Values, Perceptions, and Peacebuilding:
An Expanded Qualitative Study in Mexico

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Abstract

Mexico is one of the 25 least peaceful countries on earth, a circumstance that has worsened in the past years. These conditions have negatively affected citizens' perceptions and ideas about their safety, their trust of government, and the possibilities to eradicate violence and build peace for the future. This qualitative research, built upon previous work by Meschoulam, sought to expand upon the understanding of the process of social construction related to those sentiments and perceptions. The role of mass media, the role of the government, and the role of criminal organizations in the construction of perceptions about organized crime related violence and peace in Mexico were also explored. Through 80 semi-structured interviews with residents from Mexico City and other cities in Mexico, this investigation explored the categories found in the initial study to determine whether patterns repeated in other zones of Mexico. Experience, observation, and social conversation, in contrast to traditional mass media, were confirmed as the most influential factors in the social construction process of values, perceptions, and conceptions of violence and peace. This study corroborates the need to foster local peacebuilding and public policy aimed at directly impacting peoples' experiences and structural roots of violence.

Introduction

After nine years of frontally combating organized crime, Mexico remains one of the least 25 peaceful countries on earth (IEP, 2014). Furthermore, Mexico's peacefulness diminished five spots in the Global Peace Index between 2012 and 2013 (IEP, 2014). This drop in the global peace ranking also affects Mexicans' perceptions and ideas regarding their safety and their trust in the government (Buendía & Laredo, 2010, Consulta Mitofsky, 2011, 2014). In addition, the sense of fear, a key factor to measure the degree of peacefulness of a society is impacted (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2014). But what does this social construction process of values, opinions, perceptions, and ideas consist? How do traditional media, social media, and oral conversation, impact social interactions?

This study builds on the first stage of what has become an ongoing investigation, which was conducted in 2013 with the purpose of knowing more about the process of social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions related to organized criminal violence and peace in Mexico (Meschoulam, 2014). Applying the conceptual framework of social constructivism (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Stenmark, 2009), qualitative interviews were carried out on 15 residents from a Mexico City neighborhood. The study investigated the role of mass media, social conversation, and the role of the government and criminal organizations in how Mexicans socially constructed their perceptions and conceptions about the Mexican situation. Despite the small size of the sample, the findings from the 2013 study proved useful to recommend certain public policies be designed to positively impact peoples' experiences in order to contribute for peacebuilding. However, the results of that study were limited; one of its most important conclusions included the need to conduct further research.

Adding 65 qualitative interviews to the initial 15, this second investigation sought to explore other areas of Mexico City as well as different cities throughout the country, including some of its most violent locations, to determine to what extent the patterns found in the initial research study (Meschoulam, 2015) tended to repeat themselves. This study assessed whether new patterns emerged, and explored the extent the conclusions of the first study could be sustained.

This reach of this study remains limited in its nature as it utilized the exact qualitative methodology as the initial study. The purpose of this study was not to generalize results to the entire country, but to detect pattern repetitions and the potential emergence of new categories in areas different than the single neighborhood of Mexico City initially examined. However, expanding upon the results of the initial study

validated the potential significance of the public policies related to peacebuilding that were, and continue to be, recommended. Moreover, the constant repetition of patterns across gender, age, profession, and geographic locations, may suggest some hypotheses that could be tested in Mexico and in other countries. This could lead to the formation of a new theoretical framework regarding social construction, personal experience, social conversation, and the role of mass media in terms of peacebuilding efforts in society.

This paper presents the results of this new or second phase of the investigation. We will initially offer the conceptual framework upon which the   project is based, as well as briefly summarize the most important findings and conclusions from the original study of 15 participants. The methodology used for the investigation will be then detailed. Results and discussion of the new findings will be presented, as well as implications for theory, public policy, and further research.

Background and Conceptual Framework

After the increase in levels of violence under President Calderón, different studies showed that due to those violent conditions, there had been a negative impact on the population's perceptions, attitudes, and conduct (Consulta Mitofsky, 2011, 2014; Meschoulam, 2012). However, the process through which those perceptions and sentiments are constructed, as well as the role of key factors such as the mass media, was unknown.

The initial stage of this project (Meschoulam, 2014) applied a social constructivist framework (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Stenmark, 2009), under the assumption that realities, such as violence or peace, or the possibility to transform them, are not innate or natural, but the result of a process of human interactions and agreements, thus, are socially constructed. All knowledge, preconceptions, ideas, and perceptions, according to this perspective, would be the result of agreed-on understandings and considerations (Fagan, 2010). The study was also based on the work of Schneider and Ingram (1993), as well as Schneider and Mara (2004). These authors argued that "[…] policy design is the product of underlying assumptions, values, norms, rationales, social understandings, and shared knowledge about realities within human groups. The shared meanings inform and influence policy issues and design. Understanding social construction about how humans interpret their surroundings and the world, has resulted in the formation of rules, norms, laws, and identities, and has an impact upon policy issues, design and acceptance. According to Schneider and Sidney (2009), further empirical research should assess the process through which social constructs are formed and how they may affect understandings, assumptions, norms and rules, and ultimately, policy issues and design" (Meschoulam, 2014, p.22).

