^{186}\)

This network of surveillance cameras is complemented by the SSP placing more attention on retenes (military or police checkpoints) in the region, especially at the entrances to Mérida and along the highway encircling the city and the major roadways leaving the city. Part of the broader goal of preventing those who have committed crimes in the neighboring state of Quintana Roo from entering Yucatán (See Figure 19), retenes managed by SSP required that all vehicles with out-of-state license plates carrying more than two occupants be stopped. SSP also stipulated that random searches, both at the entrances and throughout the city, be more exhaustive.\(^{187}\) Figure 20 displays retenes installed throughout the city in the month of January 2012. Those in the color red signal a retén in which the occupants of every vehicle are required to stop and speak with authorities about the direction and purpose of their travels.

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\(^{187}\) Fuente, "Yucatán ha invertido 800 mdp en seguridad." See also Patricia Piña, "Vigilan las 24 hora en los retenes," _SIPSE_ March 22, 2010. http://sipse.com/archivo/vigilan-las-24-horas-en-los-retenes-37942.html. This is often rationalized as an effort to crack down on driving under the influence of alcohol, and most retenes include measuring the blood alcohol levels of the driver.
Figure 13: 17 video surveillance arches to be established on Mérida's periférico\textsuperscript{188}

Figure 14: 8 video surveillance arches to be established in interior Yucatán highways\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{188} Source: Debate Por Yucatán; Retrieved from http://www.debateporyucatan.com/camaras-de-video-refuerzan-vigilancia-de-red-vial-en-yucatan.html

\textsuperscript{189} Image retrieved from Ibid.
Figure 15: Military retén, entrance to state of Yucatán\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{190} Photo by author.
Professionalization, integration, and surveillance are part of the project of combating narcomenudeo (small scale drug trafficking), which was named the greatest threat to Yucatecan nonviolence in the wake of August 2008. In this paradigm, narcomenudeo represents those first few cockroaches that, without state intervention, threaten to multiply uncontrollably. The Mexican military has slowly expanded its operations in Yucatán since then, and by the summer of 2012, over 2000 troops were stationed in the state for the purpose of combating narcomenudeo. The Special Operatives Group on Robbery and Assault (GOERA), for example, conducted 472 operatives in Mérida from 2008-2012. Additionally, Yucatán is the only state

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191 Map compiled by author in Google Maps; data pulled from http://ret.io/mx/YUC/MID/retenes/ database,
in Mexico to have an agency devoted to *narcomenudeo*, a special police force (trained by Colombian police forces) called the "Crimes against Health Unit." Beginning in 2011, this agency initiated 310 criminal investigations that resulted in the detainment of 607 people, making it the institution of the country to pursue convictions related to *narcomenudeo* at the level of the state government. Across these years the Mexican Air Force conducted flyovers of Yucatán in search of landing strips, stockpiles of drugs, or drug-trafficking routes in rural Yucatán. Of this, General Virgilio Bazán Méndez, commander of the Tenth Military Command Region, proclaimed, “[W]hen we see any suspicious terrain, we destroy it,” adding that “narcomenudistas fall daily thanks to the actions of the [Mexican] Army.”

Two observations arise from the ongoing securitization of Yucatán. First, it is characterized by anxiety over the potential of "drug related violence" spreading and weakening its perceived "excess of security." It is evocative of what Foucault calls the "political dream of a disciplined society." At the center of this dream, and threatening it, lies the “state of plague,” a concept that emblematizes confusion, disarray, and even pandemonium. Infestations of drugs, criminality, and violence map onto the idea of the "state of plague," and they are said to be countered by the ordering capacities of securitization: “the plague is met by order; its function is

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192 Solera, "Seguridad Atípica."
193 Cabrera Rivero, "El fortalecimiento de la @fgeyucatán."
196 This military command region encompasses the entire Yucatán Peninsula, including the states of Quintana Roo, Campeche, and Yucatán. It is headquartered in Mérida.
197 Quoted in Fuente, "Yucatán es trampolín." I have only come across cursory references to the destruction of space perceived to be landing strips in rural Yucatán, and am therefore unable to make any conclusive statements about what they mean. But I will say that the apolitical manner in which these operations are presented is reminiscent of aerial fumigation in Colombia, and warrants deeper research
198 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 197.
to sort out every possible confusions: that of the disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together, that of the evil, which is increased when fear and death overcome prohibitions."\textsuperscript{199} What I want to highlight here (as Foucault does) is that the plague-stricken town treads on \textit{possibility} more than \textit{presence}. The securitization of Yucatán seeks to root threats out \textit{preemptively}, relentlessly scanning landscapes and people in the service of this project. This logic of preemption "acts and decides precisely on the basis of an absence or an unknown, on the basis of that which can never be captured."\textsuperscript{200} Radical uncertainty is the foundation of securitization in Yucatán.

Second, the cockroach paradigm proclaims state rationality and expertise. Cockroach extermination, after all, is carried out by the professional, whose sets of equipment and knowledge allow every crevasse, every possible hiding place, to be penetrated. This metaphor proclaims (as opposed to demonstrating) the exigency of the state maneuvers it licenses.\textsuperscript{201} (Stamping out one cockroach with your shoe does not produce the same effect as professional extermination.) Juan Carlos, a tall, stoic, fifty-something man involved in directing the police department in Progreso, educated me on the supreme visual capacity and expertise of the Yucatecan state apparatus in the face of imminent cockroach infestation. Securitization allows the exchange of knowledge between different security forces and the government about threats to nonviolence, he told me, "so that we can know when more support [is needed] over here, or there are suspicious people over there." What has allowed Yucatán to maintain its nonviolent character, according to Juan Carlos, is its position "at the vanguard of technology. The best

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{200} Louise Amoore and Marieke de Goede, "Transactions after 9/11: the banal face of the preemptive strike," \textit{Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers} 33.2 (2008), 179.
patrol cars, always. The best armaments, always. All of the technology that we’ve been able to acquire in Yucatán, for the police forces, [we've gotten] it." 202 The "cockroach effect" turns political questions (of whom is monitored by these cameras, in the words of Juan Carlos, that can record at "up to 600 meters") into questions of technical extinguishing capacity. In this logic, maintaining a climate of nonviolence comes to hinge on constantly refining said capacity so that threats can be detected and appropriately warded off.

In sum, this trajectory—from the Merida Initiative meetings, to the August 2008 decapitations, to the expansion and refinement of techniques of policing and surveillance—illuminates the circular logic of securitization. It is only through the permanent presence of security forces in Yucatán that its nonviolent status can be maintained. But the other side of this logic is that nonviolence returns to be cited as evidence for the success of securitization efforts. What holds the argument for securitization together is the idea of nonviolence itself. It is an infallible line of reasoning, because challenging it means challenging the idea that nonviolence is a desirable quality.

3.5 Conclusion: A work of theatre

In the previous chapter, I cited Weber's famous formulation that hinges the legitimacy of the state apparatus on its monopoly of lawful violence in a given tract of land. 203 Of course, when wielded by police or military, physical force is not called violence. It is instead fully imbricated with and enacted within systems of reason. Indeed, one of the reasons the "war on

202 These discourses are in many ways premised on comparisons to the technological capacities of state and municipal polices forces in other parts of Mexico—Juan Carlos followed his previous statement up by declaring, "If you were going, for example, to D.F. [Distrito Federal] and saw the vehicles, you'd see they were suritos [a kind of police car], totally inadequate for police services."

203 Weber, "Politics as a Vocation."
drugs" has gone unchallenged in mainstream political discourse in Mexico is because it is figured as

the bulwark against the terrifying anomie and chaos pressing in on all sides.
There has to be a reason, and [they] have to use reason. Yet another part of
[them] welcomes the fact that reason— as instituted—has violence at its
disposal, because [they] feel that that very anomie and chaos will respond to
naught else.  

The development of modes of policing is said to be politically neutral, with securitization enacted purely in the service of preventing and protecting from violence.

The story I have told here, however, shows that it is instead a project engineered by the state and carried out for the purpose of expanding and intensifying its power. This is a power gleaned through the fabrication of a social order in which public space is conditional on the political proclivities of people gathering (recall, for example, the state repression of March 2007), those subjected to physical violence are said to have deserved it (as in the August 2008 spectacle), and anything deemed a threat is preemptively culled. That securitization constructs and solidifies social order in many ways that fall outside legal-juridical structures is illustrative of its almost exclusive reliance on policing as a way to bring compliant and fearful subjects into being. As Neocleous reminds us, "Policing in the most general sense of the term...is the most direct way in which the power of the state manifests itself to its subjects, the way in which the state constitutes and 'secures' civil society politically."  

But while it is true, as Neocleous writes, that the "ultimate truth of the police is that it deals in and dispenses violence in protection of the interests of the state," the trajectory of

205 Neocleous, *The fabrication of social order*, 89.
securitization since August 2008 is, on the large part, free of the use of overt physical force. Mérida is a much different environment from that of, for example, Ciudad Juárez, where both security forces and narcos point guns at civilians.\textsuperscript{206} It is instead a story of slow, creeping changes designed to be noticeable enough to shore up the state's claim that it is protecting against the threat of violence (in the face of “drug-related violence” entering Yucatán, securitization countered—“it was, against the power of death, the meticulous exercise of the sword”\textsuperscript{207}) but not so noticeable that it registers as aggressive for civil society. People often say the military and police are “not really doing anything.” I am inclined to believe that they mean their presence is almost ubiquitous, and constitutes less a blip on the radar than an unremarkable constancy.

Martín, a #YoSoy132 activist with whom I conversed one balmy evening in a park, helped me see the instrumentality of this. We were talking about the retenes installed throughout the city, the number of which, according to him, continued to increase. “Tell me more about them,” I said. "What purpose do you think they serve? To restrict the movement of people? A form of social control?” I asked. I was eager for Martín to give me a simple answer, an answer that would satisfy my desire to understand the state as a singular, rational body. Martín leaned to the edge of park bench and said:

No, not only that. The retenes are a way of saying, “Look, we are working!”

They are mostly controls for alcohol. It’s not about looking for drugs. Because the truth is, here in Yucatán... we all know who sells drugs. If you ask people for names, they could say yes, this person, this person, this person, and this person.

\textsuperscript{206} Quoted in Wright, "Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide,"\textsuperscript{726} Of this environment, one of Wright’s informants stated, “There is no difference right now between the troops and the narcos. They both have guns and point them at civilians. That’s all the logic we have here. That is our state.”

\textsuperscript{207} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 207.
They are well known secrets. What I mean is that everyone knows, but no one touches you. No one can. I don’t know if this is a governmental strategy to let the narco-traffickers work here without it being a problem, like in other parts [of Mexico], where supposedly, supposedly, the military is successfully interfering seriously with the business, with its leaders. They arm themselves, there are deaths, and all of that. Here, no. *It’s all a work of theatre.* I detain a few low level drug dealers, and it becomes “The police are doing their job.” You don’t go around shooting in the streets, and we are not going to have problems.

Martín returns us to the world of rumors and secrets with which I opened this chapter. In this world, the intensification of police and military presence in Mérida does not only serve the function of scanning for and marking threats among the bodies entering, leaving, and circulating through the differentiated space of the city. Securitization is also integral to performing this space as one that is under solid state control. Picture movement interrupted by an unexpected *retén*, the subtle red and blue lights of a few police trucks circulating the road one walks every day, and, from a distance, a new surveillance tower eerily raised in the center of a parking lot. These things are designed not to puncture everyday life, but saturate it. The perpetual circulation of military and police trucks (lights flashing and men with weapons in back) serves as a physical reminder of the solidity of the state apparatus in Yucatán, as well as its tranquility for the audience of civil society. It is thus as much a *performance* of state unity, rationality, and control as an *effect* of state power, a “fantasy misrecognized as an objective state: an aspirational position of…institutional self-legitimating performativity and an affective sense of control in relations to the fantasy of that position’s offer of security and efficacy.”