Through qualitative interviews of 15 residents from a neighborhood in Mexico City, Meschoulam (2014) found that the process of social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace among those participants, was mainly formed through the following components: (a) Individual experiences and observations, (b) Social oral conversations, (c) Experiences of close people. The process involved to a much lesser degree the contact with mass media, and for younger participants, the contact with social media. However, distrust of traditional mass media was very high, and therefore, the mass media tended to be much less influential in participants' perceptions and ideas about social and political reality. Through the social construction process, participants had come to the conclusion that the violence that Mexico is undergoing lies upon the structures of the system in which socioeconomic underdevelopment coexists with corruption, and with the collusion between organized crime (OC) and state institutions. In the view of the participants, the only solutions to build peace for the country consist of long term policies addressed at tackling structural violence.

On further consideration, these findings could be linked as well to Freire's theory of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970/2014). According to Freire, violence is a process that passes from generation to generation, by the power of the oppressors. This oppressive power tends to impact a majority of the people in a social setting. The process also impacts ways of being and behaving for the group. Freire places importance on words and dialogue in the formation of this process. Human beings are not made in silence, he argues, but in words, in action, and reflection: "To speak a true word is to transform the world" (p.32). Therefore, Freire proposes a liberating education, establishing dialogue between those being educated and educators. Not pedagogy *for* the oppressed, but pedagogy *with* the oppressed, in which she or he becomes the subject who constructs reality through the analysis and reflection of the events she or he perceives. In opposition to this liberating pedagogy would be the antidialogical forces, those which manipulate the people and maintain the power in the hands of the powerful so they can maintain the oppression. These elements could explain, in part, the rage against Mexican mass media manifested by participants in the initial phase of the investigation

(Meschoulam, 2014). The mass media were seen by interviewees as a tool used by the oppressors, in contrast to social media, which was viewed as a means through which people can establish horizontal dialogue and communication.

Based on those findings, Meschoulam (2014) recommended local public policy directed toward positively impacting people's own experiences and observations. Such policies included local diagnoses, local education programs, neighborhood activities, the development of local commercial areas, peace policing, local teamwork promotion, and crisis intervention strategies. Recommendations also included fostering dialogue between the mass media and the community, as well as peace journalism. The study also stressed the need to conduct further research to confirm the pattern of repetitions in other areas of Mexico City as well as other areas of the country (or the world) in order to verify the potential value of those recommended policies.

Research Questions

The present investigation expands upon the research question previously asked in Meschoulam (2014) which can now be stated as: What is the process by which values, perceptions, and conceptions about the current state of organized criminal violence and peace possibilities for Mexico are socially constructed in different locations of the country? The present study explored the role that the government and criminal organizations played in the perception of participants regarding organized criminal violence and peace possibilities for Mexico, the role of mass media, and the role of oral conversation in the process of social construction. The investigation also verified the thematic pattern repetition from the first stage of the project (Meschoulam, 2014) among the new participants. It also compared and contrasted the results from Mexico City to the results in different locations in Mexico, including some of areas with very high violence.

Methodology

Setting
Data collected from this study was combined with that from the initial study and is being reported in aggregate form representing 80 participants. Contrasts between the initial 15 participants and the new 65 interviews are offered below. This study was carried out in Mexico City and in other cities within Mexico. Fifty interviews were conducted with participants from 29 neighborhoods in Mexico City. Thirty more interviews were conducted with participants from the Mexican states of: Yucatan (1), Baja California Norte (2), Nuevo León (4), Oaxaca (1), Chihuahua (6), Sinaloa (3), Guerrero (1), Michoacán (4), Veracruz (3), Coahuila (2), Tamaulipas (1), Tabasco (1), and Morelos (1).

Participants and Sampling Strategy
Consistent with the first stage of the research project (Meschoulam, 2015), a purposive sampling strategy was used. According to the most recent data (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI], 2015) in the Mexican Republic there are 73,109,794 persons older than 18 years. Of those, 34,980,052 (47.85%) are male and 38,129,742 (52.15%) are female. Of the total population over 18 years of age, 19% range from 18 to 24 years old, 65% between 25 and 29 years old, and 16% are older than 60. To represent those demographics, the present investigation consisted of a sample of 80 individuals, with 38 male and 42 female participants. The sample population consisted of 15 participants between 18 and 24 years old, 53 who were between 25 to 59 years old, and 12 who were older than 60. In order to achieve a diverse sample, the neighborhoods where those participants lived were purposively selected to ensure that participants represented varied incomes, as well as ensuring professional and labor diversity. Participants came from the following employment sectors: Public servants, professors, scholars, social activists, businessmen and women, insurance sellers, retail store sellers, therapists, linguists, students, designers, accountants, biologists, shoe shiners, fruit sellers, flower sellers, restaurant workers, housewives, domestic workers, drugstore sellers, street peddlers, nutritionists, architects, construction workers, taxi drivers, unemployed, and retired. The sample is not intended to accurately represent all incomes or professions of the country. The procedures for contacting, recruiting, and conducting the research adhered to identical ethical standards as the initial study (Meschoulam, 2014) and was supervised by the Iberoamericana University in compliance with Mexican law regarding privacy and security of information and data.

Data Collection
Data collection consisted of 80 individual interviews, with 58 conducted face-to face, one conducted using Skype, and 21 conducted telephonically. Telephone and Skype were used only for logistical and security reasons, since several participants were located in some of the most violent areas of the country such as the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Morelos (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal, AC. [CCSPJP], 2014). The safety of participants and interviewers was ensured at all times. Proof testing was conducted to verify that telephone interviews did not vary in their results from face-to-face interviews. The pattern repetition remained identical in both cases. Interviews were all conducted in Spanish, the native language of participants. The same semi structured interview protocol used at the initial study (Meschoulam, 2014) was applied. Variations were only used to obtain further details. All interviews were digitally recorded. Notes and signal elements about the interviews were also used.

Data Analysis
The present investigation replicated the data analysis method applied at the initial study (Meschoulam, 2014). Interviews were transcribed and processed through *NVivo* qualitative software. All the categories used for the first study, whether preexisting or emerging in that initial investigation, were now treated as preexisting themes. Words, sentences or paragraphs were encoded on those categories to detect patterns and repetitions, as well as the potential emergence of new themes. However, very few new themes emerged in this second stage of the project, and even those, received only a few repetitions. The only new themes that emerged in this study were: *Vigilantes or Self-Defenses, Need to Use Intelligence Strategies to Combat Crime,* and *My Hometown Is More Violent Than Other Places.* Since those themes did not reach more than 10 repetitions, they are not noted among the most mentioned categories. Saturation of the main themes was reached both in the Mexico City sample, as well as the rest of the cities that were researched. Table I shows the preexisting categories; consistent with the first study, some of these themes appeared very frequently in participants' discourse, while some only appeared a few times.

Trustworthiness
Trustworthiness was ensured throughout the study using a variety of methods. First, interviews were conducted by five different persons of the team who were trained in the use of the interview protocol. Patterns and repetitions were confirmed despite the variation of interviewers. Second, participants from urban and non-urban locations were interviewed. Third, the data analysis was continually shared with all the team members, verifying the findings between all of them, thus minimizing personal biases. Finally, the results of the investigation were compared and contrasted to the results of the first study, verifying that the pattern repetition was consistent throughout the entire sample.

Transferability
The first stage of this research (Meschoulam, 2014) provided results from 15 participants who lived in a single neighborhood. This second stage includes a much larger sample (65), and penetrates into very different areas of Mexico City as well as various regions of the country. The results are not transferable to the entire Mexican population due to the limitations of the small and not representative sample. The pattern repetition and the constancy between the findings of the first and second studies are   suggestive of potential hypotheses that could be tested by further research using larger samples inside and outside of Mexico.

Results

Consistent with the first study, the present investigation indicates that the most occurring frequencies in all participants' interviews were: *Experience and personal observation*, *Structural peace conception*, and *Oral conversation*, each theme having been mentioned by all participants. Table 2 provides a general overview of the most occurring frequencies, which are almost identical as the most occurring frequencies from the first study. Results are presented in aggregate form, combining data from the 2014 study by Meschoulam (p^1 =15), with data collected for this study (p^2=65), with total participants P=80. Comparisons between the two samples are provided below.