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We are now approaching an understanding of the self-referential speech of securitization, why it operates with such force, and the insidious role violence plays in Mérida in the historical moment of the "war on drugs." Things like the constant red-and-blue flicker and the fully-outfitted military member stationed on a platform alongside the main roadway are temporally deferred signs of state violence. That is, they signal the ever-present threat of state violence that remains non-activated. And they work because the acts of repression and torture carried out by the state in March 2007 remain a part of the social memory. The same goes for the beheaded bodies of August 2008, the memory of which contains the possibility of state involvement. Mitchell writes that phenomena like these “acquire usefulness in the play of domination, violence must be whispered about, recalled by its victims” and, crucially, “hinted at in future threats,” for it is the "disappearance or the hidden act of terror gains its force as an absence that is continually made present."209 Derrida might consign these signs to the work of différence, because they are “conceivable only on the basis of the presence [they] defer.”210 What is clear is that they are essential for discourses of securitization (and nonviolence) to be intelligible and to do the work of maintaining social control.

In sum, we have the endless circulation of bodies, of police, of drugs, and of rumors, all of which would fall under Foucault's category of the aleatory, or uncertain.211 Securitization attempts to monitor the aleatory, bring it under control, but only for the sake of the security and reproduction of the state. Further, the solidification of state security always performs the

possibility of state violence to be enacted against civil society. By way of conclusion, I return to Mark Neocleous:

What if security is little more than a semantic and semiotic black hole allowing authority to inscribe itself deeply into human experience? What if the magic word ‘security’ serves merely to neutralise political action, encouraging us to surrender ourselves to the state in a thoroughly conservative fashion? And what if this surrender facilitates an ongoing concession to authority and the institutional violence which underpins the authority in question, and thus constitutes the first key step in learning how to treat people not as human beings, but as objects to be administered? In other words, what if the major requirement of our time is less an expanded, refined, or redefined vision of security, and nothing less than a critique of security?²¹²

The storyline I have examined here certainly warrants these biting questions, and they can be extended to peace and tranquility as well. Is ‘nonviolence’ a conceptual black hole that defuses political action? Does it expedite and smooth over our capitulation to state power? The next chapter grapples with these questions on a deeper level.

Chapter 4: City of Peace

The master code of nonviolence

The culture of the people here is a pacifist culture. That's why we don't have a drug war.
- Manolo, "Port of Peace" campaign

We have often pointed out...that the level of security enjoyed in Yucatán is not exclusively the success of the authorities; social factors intervene, as do the geographical characteristics of the region...Yucatán is not wild, mountainous territory, and its communities aren’t isolated. In other parts [of Mexico] where defending the territory meant certain conducts, attitudes linked to distrust and suspicion, these things impede certain kinds of coexistence. Yucatán is coexistence.
- Yucatán Attorney General Hector Cabrera Rivero

[The] collapse of any distinction between war and peace mean[s] that the constant testing of loyalty, reassertion of identity and improvement in security can be carried out by and across the whole social body: the police are everywhere.
- Mark Neocleous

In the wake of the August 2008 decapitations, officials affiliated with the U.S. embassy in Mexico City and the U.S. consulate in Mérida met with Yucatecan government officials, businesspeople, and other 'important' figures in the region. They asked this diverse group to explain the beheadings. According to cables sent from the U.S. consulate in Mérida to Washington, the Yucatecans interviewed all strove to demonstrate that Yucatán is different from the rest of Mexico. Representatives from the U.S. and Mexican federal government were perplexed, and argued, “Yucatecans remain in an apparent state of denial...they think that there

214 Neocles, Critique of Security, 118.
isn’t a problem here, that the violence comes from Quintana Roo.”

This is a markedly different response from the panic I described in Chapter 2, yet there is a bit more to the story than outright denial. This peculiar oscillation—between affirming the region’s nonviolent status and suggesting that it needs to be fortified, between describing nonviolence as an intrinsic feature of Mérida and attributing it to the project of securitization—characterizes how the historical present of the "war on drugs" is experienced in Mérida. Discourses on peace and tranquility have multiplied at an astounding pace. People allude to nonviolence a lot, and they frequently encounter homages to it—flags, park benches, ceremonies, major infrastructure—as well.

This chapter scouts the relationship between cultural constructions of nonviolence (in and of Mérida), local securitization efforts (both practical and performative), and the "war on drugs" at large. I explore how the attempted resolution of the contradictions inhering in nonviolence results in the uneven distribution of material goods and political rights across the Yucatecan body politic. After describing the 2011 municipal branding campaigns that officially labeled Mérida and Progreso the "City of Peace" and "Port of Peace" respectively, I delve into what I call the "master code of nonviolence." Through interviews with governmental and police officials in these cities, I illuminate the “interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures” in the code, demonstrating its imbrication with the modes of civilian policing described in Chapter 3. As will become clear, the master code

215 “Yucatán seeking to remain an oasis of tranquility.” Wikileaks. Quintana Roo is the state that neighbors Yucatán on the east; its capital is Chetumal and its largest city is Cancún.


defines Mérida both within and against the enveloping scene of "drug-related violence," and becomes what Kathleen Stewart might call an "inhabitable space of desire." In the final part of the chapter, I grapple with how civilians are drawn into the master code of nonviolence through the state rhetoric of "nonviolent coexistence."

4.1 Introduction: the "City of Peace"

The stories of the "City of Peace" and "Port of Peace" began in 2010, when Juan Manuel Díaz Rubio funded the construction of a boat and sent it “out into the world with a Mayan boy and a cry of peace (See Figure 17).” Díaz Rubio, a prominent figure in the Yucatecan political scene, proclaimed his objective was to draw attention to the tranquility of the region and establish its dissimilitude from 'violent' Mexico at large. Though the trip received little local attention, it led to Mérida being added to a group of 98 cities throughout the world by the United Nations organization Paax-Urbis for exhibiting excellence in peace and security (see Figure 18).

In January 2011, Mayor Angélica Araujo Lara was joined by the director of the International Committee of the Banner of Peace (a non-governmental organization affiliated with the United Nations) in honoring Mérida for “achiev[ing] a more peaceful world in these difficult times.” The City Hall’s cultural affairs director Metri Duarte lauded the accolade as “a pride

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Figure 17: Zamná, Messenger of Peace

Figure 18: "City of Peace" flag raising ceremony


for each of the inhabitants of the city [of Mérida] and the state [of Yucatán], announcing that the banner would remain a fixed part of the urban landscape as long as Mérida preserved its tranquil climate. Mérida’s port city of Progreso was declared "Port of Peace" by the same organization. Soon thereafter, the international "City of Peace" distinction was taken up by the municipal governments of Mérida and Progreso, each of their landscapes becoming replete with references to peace, tranquility, and nonviolence under the "Peace" branding campaigns. The flag adorned with the symbol of Paax-Urbis is visible from many different city spaces, while the phrase “Mérida, City of Peace” embellishes park benches, fences, walls, and major infrastructure (see Figure 19). The municipal governments of Mérida and Progreso also actively reconfigured public spaces to reflect the vision of “peace” espoused by the campaigns. In the words of one municipal government employee, a park in Progreso that had previously been known as a space for “homeless people, deviant people,” was “cleaned up and rescued” under the banner of the campaign, and is now known as Peace Park (see Figure 20). Under the campaigns, the "City of Peace" and "Port of Peace" have become shimmery, immaculate, and ordered cities.

At first glance, the "peace" campaign seems to be an urban revitalization and development scheme. By establishing Mérida and its surrounding geographies as isolated from the “chaos” and “destruction” that descended upon other spaces of Mexico in recent years, governing elites shore up what journalist Edward Byrne calls Yucatán's "master development

\[\text{\textsuperscript{223} Ibid.}\]
Figure 19: Performing the "City of Peace" and "Port of Peace" 224

Figure 20: Peace Park, Progreso, Yucatán 225

224 Sources: (Top left) Informa Yucatán; Retrieved from http://informatyucatan.com/el-paso-deprimido-es-oficialmente-glorieta-de-la-paz; (top right and bottom left) Progreso Hoy; Retrieved from http://progresohoy.com/opinion/puerto-progreso-yucatan-sitio-paz-978/; (bottom right) photo by author.

225 Source: Ayuntamiento de Progreso; Retrieved from http://noticias.ayuntamientodeprogreso.gob.mx/2013/01/el-puerto-de-progreso-contara-con-el.html
plan" of building the tourist economy, attracting foreign investment, and making use of land, a plan some forty years in the making. Between 1970 and 1982, the Mexican state “discovered” the peninsula as a site of potential capital accumulation, “initiating the conquest of the southern frontier.” This coincided with the withering of the henequen industry, which both fomented the vision of Yucatán as ‘backwater’ region and drew labor into Mérida. After the piloting of the Maquila Export Program in Yucatán, an export assembly initiative, Yucatán has assumed a prominent role in Mexico's economic strategy aimed at attracting foreign (especially U.S.) capital. The first reason for this positioning was geographical. Given the costly nature of

227 Ibid., 27. My translation. This move cannot be separated from the larger context of the economic crisis in the early 1970s that threw the Mexican state into a fiscal catastrophe. Though far from egalitarian in structure or political will, the corporatist state headed by the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) and its state-directed economic development program of import-substitution a robust state monopoly sector that controlled transport, utilities, energy, and steel had before this crisis made some concessions to the peasant, working and middle classes. However, in the face of fiscal crisis, the PRI chose to borrow a significant amount of money from American investment banks to funnel back into the state. As a result of the intensification of the recession, coupled with the decline in American demand for Mexican products, Mexico declared bankruptcy in 1982. The Reagan administration, faced with significant potential losses on the parts of American investment bankers, enrolled the IMF (International Monetary Fund) to impose structural adjustment on Mexico. The result was expansive privatization, the alignment the financial system with American corporate interests, the prising open of internal markets to direct foreign investment, and dismantling barriers to trade. Taken together, this resulted in the decline of state spending on social programs and public goods as well as the decline of the value of workers’ real wages by 50% across the 1980s. After the 1982 debt crisis, the economic orientation of the Mexican state shifted substantially. In addition to domestic fiscal austerity and the privatization of state-owned enterprises, Mexico centered on trade liberalization and attracting foreign direct investment. The enactment of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) in 1994 and the devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1995 rendered drug exports to the United States fundamental for Mexico’s comparative advantage in the context of regional trade. But more importantly, Mexico began to import highly subsidized maize and bean, its most important subsistence crops. Coupled with the dismantling of the ejido institution upon which the collective security of peasants rested, neoliberalization stripped peasants and small farmers of their means of reproduction. The active propping up of financial capital by the state, linked to the systematic diminishment of the standard of living in Mexico exemplifies the transfer of surplus value from Mexico to the United States, and from the campesino and working classes to elite classes, effected under NAFTA. In its first ten years, trade between Mexico and the U.S. had exploded by 227 percent. Meanwhile, as Mexican industries were bought up by U.S.-based corporations, unions and workplace conditions suffered greatly. See Peter Andreas, "The Political Economy of Narco-Corruption," Current History 97 (1998), 160-165; and David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
transporting raw materials and machinery from the peninsula to urban centers in central Mexico and the location of the port of Progreso in relation to U.S. gulf cities, federal authorities agreed that Yucatán had tremendous potential to become Mexico’s “other maquiladora frontier,” and initiated the construction of a deep water port at Progreso that made possible the introduction of sizeable container vessels and cruise ships into Yucatán. 230 Yucatán also offered extremely lucrative benefits to its investors; it possessed a large pool of unskilled and unemployed workers, and minimum wage sanctions in Yucatán were about half as much as those along the U.S.-Mexico border. These factors converged with Mérida’s oft-cited cultural capital to render the city one of Mexico’s high-priority growth poles in recent years. 231