Social Constructors: Experience/Observation/Conversation	Social Constructors Mass Media	Social Constructors: Other	Perceptions and conceptions: causes for violence and solutions for peacebuilding
Experience someone close, Experience at work, One specific experience, Oral conversation, Excessive violence (high impact violence or terrorist tactics) Fear or terror Security forces out in the streets produce me stress or impact my perceptions Frustration Impotence	Printed, TV Radio Movies Distrust of Mass Media Little or very little, Music or Cultural Programs General They exhibit too violent images or notes, Analysis programs are interesting Not Interesting I used to watch (read/listen) them, but not anymore, Internet social construction Social media	Family social construction Education and learning social construction Religion social construction Old age social construction Books social construction Cultural social construction Public spaces interaction social construction Social or political meetings social construction	Structural peace conception Education as a peacebuilding factor/education investment Structural violence conception Grassroots peace conception Government not succeeding/not efficient/negligent Distrust of government Corruption Lack of family care or lack of parents' care Participation/engagement as citizens in public issues Ambition Situation deteriorating Mexicans are naturally violent Mexico or Mexicans are passive (do not act or engage) Loss of values Lack of social interaction/links Mexicans are naturally peaceful My Hometown is less violent than other places
Perceptions and Conceptions related to Peace	**Perceptions and Conceptions related to Organized Crime (OC)**		
Peace understood as links and relations Peace understood as respect or absence of violence/ not "messing" with one another Peace understood as tranquility, calmness, Inner peace Peace not related to poverty underdevelopment Peace is possible Peace is not possible or too difficult Mexico is not peaceful Mexico is peaceful Principles and values as components of peace,	Tough approach to OC/ we should not negotiate OC too powerful OC normalized (OC is part of Mexican life), Long time problem (Participant believe violence is a long time problem) OC is an international problem OC is not violent/lives in peace within communities		

Table 1. Preexisting Categories

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during the interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and personal observation	969	80
Structural Peace Conception (Peace possibility lies upon structural factors)	572	80
Oral Conversation	544	80
Structural Violence Conception	427	78
Experience Someone Close	374	73
Corruption	337	72
Distrust of government	325	63
Fear or terror	259	64
Mass media: Distrust (participant mentions she does not trust the media)	255	69
Government not succeeding/not efficient/negligent	231	71

Table II. The 10 Most Frequently Mentioned Occurrences, Total participants=80

General Overview and Contrasts

i)Experience, Personal Observation, and Oral Conversation
Experience and personal observation received the highest number of mentions by the 80 participants (f=969, or 14% of all mentions). This frequency confirms that all the persons who were interviewed regard their own experiences and personal observations as the most influential social constructor of their values, perceptions, and conceptions on organized crime related violence and peace.

> I observe it mainly in my neighborhood. I see how young people try to evade reality consuming drugs […] watching such behavior makes it clear to me that many people have failed, not only the youngsters […] but also the government and our society. I don't need to see other parts of Mexico to realize what happens in my country, because with what happens in my neighborhood it is enough. (Participant from Mexico City, shoe shiner, May 14, 2014)
> My conclusions are derived from the experiences I have lived. I have lived in rural communities where there are no services, no electricity, and no water. There, people live just like 60 or 70 years ago. They live the same way, education never arrives to those places; teachers don't attend […] just imagine the education level those kids have […] and then I have also seen other situations in rural communities not so far away where there are roads, but still the education quality is very low. (Participant from Sinaloa, Public Servant, September 30, 2014)

Oral Conversation (f= 544 or 8% of all mentions) was the second most important social constructor for participants and the third most frequently occurring theme. Participants tended to form their opinions and ideas about organized criminal violence and peace based upon what they heard and what they talked about with neighbors, family, friends, coworkers and associates. These findings are in concordance with those from the first study (Meschoulam, 2015). The experiences of   people and rumors remain much more influential than mass media.

> Well, unfortunately we always learn about what's going on through what people say. You are in the subway and you listen to people talking: "such and such", and that influences people. (Participant from Mexico City, student, July 22, 2014)
> It is a known fact, we all know each other, we all know what we are working in, we know where we live, what we do, where we spend all days. We know all that from years ago, and the government knows it too […], So then, among all these things we talk to each other, I heard of a person that owed some money in Apatzingan, and they went to look for him, they broke into his house and in front of

his wife, right there, they killed a person who owed some money. (Participant from Michoacán, Trader, November 12, 2014)

People close to me and friends have suffered very recently at the roads. Just out of the blue, I don't know, people appear and threaten them with guns. I also knew of people who were kidnapped. I mean, it's like an awful pain, and thank God it has never happened to me or my family, but these are things we talk about, things that are true; this is people you actually know. (Participant from Veracruz, Student, November 19, 2014)