The state government of Yucatán also played an instrumental role in aligning the infrastructure of Yucatán with foreign economic interests. In addition to subsidizing month-long training programs for new maquila workers, it offered free land to maquiladora owners, and embarked on an aggressive campaign that advertised labor costs at below one dollar per hour to a U.S. audience. These strategies resulted in the construction of several industrial parks around Mérida and Progreso, the most important of which being the 500 acre Yucatán Industrial Park. It currently houses the Yucatán International Business Development Center, a joint public-private organization premised on promoting Yucatán as an ideal locale for foreign businesses who seek

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231 Ibid.
to take advantage of the increase in trade opportunities engendered by NAFTA.\textsuperscript{232} By 2000, the maquila industry employed almost 35,000 people (or one third of Yucatán's manufacturing labor force),\textsuperscript{233} with economic benefits accruing almost exclusively to foreign investors and local elites.\textsuperscript{234} The urban infrastructure of the Mérida-Progreso area has been the target of aggressive development projects in recent years, including the construction of multiple malls, medical facilities, and resorts over the indigenous communal agricultural lands (\textit{ejidos})\textsuperscript{235} surrounding the city.\textsuperscript{236}

These political economic trajectories are visible in the very architecture of the "City of Peace" campaign. Under its banner, the municipality of Mérida created a new division in the Directorate of Economic Development centered on attracting foreign and domestic capital for constructing hotels, restaurants, and retail, entertainment, and tourist attractions along the Paseo de Montejo. This bundle of policies, according to mayor Araujo Lara, "provided all of the

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\textsuperscript{233} Baklanoff, "Mexico's Other Maquiladora Frontier," 101.
\textsuperscript{235} The constitutional right to \textit{ejido} land, abolished in 1991, was tied to the engineering of NAFTA, principally elite (U.S., Canadian, and Mexican) anxiety over resistance to neoliberal restructuring. It opened up fresh terrain for capital and placed already economically vulnerable groups in even more precarious situations. Schneck, "A War on Civilians." Though falling outside the purview of my project, it is worth noting that the expansion of Mérida over \textit{ejido} land is part of the broader trend of the privatization of communal lands in Mexico. See David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism. More research needs to be done on how the land actually changes hands, but Christian Berndt shows the animating logic of a similar trajectory in Ciudad Juárez to be that the racialized poor living on the land have not (and will not) add economic value to it, and thus have no right to it. Christian Berndt, "Assembling market b/orders," Forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{236} Jorge Bolio Osés, "Políticas públicas y privatización ejidal: nuevas modalidades de expansión urbana en Mérida," in Perder el paraíso: Espacio urbano, empresariado, y globalización en Yucatán ed. Luis Alfonso Carrillo Ramírez (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2006). In more recent years, word on the street is that the construction of many of mega projects, especially the malls, was a mechanism through which drug money laundered. I have no way to verify this, nor does it figure much into the story I wish to tell here, but I certainly think it is important to mention that this rumor is certainly part of collective imaginings of the city in the historical moment of the "war on drugs."
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necessary procedures to those interested in investing in Mérida to open their business in the shortest time possible.237 We can see what the mayor meant, then, when she stated that while the "City of Peace" distinction was a reason to celebrate, it implied responsibility and necessitated being taken advantage of. At a 2012 meeting, local industry tycoons (headed by Juan Manuel Díaz Rubio, the primary engineer behind the “City of Peace” campaign) and the SSP announced plans to "strengthen the relationship between Yucatecan business and law enforcement agencies, with the aim of promoting responsible habits that contribute to the safety of the Yucatán."238 President of the SSP Saidén Ojeda framed private business as a fundamental part of nonviolence, for “their investments and work contribute to the development of the state, and therefore it is indispensable that they, their workers, and their families have guarantees of security to labor and live in peace.”239 Nonviolence here is about the safety of capital.

New government strategies to bolster the tourist economy also tread on the safety of Mérida and its surrounding geographies. Yucatán Today, an online tourist guide directed at potential tourists from the U.S., notes "The Yucatán is one of Mexico's most tranquil and safest states...Yucatecans are good, tranquil, and hospitable people who have strong roots and traditions" (see Figure 21).240 The guide's article on travel safety in Yucatán is especially telling. "Yucatán, a safe and friendly place to vacation this year!" it opens, and relays the cartel wars logic almost verbatim:

239 Quoted in Ibid. My translation.
There has been a lot of media coverage recently about violence in Mexico. It is difficult for us in Yucatán, as the negative image can be very powerful. Most of the violence you hear about is related to drug cartels. The irony is that the increased violence is because the Mexican government is actually making headway on the drug problem. The drug cartels feel less secure and are fighting more between themselves for drug traffic territory control. What we always tell nervous travelers is that the violence is very limited to the people directly involved in the distribution of drugs or controlling the drug traffic. So as a visitor you would be totally outside the realm of violence....The U.S. State Department’s most recent Travel Alert emphasizes the U.S.-Mexican border areas as the highest risk. Yucatán is far from those cities.

Mérida is also contrasted to the resort areas of Quintana Roo (including Cancún and Playa del Carmen, but also alternative destinations like Tulum). As a government worker told me, "drug violence seems to be creeping deeper into the peninsula via Quintana Roo," and "tourism [there] is just not as secure as it used to be." Haciendas and ecotourism have thus emerged as the newest cultural product of Mérida, and the “City of Peace” and “Port of Peace” campaigns add a new layer to their attendant imaginaries of ecological and historical tranquility.

Finally, performing the region as ‘nonviolent’ is tied to attracting capital for the local maquiladora economy, which encompasses nine industrial parks with available space for establishing new companies.244 ("The spirit of free trade flourishes in Yucatán" reads the inside panel of an informative folder provided to me by the Yucatán Secretary for Economic Development.) As early as 2008, maquila decision makers in the region were making references to the "relative security of the peninsula" as something that could enhance competitive

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advantage, and Yucatán’s current guide for potential foreign investors is rife with references to security and lack of violent crime (See Figures 22 and 23). It opens with the statement that Yucatán has begun this new century as the most important financial, business, academic, cultural, medical, industrial, and commercial center in the southeast of Mexico. In addition to being the safest state in the country, its culture, geography, and climate offer a high quality of life.

This also hinges on the presentation of Yucatán's labor pool as placid. Another recent investment guide directed at possible U.S. investors, for example, uses the phrase "labor peace" to describe Yucatán. The guide highlights low employee turnover and absenteeism rates, but more importantly, the low labor costs of the region—between 10%-20% lower than in central and northern Mexico. In Yucatán, relations between political economic elites and working classes is characterized by "high morale," for over 90% of factories in the state don't operate with labor unions. Nonviolence here seems to mean a pacified labor force.

The projection of the "City of Peace" image as a strategy for economic development, pouncing on the overarching atmosphere of fear in the "war on drugs," has certainly paid off. El Financiero recently reported USD $31.25 million from foreign and domestic companies will be invested in Yucatán over the next three years to enlarge maquiladoras and improve their machinery. The state government of Yucatán has promised to reimburse 5-6% of construction

costs.\textsuperscript{247} Many of these companies, involved in textiles, furniture, and aerospace industries, stated that Yucatán's nonviolence was an important factor in their decision to invest, with Maquila Portal declaring that the private sector is confident in investing in Yucatán.\textsuperscript{248} Enrique Magadan Villami, the Deputy Minister for Fostering Business in Yucatán, has even noted maquila factories moving plants from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to nonviolent Mérida during the historical present of the "war on drugs."\textsuperscript{249}

All of this suggests that my immediate impression of the "City of Peace" campaign as an economic development strategy is not inaccurate. In each of the arenas of urban development, tourism, and maquilas, an image of security is projected to an outside audience that contrasts with "failed state" charges leveled against Mexico in recent years, the implication being that both tourists and capital investments will be safe. It also suggests the peace, tranquility, and nonviolence for which Mérida has come to be known is very much neoliberal peace, tranquility and nonviolence. But in what follows, I show that constructions of nonviolence reverberate much wider than tourism, the maquila industry, and urban revitalization schemes. And as in Chapter 3, they uncover hidden storylines of how the state polices civil society, moulds compliant subjects, and maintains social order, storylines that are both reflective and productive of power relations and socialities.

\textsuperscript{249} "Companies attracted," \textit{Maquila Portal} September 20, 2011, http://www.maquilaportal.com/index.php/blog/show/Companies-attracted-.html. Because the political economic topography of Mérida has been veritably transformed by the unfolding of the "war on drugs," I should note that the interests I outline here are changing quickly. Wealthy individuals and families from other parts of Mexico have moved to Mérida for its security, with luxury residency development plans following not far behind.
Figure 22: "Tranquility to live and do business" in Yucatán

Figure 23: Security statistics and police strength represented to potential investors\textsuperscript{251}

\textsuperscript{251} Source: "Yucatán, México: Tierra de Negocios," Secretary of Economic Development Yucatán. Reproduced with permission.
4.2 The master code of nonviolence

I first clued into these wider reverberations during a conversation with Manolo, a municipal government employee involved with the organization of "Port of Peace" proceedings in Progreso. In an office on the top floor of the sea-foam colored municipal palace, I asked him for the origin story of the campaigns. Manolo told me that they were permeated by the sense that “Mérida, as one of the most harmonious places on the planet” was a “message that need[ed] to be spread,” and that it was the “obligation of the authorities” to do so. But as our conversation drew on, I realized the campaign's message of peace was aimed more at meridanos and progreseños than an outside audience. The "City of Peace" campaign aimed to “create a painting of what the peninsula really is, because of what is happening in the north [on the U.S-Mexico border]—lots of killings, lots of narco-trafficking, just wars for power.” That is, it celebrates Mérida and Progreso in opposition to spaces of Mexico affected by the "war on drugs," telling a story of a harmonious Yucatecan community devoid of power relations to a Yucatecan audience.

Further, Manolo was adamant that the "war on drugs" was not only the backdrop against which Mérida became the "City of Peace," but woven through it. The campaign, he stated, was "not due to any tragic event. We didn't put the flag up because [his voice then deliberately taking on a high-pitched tone, inflected with exasperation] we don't want any more violence." "Oh, no?" I asked. "No," he replied, the pitch of his voice returning to its default state. "No. It's because we don't want it to come to that one day. We want to protect ourselves beforehand. With the violence that is happening all over our country, we yucatecos said, we adopt this movement [for peace].” For Manolo, nonviolence is about the preemptive protection against violence. On one hand, this connects to the logic of securitization described in Chapter 2. On the other, civilians
thus play an integral role in protecting against the threat of violence—he rallies them to "do their part" in maintaining tranquility.

I read the proliferation of material and discursive nods to nonviolence (through the City of Peace campaign, but also in wider discourse) as a governmental project to construct what Achille Mbembe would call a master code. Stated simply, the master code of nonviolence institutionalizes nonviolence as a "sociohistorical world" and makes it part of meridano common sense. Though emerging out of a whole series of tense and anxious practices, the code imposes a sense of obviousness on the established order without appearing to do so: "while becoming society's central code, [it] ends by governing, perhaps paradoxically, the logics that underlie all other meanings."\(^{252}\) It is through the code that nonviolence comes to both underpin and govern meanings and logics that have to do not only with security and the "war on drugs," but the conduct of everyday life as well. The master code is performative, too, in the sense that it draws people into the narrative of nonviolence, calling them to act in the service of its reproduction.

As will become clear, Maya identity\(^{253}\) plays an absolutely fundamental, if complex, role in the code. It is a slippery category of identification, for meridanos of all backgrounds oscillate between declaring themselves Maya and displacing it onto either pre-contact times or people who live far from Mérida. (Mérida's sea of cultural markers is vast; in addition to Maya, descriptors such as dzul, mestizo, macewal, and yucateco are mutable, constantly shifting.) Quetzil Castañeda notes that many people who would conventionally be called Maya often refuse the label of indigeneity on the grounds that 'indigenous' people are rebellious. They are

\(^{252}\) Mbembe, *On the postcolony*, 103.

\(^{253}\) The historical trajectories of colonization, independence, and Maya incorporation into the state apparatus in Yucatán are distinct from those of other indigenous groups in Mexico and Maya-speaking peoples in Guatemala.
extremely wary of being placed in the same category. Indeed, Yucatán has not been the site of a recent indigenous social movement as Chiapas or Oaxaca have, and the local government has largely governed by managing these marginalized groups through state-sponsored peasant and labor unions.  

Castañeda articulates what I see as the role of Maya-ness in the world of nonviolence: "Maya ethnicity is a malleable and fluid substance that is manipulated in the governmental articulation of citizens and state in the Yucatec polity, i.e., in a (hierarchized) public sphere of political belonging together."  

The "City of Peace" is constituted through stories told of violence (here or over there, now or then) and stories told of nonviolence (here and only here). It is a city nominally unaffected by the "war on drugs," but one where allusions to it circulate widely, serving different purposes, latching onto different projects, and reflecting different anxieties. The master code, I contend, conceals the violence on which the "City of Peace" was established and activates a sense of allegiance to the established political order. My task is to untangle the often contradictory utterances through which this is effected. What kind of logic is at work in imagining and performing Mérida as nonviolent, in referencing “those violent people” or “those violent cities” affected by the "war on drugs?" What imaginaries are enlivened by the shared state and civilian utterance that “everything is tranquil here?” What does it mean for people to sometimes answer that question with the simple statement, “it just is,” and sometimes proffer lengthy explanations? And how are these characterizations entangled with the processes of

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254 Mattiace, "Multicultural reforms for Mexico's 'tranquil' Indians of Yucatán. The Catholic Church plays a fundamental role in Yucatecan politics, with respect to both social policy as well as its influence on local worldviews; the archdiocese in Yucatán has historically been noted for its conservatism in the realm of indigenous politics.

securitization described in Chapter 3? I turn to the main contours of the "socio-historical world" the master code of nonviolence establishes and the way it fabricates subjects with these questions in mind.

4.3 Fabricating a pacific community

One morning late into the summer, I sat waiting on a bench in the lobby of the municipal police station of Progreso, flustered. Until that point, my research had largely consisted of reading governments documents and building personal connections. My interview with Juan Carlos, a police director had been working in Yucatecan police forces for around twenty years, would be my first with someone involved in material matters of security on a day-to-day basis, and I was nervous. This nervousness multiplied when a woman called me into his office. I was taken aback by both his height and the fact that he was wearing a uniform and badge. It didn’t take long for me to settle into a relaxed conversation with Juan Carlos, however. He was pleasant, charming even, and peppered his declarations with jokes. The lighthearted quality of our encounter did not detract from the air of supreme confidence with which Juan Carlos spoke. As curious about my interest in interviewing him as I was about his worldview, he seemed intent on teaching me "how things work" in the historical moment of the "war on drugs" as soon as I turned on my recorder. We spoke about the securitization of Mexico in the last five years; Juan Carlos possessed a vast knowledge of new security technologies employed in Yucatán but had never heard of the Merida Initiative. When the conversation turned to the subject of Yucatán, he leaned back in his chair as if he were about to place his feet on his desk, and launched into a description of nonviolence that was shot through with a sense of self-congratulation:
Juan Carlos: It’s really tranquil here.

Paige: But why? Why do you think that is?

Juan Carlos: There are several reasons. One, the geography we have. It’s a place that [is] practically isolated. And our geography is mostly flat. We don’t have any mountainous terrain, like in other parts of the Republic [of Mexico], where it’s easy for groups to behave like guerrillas, you know, hide in the jungle. These are things that help us. The second is, basically, the culture that we’ve had for a long time. It’s a pacific community. We’re descendants of the Maya, a great culture. People are not inclined to violence.... Yucatecans… aren’t violent people as in other parts of Mexico. Like for example, Michoacán, Veracruz, Tamaulipas. In those places, there are people who will, you know, slash you down with a machete, take you down with pistols, firearms. The culture of the people here is a pacific culture.

Juan Carlos' reference to a "pacific culture" is emblematic of how the world of ‘nonviolence’ traffics in the immutable qualities of geography and culture: the region is intrinsically peaceful by virtue of its geographical features and Maya heritage. In this environmentally and culturally essentialist paradigm, Mérida is presented as difficult to reach, its landscapes (flat coastland and benign, low-lying jungles) and culture inhospitable to criminality and violence. In addition to framing Yucatecan culture as inherently peace-loving and its Maya population as “naturally passive,” nonviolence treads on conflict emanating from the spaces of Mexico wracked by "drug related violence," as opposed to from within Yucatán. It is a fixed and timeless quality.

But historically subjugated fears are etched into visions of Mérida and its surrounding geographies as a fortress of nonviolence in many ways that contradict Juan Carlos' proclamation

256 Recall that this was one of the descriptors used by Yucatecan government officials in wires between the U.S. and Mexico. "Yucatán seeking to remain an oasis of tranquility," Wikileaks.
of eternal Maya pacifism. Recall that Mérida was not always the “City of Peace.” Its (colonial) sobriquet, the “White City,” was embossed on park benches and tourist promotional material until 2010. My experience with Delia illustrated the racialized anxiety inhering in the world of nonviolence. I met her in the colorful sitting room (filled equally with trinkets from around the world and Maya iconography) of her medium-sized house encircled by tall walls broken up by wrought iron gates. She was wearing a traditional Yucatecan traje, a loose white dress with ornately embroidered flowers in red, orange, and yellow from neck to navel, and her black hair was pulled back in a tight chignon. We spoke about her position as a fixture in the Yucatecan political scene for well over twenty years, having worked in the most elite circles of the Yucatán state government, as a representative for Yucatán in the national government, and as a figurehead of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) at the federal level. We also spoke about NAFTA, guns, and drugs.

Delia was under no illusion that state responses to “drug-related violence” are politically innocuous, but like many of the other Yucatecans in positions of power with whom I spoke, she oscillated between affirming the local state apparatus and renouncing the “crisis-ridden” Mexican state at large. Across our hour long winding conversation, she was adamant that when it comes to the questions generated in and through the “war on drugs,” history matters:

Paige: How do you perceive the wide characterization of Mérida as peaceful, tranquil?

Delia: Be careful with that. My daughter went to live in Tampico in 2001…It was a city with a dynamic really similar to Mérida. Really tranquil. I got to see its social deterioration. Above all, of its security. My daughter’s family now lives in Mérida. So when someone says to me, ‘It’s that Mérida is tranquil.
Yucatán is tranquil,’ it scares me. *Because I know how easy and how fast things can fall apart.*

Paige: What exactly do you mean by fall apart?

Delia: Well, that this society is a society very *vulnerable to violence*. People today have never lived with it, at least in the twentieth century. Now the idea that we Yucatecans are pacific. I believe it’s the most false thing I have heard. As a society, we have had one of the most violent histories of Mexico. We went from 700,000 inhabitants in 1845 to less than 200,000 in 1862. And 100 years later we still hadn’t recuperated that population.

Delia casted a nonviolent Mérida in opposition to the cities that have been sites of more overt anti-drug operatives, but she also rebuked the culturally essentialist thread of the master code. Understanding this maneuver requires considering how the claim to Maya pacifism is linked both to claims about *Maya loyalty* to the local government and the historical *pacification* of Maya "political others."

The "most violent history of Mexico" to which Delia referred was the Caste War of Yucatán, in which peasants of indigenous and mixed descent took up arms against the European-Yucatecan elite. The uprising was sparked by discontent over the formation of plantations in the wake of the peninsula's 1841 separation from Mexico. The establishment of the short-lived Republic of Yucatán hinged on the labor of these people, who had been recruited and armed by local elites in move for independence. Maya-speaking peasant classes mobilized in opposition to tribute payments and the widespread dispossession of communal lands; this movement

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257 Because the region was considered resource-poor by the Spanish colonial bureaucracy, slash-and-burn subsistence agricultural practices among the indigenous population of the peninsula remained its central economic
morphed into a full-blown uprising against the colonial state. By 1847, the insurrection came to control a large part of the peninsula, including Mérida, but eventually had to pull back into the southeastern corner of the peninsula.\textsuperscript{258} There, the rebel forces established an independent system of government. Bloodshed endured from 1847-1901, with smaller scale skirmishes continuing into the 1930s when the last vestiges of the rebel government were suppressed.\textsuperscript{259} Delia was correct in emphasizing widespread devastation; somewhere from one third to one half of the peninsula's 600,000 inhabitants were killed, with death rates reaching 75% percent in some subregions.\textsuperscript{260} And because the Caste War was, in the most general of terms, rooted in the desire for total rupture of the Yucatán's system of governance, the state apparatus struck down the 'agitators' with force. The subsequent establishment of henequen haciendas both violently conscripted Maya-speaking peasants to work the appropriated lands and broke up their activity for much longer than it did in other parts of New Spain. Thus, though Spanish colonization had made indelible marks on the sociopolitical and economic landscapes of Yucatán—by reorganizing indigenous villages and interpellating colonial subjects in the sixteenth century, for example—many features of pre-contact indigenous economic activity were sustained. Though a substantial portion of land remained under the control of indigenous communities, parcels outside of village limits were slowly appropriated by the Spanish, resulting in a "mosaic of tenure and access practices that frustrated even the most preserving bureaucrat." Terry Rugeley, \textit{Rebellion Now and Forever: Mayas, Hispanics, and Caste War Violence in Yucatán, 1800-1880}, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 12.

\textsuperscript{258} This eruption of violence coincided with the Mexican-American War, the central Mexican government was incapable of sending military forces in aid. The Yucatecan-European elite thus offered the U.S. government sovereignty over the peninsula in exchange for military protection. President Polk, proponent of the manifest destiny movement, argued that the U.S. had a “moral obligation to save the white population [in Yucatán] from destruction by the Indian race." The move to annex Yucatán was ultimately defeated in the U.S. Senate for the reason that the expansion of U.S. commerce in the gulf region did not depend on annexing Yucatán. Yet woven throughout this argument was the idea that U.S. foreign policy should be oriented toward preserving the institutions of slavery in both Texas and Cuba. See Shelley Streeby, \textit{American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture}, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 184.