Another case is from one of my best friends. They kidnapped her with her brother, an orthodontist […] She told us that the guards in charge of her were 17 or 18 years old boys; she told us that she was told by someone that the kidnappers only gave 3,000 pesos to these kids for guarding her, and that these boys are trained to look after the so called "guests", and that when things don't come out all right, other "more trained guards" take the command […] (Participant from Chihuahua, Housewife, July 14, 2014)

i) Distrust of Mass Media and Distrust of Government
Again, consistent with the first study (Meschoulam, 2014), mass media as a theme was much less important to participants than was *Experience* or *Oral Conversation*. Printed media (f=174) received 2%, TV (f=124) received 1.7%, and radio (f=84) took only 1.19% of the mentioned themes. In contrast, *Distrust of mass media* (f=255) was more frequently mentioned by participants. This does not mean that participants do not read papers, watch TV, or listen to the radio (70% of participants mentioned those themes at least once). This may only mean that participants do not trust   what they read, watch, or listen to in the media. Their perceptions and conceptions regarding organized criminal violence and peace are more greatly influenced by what they experience and observe in their surroundings, and by what they talk about with family, friends, coworkers, or neighbors. In fact, taken together, all the themes related to experience (own, someone close, one single experience, experience from work), the combined frequencies represent 50% of the ways by which participants socially constructed their ideas and opinions related to organized violence and peace. In contrast, traditional mass media (printed, TV, and radio), captured a frequency of 13% for influential elements in participants' views.

It would be good that the situation was covered and broadcast just as it is; that there would be no confusions as the result of news. News say one thing, but people close to us, who live in the most violent places, they say a different thing than what news say. That is what originates distrust on mass media and on the government. (Participant from Mexico City, Policewoman, October 7, 2014)
I prefer doing other things than watching TV because, what's the point? To watch all the bunch of lies and negative things they show? No. (Participant from Veracruz, Student, November 19, 2014)

Because really, no media tells the truth; one can easily see things are not like they are told. For example, in Tampico, there was a gun shooting or something and the mass media would perhaps tell you that there were only few injured people, or that the gun shooting never happened, and you knew about it because there were friends or close family living that experience, and you know things are not like they are told in the media. Or also, mass media may tell the news, but instead of provoking tranquility, they create more chaos, and people are always afraid. (Participant from Tamaulipas, Housewife, November 12, 2014)

Results also relate with the high distrust of the government, 79% of participants mentioning *Distrust of Government* at least once (f=325), and 89% of participants mentioning *Government not efficient or negligent* at least once (f=231). In most participants' views (86%), the mass media were part of the same system they distrust. According to those participants, the government buys the media to show or hide what they want to be shown or hidden.

Well some things are said and some things are hidden. I mean, I think there are many vested interests there, from the Federal Government, and obviously the mass media is not going to broadcast something that affects the Federal Government, in this case the president, because there are only few

TV networks, newspapers or journalists who are not receiving bribes to say good things about politicians. (Participant from Guerrero, Unemployed, October 17, 2014)

You can see that the same politicians are colluded with the crime; they are the ones who issue the licenses and give all the leeway to drug trafficking leaders; even the police is working for them. So it is criminal organizations the ones who are really in command. (Participant from Morelos, Specialist in communications, November 19, 2014)

Sometimes I just think that the government is not doing its job. You can see it all, just by looking at the amount of corruption we have; and with corruption comes violence. (Participant from Mexico City, Public Servant, September 30, 2014)
And also, our leaders are a bad example; I mean, public servants steal millions and millions and nothing happens. What do you want poor people to think? They know the only way to reach that kind of life is through criminal activities […] Lack of education in Mexico, corruption, and weakness of institutions are very toxic problems for our society. (Participant from Mexico City, professor, April 1, 2014)

Consistent with the results from the first study (Meschoulam, 2014), mostly younger participants tended to use Internet (f=89) and social media (f= 94) as alternative sources of information to traditional mass media. Many of them said they trust much more to what they see or find out in social media, than what they listen to or watch in traditional media.

Well, you know that news at night tell you that we are doing OK in the fight against drug trafficking, but not trusting traditional media, I do my own research, either at social media or asking people at the streets, and then you realize that reality is not what they tell you. (Participant from Mexico City, biologist, March 13, 2014)

It is interesting that social media seem to have become an extension of oral or social talk. They "talk" with their Facebook "friends", as if it were a replication of the conversation which takes place in the neighborhood, a pattern that can be found in older participants. In this example, the participant even uses the word "hear" when talking about her interactions at Facebook:

I like to hear opinions from my friends at Facebook. They really get very intense there. So I like to read them and see what they think. (Participant from Sinaloa, Architect, November 18, 2014)

i)Structural peace and structural violence
Structural peace conception was the second most frequently occurring concept (f=572 or 8% of all mentions). The participants believed that organized criminal violence is rooted in structural factors such as underdevelopment, inequality, and lack of social justice. In order to build peace for the country, those root causes should be addressed. Consistent with the first study, the need to invest in education appeared very frequently (f=113), as well as the need to address corruption (f=337).