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.

The colonial hierarchical order was thereby reestablished; "political others" were pacified.

The interpretation of the Caste War that dominates contemporary Yucatecan society is that of a conflict between indigenous and white society. It is crucial to highlight, however, that the Caste War produced a deep rift between Maya speakers. This fostered on one hand, the emergence of ethnic consciousness among the rebels and, on the other hand, the development of a socially and culturally homogeneous Maya-speaking lower class in the north and west of Yucatán [in and around Mérida] with a localized sense of loyalty.

People of indigenous and mixed descent in Mérida, in other words, came to be known for their allegiance to the state. It is for this reason that Castañeda argues that the Maya identity marker (as validated in Mérida today) was a consequence of the Caste War. The memory of the insurrection and its repression, which I found to surface fairly frequently in discussions about violence, play a fundamental role in Mérida’s social consciousness under the "war on drugs" because of the sense of loyalty to the state that it invokes.

Anxiety over the potential disintegration of Mérida’s nonviolent social order is the same dynamic as the constant circulation of police trucks and uniformed military members in Mérida

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261 Mattiace, "Multicultural reforms for Mexico's 'tranquil' Indians of Yucatán."
262 Gabbert argues that such an interpretation flattens a much more complex military conflagration: many indigenous people on the peninsula who did not align themselves with the rebel forces, and many Maya speakers (both of indigenous and mixed descent) fell victim to the attacks of the rebel forces. Wolfgang Gabbert, "Of Friends and Foes: The Caste War and Ethnicity in Yucatán," *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9.1 (2004), 90-118.
263 Ibid., 92.
described in Chapter 3, except that it works in a different direction. The deferred signs of state violence present the threat of state repression to civil society; signs of “state failure” in other parts of Mexico stir up memories of the collapse of the local state apparatus in the past for those in positions of power. The world of nonviolence within it the image of widespread Maya rebellion; the historical present of the "war on drugs" in Mérida is constituted "by means of this very relation to what it is not." 264 The claim of Maya pacifism can thus be conceptualized as a modality of governance that is not a clear-cut expression of state power, but instead as a "strategy by which a public sphere of polity is created in between the state and...the populations and life-worlds of those to be governed." 265 That is, Maya-ness is one of the means through which the state interpellates its subjects (whether they are "actually" Maya is not the issue at stake). It is also a way the state is interpellated by the same subjects.

Neocleous argues that both identity and loyalty play fundamental roles in the idea of security: "It is as though identity could be borne only through the political cultivation of a devoted loyalty to the state and the 'values' it purports to defend, and only a permanently expressed loyalty to this identity that will keep us secure." 266 With this statement, we arrive at an understanding of how the world of nonviolence flows seamlessly into the logic of securitization described in Chapter 3. It became clear in the second half of my conversation with Manolo, when waxed at length on both the explosion of "drug-related violence" across Mexico in recent years and how "war on drugs" policies had unfolded. After explaining this general scene, Manolo paused, and echoed the discourse of geographical isolation of which Juan Carlos had spoke:

264 Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 9.
265 Castañeda, "We Are Not Indigenous!" 52.
266 Neocleous, Critique of Security, 123.
So, that is the national scenario. What is happening in Yucatán? Yucatán is Mexico. Um, well, Yucatán has a very special, particular geographical situation. Because it’s in the middle of the peninsula. For the fourth year in a row, the safest state in the country.

I asked if he could delve a bit deeper into this. Manolo paused for a few seconds, and then said:

It’s the most secure state in the country because a lot of decisions have been made [and] a lot of things have been done that have allowed Yucatán to be the safest place in the country.

By "lots of things," he meant securitization, a declaration on which he expanded by proclaiming the commitment made by the municipal government of Mérida and the state government of Yucatán had made to improving security equipment and surveillance in recent years. Thus, with the state obligation to inculcate imaginaries of peace and tranquility in the citizenry (in Manolo's words, "spreading the values of harmony") came the state obligation to “honor the [City of Peace] distinction by never turning a blind eye to the permanent projects of prevention and public safety." For Manolo, securitization is the condition of possibility for nonviolence; it is also that which explains it.

The contradictory logics in at work in constructing this world of nonviolence should by now be clear: nonviolence is geographically and culturally innate, nonviolence is the product of the state project of securitization. Three phenomena must be unpacked. First, the argument that has assumed center stage thus far is that the story of nonviolence is a story of state power and how it polices civil society. What the world of nonviolence shows here is how state power works through (and often on behalf of) the maintenance of a hierarchical social order. One of Foucault's central insights in *Discipline and Punish* is to invert normative conceptions of politics and war,
conceptualizing politics as a “technique of internal peace and order.” That this "internal peace and order" of which he writes is one of silence and subservience is fundamental to the current political order. It encompasses both class and race, both economic instrumentality and the vestigial emotions wrought by colonialism. But a caveat is in order: the world of nonviolence does not serve the social hierarchy through the straightforward logic of identity or class repression. More insidiously, it "forms the conditions of possibility for all political work." 

Following from this point, the world of nonviolence hinges on slippages in meaning between peace-loving and passive (both in the sense of being politically acquiescent and being pacified by the state in the wake of the Caste War). Central to this slippage is the oscillation between the political validation of the loyal Maya figure, represented as the source of Yucatecan tranquility and the rebellious "political others" associated with rebellion during the Caste War. For Yucatecan sociologist Luis Carrillo Ramírez, the eternal question of Yucatecan politics is how cultural regionalism, always tied to "the presence and permanence of Maya culture," is fomented—and then capitalized upon—by those in positions of power. The same can be said for the world of nonviolence, which preserves the Maya as maquila workers and tourist attractions, maintains the social memory of the Caste War, and posits Maya culture as the origin of nonviolence and the reason for securitization. These lines of reasoning come together in Juan Carlos following up his declaration, "We live in the land of the peaceful Maya," by emphatically stating, "We have to protect that."

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270 See Diane Nelson, A Finger in the Wounds, 27-28, for a similar argument on the Guatemalan state.
Finally, the world of nonviolence is intelligible only through its relationship to the past and to possible futures. The "City of Peace" is contrasted to extreme violence in others times and places, but, crucially, possesses the capacity to fall into it. Attorney General Cabrera Rivero's statement, "It wasn't too long ago when cities like Monterrey, Veracruz, Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana, and many others were tranquil places, but at some point in the history [of the "war on drugs"], they became the regions we know today as the most dangerous," exemplifies this capacity to fall into violence. On one hand, Yucatecans are ontologically peaceful. On the other, they could be violent subjects, they could enter into the history of "drug-related violence" in Mexico, they could fall into the violence of the past, if steps to fortification (read: state securitization) are not taken. The tranquil social order of Mérida is thus situated as fragile, in need of protection, and must be vigilantly guarded.

To conclude this section, allow me to briefly circle back to the arguments advanced in Chapter 3. If, as people embedded in the governmental apparatuses of Yucatán assert, the purpose of securitization is rooted in maintaining nonviolence, it is rooted in maintaining the colonial hierarchy re-established after the Caste War. The move to intensify police and military presence in Mérida is derived both from the array of political economic interests it serves and from the historical fears enlivened by the "war on drugs" milieu. With tranquility threatened by external violence, the state doubles back, shaping and structuring the practices and institutions through which tranquility is promised to be protected. The master code of nonviolence simultaneously demarcates the problem and structures the solution. (This is why the cartel wars

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271 Héctor Cabrera Rivero, "El fortalecimiento de la @fgeyucatán."
272 I owe this conceptualization to Duncan Ranslem.
logic and the master code are both seductive and productive technologies of state power. They work in tandem.) Nonviolence proclaims good for all, but comes to stand for the perceived solidity of the local state apparatus and the social order state securitization seeks to protect.

4.4 Lessons for nonviolence coexistence

One characteristically humid Friday evening, I was on my way to Progreso for a birthday party. There are two ways to get to Progreso from where I was staying. One involves taking the bus to el centro, crossing in front of the cathedral over the central plaza and then boarding the AutoProgreso bus at its terminal. This is the way to ensure getting a seat. The other way is to hop on the Circuito Metropolitano bus (whose route encircles the city), disembark at the Gran Plaza mall, walk to the bus stop on the highway leaving the city, and hail the same AutoProgreso bus. This way makes much more spatial sense, as it cuts out having to pass through el centro, but it carries the risk of having to stand in the aisle for the remainder of the trip to Progreso. That evening, I opted for avoiding the bustle of el centro.

While waiting for the Circuito, I could not have missed a governmental sign plastered on the wall of the bus stop shelter where one normally encounters advertisements. On the sign, the phrases "A City So Tranquil, It Inspires" and "I too am Mérida" hemmed a joyful heterosexual couple (in traditional trajes) perched on a bench in one of Mérida's parks. Underneath this scene, the tagline reads "Merida, City of Peace: Together We Make the Best City." As the bus rounded the corner, I quickly snapped a photograph with my phone (See Figure 24). Thrilled to have come across something that so brilliantly encapsulated the world of nonviolence I aimed to disentangle in my research, I let the placard fill the frame of my photo. Only when I came back to it as I began writing months later did I realize that where the sign was located in the city was
just as important as the scene it displayed—a residential area at least a half hour's bus ride from *el centro*. Meridanos (mostly middle and working class) sit at this bus stop. The audience of the sign was not an outside population (investors or tourists), but instead the citizenry of Mérida.

In his Collège de France lectures, Foucault claimed, "rather than asking ideal subjects what part of themselves or their power they have surrendered in order to let themselves be subjects, we have to look at how relations of subjugation can manufacture subjects." In other words, instead of beginning with fixed subject positions, we must attend to the mundane ways in which subject positions themselves come into being. It is in this spirit that I turn to a more

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274 Photo by the author.
275 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 263.
insidious way that the world of nonviolence operates in the service of social order. The sign I encountered at the bus stop is illustrative of the way people are interpellated by the master code of nonviolence in and through the rhythms of everyday life. Tasks like riding a city bus to work, walking a few blocks to buy water, or making small talk with friends and family in the street become saturated with lessons for how to behave in a nonviolent manner. Note that the couple on the placard, after all, is sitting complacently on a park bench, enjoying nonviolent public space in a certain way. Note also that it is a strikingly normal scene, with no mention of the "drug-related violence." But perhaps most importantly, note how it reminds the viewer that nonviolence is everyone's business. The state calls forth nonviolent subjects, inviting them to participate in collectively building the "City of Peace": "Together we make the best city" (see also Figure 25).

This collective building is premised on the idea of "Yucatecan coexistence," an integral feature of the world created by the master code of nonviolence. References to coexistence circulate widely in everyday conversation, popular media, and government discourse. The importance of coexistence in Mérida under the regime of the "war on drugs"— both within civil society and between civil society and the state—cannot be overstated. It basic principle is the work of "citizen surveillance," which, according to Secretary of the SSP Luis Felipe Saidén Ojeda, joins police training and intelligence, and coordination among municipal, state, and federal police and military as the three fundamental pillars of security and tranquility in the region.276

276 Quoted in Solera, "Seguridad Atípica."
Citizen surveillance is the notion that *meridanos* both “trust and look out for one another.” U.S. ambassador to Mexico Anthony Garza marshaled the idea when he stated “[Yucatecos] really know their neighbors well...[they] report to the police any slight concern about ‘strangers’ who appear in town, who obviously have come from somewhere else.”278 So too did General Bazán Méndez when he implored *society* to help [security forces] combat the insecurity that the drug industry generates.279 Undergirding these statements is the idea of a tranquil civil society and public space—free of conflict, devoid of criminals and drug traffickers—and intense suspicion directed toward unfamiliar people and unfamiliar conduct.