Crime is much related to underdevelopment. Look for example here, in Tijuana there are a lot of deported persons […] and all those persons have no job, so you see a lot of them by the traffic lights asking for food, some of them, all drugged, some others you see them with ragged clothes and dirty appearance, and all those deported guys have nothing to do […] have no job, no money, so they are desperate, and that obviously causes that they commit felonies, I don't know if once they are drugged they get to kill, but yes, the lack of a job causes that they assault people and that generates stress. (Participant from Baja California Norte, Housewife, October 31, 2014)

Poverty and lack of education are the firewood so this all becomes a stronger fire. I have always though that Mexico's greatest problem is the lack of the education so that people can think and decide for themselves. (Participant from Mexico City, street peddler, July 7, 2014)

> Because poverty has not been tackled. Each time there are more children -and I see that in my neighborhood- who are out of track, they have no future. Look at me, I only studied basic school, but that was enough to learn a lot. Now basic school is not what it used to be. (Participant from Mexico City, Newstand Seller, April 22, 2014)

In a similar fashion as Meschoulam (2014) originally found, 73% of the participants of the present research believe Mexico is not peaceful, but 88% believe that peace could be achieved in Mexico as long as structural causes of violence would be addressed.

> To me, a complete way of dealing with those evils is through combating poverty and inequality from their roots. Look, it's just like when you have plants, I love plants; and something very peculiar happens with lavender: it's very easy to get full of plague. Of course one way to solve that is cutting the infected branch, but in the long term, the plague will grow elsewhere. So I need to know the causes, why is it forming? Perhaps lack of nutrients, maybe lack of sun, I don't know, but cutting the branch is the easiest but costliest solution, till you end up with no lavender, because it will all get infected at some point. Plague is just like organized crime; they are served by the gardener's inefficiency. (Participant from Mexico City, Shoe Shiner, May 14, 2014)

Comparing and contrasting results

Several axial coding runs were conducted to detect pattern repetitions and variations. Contrasts were done between: (a) the first stage of this study consisting of 15 interviews (Meschoulam, 2014), against this second stage consisting of 65 interviews, (b) the initial 15 Mexico City interviews conducted in one single neighborhood, against the new other 35 interviews conducted in 28 different neighborhoods of the same city, (c) the Mexico City sample of 50 participants, against the 30 interviews from rest of the country, (d) the 38 male participants against the 42 female participants, (e) participants from different age groups, and (g) participants from different professions. Results of all these cross category coding show that frequency occurrence and pattern repetitions of the most important categories of this research cross age, gender, profession, and location. Tables III and IV show a comparison between the first study (p^1 =15), and the second study (p^2=65). Tables V, VI and VII show age comparisons to illustrate pattern repetition across different age ranges.

Categories coded	Frequency of occurrence during the interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and personal observation	111	15
Structural Peace conception (Peace possibility lies upon structural factors)	96	15
Oral conversation	79	15
Structural violence conception	64	14

Table III. Four most occurring concepts in 15 the participants from initial study (Meschoulam, 2014)

Categories coded	Frequency of occurrence during the interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and personal observation	854	65
Structural Peace conception (Peace possibility lies upon structural factors)	476	65
Oral conversation	462	65
Structural violence conception	362	63

Table IV. Four most occurring concepts in 65 the participants from the second study

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during the interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and personal observation	190	15
Oral Conversation	111	15
Structural Peace Conception (Peace possibility lies upon structural factors)	105	15

Table V. Three most frequent themes in participants 18-24 years old

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during the interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and personal observation	656	53
Structural Peace Conception (Peace possibility lies upon structural factors)	386	53
Oral Conversation	366	53

Table VI. Three most frequent themes in participants 25-59 years old

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during the interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Experience and personal observation	119	12
Structural Peace Conception (Peace possibility lies upon structural factors)	81	12
Oral Conversation	64	12

Table VII Three most frequent themes in participants 60 years old or older

The Fear Factor

Only one, seemingly important variation appears to stand out, and that could be called the *fear factor*. In a remarkable way, the theme *Fear or terror*, received a much higher number of mentions inside the country than in the capital. In the cities located inside the country that category was the fourth most mention one (6.22% of the total mentions), whereas inside Mexico City *Fear and terror* was only the 13th most mentioned theme with 1.93% of total mentions in that part of the sample. This factor is related with the much higher level of violence that can be seen in some of the cities or states that are included in the sample; those outside of Mexico City. For example, the state of Guerrero has a rate of 63 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants; Culiacán, Sinaloa has a rate of 55 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants; Torreón, Coahuila's rate is 54:100K; Chihuahua's rate is 50:100K; Tijuana, Baja California Norte rate is 33:100K; whereas Mexico City's homicide rate is 8 per each 100,000 inhabitants (CCSPJP, 2014; INEGI, 2015). Consistent with these indicators, participants from inside the country considered *High Impact violence* as the 7th most mentioned category (5% of total), whereas in Mexico City that category ranked 17th (1.4% of total).

Even though the fear factor slightly affected overall results, it is deeply connected with the most important findings of this research. Fear and terror, in the majority of cases, were the product of a personal experience, an observation, or the result of oral conversations, frequently involving family or close persons, and not the result of contact with mass media. One of every two participants said that mass media does show excessive violence in order to sell more (f=71), but when they mention *Fear or terror,* the theme does not seem to be connected to mass media, but to their own experiences and conversations in their surroundings.

> I did have experiences in which I was driving, in fact, I was once in the middle of a gun shooting four blocks away from my home, and, well, it was hell of a noise. At first you think, well whatever, it must've been an electrical transformer, but then, after you listen to the bursts of gunfire, you say, "What the hell!" They are here, and I am here, and you get an amazing fear. (Participant from Veracruz, student, December 1, 2014)

> It has affected me a lot, because, well I can't go out at night like I would want to. Maybe I want to go out on a weekend, or I don't know. But perhaps once every month or two months…well you don't want to risk yourself so that precisely the day you go out something happens, a gun shooting, or a fight, and it has happened to me, in my own experience. I was with some friends and they got us into a van, I mean they dragged us and got us in, and they were about to kill us. Just like that, because they ask you this and that, they check you out, and all, and just because they researched about us, they said: "No, these guys are OK; they are OK, no problem". (Participant from Guerrero, Unemployed, October 17, 2014)

> And of course I have heard terror stories, just as the one I am telling you about, about the rural community where they took them on their shoulders and killed them in the public square, and even though I haven't seen anything myself, I am terrified; I know there is a lot of activity down there

because people tell me about it, so there are a lot of places where I prefer not to go. (Participant from Sinaloa, Public Servant, September 30, 2014)

Here they get lots of money from extortions for what is called "pay dues" they demand from the people who own little stores, or from the ladies in the fruit market who come to sell the products they seed and harvest. Well even those ladies have to pay 10 pesos so that they can set their posts at the market and it is a "well known secret", everyone knows, everybody knows who they are. And people obey only for fear of how they might respond, with a lot of violence. Well, I am terrified. Here in my city, after 8 pm you are out at your risk, even though now the situation is calmer. Just a few years ago, trust me, it was impossible to be outside your home after 8:00 pm. (Participant from Veracruz, Cook, October 23, 2014).

Discussion of Findings

Perhaps the most important finding of this investigation is related to the constancy of the pattern of repetition across gender, age, profession, and location. According to these results, the 80 participants of the two studies socially construct their values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime related violence, and about peace, mainly through: (a) their individual experiences and observations, (b) oral conversations with family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and associates, and (c) the experiences of close people. Participants showed a high distrust of traditional mass media, which was linked to the expression of high distrust of the government. In their view, there is a deeply corrupted system in which a perverse circle is formed between the government, criminal organizations, and the mass media. For that reason, even though most of them do have some contact with newspapers, radio, or TV, most participants expressed they do not feel influenced by those elements.

Fear and terror stood out as some of the most mentioned categories among residents who live outside Mexico City, which may be a result of the high rates of violence of those places. Responses confirmed that even those participants seem to socially construct their perceptions through what they live or see, and through what they talk about in the streets, at work, or with close people. In the case of most participants below 40 years of age, what they share in the social media with "friends" becomes part of the same type of conversation. In that sense, a single experience, one contact with a crime, an incident in which a person looks at a dismembered body hanging from a bridge or lying on a public square –quite common in Mexico at the time of this research- will influence the persons' perceptions and conceptions about violence and peace, in such a way the he or she arrives at broad conclusions about what is taking place in the entire country. That person will share her experiences and observations with family, friends, at the streets, or at work, and will also listen to what other people tell her on similar experiences or observations. It appears that these elements have had a much higher impact on participants, than what they read in papers or watch in the TV.

Through the social construction process, participants have arrived at the conclusion that the causes of organized criminal violence are deeply rooted in structural factors such as underdevelopment, socioeconomic and political inequality, corruption, and lack of education. Peace, in most participants' view, is nevertheless a possibility, but only if those structural factors are addressed. This also reaffirms the patterns that were found in the first study (Meschoulam, 2014).

Theoretical Discussion

Although an 80 participants sample is still small, and the findings from this investigation cannot be immediately transferred to the entirety of Mexico or even farther than that, the pattern repetition across age, gender, profession, and location may establish some solid hypotheses that could be adapted and verified by future research. These hypotheses may include the following:

1. The process of social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions, about organized or other forms of crime related violence, and about peace -perhaps about other conditions or situations as well-, is mainly formed through: (a) individual experiences and observations, (b) inputs and outputs from social conversations with close persons (includes what the person expresses and what the person listens to), (c) close persons' experiences, (d) experiences, rumors, and conversations in their surroundings.