278 Quoted in “Yucatán seeking to remain an oasis of tranquility.” *Wikileaks*.
Yucatecans refer to themselves as *curiosos* and *preguntone*es, descriptors that denote a prying sort of curiosity. They "gossip a lot" and “watch out for when things are wrong,” and "trust and report things to the authorities."

The issue of citizen-police trust points to another fundamental aspect of nonviolent coexistence: the idea that people trust the state and its governing capacities. Journalist Claudia Solera describes the operation of this trust by quoting from an exchange with a *meridana* named Neucaria:

> Neucaria has been setting up her candy stand near this park [the Plaza Grande] in Mérida from 3:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. for 15 years. Shy, and with a pronounced Yucatecan accent, she says her biggest worry on matters of security is that a drunk would assault her. But she wouldn’t be intimidated, and would go to the municipal police. “Neucaria, do people trust the municipal police?” I ask. Even President Felipe Calderón has recognized that Mexicans do not trust that institution. Due to the chain of complicity with police and criminals, the survey on Citizenship, Democracy, and Narcoviolence found that only seven of every 100 Mexicans accept their work. “The police work well, so I have always asked them for help” she responded without faltering.  

This picture painted here is that people in Mérida are generally unconcerned with personal safety, for traversing its public spaces carries no risk. They also genuinely trust the police: Neucaria would approach the municipal police should an incident arise. Finally, relationships between security forces and the Yucatecan citizenry are built on trust much more than in other

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parts of Mexico. Neucaria's statement, "the police work well" starkly contrasts the seven percent "acceptance" rate given for Mexico at large.

The lessons created by the state for civil society by constructing a world of nonviolent coexistence flows into the cartel wars logic in distinct but interrelated ways. First, it appeals to Yucatecan identity to shore up the ongoing armoring of statecraft. I asked Juan Carlos, the police director who first outlined the geographical and cultural threads of nonviolence for me, about state-civilian trust:

Paige: Okay. With respect to the police, I mean, people seem to say that Yucatan’s security has a lot to do with police training, and the trust people have in their police force. So, why? In your opinion, what does the police have, what do the police do, for example, the police in Progreso, that police in Michoacán, or somewhere like that, don’t do or don’t have?

Juan Carlos: Look. [Pause] What’s going on is [Pause] we have more identity here. As people. The majority of people working in security bodies, in the state, in Progreso, are local people. They aren’t a lot of people from elsewhere. In other parts of the Republic, for example, I am a policeman in Michoacán, but I’m not from Michoacán. I’m from Baja California, I’m from the state of Mexico, I’m from Puebla.

At this moment, the phone began to ring. I told Juan Carlos he could answer it, but he interrupted me mid-sentence and raised his voice, proclaiming, "So they don’t identify with the region. The Yucatecan police have an identity because they belong to the state. 80% are local!"

In his framing, civil society enjoys a harmonious relation with governing forces on the basis that they share a common identity. "They are local?" I asked, prompting Juan Carlos to expand on this shared sense of self. "Yes, local," he responded, "and like I was telling you...I’ve received training from the FBI, SWAT, Israel, from the best agents in the world. They've come
from Colombia, trained us in anti-terrorist techniques, [and] ways to confront guerrillas and drug-traffickers.” Juan Carlos returns to the image of state control and expertise, of Yucatán suffused with security by virtue of the rational faculties of the state (including its security forces and its technological capacities) dominating the trajectories of securitization in Mérida’s recent history. Nonviolent coexistence figures the local state apparatus as mimetic, meaning that it acts in concert with and on behalf of Yucatecan civil society at large. Again we return to the vision of the state and its securitization efforts as fatherly and protective, both separate from and opposite to the threat of violence.

The state as paternalistic and all-knowing leads me to my next point: any breaches of Mérida’s nonviolent condition are posited as springing from gaps of state-civilian trust. Cabrera Rivero argues, "if there is a solid trust between the citizen and the authority, crime has trouble walking. [This is] because **impunity and delinquency tread precisely in mistrust**." The question of nonviolence becomes a simple matter of state-civilian collaboration. One of the claims I made in the previous chapter is that securitization in Mérida treads on the preemptive extermination of security threats. Colleen Bell, however, argues that "extermination undesirable elements is intimately connected to the fostering of that which is desirable." It is in this spirit that nonviolent coexistence implores society to do the surveillance work of securitization on the more intimate scales of the neighborhood, the household, and the individual.

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281 Quoted in Ibid. My translation, my emphasis.
This is not a mere representation—*denuncias telefónicas*, or reports or accusations lodged to the authorities over the phone have increased four-fold since 2007.\textsuperscript{283} According to the Yucatán Office of the Attorney General, people are eager to *denunciar*,\textsuperscript{284} (a word that has a wide variety of meanings, including "to complain," "to denounce," "to indict," and "to report"), which points to the development and strengthening of the social fabric in the historical moment of the "war on drugs." Here it becomes clear why Foucault defines “government” as the “conduct of conduct,”\textsuperscript{285} a term that signals the co-constitution of state power and the self-management of the individual. Nonviolent coexistence can be interpreted as a panoptic schema, a form of “light” power that does not require the state use of force to function, for ordinary people enroll themselves in the project of policing. In this context, we see that as time passes, the panoptic formulation of civilian surveillance embedded in the concept of ‘nonviolence’ strengthens the state apparatus and renders its reach into everyday life deeper and more intense. The effectiveness of state power here is bolstered by nonviolence, which “assures its efficacy by its preventative character, its continuous functions and its automatic mechanisms.”\textsuperscript{286}

In the world of nonviolence, the threat of state violence (see also Chapter 3) remains nonactivated because *meridanos* are “always watching out for signs of possible violence” (like those, perhaps, that surfaced immediately before the decapitated bodies appeared), because they are perpetually “on the lookout for the strange and different.” The state doesn’t have to resort to overt militarism (as in, for example, in the pacification of Maya "political others" during the

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{286} Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 206.
Caste War) because normal people both do the work of surveillance on more intimate scales and conduct themselves as nonviolent subjects. Yet the master code of nonviolence is not limited to the politics of the "war on drugs" in Mérida; it governs the meanings and logics of politics writ large in the city.

In 2010 the municipality of Mérida proposed to build an underpass below the Glorieta de la Paz (Peace Square) to correct traffic circulation issues on Paseo de Montejo and its extension, the Prolongación del Paseo de Montejo. Because of the refusal of the municipal government to submit the project to a local referendum, it was a controversial project from the start. Sectors as diverse as the Chamber of Architects, local residents, urban planners, and members of the PAN (not in power at the time) filed statements in opposition, claiming that in addition to sullying the roadway (a site of cultural patrimony in their line of argument), it would do little to solve traffic problems. Despite these calls, work on the project was slated to begin on the morning of July 4, 2011.\textsuperscript{287} On the evening of July 3rd, several people gathered in the glorieta, asking passersby to sign a petition in opposition to the impending renovation and construction. The story\textsuperscript{288} then goes that around thirty personnel from a private security company were called in to clear the area and proceeded to physically assault those who remained. Verbal altercation ensued, then fistfights. Protestors assumed control over the bulldozers that had arrived to begin construction. State and municipal police forces, aware of the turn of events, were stationed two blocks away. They did not intervene and did not pursue the private security forces as they left the area. In the wake of the event, myriad charges of "war" in the "City of Peace" came to the fore.

\textsuperscript{288} Like the March 2007 protests, there are many different versions of the story exist, but the one that seems to be most prominent in the social memory is the one I recreate here.
The escalation of violence on July 4th remains an enigma. Some say it was an expression of intense jockeys for power between the two main political parties in the region, the PRI and the PAN. Some say it had to do with the intensity with which some protestors wanted to protect cultural patrimony. For local human rights group *Indignación*, the inaction of state security forces suggests those who bloodied the protestors did so in some level of accord with the state, or even directly under its direction. That the incident was never fully investigated, and those purported to have committed acts of violence never identified exemplify the impunity of the state at work here.289 But refracting this incident through the master code, we see how it folds into the formation of docile and compliant political subjectivities. Because the "world of meaning" of nonviolence is premised on solidifying and protecting the social order, any political challenges to this order can be framed as disturbing the 'peace.' In this way, state violence (both the interrelation of the state and the private security forces called in and the inaction of state security forces could be interpreted as such) is sanctioned in the service of the empty notion of nonviolence.

The relation between the constant claim of (delicate) regional security and Yucatecan identity should by now be clear. Security operates not only, as I showed in Chapter 3, to preemptively name threats, but also to construct a specific kind of political unity. According to Neocleous, this "reasserts and reinforces the acceptability of only certain forms of behaviour, modes of being, and political subjectivities." 290 In placing political mobilization that challenges it in opposition with the nonviolent community, the Yucatecan security state targets political


290 Ibid., 122.
others. The message—be loyal to the state, violence will not befall you if you don't get involved in the wrong activity—is not only reserved for "drug related violence." The demonstrations were interpreted as a move of disloyalty; the *si no te metes* command saturates the political climate at large.

4.5 Conclusion: Violent implications

Even a surface exploration of the political fabric of Mérida in the historical moment of the "war on drugs" would reveal the dramatic chasm between rhetoric and substance at play in constructions of tranquility and peace. "Mérida, "City of Peace?" More like, Mérida. The city with the least violence. Well actually, no. It’s violent. Extremely violent. In terms of exclusion and exploitation, it’s extremely violent," someone once said to me in passing, nodding to how the discursive regime of nonviolence conceals forms of violence less overt than those associated with the "war on drugs." Miguel Moguel, for example, notes that some of the highest rates of femicide, violence against LGBTQ, and poverty in Mexico, as well as low wages and worker protection, are found in Yucatán—despite exhibiting extremely low levels of "drug-related violence." The question that needs to be asked, as Moguel rightly points out, is whose bodies are safe in Yucatán? For whom is life tranquil?

Nonviolence in Mérida, however, has violent implications that run much deeper than the chasm between substance and rhetoric. Its fetish-like character erases the material interests, psychosocial fears, and state warnings collapsed into its master code. All that is left is a shining, crime-free city with bright tree-lined avenues. Nonviolence proclaims good for all of Yucatecan society, but at the same time brackets the structural violence of the social order it protects.
In deconstructing the master code of nonviolence, my objective has neither been to disentangle the multiple threads of the state apparatus in Yucatán so as to arrive at a conclusive understanding of “how it works,” nor to write it off as a mere project of deceit. As I have shown, the utterances of ordinary Yucatecans, of Yucatecans not affiliated with the state apparatus very much echo the worlds of those in positions of power. Their day-to-day actions are enrolled by it in the project of securitization as well. Thus, how the “world of meanings” of nonviolence is both produced and ordered demonstrates that the relation between state (whether municipal, state, federal level, or U.S.) and the subjects of its policing tactics is neither one of pure resistance nor one of pure accommodation, but in Achille Mbembe’s words, “convivial.” This sort of relationship entails familiarity and domesticity, signaling a more complex relationship between what are normally considered separate, discrete forces—violence and nonviolence.