2. Traditional mass media in countries as Mexico, in which corruption is deeply rooted, seem to be much less influential for people in current times, than what they used to or are believed to be. People may tend to form their opinions based on what they personally experience, observe, what they talk about with close people, or what they hear at the streets, than what they read at newspapers, listen to on the radio, or watch on TV. This does not mean that they do not have contact with those traditional forms of mass media, or are not influenced at all by those factors. It only means that their own experience and conversations seem to be much more influential, and traditional mass media is becoming a less reliable source of information.

3. Social media and Internet websites perceived as "alternative" sources of information, tend to be much more influential for young people in Mexico -and perhaps in other countries too-. Social media becomes part of conversations and connections with "friends" or "acquaintances". In that way, a person may trust a You Tube video, whatever the source of that video is, more than something watched on the TV or read in the papers.

Implications for Policymaking

The findings from the first study (Meschoulam, 2014) resulted in several public policy recommendations. The confirmation of those findings using a larger sample, and the hypotheses set in the previous paragraphs, may suggest that very similar proposals could positively impact on peoples' values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized criminal violence and peace, as well as diminish the effects of the fear of violence. These factors alone could increase the level of peacefulness of the country. A summary of those recommendations are:

1. Local public policy diagnosis and design directed to positively impact upon citizens' individual experiences and observations, considering the nature and the size of communities (Morse, 2004). Broad or federal policies to reduce crime or to combat criminal organizations are important, but according to results from this research, as long as they do not directly connect with peoples' experiences and observations, they may not reduce the impact on peoples' perceptions of violence (as well as corruption and distrust of the government, among other factors), and thus, will not help diminish peoples' fear of violence, a key component of peacelessness (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2014).

2. Consistent with the first study of this project, and with participants' responses in this investigation, those policies should mostly address the structural roots of organized crime such as underdevelopment, inequality, lack of education, corruption and impunity, among other factors. However, besides and not substituting federal policies, local policies directed at impacting peoples' experiences may include the development of local economic and commercial zones, fostering local education programs, develop local sports, arts, public musical activities, collaboration networks, enhance public lighting and street appearance, promote local peace policing, and fostering democracy, human rights, and combat to corruption at the local level (Nanayakkara, Culpan, & McChesney, 2010; Reid, 2006; SDC, 2005; Turati, 2012; Wright, 2009).

3. Organizing civil society to develop and implement local crisis intervention strategies (James, 2004) designed to reduce the psychological impact of violence at the most violent zones of the country. This is intended to foster links among citizens, and between citizens and authorities, as well as reducing the psychosocial effects that produce fear of violence.

4. Journalism oriented towards peacebuilding (Galtung, Lynch, & Mc. Goldrick, 2006). Traditional mass media may want to further investigate to what degree the links between them and the Mexican society are broken. The present study offers at least two clues in that direction: (a) perceived corruption and connections between mass media, organized crime, and government, and (b) lack of credibility because of differences of what people experience, observe, and talk about, and what they read at the papers, listen on the radio or watch at the TV. A journalistic practice directed to rebuild

links with mass media and society would have to foster credibility, reliability, and closeness with peoples' experiences, and would have to focus less on producing stress through images and content, and more on structural factors that build peace, according to classical authors (Alger, 1987; Galtung, 1985), but also according to participants of this research.

Recommendations for Research

Due to a solid consistency of theme occurrence and pattern repetition throughout the 80 interviews, this investigation arrives at the suggestion of hypotheses and policy recommendations that may be valid not only for the entirety of Mexico, but also for other societies in different regions of the planet. Recommendations after these findings thus, would include replicating the exact qualitative methodology used for this and for the previous study (Meschoulam, 2014), in more places inside and outside of Mexico to determine whether or not those patterns are present elsewhere. Contrasting new findings with these present results would be important.

A second recommendation would be to develop a quantitative instrument derived from patterns found in this investigation that could be applied in a much larger sample. This would lead to possible generalizability and potentially the formalization of new theory inclusive of social construction of perceptions, and   the role of experience, observation, and conversation in contrast to traditional mass media. It would also provide more evidence upon which policy could be based to foster peace in Mexico and in other countries.

Conclusion

Through a larger sample, this qualitative study confirmed most of the findings of the original. Participants of this investigation seem to socially construct their values, perceptions, and conceptions about organized crime related violence mostly through individual experiences and observations and through social conversations, where they learn from other peoples' experiences, and where they share their own. Patterns confirmed that structural peace construction through addressing systemic and root factors, from socioeconomic and political development to corruption and impunity, may be more valued by citizens than military means to combat organized crime. At the same time, people seem to feel that they need to sense peace through own experiences, observations, and conversations in their surroundings. Public policy for peacebuilding in Mexico, and perhaps in other places, must address both, structural violence and structural peace factors, as well as the need to positively impact upon citizens' daily life and experience.

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