Chapter 5: Misery's dirty fingernails

I will head out to the streets, robing my words in silence before the deafness of those politicians and business owners—legal and illegal, but all of them criminals—those who could not give a shit about the fact that we have fucking had it. I will confront the indolence and foolishness of those who will keep their arms crossed until death knocks on the doors of their houses. I will add my steps to those of the good and honest people who will march for peace and against impunity in the officially baptized “City of Peace” also called the “White City,” Mérida, Yucatán. I will go to the...Paseo Montejo, to one side of the monument that the señoras and señores of money and power erected in honor of those guilty of genocide, whose name is given to the avenue to remind us that crime and impunity have historical roots in these lands. And, together with my steps, I will offer my hands, my heart, and my thoughts to honor the memory of the thousands of people whom this war has stolen, from Tijuana to Tapachula. To walk with their friends and families, to demand that the blood quota that we are paying to a business that is still perversely prohibited, and......to take the streets and public spaces back from apathy, for indifference is violence as well, so that you, child, can grow up in a place that can call itself “City of Peace” with dignity and not with the hypocrisy of those who close their eyes, as Benedetti said, so as to not see misery's dirty fingernails. 

-Sebastián Liera

5.1 Writing the "City of Peace"

My objective in writing Pacifications is not to trace shifting notions of violence and nonviolence during the "war on drugs" in Mexico but rather to illuminate how claims to Mérida, claims to truth on broader security concerns, and claims to political rights are banked on these constructions. I focus on how the multiplication of material and discursive deployments of nonviolence in Mérida's political fabric folded into the naturalization of many different forms of state violence. It was very difficult, however, to write about these (non)violence(s).

292 The phrase is more cleverly constructed in Spanish than in English: “a los que les vale madres que estemos hasta la madre.”
293 In the last sentence, Liera nods to Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti, who often wrote about political struggle in Latin America and love. The phrase "misery's dirty fingernails," which could also be translated as "fingernails dirty with misery," comes from the poem "Un Padrenuestro Latinoamericano," or "A Latin American 'Our Father.'"
I returned to Mérida in June 2013 to do so. I thought writing a treatise on the "City of Peace" in the "City of Peace" would be a prudent, scholarly move, but it resulted in a constricting case of writer's block instead. I had never experienced it before and was baffled by its onset. The previous months before going back to the city had passed quickly and fantastically. I presented ideas from this thesis at two academic conferences, I had established the shape of my narrative arc, and I felt that all that remained was the task of "fleshing things out." Once I arrived in Mérida, however, I just couldn't write. I spent a month lodged in that awkward space between having a fully formed argument and bringing it out in textual form, and simply could not break out. I moved around; I tried writing in my friend Javier's chilled office space, I tried writing at the Starbucks in Altabrisa Mall, I tried writing at the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán's ornate central library, and I tried writing at a lunch counter in el centro over Coca Light and panuchos. When Mérida failed to galvanize my writing, I went looking for inspiration in Progreso, just off the commercial pier that extends far into the Gulf of Mexico. But Progreso betrayed me as well.

These feelings—of the senses dulled, of creative capacities blunted—were starkly different than those I had experienced the previous summer when I conducted the primary research for this thesis. Then, Mérida and Progreso energized me to read their political and poetic landscapes, and I did so fervently. I moved through the city with passion and confidence. Going back reminded me of the oft-cited geographical lesson that place and context matter. I wasn't in Mérida to explore this time. I was in Mérida to make conclusions, critical conclusions about a place to which I had grown rather attached. The once authoritative arguments I had presented in North America seemed to crumble in the humidity of Yucatán, and I began to question the conclusions I thought were solid just a month before.
Jennifer Hyndman reminds us “how violent conflict and death are represented in the context of war is at least as important as how much destruction and death wreak havoc on a society.”\(^{295}\) My inability to write was rooted at least partially in the challenging task of representing violence. I knew the way I told the story of "drug related violence" in Mexico would have to diverge from the exoticization, aestheticization, and hystericization of bloodshed so typical of mainstream media accounts that legitimate the Mérida Initiative model of security, but worried I did not have the grammar to do so. At the same time, I did not want to downplay the operation of violence in the historical moment of the "war on drugs," for it has had devastating effects on the lives of so many people throughout Mexico.

That I was examining nonviolence in the "City of Peace" spun this concern yet another way. How to depict Mérida as different from the cities in Mexico that have been sites of high-impact military operations, that have witnessed horrifying levels of violence, places where Melissa Wright argues that politics itself has been killed,\(^{296}\) without falling into the lines of reasoning I unpack in the middle chapters became my central concern. I also was nervous about the fact that my argument—that politics in and of Mérida (including issues that seemingly have little to do with "drug related violence or the "war on drugs") are suffused with violence—would likely not be received well by the vast majority of meridanos and progresenos. There is a lot of pride wrapped up in ideas of tranquility, peace, and nonviolence in Yucatán, and, to put it simply, I felt bad about swooping in from the outside and deconstructing those ideas. I repeated to myself several times over that this is my story too, that as a U.S. citizen I am, in some shape or form, implicated in the cultural politics of the "war on drugs" in Mexico. Nonetheless, I could


\(^{296}\) Wright, "Feminism, urban knowledge, and the killing of politics."
not shake the fear that my claims would be misconstrued, that the people who were so kind to sit down and speak about contentious issues with me would interpret this thesis as nothing more than a disparagement of a city and its people.

What ultimately allowed me maneuver out of this blocked state was to return to the political stakes of both my anxious feelings and my argument at large. First, I had to stop thinking of this thesis as a story of the sociality of a particular time and place—Mérida in the historical moment of the "war on drugs"—and instead think of it as a muckraking sort of exposé of two interrelated logics—the cartel wars logic and the logic of nonviolence. I would even dare to say that how the "war on drugs" works can be deciphered on a deeper level when examined in a place considered outside its purview. It bears repeating that Mérida is positioned as an exemplary city for security. If “peace” in the “City is Peace” reflects elite economic interests and racialized anxiety and is imbricated in the production of compliant political subjectivities, what are the implications of this positioning for the broader context of the "war on drugs?"

But this goes beyond scholarly judiciousness for me. Christian Berndt states that governing elites in Mexico (and also in the United States) seem to be winning what activist Victor Quintana has deemed "wars of interpretation" with respect to "drug-related violence." Following Berndt, the objective of Pacifice[ations] is to “paint a different picture than the one dominating much of public discourse.” To write, I had to realize that the arguments I advance in this thesis link up with critiques that activists and artists are making in Mérida itself, as well as

\[299\] Ibid.
Mexico more broadly. (Diana Taylor expresses what I hope to have expressed in the preceding chapters: "Rather than 'educate' the Latin Americans about democratic values, I think it is important to recognize that Latin Americans know full well what many citizens of the United States refuse to acknowledge or take to heart: that democracies are shaky institutions indeed."\(^{300}\)

The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, for example, is taken from a blog post written by Sebastián Liera, an actor and cultural commentator based in Mérida. It prefaced—and was a call to join—a *No Más Sangre* (No More Blood) march, in which people walked city streets to confront the eruption of violence accompanied by the "war on drugs." Liera's impassioned prose compels us to consider the longer temporalities of violence in Yucatán and draw connections between colonialism, capitalism, and the violence of the present day. I would like to continue along this trajectory of politicization as a means of concluding this thesis, my hope being that it energizes the reader to consider the ways in which our convictions on nonviolence might be implicated in less evident forms of violence. In doing so, I am afraid I pose more questions than answers.

5.2 On the "war on drugs" and the Merida Initiative model of security

This thesis is not the only critique of the Merida Initiative model of security; many have been leveled against the policies that have unfolded under the umbrella of the "war on drugs" since Operation Michoacán was carried out in 2006. Mexican sociologist and public intellectual Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo brilliantly counters the cartel wars logic in showing that the territorial distribution of violence has less to do with the movement of drugs, shifting cartel alliances, and fluctuations in market attractiveness than with geographies of anti-drug military

operations. “It's not all the retaliation of gangs, it's not all the war against narco, but there is something indeed general in the logic. Because there is a moment of undoubted rupture in 2008. It's one of the things that needs to be explained. The quarrel between el Chapo, la Tuta, and el Barbas isn't enough.” For Escalante Gonzalbo, the crisis of violence begins with the "war on drugs" in 2008. It is not a response to violence, it is fully imbricated with it.

Another line of argument points out the economic interests inhering in its central policy, the Merida Initiative. While the decision making processes that gave rise to such a paradigm are "hardly ever fully agreed upon or fully planned," they do tend to reflect a bundle of accepted goals that hinge on the combination of "external control" of the United States and "internal control" of local elites. Charles Bowden makes the argument that because drug production and distribution is absolutely fundamental to the Mexican economy, the "war on drugs" is predicated on obtaining a greater percentage of drug profits. He thus contends that it is not an anti-drug project at all. Garcia, on the other hand, argues that the "war on drugs" operates on the logic of security as an economic stimulant and protector. Accordingly, the Merida Initiative is a mechanism through which links can be created and solidified between Washington and Mexican military and police forces in order to shield neoliberal trade relations. This is certainly corroborated by Thomas Shannon, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere, who once stated that the Merida Initiative “understand[s] North America as a shared economic space,

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303 Charles Bowden, Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields, (New York: Nation 2010). In recent years, libertarian analyses have considered the role of the vast market for drugs in the U.S. as well as its firearms policies in fomenting "drug-related violence." While they certainly oppose the policies of the U.S. War on Drugs. Mercille argues that transnational neoliberalization is conspicuously absent from this bundle of discourses. See Julien Mercille, "Violent Narco-Cartels or US Hegemony? The political economy of the 'war on drugs' in Mexico," Third World Quarterly 32(9), 2011: 1637-1653.
and that as a shared economic space we need to protect it...To a certain extent, we’re armoring NAFTA.”

Delgado-Ramos and Romano characterize the convergence of these two imperatives as inherently unstable, for it “links a multiplicity of apparently opposed legal and illegal actors who nevertheless receive benefits in the form of increased power or wealth.”

Greg Grandin extends further, placing the Merida Initiative within a larger U.S. project of securing access to strategic resources and quelling anti-neoliberal social movement. Laura Carlsen encapsulates all of these arguments in writing that the Merida Initiative “fundamentally restructures the U.S.-Mexico binational relationship, recast[ing] economic and social problems as security issues.”

We see similar dynamics at work in the material and discursive terrains of nonviolence in Mérida. Performances of tranquility, peace, and safety cannot be separated from the production of the region as a safe place for tourists to visit and a safe place for capitalists to invest. They fold into a neoliberal development strategy whose benefits to the vast majority of yucatecos are few. Nonviolence also comes to stand for a perceived solidity of the socio-political order that serves the Yucatecan elite and foreign economic interests in the area. The first half of my title, Pacific, signifies acquiescence; it takes under its wing both this political order and the region's lack of "drug-related violence," merging them into one shining, good quality. To challenge this order is to challenge nonviolence.

This leads me to an even darker side of the Merida Initiative (and the "war and drugs" at large) articulated by journalists, activists, and scholars: deeper military and police presence is

304 Quoted in Mercille, “Violent Narco-Cartels or U.S. Hegemony?” 1645.
305 Delgado-Ramos and Romano, “Political Economic Factors in U.S. Foreign Policy,” 94.
predicated on quelling challenges to the political economic relations I just outlined. The crux of this argument is that government repression is built into the very architecture of the “war on drugs.” Forced disappearances, torture, and threats committed by both Mexican security forces and drug cartels have generated a climate of fear that actively discourages any sort of gathering in political action. This climate of fear has allowed the Mexican state to shift the blame of extrajudicial killings carried out by its security forces to drug cartels, and represent them as the source of all violence: “the military presence under the pretext of the war on drugs effectively provides the Mexican and U.S. governments a mechanism to crush social and political dissent.”

Mexican sociologist Nelson Arteaga B. asserts that the introduction of communication equipment, data bases and surveillance technology under the "war on drugs" has expanded and consolidated "spaces of exception" in Mexico. The result is the fortification of modes of social classification and control within the territorial boundaries of Mexico, corroding democratic institutions. In a similar vein, Dominic Corva frames the Merida Initiative as a means for pinpointing bodies that must be policed in ways seemingly opposed to liberal notions of freedom and equality before the law. He argues that the employment of the military apparatus coupled with the myriad ways the "war on drugs" polices civilians are emblematic of the "illiberal" governance strategies of liberal nation-states. The irony of the "war on drugs" is that the use of these techniques of governance is presented as the condition of possibility for liberal values (such as freedom and peace) to flourish.

It is worth pausing over the kind of political work the phrasing of the "war on drugs" performs. State anti-drug operations are figured not as

fighting places and livelihoods, but the abstract category of "drug related violence," which Melissa Wright has argued is a “catchall term that governing officials in Mexico and the U.S. use to blame the victims for participating in the dangerous underworld of the drug trade.”

It is for these reasons Molly Molloy insists that the "war on drugs" is actually a "war on civilians." In the case of Mérida, I would shift this phrasing: the "war on drugs" is a strategy through which civilians are subtly and not-so-subtly policed by the state. Chapter 3 reveals how the hardening of the state with security technology and the expansion of its surveillance capacities in the name of nonviolence are rooted not in the bodily security of civilians, but in the reproduction of the state apparatus. Further, I pointed to how securitization serves to perform the possibility of state violence to civil society. That both the presence and absence of dead bodies in public spaces are mobilized as evidence for the success of "war on drugs" policing efforts in Mérida speaks to how nonviolence functions as a technology of state power. In a more intimate register, Chapter 4 shows that civilians are both the objects and, alongside securitization, one of the many subjects of policing. This is nowhere more evident in the regime of 'coexistence,' a crucial thread of the master code of nonviolence that brings malleable and fearful state subjects into being. To marshal Derrida one final time: nonviolence is a “simulacrum of a presence” that “displaces itself, refers to itself, but properly has no site.”

311 Wright, "Feminism, urban knowledge, and the killing of politics."
313 Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 24.
5.3 **On the politics and poetics of nonviolence**

Beyond building a critique of the cartel wars logic and the militaristic measures it licenses, however, one of my principal goals in this thesis is to grapple with the concept of nonviolence on a more abstract level. As someone interested in calling the "war on drugs" into question, I find efforts to "broaden the call to peace" by balancing studies of violence with those of nonviolence,\(^{314}\) and to uncover "peace cultures" so as to facilitate their flourishing\(^{315}\) inspiring. But by now it should be clear this is not the kind of engagement with nonviolence *Pacific[ations]* advances. To suggest that violence is nothing more than a social construction, or that no difference exists between everyday life in Mérida, for example, and the cities that were the targets of high-impact military operations would be a serious mistake. People in Mérida do feel safe as they walk through city streets at night, and this *does* translate into a higher quality of urban life. But the dark sides of nonviolence in the "City of Peace," have left me deeply troubled by the idea of "peaceful" culture. My project is instead (cautiously) deconstructive. I ask: What is a "peace culture?" Who has the authority to police the boundaries between war and peace, violence and nonviolence? And what of the conflict involved in labeling a place or a practice as belonging to one of those categories as opposed to its inverse? I realize these questions bring me into tense political terrain, so some elaboration on their philosophical underpinnings is necessary.

The dichotomies of war/peace and violence/nonviolence are liberal principles that hinge on a high valuation of peace, an idea that carries connotations of freedom, democracy, and goodness. For my purposes here, the crucial point is that it is liberal democratic states that

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possess the monopoly over defining said peace." This is what allows war to be carried out in the name of peace, and reverberates across multiple arenas. In a recent interview, Elizabeth Povinelli offered:

Take for example how violence against women was used as a justification for attacking Afghanistan. One reason it was difficult to mobilize a counter discourse was that opposing the government’s protection of women was treated as if it were support for violence against women, as if these were two sides of the same coin. Of course, violence against women is not acceptable! But if we turn away from the problem of violence and look at the social grounds and purpose of violence we see something quite different. Take another example.

We are currently witnessing a radical federal intervention in Indigenous governance in Australia. A government report noted the horrific conditions of life in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The report stated that in the worst cases these horrific conditions have led to child sexual abuse. More or less than anywhere else? Nobody knows. And the report didn’t say. Nor did it quantify its claim about child sex abuse. But the federal conservative government stoked a sex panic to legitimate a neoliberal reorganization of social welfare, a seizure of indigenous lands, and sent troops into indigenous communities to take control over community affairs ...the only question that could be asked or answered became: “are you for or against indigenous children sex abuse?” Of course it is not about that, but there was no escape. No matter what you say and no matter how you say it, you are read in relation to the sex panic. When you say it is a sex panic used to justify a governmental

intervention, people answer: “so you are for sexual abuse of children”! Exactly like violence against women and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan.317

What Povinelli draws attention to here is both the way liberalism demarcates the boundaries between violence and nonviolence, but also the political clout with which nonviolence functions today. State practices carried out in the name of nonviolence cannot be challenged, because challenging them would mean one is in favor of violence. Think of the way mainstream political discourse frames the "war on drugs" as a response to—as opposed to entangled with—"drug related violence." The question I pose is another one of Povinelli's: "How do we penetrate violence, acknowledge it outside of definitions of violence engendered by liberal arts of governance?" 318

Scouting the material and lyrical construction of the "City of Peace" during the historical moment of the "war on drugs" has taught me that we need to conceptualize violence not as something extraordinary, but as unremarkably present in all of political life. Yet many political critiques of the "war on drugs" in Mexico operate in the grammar of 'crisis,' taking death as their starting point and reproducing liberalism's violence/nonviolence divide. Pacific[ations], after all, is in many ways a story of how gritty, power-suffused histories were (and are) divided into the binary of nonviolence (with securitization and civilian surveillance as its twin modes of continuance) and violence (under the banner of which things and actions as diverse as drug cartels, drug trafficking, physical violence, and political action are selectively placed).

It is for these reasons I think a politics based on opposition to a very narrow conception of violence—in the form of mutilated bodies—is fraught from the start. I in no way want to write

318 Ibid.
off scholarship, art, or activism that treads on crises to incite political responses; indeed, I am concerned with the kind of political urgency that might be lost if a crisis framework is abandoned. But what I find more troubling are the implications of ongoing, more muted and protracted forms of violence being rendered less urgent than overt bloodshed. My wariness here picks up on a critique I have been elaborating throughout this thesis, and can be phrased in a question.\footnote{Like Lauren Berlant, I am also troubled by the way, in a crisis paradigm, certain bodies become “saturated with emotion that is said to have been generated by a lack of or need for the responsibility” of more privileged people. I think this impedes critique that considers the historical geographies of colonialism and capitalism and their deeply embedded institutional and psychic structures. Berlant, 	extit{Cruel Optimism}.} If crisis—like the mutilated bodies and overt bloodshed normally associated with "drug related violence”—is necessary to generate political responses (both from within and without), what escapes our fields of vision? And what forms of violence are we complacent with?

Across the years 2007-2012, violence in Mérida was not precipitated by a singular, discrete outside event. It is instead has “work[ed] over a period of many years—often decades—and continue[s] to structure current social and spatial, and as such also structure[s] expectations of what is considered ‘normal.’”\footnote{See Karen Till, "Wounded cities: Memory-work and a place-based ethics of care," 	extit{Political Geography} 31(1): 2012, 3-14.} Its histories are intricate, winding; its temporalities of violence more stretched-out. Though the events of March 2007, August 2008, and July 2011 seem to be both temporally and spatially isolated from the slow rhythms of everyday, ostensibly peaceful existence (they were indeed figured by their intensities and forms of impact), I have argued throughout that it is to this existence that we must attend.

I see two reasons for this. First, crisis is part and parcel of the cartel wars logic and the "war on drugs" measures it licenses. By casting the dead body or violence in explicit opposition
to everyday nonviolent living in the "City of Peace," the rhetoric of crisis that accompanied the events of March 2007, August 2008, and July 2011, shored up the cartel wars logic. The response to these events was that nonviolence had to be protected, and the state had to be further armored. Second, it seems that when scholars examine situations like these in a catastrophe register, they “misrepresent the duration and scale of the situation by calling a crisis that which is a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives that crisis in ordinary time."321 For many people in Mérida, I have shown, collective life is saturated with rather than punctured by violence. And state regulation of that life, I also have shown, "include[s] a variety of inducements for managing life’s wearing out, which only sometimes amalgamates death to an act or event."322

Lauren Berlant's concept of 'slow death' captures the stories I have told here better than a paradigm of crisis! emergency! and exception! It understands violence as accumulating on certain bodies in more protracted temporalities. It cannot be separated from the prosaicness of living, and rejects categorical distinctions between violence and nonviolence. But perhaps most importantly, ‘slow death’ is “neither a state of exception nor the opposite, mere banality, but a domain where an upsetting scene of living is revealed to be interwoven with ordinary life after all, like ants scurrying under a thoughtlessly lifted rock.”323 This is the operation of violence in the "City of Peace" in the historical moment of the "war on drugs."

322 Ibid., 96.
323 Ibid., 102.
5.4 Pacific[ations]

Michael Taussig writes,

To counterpose the eroticization and romanticization of violence by the same means or by forms equally mystical is a dead end. Yet to offer one or all of the standard rational explanations of the culture of terror is similarly pointless. For behind the search for profits, the need to control labor, the need to assuage frustration, and so on, lie intricately construed long-standing cultural logics of meaning—structures of feeling—whose basis lies in a symbolic world and not in one of rationalism.324

As this thesis shows, nonviolence has its symbolic world too. And like that of violence, its aestheticization is dangerous, for “just to the side lurks the seductive poetics of fascism and the imaginative source of terror and torture embedded within us all.”325 The state's claim to protect nonviolence in Mérida rests on the enactment of state violence, or at least its constant threat. Because its narratives link freedoms (to gather, or to form political publics) to acquiescence, it turns on a circumscribed conception of politics that requires rights to be granted (or conceded) by the state.326 Yet as I bring this thesis to a close, I am most interested in animating the reader to question the placement of violence and nonviolence in separate impenetrable spheres. This is not to say that all forms of violence are equally devastating, but rather to acknowledge that many may be hidden from view, especially when their effects are muted and ongoing. It is also to recognize that conflict saturates all politics.

324 Taussig, "Culture of Terror, Space of Death," 471.
325 Ibid.
For Taussig, the key to cultivating a potent politics (and poetics) in opposition to violence is to tap into that part of what he calls the “underworld” that mesmerizes, and turn it on its head. He argues that we must “maintain its hallucinatory quality, while effectively turning it against itself.” Nonviolence in Mérida in the historical moment of the "war on drugs" is dreamlike, to be sure, but it is also surprisingly mundane. Confronting the way it folds into a political configuration that distributes life and death unevenly might require focusing on the unremarkable and the unexpected.

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327 Taussig, “Culture of Terror, Space of Death,” 471.
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